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CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC POLITICAL AND SOCIAL THOUGHT BEFORE AND AFTER THE ARAB SPRING: MAPPING THE FIELD

SAVREMENA ISLAMSKA POLITIČKA I DRUŠTVENA MISAO PRE I POSLE ARAPSKOG PROLEĆA: MAPIRANJE POLJA

EDITORS' NOTE

IVAN EJUB KOSTIĆ
EMIN POLJAREVIĆ

The special issue, "Contemporary Islamic Political and Social Thought Before and After the Arab Spring: Mapping the Field," emerges amidst a year of war in Gaza and the West Bank. As of August 30, 2024, Israeli military actions have resulted in the deaths of 40,602 Palestinians, 52% of whom are women and minors, with an additional 93,534 injured in Gaza alone.[1] Journalists and medical personnel have been disproportionately targeted, intensifying an already dire humanitarian crisis. This ongoing conflict reveals the deep-seated challenges confronting Muslim societies and states today. With the notable exceptions of Iran, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the Houthis in Yemen, most Muslim-majority governments have confined their responses to expressions of diplomatic concern, thus offering little in the way of substantive action to end this televised genocide.

This apparent inertia must be understood in the broader context of the post-Arab Spring political landscape, marked by counter-revolutionary efforts led by the monarchs in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and other autocratic actors, such as the Egyptian military junta. These forces have systematically targeted progressive intellectuals and liberation movements, seeking to extinguish any revolutionary or reformist momentum that had the potential to develop a people-centered governance. Such efforts are further bolstered by the support from Euro-American liberal regimes whose strategic interests seem to prop up many autocratic regimes in the Global South. The evidence suggests that the pluralization and liberation of Muslim societies are perceived as fundamentally at odds with the Euro-American geo-political and economic colonial objectives. Furthermore, this coordination transcends the Middle East as Western powers, in alignment with Israeli intelligence and Gulf monarchies, have shown a willingness to suppress dissident Muslim voices even within their own borders.

1 See the complete data on the website of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs: https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-situation-update-209-gaza-strip.

By situating these developments within a broader analytical framework, we can better understand the intersection of local and global forces that continue to constrain the possibilities for committed Muslim agency and mobilization. The Arab Spring uprisings exposed not only the complex interplay between regional and international actors but they also highlighted significant shortcomings within indigenous movements advocating for change. The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, once regarded as a vanguard of Islamic revivalism, has been repressed and persecuted to the brink of extinction. Its adaptability in responding to contemporary challenges has been severely limited. Subversive military, security, state, and local bureaucratic apparatus continued to be their staunch opponents even after winning several national and local elections. This subversive process resulted in the military coup in July 2013.

But even before the onset of the Arab Spring, the movement's reformist method and skepticism towards rapid changes limited its capacity to generate innovative political and economic ideas that could address the immediate and practical needs of ordinary Egyptians. Indeed, movements like the Muslim Brotherhood have struggled to pivot from lofty rhetoric to pragmatic, policy-driven strategies that could create real, measurable improvements in the lives of ordinary people. Many Muslim thinkers and Islamic movements have prioritized authenticity over agency, clinging to historical ideals rather than grappling with the complexities of the modern world. This general stance reflects a reluctance, or perhaps an inability, to engage fully with the shifting dynamics of our global reality. As a result, they have failed to devise forward-thinking strategies that could address the urgent challenges of today and tomorrow. This was particularly clear during 2012 when the liberal, nationalist, and rival religious and political opposition leveled a barrage of criticisms and protests against the elected Brotherhood-dominated government. The critique was directed primarily towards the Brotherhood's unwillingness to engage in serious negotiations of non-partisan issues such as the content of the country's constitution.

When examining the dynamics of post-Arab Spring Islamist political movements, it is essential to look beyond the immediate failures, such as the exclusion of the Brotherhood and their inability to adapt swiftly. A broader perspective reveals that many similar movements and thinkers have concentrated more on the authenticity of their ideological projects than on the role of ethical agency in fostering socio-political change. While this focus on authenticity plays a crucial role in affirming identity moral commitments, and resisting neocolonialism, it often comes at the expense of recognizing the dynamic and contingent nature of political engagement required for transformative and lasting change.

This narrow emphasis suggests that a significant segment of Islamist political opposition needs to be more adequately prepared to navigate the rapidly shifting contemporary landscape. To remain relevant, these movements must combine a firm ideological foundation with strategic adaptability and a nuanced understanding of power. Several articles in this special issue highlight the limited capacity of these groups to devise forward-looking strategies. The

lack of a comprehensive political strategy – one that integrates both ideological rigor and responsiveness to socio-economic realities – exposes a significant gap in their ability to effectuate meaningful and lasting change.

The special issue offers a critical and provocative exploration of the layered terrain of Islamic political and social thought, particularly during the transformative period following the Arab Spring. It aims to map the complex interplay between Islamic political theory, ethics, and social movements within diverse socio-religious contexts and economic conditions. The issue underscores the need to reconceptualize political thought in a manner that is not merely reactive but capable of envisioning alternative futures. Rather than providing definitive answers, it seeks to chart the current intellectual and political landscape, reflecting on new and historical ideas – including mobilization and activism – in order to stimulate future debates on the evolution of Islamic political thought and Islam as Method as well as on its potential role in shaping more just and equitable societies.

In this context, the significance of political thought grounded in Islamic ethics and political experiences cannot be overstated. It is not merely a matter of reclaiming a cultural or religious identity; rather, it entails articulating a vision that directly confronts global challenges such as economic inequality, lack of social justice, and systemic violence.

Again, the muted responses of most Muslim-majority governments to this televised genocide in Gaza – confined to mere diplomatic expressions – underscore a critical void in political imagination and ethical agency as well as an inability to imagine an alternative international order. This gap reveals an urgent need for a political thought that is capable of transcending reactive postures and that can envision an alternative future grounded in the lived experiences and ethical imperatives of Islamic traditions. The current crisis demands reimagining Islamic political thought in a way that is not only relevant to contemporary socio-political landscapes but also in a way that can galvanize action against oppression and inequality. To remain relevant, Islamic political theory must find ways to engage with crises, transforming ideals of virtues, justice, and governance into tangible actions that effectively address local and global challenges.

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Emin Poljarević

ISLAM AS METHOD

ABSTRACT
This essay presents "Islam as Method" as a multi-dimensional approach that serves as an academic framework, a process of engagement, and an activist strategy. It argues that Islam, in the "Islam as Method" thesis, is an ontological category rooted in a commitment to divine unity and ethical principles such as justice (*'adl*), dignity (*karama*) and excellence (*ihsan*). These commitments enable Muslim activists to assert intellectual and cultural autonomy beyond Euro-American academic, political, and ideological constraints. Drawing on examples from Islamicate contexts, this multi-dimensional approach recognizes the diversity within Islamic traditions while identifying common ethical threads that guide collective action. By emphasizing shared principles and the dynamic reinterpretation of Islamic ethics, "Islam as Method" challenges the dominance of secular and (neo)liberal perspectives and fosters the development of autonomous, cross-cultural dialogue. Informed by the works of contemporary scholars like the late Shabbir Akhtar, Taha Abdurrahmane and Khaled Aboul El Fadl, this method suggests that an intense epistemological shift is underway, allowing committed Muslims to reclaim their agency and produce coherent, ethical knowledge aligned with their values and historical experiences.

KEYWORDS
Islamic ethics, social mobilization, epistemic autonomy, Muslim subjectivity, liberation struggles.

Introduction

This essay is a brief deliberation on the idea of "Islam as Method."[1] This idea functions across multiple dimensions: as an academic framework, a process of engagement, and a strategy for activism. One important aim with this deliberation is to highlight a proposition that "Islam as Method" can be understood as a heuristic tool that allows Muslim intellectuals to redefine their understanding of themselves and their societies beyond the constraints of Euro-American academic traditions. Another aim is to suggest the need of a platform where the Islamicate is both the subject and agent of knowledge production, promoting an intellectual environment where Muslim-majority societies become each

1 This thesis is inspired by my reading of Chen (2010).

Emin Poljarević: Associate Professor, Universiti Brunei Darussalam; emin.poljarevic@ubd.edu.bn.

other's points of reference. "Islam as Method" therefore represents an attempt to reassert autonomy over one's cultural and intellectual identity.

The most important aim here is nevertheless to put forth an analysis of a framework for committed Muslim activists to reclaim their intellectual and cultural autonomy by grounding their actions in the ethical principles of Islam. This strategy, as we shall see, challenges the dominance of Euro-American-centric, secular, and ideologically prejudiced frameworks and asserts a path toward self-determination, justice, and ethical living.

I propose that "Islam as Method" represents an understanding of committed Muslims' social mobilization in relation with the historical trajectory of Islamic tradition on the whole, and especially its ethical repository of principles. These principles anchor activists' self-understanding, their purpose, and their engagement with the world, functioning much like a critical counterpoint to the dominance of Western-centric knowledge production and the Euro-American hegemonic ideological, cultural and material imaginaries.[2]

One important assumption that underlies this deliberation is that the intellectual and material context of modernity and postmodernity (colonialism, secularism, globalism, capitalism, etc.) have shaped much of the activist Muslim collective consciousness (including other traditional ways of being in the world) in the last centuries (Abu-Rabi' 2005, Haj 2008, Sinanović 2012). One line of reasoning is that the ideological structures and material conditions within which Muslim majority populations have organized their societies have been dominated, shaped and conditioned by others then Muslims themselves (Hurd 2003). Ideological structure would here encompass descriptive and prescriptive frameworks of action that help individuals and groups to navigate complex social realities as to interpret social experiences (Maiese 2022). This is an almost entirely functionalistic understanding of ideology and as such is not pursued here.

The alternative line of reasoning that goes beyond the focus on ideology, and one that I suggest here, highlights the underpinning coherence of contemporary Muslims' claim of transhistorical commitments to Islamic ethical principles. My claim of coherence might sound strange, or even incoherent, to people who are focused on highlighting the heterogeneity of Muslim practices which they sometime translate into the idea of "many Islams," due to the fact that there are innumerable expressions and experiences of Muslims (El-Zein 1977, Hussein 2003).[3] It might even sound as essentializing of Islam, claiming that it is a monolithic entity with a uniform set of ethics, values, and principles. Possible critics may further argue that this approach reduces the diversity within Islamic thought and practice by assuming that there is a single, cohesive framework that can be universally applied to all Muslim societies. Or even that "Islam as Method" overlooks the internal plurality within Islamic

2 Such realities are here understood in line with the criticisms presented in Hallaq (2018: 213 ff.).

3 For a recent iteration of this thesis, see: Otterbeck (2021).

traditions, such as differences between Sunni, Shia, Sufi, and other interpretations, thereby oversimplifying complex social realities.

These and similar criticisms are valid withing the constructivist and culturalist view of Islam. For example, this consideration puts forth a view that, Islam, much like all other all religious traditions, are human constructs. As such, religious rituals, doctrines, stories, and spiritual practices are, culturally and temporally contingent, and ways through which self-appointed clergy exercises power over people. A less cynical view could be that religions are super-structures and that contain a set of psychological, emotional, social, political scaffolding which contains a set of rules through which populations engage with the world and one another. Whichever position is taken, the bottom line is that Islam and other religious traditions are products of human mind manifested in a ray of ways in the world throughout history.

As a student of Muslim social movements and Islamicate societies, I take a position that Islam, as understood by a wide variety of committed Muslim activists throughout time and space is ultimately ontological. In other words, Islam, according to vast majority of Muslims, has a coherent set of ethical principles that are non-contingent in relation to time and space – in other words such principles are of divine origin. This position is in many ways in line with Salman Sayyid's claim that "[o]nly an understanding of Islam that emphasized the ontic would be reducible to a set of its key features, but because Islam is an ontological category for Muslims such a reduction is unsustainable" (2022: 149). Islam, and its ethical principles (justice, sincerity, faithfulness, devotion, etc.) contain noncontingent moral claims. This does not mean that the tradition should or could be essentialized.

Instead, as Sayyid suggests, Islam as a phenomenon manifested in the world through time and space, is not reducible to any single of its adherent's discursive and devotional expressions, or architectural, political, or social manifestations. Put differently, devotions of believers, their rituals and discursive practices are not the measure of all things "Islamic." Committed Muslims seem nevertheless to argue that by recognizing the divine, humans fulfill their own "nature." Recognition here does not imply comprehension, but striving to reaffirm one's "being" in the world. Being implies agency both physically (body) and metaphysically (soul) and engaging this duality in making ethical choices. These claims can be tested in a conversation with a committed Muslim activist, who might oppose unethical practices of a vast majority of Muslims, including some of his own actions, but that is done on the basis of an agreed upon set of ethical principles that are enshrined in the foundational sources of the tradition, including the moral example of the Prophet.

For instance, an individual's expression of Islam or collective interpretative act of Muslims in the world at any point in time is considered ontic or temporary expressions of Islam and thereby non-essential to the tradition as a whole. In other words, Islamic ethical reality exists even without Muslims. More concretely, Islamic ethical principles are transhistorical. If so, is it then enough to say, "I'm a Muslim, therefore, I am?" in order to reaffirm one's ontological

commitment to Islam and its ethics? Regardless of the answer to such a question, some secular anthropologists consider this set of premises seriously, and suggest that others should do it too (Schielke 2019).[4]

Let us assume that the meaning of "Muslim" (the one who imperfectly and voluntarily surrenders him/herself to the divine commands) in this set of claims, means to be a committed witness and devoted individual agent in relation to the Qur'anic ethical maxims. This assumption precludes and builds upon a premise that in pre-history, all humans reaffirmed the divine reality and their own created natures in a form of the primordial covenant (The Qur'an 7: 172–173).[5] This, by extension, suggests that by confirming the validity of this covenant through devotional acts (grounded in these maxims) an individual lives up to his/her "purpose" (The Qur'an 30:30). Such a teleological view of human nature and existence is deeply rooted in Muslim ways of being in the world. It is possible to argue that there is a full range of manifestations of being in the world, where such teleology makes sense (Akhtar 2007: 233). What holds this teleology together is shared understanding that ethics are fundamental to committed Muslims' interpretations of reality – such interpretations are manifested in countless forms across different contexts.

Another way to interpret the "reality" of a Muslim could be one that is presented in late Andrew Rippin's, *Defining Islam: A Reader*. This volume discusses a range of Euro-American academic approaches to defining Islam, all of which had focused on a range of variables related to Islam. For mainly practical reasons, Rippin described Islam as a theological and juristic reflection:

> There was a group of people who called themselves "Muslims" and who understood themselves to be adhering to a certain group of practices and basic assumptions about the nature of existence ("beliefs") in common. But the fact of "difference" – with those "outside" who did not call themselves Muslims and with those "inside" who shared some of the same assumptions but not all of them – conjured forth attempts to define membership Rippin (2016: 2).

Here, Rippin, like many Islamologist in Euro-American academia, understand Islam to represent a social category constructed by the Muslims themselves.[6] Islamic principles are here largely arbitrarily, culturally, politically etc. manifested in the observable social relations separate outsiders from insiders. This understanding implies that there is a belief system (theological aspect) upon which the distinction happens and that is embedded in cultural and legal settings (juristic aspect). In other words, Rippin and others, understand spiritual, moral and ethical principles that are historically manifested as nothing more than peoples' interpretations of constructed Islamic doctrines in the first place.

4 See also: Mittermaier (2021).

5 See also: Lumbard (2015).

6 Rippin furthermore cogently summarizes the field of Islamic studies in the West – the field that can be understood as a microcosm that reflects broader epistemic and methodological issues discussed in Religious Studies (Rippin 2006: 13). See also: Hughes and Aghdassi (2023).

This approach is oftentimes referred to as Methodological atheism, or Methodological agnosticism (Bell and Taylor 2014, Craig 2018). This means that this normative positioning cannot consider believers' ontological or truth claims as relevant in the analysis of either their spirituality, doctrines or their religious practices.

Muslims have, nonetheless, debated and practiced the distinction between believers and non-believers in the Islamic scholarly tradition for centuries. In fact, such distinction has been guided by widely shared and disputed criteria found in the foundational sources of the tradition (Ghazali 2002). On the whole, the Euro-American academic study of Islamic tradition and the Islamicate is not interested in theological, metaphysical, or philosophical claims – only in jurisprudential and observable behaviors. This choice is oftentimes justified as the methodological impossibility of verifying or falsifying "religious" claims.

From a so-called, confessional perspective, an observer can be interested in qualitatively different aspects of the tradition and his/her community. One such observer might be interested in understanding but also evaluating or changing Muslim behavior, its epistemic roots, and its consequences vis-à-vis social realities or ethical principles. Processes of knowledge production in the two epistemic communities have, therefore, different objectives.

Epistemic and Ethical Commitments

Within the framework of this paper, the larger point here is that Muslim ethical commitments are particularly noticeable in social mobilizations and activism in service of just causes and social change. As we shall observe further down, such processes present dynamic social phenomena where commitment to Islamic ethical principles shines through. This further suggests that by paying particular attention to Islamic ethical principles in mobilization-situations, such as various liberation struggles, we can also observe "Islam as Method"-manifested across time and space. The emancipatory potential in explicitly Muslim activism today rests more of less explicitly on variety of ethical principles such as justice (*'adl*), human dignity (*karama*), virtue ethics (*akhlaq*), excellence (*ihsan*) and the wider conceptions of "enjoining good and forbidding wrong."

This assumption also suggests that regardless of the Islamicate context, Muslim mobilization today, contains explicitly Islamic components, which in variety of ways, draw upon the ethical repositories found in the foundational sources of Islamic tradition. Throughout a millennium and a half, such repositories have become embedded in Islamicate (his)stories, doctrines, political, financial, discursive and cultural practices, art etc. These repositories offer both a vocabulary and grammar for emancipatory mobilization of Muslims. It also holds a potential to reclaim, reinterpret, and revive a vast intellectual and spiritual heritage that offers alternative ways of knowing, being, and acting in

the world. Such potential is embedded in increasingly activistic consciousness of committed Muslims.

This so-called activist consciousness underpins the "Islam as Method"-thesis. I argue that this activist consciousness extends beyond specific spiritual practices or rituals; it involves an epistemic and systematic awareness that foregrounds a dynamic worldview rooted in the above-mentioned ethical principles. Contemporary social movements – ranging from Malcolm X's short-lived, but transformative civil-rights activism in North America, to the groups like the Muridiyyah in West Africa, the Muslim Brotherhood in the Middle East, Jamat-e-Islami in South Asia, and Muhamadiyah in Southeast Asia – reflect some of the observable commitments to these principles. These movements, in various ways, embody a practice of ethical witnessing (*shahada*) that challenges not only external forms of domination but also internal forms of oppression, seeking to bear witness to justice even at personal or collective cost. In doing so, they revive Islamicate societies by drawing on their own ethical resources, charting a path for growth and renewal that is grounded in the repositories of their historical experiences and indigenous traditions. As such, these movements are not prisoners of Euro-American theories of practice, however modern and modernist some of these movements might be. The so-called West, is, for them, not the measure of all things Islamic.

Islamicists and students of the Islamicate need therefore to grant themselves freedom to recalibrate their epistemic position in order to pay greater attention to, and gain better appreciation of, how committed Muslims navigate challenges and transform social, political, and economic systems within the Islamicate contexts.

Abdelkader Tayob does this in part when he discusses the dilemma of redefining the meanings of Islam in relation to parts of the Islamic scholarship's discourse on modernity (Tayob 1999). He rightly recognizes that the ongoing conceptual grappling with Islam's meanings often focus on reconciling insider perspectives with external scholarly observations highlights the need for an epistemological shift (ibid.: 1–4). He surveys a number of groundbreaking Muslim intellectuals and thinkers, including the tensions among them. Notably, Hossein Nasr, Fazlur Rahman and Ismail al-Farouqi's understandings of Islam are juxtaposed with their respective modernist and traditionalist theological lenses.

Tayob concludes his analysis as follows, "in spite of [the] differences [between these thinkers], however, there is overwhelming agreement on the need to locate the ultimate meaning of Islam" (Tayob 1999: 13). In the context of modernity, within which we are thoroughly immersed, Tayob argues that "one cannot dissociate the meaning of Islam from social contexts and social agents .... In [these thinkers'] search for the core values of social justice, rational theology, and mysticism, they are able to reintroduce the relevance of Islam in public discourse" (ibid.). This relevance of the broadly understood Islamic ethical principles, one of the topics of this essay, is often found in the discourses of the above-mentioned and other Muslim scholars. Their interpretative

approaches consider ethically constitutive Islamic *principles* that seemingly guide their meaning-making intellectual projects.[7]

Both analyses provided by Rippin and Tayob regarding the meanings of Islam in the words and deeds of Muslims remain highly relevant today, particularly in light of the growing political, racial, and social polarization and the hostility directed toward Muslims and Islam in Western contexts and beyond (Afana 2014, Schmuck et. al. 2020, Verkuyten 2021, Deshmukh 2021: 317–336). This relevance is further amplified when we consider the ongoing suffering in Palestine and the failure of international institutions to prevent what many view as the systematic destruction of a people (Thabet and Sultan 2016, Afana 2020, Bishara 2024, Fassin 2024). How do we make sense of the responses from both Muslim and non-Muslim protestors in the face of Gaza's annihilation? It is evident that vulnerable Palestinian communities show resilience through both resistance and expressions of faith, utilizing well-known Islamic symbols, evocative narratives, and the sheer struggle for survival (Nijim 2023)[8]. Similar traumatic and cataclysmic human experiences in the modern world vis-à-vis Islamic tradition are the subject of continuous intellectual and spiritual liberatory practices guided by Islamic principles, a sort of autonomous "Islam as Method" approach.

Similar traumatic experiences in the modern world, when seen through the lens of Islamic tradition, continue to inspire intellectual and spiritual practices aimed at liberation – an approach that can be termed "Islam as Method." This paper, therefore, seeks to explore the ways in which contemporary Muslims assert their agency and empowerment in proactive and constructive ways. Instead of getting caught up in endless debates about defining Islam or its authenticity, this essay focuses on examples of Muslim mobilization, highlighting how activists use Islamic ethical repositories, their cultural and intellectual traditions to independently critique and engage with the world. Next, I lay out how "Islam as Method" can look like in two well-known examples where Muslim mobilization takes place facing seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

Islamism as Resistance

In 2007 during the early stages of my PhD project, I asked a simple overarching research question: Why are Muslims nonviolent? This was a strange question to ask, for at the time the U.S. and its European allies had already invaded Afghanistan and Iraq and launched an all-out war on Muslim-majority states and their populations. These military attacks and occupations generated waves of violent resistance among the Muslims being affected (Gregory 2004, Pape 2010, Bird and Marshall 2011). All the while, the U.S. and its allies were supporting several authoritarian Middle East and North African (MENA) regimes that

7 Consider the foundational works of the three scholars which center on the ideals of justice, divine unity, ethics, moral duties and, not in the least, love and mercy.
8 See also: Grotenhuis 2016, Fahmy et. al. 2024, Hall 2024.

were repressing its Muslim populations, which also generated notable violent responses (Hinnebusch 2006, King 2007). The same could be said about the West's decades-long support of Israel's colonial endeavor in the eastern Mediterranean and the consistent resistance against this modern settler-colonial project (Aruri 1997, Makdisi 2002, Khalidi 2005). This and other oppressive policies, including, arguably, a number of neo-colonial projects up to 2007, had not resulted in massive and systematic waves of organized violent resistance of the existing social movements in the MENA region (Kurzman 2018)[9]. In the late 2006, I decided to sociologically explore the reasoning of young Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (MB) activists and their choice of nonviolent mobilization (Poljarevic 2012).

The study's results pointed out that those youth activists who chose to mobilize with the MB in Egypt, at least until the breakout of the Arab Spring in the late 2010 and early 2011, did so based on the following main reasons:

(1) The interviewed activists indicated clearly that they saw the MB as the ethical and moral opposite mirror-image of the Mubarak regime. The main argument was that Mubarak's corrupt, oppressive and violent regime represented the antithesis of their own sense of Muslimness (self-understanding of their own agency) (Poljarevic 2012: 234, 251; see also: Rashwan 2008). It meant that regardless of the regime's viciousness, the mobilization needs to remain nonviolent as to further demonstrate the regime's illegitimacy on ethical and moral grounds.

(2) The interviewed activists did not see any utility of violent mobilization. After all, they had seen and heard of the violent 1990s mobilization of the popular *al-Gama'ah al-Islamiyyah* movement, and the general sense of mayhem and destruction the regime's brutal response inflicted upon Egyptian society (Stein 2014: 63–82). Their pragmatic reading of previous and current events led them to believe that other Muslim politically violent and zealous organizations such as al-Qaida represented further evidence that violence did not bring about constructive and positive social and political change (Poljarevic 2012: 155, 249).

(3) The last important element of their conscious choice of nonviolent mobilization was the fact that they have been thoroughly socialized into nonaggressive modes of expressing their ethical commitments within the existing educational (*tarbiyyah*) framework of the MB (Poljarevic 2012: 229 ff., 251–254; Zollner 2009: 9 ff.).

My further research and reflection on the Muslim Brotherhood's (MB) nearly a century-long mobilization process have led me to conclude that the organization's multigenerational response to societal grievances has fostered a broader culture of resistance among Islamist activists. This form of political resistance draws not only from Islamic legal traditions but also from its ethical

9 See also: Zollner 2009, Utvik 2022.

and moral principles (Ismail 2004: 614–631, Mustafa 2018: 123–137). It is primarily aimed at channeling public discontent over ethical and moral grievances to the usually insular and oppressive elites across the wider Middle East and North Africa (MENA). These grievances are articulated by thought leaders and activists, highly informed by their respective socio-political context. What is more, activists' specific circumstances give rise to moral and ethical commitments. In the context of Islamicate societies, these commitments are widely rooted in religious principles and moral public reasoning. Through individual and collective commitments Islamist activists address a wide range of issues, from political legitimacy, state bureaucracy, education, and financial concerns to public safety, sanitary conditions, personal wellness, and spirituality (Ismail 2004, Utvik 2022, Vannetzel 2017). If one gazes further afield and considers similar movements such as the Moroccan Party of Justice and Development (PJD), Tunisia's Ennahda, or Jordan's Islamic Action Front, and Turkey' Justice and Development Party, it is possible to observe the complexity of Islamicate moral framings and the political components expressed through the consciousnesses of millions of activists (Merone 2017, Daadaoui 2023).

This apparent resilience contradicts the notions that Islamism might dissolve, transform, or grow stronger in response to post-Arab Spring authoritarianism and neocolonial regression. These movements can be better understood as evolving within the broader framework of Muslim emancipatory consciousness. To reduce this consciousness to simplistic terms like "religion and politics," "Islamism," or "Muslim Democrats" overlooks the essential point: Muslim identities, political awareness, and moral sensibilities are deeply assimilated and analytically hard to decouple. This further suggests that rationality, morality, and perhaps even spirituality are intrinsically linked in the social actions of committed agents. In the case of middle-ground (*wasati*) Islamists, such as the MB, but also other movements, the idea of "Islam as Method" is manifested in the modern framework of mobilization that is grounded in the indigenous ethical principles that seek solutions to perceived grievances.

The main claims that activists are making are expressed through advocating the usage of historical experiences (such as the Prophetic life), cultural practices (hospitality, negotiation tactics, etc.), and social contexts (local knowledge, networks, etc.) as mutual reference points for knowledge creation. Committed Muslims therefore draw upon their own ethical principles and spiritual traditions to interpret and engage with the world. This approach fosters a self-reflective and intercultural dialogue within and between Islamicate societies, allowing Islamic intellectuals and activists to redefine their understanding of themselves and their societies beyond the constraints imposed by Western (neo)colonial frameworks.

Within this integrated perspective, Islamicate ethics play a crucial role in efforts to transform – or at least attempt to transform – social, political, and cultural structures. To adequately explain grievances, demand reforms, and address broader emancipatory impulses (both nonviolent and violent) in the Islamicate world, it is essential to reframe our understanding of social

movements by recognizing the moral and ethical principles embedded in the Islamic tradition. Here, we can discern the contours of the "Islam as Method" thesis, where processes of emancipation, resistance, autonomy, and agency seek to reclaim intellectual autonomy from the Euro-American narratives and build frameworks based on local cultural and historical contexts.

Now, let us turn to another example of "Islam as Method" that is situated outside the Islamicate context. Nevertheless, this example demonstrates the emancipatory mobilization impulse rooted in Islamic ethics and as such makes it relevant for the analysis.

The Emancipatory Ethics of Malcolm X

The late Malcolm X (a.k.a. El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz) currently represents a symbol for generation of Muslim youth and activists both inside and outside the Islamicate societies. Anyone familiar with his life-story recognizes the continuously transformative nature of his activism. The last year of his life allowed him to frame his activism not merely as a fight for civil rights, but also as a moral and spiritual quest for the dignity of all humans, with particular concern for those oppressed in the U.S. This final shift illustrates the convergence of his political actions with a renewed modality of ethical principles informed by spiritual experiences (Malcolm X: 1984, 2013).

This is particularly clear in his *Diary*, wherein his rationalization and spirituality come together in a more straightforward way then in his *Autobiography*. For example, Malcolm X's fight against racism is an ethical action that calls for upholding of human dignity. In his 1961 interview with Eleanor Fischer, he declares:

> [The goal] should be the solution of the problem of the black man in America, now. Not integration. Integration is the Method toward obtaining that goal. And what the Negro leader [e.g., Martin Luther King] has done is gotten himself wrapped up in the Method and has forgotten what the goal is. The goal is the dignity of the black man in America. He wants respect as a human being. He wants recognition as a human being. Now, if integration will get him that, all right. [...] But after he gets integration and he still doesn't have this dignity and this recognition as a human being, then his problem is still not solved. (Nessen 2015)

His other writings and speeches testify to the centrality and emphasis that he placed on human dignity. In his discourse, dignity was often linked directly with freedom, justice and equality. To him, these were not merely political acts, but also expressions of his sense of activist responsibility that, in turn, reflect his belief that *true* worship of God is both spiritual and ethical. Consider the following statement he gave shortly after his break with his former mentor Elijah Muhammad:

> I am and always will be a Muslim. My religion is Islam. I still believe that Mr. Muhammad's analysis of the problem is the most realistic, and that his solution

> is the best one. This means that I too believe the best solution is complete separation, with our people going back home, to our own African homeland … I am going to organize and head a new mosque in New York City, known as the Muslim Mosque, Inc. This gives us a religious base, and the spiritual force necessary to rid our people of the vices that destroy the moral fiber of our community. (Malcolm X 1965: 20–21)

This shows that his phenomenological approach to social change and mobilization against injustices included social protests that can be simultaneously understood as ethical and spiritual acts. In other words, the last stage of his activism is less about transforming an unjust society's system or structure, and much more about the contents of moral and ethical agency and autonomy of people rooted in his understanding of Islamic tradition (Poljarevic 2020: 26–27).

Here he seeks to de-center the "White" epistemic core of political thinking, especially among the Black-Americans, and instead draws upon what he understands to be Islamic cultural, historical, and spiritual experiences as primary reference points (ibid.). Malcolm X's integration of Islamic ethics into his activism exemplifies a turn to Islamic principles as the foundation for his civil-rights struggle, and intellectual emancipation. Malcolm X's activist journey suggests a self-reflective, Islamic-centered dialogue that enables activists to redefine their identity and social purpose beyond "Western" constructs. This is further demonstrated in a short diary note that summarizes his experiences during his pilgrimage to Makka:

> The Hajj makes one out of everyone, even the king, the rich, the priest [viz.] loses his [worldly] identity on the Hajj – everyone forgets self & turns to God & out of his submission to the One God comes a brotherhood in which all are equals … When they [whites] accepted Islam, it removed that [racism]. Well, white people whom I have met, who have accepted Islam, they don't regard themselves as white, but as human beings. (Malcolm X 2013: 23)

The brief entry demonstrates further Malcolm X's maturation and integration of wider Islamic ethics into politics and other aspects of his life. This supposed integration is not necessarily a result of his prolonged and in-depth study of Islamic doctrines and jurisprudence, but rather is directly connected to both his life and spiritual experiences.

Martin Nguyen summarizes his spiritual transformation in eloquent prose:

> Malcolm's response to God – his theology – was to live and struggle alongside the oppressed, his own community foremost of all (but not exclusively so), even at the cost of his own fragile and fallible life. His response to revelation was to proceed with faith and humility pulsing at his core and his utter mortality hanging ever before his eyes. (Nguyen 2018: 144)

This convergence of moral, ethical, and spiritual concerns in Malcolm X's activism aligns closely with the broader objectives of social movements in Islamicate contexts. Many activists I have encountered in the MENA region assert,

much like Malcolm, that they strive to align their ethical responsibilities with their political claims and social activism. Thus, Malcolm X's integration of Islamic ethics into his life and politics points to the validity of "Islam as Method"-thesis. It is within the scope of this process that committed Muslim ground their intellectual and social projects in indigenous, histories, traditions, spiritualities, and values, enabling both a critique of, and an alternative to, Western hegemony.

The mobilization of moral outrage within Islamicate contexts, like Malcolm X's emphasis on dignity and justice, highlights a similar effort to resist oppression by drawing upon deep-rooted ethical and spiritual resources.

"Islam as Method" and Moral Outrage

This framework of resistance became increasingly relevant in the years following my field studies in early 2010, as the charged social atmosphere in Egypt and across the Arab world came to a boiling point. Let us remember Khalid Saeed, a 28-year-old non-political activist, who was brutally beaten to death by Egyptian security forces in June of the same year. In his death he became the symbol of Egypt youth's collective rage against the ruling Mubarak government. His story was not unique, for many murdered men (activists and non-activists) had succumbed to such violence. The difference was that those men had usually been political activists, primarily those labeled as Islamists, and as such, they were at risk of brutal treatment and something to which the wider public did not pay much attention.

The image of Khalid's battered face ignited a firestorm that would sweep across the Arab world. Wael Ghonim, a young activist and a Google employee, saw the photo of Khalid and felt such indignation that he could not ignore it. He organized the online campaign that would later fuel the January 25th Revolution in Egypt (Parvaz 2012). Wael and his friends started a social media campaign "We are all Khalid Saeed," giving a voice to a popular movement that included Islamists, liberals and many others.

Similarly, images from Tunisia in December 2010, showed Mohammed Bouazizi, a 26-year-old fruit seller, in an act of desperation and defiance against unjust treatment by the local policeman and municipal governor, burning himself alive (Lageman 2020). These and many more tragic and violent deaths can be seen as a rallying point that has already ignited charged ordinary populations across the MENA region.

Parallels can be drawn to the events in the U.S. For example, in August 1955, a 14-year-old Afro-American boy Emmett Till was brutally tortured and murdered by two white men in Mississippi. The nationwide rage over the event erupted after his mother arranged for an open casket funeral, the images of his mutilated corpse were circulated by the media and an all-white jury declared the murderers innocent (Whitfield 1991). The moral outrage became even more poignant when even the justice system was not willing or unable to enforce the law. This event was arguably the starting point of the Civil Rights Movement, for the igniting power of images cannot be underestimated.

Despite the growth of this movement, Malcolm X continued to criticize its leaders throughout the late 1950 and early 1960, primarily for their willingness to engage in, as he saw it, negotiations with the white political establishment of the issue of rights. For instance, the Civil Rights leaders, along with Martin Luther King, organized "The March on Washington" in August 1963. Only a few weeks after the event, a bomb attack on a black church in Birmingham, Alabama, killed four black underaged schoolgirls. Malcolm X criticized the Civil Rights movement leaders' efforts: "The black masses are still without land, without jobs, and without homes ... their [Civil Rights leaders'] Christian churches are still being bombed, their innocent little girls murdered. So, what did the March on Washington accomplish? Nothing!"

Why is such example important in the deliberation of "Islam as Method"? In order to interpret an event or phenomenon that carries moral significance, we must use our perceptive faculties, rooted in ethical sensibilities, to decipher what we are observing. Traumatic, unjust, and closely experienced violence tend to invoke various populations' collective consciousnesses that are deeply connected to ethical and moral frames of reference. Such sensibilities are contingent on shared worldviews that are historically shaped and culturally transmitted. Malcolm X's words resonate with Muslim ethical sensibilities even today (Aljunied 2020, Poljarevic and Ackfeldt 2020, Suleiman 2020).

For instance, the moral outrage felt by the masses in Egypt and Tunisia in the context of Islamicate societies, were not only directed towards fellow Muslims (police officers and municipal administrators) who were to blame for deaths of Khaled and Mohammed. The rage was directed towards the entire system of repression built on corrupt practices and injustice (Mahmoud 2015). This might be related to the wider public sentiments and commitments to fundamentals of Islamic tradition which is at the basis of public ethics. For instance, belief in the oneness of the divine (*tawhid*) and the centrality of the Prophetic tradition (*Sunnah*) are ubiquitous (Lugo et. al. 2013). These fundamental beliefs' pervasiveness (orthodoxy) does not necessarily translate in coherence and conformity in religious practices (orthopraxy).

The data does suggest that the fundamental pillars of Islamic beliefs are deeply rooted in local and national knowledge across the Islamicate societies and this clearly has to do with coherence in ethical and moral sentiments. In other words, it is reasonable to suggest that the spectrum of values and moral commitments are, in a similar fashion, coherent and to a great extent shared (Abou El Fadl 2017, Zahra 2020, Lawrence 2021). One could argue that despite the historical "disruption" of Muslim sensibilities and ethical framings during the 200 years of Euro-American colonial and neocolonial projects, a surprising amount of ethical and moral coherence remains (Hashas 2020). Arguably, the same could not be said about other civilizational clusters that have survived the initial phases of modernity.

Consider again the ethical roots of mobilization in the cases of the MB and Malcolm X, in combination with the moral outrage of the Egyptian and Tunisian masses in the face of oppression, murder and torture. The roots of such

mobilization are directly connected to people's moral and ethical sensibilities, which are directly or circuitously connected to the traditional reservoir of ethical and moral values (i.e., the Qur'an) (Abou El Fadl 2017, Mrahorović 2023). It is at the same time important to highlight humanist reactions to brutality and injustice, including genocide, cut, for the most part, across cultural and religious divides – indicating perhaps an innate human ethical and moral sensibility. In other words, you do not have to be Muslim to condemn extermination of a people and live streamed acts of savagery, you just need to be ethically conscious human.

Conclusion

"Islam as Method" has been presented in this paper as a multi-dimensional approach that functions across three key dimensions: as an academic framework, a process of engagement, and an activist strategy. By framing Islam as an ontological category – marked by permanence, coherence, and independence, and defined by principles guiding humanity toward excellence (*ihsan*)[10] – this method allows for a rethinking of how Muslims understand themselves and their societies beyond the constraints of Western academic traditions. The examples of Muslim agency discussed above illustrate a consistent impulse towards ethical action, grounded in Islamic teachings, demonstrating that Islam, for committed Muslims, operates as a signifier of justice and ethical living.

Now, this does not mean that Islam is a monolithic entity with a singular, uniform set of ethics and values. Rather, it recognizes the rich diversity within Islamic traditions and practices, and the multiplicity of ways in which Islamic ethical principles are interpreted and applied across different contexts. The focus on shared ethical principles, such as justice (*'adl*) and dignity (*karama*), is not meant to ignore the heterogeneity within Islam but to identify common threads that can guide collective action and understanding.

The paper has argued that "Islam as Method" serves as a heuristic tool that critiques the dominance of Euro-American-centric knowledge production and promotes an alternative epistemological standpoint grounded in Islamic ethical principles. This approach offers a framework for reclaiming intellectual and cultural autonomy by providing a way for Muslim scholars and activists to ground their knowledge and actions in the Qur'anic moral paradigm and a broader repository of Islamic values, indigenous resources, and historical experiences.

This aligns with the insights of Islamic philosophers such as Taha Abdurrahmane, Shabbir Akhtar, or legal scholars and theologies such as Khaled Aboul El Fadl and many others, who argue that the primordial covenant between the divine and humanity, as depicted in the Qur'an, verse 7:172, underpins all Islamic moral claims. This suggests that there is an inadvertent attempt to work towards a shared Method through which committed Muslims engage with the world, one that produces coherent ethical and moral knowledge that is a result

10 "Be a community that calls for what is good, urges what is right, and forbids what is wrong: those who do this are the successful ones" (The Qur'an: 3:104).

of their agency, inquisitiveness and commitment to the divine from the very beginning of time. Individual curiosity and pledge to the divine are in turn manifested in various ways, depending on peoples' respective environments and levels of knowledge.

This is not to say that "Islam as Method" relies on a static or dogmatic essentialism. Yes, the claim here is that Islam should be understood as an ontological category with certain transhistorical ethical principles – it also recognizes that these principles are interpreted and manifested differently across various contexts and historical moments. "Islam as Method" is not about asserting an unchanging essence, but about affirming the relevance of Islamic ethics in contemporary settings. It provides a framework that is flexible and adaptive, open to contextual nuances and reinterpretations.

"Islam as Method" suggests that committed Muslims, some of whom have been discussed above, have dedicated themselves to Islamic ethical principles and which act as anchoring points. These function as primary reference points in understanding of self, one's purpose and ways in engaging with the world (Abou El Fadl 2017). Advancing such self-understanding and situating them in historical experiences of Islamic tradition contains presumably a high-level of emancipatory potential to dislodge epistemic dependance of Euro-American production of knowledge. Now, this does not mean to suggest that there is a total opposition between "Islamic" and "Western" knowledge frameworks. Instead, my critique aims to provide a necessary corrective to the dominance of Euro-American perspectives by foregrounding Islamic ethical and epistemic traditions. The approach is dialogical, acknowledging the potential for cross-cultural exchange and mutual enrichment, rather than isolation and animosity. The goal is to diversify the sources of knowledge production, not to reject "non-traditional" ideas categorically.

A more constructive engagement with "Islam as Method" involves epistemic consciousness and a dynamic worldview centered around ethical principles of justice and goodness. Committed Muslim activists seem to want to reclaim their intellectual and cultural autonomy by grounding their understanding in Islamic ethical principles. For instance, broad notions of Muslim activists' concerns, be it in the form of the Muslim Brotherhood's culture of resistance, Malcolm X's emancipatory activism or a guerilla-style resistance against occupation, aggression and colonization, all of it entail the commitment to justice and bearing witness, even if that means going against one's own interests.[11]

"Islam as Method" calls for grounding ethical commitment and social mobilization in the Qur'anic moral paradigm. This approach draws on a wide range of Islamic values, discursive tools, indigenous resources, and historical experiences. It challenges the dominance of Western-centric, secular, and ideologically biased frameworks, asserting a path toward self-determination, justice, and ethical living.

11 This entails avoiding pitfalls of moral relativism, ethnonationalism, and other similar diversions from ethical commitments.

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Emin Poljarević

Islam kao metod

Apstrakt:

Ovaj esej predstavlja „Islam kao metod" kao višedimenzionalni pristup koji služi kao akademski okvir, proces angažovanja i aktivistička strategija. U radu se pokazuje da je islam, u tezi „Islam kao metoda", ontološka kategorija ukorenjena u posvećenosti božanskom jedinstvu i etičkim principima kao što su pravda (*ʻadl*), dostojanstvo (*karama*) i izvrsnost (*ihsan*). Privrženost ovim principima omogućava muslimanskim aktivistima da uspostave intelektualnu i kulturnu autonomiju izvan evro-američkih akademskih, političkih i ideoloških ograničenja. Oslanjajući se na primere iz islamskog konteksta, ovaj višedimenzionalni pristup prepoznaje različitost unutar islamskih tradicija pri čemu identifikuje zajedničke etičke niti koje vode kolektivnu akciju. Ističući zajedničke principe i dinamičnu reinterpretaciju islamske etike, „Islam kao metod" dovodi u pitanje dominaciju sekularnih i (neo)liberalnih perspektiva, te podstiče razvoj autonomnog, međukulturalnog dijaloga. Oslanjajući se na radove savremenih naučnika poput pokojnog Šabira Aktara, Taha Abdurahmane i Kaleda Abul el Fadla, ovaj metod nagoveštava da je u toku intenzivna epistemološka promena koja omogućava posvećenim muslimanima da povrate svoju moć, kao i da proizvedu koherentno, etičko znanje koje je u skladu sa njihovim vrednostima i istorijskim iskustvima.

Ključne reči: islamska etika, društvena mobilizacija, epistemološka autonomija, islamska subjektivnost, borbe za oslobođenje.

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Seid Halilović

ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY AND MODERN SOCIAL SCIENCE: THE NEED TO RE-EXAMINE THE METHODS OF FORMING SOCIAL THEORIES IN THE SPHERE OF RELIGIOUS CULTURE

ABSTRACT
Social theories are logically associated with a series of terms that represent their principles and consequences. When they are realized in society, they actualize the entire network of their conceptual additions in a logical order. One part of this network primarily attracts the attention of the scientific community, while the other one remains hidden and takes the form of marginal knowledge. Modern social science theories move from the margins to the center of society once their philosophical principles are actualized even in the sphere of general culture. In the context of Islamic culture, these theories appeared in the shadow of the credibility of the political and economic domination of Western societies, and their philosophical principles remained hidden on the margins of domestic knowledge. In the domestic cultural atmosphere, based on significantly different knowledge, modern social theories have caused cultural and historical disturbances, because they have not been reconstructed in accordance with the needs of the cognitive heritage of Islam. Logical principles of modern science have gradually left the marginal sphere and dominantly influenced their new and weakened cultural environment, which is facing identity challenges and crises on its way to complete transformation.

KEYWORDS
Islam, philosophy, social theory, modernism, rationality.

Introduction

Modern Western theories from the field of social sciences and humanities are actively present in the educational systems of today’s Muslim societies. For more than a century, they have been carefully studied at all the newer universities in the Islamic world, which, in light of the dominance of Western political and economic capacities for strategic influence, are based on the principles of cognitive authoritativeness of modernist scientific knowledge. In countries where the system of classical education in traditional Islamic schools is still

Seid Halilović, Center for Religious Sciences “Kom”, Belgrade, Serbia: seidhalilovic@centarkom.rs.

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dynamically maintained, such as Iran, academic dominance of Western social theories is not exclusive and unlimited. In those schools, which have been the primary platform of domestic education for several hundred years, classical disciplines on various forms of Islamic knowledge and cultural identity of Muslims in their original historical environment are still very actively studied and improved. For instance, when we expertly follow the results of studies in the field of classical Islamic disciplines, such as jurisprudence, exegesis, theology, mysticism or different branches of Islamic philosophy in today's school in the Iranian city of Qom, then we notice that vital and expert discussions do not take place only in academic centers where modern and western scientific knowledge is promoted. Moreover, in the famous school of Qom, modern social and humanist theories are often analyzed very systematically, but are subject to critical evaluation by a Muslim philosopher because he boldly questions the validity of their philosophical principles in light of the credibility of his Islamic school of philosophy (Halilović, S. 2019: 10–17). So, in the example of today's Iran, scientific theories of the modern West are not dominant elements in the educational environment of Muslim students, at least when it comes to classical Islamic schools. The picture is completely different though, in the newer universities in Iran, such as the oldest university in Tehran, founded in the first half of the 20th century, and therefore cannot be compared in its originality with the brilliant historical legacy of the classical Persian schools of Islamic knowledge. Academic processes at newer universities are primarily conducted on the margins of the exclusive cognitive authority of modern Western scientific knowledge.

We can say that modern social sciences and humanities, in the complex historical example of contemporary Iran, control at least half of the human and economic capacities of the educational system and significantly direct all its broad organizational possibilities, even though they have no foundation in the domestic identity environment in that country. In other Muslim countries, the situation is many times more destructive to the detriment of classical knowledge, to the extent that the traditional educational system of Islamic schools has been neglected in those societies. Using the same analytical framework, we could evaluate educational structures of Muslims in the Balkans, which discredited very quickly the central importance of classical Islamic schools in their educational system at the end of the 19th century (Halilović, S. 2016: 156–170). On the margins of civilizational disruptions in the Islamic world, they accepted the authority of modern Western knowledge under the strong political influence of the dominant structure of the then Austro-Hungarian government (Halilović, S. 2013: 84–90).

In the last few decades, Muslims have actively participated in cultural processes in which philosophical principles of modern social sciences and humanities have been domesticated in their societies. Processes of strategic influence and domination of the modern West have gradually taken place in new universities in the Islamic world where the most talented members of the young generations of Muslims have studied, since the dominant policy on the margins

of the unquestionable credibility of Western science systemically popularized those universities. Numerous new schools in Muslim societies that bear the name – Islamic school – have also played a significant role in strengthening the foundations of the educational dominance of modern scientific disciplines. There, the main goal was to encourage as many Muslim students as possible to gradually become familiar with the basic philosophical orientations of modern scientific knowledge through skilful emotional reaffirmation of historical memory and emphasizing the external form of Islamic names (Halilović, S. 2020: 20–23). Hence, the Iranian example of the school in Qom and the few similar schools represent an exception in the modern Islamic world, in which the domestic education system, after several hundred years of brilliant successes of traditional schools, will be mercilessly pushed to the margins of social influence and continue to develop minimally in the space of its civilizational isolation.

The Influence of Modern Social Sciences on Islamic Culture: Different Layers of Principled and Marginal Influence

We do not want the basic methodological postulate on which we build our analysis in the following pages to remain insufficiently highlighted here. That is why we will immediately clarify that all theories from the field of modern social sciences and humanities must necessarily be viewed in the context of conceptual networks with which they are essentially connected. Modern theories in their essence depend on complex conceptual constructions that condition their emergence and social foundation. Were those primary concepts and principles not formed, it would not be possible for the social theories of the modern West to appear. We emphasize that we recognize the West as a natural homeland and domestic environment in which modern social theories first came to the fore. However, the final formation of these theories is the final result of complex changes in the cognitive process in which we observe at least two introductory stages of fundamental importance. Modern theories are the fruit of a long process that took place in the modern West (Pārsāniyā 2012: 147–150). First of all, it was necessary to consolidate certain philosophical principles and conceptual roots in the West, which actually serve as fundamental knowledge or cognitive platform for building new structures of social theories. Here we compare modern social theories with a multi-story building, and in the mentioned philosophical principles we recognize the basic works on strengthening the foundations of the future building. We can add that these early works on the foundations are necessarily carried out below the surface of the earth and for this reason they usually go unnoticed. By forming the foundation, the conditions would be created for us to officially complete the realization of the first introductory phase in the mentioned complex cognitive process. After the first phase, it is necessary to prepare, very patiently and with a long-term focus, social and academic instruments for the strong popularization of the fundamental concepts and philosophical principles at

the level of general culture. This will mean that the hidden philosophical principles, which we found to be largely unnoticed, will move from the marginal sphere of social influence to the sphere of principled influence in various forms of culture, such as literature, art and everyday life. It will be of key importance, according to our belief, to clearly see what is gained by moving certain philosophical networks of conceptual structures and principles from the margins and their taking on the role of a visible social element with the capacities of principled influence. The goal is certainly not to increase the number of thinkers, students and professors who will become interested in dealing with insufficiently popular philosophical questions. We will look for the aim in a different sphere of wider cognitive influence. Namely, when philosophical principles are moved from the margins to the spheres of principled influence, they bring with them an entire conceptual network whose credibility they condition and strengthen. A whole network of social realities, values, concepts and theories that are formulated after the primary foundation of a certain philosophical system will appear in the central structures of society, because we previously popularized their philosophical principles at the level of general culture in that society. We will restate that this long-term cognitive process took place according to a reasoned schedule in the West, which is a natural ground for the expansion of the conceptual network of modern social theories. This has been established with the help of examples of building foundations and the building itself. We can cite another example, which is the umbrella. According to this second example, we will say that in the modern West, in the first step, the umbrella concepts were established as philosophical principles of the coming essential cognitive changes. In the second step, the umbrella principles were popularized at all levels of the general culture, which accepted them with a cordial welcome – because it is their natural homeland. Finally, in the third step, when the new philosophical principles were moved from the margins of social structures and gained the power of principled influence, they pulled from the margins to the central spheres all those modern theories and the network of concepts that were formed under the umbrella and under the auspices of the credibility of their umbrella philosophical and conceptual causes. We consider this flow of gradual changes and movement from the margins to the structures of the principle influence of first philosophical and then social theories as a natural cognitive process in those geographical locations, such as the modern West, where new philosophical solutions are accepted as responses to domestic needs and crises. Philosophers and thinkers in the modern West did not object to the establishment of a new network of philosophical principles in the most hidden spheres of their social identity. Essential changes did not worry them because they expected to find answers to their domestic questions, problems and needs in them. For this reason, Western thinkers and scientists from all stages of modern knowledge gladly engaged in the popularization of new philosophical foundations in the spheres of general culture and education, and instead of a marginal role, they were given the central role of social elements with the possibility of principled and strategic influence. Only after

that important step in the complex cognitive process of essential changes, will modern theories from the field of humanities and social sciences be able to gain the necessary credibility and be included in the study program of the most prominent academic centers in Western countries, precisely because the entire conceptual network of their umbrella philosophical principles was already accepted in the sphere of Western collective consciousness and culture (Pārsāniyā 2022: 15–19).

When we observe how modern and Western social theories appeared in the cultural spheres of contemporary Islamic countries, we notice that this did not happen in a natural cognitive process whose various stages of gradual realization we have just explained. In the Islamic world, it happened in a completely different and unnatural direction. First, we will explain what did not happen and why we believe that the norms of the natural cognitive process were not followed in the case of the formation of new theories. Modern and Western social theories are very popular in Muslim societies and the results of their essential influence can be easily noticed in all layers of identity and educational structures in the Islamic world. However, these theories did not emerge among Muslims at the end of long-term and fundamental cognitive processes. No substantive processes took place in this case and Muslims did not accept modern social theories because they believed that they contained answers to domestic historical and social issues and the needs of their communities. We said that these theories appeared in the modern West itself as part of a conceptual network under the umbrella structures of philosophical principles that were systemically popularized in the West. In the Islamic world, modern social theories did not emerge in the company of their umbrella philosophical principles. The fundamental conceptual network to which these theories belong did not exist at all in the conceptual and philosophical structures of domestic knowledge among Muslims. We will repeat once again that modern social theories in the West have moved from the margins of social influence to the central spheres of principled influence under the auspices of their umbrella network of philosophical principles. Since such an umbrella conceptual network was not established or popularized in time in Muslim societies, modern Western social theories could not move from the margins to the central sphere of Islamic culture, as we would expect in natural cognitive processes. Moreover, Muslims accepted modern social theories as a final product that was not delivered to them in a cognitive package along with all the accompanying philosophical principles. Modern theories were offered to Muslim thinkers without any conceptual addition and they had to place them at the very beginning in the central structure of their culture, thus enabling them to have the power of principled influence on the new environment.

We must not ignore the fact that modern social theories, which apparently became popular overnight in the Islamic world, are actually the fruits of knowledge from another cultural and historical environment. The geographic host of these theories was not the Islamic world, but rather the modern West, and they primarily offered solutions to issues and problems of Western societies

(Halilović, M. 2019: 461–479). Modern social theories became authoritative in the Islamic world for another reason, which we will explain below. Namely, when these theories gained full credibility in Western societies, as a result of a natural cognitive process, Western thinkers decided to transfer their domestic social theories to other contemporary and non-Western societies because they were simply allowed to do so by the new Western hegemony and authoritativeness they gained in the shadow of the exclusive political and economic dominance of their Western societies. Modern social theories were not formed by a natural cognitive path in the Islamic world, but as a result of the will and desire of Western thinkers to transfer, under the auspices of the dominant political power of their countries, these theories to new cultural and non-Western environments (Halilović, S. 2021: 304–306).

The fundamental theoretical challenge to which we wish to draw attention here becomes clear if we pay attention to the following two points. Firstly, modern social theories in their new cultural environment, in countries that do not belong to the geographical and civilizational West, will not contain answers to the questions and problems that their new hosts naturally face (Pārsāniyā 2016: 205–206). Secondly, these theories came into a new environment in which the umbrella conceptual network of their philosophical principles did not have time to gain the necessary credibility. In fact, nowhere in Islamic countries, can even the faintest manifestation of the philosophical principles of modern social theories be observed. We will dwell on this point in particular, since we place central analytical importance on it in our thoughts. We found that modern social theories do not have the same logical relationship with their umbrella philosophical principles in Western and Islamic culture. In their cultural homeland, the modern West, these theories gain their primary epistemological credibility from their umbrella philosophical principles, and only in that natural conceptual network can they be functional and have the constructive power of principled influence. In the Islamic world, on the other hand, modern theories cannot achieve a natural logical contact with the conceptual network of their philosophical principles, because these principles do not possess instruments of popularity and credibility in the new cultural environment and in the general culture of Muslims. Here, we approach one of our main conclusions. Although modern social theories in their new environment, in Muslim societies, do not make natural contact with the logical structures of their umbrella philosophical principles, it would still be fundamentally wrong to think that the aforementioned conceptual network of philosophical principles will not continue to follow its theoretical fruits in the field of social sciences, even in new conditions. The logical connection between social theories and the conceptual network of their philosophical principles is essential and unbreakable, and this cognitive package will always be current as a whole (Ǧawādī Āmolī 1999: 66–67). However, when logical additions in the form of umbrella philosophical principles cannot appear on the theoretical surface as the primary conceptual platform of social theories, they will still necessarily follow social theories from their conceptual network, but this time, in conditions

of insufficient social popularity, they will hide behind the transparent form of modern social theories and assume the role of hidden or marginal logical knowledge. Therefore, the entire conceptual network of philosophical principles that, through the instruments of their popularity in Western societies, enabled modern social theories to gain credibility in the West, will accompany these theories in Islamic culture in its full cognitive capacity. In other words, when modern social theories are transferred to the cultural environment of contemporary Muslim societies, all conceptual elements of the philosophical network of principles that condition and determine the foundation of the modern world are at the same time transferred to Islamic culture. The only, yet very significant, difference will be that the conceptual network of philosophical principles in the modern West has been moved from the margins to the central sphere of transparent social influence, and in the Islamic world, this conceptual network will remain hidden on the margins of artificial popularity of modern social theories. Now we notice more clearly two completely different and, in a way, twisted models of the cognitive process of forming modern social theories. In the modern West, these theories follow the natural popularity of their umbrella philosophical principles, and in the Islamic world, they become primarily popular while their philosophical and logical additions remain hidden behind the outward form of popular social theories. This conclusion will not surprise us if we remember that modern Western social theories were popularized in Muslim countries by the power of political will and in the shadow of exclusive Western hegemony. We risk repeating, perhaps unnecessarily, that in this way, by political will, the necessary methodological structure of the natural cognitive process of forming new theories was destroyed.

What particularly worries Muslim philosophers in this twisted cognitive process is the fact that this conceptual network of philosophical principles, which is transferred to the Islamic world by remaining hidden on the margins of popularity of modern social theories, does not come into an empty cultural environment. If the new environment, in this case Muslim societies, were characterized by cultural and philosophical emptiness, then no big problem would arise. The modern conceptual network of philosophical principles hidden behind Western social theories would gradually fill the cultural void in its new environment and spread its influence on the margins of the cultural being of Muslim societies. However, the situation is significantly different. The conceptual network of complex philosophical teachings of the modern West, which appears in Islamic culture in the form of hidden knowledge, by no means enters a cultural void, but will be met by the rich structure of developed classical Islamic philosophical knowledge (Halilović, T., Halilović, S. & Halilović, M. 2015: 18–19). At the same time, note that domestic philosophical knowledge in the Islamic world will not be at all friendly towards the guest who was supposed to remain unnoticed, because Islamic philosophical knowledge in its domestic cultural environment built solid instruments and conceptual networks of its original civilizational awareness and popularity for centuries. These two conceptual networks, one that is the host and the other that comes as a hidden

guest, in certain essential elements of philosophical knowledge represent two bitter rivals and two irreconcilable parties (Ǧawādī Āmolī 2007: 140). What do we really want to establish here as a significant logical warning? We want to show that it would be naive to think that modern social theories will be popularized in the Islamic world, in the shadow of the political dominance of the modern West, and that all cognitive processes will end exactly at that level of superficial and simple exchange of scientific experiences. On the contrary, we believe that modern and Western social theories will actualize in the new cultural environment, that is, in the Islamic world, all the cognitive capacities of the conceptual and philosophical network to which they naturally belong, a network that has remained hidden here on the margins of popularity of modern social science. Then, in the Islamic world, we will witness fundamental disturbances in the deepest spheres of its cultural and historical being. The essential theoretical challenges will become clear to all when Muslim thinkers have to make a decision about a fateful epistemological choice. If their choice is to accept the credibility of the conceptual network of modern philosophical principles and move them from the margins to the sphere of principled cultural influence, it will mean that they are ready to discard and sacrifice domestic conceptual networks of original Islamic philosophical and theological knowledge. If they choose the second option, which is to support their original philosophical heritage, then they will have to conclude that the new modern social theories, which they took over from the West, remain without their primary philosophical foundation and therefore cannot be credible and correct. Cultural and historical disturbances at this fundamental level take on the widest civilizational proportions in the contemporary Islamic world.

The Need for Creative Reinterpretation of Modern Social Theories in the Context of Cultural Challenges

When we illustrated, in the previous few lines, the state of essential cognitive doubt of the Muslim thinker in a situation in which he perceives insurmountable differences between two conceptual networks of philosophical principles in the contemporary Islamic world, one – the domestic, original network of Islamic concepts and the other – the guest conceptual network of the modern West that is hidden behind the popular form of Western social theories, we have deliberately decided to significantly simplify the beginning of our analysis in this part of the discussion. We have pointed out, in the simplest form, that the Muslim thinker will have to take sides and make a decision whether a) he will turn his back on the classical structure of philosophical concepts of his historical heritage and traditional cultural environment or b) he will refuse hospitality to the modern system philosophical structures that, as an uninvited guest, came hiding in the company of modern Western social theories. Truth is that the choice of the Muslim thinker does not have to be so simple and exclusive towards one side or the other. Of course, we are talking here about the

thinker who understands the seriousness and complexity of his cognitive challenge and does not ignore the fact that the mentioned hidden logical structures and networks of philosophical principles on the margins of popularity of modern social theories have the power to have a very destructive influence on the domestic, that is, the Islamic cultural being. If the thinker does not understand this, and such thinkers unfortunately make up the vast majority in almost all academic centers in today's Muslim countries, then the following analytical warnings of ours might seem as meaningless conceits. However, we will not be easily discouraged and will say that it is possible for the Muslim thinker to opt for a third choice. Instead of excluding from his discussions one or the other conceptual network, that is, the original structure of Islamic philosophical principles or the structure of philosophical principles of the modern West, he will be able to take the position of an active and creative analyst in meeting this very serious cultural challenge. In that case, he will not allow the cognitive capacities of the logical structures of his domestic and original Islamic cultural environment to be a silent observer, but will actualize those logical capacities with the aim of actively re-examining and reconstructing the conceptual network of the visiting social and philosophical knowledge (Pārsāniyā 2011: 35). If he decides to critically evaluate, in the light of the original authority of the classical philosophical structure of Islamic concepts, the conceptual network of logical structures of modern philosophical knowledge, which he realized will not always have marginal importance in Islamic culture, then he will turn one of the most dangerous cognitive challenges in his cultural environment into a unique historical opportunity for a full reaffirmation of Islamic culture in the context of contemporary needs. We will explain this briefly.

Were the Muslim thinker to ignore the importance of the conceptual network of modern philosophical principles on the margins of modern social theories, these philosophical structures would eventually use the instruments of the popularity of social theories from their conceptual network and, moving from the margins to the central sphere of strategic cultural influence, would finally discredit and suppress all logical structures of original Islamic knowledge from different stages of Muslim culture and life. Therefore, it is not a small challenge for the Muslim thinker to oppose the possibility that such a destructive process is realized in conditions when essential disturbances under the surface of the general culture are barely noticed in the Islamic world. This process is a long-term one. By the time its final results have reached the surface of the cultural structures, it will be too late to contemplate a constructive response then. Therefore, serious Muslim philosophers, who, we repeat, are not numerous in today's Islamic world, must be timely cautious and ready for a critical review and reconstruction of guest philosophical structures and hidden conceptual networks of the modern West. Why do we think that in this way a great cultural challenge will turn into a real historical opportunity? Because, for a successful and comprehensive critical review of logical structures and conceptual networks of the philosophical knowledge of the modern West, it is necessary to activate all the theoretical capacities of the Islamic philosophical tradition, even those

analytical capacities and instruments which, in the absence of serious theoretical challenges, were not often used and therefore their philosophical significance was somehow neglected. When all the analytical capacities of a brilliant philosophical school, such as classical Islamic philosophy, are activated, then we can rightly expect that entirely new philosophical theories and ideas will be produced in the critical encounter between this school and the philosophical structures of the modern West. Therefore, if in the social contexts of this cognitive challenge, the Muslim philosopher appears in the role of an active and creative analyst, then he will start a wave of fundamental discussions and open the possibility for new frameworks of philosophical conclusions to appear. We are talking here about a whole series of analytical instruments and capacities in the classical Islamic school of philosophy that have not been actualized until now simply because in previous decades and centuries Muslim thinkers could not focus on them because they simply did not face any theoretical challenges on that level. Layered philosophical capacities of that sort did not come to the fore and the Islamic philosophical tradition somehow kept them hidden in its brilliant heritage. When Muslim philosophers finally faced contemporary issues and challenges of today's life, they were forced to activate all the cognitive capacities and conceptual networks of their original philosophical structures. In the last few decades, they have spectacularly reaffirmed their philosophical knowledge, especially in the context of new questions imposed on the broadest level of cultural and historical awareness by Western theories and modern science (A'rāfī 2016: 340–341). We will conclude that the process of activating original philosophical structures of the Islamic cultural environment in the encounter with foreign, Western, theories and knowledge can open unlimited horizons of constructive discussions. If, on the other hand, Islamic cultural environment is not ready to actively devote itself to a creative and critical review of the visiting conceptual networks of philosophical principles, then the mentioned cultural challenges will come to the fore. It is natural that, in that case, we will not expect challenges to turn into any opportunity for development and that social processes of cultural dialogue will not take a positive direction. However, social processes will not stop, but will have extremely negative consequences. Cultural challenges at the cognitive meeting point of the passive domestic cultural environment and visiting conceptual networks of the modern West will soon produce essential identity disturbances in all structures of the Islamic world. Theoretical challenges, for the above reasons, will take the form of a general crisis of cultural and historical annulment and disappearance of the Islamic world. Because, when in the light of the dominance of modern social theories and all the accompanying philosophical elements of their conceptual networks, logical structures of the original cultural environment in the Islamic world are discredited, then the original identity of Muslims and their cultural heritage will gradually disappear, in the absence of key cognitive principles that guarantee vitality and life of Islamic culture. If, a few lines before, we had the intention to simplify the beginning of the discussion in this part, and we emphasized that on time, we will not follow such

a methodological approach here and we will go on to draw a very cautionary conclusion. The conclusion will be that the Muslim thinker in the contemporary world will be able to have only one of the following two directions when he wants to define the relationship between his original cultural environment and modern Western theories in the field of social sciences and humanities. Of course, he will be able not to think about that relationship and continue to live and think in the classical patterns of his historical Islamic environment, which will very clearly isolate him from the possibility of coming into contact with the modern West, but such a thinker is not the subject of our discussion. Therefore, if he is professionally interested in the cognitive position of modern social and humanist theories in the cultural sphere of the Islamic world, then his first orientation will be reflected in deciding to critically evaluate and reconstruct these theories in the light of the credibility of his original philosophical and Islamic knowledge. Note that this decision and this orientation will be many times more demanding and complex than the next one. The second orientation will be shown by the fact that the Muslim thinker will not take an active position in the creative and critical questioning of modern social theories, but will passively accept and promote them in his historical environment. In that case, his hope that this will help his cultural identity and enable his Islamic society to follow modern norms of development will be an essentially naive hope. A passive approach to understanding essential theoretical and cultural challenges of the relationship between the modern West and the contemporary Islamic world will in fact be an introduction to the state of general identity crisis of Muslim societies on the way to gradual cultural and historical disappearance and annulment of their original consciousness (ʻElmī 2014: 36–38). Therefore, if the Muslim thinker does not want to isolate his intellectual tradition and close the borders of Islamic cultural environment with the aim of developing structures of his original knowledge without any contact with the modern West and modern science, then, he in the modern world will have two options, namely: (1) an active critical review of conceptual networks of the philosophical principles of modern Western science and social theories in the light of the authority of rational instruments and the capacities of the Islamic philosophical tradition and (2) the process of cultural and historical disappearance of Islamic original knowledge due to the crisis of identity disorders caused by passive acceptance of the cognitive credibility of logical structures of the modern West. The latter option, in our opinion, illustrates the dominant face of philosophical and analytical discussions in today's Muslim societies.

We can add here three more short methodological points, which in some way have already been present in the previous analysis, but we highlight them because we consider them to be of key importance. Firstly, if we want to engage in a complex process of critical reconstruction of modern sciences, it will simply not be possible if we turn our backs on those sciences and the modern West. We wish to say that the Muslim thinker does his intellectual heritage no favour if he chooses to ignore the results of scientific changes and processes in the modern West. Secondly, the Muslim thinker will not get the opportunity

to actively participate in the critical development of modern sciences in the Islamic world even when he decides to passively accept and follow Western sciences in his society. This is, of course, understandable because as soon as he chooses a passive methodological position, it will mean that he does not want to get involved in the process of evaluating philosophical principles of modern social sciences and humanities. In the explanation of this second methodological point, we will add one more possibility. Namely, it is possible for the Muslim thinker to make a decision to ignore the philosophical principles of modern sciences and to distance himself from their conceptual networks and focus on implementing exclusively practical benefits of modern Western knowledge in Muslim societies. His approach in this case would have a pragmatic determination; however, we would also classify him in the category of thinkers who have a passive attitude towards creative evaluation of modern sciences. Thus, we have established that the Muslim thinker will not be able to creatively reconstruct conceptual networks and logical structures of modern Western sciences if he neglects their importance, that is, if he passively accepts their theoretical or practical credibility. The cognitive choice that we promote on these pages is significantly different from those two paths and we define it as the third announced methodological point. The third point is that an active and critical reconstruction of modern Western sciences in the contemporary Islamic world will be possible only within the process of deepest theoretical discussions (Pārsāniyā 2018: 17–20). In that philosophical process, the Muslim thinker will have to reveal in detail the hidden cognitive backgrounds of modern social theories, as well as the complex conceptual networks that condition a successful formation of modern sciences. This means that his primary task will be to recognize all philosophical and metaphysical principles based on which modern theories in the field of social sciences and humanities are formulated. In the continuation of the analysis, we will particularly emphasize the importance of the mentioned philosophical and metaphysical principles of modern Western sciences.

Historical Contexts of Formation and Development of Fundamental and Humanist Sciences

When we observe the brilliant results of the development of both applied research and fundamental knowledge in the modern West, we need to pay attention to the fact that the primary historical contexts of the formation of new scientific disciplines from the sphere of fundamental, humanist and social sciences are found in much deeper layers of modern Western being and identity. New scientific disciplines and theories represent a logical result of essential changes in the fundamental layers of Western knowledge, since these cognitive changes condition a completely different approach to understanding the universe and man in the modern world. On these pages, we primarily wanted to focus on the importance of the mentioned fundamental changes and to show that they are illustrated in different spheres of belief, thinking

and practical decisions, as well as models of collective and social life of modern man. Therefore, here we are talking about three levels and three faces of the cognitive being of the modern West, of which the first face is fundamentally important to us in our critical analyses. At the first level, we observe the theoretical face of the modern West, which appears as a result of the speculative work of the most influential Western philosophers in the post-Renaissance period and their new views on the universe, man and reality. This theoretical face most often remains hidden and is not seen by many thinkers, but that does not mean that the basic features of this face do not appear on other and more popular levels of the modern Western being. Moreover, we tirelessly insist that according to this theoretical face, the other two faces of the modern West are formed and that serious thinkers should clearly recognize in the popular forms of the Western cultural being the deepest level of its theoretical foundation. We found that the importance of this complex intellectual task is largely neglected in the contemporary Islamic world. The task would be to critically evaluate, from the perspective of the classical Islamic philosophical school, the way in which the aforementioned theoretical level of modern and contemporary philosophical ideas has a key role in the process of forming the two other faces of Western cultural identity and modern humanities and social sciences. It is about the next, second and third, level of the western cultural environment. The second level is the level of collective and popular culture, and, at that level, we analyze daily life habits and needs of modern man in the sphere of economy, family life, common norms of behavior, as well as in the field of art and the dominance of collective desires and imagination. Finally, the third level represents the sphere of organizational orientations and the model according to which these orientations are practically implemented and realized in various political structures of Western societies. At all these levels, serious thinkers notice the primary theoretical face of the modern West and all the conceptual networks of modern and contemporary philosophical principles that guarantee the popular credibility of new cognitive stages and different views on existence and man.

We will add one more point that is important. The three mentioned levels of the cultural being of the modern West form a whole whose internal elements are closely connected with each other. None of these three levels will be credible without the other two levels and this means that each level depends on other levels in its cultural and social essence. If, in this unit, one level were to be discredited or eliminated, then the other two levels would also suffer significant damage and, finally, the mentioned unit would be annulled. We do not mean here that these three levels have the same or similar quality and strategic depth of influence. On the contrary, we pointed out that the first, that is, theoretical, level has a key influence in the process of forming the total cultural entity of the modern Western being and that the other two levels, in fact, follow the essential elements of the theoretical level. However, we have just established that it is impossible for the other two levels to form in a certain cultural environment while the credibility of their first and theoretical

level is questioned in that same environment. In other words, the conceptual network of modern and contemporary philosophical principles that we will recognize as the theoretical face of the modern West will necessarily be present in all cultural environments in which the cultural and organizational results of Western prosperity are promoted (Yazdānpanāh 2022: 473). We have already warned that this largely hidden theoretical face will eventually emerge from the sphere of marginal presence and move the structures of its influence into the central milieu of popular culture in any society that accepts the authority of the political or academic hegemony of the Western world.

The complex platform on which modern scientific disciplines are created and consolidated is made up of numerous elements of the new Western being. We will point out several important elements, namely: (1) art and literature after the Renaissance, (2) new life norms of economic and industrial activities, (3) new philosophical schools from the last four centuries, (4) foundation of an entirely new conceptual encyclopedia according to which important cultural and scientific concepts of Western modern society were reinterpreted and reconstructed. We will notice that the relationship between modern scientific disciplines and the mentioned elements is actually established as a relationship of bilateral influence. Just as these elements have a significant role in the formation and expansion of modern scientific disciplines, the new sciences also guarantee and confirm the cognitive and cultural credibility of the mentioned elements in today's world (Meṣbāḥ Yazdī 1998: 118–119). In other words, modern humanities and social science disciplines will serve the Western man to find in them the necessary arguments to comprehensively support the aforementioned elements and philosophical principles of the theoretical face of the modern West and to activate all life and economic capacities in society for the purpose of their widest popularization, even then when these elements and principles illustrate their shortcomings in the context of facing the complex theoretical challenges of the contemporary world.

Conclusion

On the previous pages, we have checked the cognitive circumstances in which modern Western sciences, including humanities and social disciplines, are transferred to new cultural and living environments in other parts of the world, primarily in contemporary Islamic societies. We have noticed that the process of popularizing modern sciences is realized in the shadow of the exclusive economic and political domination of Western countries and that modern scientific disciplines are therefore very easily introduced into the official streams of education in countries that were on the margins of the central processes of establishing the new world order. Without any additional explanation, we would be able to conclude that modern Western sciences are transferred in this way to new cultural environments, which in the case of our subject discussion are contemporary Islamic societies, significantly weakened in the complex processes of their identity, political, cultural and academic deconstruction.

Contemporary Islamic societies, mostly in new political and academic contexts, have not activated their original cultural and cognitive capacities and, therefore, have not used the opportunity to reinterpret, reconstruct and reorganize modern sciences in accordance with their domestic needs and civilizational positions. Since this has not occurred, it has been expected that another, strongly destructive, scenario would be realized. Modern Western sciences have gained increasing popularity in the Islamic world under conditions where the conceptual networks of their logical principles and appendages have been hidden at the margins of visible credibility. As we have explained, all the accompanying logical structures of modern Western sciences gradually moved into the central sphere of culture and collective life in the new environment. The original philosophical and logical capacities of the Islamic legacy were not prepared for the sudden conceptual collision and were infamously disqualified from key processes of strategic influence. Theoretical challenges in Muslim societies quickly took the form of the deepest identity crises. In the absence of a strong apparatus of classical Islamic philosophical knowledge, these identity crises bring contemporary Muslim societies to the brink of general cultural destruction and annihilation. We talked about a possible solution and a way out of the position of fundamental crisis on the previous pages in the context of the need to reaffirm the original cognitive instruments of man's theoretical and practical reason.

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Seid Halilović

Islamska filozofija i moderna društvena nauka: potreba za preispitivanjem metoda formiranja društvenih teorija u sferi religijske kulture

Apstrakt:

Društvene teorije logički su povezane s nizom pojmova koji predstavljaju njihove principe i konsekvence. Kada se realizuju u društvu, one logičkim redosledom aktualizuju celokupnu mrežu svojih pojmovnih dodataka. Jedan deo ove mreže primarno privlači pažnju naučne zajednice, a drugi deo ostaje skriven i dobija formu marginalnih saznanja. Teorije iz oblasti modernih društvenih nauka premeštaju se s margina u suštinu društva onda kada su aktualizovani njihovi filozofski principi čak i u sferi opšte kulture. U stadijumu islamske kulture ove teorije pojavile su se u senci kredibiliteta političke i ekonomske dominacije zapadnih društava i njihovi filozofski principi ostali su skriveni na marginama domaćih saznanja. U domaćoj kulturnoj atmosferi, koja je utemeljena na bitno drugačijim saznanjima, moderne društvene teorije prouzrokovale su kulturne i istorijske poremećaje jer nisu rekonstruisane u skladu s potrebama saznajnog nasleđa islama. Logički principi moderne nauke postepeno su napuštali marginalnu sferu i dominantno su uticali na svoje novo i oslabljeno kulturno okruženje, koje se suočava s identitetskim izazovima i krizama na putu potpune transformacije.

Ključne reči: islam, filozofija, društvena teorija, modernizam, racionalnost.

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Mohammad Affan

REVISITING POST-ISLAMISM A DECADE AFTER THE ARAB SPRING

ABSTRACT
The Arab Spring uprisings marked a watershed moment in regional politics, significantly impacting Islamist movements in terms of strategies, ideologies, and organizational structures. Accordingly, this paper examines whether these dramatic events strengthened or weakened the post-Islamist evolution of traditional political Islam movements, focusing on the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (E-MB) and the Tunisian Ennahda Movement Party (EMP) as case studies. The proposed hypothesis is that the Arab Spring has variably influenced Islamists. In Egypt, it initially weakened the post-Islamist turn of the E-MB. However, owing to the 2013 coup and subsequent repression, the E-MB was politically excluded and weakened, creating a vacuum that was filled by various forms of less political or non-ideological forms of Islamic activism. The Tunisian Islamists had a different story. The Arab Spring seems to have strengthened their transition to post-Islamism. In its tenth conference, the EMP declared its exit from political Islam, adopting the new concept of Muslim Democracy. Even after the presidential takeover in July 2021, which resulted in the political exclusion of the EMP, the Work and Achievement party that defected from it maintained clear post-Islamist features.

KEYWORDS
Islamism; Post-Islamism; Muslim Democracy; Muslim Brotherhood; Ennahda Movement Party.

Introduction

Since its emergence in the late 1990s, the concept of post-Islamism has been a subject of continuous debate. Academics disagree on its exact meaning, the similarities and differences it has with traditional Islamism, and, more importantly, whether it signifies the failure of political Islam as theorized by Olivier Roy, or if it represents an evolution or transformation of Islamism in the post-ideological era as suggested by Asef Bayat.

Being not Islamist nor secularist, the Arab Spring uprisings could be described as post-Islamist. As Bayat (2014: xvii) put it, the Arab *refo-lutions* (i.e., mid-way between reform and revolution) didn't aim at establishing an Islamic

Mohammad Affan: Lecturer at Political Science Department, Ibn Haldun University; Director at Al Sharq Academia, Al Sharq Forum: muhammed.affan@ihu.edu.tr.

state; rather, "a pious society within a civil (secular) democratic state". A multitude of uprisers were people of faith; however, they just aimed to gain their freedoms. In accordance with this argument, Roy (2012: 47) affirmed that the Arab Spring had nothing to do with the debate on Islam between liberal secularists and conservative Islamists for neither Islamism nor secularism was on the protestors' agenda.

In the aftermath of the Arab Spring, Islamist movements throughout the region entered a new phase. On one hand, the removal of autocratic leaders created opportunities for Islamists to fill the political vacuum and assume power in many Arab countries. On the other hand, Islamists apparently failed to maintain their popularity or effectively address the transitional challenges. Consequently, from 2013 onward, Arab Islamists began to experience severe setbacks across the region.

This swift rise and profound fall of political Islam movements over the past decade has had a significant impact on their organizational stability, ideological outlook, and political behavior. Accordingly, this paper aims to examine the impact of these dramatic changes on Islamist movements and whether they have strengthened or weakened their transformation to post-Islamism.

Using the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (E-MB) and the Tunisian Ennahda Movement Party (EMP) as case studies, this paper argues that the Arab Spring has variably influenced Islamist movements in the Arab world. In Egypt, the Arab Spring initially weakened the post-Islamist turn of the E-MB. The intense competition with secularists during the transitional period and the ideological outbidding practiced by its rival Salafists empowered the conservative faction within the E-MB. Additionally, the remarkable electoral success achieved by traditional Islamist parties (both the *Ikhwanis* and Salafis) in the 2011–2012 parliamentary and presidential elections disproved the claim that post-Islamist alternatives were more attractive (Cavatorta and Merone 2015: 29–30). Later, owing to the 2013 coup and subsequent repression, the E-MB experienced a brief cycle of radicalism followed by organizational divisions. These changes weakened the E-MB, creating a vacuum that was filled by various forms of less political or non-ideological forms of Islamic activism.

The Tunisian Islamists had a different story. The Arab Spring seems to have strengthened the post-Islamist transition of the EMP, as evidenced by the party's tenth conference held in 2016. At this conference, the party declared its exit from political Islam, adopting the new concept of Muslim Democracy (Ennahdha International Page 2016a). Even after the presidential takeover in July 2021, which resulted in the political exclusion of the EMP, an off-shout party, the Working and Achievement party, showed clear post-Islamist features. The new party, emphasized its abandonment of identity politics and aversion to ideological conflicts (Wannas 2022).

To examine the impact of the Arab Spring uprisings on the Islamist movements, it is not enough to rely on the premises of the inclusion-moderation hypothesis. Legal recognition and political inclusion of social movements do not simply urge them to moderate their ideology and political behavior, as

suggested by this hypothesis (Schwedler 2013: 3). Rather, in accordance with the political structure opportunity theory, other variables related to organizational resources, institutional arrangements, and historical precedents do also influence the mobilization abilities and strategies of social movements (Landman 2008: 169). By focusing on the incentives and threats generated by changing structures, the political opportunity theory adds new dimensions that can explain why inclusion might lead to radicalization or the cases when political exclusion triggers moderation of social movements (Tezcür 2010: 776).

As qualitative research, this paper's data collection methodology relies essentially on content analysis. The ideological outlook of the political parties and organizations in the case studies will be examined through their political platforms, constitutional proposals during the transitional periods, and the statements made by their leaders. The prime goal of the analysis is to understand how these entities envision, even theoretically and discursively, the political and societal roles of Islam and whether these views reflect a traditional Islamist orientation or could be considered as a transition to post-Islamism.

Conceptual Framework: Islamism in the Era of Post-Ideology

To grasp the elusive meaning of the post-Islamism concept, it is mandatory to commence with the elaboration of three interrelated concepts: Islamism, post-ideology, and post-secular societies. Each of these concepts highlights a particular aspect of the multi-dimensional phenomenon of post-Islamism. Islamism, for instance, refers to the process of re-making Islam as a political ideology. In its turn, the post-ideology term describes the waning of ideology in an increasingly pragmatic and fluid political realm. As for the religious dimension, the post-secularism concept attempts to capture the ambiguous relationship and the blurring demarcation between religion and secularity in post-modern societies.

The concept of Islamism, to start with, could be broadly defined as any "political activity and popular mobilization in the name of Islam" (Ayoob 2011: 6). Ideologically, it refers to "the tendency to view Islam not merely as a religion in the narrow sense of theological belief, private prayer and ritual worship, but also as a total way of life with guidance for political, economic, and social behaviour" (Shepard 1987: 308). Furthermore, in its totalitarian form, Islamic reference could give rise to a rigid ideology or a comprehensive worldview that necessitates excessive state intervention and aims to influence both the public and private spheres. Sayed Qutb's concept of *al-Hakimiyyah* could be a good example of such an assertive ideology (Affan 2022: 55).

From this perspective, the post-Islamism term can be traced back and related to the concept of post-ideology, which emerged for the first time in the late 1960s. As a concept, post-ideology was not meant to state that all ideological manifestations in the political sphere ceased to exist; rather, it simply signified the end of the era of the "dogmatic" utopian ideologies such as classical Marxism (van Veldhuizen 2021: 64).

Similarly, post-Islamism, in one of its dimensions, indicates softening of the Islamist ideology. According to Olivier Roy, from the 1990s and on, Islamists no longer aim at establishing an all-encompassing Islamic state, as theorized by Abul'ala al-Mawdudi, Sayed Qutb and Ruhollah al-Khomeini. Instead, they started to believe in the relative autonomy and priority of politics over religion (Holdo 2017: 1801). In other words, in the post-Islamism phase, the state is no longer the main instrument for "Islamization" (Wolfering 2014: 109).

Asef Bayat (2014: xvi), from his side, envisioned post-Islamism as "a critique of Islamism from within and an alternative project to transcend it". It is neither anti-Islamic nor un-Islamic; it is another way of being religious by transcending classical Islamist politics and mixing religiosity, rights, and freedoms. The dream of the Islamic state, thus, has been replaced by the endeavor to install an electoral democracy within the framework of the civil state and pious society (Bayat 2013a: 593).

Mixing liberal democratic values and procedures with religious morality is one of the principal criteria of post-secular society, as defined by Jürgen Habermas (Reder and Schmidt 2010: 5). Post-secular societies have emerged in the West, according to Habermas, when it becomes clear that religion is not "destined to disappear" as previously expected by the secularization theory, and that religion is an indispensable source of morality that can even positively contribute to the ethical debates in the public sphere. In this narrative, religion, despite being able to maintain its presence and influence in an increasingly secularized society, had to adapt to the multi-vocality and entrenched diversity of the post-secular age (Yilmaz 2014: 93, Byrd 2016: 13).

Concludingly, post-Islamism is a controversial term that denotes remarkable changes in the Islamist phenomenon. Such changes are stimulated or catalyzed by the waning of the ideological age in the past few decades. It suggests that classical Islamism gives up its revolutionary zeal and utopian puritanical outlook. In contrast with its earlier exclusivity, Islamism becomes incorporating ideals from various sources, including liberalism and democracy side-by-side with Islamic culture and values. This hybridity, in a way, resembles the post-secularist features as experienced in some European countries such as the Scandinavian states (Yilmaz 2014: 94, Akhtar 2016: 222–223).

The relationship between Islamism and post-Islamism, though, is very controversial because it can be envisioned in four different ways: (1) Post-Islamism might be perceived as a sign of failure of Islamism and an attempt to replace it with a more feasible Islamic-driven value system; (2) post-Islamist transformation could be seen as a process of adaptation and evolution of Islamism into a more democratic and liberal version that makes "post-Islamism [perceived] to mean reformism and not failure" (Cavatorta and Merone 2015: 32); (3) sometimes, post-Islamism is claimed to be a defection from and a revolt against traditional Islamism; (4) finally, post-Islamism might be a less provocative variant of Islamism, tactically adopted by the Islamist actors as a mean of survival during unfavorable political circumstances (Abu Rumman 2015: 14–15).

What makes the post-Islamist concept even more ambiguous is that it is unclear which transformation in the Islamist ideologies and practices should be identified as post-Islamist. Luz Gómez García (2012: 454) righteously states that "[p]ost-Islamist theory is extraordinarily flexible since it can accommodate … a constellation of different and even contradictory Islamic experiences." According to her, the overarching concept of post-Islamism encompasses depoliticized forms of religious mobilization, Islamic-inspired women movements (usually dubbed as Islamic feminism), and an Islamic value system integrated with global culture and market economy.

The criticisms levelled against the post-Islamism concept due to its vagueness and ambiguity do not negate the fact that, since the 1990s, the Islamist parties and movements have gone through unmistakable changes in terms of their ideologies and political behavior (Kurzman and Naqvi 2010: 57). Moreover, the Arab Spring represents another important watershed moment in regional politics that creates totally different dynamics and necessitates academic scrutiny of its impact on the post-Islamism phenomenon.

Post-Islamism as a Revolt Against and Defection from Islamism

As stated before, there are different ways to understand the post-Islamism phenomenon and its relationship with Islamism. In the Arab Spring context, a simple way to put it is that Islamism is a traditional form of ideological Islam that adopts an authoritative approach to "Islamization" by emphasizing the role of the state and the religious establishment in Sharia implementation. Structurally, Islamism represents a typical social movement with well-established techniques of recruitment, socialization and mobilization.

Post-Islamism, on the contrary, has a different understanding of Islamic reference. In such a case, Islam is perceived as a value system and moral guidance for social and political life, not an ideology of the state. The ways of organization and mobilization in post-Islamism are less centralized, and its agenda is less political and more spiritual and intellectual.

Having that said, it can be assumed that the Arab Spring, in the case of Egypt, has aggravated the division between the Islamist movements and the post-Islamist factions. During the transitional period, it was clear that the political Islam movements (exemplified mainly in the E-MB and its Salafi allies) adopted a traditional form of Islamism. Judging from the 2012 constitution, drafted by an Islamists-dominated constituent assembly, the concept of Islamic reference showed an authoritative turn. Apart from Article 2 which was maintained from the 1971 constitution and enshrined the Sharia as the main source of legislation, many other articles were either added or modified to render the constitution more "Islamic".

For instance, Article 4 was added to grant Al-Azhar institution autonomy, made the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar immune from being dismissed, and gave the Azhari Senior Scholars a consultative role in matters pertaining to Islamic

law. Article 219 was also added to determine the definition of the Islamic Sharia and narrow it down to include the rulings of the Sunni creed exclusively.

Other articles were also modified to give them more religious connotations. In Article 1, as an example, the Egyptian people are said to be "part of the Arab and Islamic nations", not "the Arab nation" only as it was in the 1971 constitution. Article 6 states that the political system is based on the principles of democracy and Shura (the Islamic term for political consultation). Furthermore, Article 46 that granted religious freedoms universally in the 1971 constitution, was modified to confine them to divine religions only (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace n.d.).

In contrast to the premises of the inclusion-moderation theory, including the E-MB in formal politics during the transitional period apparently didn't soften its ideology. Based on the political opportunity structure, many factors could explain the E-MB's steadfast position. First, the ideological struggle between the Islamists and secularists reached its climax during the transitional process owing to repeated electoral competitions as well as their disagreements during constitutional drafting. Second, the traditional Islamist rhetoric and agenda proved very efficient in terms of mobilizing resources and voters during the transition. Lastly, the E-MB's Salafi rivals, such as the Salafi Call and its Al-Nour party, emboldened by their unexpected achievements in the 2011–2012 parliamentary elections, practiced ideological outbidding against the E-MB, accusing it of not adequately defending or upholding the Islamic Sharia (Cavatorta and Merone 2015: 29–30, Affan 2022: 178).

This conservative turn of the E-MB was not inconsequential. The reformist and more progressive factions within the group felt increasingly alienated and eventually decided to defect. Two important incidents are worth mentioning: The Strong Egypt party and the Egyptian Current party.

The first party was established by the prominent leader in the E-MB *Abdul-Monaem Abul-Fotouh*. A founding figure of the Islamist youth movement in the 1970s and a member of the guidance bureau for more than 25 years, *Abul-Fotouh* was known for his moderate political views and his tendency to cooperate with other political forces across the ideological spectrum. In the early transition, it seems that *Abul-Fotouh* felt dissatisfied with the E-MB's political choices. In May 2011, he decided to run for the presidency in a personal capacity – the decision that cost him his membership in the E-MB (Wolfering 2014: 111).

After coming fourth in the presidential race with almost 4 million votes, *Abul-Fotouh* established the Strong Egypt party, which can be categorized as central-left regarding its socio-economic program. The former Islamist leader was keen to position his party away from the political Islam umbrella, in a way that likens him to Tayyeb Erdoğan's departure from Necmettin Erbakan's party and his establishment of the Justice and Development (AK) party (Al-Zawawy 2022: 440).

The Egyptian Current party was another like-minded split. A group of *Ikhwani* youth activists, who were part of the Revolutionary Youth Coalition,

was dismissed from the E-MB in July 2011 as they objected to the political platform of the group's Freedom and Justice party. For its founders, "the party is not concerned with the burgeoning political polarization between secular and Islamist forces". Instead, they affirmed the priority of supporting democratic transition, economic development, and social justice (Ahram Online 2011). Being too close to the political line of the Strong Egypt party, the Egyptian Current party, in the wake of the military coup, decided to merge with the former in 2014 (Ahram Online 2014).

The traditional Islamist movement in Egypt suffered a significant blow after the 2013 coup. The E-MB was banned and designated as a terrorist organization, with its leaders and tens of thousands of its members and supporters either imprisoned or forced to flee the country (Aboul-Gheit 2014, Human Rights Watch 2017). Even the Salafi Call and its Al-Nour party, which aspired to fill the religious-political vacuum left by the crackdown on the E-MB, could not maintain their political gains in post-2013 Egypt. The Salafi popularity greatly diminished due to their internal disagreements over the military coup, the regime's autocratic policies that largely restricted their freedom, and the fierce attacks waged by the official religious establishment and the Sufi trend against them (Lacroix 2016). Therefore, the political presence of the Al-Nour Party, as manifested in its parliamentary seats, declined significantly in the past decade from 112 members in the 2012 parliament to only 7 in 2020 (Affan 2023).

The chances of the post-Islamist political parties were not much better, as the Strong Egypt party had to freeze its activities in 2018 after the arrest of its chairman *Abdul-Monaem Abul-Fotouh* and his deputy *Mohammed Al-Qassas* (Osman 2013). Nevertheless, it could be argued that, since 2013, other forms of non-partisan Islamic activism have relatively flourished. For instance, the Sufi organizations and networks practiced a form of "quiescent" Islamism. After the modest performance of its parties, the political mobilization of the Sufi base was restricted to campaigning and voting in favor of incumbents during the parliamentary and presidential elections. In return, the Sufi trend strived to replace the E-MB and the Salafis in the religious domain in Egypt. Empowered by the support of *Al-Azhar* and the official religious establishment, many initiatives were launched to attract the Egyptian religious constituency, such as the Corridors of *Al-Azhar* initiative. Others were established and generously supported by the regional Sufi institutions, such as Tabah foundation and the Council of Muslim Elders. However, it should be noted that the Egyptian authority did not tolerate some independent initiatives with similar mode of activism, such as the *Sheikh al-Amud* initiative, whose founder was arrested in 2015, then again in 2021 (Al-Baqary 2018: 54–60, Fotouh 2021: 40–41).

Other forms of Intellectual Islamism, i.e., Islamist activism focusing on revisioning, producing, and promoting political Islamic thoughts, have also expanded remarkably since 2011. Despite its cultural and educational nature, many initiatives such as Knowledge *Maerifa* and Awakening of Thoughts *Yaqazit Fikr* entailed in-depth revision and critique of major political themes

of the Islamist ideology such as the Islamic state and the implementation of Sharia. Once succeeded to influence thousands of youth Islamists, intellectual Islamism managed to survive the resurgent authoritarianism after the military coup of 2013 and relatively maintained its presence virtually via the Islamist influencers – the phenomenon that can be called digital Islamism (Dogan 2023).

Post-Islamism as an Evolution of Traditional Islamism

As explained earlier, post-Islamism is not always at odds with traditional Islamism. The evolution of the post-Islamist trend in Tunisia is proof of otherwise. Since its establishment, the EMP has upheld a distinct version of Islamism, which Azmi Beshara (2012: 174) described as post-*Ikhwanism*. According to its founder, Rached Ghannouchi (1999: 81–84), the religious-political ideology of the EMP is a synthesis of various sources. Influenced by the key ideologues of the E-MB, Hassan Al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb, the movement adopted the major premises of political Islam: comprehensive Islam or *Al-shumuliyyah* and Islamic governance or *Al-hakimiyyah*. The EMP was also greatly influenced by the E-MB's methodology of religious education or *Al-tarbiyyah*.

Additionally, Ghannouchi identified two other intellectual sources: traditional Tunisian religiosity, shaped by the Maliki jurisprudential thought, *Ash'ari* creed, and Sufi spirituality; and the rational school of thought. This latter, he detailed, includes both Islamic sources, exemplified by the legacy of the 19th century Islamic reformers and the *Maqasid al-Sharia* school, and Western sources, encompassing various ideologies and social sciences approaches.

In a number of his books, such as *Public Liberties in the Islamic State* [الحريات العامة في الدولة الإسلامية], Ghannouchi advocated for an Islamic model of democracy, merging Islamic morality and values with democratic institutions and procedures (Tamimi 2001: 102). This composite clearly bespeaks Bayat's definition of post-Islamism that "fuse[s] religiosity and rights, faith and freedom, Islam and liberty" (2013b: 8).

In the wake of the Arab Spring uprisings, the EMP showed a great deal of flexibility and pragmatism in comparison to the E-MB. For instance, during the transitional negotiations, Ghannouchi gave up on the EMP's demand to include the Sharia reference in the constitution. It was only "articulated in terms of values rather than binding legal norms" in the preamble of the constitution (Ben Lazreg 2021). Ghannouchi justified this concession by claiming that "the mission of an Islamist party today is to realize the broader objectives of sharia, which are, fundamentally, justice and liberty" (Cavatorta and Merone 2015: 30).

After surviving the crisis of the summer of 2013, when the political polarization between the Islamists and secularists in Tunisia jeopardized the whole democratization process and threatened an eruption of civil strife, the EMP's post-Islamist turn was affirmed at its tenth conference held in 2016. In his keynote speech, Ghannouchi announced a new identity for the EMP as:

> a national democratic party devoted to reform, based on a national reference, drawing from the values of Islam, committed to the articles of the Constitution and the spirit of our age, thus consolidating the clear and definitive line between Muslim democrats and extremist and violent trends that falsely attribute themselves to Islam (Ennahdha International Page 2016a).

In the concluding statement, the implications of this post-Islamist rebranding of the EMP were further elaborated on. Ideologically, the Islamic reference was no longer an ideological project for an Islamic state. It was rearticulated to be only "a force of inspiration that opens up a vast field of interpretation" and can be translated into "a set of values in diverse political, social, economic and cultural expressions" (Ennahdha International Page 2016b). Also, the national identity of the party was emphasized in a rupture with the pan-Islamic doctrine, classically upheld by Islamist movements.

Structurally, the EMP abandoned the style of comprehensive social movement. In contrast to the typical organizational model usually followed by political Islam movements, the EMP decided to transform into a classical political party. This transformation was described as "specialization in politics", ending the partisan-preaching dilemma of the movement and granting more autonomy to other fields of cultural, religious, and spiritual activism. Additionally, it was stated that the party will be organizationally decentralized and more inclusive in terms of its membership, to be open to all Tunisian capacities (Ibid.).

The political agenda of the EMP was also revisited and modified. Overlooking the issues of identity politics, the party's priorities were set to be democratic consolidation, sustainable economic development, counterterrorism, and reforming the state bureaucracy (Ibid.). In his opening speech, Ghannouchi pointed to this shift in the party's political program by stating that:

> A modern state is not run through ideologies, big slogans and political wrangling, but rather through practical programs… Ennahda had evolved from defending identity, to ensuring the democratic transition, and today moves on to focus on the economic transition. (Ennahdha International Page 2016a)

In sum, the dramatic course of events after the Arab Spring potentiated the EMP's transition to post-Islamism. This transition seems to be supported by the majority of the party members, given the extensive preparatory meetings and huge number of participants in the conference.

Later, in 2021, more than 100 members of the EMP decided to defect as an objection to Ghannouchi's leadership and to establish their own party, which maintained the same post-Islamist tendency. The co-founder of the new Work and Achievement party, Abdellatif Mekki, affirmed that they still value the national and the liberal elements in the EMP's political program and that his party will not engage in the futile identity battles (al-Thabhi 2021, Wannas 2022).

Conclusion

After a decade, examining the post-Islamism phenomenon in the Arab Spring countries reveals three major features. First, the post-Islamist transformation is largely affected by context and its dynamic is vulnerable to structure changes. In Egypt, for instance, during the transitional period, post-Islamist political and intellectual manifestations were overshadowed by the rising ideological polarization between the Islamist and secularist trends. In such an escalation, the traditional Islamist parties were more appealing to the conservative constituencies. Later, the political fall of E-MB gave room for post-Islamist modes of activism to expand.

Second, the relationship between Islamism and post-Islamism is not unidirectional nor does it have a fixed pattern. To put it another way, the transition to post-Islamism could be perceived as either a rupture or an evolution of Islamism. In the case of EMP, it was just a new step in its long path of transformation and an expansion in the non-Islamist sources of its hybrid unorthodox ideology. On the contrary, post-Islamist parties in the Arab Spring Egypt came as a revolt against the E-MB due to its conservative and authoritative attitude during the transitional period.

Third, in accordance with Luz Gómez García's argument, post-Islamism is a multi-faceted phenomenon. It could be manifested as a political party that adopts a non-ideological version of Islamic reference. The Strong Egypt party, the Egyptian Current party, the post-2016 EMP, and the Work and Achievement party are a few examples. Additionally, it could be exemplified in depoliticized forms of Islamic mobilization such as intellectual and cultural movements that aim at "Islamization" of societies and promoting new Islamic-driven value system without engaging in partisan activities.

t" [حل الحرية والعدالة ... تصعيد ضد المعارضة بمصر]. A

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Mohamed Afan

Ponovno razmatranje post-islamizma deceniju nakon arapskog proleća

Apstrakt

Pobune Arapskog proleća bile su prekretnica u regionalnoj politici koje su imale i značajan uticaj na islamističke pokrete u smislu strategija, ideologija i organizacionih struktura. Shodno tome, ovaj rad istražuje da li su ovi dramatični događaji ojačali ili oslabili post-islamistički razvoj tradicionalnih političkih islamskih pokreta, fokusirajući se na egipatsku Muslimansku braću (E-MB) i tunisku partiju Pokret Enahda (EMP) kao studije slučaja. Predložena hipoteza je da je arapsko proleće imalo promenljiv uticaj na islamiste. U Egiptu je u početku oslabio post-islamistički zaokret E-MB. Međutim, državni udar iz 2013. godine i represija koja je nakon toga usledila, ostavili su E-MB politički marginalizovanu i oslabljenu, stvarajući vakuum ispunjen manje političkim ili neideološkim oblicima islamskog aktivizma. Tuniski islamisti su imali drugačiju priču. Čini se da je arapsko proleće potvrdilo njihov prelazak na post-islamizam. Na svojoj desetoj konferenciji, EMP je proglasila napuštanje političkog islama, prihvatajući novi koncept muslimanske demokratije. Čak i nakon predsedničkih izbora u julu 2021. godine, koji su rezultirali političkim isključenjem EMP-a, partija Rada i rezultata koja se odvojila od EMP-a pokazala je jasne postislamističke crte.

Ključne reči: islamizam, post-islamizam, muslimanska demokratija, Muslimanska braća, partija pokret Enahda.

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Imad Alsoos, Julius Dihstelhoff

ENNAHDA’S MUSLIM DEMOCRACY IN POST-ARAB SPRING TUNISIA: SYNTHESIZING POLITICAL THOUGHT AND PRACTICE

ABSTRACT
This article explores the interplay between political thought and practice within Tunisia’s Ennahda party, first during its period in opposition, then after it took power in 2011, and finally in the aftermath of the 2021 coup. We trace the genealogy of political thought within the party from the point of its foundation. In doing so, we explore the gradual evolution of party ideology, from a *daʿwa*-based belief system between 1969 and 1981, to Islamic democracy between 1981 and 2011, to ‘Muslim democracy’ after the 2011 uprising. We examine this ideological evolution through the framework of three key elements: (i) Islam, (ii) Tunisia’s changing socio-political context, and (iii) the broader universal episteme. As we show, a significant turning point came in 2016, with the separation of the daʿwa from party politics, which revealed a burgeoning state / party conceptualization of politics. However, the 2021 coup challenged Ennahda’s concept of Muslim democracy, as well as all aspects of the party’s own sense of continuity as a significant socio-political actor, such as its institutional structure, leadership, membership, social base, political strategy, and ideology. Ennahda is now confronted by an authoritarian resurgence, which aims at containing the party, and at delegitimizing its participation within nation-state structures. Empirical evidence, based on content-analytical evaluations of personal interviews as well as the media’s coverage of Ennahda, shows that the party’s representatives are increasingly focusing on organizational reform in order to deal with the ramifications of the 2021 coup. Their aim seems to be to democratize both Ennahda and the Tunisian state itself.

KEYWORDS
Ennahda, political Islam, Muslim democracy, functional specialization, re-authoritarianism, organizational reformation.

Imad Alsoos: Research Fellow, Merian Centre for Advanced Studies in the Maghreb, Tunis and Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology; . alsoos@eth.mpg.de.
Julius Dihstelhoff: Research Fellow, Department of Politics at the Center for Near and Middle Eastern Studies (CNMS), Philipps-Universität Marburg; mecam-office@uni-marburg.de.

Introduction

The scholarly literature has tended to treat Islamic groups within the framework of "political Islam". This term basically designates non-violent actors who are engaged in political activities within a framework that they subjectively define as Islamic. These actors typically seek to participate in the structures of a constitutional state, and they advocate for a democratic system based on electoral processes (Esposito 1997, Roy 1998, Tamimi 2011, Ouaissa et al. 2015). In recent years, however, Tunisia's Ennahda movement has undergone a transition from "political Islam" to "Muslim Democracy". This marks a shift in political emphasis from Islam to more symbolic or cultural references – that is, a departure from an open commitment to Islamic sharia. In its place, the state's constitution has come to comprise the party's 'sharia'. Thus, from the perspective of Muslim Democracy, political issues are the preserve of the state, and parliament is the place to discuss them. Accordingly, though Muslim democrats can comprise a majority in parliament, they cannot promote their ideology through state and society. Their religious beliefs are instead personal beliefs, based on an individual's conscience. This does not mean that social policy is not affected by beliefs of the politicians but not in the way political Islam aimed to Islamize society and the state.

This article offers a critical analysis of Ennahda's transition by exploring and examining the historical interplay between the party's political thought and practice. In doing so, the article sheds considerable light on one of the socio-political heavyweights of Tunisia's Muslim political landscape and, more generally, of post-Arab Spring Tunisia. It examines Ennahda's role in both opposition and government up to the present day, against the backdrop of a new, dynamic political landscape shaped by the policies of Tunisian State President Kais Saied. Throughout the article, historical references are invoked in order to better *'synthesize'* the relationship between political thought and practice. Synthesizing here means analyzing various elements, ideas, and actions, in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how political ideas have been and are being translated into practical politics, or how they have been and are being influenced by political practices. It is not sufficient to merely describe these relationships; the goal is to illuminate their significance and potentially gain new insights or understanding about Ennahda and Tunisian politics more broadly.

To this end, we draw on rigorous empirical research, encompassing detailed data collection and analysis. This includes content-analytical assessments of Ennahda's central reference texts and foundational works by the party's intellectual pioneers, as well as an examination of Tunisian President Kais Saied's rhetoric from 2021 onward, and fieldwork interviews held with Ennahda party leaders. The theoretical framework of the article is significantly informed by key texts authored by Rachid Ghannouchi, Ennahda's founder, and other associated intellectuals. Such texts offer insights into Ennahda's ideology, political views, and historical development within Tunisia (for example,

al-Hurriyat al-ʿAmma fi al-Dawla al-Islamiyya (*Public Freedoms in the Islamic State)* (1993 [2022]), *From the Experience of The Islamic Movement in Tunisia* (2015) and *Signs of the Revolution* (2015)). They provide nuanced perspectives on Ennahda's concepts and broader political dynamics from past to present. This is also true of "On Muslim Democracy: Essays and Dialogues" (2023), edited by Andrew March and co-authored by Rachid Ghannouchi, which is particularly relevant to an understanding of Muslim democracy, Ennahda's latest core concept. Furthermore, the incorporation of primary texts by influential thinkers like Sayyid Qutb (1949, 1954–1964, 1964, 2004) and Malek Ben Nabi (1954, 1966) further enriches the theoretical foundation.

By synthesizing empirical evidence and theoretical insights, the article examines the interplay between political thought and practice within Ennahda, always against the backdrop of Tunisia's changing historical and contemporary context. The first sections of this article trace the evolution of the interplay between Ennahda's political thought and political practice from a *daʿwa*-based model to Islamic democracy, and finally to the concept of Muslim democracy. We examine specific ideological adaptations or continuities within the party in response to the shifting historical context, particularly in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. Following this, we address the recent period of democratic backsliding and re-authoritarianization in Tunisia, which has gathered pace since President Kais Saied's monopolization of power in 2021.

In this last section, we focus on the challenges Ennahda faces both internally and externally, including the threat to its institutional structure, leadership, and popularity. To put it differently, the section analyzes how, on the one hand, the politics and discourses of incumbent President Kais Saied have shaped the relationship with Ennahda since 2021, and on the other hand, how the concentration of power in the hands of the President has impacted Ennahda's behavior and its own vision for the future. Finally, we summarize key conclusions, which cover: (i) Lessons from Ennahda's experiences and their relevance to other Islamist movements, (ii) Ideas on Ennahda's transformative potential in Tunisia, and (iii) Reflections on regional political Islam beyond Tunisia.

Ennahda's Evolution: From Islamic to Muslim Democracy

The evolution of Ennahda's thought can best be understood according to three distinct periods of transformation (or Phase I-III). These are (I) between 1969 and 1981, when the group was limited to socio-religious activism, but was nonetheless internally debating its future political ideology; (II) between 1981 and 2010, when it transformed into a public political party, and adopted the concept of Islamic democracy in order to participate in elections with a view to Islamizing the state; and finally (III), after the 2011 revolution in Tunisia, when the party assumed office, reformulated its political ideology, and introduced the central concept of Muslim Democracy.

Phase I: 1969–1981: Institutional formation: From socio-religious activism to debating political ideology

Ennahda was founded in 1969 under the name of the Islamic Group (al-Amdouni 1965–1981). The idea behind its foundation was to defend Tunisia's Arab and Muslim identity (Ghannouchi 1993). In 1956, Tunisia gained independence, and a republic was founded the following year. Under its first President, Habib Bourguiba, a secular state model was established; this entailed a marginalization of both Islam and the Arabic language. Strongly influenced by France's secular model, Bourguiba saw religion as an impediment to modernity and, in 1956, he abolished the sharia courts and sought to annex 'civil' society institutions, especially through control of the *al-ʾaḥbās* or religious endowments which financed them. This resulted in, for example, the closure of az-Zaytouna university and its associated schools. The new, exclusively secular and centralized model of the state marginalized civil society and caused socio-political division within post-independence Tunisia.

Political opposition to and protests against Bourguiba's project were dealt with by repression (al-Amdouni 1965–1981, Ghannouchi 2015: 104). Given the symbolic legitimacy Bourguiba had gained due to his role in Tunisian independence, the autocratic nature of his rule was largely overlooked, even when, in 1964, he extended the state's economic monopoly over private properties, and called for the inauguration of a *taʿāāḍud*, a socialist corporatist project (Murphy 1999b). However, Bourguiba's undisputed power and popularity did not last, especially after the failure of the *taʿāāḍud* program, which left Tunisia in a severe economic crisis, and which, by 1968, had given rise to considerable popular turmoil. Given that Bourguiba's political model linked civil society with the state, the impact of the failure of his socialist program was felt by every section of society.

Scholarship has tended to characterize this as a failed modernization project (Murphy 1999a: 651). In any case, it was at this point that Ennahda emerged to oppose Bourguiba's model of westernization (Ghannouchi 2015: 43). As we discuss in the next section of this article, the group was initially influenced at the organizational level by the Muslim Brotherhood. On the ideological level, however, the founding phase of Ennahda was undoubtedly shaped by various movements and notable intellectuals. Internal debates primarily centered on a comparative contrast between the political philosophies of Malek Ben Nabi and Sayyid Qutb. While both philosophers sought to restore Muslim civilization, they differed in terms of how to go about doing so.

Qutb (1949, 1954–1964, 1964, 2004) believed that all humans must submit to the oneness of God, or *tawḥīd*, and that submission to God mattered above all else in order to liberate individuals from material objects, opportunism and idols, be they human or non-human. He contended that this individual value system should be reflected at the levels of family, society and state, and that it presented the only solution to the maladies of Muslim and non-Muslim societies (Qutb 2004: 23). Any materialist developments, whether in the form of

communism or capitalism, lacked this spiritual dimension, and Qutb considered these tainted by desire, materialism, and opportunism.

Islam, Qutb argued, is by definition civilization, and so there could be no civilization beyond Islam (March and Ghannouchi 2023: 93). Consequently, he believed that any ostensibly social problem – such as colonialism, foreign occupation, or corruption – should catalyze the population to a new adherence to “true Islam” (Qutb 1964: 33) in order to restore civilization. Meanwhile, in order to protect religion from human intervention (including by the Muslim clergy), Qutb introduced the concept of *ḥākimiyya* (or the ‘sovereignty of God’) which drew no distinction between *tawḥīd* on the one hand and the application of sharia law on the other. Sharia, he maintained, represents the value system without which civilization is unachievable, so it must be obeyed under all circumstances and at all times, and it cannot be altered for political convenience (ibid.: 93).

Qutb’s utopian worldview was initially a major inspiration for Ennahda’s political ideology, but it was soon set against Ben Nabi’s approach. Like Qutb, Ben Nabi (1954, 1966) also contended that Muslims must acquire the Islamic value system in order to restore civilization, but he disagreed with Qutb that all civilization should necessarily be Muslim. Each civilization – whether monotheistic, pagan, or even secular – should have its own value system. Building on Abdel-Rahman Ibn Khadun’s critique of the “objectives of history” (Ibn Khaldoun 2004), Ben Nabi postulated the idea that civilizations develop in three consecutive stages: the ethical, the rational, and finally the stage of desire which paves the way for certain groups to step beyond the civilization. Muslim civilization, Ben Nabi argued, had passed through all three stages, and in order to reinvigorate it, Muslims needed to return to the initial ethical stage based on the Muslim value system, and to transform this into a collective approach.

This transformation would comprise a remaking of the individual into a social, collective-minded being who is fully engaged with society. Here, religion represents the spiritual medium that establishes a common and unified social consciousness and basis for cooperation. The social, cooperative human being is what Ben Nabi refers to as the “individual of civilization”, be they Muslim or not. To succeed, this human-based approach demands education, planning and implementation, which means that *tawḥīd* is not enough if it is not accompanied by a collective value system. Similarly, *ḥākimiyya* is not independent, and is also subject to this human-based approach. Ben Nabi’s theories proved important to Ennahda, as they held that civilizations, regardless of their ideologies, could learn from each other.

In fact, however, Ennahda did not draw exclusively on Ben Nabi’s approach; it also tapped into nineteenth-century sources. These included the writings of Muslim thinkers such as Khayr al-Din al-Tunisi, who focused on the application of European-style institutional and legal reforms within the Ottoman Caliphate and its provinces – known as “organizations” (al-Tunisi 1987: 11) – in order to restore Muslim civilization and secure its continuity. Al-Tunis’ central premise was that the weaknesses of the nineteenth century Ottoman

state stemmed primarily from flaws in its administrative structure. Thus, he envisioned a basic compatibility between Islam (or sharia) and the European modern state model.

Increasingly, then, Ennahda drew on thinkers such as Ben Nabi and al-Tunisi to hold that Muslims could learn from other societies and philosophies – a basically universalist premise. Ennahda's vision was therefore to establish a collective value system and a modern vision to reform the state and introduce this as the framework of Islamic democracy. Although Islamic democracy was inspired by sharia, it is not an essentially sharia-based, but rather an umma-based approach. This means that the population or the electorate are the source of legitimacy, and the results of elections must be accepted even if a secular party were to win and rule – which is the virtual reverse of Qutb's sharia-based approach, whereby sharia is subject to *ḥākimiyya*, and thus independent of the umma's decision in the sense that it is context-free.

In the 1970s, Ennahda not only grew at the intellectual level, but also organizationally and in popularity. In the late 1960s, the Islamic Group was limited to "inviting [a few] people to the mosque and teaching them how to pray" (Ghannouchi 2015: 43). By the early 1970s, however, they were able to gather large audiences in mosques across the country. By the end of the decade, they had thousands of followers, as became evident during the General Strike of 1978 and the Bread Revolution of 1982 (Ghannouchi 2015: 56–57, 62f., 115). This intensive political activity caught the attention of the regime, which began to monitor the group's activities, leading to the discovery of the organization on 5 December 1989. Rachid Ghannouchi, Ennahda's founder, considered this to be "the worst event in the group's history" (Ghannouchi 2015). However, Ennahda was able to turn an apparent setback into an opportunity, and declared the foundation of a political party, marking the start of the second phase of the group's existence.

Phase II: 1981–2010: Becoming a Public Political Party: Adopting Islamic Democracy for State Islamization through Elections

The Islamic Group in Tunisia held its foundational conference in 1979 and announced the birth of its political party under the name of the Islamic Tendency Movement (MTI) on 6 June 1981. The idea was to end the organization's commitment to secrecy – which was a common characteristic of Muslim Brotherhood groups – and to establish a public organization or party to participate in elections. In short, Ennahda proposed a comprehensive approach with politics at its heart.

The period between 1981 and 2010 thus marked the transformation of Ennahda into an Islamic democratic party. However, debates have continued over the validity of this approach, given that the struggle for "public freedoms" (Brayik 2013: 24) began in the context of a secular state that was antagonistic to both democracy and Islamic ideology. Ennahda's focus lay on ensuring compatibility between Islam on the one hand, and the modern state and liberal

democracy on the other. The party's internal debates thus intensified and split it into two factions. One, led by Ghannouchi, supported a "Salafi" approach, in order to firmly root modern Tunisian statehood and democracy within an Islamic narrative. This was based on an Islamic approach known as *maqāṣid al-sharīʿa* (the goals or objectives of sharia) (Qaradawi 2008).

In *Public Freedoms in the Islamic State* (2022), Ghannouchi claimed that freedom and justice are the essence and the goals of Islam and democracy. In so doing, he offered a historical reinterpretation of the society of Medina, widely considered the first Islamic state, and from which the prophet Muhammad issued the Constitution of Medina in 622 A.D. This stipulated a pluralism of religions and beliefs. The people of Medina were therefore not obliged to follow the Quran or the constitution of Muslims; instead, they were enjoined to create an independent constitution which would guarantee their cultural differences and their own religious practices based on the concept of citizenship.

The faction within Ennahda which endorsed this Salafi approach was confronted by a second, which instead called for the marginalization and annulment of both sharia and the concept of the Islamic state. This second faction viewed Islam not so much as a set of obligations, but more as a system of values, beliefs, rituals and ethics. From this perspective, the only obligation was not to sharia per se, but to the values of freedom and justice. However, they failed to convince most of their fellow party members, and so they decided to leave Ennahda and found "the Islamic left" (Ghannouchi 2015: 34). According to Ghannouchi, while this factionalism "could have ended the experience of the Islamic movement altogether" (ibid.), the Salafi approach was ratified at the Fourth Conference in 1984, and concepts such as pluralism, democracy and citizenship were added to the Islamic group's repertoire.

Ghannouchi continued to stress that the electorate itself provided the primary source of legitimacy, and that, should the communist party win elections, he would respect it (ibid.). This marked the birth of the so-called "Islamic democracy", and Ghannouchi was seen as "a democrat within Islamism" (Tamimi 2001). And yet, although Islamic democracy accepted pluralism, its ultimate goal was to gradually Islamize the state (interview by author with Sami Brahem, 2023). Democracy was thus not accepted as a fundamental principle, but merely as a tool to organize elections and help the party gain power. Ennahda's argument was that most Tunisians were Muslims, and that the objective of "Islam as a comprehensive approach" as opposed to "laicism and opportunism" was "an approach of the [Tunisian] state itself" (The Founding Carta of the Islamic Tendence Movement 2012b: 15).

This certainly fitted with Ennahda's aims to gradually transform state and society. As the party literature itself explains, "the relationship between us and Islam is a top-down one revealed by God to us, and we impose it on the people" (Ennahda Movement 2012b: 20). Given this ideological standpoint, Ennahda's cooperation with other secular parties in the 1980s was unsurprisingly rather limited. However, the state's growing repression encouraged all opposing parties, whether Islamic or secular, to temporarily put aside their ideological

differences, and to cooperate in combating government repression. This cooperation helped to create new boundaries that would reshape Ennahda's approach with respect to the Islamization of state and society.

In 1987, prime minster Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali orchestrated a coup against President Bourguiba and assumed the presidency. Lacking charisma or socio-political legitimacy, Ben Ali sought to co-opt the opposition. He met Ghannouchi and promised a democratic transition and elections for 1989, as well as the acceptance of Ennahda as an official political party. Ennahda in turn changed its name from the MTI to *Ḥarakat Ennahda* (the Ennahda Movement), a move that was taken to mean that the party no longer represented Islam but had become part of Tunisia's political spectrum. Also significant was Ennahda's acceptance of the *Majallat al-Aḥwal al-Shakhsiyya* (Code of Personal Status), which accepted equality between women and men and outlawed polygamy (Sfeir 1957).

Ben Ali's power-sharing gambit allowed a tiny minority presence for Ennahda in his parliament, and to make this goal achievable, Ennahda was supposed to limit its number of candidates. Instead, however, the party broadened its candidacy, and despite widespread electoral fraud, it received around 17% of the vote. An alarmed Ben Ali banned the movement two years later, jailing tens of thousands of activists and forcing thousands more into exile. The regime took advantage of the civil war that erupted in Algeria in the early 1990s to justify a crackdown on the opposition under the pretext of fighting "Islamic radicalism" and "terrorism" (El-Khawas 1996). Faced with this unprecedented repression, Ennahda voluntarily dissolved itself in 1993. However, in an echo of developments under the Bourguiba regime, official repression had a unifying effect on opponents of the regime. In a 1996 leaflet published to mark the fifteenth anniversary of the party's formation, Ennahda expressed acceptance of pluralism as a set of values, at least within the context of cooperation with other secular parties in alliance against state repression (Ennahda Movement 2012b: 57–90).

Ben Ali's strongarming continued until the mid-2000s, intensifying particularly after 9/11 under the pretext of fighting terrorism. The first easing of state repression occurred only in November 2005, when Tunisia hosted an important international event: the World Summit on the Information Society (Brayik 2015). With the eyes of the world on Tunisia, the opposition became more active. Ennahda leaders stressed the importance of the event, not only to join with other opposition parties to coordinate activities, but also to reconstitute their own organization within Tunisia (interview by author with Riad Chaib, 2024). On the eve of the summit, Ennahda formed "the Committee of 18 October", and quickly announced a hunger strike. This generated peaceful popular protest, which in turn encouraged coordination with other opposition groups to demand public freedoms and democratic elections. Cooperation between Ennahda and other parties led to the issuing of a common document on equality between men and women – a dramatic departure from the Salafist approach of 1980s Islamic democracy (ibid.).

In 2006, Ennahda started to reorganize itself within Tunisia for the first time since 1993 and, to this end, formed "the Higher Committee for Internal

Debate". These debates were nominally separate from the party structure itself, at least from the perspective of outsiders. One Ennahda leader later stated that "what helped us [to reorganize] was the release of political prisoners who had finished their sentence between 2000 and 2005" (Ibid). Ben Ali's extended period of repression offered an opportunity for Ennahda to cooperate with all other Tunisian parties, regardless of their political and ideological standpoint, which later facilitated its ideological and intellectual transformation during the "Arab Spring".

Phase III: 2011–2021: Reimagining Governance: The rise of Muslim Democracy

The Tunisian revolution on 17 December 2010, and the subsequent ousting of President Ben Ali on 14 January 2011, were key aspects of the Arab Spring movement. For Ennahda, they represented an unprecedented opportunity. Not only was it accepted as an official political party in February 2011; it also won the first democratic elections in October of the same year (Kirkpatrick 2011). Ennahda's cooperation with other opposition groups and secular parties prior to the revolution finally came to fruition in the form of the 'Troika' – a government coalition comprising Nahda and two smaller secular parties, Ettakatol and Congrès pour la République – which would rule post-revolution Tunisia.

However, once in office, Ennahda's self-perception as a party of Islamic democracy clashed jarringly with reality. Based on interviews with Ennahda leaders, a key reason for this was the failure of Ennahda parliamentarians and statesmen to find a balance between their ideological values and the quotidian political requirements of a long-established secular state (interview by author with Sami Brahem 2024).

Against this background, Ennahda once again renegotiated its reformist approach, and formally introduced the concept of Muslim democracy at the Fourteenth Party Congress in 2016 (Ghannouchi 2016: 58–67). In practice, however, this marked the onset of internal strife, particularly with respect to the envisioned extent of Ennahda's Islamism. The conceptual focus was now on reforming the state's institutions in order to streamline decision-making through the democratic rotation of power. This would remain distinct from sharia, which had not been the case under the concept of Islamic democracy. In short, Ennahda had not previously considered democracy to be a value system on its own terms, but as a set of tools and mechanisms which were designed to help the party ascend to office and implement its ideological agenda.

In contrast, Muslim democracy dealt with the state as an ideologically neutral arena based on the value system of liberal democracy, which incorporated individual freedoms, including freedom of conscience, as well as citizenship, pluralism, and civil society. Ennahda's leader, Riyad Chaib, has suggested that Muslim democracy was not only the result of internal debates; it constituted a debate in its own right, which included scholars and activists from the broader Tunisian political and ideological spectrum (interview by author with Riad

Chaib, 2024). Muslim democracy therefore came with a new vision, not only for Ennahda's internal organization, but also for the way the party conceptualized state and society. This entailed "functional specialization" in order to create a balance between different powers to achieve "efficiency and success." (Ennahda Movement 2016: 78).

In this context, functional specialization refers to the separation of Ennahda as a *daʿwa* movement from Ennahda as a political party, as evidenced by its new official name, the Ennahda Party Movement, from 2016. The *daʿwa* movement was concerned with cultural activities in society and played no formal role in politics, which became the designated responsibility of the group's political wing. The party ceased to preach religious ideology at the level of state or society. As such, being religious or a practicing Muslim was no longer a condition for joining Ennahda, which was now "open to all Tunisians" (ibid.: 79).

Muslim democracy therefore came to represent the party's transformation from an Islamic ideological formation to a merely symbolic or cultural unit, with no legal basis in sharia law. From the perspective of Muslim democracy, the national constitution of the state became the sharia. According to Sami Brahem, a former Ennahda activist and a proponent of Muslim democracy, religious and moral factors were no longer the main concern for the political wing of the party (interview by author with Sami Brahem, 2024), which now gave political and economic issues "the maximum priority" (Ennahda Movement 2010: 79).

Externally, functional specialization was extended to include the separation of state and civil society, arguably to strengthen the country in times of crisis. Ennahda leaders believed that civil society should not be annexed to the state, arguing that if, for example, the state's economic program should fail, society could act as a back-up for the state. This position obviously drew on historical precedent; the abject failure of the *taʿaāḍud,* the socialist corporatist project, between 1964 and 1969. Ennahda's new vision for society aimed at mitigating the power of the state, which had spread its almost monopolistic influence across Tunisian society ever since the foundation of the republic in 1957. At this time, Bourguiba had annulled the *al-ahbas* or *waqf* (religious endowments) which had historically underpinned the Muslim version of civil society. State centralization was thus seen to contrive a poverty of social participation (ibid.: 197).

Civil society became the realm in which the *daʿwa* movement could operate through cultural and religious activities to shape the value system of society, beyond the influence of the state. Meanwhile, Muslim democracy sought to render civil society institutions, including mosques, independent of political competition in order to exclude and marginalize extremist voices from playing roles that could influence politics. Ennahda leaders claim that extremist groups had previously influence and power in some mosques and Muslim democracy and functional separation aim to neutralize religious places from political polarization. The same approach is employed on social sector such as charities that helped the poor, that could influence the public mood with

regard to politics (ibid.: 95). Thus, the social contract between the political party and civil society is a moral and ideal one, but the bylaws that determined their interaction were less so, which meant that they were intended to be mutually complementary, but only on the basis of complete legal independence (Ennahda Movement 2010: 82). The goal was to defend the Muslim and Arab culture of the state through civil society, while avoiding political polarization and partisanship (ibid.: 82).

In brief, Muslim democracy is based on the idea that "the middle path approach demands the understanding of realities before the interpretation of the Quranic rule of revelations" (ibid.: 93). This relative pragmatism rendered Islamic ideology more adaptative to the existing historical context, and its demands took into consideration "the socio-cultural reality of the country" (Ennahda Movement 2010). Chaib emphasizes that Ennahda should not "stand on the theoretical constant of the movement and should not look for a new horizon for the Islamic project, because the Muslim Brotherhood basis of the project has lost its legitimacy" (Shaib 2013: 17).

To sum up, this section has argued that Ennahda's newly adopted self-understanding as a party of Muslim democracy marked its transformation as a vessel for an ideology (Phase I) to a player in more conventional party politics (Evolution from Phase II to III). Moreover, this intellectual transition points to the organizational reshaping of Ennahda from a protest movement (Phase I and II), as described in Ghannouchi's book *Signs of the Revolution* (Ghannouchi 2015), into a sort of state-centric-movement *and* a political party (Phase III), in which reforms can only happen through state politics, and through democratic elections and the rotation of power. However, President Kais Said's coup of July 2021 undoubtedly represented a challenge to Ennahda's concept of Muslim Democracy. Now that repression is once again on the rise, will Ennahda combine the state-based and protest-based approach, and will we once again see a united front of Ennahda leaders and activists alongside other opposition voices?

Ennahda under Democratic Backsliding and Re-authoritarianization: Unravelling Power Dynamics since 25 July 2021

Since July 25, 2021, President Kais Saied has endeavored to consolidate his regime's authority, notably through the invocation of a state of emergency, as detailed in Article 139 of Decree 88. Central to this strategy was the issuance of Decree 117, which conferred unprecedented legislative powers upon Saied, enabling him to enact laws via legislative decrees (e.g., Nafti 2023, Brésillon 2021, Dihstelhoff and Simon 2024: 102ff., Ben Achour 2022). These measures firmly entrenched legislative authority within the president's domain, facilitating the restructuring of Tunisia's political landscape. A crucial juncture in Saied's program of consolidation occurred with the adoption of a new constitution, which lay the groundwork for substantial transformation in alignment with his vision. The subsequent parliamentary elections in December 2022

and January 2023 validated this constitutional overhaul, further solidifying the president's position (Dihstelhoff and Mrad 2023). In sum, Saied's accrual of power, from July 25, 2021 up to the present, illustrates Tunisia's re-authoritarianization following a protracted process of formal institutional democratization (Thyen and Josua 2023).

It can also be argued that Saied's consolidation of power has intersected with the internal and external decline of Ennahda. His concentration and consolidation of power intensified pressure for change within the party, with internal petitions advocating crisis management and a shift in leadership. Indeed, in the years since 2016, Ennahda has been increasingly plagued by internal division and fragmentation, especially with respect to the divergence around Islamism, which has set supporters of Ghannouchi against dissenters who question his ideological authenticity. Moreover, Ennahda has found itself confronted by a growing disconnect from its own grassroots supporters, which has been exacerbated by myriad conservative resignees from the party aligning themselves with Salafists. Generational tensions have further strained the party, as younger members have assumed public roles but without ascending to leadership positions (interview by author with Sami Brahem, 2023).

These challenges have been compounded by an acute leadership crisis within Ennahda, as Ghannouchi's dominance and advanced age have fostered a growing discontent. The lack of 'internal democratization' has exacerbated tensions, thus prompting resignations and calls for reform, especially in reconciling ideological divisions and pragmatic approaches to government. Externally, since 2010/2011, Ennahda has held significant sway in Tunisian politics, often serving as the largest party in parliament, and a key player in government coalitions (Dihstelhoff and Simon 2024, Brésillon 2021). The party has thus borne the brunt of the growing disappointment of many Tunisians with their post-revolutionary political system (Yerkes 2022, Patel 2022a, Brésillon 2020). Overall, this mounting disillusionment, compounded by a decline in Ennahda's support base by approximately two-thirds since its peak in 2010/2011, has severely undermined the party's influence.

Saied's political re-authoritarianization serves as a stark reminder that electoral democracy alone cannot safeguard Ennahda's political fortunes. For Ghannouchi, "Tunisia is currently facing its largest democratic crisis since the Jasmine Revolution in 2011" (Ghannouchi zit. n. Ennhadha Partei 2021). Several factors contribute to Ennahda's vulnerability. Firstly, the party has often found itself isolated due to some staggering political miscalculations, such as a gross underestimation of President Saied's rising influence after his assumption of power in 2019 under the 2014 constitution (Patel 2022a, Brésillon 2020). Secondly, this Muslim democratic party faces relentless opposition from secular factions, who oppose its Islamist orientation, and accuse it of promoting an agenda contrary to their vision of a secular state (ibid., Thielicke 2021). Thirdly, Ennahda continues to grapple with widespread public discontent, fueled by economic stagnation and money laundering allegations, which have eclipsed ideological considerations in shaping public opinion against the party (Patel

2022a, Patel 2022b). Fourthly, Ennahda has alienated a significant part of its highly religious and conservative base by adopting a more moderate and consensus-driven politics in post-Arab Spring Tunisia. This "pacted transition" (Dihstelhoff and Simon 2024: 86) is seen as a move away from Islamic conventional approach into more secular policies. Since 2016, tensions grew between Ghannouchi's supporters who favored a pragmatic approach in politics, on the one hand, and other party leaders and grassroots members, on the other hand – leading to a notable internal division and fragmentation. Notwithstanding, many scholars viewed this devaluation of religious approach as a process has neutralized Salafist-aligned Karama coalition and paved the way for the shift towards the Muslim Democrat member as a new identity politics. Finally, Ennahda has faced some damaging accusations, ranging from links to terrorist groups to complicity in state corruption, which have tarnished its reputation and further eroded public trust (Présidence Tunisie 2024, Brésillon 2021).

Unfortunately for Ennahda, the party's internal struggles have coincidence with President Kais Saied's re-authoritarianization, marking a significant shift in the country's post-revolutionary power dynamics. Saied's rise has mirrored Ennahda's decline, highlighting the party's vulnerabilities and the fragility of political power. The setbacks of 2021 pose a multifaceted challenge to Ennahda, shaking its core principles of Muslim democracy, and threatening its institutional integrity, internal cohesion, and political strategy. An increasingly authoritarian state aims to diminish Ennahda's influence and discredit its role in the nation-state structure, raising questions about its future trajectory.

Saied's Approach: Neutralizing Ennahda and Reshaping Tunisian Politics

Saied's approach towards Ennahda represents a dramatic departure from the political consensus which had obtained since the Arab Spring. The leaders of political parties viewed as potential opponents of the regime have come under increasing pressure or political repression. Saied has drawn on widespread discontent to indirectly vilify Ennahda, though without explicitly naming the party, thereby positioning it as the primary scapegoat for Tunisia's myriad crises (Yerkes 2022).

In 2022, for example, he darkly implied that, "after an emptying of the state's coffers by those who now claim they seek redemption, it's the Tunisian people who want redemption from them" (Présidence de la Tunisie 2022). In 2024, he contended that "the state is not a party state or a group of parties. The state belongs to all Tunisians. Anyone seeking to disrupt the normal functioning of public facilities will bear full responsibility" (Présidence de la Tunisie 2024). He has implicitly attributed the failure of Tunisia's post-revolution governance to Ennahda by denying that the party had ever formally adhered to national consensus politics: "There are those who have rejected social and political dialogue, so why are they now calling for it?" (ibid). Moreover, in 2023, he laid the blame for Tunisia's current woes – poverty, food insecurity, corruption, and more – at Ennahda's feet:

> Whoever commits a crime against the Tunisian people must pay the price according to the law. We will not leave a single penny for those who stole them, because they took it from the pockets of the poor and the destitute, (Présidence de la Tunisie 2023).

These were by no means isolated comments without concrete consequences. In fact, Saied's anti-Ennahda stance has come to form a pivotal component of a broader political crackdown (Patel 2022a). This has culminated in a restructuring of Tunisia's political landscape, consolidating power under his presidency through constitutional amendments (e.g., Dihstelhoff and Mrad 2022, 2023). Legislative changes have restricted party participation in elections, skewing outcomes in favor of Saied loyalists (ibid., Yerkes 2022). Notably, and in echo of political repression under Presidents Bourguiba and Ben Ali, the regime's strongarm tactics have targeted Ennahda's leadership rather than its grassroots, with arrests and legal actions alleging threats to state security, corruption, and money laundering.

Scholars such as Hamza Meddeb have suggested that the regime's goal is not to completely eradicate Ennahda, but rather to neutralize the party's influence, which has in any case waned in recent years due to internal crises and growing fragmentation: "[It is] not aimed at repressing an ideology or a radical movement, but at punishing and holding politically accountable leaders who have been in power" (Meddeb cited by Ben Hamadi 2024). This "neutralization strategy" involves stripping Ennahda of its popular base and capacity to muster effective dissent. Repressive tactics have included arrests, harassment, travel bans, and asset freezes, while party offices were closed on 18 April 2023, and bans on public gatherings were introduced (Human Rights Watch 2023).

Moreover, since December 2022, Tunisian authorities have arrested at least 17 (former) members of the party, including its two vice presidents, Ali Laarayedh and Nourredine Bhiri. Perhaps the zenith of state aggression was reached in April 2023 with Ghannouchi's arrest. Most of those detained have been charged by authorities with "conspiring against state security" (Présidence Tunisie 2024). And yet Human Rights Watch contends that these charges were made with no disclosure of the alleged criminal acts constituting a conspiracy (ibid., Human Rights Watch 2023b).

All in all, Saied's actions reflect a deliberate effort to curb Ennahda's influence through state coercion and legal maneuvering, signaling the onset of a protracted struggle for political dominance. All of this suggests that Saied is well aware of both the significant role of Ennahda in the past, of its ongoing political influence, and perhaps also of the danger it poses to his monopolization of power.

Ennahda's Response to Tunisia's Re-Authoritarianization

When Saied embarked on his attempted monopolization of power, Ennahda initially adopted a cautious approach, aiming to resist without provoking violent reprisals or alienating allies and members. Maher Madhioub, an adviser

to Ghannouchi, emphasized Ennahda's awareness of the imperative to prevent escalation and maintain composure within the party's democratic framework. "Violence and civil unrest are not desired by anyone here, despite our firm stance on characterizing the situation as a coup" (Interview by author with Maher Madhoub, 2023).

Consequently, the first session of Ennahda's Shura Council on August 4, 2021, indicated the party's willingness to engage in proactive yet very mild crisis management, both in terms of tone and concrete demands. In the session's accompanying statement, delegates made almost casual reference to Saied's "unconstitutional coup" (Ennahdha Media 2021c), while also engaging in introspection and self-criticism. They expressed a desire to understand the popular discontent which manifested in the events of July 25, and they acknowledged the need for party reform:

> [The Ennahda Party Consultative Council] stresses the necessity of the party undertaking a profound internal self-critique of its policies during the last period and of the necessary revisions and renewal of programs and leadership structures (Ennahdha Media 2021a).

Additionally, Ennahda delegates expressed a commitment to the state's anti-corruption efforts, and to dialogue with other political actors in the country, including the President. However, the clear message was that no change of internal leadership would occur under the existent circumstances of political pressure (Larbi 2021). Consequently, Ennahda's Shura Council meeting did not resolve the internal dissent within the party which, in the past, had occasioned mass resignations, most notably on the part of the "Group of 100" in September 2020. Besides this, internal petitions from party members called for the dissolution of the executive office and a "crisis leadership" to deal with internal dissent. Aware of Saied's popular support and military backing, the party's central demand was a return to legitimate participation in constitutional structures:

> [Ennahda] calls on all national forces – parties, organizations and associations – to reach agreement on the minimum level of national consensus that guarantees the return of legitimate constitutional life and protects the stability and unity of Tunisia (Ennahdha Media 2021b).

Secondly, the establishment of the National Salvation Front on 31 May 2023 constituted a significant development, as Ennahda joined this coalition against the perceived coup of July 25, 2021. The party made strategic concessions, such as abandoning its primary demand to restore the pre-coup composition of parliament and advocating instead for national dialogue and early elections based on the 2014 constitution (Patel 2022a).

Since the first wave of repression in February 2022, Ennahda's strategy has reflected an attempt to navigate between, on the one hand, avoiding direct confrontation, which could lead to further repression, and, on the other, to maintaining unity with non-Islamist parties. This delicate balance is crucial for

preserving the party's position amidst growing authoritarianism. Nevertheless, arrests within the National Salvation Front have further weakened Ennahda's political foothold, stifling its capacity to operate effectively (McCarthy 2024, Al-Jazeera 2023).

In this context, Ennahda continues to pursue a state-centered reform approach. The party is actively engaged in developing both a comprehensive party program, and localized municipal initiatives, with a particular focus on the concept of decentralization (interview by author with party leader in Sfax, 2024). It thus seems that Ennahda's central minimum requirement is a formal return to legitimate participation in rule-of-law structures. At the time of writing, and due to Saied's restrictions, Ennahda operates primarily through its *daʿwa* movement, which serves as a nationwide force within civil society organizations and mosque communities.

To be sure, Ennahda's General Secretary, Ajmi Lourimi, has proposed a potential renaming of the party (Lourimi 2024), while former Ennahda leader Abdellatif Mekki has established an explicitly conservative party (Business News 2022), which aims at a diverse, less ideological, though basically socially conservative and economically liberal support base. Despite these developments, however, it is far from obvious that the concept of Muslim Democracy has undergone intellectual revision.

Conclusion

The synthesis of Ennahda's political thought and practice has arisen from the party's historical trajectory. As we have argued here, Ennahda's evolution can be divided into four distinct periods. In Phase I (1969–1981), the party emerged as an ideological force advocating Political Islam. This period witnessed its transition from socio-religious activism to debating its political ideology. Phase II (1981–2010) was ushered in by Ghannouchi's "Signs of the Revolution". This second phase saw Ennahda emerge as a public political party, which aimed at state Islamization through an advocation of the concept of Islamic democracy in elections. During this period, the party evolved in the direction of conventional party politics, while retaining some elements of its past as a protest movement. The Arab Spring marked the advent of phase III (2011–2021), during which Ennahda reimagined governance, and increasingly incorporated the concept of Muslim democracy. It transformed into a state-centric party, blending activism with governance.

Notably, the embrace of 'Muslim democracy' involved a shift towards a state-centric approach, whereby the state is intended to safeguard individual and political freedoms, regardless of ideological differences. The adoption of this position distinguished Ennahda from other Islamic movements in the MENA region. Despite the onset of Phase IV from 07/2021, we have argued here that the core principle of Ennahda's political thought, Muslim Democracy, remains prevalent, that it continues to underscore the party's ideological orientation, and its aspirations within Tunisia's changing political landscape.

Certainly, Ennahda is driven by ongoing challenges around reform and party leadership. However, due to the underground nature of the party's recent political work after the 2021 coup, it is difficult to assess this conclusively. Nevertheless, the broader Tunisian political context in the wake of Saied's power grab points heavily to the onset of a phase IV, whereby Ennahda is much less able to translate the concept of Muslim democracy into political practice. The decline of the concept lies in Ennahda's inability to pursue the prioritization of the political over the civil society field within the overall framework of a new, more authoritarian political arrangement.

In light of the circumstances which characterize phase IV, Ennahda's future looks bleak. Externally, the party is confronted with an authoritarian resurgence and finds itself marginalized from current political processes. It is suffering under severe repression, which echoes a broader state targeting of political opposition. Internally, and despite the appointment of a new interim leader, Mondher Ounissi, on 26 April 2023, Ennahda lacks effective leadership and direction (Brahem 2024), and a reconciliation with state officials seems unlikely, especially given impending presidential elections in October 2024. The party remains paralyzed by arrests and internal strife, which have constrained its political agency and diminished its influence in Tunisia's evolving political landscape.

To some extent, the presidential elections could serve as a much-needed reality check (Guesmi 2022), or as a window of opportunity for the party. They might allow for institutional reform and internal reconciliation, as well as greater purposefulness in the party's leadership and governance. Unlike Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood in 2013 which suffered unprecedented repression, Ennahda could benefit from Saied's approach, which might afford it some maneuverability in terms of forming alliances, while simultaneously allowing it to intensify its *daʿwa* work. In this sense, Ennahda increasingly operates more as a movement than a political party.

This points to the fact that, although Ennahda's political dominance has declined, its model remains relevant within – and potentially beyond – Tunisia. The party persists as a pivotal opposition force, maintains structural and geographic robustness, garners support from conservative citizens and those culturally aligned with Arab heritage, and mobilizes support from lower social strata, uniting diverse population segments socially and politically. Furthermore, Ennahda, akin to other players within political Islam, has endured prolonged periods of oppression in its history, and has demonstrated remarkable adaptability as a political entity. Its persistence suggests that its dissolution is improbable, although another reinvention might be on the cards (McCarthy 2024).

Indeed, as one Al Jazeera journalist has suggested, the party is "perhaps the only force remaining in Tunisia that can realistically act against President Saied's autocratic regime – but to succeed, it needs to reform itself" (Guesmi 2022). Of key importance here could be internal democratization, which might generate party unity and leadership cohesion. Equally important are the sustainment of grassroots connections, restoring credibility, realigning the party's agenda and communication, attracting young talent to leadership positions,

maintaining influence within the security apparatus, and forming a robust opposition bloc. Addressing these measures and challenges is imperative for Ennahda's success in navigating Tunisia's political landscape, and for fulfilling its role as a potential harbinger of change from autocracy, ensuring its relevance and efficacy amidst evolving political dynamics and resistance.

How does Ennahda fit into broader regional trends with respect to political Islam as a socio-political force? Three phases can be outlined here (e.g., Lynch 2024, McCarthy 2024): 1) Before 2010, Middle Eastern states controlled Islamists in order to shore up their own power base; 2) In the aftermath of the 'Arab Spring', movements and parties of political Islam entered the mainstream; 3) Since 2013, there has been a marked return to authoritarianism, which has jeopardized the role of political Islam in state structures. Overall, however, the political opportunities opened by the Arab Spring have fundamentally altered the relationship between political Islam and regimes.

For instance, in Tunisia, large-scale protests and regime change led to the emergence of an Ennahda-led government (2011–2013), while in Morocco, more limited protests resulted in the Islamist Justice and Development Party (PJD) becoming the largest party in government (2011–2021). Since 2013, an undoubted authoritarian resurgence has compromised the presence of Islamists in state structures. This has included a crisis of legitimacy, marked by a decline in the political, societal, and cultural sway of Islamists, as well as escalating political polarization. It has also included a reimposition of regime control, which took place as early as 2013 in Morocco, and which was marked by the rise of Saied in Tunisia in 2021. In Egypt, the previously influential Muslim Brotherhood, once hailed as a model of political Islam, has been severely suppressed and forced into exile following Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's 2013 military coup. Meanwhile, in Jordan, the Muslim Brotherhood has experienced internal fragmentation due to the emergence of a reformist faction. All of this shows that the legitimate participation of Islamist parties within nation-state structures is once again confronted by severe challenges. Societal orientations toward political Islam, and their toleration by Middle Eastern states, appears to be changing. The future remains unclear.

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Imad Alsus
Julius Distelhof

Enahdina muslimanska demokratija u Tunisu posle arapskog proleća: sintetizovanje političke misli i prakse

Apstrakt:

Ovaj rad istražuje interakciju između političke misli i prakse unutar tuniske partije Enahda tokom njenog perioda u opoziciji, nakon što je preuzela vlast 2011. godine, kao i nakon puča 2021. godine. U radu pratimo genealogiju političke misli unutar stranke od tačke njenog osnivanja. Čineći to, istražujemo postepenu evoluciju partijske ideologije od *davetskog* (misionarskog) delovanja između 1969. i 1981. godine, preko islamske demokratije između 1981. i 2011. godine, do „muslimanske demokratije" nakon ustanka 2011. godine. Ovu ideološku evoluciju ispitujemo kroz okvir tri ključna elementa: (i) islam, (ii) promenljivi društveno-politički kontekst Tunisa i (iii) univerzalnu epistemu. Kao što pokazujemo, značajna prekretnica nastupila je 2016. godine sa odvajanjem *davetskih* aktivnosti od partijske politike, što je otkrilo rastuću državno-partijsku konceptualizaciju politike. Međutim, državni udar 2021. godine doveo je u pitanje Enahdin koncept muslimanske demokratije, kao i sve aspekte sopstvenog osećaja kontinuiteta partije kao značajnog društveno-političkog aktera, kao što su njena institucionalna struktura, rukovodstvo, članstvo, društvena baza, politička strategija i ideologija. Enahda je sada suočena sa autoritarnim oživljavanjem čiji je cilj obuzdavanje stranke i delegitimizacija njenog učešća u strukturama nacionalne države. Empirijski dokazi, zasnovani na sadržajno-analitičkim procenama ličnih intervjua, kao i na medijskom izveštavanju o Enahdi, pokazuju da se predstavnici stranke sve više fokusiraju na organizacionu reformu kako bi se izborili sa posledicama državnog udara 2021. godine. Njihov cilj, čini se, jeste da demokratizuju kako Enahdu tako i samu tunisku državu.

Ključne reči: Enahda, politički islam, muslimanska demokratija, funkcionalna specijalizacija, re-autoritarizam, organizaciona reforma.

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Mohammed Hashas

RELIGION AND POLITICS IN MOROCCO: ISLAMIC, ISLAMIST, AND POST-ISLAMIST DYNAMICS

ABSTRACT
This paper aims to map the terrain of religion and politics in modern and contemporary Morocco. Seeing the chronological and intellectual diversity within Moroccan religious thought and politics, this paper proposes three major historical periods to facilitate approaching the topic: the pre-/colonial, the colonial, and postcolonial times. The first pre/-colonial period is hybrid; it coincides with the rise of the first generation of the Moroccan Nahda renewal, before the colonial period, although it lived into the colonial period and played important roles in it for liberation. I mark this with the "Islamic" label, since Islam was the only common identity marker for any project of renewal in an intellectually "homogeneous" society. As to the colonial period, this Islamic identity became stronger since the colonial administration tried to weaken this identity and the social fabric and its related institutions, be they religious brotherhoods, religious endowments, or Sufi orders; at a certain moment in 1930, the colonial administration played on linguistic differences to divide and rule, and in another occasion, in 1953–1955, it tried to dethrone the nationalist Sultan and replace him with a docile one. Here, again, the "Islamic" identity marker of society and politics was further emphasized as a force of unity, thus the label of Nationalist Islam in this stage, despite the variety of currents within the nationalist movement. As to the postcolonial period, it is a phase in which the modern debates over the format of the nation state, the place of religion in politics, democracy, liberalism, socialism, and secularization become part of Moroccan thought and politics. Thus, three major labels are used to describe the variety of political Islams in society: the Ultra-Orthodox Islam, the Orthodox Islam, and Critical Islam. And since they all share Islam as an identity but interpret it differently, I borrow the term from Asef Bayat to call this period the "post-Islamist" period, since the actors with the Islamic label are multiple, and no one single trend or project manages to win to enforce its Islamist interpretation on society and political stakeholders. More importantly, this diversity of interpretations is what saves the "Islamic" from rigidity and turns it into its fluidity of pre-modern times, i.e. to the "Islamic" as a lived spirituality and moral compass, as a theocentric way of life, in a forthcoming post-Islamist society, a secular world and neoliberal economies.

KEYWORDS
Moroccan Islam,
Ultra-Orthodox Islam,
Orthodox Islam,
Critical Islam,
Post-Islamist Society.

Mohammed Hashas, Department of History, Humanities, and Society, University of Rome Tor Vergata, Rome, Italy; mohammed.hashas@uniroma2.it.

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Introduction

In a world governed by modern nation states, and not classical empires or caliphates, it is reasonable to look first at ideas and concepts in the particular context of the nation state to see how they mature from therein before they may find echoes regionally and internationally. This applies to Islamic thought and how it has metamorphosed during the last two centuries of encounter with the project of modernity and its major pillar of secularism. In the Arab world in particular, three major dates stand as intellectual periodization moments: 1) the 1798 Napoleonic campaign in Egypt that led to the major intellectual Nahda (Awakening/Renaissance) productions in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; 2) the 1967 Israeli swift war and victory that led to the defeat (Naksa) of three Arab armies (Egyptian, Syrian, and Jordanian), and the rise of the post-1967 intellectual generation that formed various critical cultural, philosophical and theological projects; 3) and the so-called Arab Spring Uprisings of 2010–2011 in various Arab contexts, in the Maghrib, Mashriq, and Arabia.[1] For various internal and external factors, the responses to these massive protests have taken different orientations: from devastating civil wars in some states (e.g., Syria, Libya, and Yemen), to the return of authoritarianism in some (Tunisia and Egypt), and normalcy of the pre-uprisings conditions in most others (in the monarchies in particular). Morocco, an old autonomous monarchy at the western edge of the Arabicate and Islamicate classical worlds[2], has interacted with these socio-political and intellectual challenges and changes during the Nahda, the Naksa and the Spring Uprisings (Aboul-Ela 2018: 143–162).[3] Moroccan scholars and thinkers, some of them also public activists, have proposed widely read and engaging projects for how to revisit Arab-Islamic thought to

1 I will keep my references to the minimum in this mapping article, with a focus on the original sources, including new video sources whose content is not available yet in written formats. The translations are mine unless otherwise indicated. When first sources are indicated in Arabic, and the English titles in square brackets, subsequent references, however, refer only to the English titles for ease of reading.
On the political-intellectual notes above, see, for example: Corm ([2015] 2020), Hatina (2015), Belkeziz and Barout (2013), Kassab (2010), Al-Azm ([1968] 2007), Hanafi and al-Jabri (1990), Bah (2010), Abu Rabi‘ (2004), Boullata (1990), Hourani ([1962] 2013).

2 “Arabicate,” formed based on Hodgson’s known concepts of Islamicate and Islamdom, refers to whatever pertains to the Arabic linguistic, cultural, and geographical worlds, irrespective of the religious or ethnic origins of the producers of these products and worlds; these worlds, in the age of migration, can extend to mean also Arab culture as found outside the classical Arab world (Hodgson 1974).

3 The ongoing genocidal war on Gaza since the violent events of 7th October 2023 could usher in a new thinking over the intellectual relations of the “Arab and Muslim worlds and the West.” The “West,” especially its component of the G7 big economies, is accused of being complicit in this genocide for its inability to push for the end of the devastating war, despite UN and Security Council, and International Court of Justice resolutions for a ceasefire. But this we leave for future historians of ideas to outline, after the geopolitics of the region settle down.

champion socio-political and intellectual liberty, and ultimately social justice, in Morocco and also in the larger Arab-Islamic societies.[4]

This paper aims to map the terrain of religion and politics in modern and contemporary Morocco. Seeing the chronological and intellectual diversity within Moroccan thought and politics, this paper proposes three major historical periods to facilitate approaching the topic: the pre-/colonial, the colonial, and postcolonial times. The first pre/-colonial period is hybrid; it coincides with the rise of the first generation of the Moroccan Nahda renewal, before the colonial period, although it lived into the colonial period and played important roles in it for liberation. I mark this with the "Islamic" label, since Islam was the only common identity marker for any project of renewal in an intellectually "homogeneous" society. As to the colonial period, this Islamic identity became stronger since the colonial administration tried to weaken this identity and the social fabric and its related institutions, be they religious brotherhoods, religious endowments, or Sufi orders; at a certain moment in 1930, the colonial administration played on linguistic differences to divide and rule, and in another occasion, in 1953–1955, it tried to dethrone the nationalist Sultan and replace him with a docile one. Here, again, the "Islamic" identity marker of society and politics was further emphasized as a force of unity, thus the label of Nationalist Islam in this stage, despite the variety of currents within the nationalist movement. As to the postcolonial period, it is a phase in which the modern debates over the format of the nation state, the place of religion in politics, democracy, liberalism, socialism, and secularization become part of Moroccan thought and politics. Thus, three major labels are used to describe the variety of political Islams in society: the Ultra-Orthodox Islam, the Orthodox Islam, and Critical Islam. And since they all share Islam as an identity but interpret it differently, I borrow the term from Asef Bayat (1996) to call this period the "post-Islamist" phase, since the actors with the Islamic label are multiple, and no one single trend or project manages to win to enforce its Islamist interpretation on society and political stakeholders. More importantly, this diversity of interpretations is what saves the "Islamic" from rigidity, and turns it into its fluidity of pre-modern times, i.e., to the "Islamic" as a lived spirituality and moral compass, as a theocentric way of life, in a forthcoming post-Islamist society, a secular world and neoliberal economies.

Pre/-colonial Times: The Moroccan Nahda, Patriotism and the Islamic Revival

The fact that Morocco is situated in the western edge of the classical Arab-Islamic world has not distanced it from debating the core issues that touch this socio-cultural and political domain it belongs to, although it has retained its autonomy from its classical central powers from the late 8th century AD,

4 For an overview of contemporary Moroccan thought on religion, philosophy, and society, see: Hashas (2025).

when it formed its own Sultanic state of the Idrissids, the founders of Fez and al-Qarawiyyine cultural citadel. Imperial Marrakech would afterwards become, between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, the central state of the Islamic west, which included the al-Andalus in the Iberian Peninsula (Gomez-Rivas 2023; Bennison 2016, 2002; Fromherz 2012). The *Reconquista* and the rise of the Spanish and Portuguese expansions, the discovery of the New World and change of the place of the Mediterranean in world politics, and internal divisions would impact the status of the Sultanate. In the early nineteenth century, because of Napoleonic wars after the French Revolution inside Europe, and drought and famine in Morocco, the Sultanate would experience a period of introversion in its external relations with this continent (al-Mansour 1990).

Although the Napoleonic campaign to invade Egypt (1798-1801) had echoes in Morocco, it was the French seizure of Algeria from the Ottomans in 1830 that would alarm the cultural and political elite in the Sultanate (Al-Manouni 1973, Laroui [1977] 2016). When the Moroccans went in support of the Emir Abdulkader of Algeria in combatting the French, their military was defeated in 1845, which revealed their weakness; a similar defeat under the Spanish military in 1859-60 further showed how weak the traditional army was, based on volunteerism, compared to the new modern organized armies of Europe. That would henceforth lead to the ultimate inclusion of Morocco in the European colonial enterprise, to be called a Protectorate under the French and Spanish officially from 1912 to independence in 1956.[5] But how did the Moroccan cultural elite respond to these modern challenges?

Testimonies from either Moroccan ambassadors, consuls, or sent missions to Europe do not seem to have shown at first a keen interest in what the new Europe was; they saw material progress and colonialism and missed to see also the Enlightenment heritage (Belkeziz [1998] 2008: 67–105). The educated elite was trained in seminaries and ancient major colleges-mosques, like al-Qarawiyyine in Fez and Ben Youssef in Marrakech, besides others in Rabat-Salè in the center, in the Souss region in the south and Tetouan in the north, before the rise of modern educational system during the colonial and postcolonial periods (Baqa 2011: 261–302, 303–336, 361–374). This means that major scholars of the time had also a solid religious scholarly training. Examples here illustrate their reaction to both the colonial enterprise and Sultanic political compliance with it in its weak moment, and to the reform or Nahda movement the winds of which had reached from the Levant and al-Hijaz in Arabia, where some Moroccan scholars had sojourned (Ibid.: 251–260). We could distinguish here between two major generations of Moroccan Nahda revivalists: the first founding

5 The story of independence does not end in 1956; some southern Saharan territories were recovered in the 1960s and 1970s; the Sahara issue overall remains unresolved at the UN level, and two enclaves in the north of Morocco, Ceuta and Melilla cities, also remain under Spanish control from the fifteenth century, the Reconquista period, and which Morocco considers part of its territories.

generation, and its subsequent offspring generation; the first grew during the precolonial and colonial period, and the second during the colonial and early postcolonial period, thus lived different political and intellectual challenges.

Overall, revival was considered both a patriotic and ummatic requisite; the cultural heritage of the glorious far past was the guide; henceforth the Islamic spirit behind the revival movement. And "Islamic" here was broad in meanings: it was a civilizational paradigm, a socio-political barometer, guided by historical experience and achievements in all sectors of life. Replicating this past was conceived possible in modern times not only to encounter the European colonial enterprise but especially to revive societies from centuries of socio-cultural and political decadence. Otherwise here, the "Islamic" was not only law or politics but that galvanizing energy that can resuscitate life in the broad umma of which Morocco is a part.

Among the major scholars that fit into this first generation of Moroccan Nahda is the influential scholars and historian of Fez Mohammed Ben Jaafar al-Kattani (1857–1927), known as Abu al-Fayd. He wrote *Naṣīḥat Ahl al-Islām bi-mā Yadfaʿu ʿanhum Dāʾ al-Kafara al-Liʾām* [Advice to Muslims against the Infidels], a work in which he refuses cohabitation with the Europeans and calls for jihad to liberate Muslim lands. When the French entered Morocco, to escape the rule of the infidels in an Islamic space he migrated to Medina and Mecca where he taught and lectured for nearly a decade (c. 1912–1918), before moving to Damascus after the Arab revolts against the Ottomans. When the French annexed Syria, he returned to Fez and al-Qarawiyyine (al-Kattani: 1971). Relatedly, Mohammed Ben Abdelkebir al-Kattani (1873–1909), another renowned scholar of al-Qarawiyyine, considered the father of the first modern Moroccan Constitutional movement, led the initiative of some scholars that sought to constrain the new Sultan Abd al-Hafid (r. 1908–1912) through the *bayʿa* (oath of allegiance) from succumbing to the French encroachments on the land via compliant treaties. He was punished by flogging for this activism and he died of his wounds in 1909.[6]

In the north of the country, in Tetouan, another scholar played an important role in the formation of the national liberation movement during the colonial period, i.e., Abdessalam Bennouna (1888–1935). Bennouna was a reputed scholar in the northern part of Morocco that was under the Spanish rule, a region that enjoyed more freedom of the press than its counterpart in the south under the French rule. And he was well connected with scholars and liberation movement activists in the Mashriq, like the renowned Lebanese Shakib Arsalan (1869–1946) who visited Tetouan to boost support for the national liberation movement and exchange with its intellectual leaders. Bennouna's intellectual activism demonstrates his immersion in the liberation front in defense of the Islamic lands, besides the national lands. He co-founded the Moroccan Scientific Council (*al-Majlis al-ʿIlmī al-Maghribī*) in 1916, along with Ahmed al-Rahouni (1871-1953), and the journal *Liberty* (*al-Ḥuriyya*) with Abdelkhaleq

6 For more on this Constitutional phase and subsequent ones, see: Hashas (2013).

Touris (1910–1970). He sent his two sons Mahdi Bennouna (1919–2010) and Tayyeb Bennouna (n.d.) to study in Nablus, in Palestine; Mahdi Bennouna, for example, later on played an important role in the intellectual, diplomatic, and journalistic world of Morocco (Ghallab [1991] 2017: 77–82).

Another towering figure that would indirectly impact also the political liberation movement is Abu Choaib al-Doukkali (1878–1937), who studied in Morocco before spending more than a decade in Mecca and Medina, first for studies then for teaching and lecturing, and afterwards also in the ancient al-Azhar in Egypt, and in al-Zaytuna in Tunisia, before returning to Morocco to teach and lecture in the Royal Palace, and to work as judge in Marrakech and minister for justice afterwards between 1922 and 1932 (Riyad 2005). More importantly, al-Doukkali would influence with his erudition and revivalist spirit he has brought from the Levant another leading scholar who would in turn influence a whole generation afterwards, i.e. Mohamed Ben Laarbi al-Alaoui (1880–1964).

Ben Laarbi al-Alaoui became known as "Shaykh al-Islam" and father of the Moroccan progressive Salafi patriotism, or patriotic neo-Salafim, as Allal al-Fassi refers to it (al-Fassi [1948] 2003: 153–169, al-Alaoui 1997: 75–84, Ghallab [1991] 2017: 43–54). Ben Laarbi al-Alaoui taught in al-Qarawiyyine mosque-college of Fez, reintroduced tafsir tradition in curricula, tried to make modern religious educational reforms, and defended the education of women. In Fez, he taught some of the most active scholars and political leaders of the colonial and post-colonial Morocco, i.e., Mohamed Taqi al-Din al-Hilali (1893–1987), Mohammed al-Mokhtar al-Soussi (1900–1963), Allal al-Fassi (1910–1974), Mohamed Hassan al-Ouazzani (1910–1978), and Abdallah Ibrahim (1918–2005), among others; and these developed their own ideas afterwards and belonged to different intellectual trends as will be noted below. He also blessed the birth of the Leftist opposition party post-independence. He was exiled nationally a number of times by the French for his political opinions in defense of the national liberation movement. He also defended the Maghribi and Palestinian liberation movements and was ready to volunteer in the resistance movement in 1948 in Palestine (Belkebir 2014: 7–11, 13–49; al-Fassi [1948] 2003:153-155; al-Fassi 2008: 205–212).

Overall, this period of Moroccan Nahda rose politically resistant to colonialism, and tried culturally to reform the educational systems in the classical madrassas and colleges, emphasized the role of women's education in the development of society, and used amply the newspapers and magazines as a way of divulgating the idea of civilizational and national revival. At this stage, the waves of the Mashriqi Nahda were impactful, since some leading figures, as scene above, were well connected to this part of the Arab and Islamic world and what was happening in it (Jebroun 2022: 134–135). This is manifest in the way Shaykh Mohamed Ben Laarbi al-Alaoui was perceived by direct students, like al-Fassi, and indirect ones, like Abdellah Guennoun. The latter described him as the "[Muhammed] Abduh of Morocco" (Guennoun [1975] 2015: 110) and the former described him as a major thinker, in the footsteps of [Jamal Eddine] al-Afghani and Abduh (Al-Fassi 2008: 205–212) – the two pioneering figures of

the Arab Nahda and its reverberations also in the rest of the Islamic world. In sum, again, liberation here was moving in a broader orbit and its spirit could be described as Islamic, in the broad sense of the term, i.e., the Islamic world was under siege, and it was the spirit of Islam and its founding liberation moment that had to be invoked for revival; Islam as a religion, a faith system, and as a civilization were perceived as able to rise again and defend the lands and cultures.

Colonial Times: Nationalist Islam

The fact that the monarchy enjoyed historical religious legitimacy in the country played an important role in retaining it as a parallel authority, besides the colonial administration led by a French governor (*Le résident général*) who effectively ruled on most issues, which the monarch had to ratify under the French Protectorate treaty of 1912. However, the new monarch Mohammed V (r. 1927–1953; 1955–1961) joined hands with the liberation movement from the early 1930s and pushed for real reforms under the French rule.[7] He was dethroned and exiled to Corsica and Madagascar between 1953–1955 until the national liberation movement, with its various factions, supported by social protests, brought him back to the country and the throne (Jebroun 2022: 136–137, 230–247).

On 16 May 1930, the French colonial administration issued a decree, known as the Berber Decree. This was read by the nationalist movement as a divide and rule policy, an institutionalization of a division between the Arabs and Berbers – the native Amazighs – a division or schism that did not exist before then. This was the colonial act that brought together the liberation aspirations under the banner of an Arab-Islamic written cultural identity. The nationalists turned 16 May each year into a spiritual retreat in the mosques to read the Qur'an, and plan for liberation. If the French planned to use ethnicities and languages to divide the social fabric, the nationalists used the same narratives to reunite and resist – Islam is the religion, Arabic is the language, and the monarch is the axis of unity; this would become the moto of the national anthem later on: God, Land, King (*Allah, al-Waṭan, al-Malik*) (Ibid.).

Because the political and cultural elite was trained in classical schools, they had a solid religious education, and some of the leaders were also religious scholars, like al-Doukkali and the leaders he influenced, as mentioned above. For instance, Allal al-Fassi a graduate of al-Qarawiyyine who retained his scholarship in parallel with political activism, would become one of the most prominent leaders of the nationalist movement and the Independence (al-Istiqlal) Party. He is the most known Moroccan scholar of the first part of the nineteenth century outside Morocco because of his scholarly as well as political engagement with leaders of the Arab and Islamic liberation movements

7 In the Spanish controlled zone, the resistance intensified earlier under the leadership of figures like Abdelkarim al-Khattabi (1882–1963), another iconic figure of international reputation for resistance. On this figure, see: Al-Messari (2012).

(Hourani [1962] 2013: 372). In the post-independence period, he retained a major active role in which he defended the dynamics and flexibility of sharia to be integrated in the modern nation state laws. His magnum opus *al-Naqd al-Dhātī* (Self Criticism) was published in 1954, two years before independence, as a theoretical guide to the post-colonial Muslim society of Morocco. In the work he brings political theory, political theology, as well as social theories and economics together in his outline of the major features of what the Moroccan cultural elite and ruling authorities have to envision in the formation of an independent and prosperous society (Al-Fassi [1949] 2008). During the early postcolonial period, in 1963, he published *Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿa* (The Objectives of Shari'a), and *Difāʿ ʿan al-Sharīʿa* (In Defence of Shari'a) in 1966 to combat the emerging secularists and communists that had a different interpretation of how the Moroccan society and its politics should be (Al-Fassi [1966] 2010).

Al-Fassi's peer, also a student of Ben Laarbi al-Alaoui at al-Qarawiyyine, was Mohamed Hassan al-Ouazzani, who continued his studies in Political Science in Paris in the late 1920s. In France, he developed strong connections with Arab and Muslim students' associations, where the idea of the Maghrib union was first being discussed among Maghribi students and future national liberation movements leaders. Al-Ouazzani returned to Morocco and became a leading figure with al-Fassi in the founded nationalist movement of the early 1930s, but he would distance himself from al-Fassi and his group from 1937 over details about the work and organization of the National Liberation Block (*Kutlat al-ʿAmal al-Waṭanī*), founded in 1934, in which they were two major leaders. In 1946, he founded *Ḥizb al-Shūra wal-Istiqlāl* (Democratic Independence Party) as a split party from the Independence Party. Both of them were prolific writers, public speakers, and charismatic leaders; and they retained active roles during the colonial and postcolonial period, until the mid-1970s. Al-Ouazzani is often presented as a liberal figure in the intellectual and political life of modern Morocco, and al-Fassi as a progressive but conservative figure. However, this distinction is not very clear if their written literature is examined; they both believed that Islamic political concepts adjust to human conditions and are thus compatible with the ideas of constitutionalism and democracy; and both considered a constitutional monarchy the long-term aim for Morocco. They differed, nonetheless, in the details concerning the management of their parties. On the whole, if al-Fassi represents, for some, the progressive conservatives, like the progressive Salafism he was influenced by, for his steadfast commitment to converging classical shariʿa legal prescriptions into the modern state laws, and al-Ouazzani represents, for others, the liberals for his belief in modern deliberative institutions, was there a leftist competing voice in their midst? Yes, there was, and it was led by the charismatic young Mahdi ben Barka (1920–1965), a Leftist with a strong national, regional and global liberation narrative.

Ben Barka was a mathematician with a socialist orientation. He was among the youngest signatories of the national liberation declaration of 1944, and a leading young member of the Independence Party. However, he would split

from the latter in 1959 to create the National Union for Popular Forces (*al-Ittiḥād al-Waṭani li-l Quwāt al-Sha‘biyya*) over organizational matters with the Independence Party and its senior leaders. The Popular Forces would develop into the Socialist Union for Popular Forces and become the most fierce political opposition in the country from the 1960s to 1998, when it entered into a coalition government for the first time. A staunch believer in socialism as an alternative to capitalism as a colonial machine, Ben Barka sought to empower civil society and to organize the labor forces. He was also for the divisions of powers, free and fair elections, issues that brought him trouble with the political system, and the Crown Prince Hassan II (1929–1999, r. 1961–1999). Regionally, he was for the Arab unity and for the Palestinian Cause, and against Western hegemony. Internationally, he was an active member in support of Third World movements in Africa, Asia and Latin America. He was in charge of preparing for the Three Continents Conference to be held in Havana, Cuba, in January 1966 (Ghallab [1991] 2017: 273-282).[8] However, he was kidnapped and his body disappeared in October 1965, never to be recovered. His case, still open in the Moroccan political history, is known as Ben Barka Affair.[9]

The point behind referring to Ben Barka is because of his major role in the national liberation movement from the 1940s to 1965, and the regional as well as international connections he gave to this engagement from a context that is Islamic, and in a political regime that has religious legitimacy as an Islamic State (Sultanate). More importantly, his Socialist Party would become the major voice of opposition in the country for three decades (1960s–1990s), i.e., from the early postcolonial period, which coincided with the Cold War and the division of world geopolitics between the West (US/Europe, and their allies) and the East (the Soviet Union and its allies). The Moroccan ruling political system sided with the West, and opted for a more open political multiparty system, governed by two houses of representatives (sometimes the Upper House was frozen during stalemates), the open market (not to say fully liberal), and important freedoms of associations and expressions. Political Islam as an organization in the 1950s and 1960s was still absent from the scene. The rivals at the political stage were all patriotic nationalists, whether critical conservatives, like al-Fassi, or liberals, like al-Ouazzani, or socialists, like Ben Barka.[10] The other dis-institutional rival, out of the political game, were the two failed coups d'états of 1971 and 1972, which pushed the monarch Hassan II to further monopolize power and weaken the political parties of all trends – the parties which sometimes had to form a Block to create a stronger opposition to boycott "given Constitutions" (by the monarch), constitutions not agreed upon by the political actors (Hashas 2013). The 1970s was also the moment of the rise of new Islamic movements and political Islam in the country. And since

8 See also: Barka (1966, 1968).

9 For the "Affair Ben Barka," see: Daoud and Monjib (1996).

10 Internal diversity and other major figures within these major camps, as well as the parties that split from them are bracketed here.

Islam was anyway a major component of the already existing national liberation movements, the new Islamic movements would give their identities different levels of Islamicity. More importantly, critical projects would also emerge to engage intellectually with the socio-political situation of not only Morocco but the whole Arab-Islamic world as forms of calls for genuine liberation and renewal. That is, prominent intellectual projects that engage with Islamic thought, but are not necessarily Islamist or Islamic (i.e., Critical Islams), will be referred to below, besides the political actors that identify as Islamic, or Islamist. More on this below.

Post-colonial Times: Ultra-Orthodox, Orthodox, and Critical Islams

Moroccan political Islams have various roots and orientations, much the way liberals and socialists do. To begin with the roots, first, and to state the obvious, the Islamic references are used by all stakeholders since it is the fundamental identity marker that have made the Moroccan intellect over the last fifteen centuries. Second, the political system is an ancient Islamic State, the Islamic Sultanate that has survived centuries of imperial changes in the region, be they empires from the Arab-Islamic east or Euro-Christian north. And since the eighth century, a homogeneous Islamic theological and legal identity was consolidated, until the colonial and postcolonial periods that disrupted this intellectual homogeneity with the modern episteme and its variegated interpretations, nationalist, liberal, socialist, and ultimately also Islamist. Third, the colonial experience, and the encounter with modernity and the ideas of secularism and the power of the people to decide on their own affairs have challenged the Muslim intellect as well as politics to interact. This has led first to generic revivalist movements all over the Islamic world during the colonial period, before these movements turned into more nationally focused ones, without losing their regional and international conversation with the Muslim condition in this age.

As a reminder, in the Arab world, and the broader Middle East, the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in 1928, the Nakba of 1948, and the Naksa of especially Arab nationalist ideology in 1967 gave space to the rise of another narrative, the political Islam narrative. That political Islam can reclaim its place in society and politics in an authoritarian regime of the Shah of Iran that did not participate in the defense of the Palestinians in 1948 or in rescue of their neighboring authoritarian Arab regimes in 1967 gave a strong impulse to Sunni political Islam as well to reactivate its sources and resources to do politics and change power dynamics. This was being seen in Afghanistan (1979–1989), and Algeria (1991), besides Iran itself (1978–1979), to name these. Or, alternatively, it was the authoritarian and military regimes that started using more religion in their narratives to absorb the Islamic revivalism and opposition; and this was seen in Pakistan (1977–1988) and Sudan (1983–1984) for instance. As to the monarchies, which have religious legitimacy, some of them (Morocco and Jordan) only opened up to political Islamic movements

that were not a threat to their thrones, and abolished those that spoke against the monarchic regime.[11] Morocco did both: it opened up, and also abolished, or at least limited, the margin of liberty of opposing Islamist movements in the 1970s and 1980s, but started opening up to them further by the end of the 1990s, which is why its Spring Uprising was not as radical and was soon challenged through the electoral path to reach power seats (2012–2016; 2017–2021), and also to leave it, institutionally, and peacefully afterwards, as will be further clarified below.

Now, for the orientations of Islamic political movements and their thinking in the Moroccan context, three labels can be used to map the field and clarify the picture.[12] These orientations can be synthesized in three labels and groups: the Ultra-Orthodox or Salafi Islam, the Orthodox or Mainstream Conservative Islam, and Critical or Intellectual Islam.

Ultra-Orthodox Islam: Salafi Islam and Political Sufism

Ultra-Orthodox Islam

In the Moroccan intellectual context, there is a distinction between the precolonial Salafism (Salafiyya) of Moroccan Nahda pioneers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century – such as al-Doukkali, Ben Laarbi al-Alaoui, Bennouna, al-Fassi, and Guennoun, as noted earlier – and a postcolonial Salafism that started to emerge in the 1970s. The first is considered progressive and nationalist; it used a religious narrative for cultural revival and for resistance against some cultural practices that were deemed anti-Islamic (i.e., sainthood and superstitious practices), and for its resistance against colonialism. The second is considered regressive and transnational since it aimed at re-Islamizing Muslim societies through a more conservative narrative and literature that was not fully home-grown according to the Ash'ari-Maliki theological-juridical schools and orthodox Sufism of Morocco. The Hanbalite Wahhabism from Arabia was considered an imported product and met resistance by most religious scholars of Morocco in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[13] However, from the 1970s onwards, it would find more space in the country by local scholars and shaykhs. The imported Salafi movement was led by erudite

11 For an overview of political and intellectual dynamics of Islamic movements, parties and their ideologues across the Islamic world, including Morocco, see: Esposito and Shahin (2013).

12 I leave aside the jihadist movement here. For an overview on this theme, see: Masbah (2021); al-Bashir al-Turabi et. al. (2022). I will refer to the jihadis again when I speak of the birth and dispersion of the Muslim Youth Movement of the early 1970s below.

13 Wahhabism found first official welcome in Morocco under the Sultan Mawlay Sulayman (r. 1792–1822) who was attracted to the calls of renewal of the Wahhabi movement in its initial phase of renewing the meanings of Tawhid in Islam and fighting superstitious and sainthood practices prevalent among some Sufi brotherhoods then; this explains why Sufism was critiqued heavily by progressive Salafism in the Maghrib and Mashriq.

scholars like Taqi al-Din al-Hilali (1893–1987), who studied in the Levant, Arabia and Germany. Al-Hilali was embraced by some major scholarly authorities like Rashid Rida (1865–1935) and later on in Arabia by Nasir al-Din al-Albani (1914–1999) and Abdelaziz Ben Baz (1912–1999). Moroccan new Salafi branch was epitomized by Mohammed al-Maghraoui (b. 1948), a student of Taqi al-Din in the mid-1960s. Al-Maghrawi is considered the most prominent Salafi shaykh in the country since the early 1980s; his base has been Marrakech where he opened various schools (madrassas). And although he had strong links with the Wahhabi Salafism, his Salafism, however, remained rooted into the Moroccan tradition and recognizant of the Moroccan political system. Al-Maghrawi's national Salafism is proved through his critique, for example, of Abdessalam Yassine's letter "Islam or the Tempest" to the King, or his support of State policies that aim at surveying Moroccan Islam from external spiritual infiltrations, like Shiʿi discrete activism in the country or among the Moroccan diaspora abroad (Aboullouz 2013: 345–354, 380).

Nonetheless, some other Salafi leaders took a more critical stance on the Arab regimes that especially ally with the hegemon and invading USA. This criticism increased after the 9/11 (2001) terrorist events in the USA, and the invasion of both Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. Then the 16 May 2003 terrorist events in Casablanca would turn these vocal critical Salafis into a target of state surveillance and also accusations of incitement to violence, and ultimately long prison sentences. For instance, these accusation put Salafi leaders like Mohammed al-Fizazi (b. 1949), and Mohammed Abdelwahhab Rafiqi, known as Abu Hafs (b. 1970), Omar al-Haddouchi (b. 1970s), and Hassan al-Kattani (b. 1972), as well as ordinary followers in prison for up to 20 years. They were released in 2007 through a royal pardon and tribunal decree, after their confession that they differed from apolitical Salafism, and that they were Shaykhs of Jihadi Salafism (Ibid.: 381–386).

The few freed Salafi leaders have made revisions to their thinking. Al-Fizazi, among the freed, called for the creation of a Salafi party after the "Arab Spring Uprisings" of 2011, but the idea remained a call, and was never realized. The Salafis are back to their apolitical activism, although a few of them are sometimes present in public discussions through their revisionist ideas, like Abu Hafs who has adopted a liberal reading of the juridical tradition regarding inheritance, and male-female relations outside marriage (Hafs 2023).

Political Sufism

In parallel, another ultra-orthodox movement was formed officially in 1983 under the leadership of Abdessalam Yassine (1928–2012), i.e., the Justice and Excellence Movement (*Ḥarakat al-ʿAdl wal-Iḥsān*). Yassine studied under the renowned scholar – mentioned earlier – Mukhtar al-Soussi in Marrakech at an early age, before joining the Qadiriyya Butshishiyya Sufi Movement afterwards; the latter was led by Shaykh al-Abbas Ben al-Mukhtar Butshish (1922–2017). Yassine dissented from the Sufi movement in 1972 when the leadership

was passed from the Shaykh al-Abbas to his son Hamza, later Shaykh Hamza, instead of to Shaykh Yassine, who saw himself more eligible for the leadership of the Sufi path. The novelty of the path Yassine would develop, however, was more political.

From an ultra-orthodox perspective about the concepts of democracy, sovereignty, and caliphate, Shaykh Yassine issued a public letter entitled "*al-Islām aw al-Ṭūfān*" ("Islam or the Tempest") to King Hassan II in 1974, asking him to change his authoritarian regime into a just ones, according to Islamic teachings, for the development of society (Yassine 1974). A similar letter was sent to the new King Mohammed VI in 2003, entitled "*Ilā Man Yahummuh al-Amr*" ("To Whom It May Concern") (Yassine 2003). Yassine and his movement which has an important size of followers inside the country and among the diaspora in Western Europe have managed over the years to remain a public critical voice against corruption, lack of social justice, and under-development in the country. During the Years of Lead (1970s–1990s) they were often harassed, or imprisoned, by the police and surveillance agency of the ministry of internal affairs, but since the 2000s, they have been allowed public visibility and activism. During the 20 February social movement after the Arab Uprisings of 2011, the movement was a visible component of the protesters. Despite its steadfast critique of the ruling political regime, and its belief in a Caliphal system based on consultation and public selection and not hereditary, the movement has from the start denounced violence, which makes of it very connected to its Sufi teachings that seek change through peaceful protests and spiritual education to change the self and citizen for the better (Darif 1995). Still, despite the nonviolent narrative it applies, it is critiqued by the other variant of political Islam that works within State institutions, since Yassine's Movement's idealist concept of the Caliphate ignores the centuries long history of the Moroccan Sultanate and how Moroccans interact with it. One of such a critique comes from Mohammed Yatime (2000: 36–78), one of the leaders of the Islamist PJD party, on which more below.

Orthodox Islam: State Islam and National Political Islam

Two major groups can be distinguished within Moroccan Orthodox Islam: official Moroccan Islam, or State Islam, and national Moroccan political Islam, or democratic political Islam. The first is Moroccan State Islam that is represented by State institutions or has gradually been integrated into State institutions, the head of which is the King as Commander of the Believers (*Amīr al-Mu'minīn*), including the non-Muslim believers, like the Moroccan Jewish Community. It is the Constitutional Islam as well, "the religion of the State," according to Article 3 of the Constitution of 2011. Moroccan Islam embraces the classical and modern institutions that promulgate it, from al-Qarawiyyine and Dar El Hadith El Hassania, Higher Council of Ulema (*al-Majlis al-ʿIlmī al-Aʿlā*), Mohammedia League of Ulema (al-Rabita al-Muhammadiya lil-Ulama), to the Ministry of Religious Affairs, religious education at all educational

levels from primary school to the university. These institutions also use various media outlets that propagate it, like TV channels, radios, publications, and websites. Apolitical Sufi movements that receive state financial support are part of this Moroccan State Islam; the Butshishiyya and Tijaniyya brotherhoods are two major examples.[14]

As to the second type of Orthodox Islam, it refers to Moroccan political Islam that emerged as a convergence of a number of Islamic movements of the 1970s and 1980s. Although some of its factions had very critical reviews concerning the monarchy during the radical times of the 1970s and 1980s, it developed since the 1990s into a political Islam that is rooted in the Moroccan religious tradition and its established institutions, the head of which is the monarchy. This political Islamic movement emerged in the 1970s to contest three major political stakeholders: 1) the State, as a monopolizer of both the Islamic discourse (the monarch as Commander of the Believers) and all powers in the country; 2) the local nationalists that failed to cater for the socio-economic and political aspirations of postcolonial times, and regional Arab secular nationalists post-1967 Naksa; 3) and the socialists and communists that dominated the Moroccan political, cultural and university life in the 1970s and 1980s during which they at times held anti-religious narratives as a means of radical cultural and political change. In this context grew the so-called Muslim Youth Movement (*al-Shabība al-Islāmiyya*), in 1969 and officially in 1972 in Casablanca, led by Abdelkarim Muti‘ (b. 1935), and joined by his new leading companion in the movement Ibrahim Kamal (1931–2019) (Muti‘ 2020). Initially, both were members of the national liberation movement and Independence Party, and briefly joined the newly created Socialist Party in 1959, before leaving it in the mid-1960s. The movement aimed at educating the masses and the emerging lower middle class of basic Islamic fundamentals as they relate to their daily social and economic life, and ultimately at changing radically the political system. At this stage, the literature of Hassan al-Banna (1906–1949) and Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966), of the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, came into circulation (Kamal 2016). Both Ibrahim and Muti‘ were accused of inciting violence and the murder of the socialist leader Omar Benjelloun in 1975, but they denied these accusations. Kamal suffered five years of torture in prison and left it in 1980 when his innocence was proven, while Muti‘ has been in exile since then, to avoid the death sentence, passed in 1980 in absentia. That murder led to the dispersion of the movement inside the country, and the rise of other movements in other major cities of Fez, Meknes, Rabat, Salé, and Tetouan, with a different narrative that works within the Moroccan legal and political system. Muti‘, however, keeps advancing his views and revisions online from outside Morocco, by renouncing change through violence, although he remains very critical of the current ruling system and its oppression of freedom of expression, and lack of distributive justice. Muti‘ is also critical of the failure of political Islam

14 On State Islam, political Islam, and Sufi politics, see, for instance: Hmimnat (2021), Bouasria (2015), Daadaoui (2011), and Tozy ([1998] 2001).

that grew after his movement, and managed to lead politics after the Moroccan Spring of 2011 (Muti‘ 2013).[15]

In 1983, Abdelilah Benkirane (b. 1954), a school teacher and former member of the Muslim Youth Movement, appeared in Rabat as a young leader of a new movement called the Association of the Muslim Society (*Jam‘iyat al-Jamā‘a al-Islāmiyya*), to be renamed the Movement of Renewal and Innovation (*Ḥarakat al-Islaḥ wal Tajdīd*) in 1990. Similarly, the League for the Future of Islam (*Rābiṭat al-Mustaqbal al-Islamī*) would emerge and organize itself since 1994, under the leadership of Ahmed al-Raissouni (b. 1953), a scholar of religion and university professor. The two movements merged in 1996 to become the Movement of Tawhid and Renewal (*Ḥarakat al-Tawḥīd wal-Islāḥ*), and al-Raissouni became its first president. Al-Raissouni became some two decades later also head of the International Union of Muslim Scholars, after Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi (1926–2022). Al-Raissouni, known as an expert scholar on the objectives of shari‘a through a contextualist reading of al-Shatibi's (d. 1388 AD) *al-Muwāfaqāt,* defends modern democratic institutions, social justice and liberty as the source of vitality and revival of any society (Al-Raissouni 2014).

The political party of the Justice and Development (*Ḥizb al-‘Adāla wal-Tanmiya*, PJD) emerged from the movement of Tawhid and Renewal. The PJD, led by Benkirane, had to seek support of the nationalist figure Abdelkarim al-Khatib (1921–2008) and his Popular Movement (*al-Ḥaraka al-Sha‘biyya al-Dustūriyya al-Dīmuqrāṭiyya*) to integrate this "Islamic" party into the official political system of the country; this took place already in 1996; from then on the PJD started running for local and legislative elections, and winning more seats, until they reached the peak after the Moroccan Spring protests in 2011. Benkirane became the first "Islamist" Prime Minister (2011–2017) in the country,

15 On the theme of "revisions" of the Islamists pre-and-post the Arab Spring, see: Talidi (2013). Muti‘s movement remains important in the genealogy of Moroccan political Islam, since it contributed to the growth of two major trends of thinking within it. A note is helpful first. When Muti‘ escaped the country in 1975, the movement's dispersion would develop two major trends. One trend dissented from Muti‘ movement and became more radical in its rhetoric, and worked to train itself also militarily from 1975 in some zones of wars (like Afghanistan and Lebanon) as a way of preparations to change the political system in the country. However, the movement never managed to implement any bloody event in the country or outside it, mostly because its leader Abdelaziz al-Nu‘mani disappeared in 1985 in France, where he was often based, and his movement gradually froze its ambitions, and ultimately its new leader made revisions, after prison experience. As to the other trend, it would develop in collaboration with other movements that were active in society; this trend would choose the institutional path, work within the legal and political system of the country. For a most recent testimony on the birth of the Moroccan Jihadis in the mid-1970s, see, for instance, the testimony of the second Emir of the movement, after prison experience and intellectual revisions: Sumah (2022). On this theme, revisit: Masbah (2021). For an internal critique of the Islamic movements' thinking and ways of operating, and especially for a critique of the persona of Muti‘ and its influence, see: Al-Ansari (2007: 67–87).

followed by his companion Saad Eddine El Othmani (b. 1956) for the second mandate of the PJD in leading the government (2017-2021).[16]

However, the PJD would lose drastically in 2021 legislative elections for various reasons: the growth of strong coalition parties against them; the failure to deliver socio-economic improvements as were propagated during the campaigns (Yildirim and Zhang 2021); the failure to remain faithful to some of the ideals of the movement, like the protection of Arabic language in the teaching of some scientific subjects in education, besides the inability to leave the coalition government after the re-naturalization of relations with Israel took place in December 2020 – relations that the head of the government, for the Islamist PJD, Saad Eddine El Othmani had to sign. The party and its background movement of Tawhid and Renewal still oppose such naturalization, although it was the head of government of the Islamist PJD that signed it then, following higher strategic choices led by the monarch directly (Rddad 2021). Overall, recent testimonies by leaders of the PJD that were ministers during the 2011–2021 Islamist-led coalition governments say that the Islamists were not welcome by the deep state and its allies within the political spectrum; and although they did their best to implement some social, health, and economic policies that aimed at improvising the situation of the poor and lower middle class, not all such initiatives could be implemented, and some of them were blocked or caused to fail after their mandates. While they insist on the very positive relations with the monarch, and his support of their governance when they were in power, they do at the same time underline that the geopolitical relations have to be taken into account to understand the way the political and economic infrastructure, i.e., the deep state, works in the country (Daoudi 2024).

Critical Islam: The Ethicists, Egalitarianists, and Liberals

The Ethicists

Now that the socio-political context in which various forms of Islamic thought and activism in Morocco in the twentieth and early twenty-first century have been clarified through two major trends, the Ultra-Orthodox and the Orthodox, we can give an idea of how the third trend, the Critical trend, looks at Islamic thought, and political theology in particular, for change. And it is obvious that this trend is the most theoretical compared to the previous two that merge theory with practice. More importantly, and like the previous trends, it too can be divided into three trends so as to understand the field better. And to show how interconnected these trends are, I will trace some intellectual affinities for each of them, to illustrate the point further. These critical trends can be labelled as such: the ethicists, egalitarianists, and liberals. The three trends, led by some major scholars and thinkers that have marked "Rabat school" and Arab scholarship at large since the 1950s, can intertwine in certain issues, and

16 For a historical overview as well as integration of the Moroccan Spring dynamics and the involvement of the Islamic movements, see: Aourid (2020).

do not necessarily fully exclude or oppose each other (Hashas 2025: 1–124). What they share is that they seek liberation, each of them from a particular perspective. And although the last two trends do not identify as Islamic, they are read here as such – Islamic – in the broad sense of the term, since they engage intellectually with the Islamic movements as well as Islamic intellectual tradition at large, past and present. “Islamic” here is then a cultural marker, and not a political one.

To start with, the ethicists believe that Islamic thought in general and liberation theology in particular have to revisit the fundamental ethos of the Qur’an, the applied ethics of the Prophet Muhammad, and the ethical message that Islamic sharia and legal theories uphold, beyond rigid legalism. While they do not deny the role of the community and state institutions, the ethicists do believe that the essential step for the liberation of society, and the broad umma of believers, goes through individual reformation, based on genuine Islamic teachings. Thus, they are moralists, individualist-oriented in their intellectual projects, but they do contend that only when such a step is undertaken that societal change at large follows as a successive and consequential step. The ethicists can also be called traditionists, and not traditionalists, since they remain tied to the ethical backbone of the tradition, at the heart of which is the idea of Revelation; ethics need an axis, a source of profound inspiration and Revelation; the Qur’an is that source, while the Prophetic experience is its applied version and sample in its historical circumstances.

Allal al-Fassi’s *Self Criticism* (*al-Naqd al-Dhātī*), referred to earlier, Mohammed Aziz Lahbabi’s (1922–1993) *Muslim Personalism* (*al-Shakhṣāniyya al-Islāmiyya*), and Abderrahmane Taha’s *The Spirit of Religion* (*Rūḥ al-Dīn*) are three pillar theological texts that are also philosophical in argumentation (Al-Fassi [1949] 2008, Lahbabi [1964] 1969, Taha 2012). Al-Fassi’s intellectual and political weight in the country is unrivalled, and he was mentioned earlier among the early young national liberation leaders since the early 1930s. Regarding Lahbabi, he was the founder of Philosophy Department at Mohammed V University of Rabat, and a leading figure in the Moroccan postcolonial academic life; he tried to merge Islamic ethics with modern philosophical debates on ethics and social change based on the place and role of the person in society and the global community; he was also a Third Worldist in his perspective. As to Taha, he is one of the leading Muslim philosophers of modern times; he, too, has developed his theory of “trusteeship paradigm” based on a philosophic reading of the Qur’an and the place of the human being therein; he believes that the essence of humanity is ethics, and not reason; reason is a means towards an ethical life.

More importantly, these texts make sense in their times of publications, and beyond: al-Fassi’s text was published in the early 1950s, a few years before independence as a guide to the future postcolonial elite; Lahbabi’s was published in the 1960s, in the postcolonial period to give intellectual confidence to Islamic thought that it can contribute to global philosophical conversations on the place of the individual and faith in the modern age; and Taha’s was published

in 2012, immediately after the Arab Uprisings of 2010–2011, as if to say that revolts if not led by genuine internal ethical compass, they cannot succeed, even when led by various narratives of political Islams, be they Sunni or Shi'a.

The Egalitarianists

As to the egalitarianists, they have prioritized equality before the law and social justice in their intellectual projects. The epitome of this trend is the renowned political theorist and critical revisionist of "Arab reason," Mohammed Abed al-Jabri (1935–2010). Al-Jabri joined the younger camp of the national liberation movement of socialist leanings, led by Ben Barka, by the end of the 1950s, and became one of its major idealogues in the 1970s, before he left the political world in the early 1980s to dedicate himself fully to scientific research and academic life. In his four volumes of *Critique of Arab Reason,* al-Jabri defends democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and public good for renewal in Arab and Muslim societies; he sees issues in political thinking, in the political use of religion, and not in religion per se. He believes that the Islamic defense of public good and social justice is so evident, and that Muslim societies have to reclaim these major values for genuine liberation from internal authoritarianism and external hegemony (Al-Jabri 1990, 2001).

The egalitarianist thesis al-Jabri holds is not dissimilar from what Fatema Mernissi (1940–2015) also holds, from a gender perspective. Like al-Jabri, Mernissi, who became an icon of Islamic feminism from the 1990s although she did not use the term herself to describe her work, contends that patriarchal interpretations have usurped the egalitarian spirit of the Qur'an and Islamic juridical tradition; and she asks Muslim women to walk proudly into the future, since the original sources are egalitarianist and have to be reclaimed as such for modern changes in Muslim societies. Mernissi's indirect disciple, the medical doctor Asma Lamrabet (b. 1960) also holds similar views of egalitarian teachings, and believes that reforming some traditional juridical interpretations to meet the equality of rights and equality before the law is not an infidel reading of the original sources, but is, on the contrary, a faithful one and the most accurate one in this age for renewal (Mernissi 1975, [1987] 1991, [1992] 2002; Lamrabet 2018, 2016). Overall, the egalitarianists could be read as Islamic Leftists, to borrow the term from Hassan Hanafi (1981). Al-Jabri, for instance, was socialist as his political direct political engagement with the Socialist Party between 1959–1982 demonstrates. Through their positions at the university, and in public intellectual life, inside Morocco and abroad, these egalitarianists have made an important impact on Moroccan scholarship, especially the first two ones, al-Jabri and Mernissi, for their academic and prolific careers. Their intellectual projects have given ample space for scholars as well as activists amidst Islamic movements to recognize that liberation has multiple paths, and overcoming rigid legalism is one of them – a rigidity the Ultra-Orthodox Islam and Orthodox Islam still stick to as an unchangeable faith and identity marker.

The Liberals

As for the liberals within the critical trend, the political theorist and historian Abdallah Laroui (b. 1933) is its leading representative in contemporary Morocco, as well as the Arab world, since the 1960s. Laroui's thesis is that Arab reason in particular has to understand its place in history, and has to adopt a historicist approach towards its tradition so as to renew itself in light of the modern episteme. If it applies such an approach, it could become rationalist, in the sense of making reason its ultimate reference for public affairs; as to the private sphere, the individual can retain their beyond-reason (or meta-rational) interpretations of the world. Consequently, Laroui thinks that an epistemological break is already underway in Muslim societies, even when Muslims or political Islam denies it or refutes it. For him, the modern episteme permeates public affairs, governance, economics, geopolitics, and also individual affairs. Laroui's critique of Arab nationalism as well as political Islam stems from his belief that they deny that modernity has already encroached upon and transformed the Arab and Islamic classical worldview and its perception of history, and thus the place of, for example, sharia in public affairs (Laroui [1981] 2014, [1992] 2005, [1996] 2012, [2008] 2018). Unlike al-Jabri, Laroui does not see that expanding the meanings of sharia objectives could bridge the gap between sharia legal prescriptions and modern positive law, the ideas of equality, liberty, and the rule of law. While he believes that the patriotic Islamists or early Nahda pioneers played an important role in the overall cultural revival and resistance against colonialism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Laroui thinks that the early spirit of reform did not live long to adapt to the postcolonial new realities in society and the world. The pioneers could not decide on the type of the future postcolonial states; their descendants, the later reformists and nationalist leaders, however, failed to carry on the renewal aspirations as should be.

Similar views are held by Ali Oumlil (b. 1940), a prominent historian of ideas and historical sociology, and a co-founder of various national and regional human rights associations in Morocco and the Arab world. Oumlil thinks that classical Islamic political philosophy was too theoretical, not rooted in social affairs, while Islamic political theology was dominant and of influence. In modern times, however, he thinks both belong to the past, and require a real epistemological adaptation to the modern condition. Even classical figures that are re-appropriated by some scholars in Morocco and the Arab world for renewal from within, e.g., Ibn Rushd and Ibn Khaldun, Oumlil thinks that their episteme belongs to the past, and they do not have much to offer to modern Arab-Islamic societies. Instead, it is up to modern scholars and engaged critical intellectuals to implant the concepts of modernity, democracy, constitutionalism, and the rule of law, based on liberty and equality of all before the law, in Moroccan culture and Arab-Muslim societies at large (Oumlil [1996] 1998).

Abdelilah Belkeziz (b. 1959), another major younger political theorist compared to Laroui and Oumlil, has developed a similar approach to the tradition,

and to the Nahda tradition in his various writings, like his project of "the Arabs and modernity" (*al-ʿArab wa-l Ḥadatha*) (Belkeziz [2009] 2020, 2014). Overall, the liberals who critically engage with the narratives of the nationalists as well as Islamists are rationalists who see that public affairs can be, and have to be, managed by human reason alone, without a constant reference to metaphysical interpretations of the world and human affairs. At the same time, individuals have full freedom to believe in whatever gives them internal peace; it is part of freedom of belief and expression. Yet, the modern social contact and sovereignty are governed by mundane reasoning. For Belkeziz, Laroui and Oumlil before him, to name but these examples, liberation of societies from tutelage, internal and external, starts with a rational view of modern times and human affairs. Simply put, Islamic theology has to free itself first to be able to free society from various ills; and it has to transform into individualist theology, theology of the self, first before it seems to transform society at large. Modernity is a rational and individual enterprise in the first place, and these two have to be underlined for any liberation theology and thinking.

Conclusion

This paper has tried to map the terrain of religion and politics in modern and contemporary Morocco. This has proven to be a not easy task for the limited space permitted. This overview has proposed both chronologies and concepts to better understand what characterizes each period intellectually and politically: the pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial periods. Ideas transverse periods and conceptual molds, but there is no way of understanding them without freezing them, even for a while, in some historical periods to fathom them better. One could digress on how a late nineteenth century or early twentieth century intellectual figure of the Moroccan Nahda could still influence another compatriot intellectual in the early twenty-first centuries, say how Ben Laarbi al-Alaoui (d. 1963) impacted al-Fassi, and how the latter impacted Taha (b. 1944) or al-Raissouni (b. 1953), to give but this example. Similarly, one could trace the development of the liberation movement and its use of religious narratives in the 1930s, then in the 1960s, and up to the early 2000s, and then post-2011 changes. The intellectual and political histories I have tried to connect in each historical period all boil down to how to change while remaining faithful to the roots, the essential traditions, in the light of global changes and challenges.

All the intellectual and political leaders this paper has referred to do believe that their interpretation of the Islamic tradition as lived in Morocco is a liberationist interpretation that can bring prosperous changes in society, if implemented. It was seen how the Ultra-Orthodox think that deviations from the origins are multiple and going back to the roots is the way to go ahead, while the Orthodox do believe that going forward, slowly but steadily, is the way to go, since society's memories do not like abrupt changes, radical changes, towards more conservatism or towards more liberalism. Seeing the overall socio-cultural, economic, and political slow rhythm of change, the Critical

Islam thinkers also believe that change has to be embraced, but each from a particular view (ethicist, egalitarianist, liberal). Historically, the nationalists, socialists, and lately the Islamists have entered into the ruling circle and led governments, each in different circumstances, from the authoritarian 1960s to the 1990s-early 2000s, and then in 2000s. Each of them contributes to the public sphere and governance, but also faces limitations in action; the electoral system does oblige co-habitation; and the deep state, the monarchy, is active and executive. In such a context, then, what this paper has tried to show regarding the Moroccan context is that the Islamic narratives are multiple, which means that the Islamic identity marker is there to stay, however much the socio-economic policies change. It is this particular feature of the political culture of the country – the oldest monarchy in the Arab world, and one of the oldest in the world – that makes any political "Islamist" narrative an ephemeral one, and what remains is "the Islamic;" even when political "Islamist" twice led governments (2011–2021) leave the political scene, the "Islamic" will remain through Moroccan State Islam symbols and policies, on which there is both consensus as well as criticism. The intellectual implications that concern this paper most is that ultimately, it appears, the "post-Islamist" condition in which the Islamic permeates all society is also permeated by secular and liberal concepts and policies. That is, political Islam as – rigidly –conceived in modern times, as if it were the "only" custodian of faith and liberation theology, seems more free from the hurdles of secular and neoliberal policies if it remains active in society, in the public, without taking hold of power which it appears it cannot fully control. My borrowed description of the Moroccan current phase as a post-Islamist phase proposes that liberation theology has to be free from political constraints before it could preach and practice liberation. And this is another classic interpretation of the idea of Islam as a theocentric worldview, and not a theocracy. Farid al-Ansari, an Islamist who turned into a critical post-Islamist, if I can say so, captures this reading of post-Islamism already in a book entitled *The Six Errors of the Islamic Movement in Morocco* which was first published in 2000. Briefly, for him, political Islams are like any other political movements and ideologies, but the worst that befalls them is that they fail to practice the core teachings of their faith: correctness and piety for individuals, justice for society. That is why he called for renewing the human self of the Islamist, and ordinary Muslims, through an aesthetic and virtuous re-reading of the Qur'an. Al-Ansari was a post-Islamist ahead of his times in Morocco, before the Islamists reached power in 2011. He envisaged that post-Islamist Islam may be more faithful to Islamic liberation theology than political Islam, an idea I have also sought to present differently through intellectual mapping in this paper.

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Mohamed Hašas

Religija i politika u Maroku: islamska, islamistička i post-islamistička dinamika

Apstrakt:

Ovaj rad nastoji da mapira teren religije i politike u modernom i savremenom Maroku. S obzirom na hronološku i intelektualnu raznovrsnost u marokanskoj religioznoj misli i politici, ovaj rad predlaže tri glavna istorijska perioda kako bi se olakšao pristup temi: pre-/kolonijalno, kolonijalno i postkolonijalno vreme. Prvi, pre/-kolonijalni, period je hibridni; on se poklapa sa usponom prve generacije obnove marokanske Nahde, pre kolonijalnog perioda, iako je postojao u kolonijalnom periodu i igrao važnu ulogu za oslobođenje. Ovo označavam oznakom „islamski", pošto je islam bio jedini i zajednička jedinica identiteta za svaki projekat obnove u intelektualno „homogenom" društvu. Što se tiče kolonijalnog perioda, ovaj islamski identitet je ojačao nakon što je kolonijalna administracija pokušala da oslabi ovaj identitet i društveno tkivo, kao i institucije povezane s njim, bilo da su to verska bratstva, verske zadužbine ili sufijski redovi; u jednom trenutku 1930. kolonijalna administracija je koristila jezičke razlike kako bi podelila i vladala, a drugom prilikom, 1953–1955, pokušala je da svrgne sa trona nacionalističkog sultana i zameni ga poslušnim. Ovde je, opet, „islamski" identitetski marker društva i politike dodatno naglašen kao snaga jedinstva, odnosno oznaka nacionalističkog islama u ovoj fazi, uprkos raznovrsnosti struja unutar nacionalističkog pokreta. Što se tiče postkolonijalnog perioda, ovo je faza u kojoj moderne debate o obliku nacionalne države, mestu religije u politici, demokratiji, liberalizmu, socijalizmu i sekularizaciji postaju deo marokanske misli i politike. Dakle, tri glavne oznake se koriste za opisivanje raznolikosti političkih islama u društvu: ultra-ortodoksni islam, ortodoksni islam i kritički islam. Budući da svi oni dele islam kao identitet, ali ga različito tumače, pozajmljujem termin od Asefa Bajata da ovaj period nazovem „postislamističkim" periodom, pošto su akteri sa islamskom etiketom višestruki, te ne postoji jedan trend ili projekat koji uspeva da pobedi i ujedini islamističku interpretaciju društva i političkih delatnika. Što je još važnije, ova raznolikost tumačenja spasava „islamsko" od rigidnosti i pretvara ga u njegovu fluidnost pre-modernog vremena, odnosno u „islamsko" kao življenu duhovnost i moralni kompas, kao teocentrični način života, u budućem post-islamističkom društvu, sekularnom svetu i neoliberalnim ekonomijama.

Ključne reči: marokanski islam, ultra-ortodoksni islam, ortodoksni islam, kritički islam, post-islamsko društvo.

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Dustin J. Byrd

FROM "WE WANT TO DESTROY THE REGIME" TO "WE WANT TO DESTROY THE WORLD ORDER": RUSSIAN MULTIPOLARITY AND THE ENLISTMENT OF THE POST-ARAB SPRING DĀR AL-ISLĀM

ABSTRACT
The Arab Spring produced new optimism in the Middle East regarding the possibility of democracy at the heart of the Muslim world. However, as the years passed, such optimism abated, leaving bitterness and cynicism in its wake. During the Arab Spring, Vladimir Putin watched in horror as numerous "strong men" lost power, or nearly lost power, including his ally, Bashar al-Assad. Determined not to allow what he saw as the West's meddling in the Middle East provide a template for his own removal from power, Putin embarked on an anti-Western campaign to create a "multipolar world," one that would liberate the strong men rulers from the demands of the "rules-based order," i.e., the "unipolar world." Key to the success of this campaign was the fostering of an alliance between the *Russkii Mir* (Russian World) and the *dār al-Islām* (Abode of Islam). Together with other parts of the world, such a coalition would resist the collective power of the Western world and attempt to bring about global conditions wherein "traditional" peoples can express their cultural, political, and economic particularities without being subject to the corrosive influence of the West. Key to this anti-Occident ideology is the far-right Russian philosopher, Alexander Dugin, and his neo-Eurasianist ideology. This essay explores how Dugin's "reactionary modernist" ideology contributes to the struggles against the unipolar world, while at the same time arguing that his philosophy will most likely not be successful within the *dār al-Islām* for a variety of political, social, and religious reasons. If the promises of the Arab Spring are ever to come to fruition, this article argues, it will not be through a palingenetic Russia led by Putin.

KEYWORDS
Vladimir Putin, Alexander Dugin, Unipolarity, Multipolarity, Reactionary Modernism, New Middle Ages, Russkii Mir, al-Dajjal, Fitnah, Axis of Resistance.

Dustin J. Byrd: Professor of Philosophy and Religion, The University of Olivet, USA: dustinjbyrd@gmail.com.

Introduction

The early 2010s saw an explosion of political uprisings throughout the Arab world. Dubbed the "Arab Spring" (*al-rabīʿ al-ʿarabī*), these protest movements, which sought the removal of long-standing dictators, occurred first in Tunisia, then spread to Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria, and Bahrain. Large-scale street protests also occurred to a lesser degree in Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon, Kuwait, Morocco, and Oman. As those in the streets demanded the removal of their governments, they were met by severe state repression by military forces, counterdemonstrations, and pro-government militias. While some were successful in deposing their rulers, such as the removal of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt (2011), Muammar Gaddafi in Libya (2011), and Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia (2012), others remained unsuccessful, leaving their dictators and royal families entrenched in power. Nevertheless, as the dictators began to fall, a feeling of change swept through the Middle East, a change that attempted to address decades of authoritarianism, economic stagnation, kleptocracy, corruption, and systematic human rights violations. While many Western commentators, political pundits, and politicians, celebrated what they thought was the outburst of long-repressed democratic desires, in Moscow, Vladimir Putin watched in horror, as seemingly secure authoritarian regimes began to crumble under the weight of the protests. Putin did not see a dawn of a new democratic age emerging in the Arab world. Rather, he saw the meddling of Western powers in a region that was vitally important to his Eurasian geopolitics – as the Middle East is geographically important to secure the underbelly of Russia, as well as manage Russia's own Muslim population. For Putin, the Western powers, led by the United States, were not only willing to use peaceful protests to advance their own geopolitical objectives, but they also supported violent insurgencies and coups against those who stood in the way of their objectives, injecting instability in a region that desperately needed stability. Putin, already dealing with an unhappy population at home due to the "tandemocracy,"[1] keenly understood that the Arab Spring, along with the "color revolutions" of Eastern Europe which proceeded the Arab Spring, could serve as a blueprint for his own removal from office – an outcome he was keen to avoid.[2]

In this essay, I will discuss how the Arab Spring and its Western "sponsors" accelerated an already existing rightward turn in the geo-political ideology of the Kremlin, which forwarded the idea of a "multipolar world" as a future

1 At the time of the Arab Spring, Putin was serving as Prime Minister but was widely seen as the ultimate power behind his Presidential acolyte, Dmitry Medvedev, who served as President of the Russian Federation from May 7, 2008, to May 7, 2012, directly after Putin's first two terms as President. As was expected, in 2012, Vladimir Putin was elected to a third term as President. This unusual swapping of power in Moscow has been called the "Medvedev-Putin tandemocracy" (Тандем Медведев—Путин).
2 The "color revolutions" refer to a variety of protests in post-Soviet states that resulted in a change of government, including the "Rose Revolution" in George (2003); the "Orange Revolution" in Ukraine (2004), and the "Tulip Revolution" in Kyrgyzstan (2005).

alternative to the present "unipolar world." The concept of "multipolarity" has been developed most thoroughly by the enigmatic Russian philosopher, Alexander Dugin, in his Fourth Political Theory and his ideology of Neo-Eurasianism (Dugin 2012, Dugin 2014). If such a challenge to Western dominance in the world is to succeed, Dugin argues that the "Islamic civilization" (*dār al-Islām*) must unify and join the Russian "civilization-state," as well as other independent civilizations such as the Chinese and Indian civilizations, in opposing the West's unipolar dominance. The only way to stop the dysgenic chaos that comes with Western liberal democracy and its militaristic interventions into the affairs of sovereign states is for distinct civilizations to combine forces and defeat the hegemonic West. In this world-historical project, the subaltern Muslim world, especially the Arab world, is central to materializing multipolarity. This essay will both explain Dugin's (and the Kremlin's) position on the necessity of multipolarity in international relations, as well as offer a critique of it, as I find it to be fundamentally flawed on various points, especially as it relates to Islam, Muslims, and the *dār al-Islām*.

The Birth of Unipolarity

Unipolarity, or the hegemony of the West, emerged after the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991, which was celebrated as a world historical event by Western liberal theorists such as Francis Fukuyama in his famous book, *The End of History and the Last Man* (Fukuyama 1992, Nad 2022: 139).[3] "Post-historical" liberal democracy and capitalism had seemingly triumphed over authoritarianism and communism, and after the reunification of Germany (1989) as well as the Maastricht Treaty's founding of the European Union (1992), there were no other viable alternatives to the model of governance and economy preferred by Western nations. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia had been brought to its knees, and those countries that were previously dependent on it looked Westward for their democratic future (Nad 2022: 139). Additionally, it was assumed that those "third world" nations still trapped in totalitarian systems, many of which were in the Muslim world, would inevitably succumb to their neoliberal fate. However, according to the critics of this new world order, unipolarity did not bring about a state of international ataraxia. Rather, the emerging unipolar condition was challenged by Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait and the subsequent Gulf War of 1991, two Russian wars on Chechnya (1994–1996, 1999–2009), the Yugoslav Wars (1991–1995), the Kosovo War (1998–1999), as well as a variety of smaller conflicts in Africa, Latin America, North Africa, and Central Asia. The 1990s also saw major terror attacks on the United States in Kenya and Tanzania, as well as at home on the World Trade

3 The fall of the Soviet Union was famously described by Putin as "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century," as it greatly reduced the size of Russia while leaving millions of Russians within the borders of the newly created countries on Russia's periphery.

Center in New York City (1993) and on the Alfred B. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City (1995), with the culmination of such attacks happening with al-Qaeda's attack on the U.S. on September 11th, 2001. Despite these challenges, and sometimes taking advantage of them, Western unipolarity consolidated its power via international institutions, such as the United Nations (UN), the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). This Western domination of global institutions, combined with the U.S.'s long military reach, created a condition wherein the Western interests eclipsed the interests of the rest, economically, culturally, and politically, all in the name of a "rules-based international order" (RBIO). Thus, this unipolar condition led to Western entities' (both states and institutions) abilities to intervene into non-Western civilizations with ease, and thus determine their political, economic, and cultural development, with little to no meaningful opposition (Perkins 2004).

Putin's Rightward Turn: Against Liberal Unipolarity

President Vladimir Putin was handed power of the Russian Federation upon the resignation of Boris Yeltsin on December 31st, 1999. Soon after, elections were held, and the little-known former KGB officer was inaugurated for his first term in office (May 7, 2000) with fanfare invoking the bygone era of the Tsars (Nad 2022: 141–142). Although in his first years he appeared to many in the West as a liberal-oriented reformist, by the mid-2000s, Putin's political orientation had grown more militaristic, nationalist, and virulently anti-Western. In 2007, at the Munich Security Conference, he famously criticized the West's growing hegemony over international relations, its unilateral use of military force on the world stage (especially the 2003 invasion of Iraq), and the instability it creates via its demands for democratic reform in countries with no tradition of democracy. All these criticisms were indicative of the fact that the post-Cold War world was now subject to unipolarity. As U.S. officials, including Senator John McCain watched on, Putin exclaimed that the U.S.-led unipolar world is "a world in which there is one master, one sovereign" (Putin 2007). Years later, Moscow saw the dirty hands of this unipolar world order all over the Arab Spring, as authoritarian (yet stable) regimes were confronted with the demand to democratize, resign, or be toppled. The populist chant, "الشعب يريد إسقاط النظام" ("we want to destroy the regime"), which was heard throughout the Arab world during the Arab Spring, put Putin on notice: the Russian people too may begin to think in such revolutionary ways, and they will have allies in the West.

The three countries that experienced the Arab Spring that were most important to Putin were Egypt, Libya, and Syria. In Egypt, Putin witnessed the downfall of Hosni Mubarak, who had been in power since 1981 and had cultivated strong ties to the United States, who often looked askance at Mubarak's abysmal human rights record and the brutality of his secular regime. In Mubarak's case, not only were the demonstrations in Tahrir "Liberation" Square (*Maydān*

at-Taḥrīr) unrelenting, especially after the Egyptian military and police murdered numerous protesters, but Mubarak was also pressured to abdicate power by then-U.S. President Barak Obama. For Putin, Mubarak's eventual abdication demonstrated that so-called "allies" of the United States rule their nations only at the pleasure of Washington D.C., and that the "democratic" removal of stable authoritarian regimes creates socio-economic chaos and power vacuums, which are often filled by even worse regimes, such as that of "Islamist" Mohamed Morsi and *al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn* (Muslim Brotherhood) in the case of Egypt (Arafat 2012). At any time, the political-economic leverage the U.S. has on countries could be utilized to remove their leaders from power in the name of "democratization." For Egypt, that leverage included the over $1.3 billion in Foreign Military Financing (FMF) that the U.S. sent to Egypt each year, which was only seconded to the amount sent to Israel (POMED 2020). Ultimately, Putin's lesson from Egypt was the following: if the unipolar hegemon wants a leader gone, they have the tools to make that happen, with or without a direct *coup d'état* or military intervention. The "revolutionary" mobilization of the people against their ruling regime can be utilized for the expansion of unipolarity.

Another Arab country that Putin watched closely was Libya. Since the 1969 *coup d'état* of the Libyan King Idris I, the flamboyant and often unpredictable Muammar Qaddafi ruled what he declared in 1977 to be the Socialist People's Libya Arab Jamāhīrīyah (people's state) of Libya.[4] Qaddafi's political ideology was tied with Third World liberation and decolonization movements and had cultivated ties with the Soviet Union during the Cold War. In the 1970s and 1980s, Qaddafi was seen as an important figure in the Middle East and North Africa's resistance to Western domination (Chan 2021). Likewise, Libya was seen as a major sponsor of terrorism by Western nations, especially after the 1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland. Although he maintained the claim that he did not order the attack, Qaddafi ultimately took responsibility for the Lockerbie bombing, and in 2008 paid $1.5 billion in compensation the families of the U.S. victims in exchange for normalized relations with the U.S. government (Al-Jazeera 2008). Yet, in 2011, inspired by the Arab Spring in Tunisia and Egypt, Libyans took to the streets of Tripoli, Ben Ghazi, and other cities, demanding the overthrow of Qaddafi, who by that time was seen as a despotic relic of an antiquated liberation movement. Despite the normalized relations, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton urged the Obama administration to support the people's overthrow of Qaddafi (Friedersdorf 2015). As the Libyan protests turned into a civil war, Putin watched as the Libyan people, with the assistance of airstrikes by the British Royal Navy and the U.S. Navy, overthrew Qaddafi's government (Stent 2020: 268).[5] Wounded

4 In 1986, this title was revised to the "Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya," which lasted until 2011.

5 Putin was reportedly dismayed at the lack of support for Qaddafi on the part of Dimitry Medvedev, who ordered Russia's ambassador to the United Nations to abstain from voting on the UN Security Council Resolution 1973 instead of vetoing it, which

in a firefight, Gaddafi was seized by members of the National Transitional Council (NTC), who would eventually murder Qaddafi and put his mutilated corpse on display (Pargeter 2012, Chivvis 2014). Videos of Qaddafi's lifeless body being abused by those Qaddafi once ruled over sent a chilling message to dictators around the world.

For Putin, the Western-supported overthrow of another authoritarian leader, one who happened to curry favor with Moscow for decades, was another sign that the unipolar world was lawless, chaotic, and corrosive to established regimes. Regardless of Libya's attempt to normalize its relations with the U.S., the U.S. still supported Qaddafi's overthrow in the name of democracy.

Putin learned a different lesson in Syria: if unipolarity was to be arrested and abated, it would start by first standing up to it. The U.S.'s intervention into the Syrian civil war, which also began with the Arab Spring, was bitterly opposed by Bashar al-Assad and his backers in Moscow. The Kremlin had long-established ties with Syria, beginning with Bashar al-Assad's father, Hafez al-Assad, who had developed such ties already with the Soviet Union (Stent 2020: 269). Putin further strengthened Russia's ties to the Syrian regime by forgiving almost 75% of Syria's $13.5 billion debt to Russia and increasing the arms sales to $4.7 billion (Stent 2020: 270). As such, when the U.S. and other Western countries entered Syria to fight against the Islamist group, Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), as well as to topple the al-Assad regime, it was Russia that came to his defense. Russia not only attacked ISIS and the Islamist group, Jabhat al-Nusra, but also the secular anti-Assad Free Syrian Army (FSA), which was backed by the U.S (Stent 2020: 270–271). Despite crossing Obama's "red lines" concerning the use of chemical weapons, the U.S. was reluctant to intervene in Syria beyond the backing of the FSA, possibly due to the heavy Russian involvement, which included Russia's naval base in Tartus and air base in Hmeimim, as well as a large contingent of Wagner mercenaries, led by "Putin's Chef," Yevgeny Prigozhin. The U.S. would eventually pull most of its military assets out of Syria, at least to such a degree that it was no longer attempting to topple the al-Assad regime. Putin understood this as a triumph for his aggressive foreign policy. To stop the expansion of the unipolar world, Russia had to commit itself to the fight. The result of Putin's intervention in Syria, according to Angela Stent, was that Putin "reestablished Russia as a major power in the Middle East and achieved one of his major goals: ensuring Russia has a seat at the table on all major international decisions" (Stent 2020: 274). From the perspective of the Kremlin, the unipolar world had backed off; multipolarity, led by Russia, was on its way.

Yet, trouble wasn't only in the near-abroad for Putin, it was close at home. Running nearly parallel to the Arab Spring (2011–2012) were mass protests in a variety of Russian cities regarding the irregularities in the December 4th, 2011,

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effectively green-lighted NATO's attack on Libya. Putin publicly chastised Medvedev's decision, saying, "the West is not to be trusted – once they pocket your concession, they ignore you."

legislative elections and the March 4th, 2012, presidential election, i.e., the latter of which firmly established Putin and Medvedev's "tandemocracy" (Short 2022: 495–537). This "democratic" unrest was also perceived by Putin to have been fomented by the Obama administration, and most specifically neoliberal hawk, Hillary Clinton, who saw Putin's increasingly illiberal regime and its military intervention in Chechnya and Georgia as a threat to the Rules Based International Order.[6] It appeared to Putin that his own regime was at risk of falling victim to the same "democratic uprisings" supported by Washington D.C. that Egypt and Libya succumbed to. Having learned his lessons in Syria regarding the importance of standing up to protest movements inspired and supported by the West, Putin brutally suppressed the 25,000 protestors in Moscow's Pushkin Square. Among those chanting "Russia will be free," were West-oriented reformers Alexei Navalny, Sergey Udaltsov, and Ilya Yashin, and other leaders of an anti-Putin coalition. Despite the intensity of the protests, which went into 2013, Putin, like Bashar al-Assad, survived the opposition, with the help of new draconian laws (foreign agent laws, treason laws, and increased restrictions on public assemblies, the internet, and NGOs, etc.), as well as police violence that suppressed the street protests (Human Rights Watch 2013). Amidst the crackdowns, Putin framed the images of the chaotic nature of the Arab Spring as a reminder of Russia's own anomic situation of the 1990s, wherein Moscow lost its ability to adequately govern the post-communist nation, thus resulting in a period of low wages, lack of resources, rampant corruption, hyperinflation, and pervasive crime. He made it well known to the nation that it was his heavy hand that ended Yeltsin's Western-backed "shock therapy," which had resulted in the 1998 economic crash of the Russian economy. A revolution on par with the Arab Spring could wipe away all the economic and social progress that had been made since Putin took power on December 31st, 1999. A depoliticization of the populace was in order, not a revolution. According to Putin's biographer, Philip Short, Putin's third term marked a period of "deepening change" that was radically different from his first two terms in office, and once the internal threat was adequately suppressed through his newly granted powers, Putin could once again turn his attention to the external threat (Short 2022: 538).

The Arab Spring and the mass protests in Russia against the tandemocracy were enlightening for Putin; it demonstrated to him that the lack of a true countervailing force on the world stage, which would limit the actions of the Western hegemon as the Soviets had done during the Cold War, allowed the

6 Attempting to forward the "Russian Reset" policy, in 2009 Secretary of State Hillary Clinton presented Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov with a red button with the word "перегрузка" in Cyrillic. While it was meant to say "перезагрузка" (Reset) [perezagruzka], it said "Overload" [peregruzka] in Russian. The Russian Reset policy was meant as a rapproachment between the U.S. and Russia after relations were bitterly strained due to the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, wherein Russia occupied South Ossetia in Georgia. Looking back, this misunderstanding seems to be an ominous sign of what was to come.

West to impose its political and socio-economic will upon subaltern nations, with dissatisfied populations acting as its means of doing so. What was needed to address this international imbalance of power was both internal suppression of the Western-backed opposition, and the building of an anti-Western, anti-unipolar coalition of large and small states that could resist the corrosive power of the West. To produce such a countervailing force, Moscow turned to a palingenetic ultra-nationalist political ideology that would both restore the greatness of Russia and attempt to enlist the post-Arab Spring states as well as other Muslim majority countries into a coalition of civilizations standing firm against Western globalization, neoliberalism, and democracy, i.e., unipolarity.[7] This aspirational coalition, rooted in widespread grievances against the Western world, would be tasked with championing the cause of multipolarity.

Reactionary Modernism and Anti-Western Multipolarity

The Constitution of the Russian Federation does not allow for the government to have an official ideology, as was the case with communism in the Soviet Union (Legalforum 2023).[8] However, such a prohibition does not limit political parties from adopting a guiding ideology. This is true for Russia's dominant party, the All-Russia Political Party, or as it is commonly called, "Russian United," led by Vladimir Putin. While in 2009, at the 11th Party Congress in St. Petersburg, the party proclaimed that "Russian Conservativism" was its official ideology (Trenin 2010: 27). Such a vague title does not adequately reveal the specific content of such "conservativism," which is necessary to distinguish the peculiarities of Russian conservativism from other forms of conservativism. According to Paul Robinson, Putin's Russian Conservativism includes five essential components: (1) a "revival of the Russian Orthodox Church," (2) the "centralization of political authority," (3) the embrace of "growing Russian nationalism," (4) the "increased tensions between Russia and the Western world," and (5) the enactment of "socially conservative legislation" (Robinson 2019: 181). In addition to these five, an additional component should be added: what Alexander Dugin calls "defensive modernization" (Rooney 2023: 58). Post-Bolshevik Russia inherited the Soviet Union's push to modernize through the advancement of science, instrumental reason, and technological knowledge. With this tech-savviness

7 For a comprehensive study of Putin's eclectic political ideology, see Mikhaeil Suslov's book, *Putinism: Post-Soviet Russian Regime Ideology.* Like Alexander Dugin's "Fourth Political Theory," and his Neo-Eurasianism, Putin's political philosophy draws upon right-wing thinkers such as Aleksander Zinov'ev, the 19th century Slavophiles, and Eurasianists. While taking Tsar Alexander III as a model, Putin delved into the writings of the Russian fascist, Ivan Ilyin, whose corpse (from Switzerland) and writings (from the US) he repatriated. Also see Michel Eltchaninoff's book, *Inside the Mind of Vladimir Putin,* especially pages 45–56.

8 This fact has not stopped numerous prominent Russian idealogues from calling for a new state ideology based on traditional moral and spiritual values, as it is seen to be a necessary defense mechanism against Western liberalism, individualism, and secularity.

combined with the palingenetic cultural demands of Russian Conservativism, Putin's Russia can accurately be described as a "reactionary modernist" regime, one that attempts to remain both at the forefront of technology while simultaneously protecting its pre-modern traditional values and identity (Herf 1998: 1–17). Thus, this Janus-facing political ideology attempts to reconcile the anti-modern and irrationalist elements within Russian nationalism, especially those elements rooted in Russian Orthodoxy, with post-metaphysical autonomous reason and techne, the hallmarks of Western modernity. Together, they create a future-oriented remembrance and embrace of the past to bring about a technologically advanced and militarily powerful "retrotopia" (Bauman 2017: 5).[9] As such, Putin's Russia is a palingenetic ultra-nationalist project, one that is meant to form a retrotopian state out of the cultural content of pre-Soviet Russian Imperialism, and the scientific content of Soviet communism. This reactionary-modernist state is a challenge to the assumption that cultural modernization (liberalization) is inherently wedded to technological modernization. Russia seeks to demonstrate that when palingenetic conservativism and technological modernism are brought together, it produces a viable alternative to the modern liberal state and the atomized, post-modern, libertine society it creates. In the case of Russia, such a palingenetic ultra-nationalist state should have the capacity and willingness to spearhead the struggle against Western unipolarity, both in the realm of culture and technology.

Considering this, it is not accurate to think of Putin's Russia as being wholly anti-modernist, as that only accounts for the *cultural* trends in Russia. Moscow is fully aware that an anachronistic "return" to the Russian past – the "new Middle Ages" as described by Nicolas Berdyaev – without a concurrent advancement in technology would leave Russia vulnerable to the technologically superior West (Berdyaev 2009: 67–120, Khapaeva 2024: 36–70). Thus, despite the cultural embrace of the values and identity of pre-modern Russia, rooted in Tsar Alexander I's imperial doctrine of "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality," Russia has no choice but to remain at the forefront of technological advances, for without doing so it cannot wage an effective resistance to Western unipolarity, nor can it protect the cultural conservativism the regime advocates. However, according to Dugin, such a "progress in weaponry" and other "aspects of modernization" is lamentable; it means Russia is "going deeper and deeper into the hell of the modernity" (Rooney 2023: 59). Nevertheless, the anti-Modernist elements in Putin's political philosophy, which he shares with Dugin, will become especially important to building a coalition with other "traditional" (and aggrieved) states, including those in the Muslim world.

9 By the term "retrotopia," the Polish theorist, Zygmunt Bauman, refers to "visions located in the lost/stolen/abandoned but undead past, instead of being tied to the not-yet-unborn and so inexistent future." While his concept of retrotopia is primarily about cultural nostalgia, reactionary modernists attempt to build a political present with the socio-political and religious content of the past without the reactionary rejection of technology that is common in romantic thought, i.e., Heidegger et al.

Despite this mission, Putin is well aware that such an attempt to climb back into the role of a world-historical force, as Russia was when it was at the core of the Soviet Union, cannot be done unless Russia realizes two imperatives: (1) Russia must return to the borders of the Soviet Empire (or at minimum the borders of the Tsarist Empire), and (2) it must develop strong ties with other aggrieved non-Western "civilizations" that can serve as independent poles in a multipolar world. To the first point, Neo-Eurasianist philosophy, which informs (but does not determine) Putin's politics, argues that the entirety of the "Russkii Mir" (Russian World) must be reintegrated into a singular "civilization-state," either by alliance or by force, which helps explain why Moscow finds it necessary to keep Ukraine securely within the Russosphere (Rooney 2023: 99–113). To the second point, one of the civilizations that Moscow looks to develop alliances with is the *dār al-Islām*, especially the Arab, Turkish, and Iranian states, which are located geographically in the underbelly of Russia, and are also strategically important to Western interests (Stent 2020: 258–292).[10] The first imperative is a matter for another discussion; we will focus on the second in his study.

Islam and Muslims in a Russian-led Multipolar World: Enter Alexander Dugin

The most prominent theorist of multipolarity in Russia today is Alexander Dugin. A member of the "Old Believers" sect of Russian Orthodoxy, Dugin alloys the geopolitical theories of the Nazi jurist Carl Schmitt and Karl Haushofer, Heideggerian existentialism, with the esoteric traditionalism of René Guénon and Julius Evola. Additionally, his political philosophy incorporates the cultural politics of France's *Nouvelle Droite*, Russian Orthodox political theology, Ivan Ilyin's form of Russian fascism, and the Eurasianism of Nikolai Danilevsky, Nikolai Trubetskoy, Petr Suvchinsky, and Petr Savitsky, alongside the Russian biopolitics of Lev Gumilev. Dugin's religio-political philosophy, which is an eclectic mix of recycled thought riddled with inconsistencies, is decidedly far-right in nature, and for this, he is often described as a "fascist" by his critics (Clover 2016: 174).[11]

Dugin's philosophy is decidedly anti-Western, anti-Liberal, and anti-Democratic. He advocates for the return to Tsardom (under Putin if necessary) and the maximalization of the Russosphere, i.e., a Russian Empire that dominates the Eurasian expanse – from Vladivostok to Lisbon (Brands 2023). Long before the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, Dugin advocated for the forceful reintegration of Ukraine into Russia, to "kill, kill, kill Ukrainians," and even risk

10 According to Angela Stent, Russia also has strengthened ties with Saudi Arabia and Israel, to the ire of the United States.

11 Dugin's one-time collaborator, Eduard Limonov, described Dugin as the "St. Cyril and Methodius of fascism," invoking the Christian missionaries who brought Christianity to the Slavs.

nuclear exchange with the West if Russia loses its 2022 "Special Military Operation" (SMO) in Ukraine (Clover 2016: 327, Rooney 2023: 103).[12] "We would prefer to destroy mankind… if there is no Russia in the world, let such a world die" (Rooney 2023: 59). As the "Third Rome," Dugin believes that Russia is the latest "Katechon" (Restrainer) of the Apocalypse, as described in St. Paul's 2nd Epistle to the Thessalonians, and therefore has the messianic duty to resist the "Son of Perdition," i.e., the Anti-Christ. Dugin identifies the United States – the chief source of chaos, disorder, and instability in the world today – as the Anti-Christ (Byrd 2024, Meyendorff 2003). When asked about holy war in the Russian Orthodox tradition, Dugin states:

> In the Orthodox Christian tradition, an empire is not only in the material world, but it is a kind of reflection, a mirror, of the eternal heavenly kingdom. And the status of the empire, the ontology of empire and emperor is to be a Katechon; that is, to be a kind of obstacle to Satan invading the world. It is a defense of the border, a defense of the fortress, and the empire was considered to be a holy fortress in the path of Satan, and to fight and die for the empire was considered to be a religious duty that was not egoistic, that was not material in the sense of gathering more objects and accumulating riches, but the idea is/was the sacred… After the fall of Constantinople, according to the Russian Orthodox tradition, the place and the function of the Katechon – Empire and Emperor – shifted to Russia (Rooney 2023: 80).

If Russia were to be defeated in this modern "holy war" (Dugin's term), then the reign of the Anti-Christ (Western unipolarity) is complete, and there is no point in allowing the world to continue (Rooney 2023: 79).[13]

Operating within this worldview, Dugin has long argued that the world outside of Russia is dependent upon Russia to stop the advancement of the "demonic" unipolarity of the West. Yet, Russia is a "subaltern empire," a limited empire operating beneath the power of the hegemonic empire, the U.S.-led West, struggling to be taken seriously as a global power (Morozov 2015). In order to achieve this recognition, and to bring about meaningful resistance to the hegemon, the subaltern empire must build conservative coalitions of aggrieved nations and civilizations that are willing to combat the unipolar condition and thus rescue the world from globalism.

Russia's return to the world-historical stage, especially after it successfully defended Bashar al-Assad from the United States and its Syrian allies, along with its unilateral invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, has led Dugin to believe the beginning of the end of the unipolar world has begun. According to Dugin, the latter was Russia's "final break with the West" (Dugin 2024a). In his

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12 Dugin would later deny that his "kill, kill, kill" comment was directed towards Ukrainians in general but was rather about the Ukrainian perpetrators of the Odessa "Trade Union massacre" that happened during the Euromaidan uprising in May 2014.

13 Dugin argues that a "holy war" is simply the "conscious participation of the being on the side of God," and that "any war for any sacred goal is holy."

article, "Multipolarity: The Eras of the Great Transition," Dugin argues that we are in an interregnum, not fully unipolar but not quite yet multipolar. He states:

> We live in an era of significant transition. The era of the unipolar world is coming to an end, giving way to an age of multipolarity. Changes in the global architecture of the world order are fundamental… in opposition to unipolar hegemony, a new – multipolar – world is being born. This is the response of great ancient and unique civilizations, sovereign states, and peoples to the challenge of globalism (Dugin 2024b).

Among the emerging poles, Dugin identifies the following:

> It can already be said that global humanity is actively building independent civilizational poles. These are primarily Russia, awakening from its slumber; China, making a rapid leap forward; *the spiritually mobilized Islamic world*; and India, gigantic in demography and economic potential. Africa and Latin America are on their way, steadily moving towards integration and sovereignty of their vast spaces (Dugin 2024b. Emphasis added).

The "spiritually mobilized Islamic world" is especially important for Dugin, as he believes American-style liberalism, universalized via globalization, has had devastating effects on the Muslim world. Additionally, since 1953, when the CIA orchestrated a coup d'état of the Prime Minister Muhammad Mosaddeq in Iran, up to the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003), the U.S. has meddled in the Muslim world so thoroughly that it has created mass resentment among the Muslims. This was exasperated with the Arab Spring, as the West's support for the overthrow of dictatorial – yet stable – regimes, along with the false promises of democracy, caused additional socio-political chaos and the death of hundreds of thousands of Muslims. The deep-seated resentment that developed in response to these actions is precisely what Alexander Dugin seeks to exploit and therefore deliver to Vladimir Putin.

Dugin's geopolitical vision for the Muslim world is a vision of unity, wherein the leaders of the Muslim world would consolidate into a unified civilizational pole that would join the reconstituted Russian Empire in their anti-Western struggle. "The West has made Islam its Enemy," Dugin reminds Muslims, as he dubs the West to be the "civilization of the Anti-Christ," i.e., the "civilization of al-Dajjal" (Dugin 2023d). Just like Ukraine cannot be abandoned to the Anti-Christ, so too must the Muslim world not be abandoned to al-Dajjal. To "decolonize" the Muslim world from Western influence is to eradicate the presence of al-Dajjal in the *dār al-Islām*.

From Dugin's writings, we can ascertain three fundamental principles by which Dugin seeks to create an alliance between the Katechonic Russian Empire and the "spiritually mobilized" Muslim world: First, Dugin believes that *Islam* is the primary adhesive in the Muslim world. It is what makes Islamic civilization distinct from other civilizations, and thus for Dugin, in the absence of a unifying Caliphate, Muslims must make a palingenetic return to their Islamic roots and overcome historical forms of *fitnah* (division). Uniting under

the banner of Muhammad is the only way to overcome the *divide et impera* conditions that were imposed on the Muslim world during Western colonization, which are exploited by the neo-colonization inherent within globalization. Without a unifying return to Islam, Muslim will remain fractured, disunited, and therefore unable to resist the hegemon. Disunited, one segment of the Muslim world will be played against another, a fragmentary state that allows the hegemon to neutralize an "Islamic" resistance to its global dominance. From Dugin's perspective, the West must prevent the Muslim world from ever becoming a unified Islamic empire, i.e., a "civilization-state," like China and Russia (albeit without Ukraine). If it were to achieve the status of a unified civilization-state, it would be a powerful pole, encompassing one-fifth of the world's population (Dugin 2023a). Knowing this, Dugin envisions a palingenetic "Islamic Empire, with Baghdad as its logical center" – a new "Abbasid caliphate… unified by a powerful religion [and] underlying ideology" (Dugin 2023a).

The second of Dugin's fundamental principles is the imperative to identify the enemy in this world-historical struggle. Being a disciple of Carl Schmitt, Hitler's court jurist and theologian, Dugin has dubbed the "antithesis" to global liberation via multipolarity as the West in general and the United States in particular (Schmitt 1996: 25–37, Lewis 2021). In Islamic terms, the "enemy" is the civilization defined by *al-Dajjal* – the Anti-Christ. In Dugin's framing of the West, in the name of liberalism, it is a civilization that rejects traditional values, traditional worldviews, traditional ways-of-being-in-the-world, and one that embraces pathological neophilia over anything ancient, culturally secure, and foundational. As such, the West is conceptualized as an underminer of all things native, religious, pre-modern, and traditional, thus making the West the common "enemy" of all subaltern peoples, whose cultures have been damaged and or replaced by the globalized culture and ways-of-being of the capitalist West. Among the victims of this globalized West are the *Russkii Mir* (Russian World) and the *dār al-Islām*.

This leads us to the third fundamental principle of Dugin's aspirant Russian-Muslim coalition: Schmitt's identification of the "friend." Dugin assumes that both being the victim of the West's corrosive culture, political manipulations, and military adventurism, the *Russkii Mir* and the *dār al-Islām* are natural allies. Additionally, and for Dugin this may be even more important, both the Islamic Civilization and the Russia world are *inherently* conservative, i.e., their civilizations are based upon religious identities that are antithetical to the amorality and theomachism of Western modernity. While the West has long abandoned its religious identity and can no longer describe itself as "Christendom," due to its advanced secularization, the Russkii Mir and the Muslim world continue to maintain the importance of religion as a comprehensive way-of-being-in-the-world within their lands. In other words, the Islamic Civilization cannot survive without Islam being at the core of its identity, no more so than Russia can survive without Russian Orthodoxy as its core. The competing claims and historical antagonism between religions, in this case Russian Orthodoxy and Islam (both Sunni and Shi'i), is not the antagonism at the core of

Dugin's multipolar thought. The abiding antagonism in modernity is no longer between religions, but rather is liberal anti-religion against traditional religion. For Dugin, traditional religiosity, in all its forms, Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, etc., is under attack from the secularized West; inter-religious squabbles are of minor importance in the face of the secular behemoth that threatens them all. In this sense, the Russo-Islamic coalition is based on the defense of traditional religion and traditional religious identities from the dysgenic effects of Western liberalism, which undermines all pre-modern religious worldviews in the name of "progress." Dugin believes that "progress," as defined by the West, is inherently antithetical to traditional religion. Although the West still occasionally refers to itself as a "Judeo-Christian" civilization, Dugin rejects that idea as "pure nonsense," due to its comprehensive adoption of the secular-democratic values (Dugin 2023e). He writes, "a society deeply rooted in atheism, materialism, and the legalization of various perversions, having long abandoned theology and traditional values, can neither be considered Christian nor Jewish" (Dugin 2023e). Furthermore, in the name of progress, Dugin writes:

> the West denies all traditional values; it distorts everything one can possibly imagine. It warps Christianity; it doesn't just create an anti-Christian civilization but also distorts it, introducing female priesthood, which is strictly prohibited, gay priests, same-sex marriages… the legalization of various perversions, tattoos, and drugs… Progress is a highly questionable thing (Dugin 2023b).

As such, the West, especially the Eurosphere, which was once the core of the Christian civilization, is now an apostate civilization, one with a "demonic mandate" (Dugin 2023e). As a "God-bearing" people, Russia cannot adopt the mandate of the demonic, for to do so would be to abandon its role as the Katechon – the restrainer of the apocalypse. Likewise, to adopt such cultural liberalism in the Muslim world would be to abandon traditional Islamic ethics, traditional morality, and the responsibility of the *Ummah* (Muslim community) to "enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong" (al-Qur'ān, 3:104, 3:110).[14] Thus, for Dugin, it is imperative that traditional civilizations band together as Schmittian "friends" to resist the "utmost evil – the civilization of the Anti-Christ" (Dugin 2023e). As Dugin states, "to defend the sacred Motherland of Russia is… a sacred duty," and to do that effectively it needs to create a multipolar world, wherein global power is dispersed between a variety of imperial poles, many of which Dugin assumes would be more traditional in their cultural and political constitution. Bi-polarity, wherein Russia is a second pole, is not enough to resist the hegemon. Multipolarity is necessary according to Dugin. Thus, this vision of a multipolar world impels Dugin to seek support in the *dār al-Islām* – a part of the world that is both aggrieved by the West and religiously conservative (Rooney 2023: 80). "We are obliged to defend Chinese

14 Variation of this Qur'ānic command can also be found in the following: 9:71, 9:112, and 31:17.

truth, Islamic truth, African truth, Latin-American truth," Dugin says, "in order to find our place in the multipolar system... We have an existential need for multipolarity; it is not only a possibility, it is rather the only way for us to survive" (Rooney 2023: 87).

Fundamentalism, for Dugin, is the modern politicization of the sacred, as opposed to the traditional sacredness of the political (Rooney 2023: 83). Yet, regardless of how the *dār al-Islām* – especially in the Middle East – come to be political, what is ultimately important is that they join with Katechonic Russia in opposing the hegemonic condition of Western unipolarity. Both Shi'i Muslims and Sunni Muslims are subaltern and threatened by the domination of the West. The sectarian *fitnah* between the two is secondary to the existential threat looming over both. For Dugin, it is in the interest of the *Ummah* as a whole to ally with Orthodox Russia against the "civilization of al-Dajjal."

The Wishful Thinking of Dugin and the Russian "Enemy" of Muslims

So far, we've seen that Dugin wishes to unite the Muslim world within itself, as well as unite it with Russia in a grand coalition for the purpose of bringing about the demise of unipolarity and the birth of multipolarity. However, it is doubtful that appealing to the Islamic identity of the Muslim world is not enough to overcome deep-seated forms of *fitnah* in the Ummah, i.e., divisions created by ethno-nationalism, country-specific interests, ruling-class interests, geopolitical concerns, economic interests, the abiding nature of religious sectarianism, and the festering post-colonial wounds, such as the "Kurdish problem," that plague numerous Muslim majority nations. Islam, as a religion or as a civilizational adhesive, does not have the power to transcend the deep divisions in the Muslim world. Even when the collective grievances against the West are mobilized, there is no straight path to Muslim unity. The West's many crimes in the Muslim world, including the unconditional support for Israel and the "incremental genocide" of Palestinians; the West's numerous wars in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen; its support for corrupt and brutal regimes in the Arab world, are well known. Yet, the *dār al-Islām* remains fractured within a million pieces – not to mention that Western secularization, both cultural and political, has already penetrated the Muslim world, and the opposition to such is rather weak. Fundamentalism, which is an authoritarian "belief attitude," is anachronistic within modernity and lacks mass appeal (Borradori, 2003: 31–32). Western consumerism, it can be argued, is as strong in the large cities in the Muslim world as it is in London, Paris, Berlin, and Rome. Yet, it lives side-by-side with the mosques, which are still full during *Ṣalāh al-Jumuʿa* (Friday prayers) relative to the empty cathedrals and churches of Western and Central Europe. In many ways, the Muslim world has become more reconciled to this cultural Westernization than Putin's Russia, a regime which tries to distinguish between what is Western, and therefore "inauthentic," and what authentically belongs to the Russian civilization. Few if any heads of state in the Muslim

world make that distinction to mobilize political action. That type of cultural puritanism is more akin to the Sunni fundamentalism that Dugin rejects as a "caricature" of Islamic sacred politics (Rooney 2023: 83).

Dugin's appeals to Muslim unity are more wishful thinking than a serious plan to overcome *fitnah* in the Ummah, let alone unite the entire Ummah against the unipolar world. This wishful thinking plays upon the suppressed desires of Muslims themselves for a more integrated sense of community, rooted in a longing for an "imagined community" of the Islamic Golden Ages (Anderson 1983). In reality, this vision of an Islamic super-state has been effectively abandoned since the end of the Ottoman Empire, except for the occasion group supporting a new "Caliphate," such as the ISIS caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Much of the Muslim world is led by individuals who would play the U.S. and the West against Russia for their own benefit, as does the House of Saud under Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salmaan (Stent 2020: 283–288). The Arab Spring, despite its mixed results, did not mobilize the Muslim world into the Russian camp; rather, it diversified the geopolitical entanglements of the Arab world. Strict ideological adherence to Western liberal democracy or the ideology of multipolar resistance advocated by Dugin is a binary logic belonging to a past age, principally the Cold War. There is very little desire to return to such a Manichean geopolitical condition within the Middle East. While it certainly is true that independent poles are rising, especially the Chinese pole, it is doubtful that such poles will ever congeal into the regional empires that Dugin believes are necessary to resist the hegemony of the current global world order. This is especially true for the *dār al-Islām*; it is merely a collective wish among *some* that an Islamic superstate would rise out of the ashes of colonialism. Russia itself remains merely a regional power, both in the Russosphere and in the Arab world via Syria, as opposed to a world-historical force, as it was within the Soviet Union. Putin's "three-day war" in Ukraine, which is now in its second year, has demonstrated that Russia does not even have the requisite power to project its neo-imperial wishes on its neighboring states, especially when the collective West unites to defend its periphery, as it has done since Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 22nd, 2022. Such an inability to control its own "zone of influence" does not build confidence in its hoped-for allies. If the multipolar condition is to come about, it is doubtful that it will be led by a reactionary modernist Russia.

Additionally, we must not forget that Russia itself has a long antagonistic history with Muslims within the traditional Russosphere and on its periphery, including former Soviet states. In its eastward expansion, the Tsarist Empire appropriated and colonized much of Muslim majority Central Asia and the Caucuses (Hiro 1995, Dugin 2018). The Russian "civilization-state" remains an empire that dominates millions of Muslims, who are themselves "subaltern" within the hegemonic Russosphere (Etkind 2011, Dugin 2018).[15] This became

15 Dugin believes that Russia by nature is a multiethnic and multi-confessional civilization, but one that is ontologically centered on the Slavic Rus.

especially clear in Russia's latest war on Ukraine, wherein an inordinate number of conscripts came from the Muslim communities in Russia's central Asian Republics (Mackinnon 2022). Historically, Muslims have not only protested Moscow's domination of the predominantly Muslim territories within Russia, but have also fought against Russian rule, with recent examples happening in Chechnya and Dagestan, etc. Tartar Muslims from the Crimea, the descendants of those who were deported by Joseph Stalin, who had hence returned to Ukrainian Crimea post-1991, are currently taking part in the war against Putin's annexation of the "Novorossiya" (Eastern and Southern Ukraine) (Hughes 2023). Just recently, on March 22nd, 2024, members of ISIS-Khorasan attacked Crocus City Hall in Moscow, killing at least 140 individuals and wounding over 400 more, most likely in response to Russia's killing of ISIS members in Syria on behalf of Bashar al-Assad (Chingaev 2024). Although Putin shifted blame to the Ukrainian government, four men, all citizens of the Muslim majority country of Tajikistan, a former Soviet republic, were later arrested and indicted for their attack in Moscow. While numerous Chechens and Syrians fought on the side of Russia in its war on Ukraine, it is clear that many other Muslims see Russia not as a Schmittian "friend," to whom they can ally against the unipolar world, but rather as another Schmittian "enemy," especially after Putin's attacks in Chechnya and Syria.

Despite the long antagonism between the Russian world and the Muslims, in the last decade, Vladimir Putin's push for a multipolar world has attempted to mobilize what has been called the "Axis of Resistance" (*Miḥwar al-Muqāwamah*), an Iranian-led political and military coalition, comprised predominately by Iran and Syria and their allied groups, Hezbollah, ʼAnṣār Allāh (Houthis in Yemen), and Hamas. This coalition has opposed the U.S.'s continual involvement in Syria as well as Israel's continual occupation of Palestine, both of which are viewed as manifestations of the unipolar world's imposition upon the Middle East. However, as previously stated, those countries at the center of the Arab Spring have on occasion developed closer ties with Russia since the uprisings, but by-in-large they have not joined Russia in its latest affront to the unipolar world order, except for Syria. Iran, which is not an Arab state, has been the most involved in Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and is the Muslim majority country most likely to remain in the sphere of Russia besides Syria. For Dugin, this is precisely because Iran, amongst all the "Islamic countries," understands that Russia's emergence as a pole is "in the interests of all emerging geopolitical poles" (Dugin 2023c). However, like Russia, Iran has seen massive protests against the cultural and political conservativism of the Islamic Republic's ruling elites. Such revolts, such as the 2022 "Women, Life, Freedom" (*Zan, Zendegi, Azadî*) uprisings, have also been discredited as being provoked and supported by the West and thus to the benefit of the unipolar world order. Nevertheless, there is growing discontent in the Muslim world, especially in the more conservative nations that Dugin himself believes as being central to the Islamic pole. It very well could be that the more conservative individual Muslim-majority states get, the more likely they will be

incapable of joining a multipolar front against the West, as such states will be consumed by their own inner-antagonisms – the dissenting subaltern against the oppression, tyranny, and dictatorship of the ruling elites.

Conclusion

The Arab Spring was a wake-up call for Vladimir Putin. He witnessed numerous strongman regimes in the Arab world toppled by the people for whom those regimes ruled. The disquiet that burst within the Middle East and North Africa in December 2010, when the Tunisian fruit seller, Mohamed Bouazizi, engaged in self-immolation to protest deteriorating economic conditions and the corruption of the Tunisian state, demonstrated to Putin that the power of the American-led unipolar world could capitalize on any nation's internal dissent to remove a regime they found unfit to rule, even if that regime had been friendly to American interests (Lageman 2020). As such, the inner-enemy of any regime was the friend of the unipolar world, and thus, to save his own rule, Putin increasingly turned to the palingenetic ultra-nationalist thinkers like Alexander Dugin, who had already created a far-right "traditionalist" Neo-Eurasian ideology out of the anti-capitalism of the Soviet Union, the cultural conservativism of the Tsarist Russian Empire, and geopolitical thought from the Third Reich. The subaltern neo-imperial ideology adopted by Putin attempts to confront, arrest, and abate the power of the liberal unipolar world by bringing about the dispersion of global geopolitical and economic power to a variety of civilizations, which in themselves are to serve as "poles," i.e., countervailing forces against Western hegemony. As we have demonstrated, one of the poles central to Dugin's ideology is the Islamic pole, which is predicated on a civilizational unification of the *dār al-Islām*. However, as we have seen, this vision of a unified Muslim world rising to confront the West is more wishful thinking than reality on Dugin's part. The Muslim world, as witnessed by the Arab Spring and its aftermath, is a civilization divided by the same ills as other civilizations: class, race, gender, politics, economics, sectarianism, ideology, etc., and appeals to Islam are unlikely to unify that which is thoroughly divided. While "multipolarity" is a powerful rallying cry for those who wish to see the end of the unipolar world order, it is unlikely to persuade the leaders of the Muslim world to divest in the status quo, especially when that status quo is as lucrative as it is. Russia, the regional power in Eurasia, will most likely remain only a regional power, diminished by international sanctions and its protracted war in Ukraine. While certain Muslim majority states will lend their resources to Russia's neo-imperial adventures, it is highly unlike the Islamic "civilization" will follow, as Dugin hopes. No amount of invoking "al-Dajjal" will mobilize the Muslim world to fight Russia's war.

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Dastin Bird

Od „Želimo da uništimo režim" do „Želimo da uništimo svetski poredak": ruska multipolarnost i angažovanje post-arapskog proleća Dar al-Islam

Apstrakt:

Arapsko proleće proizvelo je novi optimizam na Bliskom istoku u pogledu mogućnosti demokratije u srcu muslimanskog sveta. Međutim, kako su godine prolazile, takav optimizam je jenjavao, ostavljajući za sobom gorčinu i cinizam. Tokom Arapskog proleća, Vladimir Putin je sa užasom gledao kako su brojni „diktatori" (skoro) u potpunosti izgubili moć, uključujući i njegovog saveznika Bašara el Asada. Odlučan da ne dozvoli da ono što je video, kao i mešanje Zapada na Bliskom istoku daju šablon za njegovo uklanjanje sa vlasti, Putin je krenuo u anti-zapadnu kampanju s ciljem da stvori „multipolarni svet", svet koji bi oslobodio moćne vladare od zahteva „poretka zasnovanog na pravilima", odnosno od „unipolarnog sveta". Ključ uspeha ove kampanje bilo je negovanje saveza između Ruskog mira i KDar al-Islam-a. Zajedno sa drugim delovima sveta, takva koalicija bi se oduprla kolektivnoj moći zapadnog sveta i pokušala da stvori globalne uslove u kojima „tradicionalni" narodi mogu da izraze svoje kulturne, političke i ekonomske posebnosti, a da pritom ne budu podvrgnuti korozivnom uticaju zapada. Ključ za ovu anti-zapadnu ideologiju je krajnje desničarski ruski filozof Aleksandar Dugin i njegova neo-evroazijska ideologija. Ovaj rad istražuje kako Duginova „reakcionarna modernistička" ideologija doprinosi borbi protiv unipolarnog sveta, dok u isto vreme pokazuje da njegova filozofija najverovatnije neće biti uspešna u Dar al-Islam-u zbog niza političkih, društvenih i verskih razloga. Ako se obećanja arapskog proleća ikada ostvare, ovaj rad pokazuje, to neće biti kroz palingenetičku Rusiju koju vodi Putin.

Ključne reči: Vladimir Putin, Aleksandar Dugin, unipolarnost, multipolarnost, reakcionarni modernizam, novi srednji vek, Ruski mir, al-Dadžal, fitna, osovina otpora.

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Jaan Islam

REFORM AND RESURGENCE: THE TRANSFORMATION OF ISLAMIC MOVEMENTS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

ABSTRACT
This paper studies the development in the thought and praxis of Islamic movements that aim to revive a political system governed by Islamic law. Post-Caliphate Islamic movements – the subject of the current study – have undergone recent reforms in thought, approach, and even branding since the Arab Spring. Notwithstanding the movements' legal and theological diversity, the author argues that they share common features of reform characterized by (a) appeal to public opinion and grassroots work; and (b) willingness to work with groups outside their movement. These reforms were shaped in tandem with and in reaction to the War on Terror, the Arab Spring, and the Taliban's victory in Afghanistan. The author argues that these changes gave rise to dynamic reform in the latest generation of Islamic movements, leading to substantive revisions in their approach (*manhaj*) to achieving Islamic change. Despite tightening proscription and censorship, the author argues that the fruit of these reforms has been a resurgence in the form of highly efficient and creative collaboration between movements. Examples studied include collaboration between the Muslim Brothers (MB) and Hizb ut Tahrir in the West, and between former-al-Qaeda and MB affiliates in Syria. The author estimates these strategies – following a period of political failure and internal skepticism – have precipitated a resurgence that makes the future of Islamic movements highly potent, despite resulting in a dilution of each group's identity and possible decline in membership. As a result of this trajectory, this study argues for the need to theorize contemporary Islamic movements beyond historical categories that have fossilized in Western academia, and often do not capture the dynamic, fluidity and comprehensiveness of Islamic struggle. This study utilizes a mixed methodology, including archival analysis and intellectual genealogy.

KEYWORDS
Post-Caliphate Islam, Muslim revival movements, decolonial thought, Jihad, Shari'a.

Jaan Islam: Department of Political Economy, King's College, London; jaan.islam@kcl.ac.uk.

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Introduction: Identifying the Movements

The classification of contemporary Islamic movements has become a truism in Islamic Studies literature. Ranging from the sociology of religion to Islamic intellectual history and political science, there is a tendency to problematize, study, and understand Muslim social movements and institutions as autonomous and monolithic schools, institutions, and intellectual leanings. There is a simple rationale for this – several movements themselves portray and understand their thought and praxis within the framework of their movement. In this regard, a variety of Muslim social organizations are centred around the concept of *bay'a* (pledge of allegiance), a practice with Prophetic origins serving as a strong social indicator of group allegiance (Salahuddin 1986).[1] This is, interestingly, the case across various unrelated movements, including Sufi Orders (*turuq*) which require *bay'a* to the Shaykh, political parties like Hizb-Ut-Tahrir imitating the pledge of allegiance of the rightly guided caliphs, and Mujahideen[2] pleading obedience to the leader of an armed group within a military context.[3] The existence of such practices, in addition to groups' self-portrayal as intellectually and logistically autonomous understandably undergirds the literatures' concern with studying their dynamics and trajectories.

Another reason for the preponderance of movement-based classifications relates to the academic observer's understanding of those groups and purposes. These assumptions are inextricably linked to the political and ideological motivations of the observer, and ultimately the purpose behind the production of knowledge. As I have previously shown in my research on Mujahideen for example, there is an especially strong tendency in the field to study armed groups with the objective of eliminating the subject of the study, thus leading to overgeneralizing social phenomena and denial of the subject's thought any precedence in the premodern tradition.[4] In this regard, several scholars have observed a highly problematic phenomenon across the field wherein researchers project their preconceived notions of Islam – and especially a division between liberal 'good' Muslim and illiberal 'bad' Muslim – into their portrayal of both contemporary and premodern Muslims (Siddiqui 2020: 6). In the study of Muslim social movements, furthermore, scholars like Farid Hafez (2014, 2017) have critiqued the use of political parties and even academics' use of unscientific conspiracies of a 'Trojan horse' in insinuating ulterior political

1 That is, in the Khaldunian sense of '*asabiyya*, where the *bay'a* formalizes '*asabiyya* required for the constitution of society around a religious-political system, including in non-Muslim societies (Ibn Khaldūn 1958: Ch. 3, pt. 27).

2 My choice of "Mujahid(in)" to "Jihadist(s)" is made deliberately to avoid the systematic misconceptions that jihadism constitutes a definable school within contemporary Islam, which incorrectly assumes jihad lies at the centre of their Muslim identity. See: Darryl Li (2020: 10), Islam (2023a).

3 The *bay'a*, despite remaining standard in articulation, varies vastly in its practical scope and type of authority (Malik 2023: 188).

4 That is, in addition to assuming their motivations and even personality traits, such as being driven by blind rage or 'nihilistic violence'. See: Islam (2023a, 2023b).

motives behind ordinary Muslims living in the West. The line between academic work and Islamophobia becomes even more blurred when studying the role of this 'research' in serving as a blank cheque for the surveillance state to continue and expand its violations against Muslims living in their borders and internationally.[5]

The neocolonial state – with these elements in Western academia as its principal witness – has unwittingly served its ever-expanding power to control and eliminate Muslims around the world despite the passing of over two decades since 9/11, and one decade since the rise of ISIS. This observation ushers the important question of how these biases impact the academy's portrayal of Muslim movements. Perhaps more importantly – and the central concern of this paper – is the question of how the Ummah's spiritual and political disenfranchisement has caused Islamic movements to reform, adapt and revive their projects in pursuit of unity.

Following the deposition of the Caliphate in 1924, Pankhurst as well as Hassan have meticulously documented the spiritual and political turmoil experienced across the Muslim world (Pankhurst 2013: 162, Hassan 2016: 184–216). The caliphate, viewed as a bastion for political unity, Islamic legitimacy, and an essential component of Islam as a way of life, became the primary pursuit—or at least the final objective — of diverse Muslim groups, ranging from political parties to revolutionary militias. Most importantly, this remains a central priority for many Muslims, despite the popular decline and failure of such groups since their post-caliphate establishment. These include the Muslim Brotherhood, Hizb Ut Tahrir, and Al-Qaeda; three groups commonly studied in the literature and which are to different extents largely responsible for the formulation of post-caliphate Islamic political thought – including the drivers behind the Arab Spring (see, for example: Pankhurst 2013).

It is my central contention in this paper that despite an official decrease and even erasure of these movements – what some have described as "burnout" (Aboushady 2023: 131) – including political-military failure and decline in membership, such perceived failure is in fact reminiscent of significant reform and revival across Muslim groups after the failed Arab Spring. Furthermore, it is highly plausible that these changes were not observed precisely because the literature, in a form of selection bias, has largely not looked outside the defining lines of these old movements. Specifically, I argue that two important factors are behind this new praxis – a reformed quid pro quo – defined by ideological reform, social and logistical adaptability, and cross-movement alliances. Firstly, it is possible to observe a significant intellectual trend in shifting towards local, grassroots levels of organization across groups, strengthening their effectiveness despite decreasing the reach of their global message. Secondly, there is an increasing tendency to form new initiatives – and not full-fledged

5 Most recently, UK MP Michael Gove released a highly controversial report, providing an expanded definition of extremism, suggesting that Muslim advocacy groups may be investigated for promoting extremism. CAGE International (March 13, 2024).

groups – allowing for the dual combination of cross-movement specialization and inter-movement collaboration without the social cost of severing ties with existing movements. To study these exciting developments key to the future of global Islamic thought, I refer to several minor case studies where these patterns can be observed, discussed in the following sections.

Understanding Islamic Movements: Goals, Ideology and Praxis

The post-caliphate period was marked by a state of spiritual and political dispossession. Its subsequent replacement with the modern state system through colonial imposition and rapid modernization and secularization uprooted deep-seated Muslim societies, including systems of education, law and adjudication, local forms of government and the role of Islamic institutions, penetrating even the most deep-seated normative values and communal ties (see: Asad 205–256, and Moumtaz 2021: 31–68 on the waqf system, Hallaq 2013: 1–19 on the modern state). Given the enormity of sociopolitical change, this transitional period expectedly gave rise to several 'Islamiscizing' movements centred around several interconnected goals in pursuit of 'preserving', 'reviving' and 're-establishing' Islam as the central frame of reference. Several of these movements were analyzed in detail in Reza Pankhurst's study on Islamic political organizations, which in the literature have formed the staple set of movements studied in political science literature. All of these movements are united around a central goal, despite the diversity in their articulation, theorization and method of implementation. Effected by post-caliphate dispossession, filling the spiritual-political gap through the revival of its central properties – including conceptions of Islamic justice and political unity – lies at the centre of these movements (Pankhurst 2013: 191–208).

The common identifying feature of post-caliphate Islamic movements is the ultimate aim of reviving Islam as the standard of reference – epistemologically, legally, socially, and normatively. As Sayyid theorizes in his theorization of a post-colonial caliphate, the defining characteristic of any such Islamic movement is to make Islam the central signifier. In the words of Sulaiman: "It is the privileged signifier of totality, which makes possible the closure and coherence of Islamic meanings and truths." (2018: 149). In an interesting parallel, this argument bears similarity to Talal Asad's (2009) anthropological argument that Islam must be studied and understood as a tradition derived from its primary revelatory sources, despite the plurality of interpretations and even greater diversity in social implementation. My argument vis-à-vis this study's thesis is that neither the diversity of interpretation nor the movements' coopting of colonial discourse or culture detract from their commonality as fundamentally grounded in Islam as the only legitimate source of knowledge, discourse and power. Importantly, I am not interested – unlike Shahab Ahmed (2016) or Wael Hallaq (2013), for instance – in the value-neutral judgement of premodern Islam, nor a rejection of the authenticity of Islam post-modernity. For the purposes of this study, I am specifically concerned with the way Islam as both

a tradition and (de-)legitimizing discourse has been articulated in similar ways across movements, even where movements may adopt different interpretive frameworks.

Furthermore, in addition to groups that are explicit in political affiliation, it is important to not mistakenly reify a categorization between 'political' and 'apolitical' Islamic movements. Although the revival of the caliphate may be explicitly clear for Hizb-Ut-Tahrir, for instance, it is also the case that pro-government Sufi Orders, like the Turkish İsmailağa *cemaat*, are profoundly political and highly active both in lobbying existing political elites and in articulating a vision for reviving the caliphate in the form of a centralized political authority.[6] Given the inconsistencies brought by insisting on isolating certain groups and schools, it is necessary – and especially pertinent for the current study – to move beyond simplistic categorizations. This study actively considers the role of multiple movements and intellectual trends influencing each other, and the possibility of articulating unique sociopolitical aims as part of an Islamic vision overall defined by another quality – including personal spirituality (as in the case of Sufism), grassroots organization, religious education and armed resistance.

I make these qualifications notwithstanding, of course, while acknowledging the existence of movements as often self-sustaining, coherent articulations of Islam, and often deeply influenced by modernity and the modern state. The colonial period witnessed the launching of the Muslim Brotherhood founded by Hassan al-Banna in 1928 – an active political party with branches across the Muslim world, sister political parties, and a paramilitary wing (Soage and Franganillo 2010: 39–42, Pankhurst 2013: 63–70). Hizb Ut-Tahrir, founded by the Muslim jurisconsult, Taqi al-Din al-Nabhani in 1953, is an elite-focused movement concerned with theorization and reimplementation of the caliphate, advocating for non-violent means of political change and actively recruiting leaders of political elites in the Muslim world (Pankhurst 2016). Al-Qaeda – perhaps the hardest to pin down – was first founded under Osama bin Laden in the late 1980s, and has had a strong presence in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, Somalia, Mali, Yemen, and Chechnya, among other regions, and currently leads several active insurgencies.[7] In addition to these three strongly-defined movements, there are additional spheres of influence that pervade the identity-formulation and praxis of Muslims in local contexts – often in ways that break isolated conceptions developed in the literature, and which are important to understand to theorizing the future of Islamic movements. Sufism, as defined in particular orders (*turuq*) and an interpretive complex, has heavily influenced and sustained groups like the Muslim Brotherhood and its sister

6 On the increasingly political nature of Turkish religious movements, see: Özdalga (2010: 69–91); on government-aligned Sufi movements, see: Cankal (2021: 141–163).

7 Darryl Li (2023) in his analysis of Al-Qaeda's founding document mentions the unclear origins of what was initially referred to as a 'base', and later conceptualized by the American government into a coherent and targetable group to justify foreign military intervention and the expansion of state coercive structures.

organizations, including most famously the AK Party in Turkey (see: Kenkins 2020: 155–169). In contrast, Salafism as a hermeneutical phenomenon is partly theorized as scripturalism, including in its opposition to religious innovation (*bid'ah*) and rejection of participation in democratic institutions, even where there is no discernible influence or connection to Wahhābism (Islam 2024). The existence of diverse articulations of Islam as a frame of reference within a given movement lies at the core of understanding the possibility of a post-movement Islam.

Reviving Islam in the West: Grassroots Initiatives and Intellectually Diverse Organizations

In the 1990s, a new generation of Muslims living in the West witnessed a unique revival of Muslim movements with a global outlook. The Iranian Revolution (1979), the return of Mujahideen from Afghanistan (post-1989) and Bosnia (post-1995) were arguably critical events in defining the outlook and revival of Islamic thought and praxis, in addition to the minority identity of Muslims living in a multicultural and Islamically diverse social context. Subsequently, the increasing migration of Muslims, including global community leaders and scholars of global Muslim movements often persecuted in their home countries created a strong environment for Islamic *da'wah* (propagation, calling) and – at least in the eyes of those leaders themselves – a beacon for Islamic unity and justice in the Muslim world.[8] Taking the United Kingdom as an example, the thriving of this Islamic vision is abundantly clear; the 1990s saw the spread of multiethnic mosques and Muslim community centres, the proliferation of Hizb-Ut Tahrir in university campuses, and the establishment of Salafi scholarly circles and Islamic centres (McNeil-Willson 2022: 220–235, Dawood 2020).

Within the context of an increasing government concern with 'terrorism' (i.e., a global Islamic vision),[9] the War on Terror era gave global hegemons a blank cheque to alienate, persecute and kill Muslims without due process or concern for their human rights. Enabled through anti-terror legislation and even by executive order, the modern state proliferated in using its coercive power to uproot Muslim communities by targeting community leaders, scholars ('ulama), NGOs and advocacy organizations.[10] This decapitation of the Muslim com-

8 This is demonstrated in the relative albeit limited autonomy of Muslim leaders in the West, with many Mujahideen leaders, and Islamic Party activists seeking asylum.

9 Some examples of this include the UK government's deportation of accused 'jihadist' ideologues, banning of non-violent Muslim groups like Hizb-Ut-Tahrir, Austria's banning of the Muslim Brotherhood as a "Terror Organization", and Germany's crackdown on pro-Palestine groups, Muslim associations, and even academic conferences (Kopty 2024, McElroy 2021).

10 These persecutory policies and specific case studies are meticulously documented by various advocacy and legal support organizations, including CAGE International. For compilations of such policies since 9/11, see CAGE International, "Reports and Publications", "Monthly Policy Briefings," https://www.cage.ngo/we-research.

munity from community leaders and organizations curtailed Muslims' ability to participate in this global vision, greatly reduced the explicit membership of Islamic groups, and unsurprisingly, an increased threat of radicalization resulting from spiritual dispossession and foreign intervention in Muslim countries.[11] Although I do not have primary data on members of Muslim groups dispossessed from the War on Terror, later research (15-20 years post-9/11) strongly suggests a significant decrease in the membership of groups like Hizb Ut Tahrir, and the rebranding of Islamic groups like the Muslim Brotherhood (Wali 2024: 1–12, Vidino 2019, Stemmann 2010: 57–72). Together, this evidence suggests a decrease in the self-identifying membership of Islamic movements and their resources, including research institutes, NGOs and mosques. Importantly, sociological research on the post-9/11 generation of Muslims emphasizes the spiritual and intellectual disenfranchisement and sense of hopelessness in response to Western intervention in the Muslim world (Nassar-McMillan et al. 2011: 38–47). I posit that at least part of this feeling results from the decentralization and reduced capacity of Muslim organizations resulting from unlawful government intervention.

Muslim movements in the West take a number of unique configurations and have diverse goals. Focusing on three particularly strong responses in a post-movement era, I explore some of these initiatives as part of larger trends.

The first cluster movements share several characteristics, including a heavy grassroots focus, targeting Muslim youth, content focus on personal development and basic Islamic education. These movements, all sprouting in universities and local Muslim communities, are the Canada-based i3 Institute ('Interactive Ilm Institute', est. 2016), UK-based Roots Academy, NYM (Nation of Young Muslims, est. 1999), and UK-founded iERA (Islamic education and research academy). These four organizations with relatively recent origins are founded by Islamic scholars – many born and raised in the West – with decades of experience in community engagement, traditional Muslim education, and professional development.[12] These include popular figures and community leaders with multiple affiliations, such as Abdurraheem Green, Mohammed Osta, Omar Suleiman and Hamza Tzortzis. As stated in the missions of these groups, local chapters aim to develop the youth of diverse Muslim communities

11 While I have not found anthropological studies that show the absence of Islamic institutions and leadership as a driving factor behind radicalization, the absence of Islamic education and association with the community at large, alienation and loneliness, and police targeting/persecution are all known drivers behind young Muslims taking matters in their own hands. See: Aysha (2020: 33–44) and Lindekilde et. al. (2019). The lack of data on this is due to the fact that the literature disproportionately focuses on "pull" and not "push" factors of radicalization (Vergani et. al. 2020).

12 i3 Institute (n.d.), founded in 2016 by Shaykh Mohammed Osta; Roots Academy (n.d.) founded in 2021; iERA (n.d.) founded by Abdurraheem Green with the participation of senior figures in the US Muslim community, including Imam Omar Suleiman, also the founder of a non-denominational research group (Yaqeen Institute), and Nation of Young Muslims founded in 1999. See also: Baz (2016: 52–60).

in association with mosques and community centres (ibid.). Each of these organizations work under a decentralized structure, enabling and empowering local leaders under a common intellectual framework. Interestingly, all groups—and even others—resemble each other in their social structure and structuring the movement around an Islamic vision.

The intellectual concerns and ultimate goals behind the organizations are highly diverse, despite sharing a relatively broad vision. Some, such as iERA and Roots, are more strongly focused on developing an intellectual framework and confidence to practice and discuss Islam in the public sphere. Within the context of living in Muslim societies, the chapters empowered by local leaders take students through a comprehensive curriculum, including the basics of Islam and even traditional sciences (theology, jurisprudence, and ethics). They subsequently provide detailed readings and examinations of contemporary ideologies and religions, including world religions, liberalism and capitalism, and colonialism. In this regard, Islamic history of intellectual development, epistemology, and the historical uprooting of Islamic society and values in the colonial period is given special concern.[13] As mentioned by Bar, such academies are especially concerned with countering misconceptions and intellectual pressures against Islam, including orientalism in universities, and atheism and 'moral relativism' associated with materialism (Baz 2016: 69–70).

Several moments are also comprehensive: NYM and i3, for instance, largely focus on both intellectual modules and the establishment of physical communities and practices. The latter includes praying in congregation, organizing youth retreats, and physical development and education.[14] Programs include diverse and explicitly Islamic-framed excursions, such as 'sunnah sports' – physical activities recommended in Prophetic teachings, including wrestling, archery and horseback riding.[15] In this regard, similar to community frameworks of non-Muslim communities, groups are very explicitly geared towards providing skills and confidence for success as adults, including in the professional world and political activism. This is in addition to the aim of both intellectual and community-oriented organizations of development participants to "make a difference in their own lives, their Muslim community, and society as a whole". (NYM.)

Although it is not possible to provide a substantive analysis of these movements either intellectually or ethnographically, I mention these examples to identify a larger trend of adaptation and resilience to the intellectual and legal pressures lived by many Muslims in dispossessed societies. It is firstly significant

13 One example of this is i3's Reviving Roots Annual academic conference, in which I had the pleasure of presenting. Among the many themes of Reviving Roots is its focus on reviving traditional Islamic epistemology and articulating postcolonial visions for Islamic unity. See: i3 Institute (2023) and Baz (2016: 133–146).

14 NYM ink, "Our Story"; Tom Facchine, Podcast with i3 Institute (Muslim Central 2023).

15 The project, titled "Camp Sunnah" aims to develop "leadership skills to better society" and "talk about contemporary issues facing the Muslim world". NYM ink (n.d.).

that in response to external pressures, Islamic movements are highly reflexive and capable of adapting to new social contexts and addressing the local needs of the Muslim community. Importantly, these movements, despite significant adaptation to the context of minority communities, are not in any way disconnected from larger political and intellectual trends both in the country and the Muslim world. In this regard, it is important to note that the founders of these organizations, for instance, have for decades been in conversation with, and themselves even influenced by global Islamic movements (Tzortzis 2013, Baz 2016: 53–54).

Similarly, local leaders are not formed in a vacuum: the religious leaders and activists are almost without exception all highly involved in global Islamic traditions, including long-standing institutions like al-Azhar and Madinah University.[16] It is then unsurprising that the successful ambassadors produced by the academies are often heavily involved with the sociopolitical makeup of the countries in which they live, including political organization, protests and boycotts, and lobbying. It is thus unsurprising that organization leaders are co-affiliated with Muslim advocacy groups and scholars with connections to global Islamic movements.[17] Importantly, I am not claiming that these organizations are to be considered to be co-opted adaptations of larger Islamic movements, be it the Muslim Brotherhood or Hizb Ut Tahrir. My argument is in fact the opposite: the disillusionment towards global groups in addition to their reduced efficacy has given rise to a strong, organic socio-intellectual movement that is deliberately constructive and non-partisan. It is precisely this concern to theorize, call and act within a *new* political imagination that encourages the articulation of unique narratives, and even more unique forms of cooperation centered around the achievement of a normative vision outside the goals of a given group.

Essential to understanding the post-movement intellectual rapprochement between groups is a trend towards goal-based thought and action. The political failure and stigma associated with Muslim figures and organizations, resulting in mass-exoduses has counterintuitively given rise to new and arguably stronger configurations of Muslim unity. In the West, I hope to give the example of Ummatics, one of many research institutes that have contributed and developed to a post-movement phase of Islamic intellectual thought post-Arab Spring. Ummatics, founded very recently in 2022, is an international institute for Islamic thought centred on the mission of achieving "a comprehensive unity of Muslim societies." (Ummatics 2023). Based in the United States and founded by Khattab Chair of Islamic Studies at the University of Toledo with

16 Briefly studying the educational backgrounds of the movement leaders often reveals strong training in the Islamic tradition, including in Deobandi Dar-ul-Ulooms, Madinah University and al-Azhar, or institutions founded by their alumni.

17 In response to various events, for example, it is not uncommon to see various event leaders co-sign with advocacy organizations, international movements leaders and local Islamic learning centres. See, for example: Muslim Matters (2017), 5Pillars (2020).

the help of several Muslim scholars and academics. The institute, focusing on the promotion of intellectual and political unity among the Ummah, focuses on analyzing global crises and simultaneously setting the foundation for a post-nation state conception of Islamic government.

Importantly, one of Ummatics' unique features is that it is adamantly non-partisan and does not represent or support any of the post-caliphate Islamic movements. In the Institute's words:

> Generations of Muslim scholars, institutions, and popular movements ... have defended the Islamic Umma against foreign threats and internal decay and advanced the cause of Muslim unity and Islamic flourishing. We stand on their shoulders and seek to constructively critique and build on their contributions, placing them in conversation with each other and with the broader bodies of contemporary human knowledge. (ibid.)

The innovativeness of Ummatics lies in its unique role of facilitating dialogue and cooperation beyond movements, focusing on goal-oriented solutions to conceptual problems. In this regard, Ummatics research papers include publications on various Sunni schools (*madhāhib*) on the concept of Imamate and visions of post-capitalist and post-state Islamic futures (Ayub 2023, Wahb 2023, Vahedi 2023). The institute, in effect, takes Muslims back to the theoretical drawing board in identifying areas of agreement and proposing new Islamic solutions for the Ummah in a post-caliphate context.

Restructuring Movements in the Muslim World: Victories and Ummah-building

Post-War on Terror: Responding to Challenges and Strategies

Islamic movements in the Middle East have faced similar difficulties to those in the West, notwithstanding the radically different sociopolitical context. The failure of the Arab Spring, with Egypt as its most severe case, has been followed by a series of repressive counter-revolutions and the subsequent extrajudicial persecution of Muslim movements (Al-Azami 2021). In contrast, Muslim states within the sphere of Pax Americana have contributed and even led hostilities toward Mujahideen. Since American support for the Jihad in Afghanistan, the US and its allies have consolidated power following the USSR's collapse by readjusting its foreign policy focus towards Islam as the final obstacle to American hegemony. These shifts culminated in the War on Terror, which effectively stripped Muslims of fundamental human rights for working towards unification of Islam through a revival of the Shari'a and the Caliphate, enabled and enforced by brutal dictatorships in Muslim countries.[18] Mujahid movements, regardless of their group affiliation, have been systematically targeted, tortured

18 This includes Turkey's participation in the NATO invasion of Afghanistan, Egypt's consistent blockade of Gaza at the behest of US-Israeli pressure, and Gulf regimes'

and killed under counter-terror legislation despite their extremely small size and level of resources relative to that of any state.[19] As explained best in terrorism studies literature[20] – which detail political objectives absent the superficial political correctness of press secretaries – the state is concerned with maintaining its military hegemony (coercive power) and the dominance of the capitalist system (economic power), targeting Mujahideen due to the potency of its ideology in challenging and dismantling the entirety of the nation-state system. These true material objectives are far removed from humanitarian concerns or tropes of women's rights that Western powers have utilized since the colonial era. Such non-state actors, despite objectively being far less violent than their nation-state counterparts, and entirely unbalanced in material resources, have been systematically targeted on an unfathomable scale, with an estimated price tag of eight trillion dollars and tens of thousands of its soldiers and private contractors (Costs of War 2021). The movements targeted, on the other hand, include the Qassam Brigades in Gaza, revolutionary groups in Syria, the Afghan Taliban, and various local Islamic movements in Somalia, Western Africa, and Yemen.

In the context of these developments, Muslim movements have been heavily suppressed on both political and military levels, leading to widespread failure in realizing political goals. The Muslim Brotherhood and Jamaat-e-Islami, for instance, have largely been banned from participation in elections, including, respectively, in Egypt and Bangladesh (Alam 2023), while groups like Hizb-Ut-Tahrir are proscribed in several Muslim countries. The picture is far bleaker when considering the targeting of armed Islamic movements. Al-Qaeda, which many have described as the boogeyman of the 21st century[21] largely sticks out as the largest and most threatening terrorist group, justifying the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan for two decades, the post-war occupation of Iraq, and foreign intervention in the form of drone strikes, training missions and military aid to nation-state powers working under the security and economic hegemony of the United States and its allies. In all cases, foreign intervention has resulted in unprecedented destruction in the form of fatalities, the levelling of entire cities and towns, the deterioration of human health and destruction

creating an entire military and intelligence apparatus under the guidance of the United States military. On the colonial origins of the anti-terror policy, see: Alzubairi (2019).

19 Various observers estimate the current membership of active, al-Qaeda affiliated fighters, for instance, at an upper bound of 13,000, comprising almost entirely of the Somalia al-Shabaab, not including fighters in Afghanistan and smaller movements (Byman 2022: 1–40). Even the most inclusive definition of Mujahideen, including the Qassam Brigades and HTS in Syria, the manpower and budget do not remotely approach the military power of the average Muslim nation-state.

20 This is best demonstrated in analyses of US Military Schools, such as the West Point Combatting Terrorism Centre, and centres like the Hudson Institute, Rand Corporation, and the Middle East Forum.

21 As early as 2005, Robert Sheer proposed the possibility of al-Qaeda being a "Bush Boogeyman" (Scheer 2005). See also: Islam (2021).

of the environment through chemical and nuclear warfare. The devastation wrought by relentless global powers in the dismantling of armed resistance to its hegemony has resulted in the contravention of the most basic international legal norms differentiating between civilians and combatants (Duffy 2015, Li 2019). Despite superficially promoting universal human rights, such powers have made targeting civilians and civilian institutions, including children, the rationale behind military intervention, not only collateral damage. This is currently best demonstrated in the relentless genocide Israel is perpetrating against the Palestinian people in Gaza. As noted by countless scholars, the deliberate targeting and elimination of children, civilian infrastructure and humanitarian aid is part and parcel of Israel's military doctrine, viewing the elimination of civilians as necessary for the elimination of Hamas (Ihmoud 2023: 1–8). It is essential to understand that associating the civilian population with the armed resistance of so-called terrorist groups is in fact highly accurate—the attempted elimination of resistance will only prove to the larger population the legitimacy of and drive support for resistance. It is in this context that we must understand the American failure in Afghanistan, for instance, which despite killing numerically large numbers of Mujahideen, ultimately increased local support for the Taliban and the deterioration of decaying and corrupt republic institutions, culminating in the grassroots revolution and capture of Kabul in 2021.

Explaining this social reality becomes ever more difficult given the context of the groups themselves. Presumably following the banning and targeting of Islamic groups, outward memberships and associations have significantly decreased and, in many cases, entirely eliminated. This is easily observable across diverse movements. Following the ban in the United Kingdom, most of Hizb-Ut-Tahrir's former vocal supporters rebranded themselves as independent thinkers.[22] Similarly, the abolition of the MB in Egypt was followed by a rebranding of its institutions and most vocal scholars despite the continued existence of those institutions, including mosques, endowments, and schools. After disallowing the JI from participation in the 2023 Bangladeshi election, a large number of former party candidates rebranded themselves and stood as independents (Irani 2018). Similarly, one of al-Qaeda's post-9/11 strategies has been to encourage publicly revoking allegiance to the group with the purpose of receiving regional support and legitimacy. This is best demonstrated in Abu Muhammad al-Joulani's experiment with the Al-Nusra Front, which at least according to al-Qaeda central sources consisted of a secret agreement of apparently revoking affiliation for the purpose of uniting ideologically diverse groups (Al-Tamimi: 10 December 2017). In observing these maneuvers, there are two significant points to observe: (a) firstly, that the post-9/11 crackdown on Muslim groups has largely decreased their open membership, largely contributing to the disillusionment of some former supporters to the groups' core

22 Consider how the Twitter profiles of its former public members, such as Abdul Wahid (former Party Chairman) and Taji Mustafa, are now listed as unaffiliated with any organization. See: https://twitter.com/AbdulWahid_X, https://twitter.com/tajimustafa.

doctrines (as discussed above); and (b) that many movement leaders and members are highly reflexive and dynamic in their approach to maintaining their public mission in response to stigmatization and persecution.

Restructuring and Resurgence Following the Arab Spring

Several important events have shifted the strategy and structure of Islamic movements. Firstly, the failure of the US and its allies in several foreign interventions – including in Afghanistan, Somalia and Iraq-Syria – has aided in the increasing perception (and reality) of multipolarity and subsequently high morale among Islamic movements. This includes, for instance, Hamas' dependence on Iranian support, Al-Shabaab's successful capture of Mogadishu in 2006,[23] and most significantly, the iconic victory of Afghan Taliban and the re-establishment of an Islamic Emirate after twenty years. Secondly, the Arab Spring has itself contributed to the rejuvenation of Islamic discourse and praxis, raising the chance of hope for a political future after decades of ruthless dictatorship. In the last 10-15 years, this has culminated in the Syrian revolution against Bashar al-Assad and the short-lived strength of the Brotherhood in Egypt and Tunisia. This post-post War on Terror praxis, I argue, has given rise to a series of important milestones in the political and military success of non-state Muslim movements. These successes were achieved in defiance of severe legal, economic and military pressures. In this subsection, I explore how these movements thrived and succeeded on the spiritual, political and military levels through diverse and reflexive methods of restructuring, localization, and sociopolitical pragmatism.

The first pattern of post-movement change is a reconfiguration of structures and even ideological goals around pragmatic, goal-based praxis. The most glaring example of this is in post-revolution Syria. After the breakout of the war, various groups formed a faction known as the 'Syrian Islamic Liberation Front' representing a large number of Sunni Islamic groups, and informally allied with diverse groups ranging from the then-AQ affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra to the secular-nationalist Free Syria Army (al-Tamimi: 15 December 2017). Following the sweeping victories of various allied groups, the rise of IS in 2014 and its control of half of Syria's territory – taken from both resistance groups and the Assad regime – eventually resulted in military failure. IS' concern with resistance groups, whom they deemed 'apostates' as they did the Assad regime, opened swathes of territory to the Kurdish SDF ('Syrian Democratic Forces') allied with the Assad regime, eventually resulting in a stalemate and major losses for Sunni, anti-Assad groups (Martin and Kozak 2016). The dual challenge of disunity among the Sunni groups and the stigma attached to al-Nusra Front's al-Qaeda association posed a significant strategic obstacle to both unity and regional support. In what was largely considered to be a symbolic gesture, al-Nusra Front led by Abu Mohammed al-Joulani declared its

23 Al-Shabaab is Al-Qaeda's regional affiliate in Somalia.

retraction from its pledge of allegiance to al-Qaeda's Emir, Ayman al-Zawahiri (d. 2022). For Joulani, this move had two aims, both of which were achieved: (a) the unification of diverse resistance groups under a single banner, and (b) the international legitimacy to sign agreements and receive foreign aid (Cole 2022: 299–337).[24] It was only after the funnelling out of al-Qaeda's own appointees and barring from forming anti-Assad groups (i.e., Hurras al-Din) that al-Joulani's newly minted group Hay'at Tahrir al-Shām experienced significant setbacks – including desertions – resulting from Joulani's severity towards fellow Sunni resistance groups and intolerance of criticism (Jihadica 2020, International Crisis Group 2023).

What is significant for this study is the existence of a short-lived unity at the start of the war despite significant disagreement over worldview and a hypothetical post-Assad alternative. This was followed by another alliance under a secret al-Qaeda allegiance, demonstrating remarkable reflexivity of highly diverse local resistance groups and al-Qaeda's/al-Nusra Front's central leadership. Al-Nusra Front significantly includes the Jaysh al-Ahrar faction, formerly associated with the Ahrar al-Sham and with strong ideological ties to the Muslim Brotherhood (Conduit 2019: 213–220). As several analysts note, there existed among all factions a tendency for ideological negotiation due to the prioritization of immediate interests. Importantly, however, the framing of these alliances as mere strategic alliances limits the effect of genuine ideological negotiation taking place within the larger geopolitical context. The Hay'ah's leadership, for instance, has long portrayed their alliance not as a strategic quid pro quo but as an attempt to reform and standardize intellectual heterogeneity within a workable framework of Islamic normative values. This includes the creation of Shari'a courts, the juristic Islamic obligation of defensive jihad, and abstaining from excommunicating and infighting fellow Sunni Muslims (Cook et al. 2020: 1–20) – all of which are themselves ideological ends to themselves in addition to (and sometimes in spite of) perceived military objectives. Another example of this ideological rapprochement within movements is in Mali in the context of significant infighting between the decentralized al-Qaeda allied JNIM (Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wa-l-Muslimin) and the Islamic State following the independent gains of both groups against French and Russian-backed state regimes in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. The context of infighting and especially IS' excommunication of the former has led to local leaders and regional tribes attempt to negotiate between the two movements. This has led even to the creative initiative of forming a new group focused on maintaining normative Islamic government and stopping infighting between Shari'a-minded Muslims (al-'Arab 2023).

The second pattern of post-movement change is localization, most clearly demonstrable in the loose set of organizations known as 'al-Qaeda'. Al-Qaeda

24 Cole (2022) argues that Joulani's 'rebranding' into HTS did not actually constitute withdrawal of the pledge of allegiance. The subsequent independence of Joulani's actions, however, drew accusations of treachery from al-Qaeda's own central leadership.

(literally, 'the base'), was hardly more than a military base considered part of the Maktabat al-Khidamat ('Services Bureau') of the Afghan Arabs against the Soviet Union (Hegghammer 2020). Today, as Li notes, this deliberately vague term was spanned into cryptic reference to a supposed global leadership, or set of loose organizations which baffles the most experienced counterterrorism officials and researchers (Li 2023). Loosely conceived, al-Qaeda shortly after its inception developed into a global movement for resistance against American hegemony. Despite organizing a number of attacks designed to gain international attention, and supposedly maintaining centralized leadership networks in the early 2000s, the elimination of any public manifestation of the movement – and targeting of its leaders – reduced it to a small set of detached leaders forced into hiding or in prison. Since then, the initial post-9/11 defeat of Al-Qaeda has been followed by a slow but steady global resurgence. This included the Shabaab in Somalia, which successfully captured its capital Mogadishu in 2013 until an African-Union-led foreign invasion ousted them from power, and the regional (though short-lived) success of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in Yemen, Chechnya, and Iraq-Syria under Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi (d. 2006). It peaked in popularity with the adoption of highly popular and eloquent, traditionally trained Islamic scholars supporting the movement as part of an Ummatic call for Muslim resistance to imperialism, demonstrated best in the rich life of Anwar al-Awlaki (Meleagrou-Hitchens 2020).

Explaining the success of al-Qaeda despite its apparent political failure requires understanding its post-9/11 adaptation. A widely observed phenomenon is that the movement, unlike the Islamic State, for instance, has almost entirely substituted its global military strategy for a localized insurgency. This phenomenon is described by theorists as moving from the 'far enemy' to the 'near enemy' as evident in the thought of al-Qaeda's thinkers, and has also been termed localization and decentralization (Moghadam 2013: 466–497). It is accurate that these scholars have identified a general attitude shift followed by an internal critique of al-Qaeda's global strategy – notably by Abu Mus'ab al-Suri (d. 2011) (2018: vols. 1–5) who suggested in his voluminous *Call to International Islamic Resistance* a reorientation of jihad towards decentralized and localized action. These narratives are at the same time severely handicapped in their propensity to capture the social, Islamic, cultural and economic dimensions of diverse, multiple fronts of conflict. As Faisal Devji observes, the Jihad in Afghanistan and elsewhere cannot at all be understood within the prism of a global militant network operating within local contacts – in fact, as Darryl Li identifies, this very suggestion reifies the stereotype of the 'foreign fighter' assumed to have little connection to the local society (Li 2019: 10). As Devji observes, the fact that Islamic resistance movements are almost entirely dependent on local communities suggests that they cannot be financially or personally identified as external to the population, unlike that of the modern state which homogenizes, recruits and sacrifices its subjects (Devji 2019: 1–25). In this regard, the fact that mujahideen movements are highly dedicated to providing local community services and are heavily involved with aid work and non-governmental

organizations (at times comprising such organizations) requires understanding these movements within the context of their local communities.

In examining the success of local al-Qaeda affiliates, it is significant to observe a local adaptation of groups in (a) developing localized, semi-autonomous and self-governing structures; and (b) sustaining an anti-state insurgency through reliance on the populations' financial aid, taxes, and logistical support. The role of these insurgencies in either combatting foreign-led external invasions (e.g., Somalia, Afghanistan, Gaza and Chechnya), or overthrowing highly repressive state regimes (the Sahel, Yemen, Syria, etc.) means that these movements are largely the product of the struggle of local communities for self-government and the removal of foreign occupation.

The third pattern of post-movement change – and arguably the most significant development concerning the future of post-movement Islam – is the establishment of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA), following the Afghan Taliban's lightening offensive and conquering of Kabul in mid-2021. The IEA's establishment and full consolidation of power in Afghanistan and even its international embassies and international diplomacy constitutes a highly critical development (Zelin 2022). Within the modus operandi of nearly all (post-) Islamic groups, the IEA constitutes the only Islamic country in the world – in that the legal system and values are explicitly articulated by the government in adherence to the Islamic Shari'a, as opposed to the constitution of a secular state or monarchy.[25] In other words, groups and individuals who have long critiqued secular nation-states as outposts for neocolonialism now have – as flawed as it may be – a stable foundation and economic stronghold from which to give Da'wah, live an Islamic lifestyle and promote Islamic change abroad. This vision constitutes the culmination of the vision of the non-partisan scholar Mujahid ʻAbdullah ʻAzzam who articulated a similar theory over forty years ago (Hegghammer 2020: 313). Unsurprisingly, the Islamic Emirate has gained the overwhelming support of several Islamic movements and of diverse Sunni Ulama, praising the Emirate as the only Islamic state, and most importantly, the future model of government Muslims should aspire to implement around the world. (Samadi 2023, Tolo News 2023).

While the potential prospects of inter-movement alliances with the evolving of the IEA into a state are not immediately clear, the Emirate's history and current situation give us an insight into future possibilities in a post-movement world. Firstly, the evolving of the Taliban into the status quo government of Afghanistan means they take on a new role of negotiating, tolerating and influencing the diverse ethnic, cultural and Islamic makeup of the country. With

25 The legal and political system of the Islamic Emirate is described in various sources, including the Chief Justice's formulation of the government, forwarded by the Amir al-Mu'minin Hibatullah Akhundzadah himself (al-Haqqānī 2022). While this subject itself is deserving of an independent study, this is signalled towards in the Emirate's inclusion of the *Mecelle* (the 1869 Ottoman Hanafī legal code) as its primary legal document studied and implemented by judges, and attested to in previous semi-constitutional formulations of the Emirate's legal system. See: Islam (2023).

the Jamaat-e-Islami associated Hizb-e-Islami, Salafi and Ahl-e-Hadith movements, and especially Shi'i Islamic movements and populations now operating within the educational and governmental framework of the Emirate, it is highly likely that this will lead to the creation of new hybrids between the government and these intellectually diverse movements. This may occur through the gradual filling of movement members into the civilian state apparatus, or conversely, through the government's influence on formerly autonomous education institutions belonging to the movements.

Secondly, the IEA's consolidation raises the prospects for international Islamic cooperation. The legitimized international diplomacy of the Emirate, which held 400 meetings with various international actors in a single year, suggests the possibility of future collaboration between Islamic movements and institutions on an international level. The continued support of Islamic NGOs and charities will likely take place in the form of establishing hospitals, schools, orphanages and even universities, increasing the potential for collaboration and intellectual exchange between Afghan society and the international movements that support these organizations. Thirdly, the flow of highly skilled, multilingual muhajireen (migrants) with relatively significant capital savings into the Emirate offers the possibility of an Afghan-led technological and economic development, especially if these flows are organized into major projects.[26] The most significant observation concerning the Emirate on a theoretical level is that regardless of the innovative ways future collaboration develops, the IEA's consolidation of power and assumption of status quo rule arguably makes it the most significant source of inter-group cooperation.

Conclusion: The Bright Future of Global Islam

In this paper, I provided a very brief study of the evolution of post-Arab Spring Islamic movements around the world. Despite significant disagreements such movements hold on theological (*'aqidah*) and political (*manhaj*) levels, I have shown how they successfully collaborated and even integrated with members of other institutions and movements. The success and reflexivity of movements following the Arab Spring are the result of two major forces: negative forces in the form of policing, bans and extrajudicial killings, and positive forces in the form of sharing similar goals and a broadly shared political vision. Since the Arab Spring, while the traditional movements themselves have struggled to gain membership, these have largely been substituted by independent, unaffiliated movements that have espoused two central characteristics: (a) an appeal to public opinion and grassroots work in local communities; and (b) willingness to work with groups outside their movement. Contrary to the original intent

26 There are many anecdotal examples of this very recent phenomenon, and I anticipate anthropological studies will study such migration as part of the Muslim 'hijrah' (sacred migration) phenomenon increasing in popularity in the West. See, for example: Fadil et. al. (2021).

of state powers and right-wing policymakers, the proscription and censorship of Islamic movements have in fact led to a resilience to government persecution, and a far more potent synthesis in the form of pragmatic, goal-oriented action and creative collaboration between movements. As shown in the case studies, these developments question the relevance of studying and understanding the health and nature of Islamic activism and resistance within the strictures of certain movements, given the proliferation of 'independent' thinkers and new synthesis of ideas previously compartmentalized to a political party or framework. As a result of this trajectory, this study argues for the need to theorize contemporary Islamic movements beyond historical categories that have fossilized in Western academia, and often do not capture the dynamic, fluidity and comprehensiveness of Islamic struggle.

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Džan Islam

Reforma i preporod: transformacija islamskih pokreta u 21. veku

Apstrakt:

Ovaj rad proučava razvoj misli i prakse islamskih pokreta koji imaju za cilj da ožive politički sistem vođen islamskim pravom. Islamski pokreti nakon kalifate – predmet ove studije – prošli su nedavne reforme u razmišljanju, pristupu, pa čak i brendiranju od Arapskog proleća. Bez obzira na njihovu pravnu i teološku raznolikost pokreta, pokazujem da oni dele zajedničke karakteristike reformi: (a) pozivanje na javno mnjenje i rad na bazi, kao i (b) spremnost za rad sa grupama van njihovog pokreta. Ove reforme oblikovane su u tandemu i kao reakcija na Rat protiv terorizma, Arapsko proleće i pobedu Talibana u Avganistanu. U radu pokazujem da su ove promene dovele do dinamičke reforme u najnovijoj generaciji islamskih pokreta, što je dovelo do suštinskih revizija njihovog pristupa (manhadža) postizanju islamskih promena. Uprkos pooštravanju zabrane i cenzure, tvrdim da je plod ovih reformi bio oživljavanje u vidu veoma efikasne i kreativne saradnje između pokreta. Proučeni primeri uključuju saradnju između Muslimanske braće (MB) i Hizb ut Tahrira na Zapadu, kao i između bivših članova Al Kaide i MB u Siriji. Procenjujem da su ove strategije – nakon perioda političkog neuspeha i unutrašnjeg skepticizma – ubrzale oživljavanje koje čini budućnost islamskih pokreta veoma snažnom uprkos tome što su dovele do razvodnjavanja identiteta svake grupe i mogućeg opadanja članstva. Kao rezultat ove putanje, ovaj rad pokazuje da je potrebno da se teoretizuju savremeni islamski pokreti izvan istorijskih kategorija koje su se fosilizirale u zapadnim akademskim krugovima i koje često ne obuhvataju dinamičnost, fluidnost i sveobuhvatnost islamske borbe. Ovaj rad koristi mešovitu metodologiju uključujući arhivsku analizu i intelektualnu genealogiju.

Ključne reči: Islam posle kalifata, pokreti muslimanskog preporoda, dekolonijalna misao, džihad, šerijat.

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Ivan Ejub Kostić

POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT: THE ROLE OF PARTY POLITICS IN THE FUTURE OF EUROPEAN MUSLIMS

ABSTRACT
This paper critically examines the socio-political dynamics affecting Muslims in Europe, focusing on the significant barriers that hinder their active participation in party politics. A central argument is that the internalized secular worldview has led to widespread political disengagement. This issue is further compounded by the first generation of Muslims in Europe, who developed and entrenched a minority mindset, along with certain ulema who promote socio-political passivity and quietism, severely limiting more complex and effective political engagement. To counter this situation, the paper emphasizes the urgent need for Muslims to move beyond status quo or reactionary approaches, such as supporting mainstream parties or resorting to political abstention, both of which only superficially address their concerns. Instead, it advocates establishing independent political entities rooted in Islamic principles that strive for more profound systemic change. Such an approach would empower Muslims to form strategic alliances, challenge the status quo, and tackle broader societal issues, ultimately advancing the interests of both their communities and European society as a whole.

KEYWORDS
Muslims in Europe, securitization, normative engineering, party politics, mainstream political parties, minority mindset, quietism, disruption, empowerment.

Introduction

On July 24th, 2023, Shabir Akhtar, one of the most significant contemporary Islamic thinkers, passed away. In 1991, Akhtar published *The Final Imperative: An Islamic Theology of Liberation*. In this work, Akhtar endeavored to defend and affirm the belief that Islam is a "political religion," positing it as an alternative to the defeatism, quietism, tyranny, authoritarianism, corruption, and radical opportunism that characterize much of the contemporary Muslim world. Moreover, Akhtar sought to challenge the widely held notion that "violence" is inherently unacceptable, emphasizing that in certain circumstances, it is necessary to achieve peace, justice, and freedom. In this regard, Akhtar

Ivan Ejub Kostić: Research Fellow, Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade: ivan.kostic@ifdt.bg.ac.rs.

argues that Islamic teachings take political obligations very seriously, making it incumbent upon every Muslim believer to identify injustice and actively combat it. Akhtar supported all forms of political engagement for Muslims, from participation in party politics to involvement in liberation movements. In the introduction to the book, Akhtar notably approved of establishing the Islamic Party in the United Kingdom, which held substantial symbolic significance as it marked the first time such a party had been formed. He viewed the creation of this party as a step through which British Muslims offered an alternative to mainstream political parties (Akhtar 1991: 3).

Following Akhtar's line of thought, this paper aims to demonstrate that creating alternatives to mainstream political parties to disrupt the status quo in the political sphere and to secure more substantial agency for Muslims in Europe is crucial for their future. The analysis will first offer a critical review of the lack of European Muslim participation in party politics, followed by a discussion of the potential reconfiguration of their political strategies. These strategies would mean systematic efforts towards establishing political parties rooted in Islamic worldviews and, subsequently, active collaboration with political organizations that do not include the long-dominant political parties. However, before delving into these questions, we will provide a brief historical overview of the most significant debates regarding Muslim presence in the West and then examine the current state of Muslim communities in Western European countries.

Historical Debates on Muslim Presence in Europe: Reconsidering the West as Dar al-Islam

> *"To God's is the east and the west: and wherever you turn, there is God's countenance. Behold, God is infinite, all-knowing" (Al-Baqara: 115).*

In classical Islamic theory, cartography often appears dominated by the concepts of *dar al-harb* (the abode of war) and *dar al-Islam* (the abode of peace), positioned in antagonistic opposition. The term *dar al-harb* refers to territories governed by non-Muslim rulers and laws. In contrast, *dar al-Islam* denotes territories predominantly inhabited by Muslims where Islamic law, *Shariah*, is in effect. This dichotomous, polarizing worldview was not reflective of the complex realities, prompting Islamic jurists throughout history to continually adjust their views towards a more nuanced understanding of Muslim existence in regions governed by different legal frameworks. Khaled Abou el Fadl notes that early Islamic legal discussions regarding the legality of residing in non-Muslim territories were cryptic and evolved in response to emerging historical challenges. Initially, the discourse was strongly influenced by the traditional dichotomy between *dar al-Islam* and *dar al-harb*, which primarily focused on whether Muslims could ethically live under non-Islamic rule.

Nevertheless, despite the dominance of this traditional dichotomy, early Islamic jurisprudence did not uniformly prohibit Muslims from living under non-Islamic rule, with opinions varying across different legal schools (Fadl 1994a). For instance, the Hanafi school demonstrated a tendency toward a more open approach, emphasizing the ability to freely practice one's faith as a key criterion in deciding whether Muslims should remain in non-Islamic environments. Al-Shaybani, one of the prominent Hanafi jurists, argued against the obligation to migrate if Muslims could live their faith authentically, thus opening the possibility of coexistence in diverse cultural contexts (ibid). On the other hand, the Maliki school adopted a more restrictive stance, emphasizing the need to avoid residing in non-Islamic territories to protect Muslims from the legal and ethical complications that may arise from exposure to non-Islamic laws. Malik ibn Anas, the school's founder, particularly stressed the risks associated with traveling to non-Islamic countries for trade, warning against the moral and legal dangers such endeavors may entail (ibid). The Shafi'i school, through the works of the well-known Islamic thinker al-Mawardi, presented a more nuanced perspective, suggesting that territories where Muslims could publicly manifest their religion could be considered part of *dar al-Islam*. Lastly, while closely aligned with the restrictive Maliki approach, the Hanbali school permitted exceptions based on the security of religious practice and personal safety. Ibn Qudama, a renowned Hanbali jurist, advocated migration as a necessity except when conditions for practicing Islam were guaranteed (ibid).

The shift towards more permissive perspectives intensified, particularly from the tenth century onward, when many Muslims came under Christian rule due to conquests and border changes. These historical circumstances led to a fundamental questioning of the binary worldview, resulting in even more nuanced positions among Islamic jurists, who increasingly began to legitimize Muslims living in non-Muslim territories.

This historical process culminated in the modern era when many Islamic thinkers started using terms like *dar al-ahd* (the abode of treaty), *dar al-aman* (the abode of peace), *dar al-sulh* (the abode of conciliation), and *dar al-shahada* (the abode of testimony) to describe non-Muslim territories.[1] The reason for this shift is that, from the mid-20th century, many Muslims began settling in Western Europe and North America, regions where their human rights were better respected than in the predominantly Muslim countries of their birth. With the increasing presence of Muslims in European and North American states, some Islamic scholars felt the need to provide legitimacy through jurisprudential approaches for their residence and the potential permanence of

1 Other terms are also in use. For example, Taha Jabir al-Alwani argues that it is more precise to use the terms *dar al-ijabah* (the abode of acceptance) and *dar al-dawah* (the abode of invitation) (Kamali 2011: 126). All of these terms are synonymous and refer to those states that are predominantly non-Muslim and do not have Islamic governance but still respect international law, which guarantees freedom of religious practice and freedom of thought.

their descendants. Thus, in the 1970s and 1980s, *fiqh al-aqalliyyat* (the fiqh of Muslim minorities) emerged, primarily developed by Sunni activists and jurists of Arab origin in response to the Muslim immigration to the West during that period (Hassan 2013: 8). The most prominent figures of this school were Taha Jabir al-Alwani and Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who, in their works, emphasized the issue of Muslim integration into non-Muslim societies. They advocated for a careful understanding of Islamic sources, aiming to support active civic participation by Muslims and to recognize the existence of multiple identities and the possibility of diverse forms of loyalty that Muslims could develop in non-Muslim societies.[2] Additionally, these scholars insisted that the context, i.e., the reality of living (*waqi'*), significantly influences the interpretation of the original text.[3]

Despite these ideas, the outcomes of *fiqh al-aqalliyyat* remained limited. These scholars continued to view social issues primarily through the lens of necessity (*darura*) or need (*haja*), revealing that they had not fully reconciled with the idea that Muslims in the West today consider it home. In other words, this approach provided Muslims with "tools to survive in Western non-Muslim societies but not answers on how to genuinely be active citizens and agents of change and reform within them" (Ramadan 2005: 159). Therefore, it can be concluded that, at its core, this approach was still dominated by a communitarian perspective that did not provide European Muslims with sufficient breadth to develop thinking that transcends notions of "minority status," often resulting in self-ghettoization and, in some cases, self-victimization.

As a response to this situation, critical works emerged towards the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century, primarily those of Tariq Ramadan, as well as significant reflections by Khaled Abou Fadl, Jasser Auda, and other Muslim thinkers, who, from various perspectives, sought to provide a different worldview for Muslims in predominantly non-Muslim societies. In his writings, Ramadan moved towards rejecting the traditional cartography, i.e., the geo-religious boundaries defined through the territorial applicability of Islamic law.[4] His goal was not only to redraw more inclusive boundaries but to fundamentally dissolve them, proposing a unified global space where

2 The most significant works by Al-Alwani and Qaradawi on *fiqh al-aqalliyyat*: Al-Alwani, Taha Jabir. 2003. *Towards a Fiqh for Minorities: Some Basic Reflections.* Herndon: International Institute of Islamic Thought, and Al-Qaradawi, Y. 2003. *Fiqh of Muslim Minorities: Contentious Issues & Recommended Solutions.* Cairo: Al-Falah Foundation.

3 Contextualists assign crucial hermeneutical value to the historical context in which the Qur'an was revealed. In other words, they argue that when interpreting the Qur'an, scholars should consider the social, political, economic, intellectual, and cultural circumstances of the revelation, as well as the environment in which the interpretation took place in the past and takes place today. Contextualists thus tend to view the Qur'an as a source of practical guidance (Saeed 2014: 4). For more on the contextual approach to the text, see Abdullah Saeed's work: *Reading the Qur'an in the Twenty-First Century: A Contextualist Approach.*

4 In addition to Ramadan's views, Sarah Albrecht's book *Dār al-Islām Revisited: Territoriality in Contemporary Islamic Legal Discourse on Muslims in the West* offers more

Muslims transcend physical and political borders through the practice and expression of their faith (Taha 2013: 23). Drawing on these premises, Ramadan developed a critical stance towards *fiqh al-aqalliyyat*, emphasizing that Muslims must actively engage in the various societal contexts in which they live, while particularly warning against the dangers of all forms of isolationism and communitarianism.[5] In Ramadan's view, by failing to account for the circumstances and realities in which Muslims live, they place themselves in a position of political and social disconnection, which is fundamentally at odds with the original Islamic message. As an alternative, Ramadan argues that Muslims must be aware of Islam's universal message and ethical obligations, which mandate that they work within their societies to promote justice and do good to ensure social progress. He also urges Muslims to reject narrow political strategies that neglect the Qur'anic universal principles in favor of merely ensuring the community's survival or pursuing utilitarian political interests and societal advancement exclusive to their group rather than the broader society (Ramadan 2005: 159–165).

Similarly to Ramadan, Jasser Auda points out that the ideal of achieving justice is so central in the Islamic worldview that the term *dar al-adl* (land of justice) is synonymous with dar al-Islam and is used in numerous traditional sources.[6] According to Auda, this premise implies that "Islamic leadership" that is not guided by justice but rather by a predominantly "ethnic principle" (*asabiyya*) does not constitute a valid condition for any territory to be recognized as *dar al-Islam*. In other words, Auda argues that the traditional cartography, which divides the world into *dar al-Islam* and *dar al-harb* without considering the level of justice exercised by the rulers and the freedom within society, represents a false dichotomy. Consequently, Auda contends that certain states with a predominantly non-Muslim population could be more accurately characterized as following Islamic principles of justice than many predominantly Muslim states. This stance led Auda to conclude that this reality undermines one of the fundamental postulates of *fiqh al-aqalliyyat*, namely that Muslims in Western states should not be regarded as a "minority" since these states are "lands of justice" and, as such, acceptable from an Islamic perspective (Auda 2018: 46).

However, viewing Western states solely through the lens of embodiments of justice overlooks significant challenges posed by contemporary circumstances, particularly those that emerged after the September 11, 2001 attacks and the commencement of the War on Terror in 2003. This strategy led to the rise of radical right-wing and populist parties with pronounced Islamophobic stances

on different contemporary critical perspectives on traditional cartography. The reflections of the French-Moroccan theologian Tareq Oubrou are particularly interesting.

5 In his works, Ramadan consistently warned about the dangers of religious communitarianism and the risks of ethnic communitarianism.

6 It is worth noting that Auda, to support his views on the centrality of justice in the Islamic worldview, cites Ibn Taymiyyah and Rashid Rida, figures often associated with the Salafi school of thought.

and has become increasingly prevalent across Western countries. Therefore, although Western states certainly provide a degree of flexibility in religious expression, the widespread media stigmatization of Muslims, the securitization and surveillance of Muslim communities, xenophobic immigration policies, and political rhetoric that portrays them as archetypal enemies all affect their daily lives and sense of security, ultimately making their existence and livelihood more difficult.

To combat this situation more effectively, the question arises as to what extent Muslim European citizens must take significantly more active roles in social and political arenas, specifically in party politics and electoral processes. And, by actively engaging in party politics, do they compromise Islamic ethics? (El-Fadl 1994b: 186).

Before addressing these questions, it is essential to briefly examine the unfavorable socio-political context, namely the discriminatory conditions in which Muslims currently live in Europe.

Securitization, Discrimination, and Normative Engineering

Anti-Muslim hatred and the perception of Muslims as a security threat to Western civilization significantly intensified following the September 11, 2001, attacks in New York. From that moment, the “clash of civilizations” discourse became the dominant narrative guiding state policies in Western plutocracies. Shortly after the attacks, in 2003, George W. Bush declared the Global War on Terror (GWOT), which has, for over two decades, been primarily directed at Muslim-majority countries in the Middle East, as well as Muslims in the West who are unwilling to conform to the Western-centric worldview unconditionally. As a result, the GWOT in Europe unleashed deeply entrenched Islamophobic societal prejudices. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in countries with colonial histories, such as the United Kingdom, France, Holland, Belgium, Germany, Austria, and Italy, as well as in states that, despite their declared commitment to the rule of law, pluralism, and human rights, have for decades treated Muslim minorities as inferior and uncivilized through Orientalist stereotypes and the racist ideologies of white supremacy (Aziz and Esposito 2024: 2). Within the GWOT context, Western governments have, over the past two decades, implemented numerous security programs aimed at monitoring, disciplining, and, if necessary, detaining or even physically eliminating defiant Muslims who manifest their Islamic identity and piety in the public sphere. Mainly, draconian measures have been reserved for Muslims eager to engage in overt political activism grounded in their Islamic values.

The first program launched following the declaration of the GWOT was the Prevent program in the United Kingdom, which assigned various segments of British society roles that should have been exclusively reserved for the police and secret services. Initially created in 2003 by the Labour government, it was expanded following the London bombings in 2005. The program’s core tenet is that any opposition to British values constitutes a form of extremism.

Numerous reports have revealed that this program disproportionately targets Muslims, including investigations into children as young as three years old for "extremist" behavior (Bridge Initiative).[7] Despite criticism from human rights organizations against the Prevent program, the British government continued its implementation, further institutionalizing it in 2015 by making it a statutory duty for public institutions (Tazamal 2024: 96).

Under the influence of this discriminatory program, the Barack Obama administration in 2011 launched the Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) program in the United States. Like Prevent, this program has been sharply criticized for primarily targeting and stigmatizing American Muslims based on unfounded accusations, leading in many cases to severe violations of civil liberties. Particularly problematic was the expansion of the term «violent extremism» to include «non-violent extremism,» resulting in many projects under this program focusing not on (physical) violence and militancy but on ideas. In other words, the goal was not to prevent or eliminate specific (violent) acts, but to punish individuals for their beliefs (Hafez 2021: 12).

Outside the Anglophone sphere, one of the most recent and radical examples of the securitization of Muslims and their organizations is the establishment of the Documentation Center for Political Islam in July 2020 by the Austrian government, led by Sebastian Kurz and his right-wing populist Austrian People's Party (ÖVP).[8] This center, staffed by individuals with documented histories of anti-Muslim sentiments, continually promotes the surveillance of vital Muslim organizations as well as prominent Muslim intellectuals in Austria.[9] The culmination of this repressive policy by the Austrian government occurred during "Operation Luxor," the most extensive police action in Austrian history, exclusively targeting the Muslim community. During the operation, raids were conducted at 60 locations, and 70 individuals were detained without any grounds linking them to alleged terrorism (Hafez 2023). The state used the November 2, 2020, terrorist attack in Vienna as a pretext for the crackdown, which was immediately followed by the deeply controversial "Law on Political Islam." The vast majority of the Muslims detained were targeted solely because of their religious and humanitarian activism, highlighting the extent of the criminalization of Muslim civil society in Austria (ibid.).

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7 In 2019, the UK Home Office announced an independent review of the Prevent program, finally taking into account widespread criticism and concerns from numerous social actors regarding human rights violations. For more Bridge Initiative Factsheets see: https://bridge.georgetown.edu/

8 The ÖVP also used various institutions, such as the Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF), to spread narratives about Islam that fuel anti-Muslim hatred. Additionally, the ÖVP advocated for banning foreign funding of Islamic organizations, closing mosques, and attempting to secure authorized translations of Islamic texts.

9 The Kurz government's introduction of the concept of "political Islam" into the public sphere aimed to establish a distinction between Islam as a religion and «political Islam" as an alleged ideological and violent threat. However, in practice, this effort sought to avoid accusations of implementing repressive policies based on anti-Muslim hatred.

In addition to security projects primarily focused on the surveillance and monitoring of Muslims, it is crucial to highlight the programs implemented by Western states aimed at normative engineering—that is, the epistemological and value-based reconfiguration of Muslim minds. From a long-term perspective, these programs are significantly more malignant and detrimental to Muslims and Islamic values than security programs. The American state-affiliated organization RAND provided the platform for the ideological battle against Islamic values and their reconfiguration in 2003 with the publication of the report *Civil Democratic Islam: Partners, Resources, and Strategies* by Cheryl Bernard. This report offers detailed guidelines to the United States government and Western European states on how to undermine Islamic values by "domesticating Islam" and establishing ties with liberal Muslim organizations and intellectuals to fund their promotion of (post)modernist and relativist interpretations of Islamic sources to advance "liberal values," "secularism," "gender equality," and "sexual freedoms and LGBTQ rights" (Kostić 2021 and Massad 2024).

The project of "Islamic reform," which French President Emmanuel Macron has been attempting to implement for years under the label of creating a national "French Islam," certainly falls within the category of normative engineering. This initiative aims to Westernize the doctrinal content of Islam in theological terms (Roy 2004). Hakim El-Karoui, widely regarded as an unofficial advisor on "Muslim affairs" to President Macron, authored a report in 2016 titled *French Islam is Possible*, which outlines his vision for reorganizing the relationship between the French state and Muslim communities to promote "harmonious" coexistence (El Karoui 2016). The report suggests the establishment of various institutions, legal alignments, and doctrinal interventions to align Islamic teachings with French societal norms and values. It proposes creating two bodies—the Foundation for Islam in France and the Muslim Association for French Islam. These institutions are envisioned as bridges between the French state, Muslim communities, and the broader public. Practically, they would aim to fund religious and cultural projects to support the development of a "French Islamic theology." Additionally, the report envisions establishing the institution of the "Grand Imam of France," who would be responsible for promoting doctrinal sources reinterpreted in line with French republican principles.

The tactic of creating paternalistic and security-centric "nationalized Islams," whose primary goal is to reflect the secular values of nation-states, is not unique to France but has also emerged in other European countries. In Germany, the German Islam Conference (Deutsche Islamkonferenz) was established in 2006 by the Ministry of the Interior. Like France, the DIK encouraged "dialogue" between the state and Muslim communities. However, in practice, rather than establishing genuine dialogue, this institution serves as a platform that imposes conditions on Muslim organizations in Germany, particularly regarding "national" "German" values, all to produce a 'German Islam eventually' (Hernandez Aguilar 2017: 5). One of the most illustrative examples in Germany is citizenship tests. In 2006, the state of Baden-Württemberg introduced a discriminatory citizenship test. Dubbed the "Muslim test,"

it specifically targeted Muslims, who were required to prove their adherence to "German values" through the test. The questions addressed attitudes toward gender equality and Jews. Although this specific test was eventually abolished, it was replaced by a mandatory nationwide test for all citizenship applicants (Hernandez Aguilar 2017: 25; Islamic Human Rights Commission 2006). The latest instance of discrimination against Muslims seeking German citizenship occurred in June 2024, when the government decided to include questions about antisemitism in the test, along with a declaration explicitly affirming the right of the apartheid state of Israel to exist.[10]

These examples of normative engineering, which at times transitioned into overtly repressive policies, represent more subtle and sophisticated forms of epistemological racism that dominated European states during the colonial period. In other words, the critical characteristics of epistemological racism remain alive and well. European states continue to privilege an essentialist worldview rooted in the dominant tradition of Western philosophy, where only the "West" is considered legitimate and capable of producing knowledge, granting it exclusive access to "universality," "rationality," and "truth" (Grosfoguel 2010). On these foundations, Muslims in Western societies can only participate in socio-political processes if they unequivocally reject their Islamic worldview and embrace the dominant Eurocentric perspective. Otherwise, any Muslim who attempts to engage socially and politically guided by an Islamic reference framework is labeled a fundamentalist and subsequently ostracized and excluded from the public sphere. Consequently, today in the West, every practicing and politically active Muslim is deemed "bad" (Mamdani 2005). In contrast to the "bad Muslim" stands the category of the "good, moderate Muslim," which corresponds to a Muslim identity disinterested in political activity and unwilling to challenge or potentially dispute the alleged virtues of secular politics.

Under the pressures of normative engineering, many Muslims have unfortunately become complicit in undermining their traditions. Those seeking incorporation into society are often compelled to conform to a system that upholds the absolute epistemological dominance of the secular Western European paradigm (Lumbard 2024). As a result, these Muslim activists, driven by personal gain, have consciously accepted the role of "compradors." Hamid Dabashi uses this term to describe individuals who tell their masters what they want to hear, earning them promotion as exemplars and recognition as "voices of progress, rationality, and moderation," even though they do not genuinely represent Muslims in Europe (Dabashi 2011).

10 In addition to the new conditions for obtaining citizenship, after the start of the war against Gaza, Germany introduced strict repressive measures banning protests against crimes against humanity in Gaza. At the same time, the suspension of freedom of expression and speech permeates all segments of society, from the media to civic associations and even the academic sphere. In this context, the German government labeled the non-violent Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement as a potentially extremist group in June.

Achieving Political Agency through Party Politics

In light of the considerations above, Muslims in Europe must reevaluate their socio-political engagement. This is particularly pertinent after October 7th and the onset of the war against Gaza, which once more made it evident that mainstream political parties in Western European plutocracies do not genuinely care about the opinions and perspectives of their Muslim citizens but instead follow a pragmatic, opportunistic agenda driven by powerful lobby groups and corporate capital.

Since the 1960s, Muslims have predominantly supported political parties that take more open stances on immigration issues and workers' rights, such as the Labour Party in the United Kingdom (Hussain 2004, Peace 2013), the Socialist Party in France (Chelini-Pont 2023, Serisier 2016), the Social Democratic Party and the Green Party in Germany (SVR Integration Barometer 2016), and other ideologically similar political organizations across various European states.[11] Initial connections with these political parties were primarily established through labor unions, with which first-generation Muslims had substantial ties. However, over time, these parties have consistently shown that their willingness to accommodate the needs and aspirations of Muslim voters is limited. Integrating Muslim concerns into mainstream party agendas is driven purely by electoral calculations. Only when these parties—despite their rhetoric on equality and anti-discrimination—determine that the net gain from engaging Muslim voters outweighs potential losses will they make any genuine effort to address their needs (Dancygier 2017: 7). Consequently, the current support for these parties and existing forms of socio-political engagement must be fundamentally re-evaluated.

Thus far, Muslim socio-political activity has primarily focused on work within the civil sector, namely non-governmental organizations, and to some extent through initiatives and advocacy groups exerting pressure on state institutions regarding specific, isolated issues.[12] For example, in the Netherlands, a study published in 2016 showed that those who frequently attend mosques are more engaged in civic organizations, both within their ethnic communities and in the broader society (Fleischmann, Martinovic, and Böhm 2016).[13] However, this study also revealed, as did the most recent research published in 2023 covering 17 European countries, that mosque attendance and regular religious practice do not contribute to party political participation and

11 Over time, there has been limited support from Muslims for other political options on the right side of the political spectrum. However, this remains a minority compared to the aforementioned support for liberal, social-democratic options.

12 Tariq Ramadan strongly criticized politics based on advocacy groups and lobbying. In his critique, he emphasized that Israeli, Zionist politics should not be the standard for Muslims; in other words, Muslims should not aspire to politics driven solely by "interests" but by "principles" (Ramadan 2005: 169).

13 This study specifically focused on members of the Turkish and Moroccan ethnic communities in the Netherlands.

increased voter turnout among Muslims (Kollar, Geurts, and Spierings 2023).[14] Simultaneously, research conducted in the United Kingdom and published in 2017 highlighted another crucial factor: Muslims tend to abstain from voting when they are dissatisfied.[15] This pattern was evident in the most recent general elections in the UK, where voter turnout was 10 percent lower in areas with high Muslim concentrations. A similar trend was observed in the European Parliament elections in France, where Muslims, frustrated with policies regarding the genocide in Gaza, chose to «punish» mainstream political parties by withholding their votes.[16]

These data suggest that despite decades of Muslim presence in Europe, there remains a need to cultivate further awareness and understanding regarding the role of party politics and electoral participation. The role of political parties in the political systems of Western countries is to select, aggregate, and ultimately articulate interests and grievances at normative, institutional, and practical levels. In other words, political parties represent the most significant form of organization in contemporary politics and, as such, serve as the critical link between the civil sector and the state, between the interests present in society and the institutions of power. Similarly, participation in elections in Western democratic societies is the only way to ensure legitimate and adequate representation and influence the formation of a government and its policies (Heywood 2019). Therefore, it is exceedingly difficult to address grievances and achieve common goals without engaging in party politics and the electoral process, which are the cornerstones of the political system.

In this regard, the experience of Christian democratic parties in the twentieth century can inspire Muslims in Europe. Christian democratic parties demonstrated that repressive state actions can be capitalized upon and used as a rallying point for mobilizing potential voters around a specific issue and channeling their political resistance. These parties emerged out of the dissatisfaction of devout Christians with the overly strict separation between state and religion, leading them to become agents rather than objects of politics and to work towards establishing and affirming political Catholicism as a response

14 Some studies present a different perspective, such as the one by McAndrew and Sobolewska, which showed that in the UK, regular mosque attendance is positively correlated with all forms of social engagement by Muslims, such as voting, protests, petitions, and boycotts (McAndrew and Sobolewska 2015). A similar study in the USA from 2005 also showed a high correlation between regular mosque attendance and political engagement (Jamal 2005).

15 Martin's research revealed that the increase in Islamophobia and dissatisfaction with foreign policy in the case of the Iraq intervention and participation in the war in Afghanistan resulted in greater political alienation, i.e., lower voter turnout and a decreased likelihood of voting among Muslims (Martin 2017).

16 Voter turnout among Muslims was higher in French national elections. A broadly based coalition and an almost referendum-like atmosphere succeeded in mobilizing more Muslims to vote; however, in the European Parliament elections, abstention among Muslims was 10% higher than in the rest of the population. See: https://www.lejdd.fr/politique/europeennes-2024-62-des-electeurs-musulmans-ont-vote-pour-lfi-146276.

to the unfavorable circumstances in which believing Christians found themselves (Laurence 2012). They achieved this by supporting political parties that advocated for their interests or by founding their political organizations to participate in elections and enter institutions where political decisions are made.

Attempts to establish Muslim political parties have been made in several Western European countries, including the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Sweden, and the Netherlands. However, unlike Christian democratic parties, these attempts were insufficiently theoretically and strategically articulated and were narrowly communitarian, reflecting the "minority mindset" promoted by the first generation of Muslims in Europe.[17] Due to this approach, their electoral success has been very modest, highlighting the need for an original political agenda that goes beyond narrow identity politics and can attract not only younger generations of Muslims who reject a communitarian mindset and rigid conservative views but also create conditions for forming alliances with non-Muslim political organizations.[18] These parties must prioritize the fight against all forms of socio-economic inequality, resist radical identity politics, and ensure robust protections for workers' rights. Additionally, they must tackle the crises in housing, healthcare, and the environment while unapologetically championing anti-war and anti-imperialist positions. Such political programs would bring them closer to genuine left-wing political parties, with which Muslim parties could form plural, multidimensional coalitions, alliances, and partnerships in the broader socio-political space and within party politics to challenge the dominance of mainstream political parties.[19] Furthermore, this

17 Over the years, there have been several attempts in different European countries to establish parties inspired by Islamic teachings or parties aimed at representing a specific ethnic Muslim group. None of these parties achieved significant success, and all are highly conservative and focused exclusively on minority issues. Some of them include the Islamic Party of Great Britain (UK), the Union of French Muslim Democrats (France), Islam Democrats (Netherlands), Denk (Netherlands), NIDA (Netherlands), the Alliance for Innovation and Justice (Germany), DAVA (Germany), the Nuance Party (Sweden), and the Islam Party (Belgium). Some of these parties even formed a pan-European alliance in 2024 called "Free Palestine" for the European Parliament elections. None of the parties received enough votes to enter the parliament. See more at: https://hyphenonline.com/2024/01/29/a-new-muslim-political-coalition-is-running-for-power-in-europe/.

18 Previous research on the second and third generations of Muslims in Europe has shown that, unlike the first generation, they adapt Islamic values to align with their lived reality. In other words, many young Muslims, while maintaining a connection with their ancestral culture, are also influenced by the secular and liberal values of European society (Ghatas 2017). This leads to the creation of "multiple" and "hybrid identities," where Muslim and European/national identities do not exclude one another but complement each other (Torrekens, Kavadias, and Bensai 2020).

19 The best examples of attempts to destabilize mainstream political parties and disrupt the status quo are the support given by Muslims to genuinely leftist options in the UK (Respect Party and Workers Party) and in France, La France Insoumise and its leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon. In Germany, in several instances, similar support was given by Muslims to the Die Linke party. However, unlike Galloway's Workers Party in the UK and Mélenchon in France, this party showed inconsistency regarding the genocide in Gaza, leaving

would enable Muslims to actively support and strengthen leftist parties in their ongoing struggles against right-wing and nationalist movements and parties that threaten to take over Western European societies and impose their xenophobic and racist ideologies.

One significant obstacle on this path is the puritanical and quasi-quietist ulema, who pander to systems of power. On the one hand, they serve as tools in the hands of Western governments, aiming to alleviate Muslims. On the other hand, they are financially and politically connected to states ruled by authoritarian monarchies or military juntas that have, for decades, physically persecuted and eliminated thinking Muslims and liberationist Islamic movements, perceiving party politics and free elections as existential threats to their corrupt, despotic oligarchies. As a result, members of this ulema caste use mosques and religious organizations to promote anti-intellectual narratives and reactionary ideas that define political parties and free elections as anti-Islamic, all intending to maintain socio-political stagnation, both within European Muslim communities and throughout the predominantly Muslim world. This ulema, which has largely monopolized the exclusive right to define "true" Islam, is not limited to petrodollar-funded Salafi scholars. It also includes (neo)traditionalists with a pro-Sufi orientation, who, rather than condemning Western imperialism and capitalist world order, promote the belief in a symbiosis between conservative Western values and core Islamic principles (Quisay 2023). Both groups equally ostracize Muslims who do not accept the existence of an ontological category of the "good" Muslim based on unquestioning acceptance of divine law as they interpret it. These essentialist narratives, which drive Muslims towards isolationism or quietism, align with far-right anti-Muslim rhetoric that seeks to portray Europe as threatened by Islam, promoting patriarchal worldviews and exclusive, anti-Western interpretations that insist Islam is in irreconcilable conflict with European values and lifestyles (Cesari 2014).[20]

The response to this situation within Muslim communities must be that every Muslim rediscovers the liberating message of the Qur'an and frees their faith from the clutches of those who, by denying the socio-political and socio-economic demands of *tawhid* and the importance of justice in the Qur'anic worldview, have turned Islam into a theology of the status quo (Saffari 2024: 59). Islamic teachings are fundamentally oriented towards societal and political dimensions, to the extent that it can be said there is no religious practice (from prayer to pilgrimage) that does not emphasize, and even prioritize, the collective aspect. With this in mind, it is incumbent upon Muslims, wherever they may be, to defend justice, promote the common good, and work towards improving the society in which they live (Ramadan 2005: 148).

Muslims isolated and subjected to social ostracism and repression. See more: https://www.newarab.com/opinion/eu-elections-why-everyone-germany-should-vote-mera25.

20 Khaled Abou Fadl warns that insisting on preserving the distinctiveness of Islam will ultimately negate the universality of Islamic experiences. Moreover, he points out that this approach will unconsciously transform Islam into a marginal eccentricity (Fadl 2004: 126).

Conclusion

The potential for advancing the interests and needs of Muslims in Western European societies remains largely untapped. The roots of this underutilization can be traced to the internalization of a secular worldview systematically imposed on Muslims in Europe over the past few decades through epistemological interventions, repression, and securitization tactics. This worldview has predominantly been embraced by Muslims who have forsaken the Islamic understanding of the fundamental synergy between religion and power, instead adopting Enlightenment-inspired, Eurocentric values and the notion of a strict separation between religion and politics. However, significant responsibility also lies with the first generations of Muslims in Europe, who, in reaction to the circumstances they faced, developed a closed system that resulted in a minority mindset insufficiently capable of more effective socio-political engagement. Finally, the situation is further exacerbated by the influence of certain ulema who unequivocally promote the idea that Western European societies are un-Islamic and encourage Muslims to withdraw from the socio-political sphere. Although these ideas are in direct contradiction to the proactive universalism of the Qur'anic message, they hold considerable influence over Muslims in Europe, particularly during times when they feel threatened and discriminated against.

Overcoming these barriers is essential, and one critical step forward is the active participation of Muslims in party politics. Despite an increasingly favorable demographic landscape, Muslims in Europe have yet to demonstrate a clear and unified political vision. In Britain, for instance, Muslims make up over 30% of the electorate in 20 municipalities; in Berlin, every fourth resident has a migrant background, with the largest group being of Turkish origin. Similar demographics are found in cities like Cologne, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Brussels, Vienna, Marseille, Malmö, and Stockholm (Dancygier 2017: 2). Unlike the first generations of Muslims living in Europe, today a significant number have acquired citizenship, granting them full membership in society, the right to vote, and consequently, the ability to influence political outcomes. Therefore, Muslims in Europe must reassert their agency by drawing on Islamic principles while shedding the limitations of a minority mindset and actively engaging as empowered citizens in the political sphere.

Additionally, they must develop policies that are not merely reactive responses to the circumstances they face and the actions of other actors but also call for innovative initiatives to improve the situation of Muslims and, more importantly, the betterment of society. While often focused on critique, reactive politics can devolve into defeatism and self-victimization if they do not provide concrete solutions or forward-looking visions. Muslim communities need to transcend mere criticism and articulate strategic, actionable goals that align with broader societal needs. For this reason, Muslims must not enter politics solely in the name of 'their community' but in the 'name of God,' which implies acting in the name of inalienable, unchangeable principles that

are fundamentally opposed to any form of quietism and communitarianism (Ramadan 2005: 147).

Of course, it is essential to note that Muslims in Europe do not constitute a monolithic voting bloc, and no political party can confidently rely on their votes (Dancygier 2017). However, as some studies have shown, the existence of a "Muslim vote" is indeed a reality. In other words, shared religious beliefs, identity, and concerns among Muslims in Europe often lead to preferential voting for "Muslim candidates" (Azabar, Thijssen, and van Erkel 2020).[21] Muslims should capitalize on this reality much more in the future rather than allowing their votes to be co-opted by mainstream political parties that address their issues only in a utilitarian manner while perpetuating various forms of social inequality. A crucial step forward would be for Muslims to completely abandon voting for mainstream parties. The approach of one-off 'punishment' through abstention, which some advocated during the war against Gaza and the genocide carried out by Israel, is fundamentally flawed. This 'impulsive' politics, driven by immediate frustrations, lacks the strategic, long-term planning necessary for meaningful change. Even if specific policies, like those related to foreign affairs, were to shift, the systemic inequalities perpetuated by these political structures should compel Muslims to pursue more profound, more substantial alternatives.

Promoting participation in party politics does not mean other forms of social activism are not valuable. On the contrary, these activities should be viewed as mutually complementary, meaning that political participation should be an extension of other socio-political activities. Moreover, in modern societies, financial and media power often surpasses that of politicians, while art significantly influences societal movements and values. Therefore, Muslim engagement in these spheres of life can have an equal, if not greater, role in contributing to society (Hussain 2004).

Thus, whether in party politics or other forms of social participation, Muslims in Europe must further develop their interest in issues of broader public concern and, through active engagement in society, strengthen civic awareness so that they are not merely passive critics or objects of decisions made by others. To achieve this, Muslims must thoroughly study the societies in which they live, identify the resources available to them, and recognize the actors with whom they can effectively collaborate in the radical political, economic, and value-based transformation of European societies, all while remaining faithful to their Islamic principles and ethics.

21 The same study showed that among Muslims, religious identity outweighs ethnic identity in influencing voting behavior and that preferential voting is significantly more common among Muslims than in the non-Muslim population.

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Ivan Ejub Kostić

Političko osnaživanje: uloga partijske politike u budućnosti evropskih muslimana

Apstrakt:

Ovaj rad kritički ispituje društveno-političku dinamiku koja utiče na muslimane u Evropi, fokusirajući se na značajne barijere koje ometaju njihovo aktivno učešće u partijskoj politici. Glavni argument jeste da je internalizovani sekularni pogled na svet doveo do široko rasprostranjenog političkog neangažovanja. Ovo pitanje dodatno otežava prva generacija muslimana u Evropi, koja je razvila i učvrstila manjinski način razmišljanja, zajedno sa određenom ulemom koja promoviše društveno-političku pasivnost i kvijetizam, čime ozbiljno ograničava složeniji i efikasniji politički angažman. Kako bi se suprotstavio ovoj situaciji, u ovom radu naglašava se hitna potreba da muslimani prevaziđu *status quo* ili reakcionarne pristupe, kao što je podrška preovlađujućim partijama ili pribegavanje političkoj uzdržanosti, koji samo površno rešavaju njihove brige. Umesto toga, ovaj rad se zalaže za uspostavljanje nezavisnih političkih entiteta koji su ukorenjenih u islamskim principima i koji teže dubljim sistemskim promenama. Takav pristup bi osnažio muslimane da formiraju strateške saveze, izazovu *status quo*, kao i da se pozabave širim društvenim pitanjima čime bi, na kraju, unapredili interese kako njihovih zajednica tako i evropskog društva u celini.

Ključne reči: muslimani u Evropi, sekuritizacija, normativni inžinjering, partijska politika, preovlađujuće političke partije, manjinski način razmišljanja, kvijetizam, poremećaj, osnaživanje.

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Sari Hanafi

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?

KEYWORDS
Arab Spring, secularism, Arab world, French style secularism, Islamism.

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

Sari Hanafi: Professor of Sociology, American University of Beirut; sh41@aub.edu.lb.

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.

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”

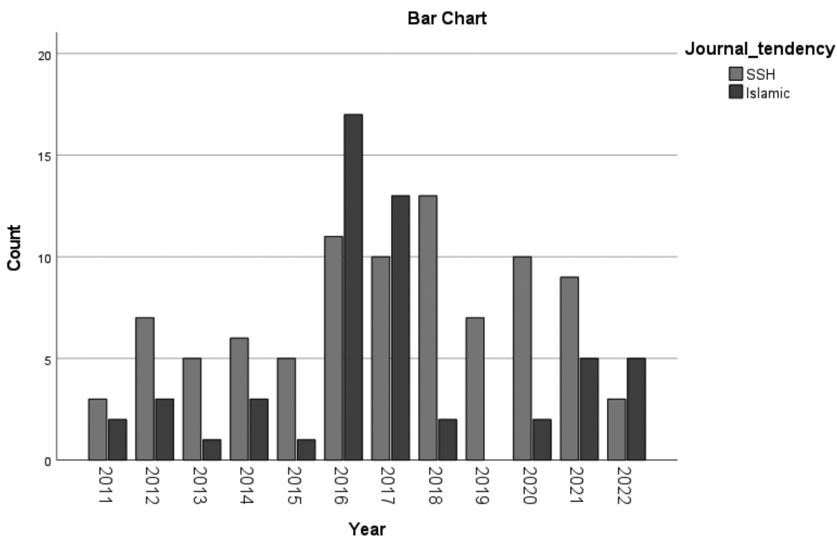
		N	%
	Secularism	128	85.9
	Civil State	21	14.1
	Total	149	100.0

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:

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

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

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.

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.

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Syed Mustafa Ali

AI AND/AS RACIALISED POLITICAL THEOLOGY

ABSTRACT
Building on earlier work engaging with the entanglement of artificial intelligence (AI) and apocalypticism and both with whiteness (Ali 2019), in the present essay I explore AI through the lens of a political theology informed by critical race theory and decolonial thought. The essay begins by setting out the meaning of a few key concepts, viz. AI, political theology, ‘The World’, and the apocalyptic, before going on to consider their relationship, and concludes by briefly sketching an oppositional stance that I suggest is appropriate to adopt in relation to AI where the latter is understood as a manifestation of racialised political theology.

KEYWORDS
artificial intelligence, political theology, racism, critical race theory, decolonial thought.

Introduction

In April 2022, Michael Paulus, Dean of Library, Assistant Provost for Educational Technology, and Director and Associate Professor of Information Studies, at Seattle Pacific University delivered a Winifred W. Weter lecture entitled “Artificial Intelligence and the Apocalyptic Imagination: The Ends of Artificial Agency”. The abstract for this lecture reads as follows:

> The increasing role and power of artificial intelligence in our lives and world requires us to imagine and shape a desirable future with this technology. Since visions of AI often draw from Christian apocalyptic narratives, current discussions about technological hopes and fears present an opportunity for a deeper engagement with Christian eschatological resources. Dr. Paulus argues that the Christian apocalyptic imagination can transform how we think about and use AI, helping us discover ways artificial agency may participate in new creation. (Paulus 2022)

While broadly concurring with the view that Christian apocalypticism and eschatology inform the historical backdrop to developments within AI and cognate phenomena, building on yet extending earlier work engaging in critical race theoretical and decolonial interrogation of the rhetoric and reality of

Syed Mustafa Ali: Faculty of Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics, The Open University, Milton Keynes, UK: mustafa.ali@open.ac.uk.

a purported 'existential risk' posed by AI[1], I suggest the need to shift the lens from theology to political theology – more specifically, and crucially, to *racialised* political theology given that religion and race should be seen as entangled and historically co-emergent[2]. Embracing such a shift invites us to think about AI in relation to transformations about what some commentators refer to as "the line of the human"[3]. In this connection, I suggest that contemporary Transhumanist and technological Posthumanist phenomena such as AI, irrespective of whether these are understood in purely discursive and/or material terms, indicate that such transformations are underway.

I further maintain that the shift in lens to racialised *political* theology also requires us to consider transformations about the line of the human in relation to the matter of sovereignty as conceptualised by German jurist and legal theorist Carl Schmitt[4] and what existential phenomenologist Martin Heidegger refers to as 'onto-theology' – that is, metaphysics as a historically-disclosed common way-of-being and hierarchy of beings whose apex is occupied by a being of divine standing (that is, a god)[5]. Drawing on the work of various decolonial and other theorists, I suggest the need to think about AI as occupying such a 'God-spot' in late technocentric colonial modernity, this position being located immanently in the world and manifesting as an apocalyptic response to the recurrent phenomenon of 'White Crisis'[6] prompted at least in part by non-white contestation of the hegemony of whiteness[7]. I maintain that political theology is better positioned than theology to think through the implications of the emergence of this AI 'god' insofar as the latter is, at least on some readings, being positioned to take on the surveillance and control of human

1 On this point, see: Ali (2019) and Ali (2021).

2 On this point, see: Loyd (2013).

3 Commentators include decolonial theorists such as Sylvia Wynter, Lewis Gordon, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, and Ramon Grosfoguel, all of whom draw and build upon the work of Martinican psychiatrist and anti-colonial activist Frantz Fanon. Briefly, according to Fanon (1986), a "line of the human", erected by white colonisers, demarcates a "zone of being" occupied by those racialised as white – and thereby considered human – from a "zone of non-being" occupied by those racialised as non-white – and thereby considered sub-/non-human.

4 In the first instance, Schmitt's (1922) state-centric theorisation of sovereignty as the capacity to decide upon a state of exception – that is, enact the suspension (temporary or otherwise) of a legal regime from a site above and beyond the law.

5 In this connection, see: Thomson (2000) and Thomson (2013).

6 By 'White Crisis' I refer to a situation in which a hegemonic whiteness is subjected to increasing contestation by the non-white 'other', engendering a heightened sense of anxiety and threat among those raced as white expressed through various discursive formulations, and prompting a variety of responses; in this connection, see: Bonnett (2000) and Bonnett (2005).

7 'Whiteness' should be understood here as both (1) a marker of identity existing in dynamic relational-tension to other racialized identity markers (such as blackness, Muslimness etc.) and (2) a tacit invisible background standard; on this point, see: Garner (2007), Garner (2010a), and Garner (2010b).

beings for biopolitical (that is, social differentiation) and necropolitical (that is, extermination) purposes[8].

To motivate my argument, I need to set out the meaning of a few terms, viz. AI, political theology, 'The World', and the apocalyptic with a view to exploring how AI might be understood in relation to them. I conclude by briefly sketching out a stance in relation to resisting the encroachment of the AI 'god'.

Artificial Intelligence

For my part, and irrespective of whether one is considering artificial intelligence (or AI) more generally so as to include its symbolic and robotic incarnations, or focusing on machine cum Deep Learning more specifically[9], I want to suggest that thinking about the phenomenon in technological rather than in sociotechnical terms is problematic insofar as it 'brackets' (that is, ignores or sets aside) the context within which AI emerges as a 'machinic assemblage' of material and other forces (social, economic, political, cultural etc.). Arguing along similar lines, in *Artificial Whiteness: Politics and Ideology in Artificial intelligence* (2020), Yarden Katz attempts to make the case for thinking about AI as both a political economic tool for advancing imperial/colonial interests, and an ideology that mimics the fluid/nebulous structure of race – more specifically, whiteness[10]. Somewhat relatedly, in *Resisting AI: An Anti-Fascist Approach to Artificial Intelligence* (2022), Dan McQuillan refers to AI as a "layered and interdependent arrangement of technology, institutions and ideology" (McQuillan 2022: 1), and "a form of computation that inherits concepts developed under colonialism [reproducing] them as a form of race science." (ibid: 4)

Although interpreting AI as a tool and an ideology is quite plausible given its historical development, this framing does not exhaust the range of possibilities for thinking about the relationship between AI, colonialism, and whiteness – more specifically, white supremacy[11]. Crucially, rather than follow Katz's invitation to think about "AI [as being] adapted, like whiteness, to challenges from social movements" (Katz 2020: 155), I want to suggest that AI might be

8 For a recent example of a theological approach to AI, see: Dorobantu (2022).

9 It is useful to briefly distinguish three related phenomena: (1) AI as the attempt to build computational systems and/or tools capable of simulating – perhaps even *replicating* – intelligent behaviour, where intelligence is framed either in specifically human or in more general natural terms; (2) machine learning as the attempt to give computers the ability to learn without being explicitly programmed based on processes of statistical correlation and pattern detection; and (3) Deep Learning as a subset of machine learning systems based on neural network models involving multiple hidden layers. As to the relationship between the three phenomena, it is often stated that Deep Learning is a subset of neural networks is a subset of machine learning is a subset of AI.

10 According to Katz, "AI serves the aims of whiteness – and thus is a tool in the arsenal of a white supremacist social order – but ... it also mirrors the nebulous and shifting form of whiteness as an ideology." Katz (2020: 155)

11 Briefly, in referring to 'white supremacy', I follow Mills, who understands it as "the unnamed political system that has made the modern world what it is today." Mills (1997: 1)

an adaptation of whiteness itself. Put simply, we should be thinking about AI *as* white supremacy. Relatedly, I want to consider the possibility that rather than AI being understood as a tool for advancing imperial/colonial interests, it might be more useful to think about AI *as* colonial in and of itself, since this raises the vexing question as to whether AI can be decolonised.[12] Furthermore, and notwithstanding McQuillan's assertions that AI is, among other things, "a paradigm for social organisation and a political project", and "a condenser for existing forms of structural and cultural violence" (McQuillan 2022: 2), I want to push back against his assertion that "rather than being an apocalyptic technology, AI is more aptly characterized as a form of supercharged bureaucracy that ramps up everyday cruelties, such as those in our systems of welfare." (ibid: 4) While not disputing the value and importance of bureaucratic readings of AI, especially given the biopolitical and necropolitical entanglement of AI technology with statist formations, I maintain that attention to 'the political' – more specifically, to the matter of sovereignty – prompts engagement with political theology, and in times of crisis the latter can assume apocalyptic form.

Political Theology

Like AI, political theology can be – and has been – understood in various ways. One useful point of departure is provided by Reichel, who invites us to think about how "the theological conceptualizes *higher* powers engendering, conditioning, and affecting our reality as a whole, while the political deals with *rivalling* claims and contestations of power *within* the creaturely realm, and devises norms, structures, and institutions to negotiate them [emphases added]." (Reichel 2021: 3) Framing the issue in this way necessitates engaging both 'vertical' and 'horizontal' concerns, thereby pointing to something akin to the idea of a 'Great Chain of Being' (Lovejoy 1964) and/or what Heidegger referred to as an onto-theology. Against this backdrop, Reichel further suggests thinking about "political theology proper on a meta-level with regard to both politicized theology and theologically funded politics", insisting that "such a meta-perspective does not make political theology neutral in any way" since it is always articulated in terms of and with reference to "specific conceptions and shapes of power." (Reichel 2021: 4) Attending to such non-neutrality, it should be noted that Reichel's framing and exploration of political theology is both Christian-centric and Eurocentric prompting the need to think and do political theology 'otherwise' along decolonial and critical race theoretical lines.

Notwithstanding such concerns, Reichel's approach is apposite insofar as it involves a shift in focus from theology to political theology in the context of exploring digital theology as a political theology of the digital[13]. Notwith-

12 In this connection, see: Adams (2021).

13 On her view, "what is curiously absent in digital theology as it presents itself to date ... is a species of digital theology that undertakes something like a conceptual analysis and theorization of digitality through a theological lens, with specific attention to the

standing the contingency of the relationship between AI and digitalisation, in its contemporary articulation as machine cum Deep Learning, AI is enabled by cloud services that supervene upon a digital infrastructural substrate, viz. the Internet[14]. For this reason, and analogous to the need for a political theology of the digital, there is a need for a political theology of AI – or perhaps understanding AI and/as political theology, where political theology is racialised in colonial modernity.

In framing her political theology of the digital, Reichel begins with the state-centric conception of political theology theorised in terms of sovereignty set out by the German jurist, legal theorist, and Nazi party member, Carl Schmitt[15]. However, taking a lead from Foucault and others, her engagement with political theology entails a shift in focus from sovereignty – and divine omnipotence – to surveillance – and divine omniscience (as entangled with divine omnipresence)[16], whereas I insist on the need to remain focused on the issue of sovereignty, albeit framed in terms that do not presume the necessity of statism.

In setting out my approach, I similarly turn to Schmitt, drawing attention to two statements which appear in his seminal work, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (1922), viz. (1) "sovereign is he who decides on the exception" (Schmitt 1922: 5), and (2) "all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts." (ibid: 36) For present purposes, the importance of the first statement lies in its pointing to a power located at and exercised from a site beyond the scope and reach

power dynamics engendered by its technological and societal transformations. In other words, a political theology of the digital." Reichel (2021: 2)

14 Riffing on Lovejoy's (1964) 'Great Chain of Being', Kirby et al. (2011) theorise such developments in terms of the development of one or more 'Great Chains of Computing.'

15 According to Reichel, "God is not the state, and the state is not God. God's sovereignty and the sovereignty of nation-states, God's providence and political governance, God's relation to creation and power dynamics within the world, are not one and the same thing. The political, then, is not the theological, and the theological is not the political. But clearly, the theological is political, and the political is theological." (Reichel 2021: 4) Going further, "sovereignty became the central notion of the modern nation-state even as it theologically had long served to define God's absolute authority and providential control over creation. It marked the political aspiration for absolute power and the site of struggle between secular and religious political theologies." (ibid: 5)

16 Reichel's concern is with exploring the "conceptual exchanges and structural homologies between notions of divine omniscience and the digital". On her view, "the sophisticated conceptualizations of divine omniscience theologians have developed over centuries can offer helpful intellectual resources for a more fine-grained analysis of how power/knowledge operates in the digital. It may even turn out that some are not only systematically, but even genealogically relevant." (Reichel 2021: 8) On this basis she identifies four kinds of digital omniscience, viz. (1) disciplinary (typified by the Foucauldian panopticon), (2) performative (typified by the exhibitionism associated with social media), (3) controlling (typified by the behavioural conditioning associated with surveillance capitalism), and (4) replicating (typified by metaphysical speculations about the computational nature of the cosmos) (ibid.: 10–15).

of the law. By way of a concrete example drawn from the field of AI, consider attempts by the UN to gain international agreement on a treaty banning the development and deployment of Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS), efforts that continue to be thwarted by powerful statist actors within the world system such as the US and China exercising veto powers. How best to think about the sovereignty of those who *can* position themselves as 'above-and-beyond-the-law'? Herein lies the importance of the second statement and the historical fact that, as Schmitt maintains, in Western historical experience there was a transfer "from theology to the theory of the state, whereby, for example, the omnipotent God became the omnipotent lawgiver." (ibid.: 36) Put simply, the lawgiver – who is also, following Schmitt's first statement, above and beyond the law – occupies what might be referred to as the 'God-spot'. While Schmitt articulates this position in the context of theorising sovereignty in statist terms, I suggest that the first statement points to a contingency between the state and sovereignty which allows for the possibility of conceptualising sovereignty in non-statist terms. Recent examples of thinking about non-statist sovereignty in the context of digitalised space more broadly include Blount's (2019) 'nomos of cyberspace', extending the later Schmitt's exploration of the history of international law as a European colonial undertaking by disarticulating its dependence on the notion of territoriality (that is, land)[17]; and in the specific context of AI, there is the notion of 'AI Empire' according to Tacheva and Ramasubramanian (2023) based on the networked conceptualisation of empire and sovereignty theorised by Hardt and Negri (2001)[18].

17 According to Blount (2019), "Schmitt reads territory as an essential agent of law and politics. Here, Schmitt's analysis is chosen for critique due to this asserted essentialness, because it is the question of territory that sits at the heart of the debate on the nature of Cyberspace." On his view, "Cyberspace pushes up against the international as its territorial geography thins and runs out, and it is these places of abutment and intersection that exhibit the fault lines from which global space is emerging." In short, Cyberspace is neither free of the state nor fully under its control; rather, it is entangled with it.

18 According to Tacheva and Ramasubramanian, "AI is more than just the information and communication engine of Empire – it has become a totalizing ecosystem, prompting us to refer not simply to 'Empire' but rather to AI Empire." Tacheva and Ramasubramanian (2023: 2–3) Crucially, they go on to state that "in many ways, AI acts as the glue binding together the complex ecosystems of data, algorithms, and the computer." (ibid.: 3) Notwithstanding the utility of framing AI as an imperial assemblage, the assertion that AI Empire is 'self-gluing' – that is, self-organising – arguably invokes a form of fetishisation that obscures the role of differently positioned actors in the modern/colonial world system. This is ironic given their insistence that "the interlocking *roots* of AI Empire are deeply steeped in heteropatriarchy, racial capitalism, white supremacy, and coloniality [emphasis added]" (ibid.: 2), "*religion* and *ethnicity*" being understood as merely among "many other important systems of oppression and axes of identity AI Empire is implicated in." (ibid.: 4) In the context of the present essay, given the entanglement of race and religion (Lloyd 2013), to what extent does their excavation of roots betray a 'bracketing' of political theology? More specifically, and informed by the interpretative schema set out in Ali (2017), to what extent does it turn about a 'secular' (in the sense of 'de-godded') modernist framing that obscures *long durée* theopolitical

Yet what political bearing might this have beyond the (onto-)theological – that is, beyond articulating the positioning of different political actors, dominant and subaltern, statist or otherwise, in a singular hierarchy of power? Here I turn again to Reichel who makes the following interesting assertion in relation to the matter of sovereignty: "since sovereignty invariably gestures toward ultimate dimensions, it not only prompted *struggle between different conceptualizations* of 'superhuman power,' but also *struggle for supremacy* between the respective ultimate authorities of the two participant fields [emphases added]." (Reichel 2021: 6) Although she frames this struggle in conceptual terms and within the context of a particular tradition, viz. Western Christianity, it is interesting to interrogate the issue of theopolitical struggle 'otherwise' – more specifically, from a decolonial and critical race theoretical perspective. Exploring that line of enquiry brings me to the work of decolonial theorist Jared Hickman, his re-reading of race and/as globalisation, and the idea of battling political theologies/cosmologies which I approach through a sustained engagement with the phenomenon of world-making.

'The World'

By 'The World' I mean the world system which emerged in the *long durée* of the 16th century following the so-called Columbian voyages of discovery to the New World commencing in 1492 CE, a global hierarchical system whose dominant core lies in 'the West' and whose subaltern periphery is constituted by 'the Rest'[19]. According to seminal world systems theorist Immanuel Wallerstein (1974), the history of the modern world-system has been in large part a history of the expansion of European states and peoples into the rest of the world and resulted in the emergence of a capitalist world-economy. However, others have argued that this framing is at best incomplete and at worst a mischaracterization insofar as it obscures what decolonial scholar Walter Mignolo (2011) refers to as the 'dark underside' of modernity, viz. the fact that it was forged through violence[20] as an imperial-colonial undertaking with 'religious' cum racial foundations, and that the structuring logics (ontological, epistemological, cultural, political, economic etc.) of this project – what is referred to as 'coloniality' – persist in the post-colonial era notwithstanding the formal end of colonialism with the national independence movements of the 1960s.

Yet while centring 1492 CE and race in relation to the formation of the modern/colonial world system – where race(s) should be understood as the outcome of a process of racialisation involving processes of (1) exclusion, (2)

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phenomena such as anti-Islamism (Orientalism, Islamophobia) and its necropolitical entanglements with the War on Terror (WoT) etc.?

19 See: Hall (1992). Whether this constitutes the *first* instance of a world system is open to debate; in this connection, see: Gunder Frank and Gills (1993) among other works.

20 Crucially, Feldman and Medevoi maintain that "race was born, reproduced, and fashioned in war making, where perpetual war, not the Enlightenment's perpetual peace, comes to mark the very being of modern statehood." Feldman and Medevoi (2016: 11)

taxonomisation, (3) reproduction, and (4) naturalization of (1)-(3) – I suggest the need to make some corrections to the decolonial reading of the world's creation.

Scholars such as Nelson Maldonado-Torres, building on the work of Sylvia Wynter (2003) and others, rightly draw attention to the decisive role played by 'religion' in the lead-up to what I refer to as the 'Big Bang of Race'[21]. Yet in conceptualizing the racial world system emerging in the long durée of the 16th century in terms of a 'rupture'[22] of the "theological-racial episteme" (Maldonado-Torres 2014a: 648) inherited from the medieval era and its replacement by an anthropological/racial episteme (ibid.: 651)[23], they assume the legitimacy and facticity of the secularization thesis[24], viz. the inevitability of the transition

21 According to Lloyd, "race and religion are thoroughly entangled, perhaps starting with a shared point of origin in modernity, or in the colonial encounter [such that] religion and race is not just another token of the type 'religion and,' not just one approach to the study of religion among many. Rather, [that] every study of religion [and/or race] would need to be a study of religion and race." (Lloyd 2013: 80) Consistent with this view, Maldonado-Torres states that "the modern concepts of religion and race were mutually constituted and together became two of the most central categories in drawing maps of subjectivity, alterity, and sub-alterity in the modern world." Maldonado-Torres (2014a: 691) For this reason, Feldman and Medevoi point to "a pressing need ... to thicken a transversal critical vocabulary adequate to our political present ... recenter[ing] religion as an organizing category for the comparative study of race and ethnicity." (Feldman and Medevoi 2016: 13)

22 For my part, I am inclined to consider the idea of a 'rupture' problematic insofar as it suggests a break with the past, whereas I want to argue for continuity through change based on the phenomenon of historical *sedimentation* of structural relations. In short, I want to argue for the taking up into and *persisting* of the old at the core of the new, which is crucial in terms of how we think about the ontological background or 'horizon' of 'The World'.

23 In this connection, Abbasi rightly points to "a major issue in Maldonado-Torres' work", viz. "the seemingly secular approach that he assumes with such binaries as the religious versus racial, and theological versus anthropological, when dealing with the racialization of the Muslims." Abbasi (2020: 10) Ironically, he goes on to state that "part of Maldonado-Torres' main argument itself is based on a *theological* difference between a supposed 'religion' and 'no religion', yet it seems to overlook that this is a theological difference, while framing it solely as anthropological." (ibid.: 18) I suggest that Abbasi's critique is supported by Hickman who maintains that "to the extent modernity can be ascribed a particular intellectual content, it is a 'theological' one: nothing less than 'the creation of the world'." (Hickman 2010: 147) Crucially, he avers that the result of such political theological world-making is "the (re)routing of the theological through the anthropological, indeed, the ethnological." (Hickman 2010: 147) For my part, such '(re) routing' might better be understood in algorithmic terms as involving the sedimented procedural re-*iterating* of political theology along racialised lines; in this connection, see: Ali (2019) and Ali (2020). Going further there is a need to think about the anthropological and ethnological in relation to the transition from pre-modern intellect to modern rationality – see: Ogunnaike (2016), the relationship between rationality and computation (including in and as AI), and how race is set in opposition to computation with respect to whiteness – see: Mahendran (2011).

24 Maldonado-Torres' embrace of the secularisation thesis is ironic given his critique of Wallerstein for failing "to examine critically enough the role of secularism in the

from religion to reason (and latterly, science), a move which has been called into question on empirical, ethical, and theoretical grounds by various scholars including the anthropologist Talal Asad. According to decolonial theorist Jared Hickman, "the secular" is a local phenomenon particular to Euro-Christian history that "reinforce[s] the Eurocentrism encoded in its very provenance" (Hickman 2017: 34) when deployed globally[25]. For this reason, and with a view to correcting the secularist tendency within decolonial theory[26] obscuring the theological nature of race as a *persistent* phenomenon rather than as a phase within the history of racialisation as suggested by Wynter and others, I suggest the need to adopt a position along the lines of Hickman's globalised post-secular conception of race as political theology.

According to Hickman, modernity needs to be understood not as a passage from a religious to a secular ordering of the world, but rather in terms of a *remapping* of the political theological in terms of a globalising shift from the transcendent (or 'vertical') cosmological order to an increasingly immanent (or 'horizontal') sphere of the planetary via racialised difference[27]. I would suggest that this reading has precedent within decolonial and critical race theoretical scholarship: consider, in this connection, Lewis Gordon's argument for thinking about race as a creation of the 'theodicean grammar' of the world, wherein (racialised) failing is associated with a deficit (or 'lack') on the part of those rendered subhuman[28]; David Theo Goldberg's conception of race as the work of 'anthropic gods'[29], and Sherman Jackson's reference to 'second creators'[30],

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geoculture of the world-system. He cannot … see the ways in which secularism continues the logics of imperial Christendom … The secular-religious divide has come to work in ways similar to the Christian-pagan divide. The lack of a radical critique of secularism surreptitiously serves to maintain the superiority of Western cultural epistemologies intact." (Maldonado-Torres 2008: 382–383)

25 According to Hickman, "it is a mistake to cast [the] epistemic shift, [the] slippage between the universal and the planetary [as effected by the onset of race as globalization], as an eruption of the 'secular,' unless that term is qualified beyond recognition. To consider it as other than the opening of yet another political-theological dispensation – that is, as an extension and expansion of the 'religious' in new circumstances – may be simply to fall prey to a type of presentism (namely, a triumphalist modernism) that is blind to the ongoing mystification of the contemporary moment, as though the world we live in now is more real and immediate, less laden with symbolic meanings, than before." (Hickman 2010: 152)

26 In this connection, see: Pasha (2017) among other works.

27 Consistent with the view of decolonial scholars, Hickman locates this shift in the Columbian voyages initiated in 1492 CE which he understands as inaugurating a transformation of the political theological order. Crucially, this reading ensures that the Weberian thesis of disenchantment associated with secularisation is replaced with a framing in terms of re-enchantment as relocation of enchantment. Put simply, it is not about *de*-theologization, as suggested by Nancy (2007) or *de*-godding, to use Wynter's (2003) phrasing, but rather *re*-theologization or *re*-godding.

28 See: Gordon (2013).

29 See: Goldberg (1993: 83) and Goldberg (2009: 522).

30 See: Jackson (2005: 182).

all of which point to whiteness as attempting to occupy what was earlier referred to as 'the God-spot' in the Great Chain of Being. In short, "we might best think of race as a 'God-term'" and that "'race' originates – and persists – as a theological construct." (Hickman 2010: 158–159)

Following Hickman (and others), I maintain that what is perhaps most important, at least at the outset, in shifting from a secular to a postsecular frame is that it enables us to recalibrate and refocus our decolonial lens and the attendant set of categories[31] we use to interrogate the modern/colonial world, thereby allowing us to better appreciate continuity through change[32] and the hauntological presence of the past. However, before going on to explore the latter, there is a need to problematise certain aspects of Hickman's racialised political theological schema.

According to Hickman, "the Muslim world occupies a special place in the Euro-Christian eschatological fantasy unleashed by the revelation of planetary immanence – it is not merely an object of that fantasy but also felt to be a competing subject with its own comparable fantasy." (Hickman 2017: 267) While it is beyond the scope of this essay to engage at length with Hickman's discourse on political theology as immanentization along critical lines, it is important to appreciate the implications of the *meta*-theological – Hickman (2017) refers to it as 'metacosmic' – location from which Hickman's assessment of competing theological fantasies are framed *as* fantasies.

While he indeed endorses a postsecular framework, I suggest that this is one that is 'ontologically-flattening' insofar as all eschatological schemes are deemed equally 'fantastic'. In addition, and like Nancy (2007), whom he subjects to critique for the latter's embrace of secularisation/de-theologization, Hickman's metacosmic framework is totalising and universalist insofar as it involves a generalised claim-making regarding the world and/or the global. For example, Hickman sees rival, battling God(s) as folded into the planetary, yet all Gods are required to 'horizontally' fold into the planetary in the same way, albeit differently positioned, which points to a disciplining meta-discourse on the political theological and onto-theological similar to Richel's (2021) meta-level framework.[33]

As to immanentization, Coviello and Hickman maintain that "the 'immanent frame' ... that supposedly surrounds all of us might be better ascribed to globality than secularity, since it is precisely that encounter with radical, unforeseen difference within the emergent singularity of the globe that fragilized belief in an unprecedented way. Replacing secularity with globality as

31 In this connection, see: Hickman (2010: 146) and Coviello and Hickman (2014: 647-648).

32 See: Hickman (2010: 164).

33 As Hickman states, "as diverse peoples were yoked together in a coherent mundus, it became more urgent to specify each group's role or place in a cosmic scheme that increasingly seemed to encompass them all ... I suggest that global cultural encounter occasioned critical metareflection on tradition itself and the anxious speculation of self-consciously 'new' or the polemicized 'invention' of 'old' cosmologies." (Hickman 2010: 170)

the background condition of modern life has the signal virtue of introducing a master category that by definition theoretically makes all planetary inhabitants full subjects of history and also is considerably more neutral in relation to religion." (Coviello and Hickman 2014: 649) One problem with this line of argument is that it tends to assume that the 'fragilization of belief' associated with the loss of transcendence – Nietzsche's death of God – that is arguably specific to Euro-Christian historical experience generalises to other political theological formations, a position that has been subjected to contestation by Pasha (2013). For my part, I am inclined to think that the source of this problem is traceable to possible latent Eurocentrism – or rather Euro-*Christian*-centrism – on their part as well as a lack of awareness of the 'paratheological' possibilities afforded by metaphysical schemes rooted in *tassawwuf* (that is, the Sufi tradition within Islam), *a fortiori* the latter in its Akbarian[34] articulation with its commitment to *both* theological immanence *and* transcendence.[35]

Yet notwithstanding the problems with Hickman's totalising reductionism, as stated previously, his framework is important insofar as it invites us to engage with how the past is reiterated in the present. In terms of the contribution of antecedent historical phenomena that informed the colonial enterprise, and whose structuring logics were embedded in the constitution of the modern/colonial world system – building on the work of Slovenian historian Tomaž Mastnak and others, I maintain that the anti-Islamic(ate) foundation of the Crusades commencing in 1095 CE stands out as of perhaps decisive significance vis-à-vis its role in Christian polity formation[36] – that is, the emergence

34 By 'Akbarian', I refer to that metaphysical tradition of *tassawwuf* initiated by the Shaykh Al-Akbar (Great Teacher), Muhiyyudin ibn 'Arabi.

35 According to Hickman, it is immanentist polytheistic political theology that "takes for granted a certain reciprocity between the divine and the human that is largely lost on those schooled in the traditions of transcendental monotheism." (Hickman 2010: 174) To what extent does this invocation of "traditions of transcendental monotheism" constitute a veiled reference to Islam as tacitly domesticated both to monotheism and transcendence on the pattern of an alleged affinity to, and 'fantastic' symmetry with, Christianity? And assuming "a certain reciprocity" between the Divine and the human is warranted, how should this reciprocity be understood? Is a commitment to polytheism and immanentism necessary? I would suggest otherwise. For example, on the anthropo-cosmological scheme of the Andalusian Sufi ibn 'Arabi, the Divine is both transcendent and immanent in relation to the world, and the human being is a finite theomorphic 'mirror' reflecting this transcendent and immanent nature. While this entails the existence of a plurality of theomorphic human beings, it does not entail the need to embrace the kind of universalizing and 'metacosmically'-flattening political theology advanced by Hickman – and I maintain this with due regard to differential asymmetries of position among these ontologically flattened 'gods'.

36 My focus on the Islamicate 'other' in relation to the matter of Christian (cum European cum 'Western') polity formation should not be taken as justification for not taking into consideration the relationship of other 'others' including those that are 'internal' – for example, the Jews – and those that are 'external' – for example, the indigenous of the Americas and Africans – to the Christian (cum European cum 'Western') polity. That said, I maintain that the Islamicate other as a polity formation was *distinct* from

of Christendom cum Europe cum 'the West', and it is to the phenomenon of anti-Islamic(ate) crusading that I should now like to turn with a view to understanding its contribution to the phenomenon of race-making and how this is taken up into the political theology of AI.[37]

Crusading, Race-making, and the Islamicate

While decolonial scholars rightly point to the 'colonial moment' of the *long durée* of the 16th century inaugurated by the Fall of Granada in 1492 CE, and the commencement of the Eurocentrically-framed 'voyages of discovery' (actually, conquest) as initiating indigenous genocide, systematizing anti-black racism, and bringing the modern/colonial world into being along structurally-hierarchical lines, the phenomenon of structural/systemic anti-Islamism dates back much earlier – arguably to the launch of the Crusades. As Hamdani states, "the year 1492 is an important milestone … Yet its birth in a medieval crusading milieu is most often underrated, if not totally forgotten." (Hamdani 1979: 39) I suggest that while decolonial scholars such as Maldonado-Torres have not *forgotten* the crusading milieu, they have *underrated* its importance vis-à-vis thinking about modernity/coloniality, and that this underestimating is due to a mistaken conception of the *paradigmatic* relationship between Christendom and 'Islamdom', that is, the spatial-political abode of the Islamicate.[38]

Here I draw attention to the need to think about the significance of the Crusades vis-à-vis the Muslim threat, whether real or imagined, and their entanglement with events involved in shaping the contours of the religio-racial logic emerging within the context of the so-called New World voyages. In this connection, consider how anti-Islamism functions in and *as* a background discursive 'horizon' informing the very terms of debates that were arguably of decisive significance in the emergent construction of 'race' such as those which took place at Valladolid during 1550–1551 CE between Bartholome De Las Casas and Juan Gines de Sepúlveda. According to Mastnak, for both Sepúlveda and Las Casas, "'the Turk' functioned as an organizing principle in the internal economy of [their natural philosophical and theological] reasoning" structuring their responses to the 'problem' of the humanity of the New World Indians" (Mastnak 1994a: 140), European identity having been forged in antagonistic opposition

other formations in being perceived as posing a military threat, real and/or imagined, to the Christian (cum European cum 'Western') polity, and that this is a difference that makes all the difference when thinking about what I refer to as the longer durée logics informing the long durée project of colonialism.

37 It should be noted that, rather bizarrely, Hickman is strangely silent about the Crusades.

38 In this connection, see: Ali (2017). A similar argument has been made more recently by Abbasi who takes Maldonado-Torres to task for exemplifying "a wider tendency of Latin American and Caribbean decolonial thinkers to unintentionally center their own geopolitical commitments, at times, at the expense of others, such as the Muslims and Muslim Question." (Abbasi 2020: 2)

to what was known as the '*imago Turci*'.[39] Crucially, I suggest this has genealogical significance for what I have elsewhere referred to as 'the decolonial question concerning artificial intelligence': briefly, and developing the argument of Dilan Mahendran (2011), AI and developments such as machine *cum* Deep Learning are grounded in computation[40], the latter is grounded in rationality, and both can be situated in opposition to race along the line of the human. Yet what mediates the shift from that which is the bearer of a rational soul created in the *imago Dei* (image of God) to the rationally-embodied *imago Hominis* (or 'Man') is the *imago Turci*, a largely occluded figure within decolonial accounts.

Returning to the Crusades, Mastnak maintains that their significance cannot be overemphasised. On his view, which is worth quoting at length:

> As an ideal and as a movement, the Crusades had a deep, crucial influence on the formation of Western civilization, shaping culture, ideas, and institutions. The Crusades set a model for 'expansionist campaigns against non-Europeans and non-Christians in all parts of the world.' The ideas, iconography, and discourse associated with the Crusades made a profound imprint on 'all Christian thinking about sacred violence' and exercised influence long after the end of actual crusading. They continued to play a prominent role in European politics and political imagination. In fact, the crusading spirit has survived through Modernity well into our own postmodern age. (Mastnak 2002: 346)

In short, the Crusades provided a 'template' for later imperial-colonial ventures[41] including, I argue, those taking place within the contemporary techno-centric modern/colonial world order witnessing expansionist datafication

39 In this connection, mention should be made of Sepúlveda's *Exhortation on The War against The Turks* which was published in 1529 CE, thirty years prior to the Valladolid debate, and the fact that Turks were viewed as irrational and sub-human; on the latter point, see: Nájera (2010) and Abbasi, the latter of whom maintains that "a rereading of a number of the key events and figures that define the decolonial discourse on race and religion, such as the Valladolid debates and the figure of Christopher Columbus, help to better conceptualize how active the figure of the Muslims was in the imagination and real lives of Europeans who created the coloniality of being." (Abbasi 2020: 3) On this basis, one might argue that there is an intimate link in European imagination between two 'outer' worlds, viz. the so-called 'New World' and 'Islamdom'.

40 While it might be argued that machine cum Deep Learning systems are better construed in terms of *pattern recognition* (rather than rationality) once the latter is operationally-recast along instrumentalist lines – that is, in terms of pattern detection and classification through statistical correlation – this line of argument fails to engage with the fact that such pattern recognition is rule-based, the choice of which rules to encode being tied to human purposes; on this point, see: Gluck-Thaler (2023). Beyond this, there is the fact that a developmental goal of AI systems – including those implemented through machine cum Deep Learning – is attainment of at least human-level intelligence which certainly includes the capacity for reasoning (that is, rationality).

41 On this point, see: Mastnak (1994a), Mastnak (1994b), Mastnak (2002), Mastnak (2003), Mastnak (2004), Mastnak (2010). According to Mastnak, "Europe as a unity that [emerged from Christendom and] developed a 'collective identity' and the ability to orchestrate action ... was, as a rule, articulated in relation to Muslims as the enemy ... [Crucially,]

and algorithmization, carceral surveillance, and securitisation, all of which are entangled with and empowered by the development and deployment of AI and cognate technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT).

Yet, what has the Crusades to do with my earlier reference to Hickman's suggestion that political theology should be understood in relation to the immanent sphere of the planetary? Consistent with the position of Mastnak and others, Hickman maintains that:

> Due to [an] intense, intertwined history ... Euro-Christian anti/imperialism is bound to see itself – and so must strain all the more not to see itself – in its Islamic counterpart. Call it the brother/other effect – discomfiture by the resemblance of the brother induces his projection as other only for that otherness then disconcertingly to retroject the self to the self." (Hickman 2017: 267)

In short, the planetary terrain as dominated by Christendom cum Europe cum 'the West' remains entangled with anti-Islamism. Going further, drawing on Hickman's framing of this statement against the backdrop of his assertion that "the Muslim world occupies a special place in the Euro-Christian *eschatological* fantasy unleashed by the revelation of planetary immanence [emphasis added]" (ibid.: 267), it is crucial to appreciate that Euro-Christian eschatology – that is, expectations about the end of the present age, the world, or history itself – tends to be framed in apocalyptic terms.

The Apocalyptic

According to John M. Court, author of *Approaching the Apocalypse: A Short History of Christian Millenarianism* (2008), the term *apocalyptic* "comes from a Greek word meaning to uncover or reveal and refers to revelations or prophecies relating to the destruction of the world at the end of time." (Court 2008: 215) Although eschatological and apocalyptic ideas are traceable to other traditions, including the Islamic, given what historian David F. Noble (1997) refers to as the West's "religion of technology", I suggest the need to centre Jewish and Christian apocalypticism in any exploration of AI and the apocalyptic[42].

European identity was formed not *by Islam* but, predominantly, *in the relationship ... to Islam*." (Mastnak 1994b: 3) This view is supported by Cardinal and Mégret who maintain that "Islam was created as the archetypal 'Other' against which Christendom could narratively project what it was not, and in the same swift move, what it was ... Involuntarily, Islam forged medieval Christendom, which in turn forged a particular image of Islam, without which ... there would be no Europe." (Cardinal and Mégret 2017: 5–6)

42 According to Noble (1997), since its 12th century CE rise in medieval monasteries, technology has been entangled with Christianity in at least two ways: (1) as implicated in the Christian desire to restore humanity to the perfection of Adam prior to his fall – that is, the 'pre-lapserian' state of being (and knowing) – if not to the pursuit of divinity itself (a 'turn' which took place in the 17th century CE), and (2) from the 13th century onwards, technology has been presumed necessary in a millenarian struggle – rather, war – between Jesus and the forces of evil (or 'the Antichrist'), the outcome of which will inaugurate the eternal heavenly kingdom. Regarding (2), it is crucial to note that at

This is crucial since according to Court, "Jewish and Christian apocalypses use *a schematic view of history* to calculate the calendar and focus attention on the imminent events of this world's end [emphasis added]" (Court 2008: 4–5) – that is, a unilinear and teleological sense of history marked by an immanent unfolding of events. In this connection, perhaps one of the most important and abiding such historical schemas is that due to the Catholic abbot, Joachim of Fiore (c. 1135–1202 CE), whose Crusader worldview and apocalyptic thinking was endorsed by Columbus, principal architect of the so-called New World voyages of discovery that ushered in the modern/colonial racial world system. According to Fiore, history is divided into three ages – that of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit – and it has been argued that this scheme came to be the most influential one known to Europe until the appearance of Hegelianism, Comtean positivism, and Marxism[43].

In terms of how the Western Christian apocalyptic might manifest in the realm of AI, I suggest the need to return to the ancient Greek sense of the apocalyptic pointing to 'that which is revelatory of some truth'. On this basis, it might be argued that AI, *a fortiori* in its machine *cum* Deep Learning incarnation, might be viewed as apocalyptic insofar as it functions as a reinforcing (if not amplifying) 'social mirror', its training data, mode of validation, and range of deployment reflecting – and thereby *revealing* (at least to critical consciousness) – the structural violence of the social fabric along multiple entangled and interlocking lines (racial, gendered, classed etc.) which, building on what was stated earlier, is usefully understood in terms of a racialised political theology.

Yet engagement with the apocalyptic also warrants thinking about the revelation of truth in terms of 'the fulfilment of prophecies' which in a technological register and in the specific context of AI invites thinking about the validation of machine cum Deep Learning 'predictions' (actually, statistical correlations), who gets to make and validate them (and according to what rule-based criteria), as well as surfacing and interrogating claims about the alleged inevitability of AI systems to become a pervasive GPT (that is, General Purpose Technology) and critical infrastructure.

Going further, and attending to the later and specifically Western Christian sense of the apocalyptic, the fulfilment of such prophecies tends to be framed

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different periods in Western history, along with the Catholic papacy, various figures within Islamic and Islamicate history – including the Prophet Muhammad, Muslims in general, and Salahuddin Ayyubi (Saladdin) – have been identified as the Antichrist.

43 On this point, see: Cohn (1957), Noble (1997) and Gray (2007). According to cultural critic Erik Davis, "the speculative waves from Joachim's work surged beyond theology. By casting history as a self-transcending process, Joachim prepared the way for thoroughly modern ideas about progress, revolution, and social development" (Davis 1998: 305). Crucially, on his view, "Joachim's age of the Spirit pops up in the heart of postwar visions of the information age" (ibid.: 305), and at least one commentator has suggested that "in the title of one of [Ray] Kurzweil's earlier books, 'The age of spiritual machines', one can hear the echoes of Joachimite prophecies down the centuries" (Jones 2016: 12).

in terms of 'the destruction of the world at the end of time', thereby inviting a return to the discussion of the phenomenon of 'the world' and its relation to the planetary, as well as to how to think about time and its ending; regarding the latter, should this be understood as pointing to the death of 'The Future' (not to mention its ongoing erasure of 'Other'-ed futures), or its transformation into a new temporality that preserves the contours of the old through change?

While the above constitutes one way of thinking about AI and the apocalyptic, in earlier work I have argued for thinking *otherwise* about the entangled apocalypticism of AI[44]. Building on that work yet extending it vis-à-vis what has been suggested above regarding a planetary racialised political theology framed in terms of rival, battling cosmologies, I turn now to offer some brief reflections on AI in relation to whiteness attempting to occupy 'the God-spot'.

AI and 'the God-spot'

While there are an increasing number of works exploring the religious and theological implications of AI, few if any have approached developments within this area through the lens of political theology. For example, in his brief think piece for *Medium* entitled "The Great White Robot God" (2019), cultural theorist David Golumbia explores connections between white supremacy and the nebulous phenomenon of artificial general intelligence (or AGI) through the bridging phenomenon of discourse about IQ[45], notably pointing to "the messianic/Christological structure of AGI belief, especially when promoted by members of the Radical Atheist community, which itself has significant overlap with the alt-right." Notwithstanding such resonances between AI, crude or overt white supremacy, and strands of apocalyptic Christian messianism, I suggest the need to consider the entanglement of AI and white supremacy within the more mainstream political landscape of liberalism which critical race philosophers such as Charles W. Mills maintain is racialised, at least in its contemporary, manifestation within Western polities. For my part, this necessitates returning to the relationship of whiteness to the line of the human, and both in relation to technology – more specifically, AI.

For some commentators, whiteness continues to occupy the position of the human, technological beings coming to displace non-white others in the realm of the sub-human[46]. However, in earlier work I have suggested a different possibility, viz. the migration of whiteness into the realm of the Transhuman and technological Posthuman under mounting contestation of the human by others previously positioned as sub-human – which I elsewhere suggest is usefully understood in terms of the historically-recurrent phenomenon of 'White Crisis', with the latter understood as apocalyptic – that is, revelatory, inevitable,

44 In this connection, see: Ali (2019).
45 For a useful exploration of the links between scientific racism, IQ, and AI in its statistical incarnation as machine cum Deep Learning, see: McQuillan (2022).
46 In this connection, see, for example: Atanososki and Vora (2019).

and bringing about the end of the world[47]. Crucially, this migratory shift is intended to maintain the relational and hierarchical binary between the European (Western, white) and non-European (non-Western, non-White). Insofar as this hierarchy can usefully be thought about in the onto-theological terms of a 'Great Chain of Being', and if it is indeed the case that whiteness is attempting to morph into the technological Posthuman – which for present purposes means into AI[48] – then insofar as the apex of this chain is occupied by God, whiteness as AI is attempting to occupy 'the God-spot'.

Conclusion

Taking seriously Hickman's suggestion to think about 'the world' as a *theo-geopolitical economy* – that is, a "divine economy not in its traditional theological sense but in a modern critical sense, denoting something like a historical sociology of humanizing divinities and divinizing humans in the eschatologically charged immanence of the globe" (Hickman 2017: 51) – while contesting the ontological flattening at work in this schema, I want to conclude by gesturing toward what I consider to be perhaps the most appropriate response to the onset of AI and/as racialised political theology.

In doing this, I switch register from decolonial and critical race theory to the genre of speculative science-fiction apocalypse, engaging the backstory to Frank Herbert's *Dune* saga, viz. the Butlerian Jihad, which, I suggest, provides an interesting exploration of a possible future confrontation with AI[49].

Why Herbert's epic rather than something else? Perhaps because he appears to have taken political theology seriously, and because if the *long durée* of history has anything to teach us, it is that when 'the machine' launches its crusades, the wretched of the earth respond with *jihād*.

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47 For a detailed presentation of this argument, see: Ali (2019) and Ali (2021).

48 In this connection, it is crucial to appreciate that technological posthumanism refers to an orientation that turns about a convergence – or perhaps confluence – of technologies referred to by the acronym GRIN, viz. genetics, robotics, information technology and nanotechnology. A related acronym is NBICS which refers to the combined resources of nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology, cognitive science, and synthetic biology.

49 This topic is explored in greater detail in Ali (Forthcoming) which is based on a presentation delivered at "ReOrienting the Muslim Question: 2nd International Conference on Critical Muslim Studies" which took place at Leeds University from 16–18 June 2023.

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Sajid Mustafa Ali

VI i/kao rasna politička teologija

Apstrakt:

Nadovezujući se na raniji rad koji se bavi preplitanjem veštačke inteligencije (VI) i apokalipticizma i oboje sa belinom (Ali 2019), u ovom radu istražujem veštačku inteligenciju kroz okvir političke teologije zasnovane na kritičkoj teoriji rasa i dekolonijalnoj misli. Ovaj rad počinje izlaganjem značenja nekoliko ključnih pojmova, tj. VI, politička teologija, 'Svet' i apokaliptika, pre nego što pređe na razmatranje njihovog odnosa. Rad zaključuje kratkim ocrtavanjem opozicionog stava za koji predlažem da je prikladno da se usvoji u odnosu na veštačku inteligenciju gde se ona shvata kao manifestacija rasne političke teologije.

Ključne reči: veštačka inteligencija, politička teologija, rasizam, kritička teorija rase, dekolonijalna misao.

II

STUDIES AND ARTICLES

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Asger Sørensen

UKRAINE, IDEOLOGY, AND ARMS: COMING TO TERMS WITH JUST WAR THEORY

ABSTRACT
The Russian invasion of Ukraine has challenged the ideals of peace that I and many other left-wing critical intellectuals hold dear. By the end of the 18th century, Immanuel Kant argued that the realist law of peoples and the idea of just war should be superseded by the idea of perpetual peace, and, fortunately, the principled opposition to war was institutionalized in the United Nations in the 20th century. However, when the aggressor has already taken possession of huge swathes of territory, calls for peace may be suspected of ideological bias. The right to defend yourself is almost universally recognized, but a military counter-offensive to reconquer lost territory is not merely defense but itself aggression, and thus an act of war. Many of us, however, want to support such efforts in Ukraine, and what is worrying is that this places us on a slippery slope, reopening the possibility of justifying war. As I will argue, this is nevertheless the path we must take, thus accepting the possible justification of war and the possible justification of specific activities and armaments but not others. We should take more seriously the justice of war, with all the specific normative challenges that this implies.

KEYWORDS
just war theory, jus ad bellum, jus in bello, Toward Perpetual Peace, ideology, armament, proportionality.

Introduction

The Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 changed the world, at least as seen from Europe. As concerned citizens and intellectuals, and as left-wing critical theorists, we have to consider how to respond to this disturbing situation. In a recent discussion initiated by articles by two critical Russian scholars, Artemy Magun and Greg Yudin, the focus was primarily on the roots of the conflict, particularly the role that capitalism and authoritarianism played in the process that led to Russia's attacks on Ukraine during the last decade (see Magun 2022a, Yudin 2022a, Azmanova 2022, Magun 2022b, and Yudin 2022b). I learned a lot from this discussion and Magun and Yudin's work. However, even though, also in my view, it is crucial that Critical Theory discusses

Asger Sørensen: Associate Professor, Aarhus University; aso@edu.au.dk.

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the material details of capitalism (see e.g., Sørensen 2024, 2019), ideology and its critique is an issue of equal importance (see, e.g., Sørensen 2022a, 2015b).

Hence, rather than engaging directly in the discussion as it developed, my reflection begins precisely where Yudin ends his reply to those commenting on his initial article. As he says: "Under current circumstances, the pressure to stop the war has a decent chance of stripping Ukraine of the means to resist aggression. What the calls for peace are yet to demonstrate is how they are going to stop Vladimir Putin" (Yudin 2022b).

Yudin's statement raises urgent normative issues regarding the commitment to peace. In the following reflection, I outline the six steps that have led me to a worrying conclusion, namely that in his 1795 project *Toward Perpetual Peace*, Kant was wrong to ridicule the just war theorists Grotius, Pufendorf and Vattel as merely "sorry comforters," (Kant 2011: 26 [AA VIII: 355]) and thus wrong to refuse to discuss the details of possible justifications related to war. Somehow, the famous ideal of reason that I also hold so dear, simply stating that "There shall be no war," (Kant 1945:185 ([AA VI: 354]) may have gotten out of hand for Kant and overshadowed the obvious need to discuss with his honorable predecessors the specificities and nuances regarding the justification of war and peace. Hence, as I argue here, a responsible project for perpetual peace has to include both the ideal project to end all wars and the right to wage war under certain circumstances. In addition, it must also consider principles to guide the practical project of remedying, restricting and regulating the violence committed during armed conflicts.

As I will hesitantly contend, the classical discussions in just war theory of *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* must therefore be taken seriously in political philosophy. This is the lesson that the war in Ukraine has taught me. While I accept it, it makes me very sad and, like Cian O'Driscoll, I feel the need to emphasize that just war "is never a victory, nor a solution, it is always a defeat, always a disaster, always a tragedy; and just war thinking is about coming to terms with this." (O'Driscoll 2019: 182) For this reason, I cannot but respect the sorrow expressed by Neville Chamberlain when he addressed the British Parliament to recommend declaring war on Nazi Germany on September 3, 1939: "Everything that I have worked for, everything that I have hoped for, everything that I have believed in during my public life has crashed into ruins." (Chamberlain quoted in: Sontag 1972: 381) Even though I am deeply concerned at the ideological discourse about increasing armament that has gained a foothold among politicians in the Western world, I nevertheless endorse the idea that wars may be just.

In the first step, I deconstruct the call for immediate peace in Ukraine as ideological in the current situation (i.e. as of spring 2024) (1.). This leads me to the second step, where I emphasize the importance of taking ideology and its critique seriously (2.). The third step acknowledges that reliable empirical knowledge cannot be made available for judging the war, and we must therefore recur to principles, and that these principles must be idealist rather than realist (3.). Having accepted the right to defense, in the fourth step I discuss

the question of the armament needed for such defense, arguing that we need an affirmative vocabulary of arms, even though we must also criticize the current ideological escalation of the arms race (4.). In the fifth step, I argue that the right to defense is not enough; we need to acknowledge that offensive war can be justified under certain conditions, and we must therefore discuss *jus ad bellum* (5.). Having accepted the possibility of waging just war, in the sixth step I briefly consider the principles for conducting just war, i.e. *jus in bello* (6.), arguing in conclusion that as critical theorists and philosophers, we should engage more with efforts to detail the specificities and nuances of these awful questions, thus distinguishing acceptable uses of violence from atrocities, rather than leaving such discussions to the unfortunate practitioners of war.

1. Deconstructing the Ideological Implications of a Call for Peace

Let me first once again pay Kant his dues; too many philosophers, in my opinion, have been willing to make too many allowances to the political realism of war-making. As the 19th century Argentine lawyer Juan Bautista Alberdi reminded us from his exile in France, war is a crime, plain and simple. War means burning down houses and killing indiscriminately to take people's land, pillaging their possessions and raping women along the way—actions which, as Alberdi emphasizes, are universally condemned as crimes. Moreover, Alberdi argues, the alleged right to war in the original law of peoples dating from antiquity only made war legitimate by considering other people as inhuman barbarians (see Alberdi 2007: 41 [§ I.I]). Hence, what is called the law of peoples confuses crime with justice and has only been made possible by prostituting human reason (see Alberdi 2007: 50-51 [§ I.V]).

For similar reasons, I have for years defended the merit and realism of Kant's peace project, striving to place this ideal concept of reason higher on the philosophical agenda. Raised while the Vietnam War was in the news every day and being young in the 1970s and 1980s Europe with its Cold War peace movements, I have all my life been deeply troubled by war. As a human being, I cannot help but be affected by the realities of corporal and spiritual suffering, by imaginaries of flesh being torn asunder, blood pumping from wounds, and limbs being lost in screams of pain; of homes being bombed into ruins and people being forced to flee on foot, cast into unforeseeable weather conditions. For this reason, peace must be the project that we pursue, and this is also why the Charter of the United Nations is one of the world's most important documents, stating in chapter 1 the UN's aim of securing peace, friendliness, and cooperation between nations.

However, at the present stage of the war in Ukraine, more than two years after the invasion, I share Yudin's fear that, functionally, the call for armistice and immediate peace will weaken Ukraine's prospects of recapturing the territories that Russia currently occupies. The call for peace thus functions as an ideological pressure that mainly benefits the side of the conflict that has already gained from it. Hence, I will hesitantly argue for the possible justification of

war, reflecting on how we as critical theorists should take a normative stance in relation to this disturbing perspective.

Years ago, applying a similar perspective but reaching almost the opposite conclusion, I criticized the ideological arguments for just war in John Rawls' *The Law of Peoples*, arguing that promoting the idea of just war increases the likelihood of wars (see Sørensen 2015c). Without the present burdens of experience and in the spirit of Critical Theory, I also criticized ethical cosmopolitanism as a liberal ideology that legitimizes global capitalist exploitation, arguing in continuation that Kant's *Toward Perpetual Peace* is the only respectable political project to pursue, combining the republican state of law with the law of peoples and the law of the world citizen (see Sørensen 2016; see also Sørensen 2017). I therefore, finally, had serious reservations regarding Jürgen Habermas' and in particular Michael Walzer's arguments for justifying war (see Sørensen 2015a).

Returning to these questions today, however, I must make a concession. As I see it now, in contrast to Kant, I have probably never thought of war simply as war. With an upbringing as described above in post-WWII Western Europe, unconsciously my paradigm case for war has probably always been just war, initially believing it was just to fight the Nazis, and then being revolted by all the subsequent unjust violations of territorial and political integrity by the USA and the USSR during the Cold War.

As Lars Erslev Andersen has argued, the 20th century witnessed the fall of the European territorial order. After WWI, US president Woodrow Wilson called for the world to be made "safe for democracy," (Wilson in: Andersen 2010: 21) and that gave rise to an American world order based on humanism, human rights, and democracy. Just as with the medieval Christian order, both this liberal order and the order of working-class international socialism could justify warlike efforts disregarding territorial references. Both the two Cold War superpowers thus rejected the pre-WWI European order of respecting territorial integrity, and the 20th century's main ideas of just war were therefore freed from references to territory (see Andersen, 2010: 23). It is these ideal ideas of just war that balance territorial sovereignty in the UN Charter and that I have probably unconsciously presupposed.

As I see it now, the war in Ukraine may have made me conscious of some of these unconscious presuppositions about war that have influenced my earlier work and, consequently, I have allowed myself to reconsider my thoughts about just war. As I see it now, the problem is not the idea of just war in itself, but the particular versions of this idea that have dominated since the early 20th century, assigning legitimacy to armed interventions on an unprecedented scale.

Admittedly, I have been far too slow to take seriously Russia's aggression towards Ukraine. Moreover, I must also admit that it has taken me too long to realize some of the conceptual implications, and I have no excuse. I first presented my critique of Habermas and Walzer at a seminar on "International Relations and Human Rights" at the European Humanities University in Vilnius with good colleagues from Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia—a seminar

that took place precisely during those days in March 2014 when Crimea was occupied by the infamous little green men (see, e.g., Sazonov, Saumets, and Mölder 2016).

Finally, however, I am now ready to consider the issue that has lain before me for so long, and as in every aspect of life, one benefits from people who have developed specialized knowledge concerning the relevant issues. Consulting contemporary textbooks, it is obvious that, as a general principle, defending a territory from military aggression is almost universally recognized as constituting a legitimate reason for taking up arms in a conflict. Interestingly, however, the technical term used for legitimate armed response is "self-defense," (see, e.g., Reichberg, Begby, and Syse, 2006: 723 and Brooks 2008: 738) i.e. not merely 'defense;' in fact, 'defense' is often not even an entry in the indexes of these textbooks (see, e.g., Reichberg et al. 2006: 701 and Brooks, 2008: 730). Hence, straightforward legitimacy is reserved for the simplest, almost intuitively not only evident but self-evident case of self-defense, whereas solidaric support for the defense of someone else somewhere else remains problematic.

Today, I thus find it necessary to emphasize the following: No matter how much we strive for peace and justice, no matter how disturbing the corporal and mental suffering may be, no matter which ideals of freedom and equality we hail, people have a basic right to defend not only themselves, but also their families, their surroundings, and their belongings. The right to self-defense is almost universally recognized as an axiomatic point of departure in discussions of just war, but as I see it today, it is not enough. The right to self-defense is so narrowly specified that it becomes almost tautological and thereby empty of real meaning—I mean, who would deny anybody the right to self-defense when attacked? Even Alberdi recognized this (see Alberdi 2007: 48 [§ I.IV]).

Hence, what I want in this case is to support the self-defense of someone else, i.e. to defend another person or people. As is the case with self-defense, the possible legitimacy of defending others through armed intervention is also recognized by the UN Charter, namely in chapter 7. The implication of this was demonstrated when the UN sanctioned the employment of arms to force Iraq out of Kuwait (see, e.g., Ninan 1997: 3011). However, as much as I think that this was the correct decision, this realization is also very painful, placing me on the slippery slope leading to the acceptance of the possibility of war being justified. Hence, as has been stated very precisely, discussing the justness of war only makes sense if we place ourselves between the absolute pacifism of, say, Bertrand Russel and the realist *Realpolitik* of Hobbes or Machiavelli (see Reichberg et al. 2006: x). Discussing just war thus implies accepting war as a reality – as sad, but inevitable.

2. The Importance of Ideology, Critique and Justification

In the case of Ukraine, at the time of writing, following two years of war, their armed forces were initially able to successfully defend the country against the military invasion, to force back invaders on some fronts, and to ward off

terrorist attacks on its critical civilian infrastructure (heat and electricity). Still, Russia is in possession of around 20 % of Ukraine, but with the decisions in the West to supply Ukraine with some of the world's most advanced weapon systems, Ukraine can now carry out offensives to reconquer this occupied land.

So far, Ukraine has not been very successful with their offensives, but assuming the prospects of possible success, calls for immediate peace can still be criticized as ideological in the most classical sense. These calls thus present themselves as universal ideas for the benefit of humanity, as we know them from Kant, ideally beneficial to both sides of a conflict, but in reality clearly biased, primarily benefitting one side, namely the aggressor that has already taken advantage of the other side's weaknesses at an earlier stage. As Yudin called attention to, if claimed right now, calls for immediate peace in Ukraine would clearly benefit Russia as the invader, whereas Ukraine's prospects of recapturing its land would be severely weakened.

What is at stake here is the material importance of ideology and ideas. As we have been reminded over the last decade by riots in the US, when there is no justice, there will be no peace. Internationally, the United Nations general secretary, António Guterres, has also emphasized that peace should always be "a just peace in line with the UN Charter and international law" (Guterres 2023). In this perspective, the idea of just war may thus be considered a compromise between peace and justice.

Of course, economic, social, and political realities have a structural and causal impact on the instigation of social and political unrest, and such realities were the focus of the aforementioned discussion in *Emancipations*, exploring the role of Russian capitalism and authoritarianism in relation to the invasion of Ukraine. However, as was also acknowledged, the final decision to launch a war is made by individual human beings, in this case Putin and his consorts. Accordingly, the discussion among Magun, Yudin, and their commentators also considered to what extent Putin's actions represent a more or less rational attempt by an agent in charge of a global superpower to increase (national and personal) power and wealth; i.e., whether or not it was rational for Russia to invade Ukraine when calculating the possible gains and losses, costs and benefits.

Following this lead, within the horizon of a relevant rational agent, the discussion extended beyond the material matters of political economy, introducing culture, ideology, and philosophical ideas as explanatory factors. My argument will go even further in emphasizing the importance of ideas, ideology, and justifications, both factually as part of the current scenario and normatively for us as critical intellectuals. As we all know, both before the invasion and after, Russia has officially offered ample justification for its actions. Hence, as an almost classical example of *jus ad bellum*, i.e. of justifying an armed intervention, Putin and others have repeatedly made two arguments that together are supposed to suffice in making the case for a just war.

Firstly, within a narrative of the great and spiritually pure Russia, it was claimed that Ukraine was never really a nation as such, but only an unfortunate

20th century invention by Lenin that therefore cannot claim the right to continued independence from Russia (see e.g., Putin 2021; see also Tolz 2002). Secondly, it was argued that the government in Kyiv that came to power through a 2014 coup reflected "neo-Nazism [...] elevated to the rank of national policy" (Putin 2022). Taken together, these two arguments were supposed to lead to the conclusion that Russia therefore had the duty to intervene and liberate the Russian people of Ukraine, just like the USSR fought Nazi Germany during the great patriotic war. For these reasons, Russia did not consider it right to declare war (which would imply an admission of Ukraine's sovereignty), but simply launched a "special military operation."

Like most people in the West, I consider these Russian narratives fictitious and ideological, and the Ukrainians clearly have a different narrative of their history (see, e.g., Plokhy 2015). As also recognized by critical Russian intellectuals, the modern Ukrainian identity and the longing for national independence from the Russian Empire was already widespread in 19th century Ukrainian literature (See e.g., Zygar 2023; see also Kazankov 2024). Nevertheless, the Russian stories are still believed in various circles, not least since it seems that right-wing nationalists, who have defended Ukraine so strongly, frequently use Nazi symbols (see, e.g., Gibbons-Neff 2023). Together, these issues serve to remind us of the importance of ideology in attempts to justify war.

3. Dealing with Factual Uncertainty: Resorting to Simple Principles

It is also important to note that before the war, very few critical intellectuals supported the current regime in Kyiv, believing, based on various data and surveys, that the Ukrainian authorities were both corrupt and authoritarian by Western standards (see e.g., Wikipedia, 2023). Now, however, we find ourselves enthusiastically defending Ukraine and its people's right to independence and, while some may cautiously distinguish between the principle of popular sovereignty and actual national and territorial sovereignty (see, e.g., Strecker in: Azmanova 2022, and Yudin 2022b), in reality many of us find ourselves arguing for the defense of territorial integrity—not as an abstract principle, but of an actual country whose current regime fails to meet our usual standards of political integrity and democratic legitimacy.

In contrast to the defense of Kuwait, we have no UN endorsement to lean on, and the weight of the argument for supporting Ukraine is most likely borne by the intuition that it is still a relatively "decent" regime – i.e. one that does not fall too far short of our usual standards. This is the kind of reasoning that Rawls would suggest (see, e.g., Rawls 1999: 62-67), and that I criticized in my earlier work for legitimizing war (see Sørensen 2015c: 25-26). Today, however, my point is that most of us do not really know the facts of the situation. Still, we support Ukraine with little hesitation – at least, I do – well aware of the non-ideality of Ukraine and that the first casualty of war is truth. As academics, we prefer to present objective arguments based on solid empirical

facts, but in cases such as these, we have to accept that doing so is ultimately impossible, yet we still have to make up our minds.

Unable to ascertain the facts about the situation in Russia and Ukraine, from very early on, I therefore suspended detailed empirical judgment and returned to the simplest normative criteria – namely that, as a widely accepted normative principle supported by both Kant and the UN, no state shall interfere with military force in the internal affairs of another state, and for most people, this was obviously the case here. Like Kant (see Kant 2011: 13 [AA VIII, 34]7), I believe that this simple principle of territorial integrity is crucial for securing peace, which is also recognized in the UN Charter where it is a constitutive element of article 2.

Meanwhile, such a simple principled stance regarding Russia's invasion of Ukraine has been challenged by left-wing 'whataboutism,' referring to the lack of critique of US-led military interference in other countries over the years. This form of whataboutism remains powerful in certain contexts, not least in Latin American countries, which have suffered from US imperialism since the presentation of the Monroe Doctrine in 1823, which declared the American hemisphere off-limits to European powers, warning Russia, Spain, and Great Britain in particular to stay out of the US sphere of influence (see, e.g., Perkins 1972). As Noam Chomsky has reminded us, the US imperialism implied by this declaration has been especially hard on Central America (see, e.g., Chomsky 1985, 1988). However, many proponents of whataboutism may be said to resolve the issue of perceived double standards by levelling the double standard down to no standard at all (don't do anything in any situation), whereas the goal should rather be to strive for a single standard (do what is right in every situation).

Hence, the legitimate argument that all cases should be considered equally may also lead to agreement that proximity to what is perceived as an aggressive local superpower constitutes a legitimate concern. As stressed by Kant, a crucial preliminary step for the peace project is to reduce threats by avoiding professional standing armies (see Kant 2011: 13 [AA VIII, 34]5). Countries in Latin America thus face the armed forces of the USA just as we in Europe face those of Russia, and the behavior of these heavily armed neighboring superpowers causes concern that must be addressed somehow, even if the perceived aggression cannot be established as an undisputed fact.

In addition, some left-wing intellectuals have conceded the legitimacy of the kind of *Realpolitik* that recognizes the need for superpowers like Russia to retain a protective belt, or a sphere of influence, beyond their borders for security reasons, thus recognizing the logic of the Monroe Doctrine. Unfortunately, these discussions have been fueled by prominent intellectuals such as Chomsky, for which he has rightly been criticized by Ukrainian scholars (see Kukharskyy, Fedyk, Gorodnichenko, and Sologoub 2022).

The problem with recognizing superpowers' needs for such protective belts is that it does not acknowledge the interests of the nations and people in those adjacent territories thought to be included in the belt. In fact,

being confronted with explicit expressions of such imperial needs from Russia throughout 2021 (see, e.g., Lavrov 2022), and witnessing shortly thereafter the invasion of Ukraine, neighboring Finland and Sweden decided to give up their long-established neutrality and seek refuge in NATO (see, e.g., Jakobsen 2024: 2), which presents itself as an alliance for the defense of sovereign nations, in the North Atlantic Treaty recognized as the "parties." Hence, because we cannot establish with certainty the truth of any real and legitimate needs for such security belts and spheres, I see no other way than to return to the well-established principle of the territorial sovereignty of nations, rendered legitimate by their international recognition.

The only factual truths that we can hope to agree on in conflicts of this kind are the existence of internationally recognized borders and whether or not they have been crossed by an invader. In this case, Russia invaded neighboring Ukraine, which they themselves recognized as an independent state in 1991. If one instead considers the situation in Israel, one may emphasize that in 1947-48, when an offensive by Zionist militia forced Palestinians to flee into neighboring countries (see, e.g., Pappé 2006), the Zionists also invaded territory defined by internationally recognized borders, namely the borders inside Palestine decided by the UN on November 29, 1947, which divided the land into a Jewish state and an Arab state (see, e.g., Wikipedia 2024a). Originally, the UN thus envisaged a two-state solution, and the very state of Israel may therefore be said to be built on occupied territories.

Having thus established a factual agreement regarding the transgression of recognized borders, we may then hope to add a normative agreement, namely that, as Kant and the UN would also concur, it is simply wrong to interfere militarily in the affairs of other countries within their recognized borders. In my earlier writings on these issues mentioned above, I have thus followed an interpretation of Kant that emphasizes the prohibition against crossing borders with armies as a constitutive preliminary step in his project for perpetual peace.

Hence, even though, in continuation of Kant's peace project, I have criticized the ideology of just war and thus any claims of a sufficient *jus ad bellum*, I have also recognized that should one nevertheless become the object of an attack, one has the right to defend oneself. As mentioned, this is uncontroversial when applied to individual persons. The problems only start when I now want to extend this right to defend oneself using violent means to collective entities, including families as well as political or cultural entities—and especially when I also argue that it is right for collective entities like a state to actively support another state's rights in this regard.

As mentioned, we cannot know precisely what led to the present war. What we can know is that following the invasion, destruction and suffering have almost entirely taken place inside Ukraine. In addition, as I see it, no plausible case can be made that Ukraine has previously committed wrongs sufficient to justify Russia's invasion and the continued atrocities. For me, that is enough to define Ukraine's war efforts as defensive and thus legitimate, which is why I believe that Ukraine should be supported in their war against Russia.

4. Dealing with Principles: Considering Defense and Peacetime Armament

But where does that leave Kant's peace project – the principled project that I have defended so consistently for years? A Kantian could oppose detailing the idea of just war on two grounds, claiming it to be either too optimistic to think that war can be effectively regulated or too pessimistic that war must be accepted as part of the human predicament (see Reichberg et al., 2006: xi.), thus employing either realist or idealist reasoning against establishing institutionalized regulatory bodies that detail what constitutes just war. I have mainly been a proponent of the idealist argument. As I now see things, however, both arguments fail. Wars are part of human reality and will continue to be so for the foreseeable future and, even though we must continue to strive to ultimately eradicate war, we will fail in our responsibility to the people currently living on this planet if we do not take seriously the issues regarding justice and ethics that wars raise.

As mentioned, the right to defense is almost universally recognized. However, simply referring to the unconditional right to defend oneself against an aggressor is not sufficient to protect the project of perpetual peace, since almost all wars can be presented and justified in such terms. When invading Poland, Hitler presented the German army's actions as defending the Germans in Danzig, just as they had defended the Germans of Sudetenland the year before. In the present case, Russia has for years claimed to be defending an oppressed Russian minority in Ukraine, in particular in the Donbas region, and this claim was in fact part of the justification that Putin offered on the day of the invasion (see, e.g., Wikipedia 2024b). Hence, as noted by Alberdi, when it comes to war, everybody thinks of themselves as defenders rather than aggressors (see Alberdi 2007: 70 (§ II.XV)); therefore, simply making defense a criterion does not solve the quandary of justness without additional specification or qualification.

What is worse, and a cause for concern: Given that I believe that people living within internationally recognized borders should have the right to struggle in peace with their own political problems without the fear—or the hope—that a foreign power will decide it has a right to intervene militarily, and given my strongly felt opposition to war as such, and even to the idea of a power balance sustained through military threat (mutual deterrence), what about arms?

How can I support the principled right to defend oneself or others, for instance in the case of an invasion, without supporting the prior production and acquisition of arms? Defense against armed aggression is difficult without weapons. Hence, should we support the acquisition and production of arms in what we consider peacetime? Or, more precisely, during this "peacetime," what level of armament, conflict, and mutual deterrence is acceptable? And what kind of potentially lethal armament can be classified as non-aggressive or non-offensive?

Arms are real, and if only one part of a conflict is armed, then the outcome is almost guaranteed. Interestingly, however, for much of the 20th century, such

concerns did not constitute definitive political grounds for armament, regardless of the country's size. It is well known that, prior to WWII, i.e. even after the experience of WWI, the USA did not spend much on its armed forces and was therefore poorly prepared for WWII (see, e.g., Berky and Shenton 1972: 1274). Now, that could seem reasonable for the USA, which at that point was already a powerful and self-assured nation, but it was also thought reasonable for a small nation like Denmark.

At that time, Denmark's population of less than four million people had democratically elected a coalition government of social democrats and social liberals for whom political realism included principled pacifism (see, e.g., Shishkina 2006), resulting in a very low level of armament. When Nazi Germany announced its invasion on April 9, 1940, Denmark therefore surrendered after only a few hours, sparing the country from the suffering of war, but also handing to the aggressor an economy complete with agriculture and industry, work and leisure, that served the occupiers well in the following years. Was that the right thing to do? Should Denmark have defended itself, thus weakening Nazi Germany to the benefit of the allied efforts to counter Nazism, while knowing and accepting that doing so would cause suffering among its own civilian population? That is not an easy question for a responsible, democratically elected government.

The Ukrainian government chose to defend the country despite being in what was almost universally considered a hopeless situation in terms of armament and despite being offered safe exile (see, e.g., Braithwaite 2022). I must admit that I was deeply moved when witnessing what appeared to be the Ukrainian people's staunch willingness to make sacrifices for their country. Believing, as mentioned, that many things in Ukraine were far from ideal before the invasion, I assumed that Ukrainians must be motivated by the belief that life in Ukraine nevertheless is, or could be, far better than life in Putin's Russia. Hence, I consider Ukrainians' initial willingness to defend themselves with Molotov cocktails—i.e., despite having very few arms—a sign of their intimate knowledge about the current realities of life in Russia. Many have families across the border (see, e.g., Mohieldin 2022), and until a few decades ago, Russian was also an official language in Ukraine. This being the case, I also find it likely that many Ukrainians are indeed fighting for the ideals that many of us hold dear—for social democracy, including various liberal freedoms and the rule of law. That is why the war can be considered just.

However, one can better fight and defend oneself with arms, which leads us back to the delicate question of peacetime armament. Generally, legitimate armament appears to pose a severe challenge for contemporary normative discourse regarding international relations. Once again, this might be illustrated by the indexes of textbooks. In one such book, the keywords related to arms all seem to indicate that we were best off without arms. Entries thus include "disarmament," "armistice," "arms race," "arms control" etc. (see Reichberg et al. 2006: 695–696) Also included is the term "armed peace," but that simply redirects readers to "balance-of-power politics," which in turn refers to critical

discussions of pre-Kantian just war theory that do not confer much legitimacy to contemporary advocacy of peacetime armament.

The lesson from Ukraine, however, is that even when arguing for a principled peace project, we have to consider what level of armament, and what kind of armament, is consistent with such a project. Arms will continue to be necessary for the foreseeable future, I would claim, and we must therefore find an affirmative vocabulary for discussing them, pursuing an appropriate level and kind of armament. However, as Gerhard Schweppenhäuser has also emphasized (see Schweppenhäuser 2022 and Schweppenhäuser 2023: 30–32), discussions in the Western world, including discussions on the left-wing, currently show an alarming tendency to support the allocation of ever-more resources to the armed forces. The challenge is thus twofold: both developing an affirmative vocabulary for discussing arms and resisting the ideology supporting an indiscriminate continued arms race. In other words, we need arms, but not too many, not too powerful, and not too offensive.

5. From Defense to Reconquest: It is War, and May Even be Called Just War

At the current stage of the conflict, however, the question is no longer whether one should surrender or engage in armed defense, nor what level of peacetime armament is appropriate. There is a war going on. Through armed intervention, Russia has captured significant Ukrainian territories without being able to gain control of the entire country, and, at the time of writing, the war is ongoing inside Ukraine with no end in sight. This situation raises questions, both normative and strategic, with which we must grapple – as individuals, in relation to our ideals, and as governments, in relation to realist foreign policy.

The fundamental question is: How can one best support the wronged party, i.e. Ukraine? Moreover, can such support legitimately include assisting Ukraine to recapture its territories, some of which it has not controlled for more than a decade? To be even more specific, is it justifiable to provide support that includes arming a nation to enable offensive war efforts that it could not have undertaken without such support, and if so, what form should this support take, and how can it be done without escalating the war and provoking a nuclear response from Russia? This last question appears to have awakened Habermas's pragmatic and realist tendencies, leading him to call for ceasefire and negotiations (see Habermas 2022). Even though I share his fears, and even though Putin regularly reminds us of Russia's capacity for nuclear warfare, I have nevertheless allowed myself to ignore these threats. As I argued above, I still consider the call for armistice potentially ideological, thus benefitting the invaders and occupiers more than those to whom the land rightly belongs, and I count on the Putin regime being unwilling to take actions constituting an existential threat to humanity.

Acknowledging the relevance of both deontological and consequentialist reasoning, we move from one part of the traditional theory of just war, *jus ad bellum*, to another, namely *jus in bello*—that is, what constitutes proper conduct during war. Once war has broken out, if we disregard its possible justification, and who is to blame for breaking the peace, how can we justify some actions and not others when resorting to force, violence, and weapons?

With regard to Ukraine, the initial approach in the West was to send helmets and bulletproof vests to protect against Russian invaders; later, guns and ammunition were sent for defense, for instance in the form of anti-tank weapons. Firearms were then sent to neutralize missile and drone attacks, followed by long-range cannons to attack the logistics behind enemy lines. With some hesitance, the sending of tanks was approved, and next in line are fighter planes.

The general question has remained the same: What kinds of armament are aggressive or offensive, and what kinds are defensive? More specifically with regard to the current situation, one might ask as a matter of principle: Recognizing that war is a crime, as initially argued by Alberdi, what kind of weapons can be justifiably used when an invader has already conquered and secured huge swathes of territory that is recognized internationally as belonging to another party? And when the legitimate reconquest proves to be much more difficult than hoped for and initial support insufficient, how much can the lethal capacity of the weaponry provided by other countries justly be reinforced? To be specific, is it for example justified to use cluster bombs against the Russian invaders, as the US and Ukraine have agreed? Cluster bombs are non-precision weapons intended to indiscriminately wound or kill people over a vast area, with more than 100 countries having signed a convention banning them (but not the USA, Ukraine, or Russia).

I believe that Ukraine is justified in launching a military offensive to attempt to recapture the lands that have been recognized internationally as theirs. And as much as I hesitate to say it, I also believe it is desirable that they do so. The only question concerns the grounds for this justification. Meanwhile, this question reveals another and more general question, namely: If military aggression is inherently wrong, can we operate with a concept of a non-aggressive military offensive, provided it is a countermeasure seeking to correct previous wrongdoing? I do not believe so – it would almost be a contradiction in terms – which is why I hesitantly have come to accept the possibility of justifying war.

Francisco de Vitoria reached this same conclusion in 16th century Spain: The use of military force is justified for self-defense, to protect innocent people from harm, to regain stolen property, and to punish evildoers (see Reichberg et al. 2006: 290). If we thus think of Ukraine as legitimately trying to regain stolen territories, then we have accepted the possibility of *jus ad bellum*, of justifying waging a war. Confronted with Russia's ideological justification for the invasion and occupation, we can thus posit an alternative justification for counterattack and possible reconquest; that is, a military offensive that goes beyond mere self-defense can be justified with reference to regaining stolen territory. It is such specific arguments that the Kantian peace project

discourages, and we must therefore look elsewhere for a conceptual framework that supports this approach. It is the process of developing such a framework that I embark on here.

6. Jus in Bello: Proportionality and Discrimination

As I have argued, having accepted the possibility of *jus ad bellum*, questions concerning *jus in bello* inevitably become pertinent. Thus far, discussion of justification in relation to war has mainly focused on the uncomfortable questions regarding the right to wage war. Now, however, far more serious consideration must be given to the possible justifications for specific ways of conducting war. However, with serious consideration now given to the possible justifications for specific ways of conducting war, relatively less weight is given to the principled contrast between war and peace that was the main point of discussion from Kant over Alberdi to the establishment of the UN Charter, and that I also adhered to until recently.

The core idea of *jus in bello* is that some ways of conducting war are better, or at least more acceptable – or maybe just less brutal, inhuman, and unacceptable – than others. As such, if need be, there can be legitimate – or at least not entirely illegitimate – ways of killing and maiming people considered enemy combatants. And it is within this framework that we can argue that the USA's decision to provide Ukraine with cluster bombs was wrong.

Interestingly, this line of thought has not been high on the agenda among contemporary intellectuals and philosophers. Hence, Jeff McMahan argues clearly for the right of oppressed people living in occupied territories to rebel, taking as an example the Palestinians living on land occupied by Israel, but recommends peaceful means; the situation where one part of a country is trying to reconquer another part lost initially to an invading army via military means is not something he considers (see McMahan 2005: 12–13; also in Brooks, 2008). Moreover, in a radical interpretation of Kantian pacifism, McMahan has argued forcefully against just war theory, stating that killing is wrong no matter the circumstances, thus refusing to recognize war as an exceptional situation (see McMahan, 2011: i, vii), and suggesting that even self-defense may not justify taking a life (see McMahan, 2011: 155).

On the other side of the table, when arguing for the legitimacy of just war, Rawls had only minor reservations about justifying the killing of non-belligerents in situations of supreme emergency (see Rawls 1999: 98–100; see also Sørensen 2015c: 28–29). Meanwhile, Walzer, despite thinking it relevant to consider who can be a legitimate target of lethal force, saw the conventions about what means may be employed in war to be, as Brian Orend puts it, "beside the point" (Orend 2010: 283).

Hence, among the few prominent philosophers who have participated in discussions of the notion of just war, most have focused primarily on *jus ad bellum*, shying away from the even more uncomfortable questions related to *jus in bello*. One exception is the young Thomas Nagel, who in 1972 argued

in favor of respecting some form of ethical absolutism in support of the conventions prohibiting war atrocities, thus potentially distinguishing between justified acts of war and war crimes. He was brought to this point by the US engagement in the Vietnam War and especially the My Lai massacre, napalm bombing, and the bombing of civilian villages to kill guerillas assumed to be hiding there (see Nagel 1972: 127–128; also in Brooks 2008). Nagel specifies that his argument aims to limit both legitimate targets of hostility and the character of the hostility practiced (see Nagel 1972: 138).

Nagel's claim is that some kind of measures and means should be considered wrong, no matter how just the war itself may be (see Nagel 1972: 123). The basic contention is to trust our absolutist intuition to resist "the abyss of utilitarian apologetics of large-scale murder" (Nagel 1972: 126). With the absolutist intuition and the classical idea of the double effect (see Nagel 1972: 130–131), he argues for clearly distinguishing between direct hostility toward someone, which may be justified, and accepting collateral damage, which may also be justified, but only under very specific and limited conditions. Knowingly killing or inflicting pain on innocent civilians as a means of eradicating possible enemy combatants, as when applying torture and in the aforementioned massacres, cannot be justified (see Nagel 1972: 139–140).

Fortunately, many executive practitioners of war and peace (i.e. governments, officials, diplomats, generals, and soldiers) have recognized that such issues are crucial in the real world as we currently understand it, that they will in all likelihood continue to be so for the foreseeable future, and that the regulation of war is therefore desirable for all parties. Part of the reason for this remarkable asymmetry between philosophers and practitioners may be the dual roots of the classical idea of just war, from Thomas Aquinas until Grotius, namely Roman and Christian thought.

Hence, as outlined by Andersen, the ideal and principled discussion about whether or not there can be legitimate grounds for waging war, i.e. *jus ad bellum*, has mainly been inspired by supra-human Christian theology and canon laws, whereas the more concrete and practical principles of *jus in bello* rather drew on Roman and common law, i.e. something much less ideal (see Andersen 2010: 48–49). The former thus appears to have more in common with philosophical idealism, whereas the latter may seem more appealing to people emerged in worldly practicalities.

Since the 19th century, it has thus mainly been thanks to the practitioners of war that we have developed international conventions that seek to civilize wars, starting with the Geneva Convention that protects innocent lives during war. Today, this has fortunately resulted in a number of internationally recognized conventions restricting warfare with regard to civilians, private property, wounded soldiers, and prisoners of war, as well as conventions prohibiting the use of known indiscriminate weapons such as landmines and cluster bombs, and weapons of mass destruction such as nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons.

Rather than philosophy, much of the literature on *jus in bello* can thus be classified as part of international law. However, since there is no universally

recognized legislative, executive, or judicial authority to enforce these issues, many discussions of the specifics of this branch of normative justification have seemingly been placed under the heading of ethics rather than politics or law, thus displacing the responsibility for decisions from the state to the conscience of every individual person.

One of the textbooks referred to above is thus called *The Ethics of War*, and other such textbooks also employ "ethics" as the key term (see, e.g., Lucas 2019), just as there is a *Journal of Military Ethics* that deals with these questions. This should all be sufficient to demonstrate to conscientious philosophers and critical theorists their possible relevance to this field, as I hope they will realize. I hope they will also choose to discuss war primarily in terms of justice rather than ethics, thus emphasizing that questions of just war primarily concern politics and law; that is a lesson from Kant that we should continue to accept. Ethics is always important, especially when discussing *jus in bello* but still, it should only be a secondary concern.

A cursory review of the literature in this field reveals that the two most basic principles of *jus in bello* are proportionality and discrimination. The principle of discrimination or distinction is quite simple: determining what is a legitimate military target and thus securing the immunity of civilians and the rights of prisoners of war. This is the principle behind the Geneva convention that was compromised by the war on terror in Afghanistan and Iraq, and by the imprisonment of so-called unlawful combatants in Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib (see, e.g., Kinsella 2005).

The principle of proportionality raises more questions. Regarding the justification of war, i.e. *jus ad bellum*, the right to self-defense is, as already mentioned, almost universally recognized. However, considering *jus in bello*, the way a war is conducted may render an otherwise justifiable armed response to unjust aggression illegitimate. According to the principle of proportionality, defense can itself become an aggression and thus wrong when it constitutes an unproportional response to the original aggression. This has been recognized by the International Court of Justice (ICJ), e.g. when the US attacked Nicaragua in the 1980s because Nicaragua had supported guerillas fighting in the US ally El Salvador (see Franck 2008: 720). It is also why Israel is currently criticized for wrongdoings in Gaza. Even though Hamas may be said to have started the conflict, Israel's response is clearly disproportionate (see, e.g., AFP 2023). Moreover, the ICJ has found it plausible that Israel is at present committing genocide against the Palestinians and has therefore accepted to consider the case more closely (see, e.g., Holmes, 2024 and Borger 2024). Finally, this is also McMahan's point: that killing in self-defense may be a disproportionate response to the original offense (see McMahan 2011: 156).

One rationale for the principle of proportionality is to prevent escalating mutual aggression, so that both parties can maintain the hope of reaching a resolution to the conflict through negotiation. It has been said that, ultimately, all wars have to end at the negotiation table, i.e. with some kind of negotiated agreement. The warring parties thus have to agree to stop the war, and that

requires an ability and a willingness to communicate with the adversary. Securing this possibility is in fact the only concession Kant makes to *jus in bello* (see Kant, 2011: 16-17 [AA VIII: 346-47]). My disagreement with Chomsky and Habermas therefore only concerns the timing of calls for ceasefire, negotiations, and peace.

However, whereas the *jus in bello* conventions of practitioners have been acknowledged for their highly detailed specifications (see, e.g., Orend 2010: 283), this second principle of proportionality can be criticized as overly general and vague (see, e.g., Franck 2008: 716–717). However, as Thomas Franck has argued, the generality and vagueness of the principle of proportionality may in fact be conducive to the peace process, opening up a space for discussion and interpretation that may stimulate peace talks and negotiation rather than strict deduction and argument (see Franck 2008: 717–718). As much as we would like to present objective arguments based on solid empirical facts, in this case it is not only impossible, it could also be counterproductive, if the goal is peace.

Meanwhile, a commitment to proportionality does not solve the problem entirely, neither for the warring parties nor for intellectual bystanders. Reaching the right conclusion about a proportional response – i.e. a response that ultimately can be recognized as proportional by both sides of the conflict – presupposes knowledge about the details of the situation that we are responding to, i.e., who has inflicted what damage on whom. As mentioned, however, such knowledge is not easily available, even with extensive and meticulous intelligence services. Thus, the problem of determining a proper and proportional response to aggression persists, since there remains a lot of room for judgment. Nonetheless, employing these two overall principles must be part of any attempt to determine the circumstances justifying some forms of warfare but not others.

Conclusion

Whether applying principles of discrimination and proportionality or identifying acts of aggression and defense, we are at the mercy of empirical facts that we cannot establish beyond reasonable doubt. Principles may help us reach a basic orientation, but the mélange of ideology, principles, and facts will continue to haunt any solution reached. For a long time, we have had the privilege of being able to follow Kant in his staunch optimism regarding the potential of a global public sphere to make peace a common project, where the violation of law in one place would be felt all over the world (see Kant 2011: 33 [AA VIII: 360]), but these are times where it is difficult to trust in the effectiveness of the public sphere.

Sad as it may be, it seems unlikely that we will escape war as a large-scale armed conflict in any foreseeable future. This raises normative questions that we must consider, regardless of whether we are citizens of somewhat democratic countries, members of governments, or left-wing intellectuals. Modern philosophers have by and large excused themselves and avoided addressing

the extremely difficult questions that are raised by *jus in bello*, e.g. the detailed discriminatory evaluation of weapons, war, and violence that would enable an affirmative discourse on arms. Of course, the answers are by no means easy, even when pairing, as I did until recently, a criticism of the ideology of just war in the work of Walzer and Rawls with an endorsement of Kant's project of perpetual peace; not even when accepting, as I do now, the uncomfortable move from uncompromising and principled criticism of *jus ad bellum* to affirmative consideration of *jus in bello*.

Ultimately, having established the possibility of just war, we must consider the possibility of a duty to wage a war and to do so in certain ways. This is an idea that I have criticized in strong terms in the work of Rawls (see Sørensen 2015c: 27–28), but as critical theorists and philosophers, I now believe that we have to confront these difficult questions in greater detail; not doing so would be to fail our obligations to society in general and to the brave practitioners of war.

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Asger Sorensen

Ukrajina, ideologija i naoružanje: pomirenje sa teorijom pravednog rata

Apstrakt

Ruska invazija na Ukrajinu dovela je u pitanje ideale mira koji su veoma važni meni i mnogim drugim levičarskim kritički-orijentisanim intelektualcima. Krajem 18. veka, Imanuel Kant je tvrdio da realistički zakon naroda i ideja pravednog rata treba da budu zamenjeni idejom večnog mira; srećom, principijalno suprotstavljanje ratu je institucionalizovano u Ujedinjenim nacijama u 20. veku. Međutim, kada je agresor već zauzeo ogromne delove teritorije, pozivi na mir mogu se dovesti u pitanje kao ideološka pristrasnost. Pravo na odbranu je skoro univerzalno priznato, ali vojna kontraofanziva za ponovno osvajanje izgubljene teritorije nije samo odbrana, već i sama agresija, a time i čin rata. Mnogi od nas, međutim, žele da podrže ovaj napor u Ukrajini, a ono što je zabrinjavajuće je da nas to stavlja na klizav teren, ponovo otvarajući mogućnost opravdavanja rata. Međutim, kao što ću tvrditi, ovo je put kojim moramo ići, prihvatajući i moguće opravdanje rata i moguće opravdanje određenih aktivnosti i naoružanja, ali ne i drugih. Stoga, treba da ozbiljnije shvatimo pravednost rata sa svim specifičnim normativnim izazovima koje to podrazumeva.

Ključne reči: teorija pravednog rata, jus ad bellum, jus in bello, Ka večnom miru, ideologija, naoružanje, proporcionalnost.

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Stipe Buzar

FROM SECESSION TO SUBMISSION: AN ETHICAL FRAMEWORK FOR NON-TERRITORIAL AUTONOMY

ABSTRACT
The purpose of the paper is to ascertain when non-territorial autonomy (NTA) arrangements are a morally appropriate response by states to various minority claims, given possible alternatives. As such, it is not about the relationships between minorities and majorities, but minorities and the state. The two main questions are: (1) What are the criteria of moral appropriateness? (2) When are any of the alternatives morally appropriate? Methodologically speaking, it makes sense to start from the most difficult of the alternatives to justify secession because it represents the most extreme possible claim of a minority towards a state, or even against a state. Once such a criterion or set of criteria is established, the criteria for other alternatives can only be reasonably lower, and the criteria for secession will be indicative of what these lower criteria could be.

KEYWORDS
ethical framework, moral appropriateness, NTA, secession, states, minorities.

1. Introduction

In his interpretation of St. Augustine's views on the relationship between Church and state the famous American international relations scholar John Lewis Gaddis writes that "[...] not all ends are legitimate; not all means are appropriate. Augustine seeks, therefore, to guide choice by respecting choice" (Gaddis 2018: 100). In the present international order, at least as it is presented in its relevant documents, such as the Charter of the United Nations, one of the legitimate ends which can be pursued by peoples is their self-determination. That self-determination is considered a primary right. A group may, however, choose to assert that right in various ways, and existing states might choose to react to those assertions in different ways as well. The main purpose of the paper is to ask when non-territorial autonomy (NTA) arrangements are a morally appropriate response by states to various minority claims, given possible alternatives. As such, it is not about the relationships between minorities and majorities, but minorities and the state.

Stipe Buzar: Associate Professor, Libertas International University; sbuzar@libertas.hr.

When theorizing about possible normative frameworks for NTA, we usually speak of legal or even constitutional arrangements, but the legitimacy of these frameworks can also be developed from an ethical point of view. Legal histories and international law written in Serbo-Croatian are also full of such historical examples, since ancient, medieval and early modern age jurists were philosophers at least as often as they were anything else. Therefore, when mentioning a normative framework, the paper will focus on moral philosophy.

The goal is aligned with the broader goals of the European Non-Territorial Autonomy Network (ENTAN) which are to discuss possibilities and make academic breakthroughs in the field of NTA as an alternative to separatist movements and tendencies which can result in more extreme or robust expressions of minority self-determination, such as territorial autonomy or even secession. The claim of the present paper is that in theorizing about NTA, there remains an intellectual obligation to place them in a larger framework of options or alternatives, from a complete lack of state-minority arrangements to secession. Because of this, one's broader normative framework for NTA does not have to present a simple binary option - either NTA or separatism, but rather needs to be placed in a spectrum of possible alternatives for the relationship between the state and its minority or minorities.

The possible alternatives within the relationship being explored, when it comes to minority rights claims, seem to be:

(1) Secession or revolution
(2) Territorial Autonomy (TA) arrangements
(3) *Non-Territorial autonomy (NTA) arrangements*
(4) Minority arrangements with the state less than NTA[1]
(5) Lack of any arrangement between minorities and the state

The two main questions are:

1. What are the criteria of moral appropriateness? (methodology)
2. When are any of the alternatives morally appropriate? (a typology based on the above mentioned methodological criteria)

Methodologically speaking, it makes sense to start from the most difficult of the alternatives to justify - secession - because it represents the most extreme possible claim of a minority towards a state, or perhaps rather against a state. Once such a criterion or set of criteria is established, the criteria for other alternatives can only be reasonably lower, and the criteria for secession will be indicative of what these lower criteria could be. Following this line of reasoning, the first part of the paper describes the existing mainstream theories

1 This alternative is speculative and is merely meant to enable the conceptualization of situations in which states recognize the existence of minorities at some level but have barely visible or existent NTA arrangements.

about the moral right to secession. After that, the second part of the paper focuses on the lower alternatives, ranging from territorial autonomy to a complete lack of arrangements between minorities and the state.

Within this spectrum, the most important first choice in the first part of the paper is that of an appropriate theory of the moral right to secession. This is because some of these normative theories maintain that it is a primary moral right of certain groups to make a strong self-determining claim to secede from their existing states and create new ones, thus taking away territory from the former. While it might be clear that self-determination is itself a primary right of peoples, it is not clear that asserting that right with a secessionist claim can be regarded in the same way.

As for the second part of the paper, while it questions for possible options, its main focus revolves around placing NTA into its proper place within the spectrum of possible alternatives. Because of this, it is important to define from the outset what kinds of institutions can NTA include. The various types of NTA can, thus, include the following institutions (Goemans 2023: 86):

a) "some kind of language regime, possibly a language right,
b) proportionality in the public administration,
c) a national council that autonomously decides on cultural and educational matters, and
d) some minimal powers, possibly only advisory powers, on matters that are not cultural or educational."

All of these can find moral and political justification in the principles of equality, cultural preservation and group rights, as argued by Goemans (2023). However, while that is informative of what NTA arrangements can entail and how their existence and implementation is justified, it does not place them within a broader spectrum of possibilities for minority self-determination. That is why the paper attempts to place them within a broader framework which takes into account possibilities ranging from secession to a complete lack of autonomy arrangement, aiming to ascertain what the relevant criteria would be for choosing the morally appropriate course of action.

2. Criteria for the Moral Permissibility of Secession

Normative theoretical approaches of the moral right to secede can roughly be divided into two categories (Mladić, Buzar 2015: 229; Buchanan 2007). As put forth by Allan Buchanan (Buchanan 2004, 2007), they fall can be categorized as *Remedial Rights Only Theories* and *Primary Rights Theories*. Since the paper ultimately settles on the remedial rights approach, a short treatment of the primary rights approaches will be provided first, followed by a treatment and arguments in favor of the remedial rights approach.

2.1. Primary Rights Theories

Primary rights theories can be subdivided into ascriptivist or nationalist theories (e.g. Miller 1999, Miller 2003), and plebiscitary theories of the right to secede (e.g. Wellman 2005,Beran 1984).

Ascriptivist or nationalist theorists claim that certain types of groups, because of their common cultural features, i.e. national minorities, have a primary moral right to protect their culture, language, and other defining characteristics, by seceding from their existing states. Most authors, for example Miller, offer relatively strict conditions under which this can occur, but nevertheless maintain that the right to secede is a primary one, meaning that it doesn't have much to do with the treatment a minority is receiving by a state (in terms of NTA or lack thereof).

Ascriptivist theories, as has been stated, are a subgrouping of the theories of the primary right to secession. This means that they do not consider the right to secession to be justified *only* in cases of serious violations of human rights and legally valid contracts between states and minorities, but rather consider certain groups to have the right to secession as a fundamental right to their own self-determination. At the same time, at least in most cases, it is about the right of nations to achieve their own self-determination through their own nation-state. Ascriptivist theories of the primary right to secession are therefore often called nationalist theories.

One of the most famous representatives of this tradition is David Miller. The claim that Miller advocates is "[...] each nation should have its own set of political institutions which allow it to decide collectively those matters that are the primary concern of its members" (Miller 1995: 81). For Miller, a nation is a group of people who perceive themselves as members of a community who have special duties towards each other, and who strive for political autonomy in that community. These special duties and common aspirations are the result of characteristics that the members of a community believe they share, such as a common history, attachment to a certain geographic area, and a culture that distinguishes them from the culture of their neighbors (Miller 2003: 65). Of course, Miller's approach is far more complex than simply attributing the right to secession to any national group in any part of the world. He even concedes to Buchanan that the normative nationalist principle that any group, once proliferating into a nation, should have the right to secede is a recipe for continued political fragmentation (Miller 2003: 62). However, the conditions under which a nation could have the right to secession are not so general that every nation could easily satisfy them or take them lightly. In order for a nation to have the prerequisites for secession, it would have to be a territorially compact majority on a part of the territory of a state ruled by another nation. A more serious analysis of the world map and the national minorities we find on it would show, according to Miller, that we find such cases less often than we would think.

The conditions which Miller considers essential for the justification of the secessionist demands of nations are the following (Miller 1995: 113–114; Rosůlek 2011: 123–124):

- “The national identity of A is clearly distinct from the national identity of B, and the national identity of A cannot be developed and protected within the framework of the limited autonomy provided by B.
- The territory claimed by A cannot be inhabited by a third group C, whose identity is so incompatible with A that this would result in discriminatory action on the part of A.
- The part of minority group A that remains within group B’s new territory after secession must not therefore be vulnerable to attacks by group B.
- Group A must have good arguments for taking a piece of territory from group B, i.e. there must be a clear connection between group A’s historical identity and the territory they want to take over.
- Finally, the secessionist group A and the majority group B must have enough resources left after secession so that both new states are able to implement distributive justice in their territories.”

Furthermore, Miller strongly emphasizes the distinction between a nation and an ethnic group, insisting that not all ethnic groups are nations and that a strong right to self-determination cannot be accorded uniformly to every cultural and ethnic group in the world. Finally, precisely because of the problems that secessionist movements often cause, Miller himself suggests that the self-determination of nations can often be achieved within the framework of other democratic options, such as federal arrangements, etc. (Rosůlek 2011: 124).

Here, of course, our task is not to evaluate which of the mentioned normative approaches to the issue of secession would be the best solution. However, although the reality of secession is as complex and destabilizing as Buchanan tells us, and we tend to accept the right to secession mainly as a remedial right, one thing should be clear. Namely, if Miller’s definition of the nation is at all correct and if the very essence of the nation includes the common aspiration for political autonomy, then any attempt to deprive a nation of its right to that autonomy is, in a sense, unnatural. Such attempts are at least as destabilizing as secession itself.

Plebiscitary theories go further, as their proponents such as Christopher Wellman and Harry Beran believe that secession from a liberal-democratic state is a matter of plebiscite, and not even connected to groups *as* ethnic or national groups. Any group of people, if they are a majority in a part of a state’s territory, have a primary moral right to secede if they choose to do so. There are of course some fundamental and technical conditions that need to be met, but the main point is that secession is a primary right.

Like ascriptivist theories, plebiscitary theories also belong to the category of theories of the primary right to secession. However, their proponents believe that secession is legitimate simply if the majority population of a territory has a desire for secession. There are no other conditions, such as violation of human rights or unjustly confiscated territory, that this majority group would have to satisfy, and the secessionist group does not have to be culturally

defined, nor does it have to have a special historical connection with the territory or any other type of argument for the territory which they wish to claim for themselves (Norman 2003: 37).

In other words, the plebiscite theory promotes the position that any group of people, with a place of residence in a certain part of the territory of a state, has the right to secession without a special agreement with the state from which it wants to secede. In other words, secession is morally justified and without any legal basis for such an act in the constitution of the country from which they want to secede, and no country, including their home country, has the right to interfere and prevent their attempt to create a new (legitimate and recognized) country on part of the old territory. The only condition that must be met is the gathering of a sufficient number of votes for secession. If a sufficient number of votes are collected, then the right to secession for the group in question is a primary right and should not be denied (Norman 2003: 37).

The plebiscitary approach seems intuitively in line with democratic values such as freedom of decision making and the power of the majority vote. It seems to us that the recognition of this theory in international law would allow a sufficient amount of freedom for people to decide their own political destinies. Plebiscitary theories are based on the notion of a liberal state and a liberal society, which focus on the rights of the individual, which in the liberal tradition represents the highest value, and any violation of individual rights belongs to the category of the highest violations of the moral and legal order that we can imagine. Therefore, the restrictions that the state can place on an individual or a group of individuals who agree on a principle or on a decision are really minimal. Any critique of this view would have to be addressed either to the liberal concept of the state, or it should show that the liberal concept of the state does not support plebiscitary theories of secession (Mladić, Buzar 2015: 223).

Christopher Wellman's plebiscitary theory, for example, considers that for every group in a liberal-democratic state there is a primary plebiscitary moral right to secession "[...] as long as its political divorce will leave it and the remainder state in a position to perform the requisite political functions" (Wellman 2005: 1). Another condition is that the newly created state should not be less liberal in its constitution than the state from which it seceded (Wellman 2005: 1). Although any realistic conditions for the aforementioned necessary political functions would be a matter of great debate and the arguments would often be manipulated in one way by the secessionists, and in another by the state that claims the piece of territory in question,

Beran's starting point for the defense of the plebiscitary theory is the following: if it is just to kill a tyrant in a revolution, then an attempt at secession from a tyrant should also be considered just. However, a group that needs or wants to carry out secession does not have to be characterized by a national character, nor by any other ascribed character. It is enough that the group in question wants to secede. According to him, "[...] any territorially concentrated group is a potential candidate for permissible secession" (Beran 1984: 29). Namely, if peoples in democratic countries have the right to such radical

moves as changes to the constitution and basic laws of a country, then they also have the right to change that character in a territorial sense, i.e. by attempting secession. Therefore, there does not have to be a national body on a piece of territory that is different from other national bodies on the rest of the state's territory, and there is no need for wrongdoing that would have to serve as a basis for the remedial right to secession. Likewise, we can easily imagine secession in its plebiscitary form at smaller federal and local levels, and ultimately even at the individual level.

> The theory can be applied to the part of Northern California that wants to secede from California, or to a southern portion of New Jersey, which wants to break away from New Jersey, or to Staten Island, which wants to secede from New York City. Theoretically, the theory can be applied to a single individual or household. In principle, there are no lower limits, although [one] would say there are technical considerations that preclude secession at the individual level. (McGee 1994: 11)

According to Beran:

> [...] the people have sovereignty. Is this sovereignty a collective attribute of all the citizens of an existing state or can some of them exercise their share of sovereignty by setting themselves up as an independent state? Majority rule is claimed to be an essential part of democracy. But is majority rule morally legitimate if a territorially concentrated minority does not acknowledge the unity of the state?' According to liberalism, freedom is the greatest political good. Does this imply a freedom to secede? (1984: 22)

From the standpoint of remedial rights only theory and ascriptivist theory, the answer is no. Beran's answer is that, based on the belief that a plebiscitary approach to secession belongs to the essence of democracy as a form of popular majority rule, a concentrated territorial majority, meaning a minority with respect to the entire state's territory, but a majority on a disputed piece of territory, has the right to all forms of self-determination, including the most radical.

2.2. Remedial Rights Only Theories

Neither of the primary rights approaches seems appropriate as a starting point for a framework within which NTA could play a significant theoretical or practical role. With nationalist theories as a theoretical starting point, NTA would be more of a milestone in a minority group's *cursus honorum*, a building block for future growth towards stronger separatist claims. With plebiscitary theories there is no relevant connection, since groups which could not identify certain common traits in the way national minorities do, would never consider, need, or be able to make use of NTA.

The theorists of the remedial right to secession, and here with the emphasis on Buchanan, stand out among the moral theorists of secession as the group least willing to grant any group the right to secession, and they emphasize morally

the legitimate interest states to maintain their territorial integrity (Rosůlek 2011: 122). These interests, Buchanan believes, ultimately serve individuals and support their basic freedoms as individuals, because the recognition and protection of the territorial integrity of states in international law exists precisely in order to provide for the protection and support of individuals. Behind this is the belief that the territorial stability of the state is essential for the general stability that provides individuals with security and an environment in which they can develop their freedoms. Territorial instability would render states ineffective in protecting their populations. Namely, effective and just states are able to (a) implement a functional legal system, (b) protect the physical security of both individuals and groups, (c) protect their rights, and (d) enable citizens the right to active participation in political processes (Rosůlek 2011: 122). This is precisely why theorists of the remedial right to secession emphasize the importance of respecting the territorial integrity of existing states.

Remedial rights only theories generally consider that the right to unilateral secession is acquired only by those groups that have experienced and continue to experience constant and severe injustices and violations of basic human rights within the borders of an existing state. This right is analogous to the right to revolution as understood in liberal political theories. Revolution aims to overthrow the government, while secession aims to separate part of the territory from the control of the state which claims that territory. In that case, the basis for the right to secession exists in cases of (Buchanan 2004: 351–352):

(a) genocide and massive violations of fundamental human rights,
(b) unjust annexation of territories, and
(c) constant violation of intrastate treaties on autonomy by the state.

“A more austere Remedial Right Only Theory would recognize only (a), persistent, large-scale violations of basic human rights (in the most extreme case, genocide or other mass killings) as sufficient to justify unilateral secession” (Buchanan 2021).

In short, if a state does not commit the above acts, then we can consider it a just state, or at least a minimally just state. Remedial rights only theorists would not allow secession from such a state. Of course, this does not have to apply only to liberal states with liberal societies. Many may object to Buchanan that his conditions for a just state do not meet the conditions of a just society because there is no mention anywhere of the equal right of all citizens to participate in political processes, the rights of minorities, etc. However, if one considers the importance and weight of the secessionist’s territorial claim (Brilmayer 1991), then remedial rights only theorists can suggest to vulnerable groups that there are various forms of self-determination that are not as radical as secession. This refers to the various forms of intrastate autonomy that many provinces in the world possess, which enable them certain freedoms and rights that they would not have without the status of autonomous provinces. Furthermore, if the state within which some group attains a certain level of

autonomy persistently violates the autonomy agreements that have been passed, then according to the remedial rights only theory there is already a moral right to secession. In short, remedial rights only theories are not against secession *per se*, nor are they against the spread of liberal values and the acceptance of liberal constitutions and laws in the countries of the world, but it is very skeptical of secessionist movements within states that do not fall into any of the three categories mentioned above (a, b, c). So, groups that are for any reason (beyond the three reasons mentioned above) dissatisfied with their status in the state in which they abide, are still free to fight for other, less radical forms of self-determination.

It should be pointed out that the philosophical discussion between the primary and remedial rights only theories is not settled, nor does it need to be for the present purpose. The important point for this paper is that if NTA is to be discussed in a broader ethical framework, then it seems to make sense that the discussion takes place in view of the remedial rights only approach, given that both advocates of NTA and remedial rights only theories are skeptical of separatist movements. Alternatively, there are grounds for considering the relationship between nationalist theories and NTA in those situations when Miller's conditions for secession are not met and other modes of self-determination need to be explored. The difference is, however, that nationalist theories seem to view secession as the ideal course of action which, unfortunately, cannot take place unless certain conditions are met, which is often the case. On the other hand, remedial rights only theories do not view secession as an ideal, though often unattainable solution, but as a last resort for peoples who are unable to guarantee for their self-determination in any other way. The two theoretical approaches reflect very differently on NTA, because for nationalists it may be a last resort, while for remedialists it is a first resort. That is why anyone interested in seriously exploring and advocating NTA should take a remedialist-only position to the question about the moral right to secession.

3. Moral Criteria for NTA and Other Forms of Self-determination Short of Secession

Once remedial rights only theories are accepted as providing adequate criteria for morally permissible secession, the moral criteria for less radical types of self-determination can be reasonably lower. In that case, territorial autonomy (TA) arrangements can be viewed as morally appropriate when secession is not warranted according to remedial rights only theories, but when the next alternative (NTA) would not function, given specific minority needs in a specific part of the state's territory.

> Instances of NTA are part of the broader category of autonomy arrangements and, as such, illustrate the logic of power-sharing. [...] The power, which is divided and shared, belongs to the state, the beneficiary of the arrangement is a sub-state actor. [...] Thus, the two main actors of any autonomy arrangement

> are the state, on the one hand, and the autonomous entity, on the other hand. The distribution of state power can be done on [a] territorial or non-territorial basis, which means that the sub-state actor endowed with certain functions otherwise exercised by the state can be a part of the country's territory, a geographical unit equipped with a special status (TA), or an institution resulting from laborious procedures initiated by members of a certain category of the state's population, regardless of their residence (NTA) (Salat 2023: 2–3).

A minority group can opt for some form of TA only when they are a majority in a certain part of the existing state's territory. Also, such an arrangement should require a plebiscitary decision made by the entire population, not only by members of the minority group, within the part of the territory of the state to which some form of TA would be granted by the state. In states which are federally or co-federally arranged such forms of TA would be available to populations even regardless of minority status, as they generally are available in federal and co-federal states, but the important point here is that such state arrangements allow for high levels of exercising self-determination rights without the need for secession or separatist tendencies altogether. Whether all federal and co-federal arrangements are roughly equally conducive to such exercise of self-determination rights, is an important question, but beside the point of this paper.

TA arrangements can be considered as morally permissible and appropriate when the above conditions are met, but they by no means have to be considered as *a priori* necessary. If a minority group's desired goals of self-determination can be achieved with non-territorial means, then they may (though not necessarily should) be achieved with non-territorial means. Such means involve NTA arrangements, which is the central point of this paper. Also, when the criterion of a minority being a majority in a particular part of the territory is not met, then NTA are again morally permissible and appropriate. Additional reasons for advocating NTA arrangements is that in allowing for the exercise of self-determination rights they relevantly increase the standing of minority rights nationally and internationally (Vizi 2023), and they are a relevant democratization tool (Smith 2023).

Cases where the institutional arrangements between the state and a minority are lesser than NTA or there is a complete lack of any arrangement can be considered as morally appropriate when there are no recognized minorities, either because no one is identifying as a minority or because a democratic state functions based solely on a civic conception of nationality. All other cases would probably imply that the state is suppressing minorities' rights to self-determination in which case a lack of NTA would not be morally appropriate. If this suppression were to include mass violations of basic human rights, then in such cases minorities would be morally justified in attempting more radical forms of self-determination such as TA or secession. In cases in which they did not constitute a majority in a part of such a state's territory, which would prevent them from opting for TA or secession, they would be morally justified in, *ceteris paribus*, attempting a revolution, although one imagines

that it would have to be preceded by a number of attempts to first gain international assistance in bettering their status. Namely, the moral criteria for secession and revolution from a remedial rights only perspective are the same.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, it should be said that the ethical framework for NTA arrangements, which attempts to view NTA within a broader spectrum of possibilities, ranging from secession to a complete lack of any arrangement, is far from finished in a variety of details. However, the paper does provide a broad preliminary sketch of the possibilities, and by doing so it allows for a moral assessment of NTA from a broader ethical perspective. The paper focused heavily on the theories of the moral right to secession, because secession is the most radical form of self-determination for which a minority population can opt, and as such represents the most difficult of all the options to justify. Viewed from that perspective, NTA seems doubly justified and morally appropriate, both for the reasons stated by authors such as Goemans (2023) and for the reasons explored in this paper. The reason why such a perspective is important is because a large number of minorities worldwide consider secession as their best and only option for self-determination, which might well be the case in a number of non-democratic states, while the paper emphasizes that other types of institutional self-determination, such as NTA, are often times not only more practicable, but more morally justified.

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Stipe Buzar

Od secesije do podčinjenosti: Etički okvir za neteritorijalnu autonomiju

Apstrakt

Svrha ovog rada je da se utvrdi kada je neteritorijalna autonomija (NTA) moralno primeren odgovor država na različite zahteve manjina, s obzirom na moguće alternative. Kao takva, svrha se ne tiče odnosa manjinskih i većinskih populacija, nego manjinskih populacija i države. Dva su osnovna pitanja: (1) Koji su kriteriji moralne primerenosti? (2) Kada je neka od alternativa moralno primerena? Metodološki gledano, ima smisla krenuti od alternative koju je najteže opravdati – secesije – jer ona predstavlja najekstremniji mogući zahtev jedne manjine prema državi, ili pak i protiv države. Nakon što se uspostavi takav kriterijum ili skup kriterijuma, kriterijumi za druge alternative mogu biti samo razumno niži, a kriterijumi za secesiju će biti indikativni za to koji bi ti niži kriteriji mogli biti.

Ključne reči: etički okvir, moralna primerenost, NTA, secesija, države, manjine.

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Mladen Lazić, Jelena Pešić

VALUES, NORMS AND SOCIAL DYNAMICS

ABSTRACT
The aim of this paper is to offer a distinct approach to the theoretical conceptualization of values and norms, as well as their relationship to one another. This approach views values as a factor that can hinder the integration of the existing order and potentially contribute to a crisis of its reproduction. The relationship between values and norms is defined as potentially asymmetrical. The concept of normative-value dissonance is derived from this asymmetry, indicating the dynamic character of relations between changes to the dominant system of social reproduction and changes to the order of values and norms. Normative-value dissonance can further be broken down into systemic normative-value dissonance, which occurs when the value and normative order are not harmonized due to changes of the system of social relations as a whole, and intrasystemic, which occurs due to changes in the dominant social order, without changes to the foundations on which it is based.

KEYWORDS
values, norms, normative-value dissonance, dominant and alternative values, central and peripheral values and norms.

Introduction

Building on the existing literature on values, the primary aim of this paper is to provide a new perspective on the role of values in society, specifically on the interplay of values and norms and the interplay's possible outcomes for the process of social integration. While some of the most influential theoretical approaches in this area have focused on the issue of social system integration and the question of how values contribute to this integration (for example, Parsons & Shils 1962), this approach seeks to move in the opposite direction primarily by striving to show how values can hinder integration and lead to crises of reproduction of existing dominant social relations or otherwise contribute to such crises. Further, while contemporary, mostly socio-psychological or psychological approaches typically rest on nominalist foundations and therefore necessarily develop concepts on the basis of assumed characteristics of 'human nature' (as is the case with Inglehart's materialist and postmaterialist

Mladen Lazić: Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade; bigalazi@eunet.rs.
Jelena Pešić: Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade; jlpesic@f.bg.ac.rs.

values, based on human needs as defined by Maslow[1], or Schwartz's ten basic value-types[2]), we analyze values as primarily founded on the dominant social system. We will show that this system represents the framework in which values are first formed and changed before they themselves contribute to the shaping and changing (or stagnation) of the system.

In mainstream approaches values appear principally as reflections of economic, political and cultural processes (dominant social relations, advancing processes of modernization and similar; for examples, see Lipset 1965, Almond & Verba 1980, Parsons 2005, Hofstede et al. 2020, Inglehart & Baker 2000, Inglehart & Welzel 2005, Welzel & Inglehart 2010); alternately, within contemporary dominant nominalist theoretical perspectives, they are patterns of socially desirable thoughts or actions adopted by individuals or groups (Inglehart 1997, Chong 2000, Schwartz 2012). Our analysis will, in contrast, center on values as historically dynamic phenomena.

Initial Conceptual Definitions

Irrespective of significant differences in the interpretation of this phenomenon, typical approaches in sociological analysis of values share a joint – and for the social relations within which they are analyzed, 'positive' – socially integrative aspect as a starting point: the role values play in sustaining a given social order. This applies to Weber's (1978) understanding of the role of values in legitimizing those in power and the order as a whole, as much as for a whole slew of analyses derived from it (for example, from Parsons and other functionalist sociologists to contemporary thinkers such as Inglehart). Situated within the same framework, and related to the concept of values, is Marx's (1977) understanding of the role of ideology in sustaining existing systems of social domination, as is, following in these footsteps, Gramsci's (1978) position on cultural hegemony as one of the pillars of the ruling order.[3]

The first approach rests on the assumption of a voluntary establishment of consensus on the acceptability or desirability of a given social order, which is formed, for example, on the basis of culturally defined choices under conditions of social competition. Meanwhile, the second approach starts with the hypothesis of a forced establishment of social consent, on the basis of normatively regulated physical coercion by the repressive apparatus of the state, as well as the 'invisible' imposition of the prevailing worldview through processes of socialization – within the family, education system, ecclesiastical institutions

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1 Inglehart (1997), Inglehart & Welzel (2010). For a more detailed critique of Inglehart's approach, see: Haller (2002).

2 Schwartz (1994, 2006, 2012). Also, it is certainly worth mentioning the recent texts by Martin & Lembo (2020) and Miles (2015), although we will not deal in detail with the views that are typical of the socio-psychological approach.

3 For more on approaches to and definitions of values in the social sciences, as well as research practices prior to the 1980s, together with extensive bibliographical data, see: Spates (1983). For new approaches and research, see: Thome (2015) or Chong (2000).

and the hegemony of informational systems and similar. Nevertheless, in both approaches the emphasis is on the assumption that the value system stabilizes the given order and, by presenting them as universally desirable, dictates the socially acceptable forms of thought and action. In both variants of this general framework, viewed from our perspective, the analysis of values emerges as an approach that is restricted to the framework of 'social statics': values represent an element that, by ensuring social integration within the framework of given social relations, facilitates stable reproduction and, ultimately, the stability or immutability of the dominant social order.

In contrast, the approach developed in this paper shifts the debate to a different plane, to issues primarily pertaining to 'social dynamics'. By which we mean social processes that emerge in circumstances where the values accepted by a large number of individuals – or, more importantly, social groups – undermine/impede the existing order or, on the other hand, hinder a new order establishing itself or taking root, by destabilizing the emergent dominant social relations. The starting point of this approach is, therefore, an understanding of historicity, in the sense of the longevity, instability and mutability (including dissolution), of every form of the production of social life. Of course, the alterability of the system of values is derived from the mutability of the means of social production, tied in with the current, preceding or potential/emergent system of social relations. In other words, our approach challenges those viewpoints that assume that the "normal" functioning of the social order is determined by the harmony between the conditions of reproduction of the system and its legitimation (whether this harmony is achieved through non-repressive or repressive means); on the contrary, we argue that the reproduction of the order constantly encounters various obstacles, resulting in the lack of complete alignment between the conditions of reproduction and the legitimation framework.

Studying the interaction between values, norms and social dynamics can involve different levels of analysis. The first level is trans-historical or trans-systemic, and refers to the conditions necessary for the reproduction of any system; the second level is systemic, it specifies conditions of social dynamics, i.e., systemic changes; finally, at the third level, the analysis incorporates the actor dimension, i.e., the way in which values are translated into concrete guidelines for the behavior of individuals and social groups.

At the highest analytical level, values can be understood as ideals, in Durkheim's sense, as set or a system of ideas (Durkheim 2010: 47, Peristiany 2010: xxi) or transfigurations that go beyond the reality to which they relate, that is, as a kind of "enriched reality" that does not refer solely to factual or possible state, but involves the idea of what is derisible (Durkheim 2010: 50, Karsenti 2012: 34). However, unlike Durkheim, in our understanding, they are not collective forces that have their own existence (Durkheim 2010: 49), independent from the underlying structures (Bottomore 1981: 909). On the contrary, we understand values as derived from material reality, that is, from the structures that form basic social relations. Bearing this in mind, it should be

noted that some of the fundamental values, which are necessary for the preservation of the social community, are usually formulated abstractly. In order to be able to regulate systems in which growing differentiation occurs, they contain a minimal reference to the concrete contents of social reality, they are more encompassing, referable to a whole range of different situations (Pusić 1977: 22–25). We refer to them as to trans-historical (or trans-systemic) values, since they transcend particular historical systems (Lazić & Pešić 2013, 2019; see also: Altiser 1971). The necessity of establishment of these fundamental, trans-historic values lays in the fact that the very notion of human social life ('ontologically') presupposes a certain relatively long-lasting regulation of interpersonal relations, which ensures the survival of a given community (for example, see: Feldman Hall et al. 2018). This regulation can take place in two ways: coercively (through imposed norms that include punishment of transgressions), and voluntarily (ensured in various ways through acceptance as desirable of encountered/created patterns of thought and action – i.e., values).

Analytically, we can distinguish trans-historic (or trans-systemic) from systemic values that emanate from the dominant system of social relations (Pešić 2017), although empirical demarcation is not always clear or possible, since the legitimation of historically specific orders is often sought to be expressed precisely through universal value patterns (Lazić & Pešić 2013, 2019). Given that ruling social relations are in principle conflicting, in this understanding of values they are closer to Gramsci's accounts of "organic ideology" (Gramsci 1978), a common world-view, established by the ruling classes, as emanations of their particular interests which legitimize the conditions of their own reproduction, being, at the same time, imposed (through coercion and consensus) as common and desirable. Within the mainstream functionalist approaches, understanding of the prime function of values is to achieve social integration (for example: Parsons & Shils 1962, Durkheim 2005). However, what is, as a rule, omitted from these analyses of values (with the exception of those rare cases that belong to conflict approaches) is that the primary origin of the need to achieve social integration, and the difficulties of its realization, lie in the fact that in most social orders, the fundamental social relations have been based on deep social division – i.e. on the inequitable distribution of economic, organizational and cultural resources (for example, see: Marx 1995, Weber 1964, Dahrendorf 1959, Lenski 1966, and Bourdieu 1986). These inequities lead to discordant interests of various social groups and, therefore, their lasting manifest and latent conflict.

In addition to this understanding of values at the higher analytical levels, as ideals, worldviews or ideologies that stem from the need to preserve social community as such or dominant system of social relations, at the lower analytical level, values appear as internalized aspects of individual or group consciousness that direct thoughts and actions. Therefore, values can further be specified as voluntarily accepted (according to the legitimizing mainstream approach) and/or – through various instruments of state coercion, socializing mechanisms, mass media and similar – imposed (according to the critical

approach) patterns of desirable thought and actions for individuals and social groups, which ensure social integration as a necessary precondition for the sustenance (reproduction) of the social order.[4] This definition neglects, at first glance, the most basic property of social life – its aforementioned historicity. Of course, on the other hand, by emphasizing how necessary it is for the sustenance of prevalent (conflicting) relations to voluntarily adopt/impose certain patterns of thought and action, this implicitly introduces assumptions about potentially destabilizing or, for the order itself, destructive tendencies within those relations.

When it comes to the notion of norms, here the definition also varies widely (see: Chong 2000 or Thome 2015), but commonly includes a stipulation indicating that punishment is the basis of social demands for compliance. Thus, again in the most general terms (so as to 'reconcile' differing approaches), *norms can be defined as prescribed patterns of behaviors (actions) that various social institutions impose on community members by providing for or imposing certain sanctions* (see, for example: Elder-Vass 2010). Of course, given the highly diverse sources of norms, the sanctions supporting them are also appropriately diversified (from judicial rulings, to ad hoc disapproval of certain actions, such as entry into a certain public space without a tie or, simply, public shaming).

The Interplay of Values and Norms

At this point the following question clearly arises: what is the key difference between norms and values and can this difference be reduced only to the existence and/or absence of sanctions? Indeed, it is not hard to see that this distinction gives rise to another – the existence of more or less formalized institutional 'support' for the normative system. Therefore, as we have seen and as is implied by the abovementioned differences, norms are in principle limited to regulating behavior, that is actions, since only actions can be formally sanctioned. Meanwhile, the scope of value regulation is somewhat broader and includes the views and beliefs of society's members. This further means that, in principle, the normative order acts explicitly and externally (most often through the existence of institutions that prescribe norms and sanction their violation). The value order, on the other hand, much more commonly appears implicitly and is 'internalized' (seemingly as the product of freely made decisions by individuals or groups). In order to provide a solid argument regarding separation between norms and values, we refer to Durkheim's distinction between formal (legal) norms and morality, which, although being a "species of single genus," differ on the basis of the sanctions that accompany them, organized in the first case and diffuse in the latter (Karsenti, 2012). In the case

4 Of course, it is clear that with this definition we want to include those values that refer to desired visions of social reality, leaving aside basic human values as defined by psychologists (Kluckhohn & Strodtback 1961, Rokeach 1979, Hofstede et al. 2010, Schwartz 2012).

of a violation of institutionalized norms, the sanction represents a reaction to the fact that the rule was violated (although the sanction itself does not say anything about the act itself), while in the case of morality, the idea of the sanction that represents the basis of the obligation to act in a certain way is combined with an internalized, socially conditioned, desire to act in that way (Durkheim 2010: 20–21).

Therefore, on the general (abstract) level, the two regulatory forms – values and norms – can engage in different relationships: the domains of social life that these forms cover largely, though not completely, overlap while the relationship between them is not completely symmetrical. In most cases, norms and values directly 'support' each other, in a manner that cuts both ways. The sacrosanct nature of private property, as a foundational value on which the social relations in capitalism, for example, are based, is supported by the normative order through legal penalties for theft and similar acts; but the same relationship can also be expressed in reverse: respect for norms is reinforced through the acceptance of corresponding values. Conversely, on the other hand, in certain circumstances, norms can stand in direct opposition to widely accepted values. Typical example here being the unsanctioned killing of indigenous people by the colonizers in the South America, implemented in contravention of the civilizational and, in the contemporary world, ubiquitous, universal value of the right to life. Additionally, norms can (in principle, only temporarily) be significantly out of step with values. So, the standardized plunder of the private property of an internationally and indeterminately defined 'enemy' can, in times of war or in various 'extraordinary' circumstances, remain unsanctioned. Furthermore, there are cases in which the relationship between values and norms is distant and indirect. Wanton squandering of one's own property is, for example, not penalized though it does go against certain widely held values, such as under Protestant asceticism during the initial period of accelerated accumulation of capital discussed by Weber (2010). However, deliberate destruction of one's own property can face sanction, for example, if a general social danger is attributed to it. Finally, some values, in various historical circumstances, can lie entirely beyond the normative framework. Such as, for example, those regulating emotional relations.

When it comes to the partial asymmetry of the relationship between norms and values, it should be emphasized that sustaining the normative order is made more difficult if it is not supported by corresponding values. Governing relations exclusively on the basis of coercion/penalization, without at least partially securing the support of widely accepted values, will inevitably lead to a crisis of the order. On the other hand, some values can persist for a very long time, whether for an individual or a group, even when they are not supported by the existing normative framework and can even stand in opposition to it (for example, patriarchal patterns of thought and behavior persist in many societies for decades after the introduction of legal norms that affirm gender equality).

There is no doubt, therefore, that consolidation of the principles on which the reproduction of a given social order (of fundamental social relations) rests,

inevitably implies the establishment of an appropriate normative order and imposes ever greater harmonization of norms and values. However, at the same time, it should be stressed that with the 'distancing' of some area of social life away from these fundamental relations (which define the order), the relationship between norms and values can become ever looser, to the point that parts of these two regulating forms can experience a high degree of separation/inconsistency.

The Social Order, Values and Norms: Dominant and Alternative, Central and Peripheral Value and Normative Systems

The historical character of social orders (systemic changes of social relations, as well as changes to intrasystemic relations) indicates that the introduction of additional distinctions to the analysis of values and norms is necessary. Specifically, a distinction must be introduced between dominant and alternative values, on the one hand, and between central and peripheral values, on the other – and this must also apply to the normative system.

Differentiating dominant and alternative values is founded on the fact that in every social order, in addition to the social groups that establish the relations that will define the order, there are also large social groups (social strata or classes) that are remnants of a preceding order, or groups capable of establishing a new order in the future, that enter into various relationships with the fundamental classes (or strata). In other words, a distinction must be made between dominant social relations, in which the relations that define the system are reproduced, and other relations that are in various ways connected to those dominant relations.[5] In a capitalist order, for example, the economic relations that sustain the primary role of the profit-orientated universalizing market economy – i.e., commodity production, pluralist political representation of the special interests of large social groups, the right to have these interests discursively presented in public, with the aim of mobilizing consent for the maintenance of the order (via the protection of the interests of privileged groups) – can be understood (in an ideal-typical formulation) as dominant social relations. Elements of other orders that differ (deviate) from these dominant relations to varying degrees can function alongside them, subordinated to them, in every social subsystem (in capitalism, for example, these might include limited slavery, autocratic political regimes, press censorship,

5 Of course, here we do not imply that all people necessarily accept values that are dominant within a specific system. Both at the systemic and at the individual level, values can, to a greater or lesser extent, be mutually inconsistent. This inconsistency, as we will show later, partially results from systemic and intra-systemic changes, which generate discrepancy between value and normative orders. In addition, dominant value system implies the parallel existence of one or more alternative value orders, which on an individual level leads to a whole series of possible outcomes, from complete conformity to dominant values, through partial acceptance, to complete rejection (see, for example: Merton 1938).

patriarchal patterns of thought and behavior, etc.). Within the framework of these relations, which can be defined as alternatives to the dominant relations, the corresponding values form and reproduce. Additionally, various values can survive long after a change to the fundamental social relations within which they formed. In other words, in addition to the dominant value system, a given social order will also contain elements of other value systems, which are historically shaped and have a tendency to be sustained by 'inertia'.

These factors – the historical, trans-systemic 'transfer' of values, the hybrid nature of every concrete historical social order (the presence of elements of other, earlier or alternative/potential orders), as well as the existence of social groups with different structural positions, interests and, subsequently, values – indicate that any analysis thereof must make a distinction between the dominant value system of a given order and its alternative value systems. Moreover, this distinction is relevant to analysis of values at the level of the social order but not of individual value orientations, the 'hierarchy' of which may indeed be reversed. The values that guide the thoughts and actions of individuals may be opposed to the dominant value system, where these individual deviations are always in the minority when compared with the typical patterns of thought and action in the given order.

On the other hand, it is clear that not all social relations on which a social order is founded, as is the dominant value order, are of equal importance for its reproduction. Therefore, the values that regulate reproduction of the fundamental characteristics of the order will be termed central values, while those that regulate the reproduction of less significant elements of the order will be termed peripheral (for example, patriarchal patterns, which are sustained within contemporary capitalism not only within the family environment but also in work environments).

A somewhat different situation is to be found when it comes to the normative order. Its regulatory role is founded on its binding (coercive, sanction-based) nature, hence elements of alternative normative orders cannot, in principle, be reproduced. This is not the case with inter-system regulation, where there is a distinction between norms that protect relations that are key to the reproduction of the order and those that regulate relations that are of lesser significance for its reproduction. Thus, in normative orders a distinction can be made only between the central and the peripheral. Central norms are the principles that are vital for the reproduction of dominant relations – these are, as a rule, regulated by formal and institutional sanctions (organized, legal, systemic, normative) and on which the central normative order is founded. Meanwhile, the series of norms that regulate relations (actions) that do not intrude upon dominant relations can be designated as the peripheral normative order.

Those norms, and also values, that ensure the survival of a given social order – by regulating desired patterns of thought and action in various of the order's subsystems and in alignment to the needs of its reproduction – demonstrate a tendency towards mutual consistency (although it may never be fully

achieved)[6]. It is precisely such harmonized values and norms, which 'cover' the entire functioning of a given order, that will be termed the dominant (and also central) value or normative system. In other words, at the most abstract analytical level, the dominant (and central) normative and value system, represents the totality of norms and values that ensure the unhindered self-reproduction of the order as a specific type of social relations.

Given the question at the root of this discussion – about the role of values in maintaining/undermining the existing, or consolidating the emerging/potential social order – it is clear that the key role in this social dynamic is played by the relationship between the norms and values that are established within dominant social relations. Therefore, further discussion will be limited to norms and values designated as the dominant and central normative and value system.

Finally, given their significance for sustaining/reproducing a social order, values and norms that are tied to the central field of social relations (the central normative and value system), as a rule, are imposed 'globally', primarily among the bearers of basic social relations, that is the larger social groups (classes or strata). As we move away from the central field, the imposition/acceptance of norms and values is increasingly ceded to narrower groups and individual actors. The mechanisms of global system regulation are structural: existing central norms and values are presented as a natural fact of life, in the same way as the ecological sphere (water, air, food and so forth). The unhindered reproduction of the order evidences that the large social groups view this as legitimate, in other words that they accept the central values, reducing the need for normative regulation and increasing value variations among narrower groups and individuals (which can create the illusion of greater individual freedom to accept various values). The spread of alternative values that call into question the existing order, and in so doing hinder or jeopardize its reproduction, results in the intensification of the mechanisms that impose central values, at first through the strengthening of the normative system that 'supports' the values in question, then through other mobilization and socialization mechanisms.

Of course, historically, the relationship between norms and values (both central and alternative and/or peripheral), and the forms of their 'overlap' and symmetry or asymmetry, is variable. It may be stated that the strengthening of a consensus on values (broader and deeper acceptance of dominant, central values) in a social community reduces the need for normative regulation (as in the case of Durkheim's concept of morality). Conversely, the spread of normative forms of regulation into areas where a value consensus previously prevailed, indicates difficulties in reproducing social relations, which is manifested through a decline in the acceptance of certain values. As an example of

6 Here, we should note that tendency towards establishing consistency between values and norms is necessary in order for the system to reproduce stably. However, it is almost always accompanied by the efforts of various factors (individual actors, groups, social relations, institutions, etc.) to legitimize discordant values. The normative system here "assists" in maintaining consistency, but cannot always maintain it.

this, we can mention increased restrictions on market-based financial dealings that had previously been regulated only through 'business practices' in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis (Krugman 2008, 2020; Stiglitz 2019), or 'emergent Keynesianism' policies that governments around the world were resorting to during the COVID pandemic induced crisis (Šumonja 2020).

At the end of this section a few additional remarks should be added to the problem of determining the relationship between changes to the social order and value and normative changes. When it comes to norms, the tendency is clear: the central normative system undergoes change as a consequence of changes to the order. Actors who occupy dominant social positions establish and maintain this system, which (on the basis of direct repressive apparatus and through 'tacit' assistance from the central value system) enables them to reproduce their status (the normative order in capitalism supports all fundamental relations necessary for the reproduction of capital but it is clear that capitalist relations are not a consequence/effect of the previously extant normative system). Only when elements of a new social order prevail, when emergent dominant groups establish control over the fundamental social resources, can they impose a central normative order that is supportive of their specific group interests on the society as a whole. The new central normative order then ensures the consolidation of fundamental social relations and the normative order on the surface appears as the basis from which prevailing social relations 'emanate'.

The relationship between the social order and central value system is more complex. Specifically, elements of a different (alternative) order begin to crystallize within a particular order over time and for various reasons, whether internal and/or external. This is, along with greater or lesser internal changes, the basis for the historical nature (transience) of existing social relations. A look at, for example, European society since the fifteenth century, reveals how, gradually, with the development of trade, transport and production, the elements of capitalist relations emerge within the feudal structures that had been experiencing decline for some time (Braudel 1992). The newly emerging capitalist social relations, within a dominant non-capitalist order, can give rise only to fragments of the new (alternative) value system, which spread through the development of these relations (Elias 1994, Weber 2010, Hirschmann 2013). But when structural elements of the new order develop significantly, the role of the values that develop within these structures (the 'Protestant ethic', for example) can become one of the decisive factors driving changes to dominant relations. And so, values become one of the factors that can lead to change. Support from these values can help mobilize members of the most diverse social strata, who are then able bring forth social revolution and establish a new order – in which they will again be relegated to subordinate social strata (Skocpol 1979).

Looking at the intrasystemic level, it is clear that a similar dynamic is established. At the foundational level, there are specific values typical for various historical 'phases' of a social order, determined by the specific structural characteristics (social relations) of these phases. Furthermore, at the foundational level of both lie the general traits of the prevailing social order, as well

as the central value system. However, in addition to these, a whole slew of other formational characteristics can emerge: elements of transhistorical values (of course, 'processed' in line with dominant relations), the interests of special social groups (which shape and are shaped by current social relations, such as social conflict), the degree of consolidation of the prevalent order (e.g., due to an ongoing economic or political crisis), etc.

Thus far in the paper we have defined and analyzed the concepts of values and norms, as well as their relationships to each other in the most general terms, as they are reproduced in human societies. More than once, however, we have mentioned that one of the constituent properties of human society is historicity. This means that over time, as a result of causes that cannot be expanded upon here, human communities change fundamentally and in such a way that the basic principles governing their reproduction also change. History is, therefore, witness to various aspects of change: civilizations, forms of production (hunting and gathering, herding, agriculture, industry, post-industrial society), levels of modernity (pre-modern or traditional, modern and post-modern society), socio-economic formations (early communities, slavery, feudalism, capitalism, socialism) and so forth. With this in mind, it is clear that the definitions of the notions that are the subject of this analysis (values and norms) must also be historically concretized so that they include social relations that determine the character of these specific social forms (dominant and central relations).

Bearing in mind, therefore, the immanent historicity of human society, the concept of values can, at the level of historical periods (social orders, etc.) be defined in the manner to be expanded upon here in these passages (in other words, the general definition must now be made more specific in order to adhere to the level of historical analysis). Dominant central values are imposed (through various instruments, including the repressive and mobilizing apparatus of the state, economic mechanisms for production, exchange and distribution of resources, securing the basic necessities and socializing processes – as part of the educational system, above all, calling upon cultural tradition and similar), or voluntarily accepted patterns of thought and action of individuals or social groups, according to which the basic principles of the reproduction of dominant social relations in that community (within economic, political and cultural subsystems) are presented as universally desirable patterns. Within this same analytical framework, dominant central norms are institutionally imposed patterns of actions of social groups and individuals that, through everyday practices, establish, reproduce and sustain dominant social relations in a given social order (and the violation of which is prevented with the threat of punishment).

These 'transitional' – due to the level of their generality – definitions lead us to further historical specificity, which pertains to definition of dominant and central values and norms in capitalism. Relative to the more abstract definition, here it is imperative to precisely set out the basic principles of the reproduction of this order and how they are shaped in terms of values and norms.

Values and Norms in Capitalism

As an example of how the interplay of values and norms leads to social dynamics, we will take the liberal form of capitalism, considering that, historically, it represented the first (or initial) form of regulation of this system. We have already alluded to the core constitution of the (ideal-type) liberal form of capitalist system: 1) in the economic subsystem, as a universal, profit-orientated market economy, in which mutually independent actors freely exchange economic resources, where private ownership predominates, while the state appears as a secondary transaction regulator; 2) in the political subsystem, as an area of free competition between political parties, under relatively equitable conditions, within which framework various social groups seek to gain control of the state apparatus in order to use its resources, promote primarily their own economic and social interests, and 3) in the cultural subsystem, as the opportunity for relatively free public discursive articulation of interests primarily of the dominant social group, presented as universal interests, on the basis of which the prevalent order is legitimized. Another idiosyncrasy of liberal capitalism is that these three subsystems are relatively autonomous one from another while the mechanisms of their regulation are different. The economic subsystem is dominated primarily by competition in the markets, the political system by political competition, and the cultural system by competition amongst idea-based orientations.

Mutual coherence in the regulation of these three subsystems is achieved by the fact that each relatively autonomous form of regulation is directed at supporting the other two. Autonomous market entities support political competition, the always temporary outcome of which promotes the interests of one (or more than one but never of all) group of these entities (class fractions), while the temporary nature of the outcome – the change of political parties in power – ensures that market entities retain their principled autonomy from the state apparatus and vice versa, that the state apparatus is free of lasting domination by particular groups of economic actors. Meanwhile, competition between idea-based orientations in the cultural subsystem ensures that parts of society will be mobilized to support the various forms of regulation in both the economic subsystem and the political subsystem. The focal point of the internal and mutual coherence of these different but essentially homologous regulatory principles is the tendency to ensure unhindered reproduction of profit-orientated commodity production, as well as fundamental social relations founded on the production of capital.

In other words, the source of the (dominant) central normative and value system in capitalism is situated in the production of capital. The central normative system in capitalism institutionally (repressively) guarantees the provision of the foundational preconditions for that production. In the economic subsystem this means protection of private property, protection of equal access for economic actors to the market, protection of contracts, etc.; in the political subsystem, the right to organize politically, the right to equal electoral

conditions for parties, the right to suffrage and the right to be elected, etc.; in the cultural subsystem this is the freedom of thought, speech and public debate, etc. As a rule, this normative order is shaped by constitutional provisions and/or in other legislative acts. Similarly, the central value system in capitalism is constituted around: 1) private property, which is the basis of the market economy; 2) ensuring the formal autonomy of market actors – companies, owners of capital and workers; 3) preservation of the general preconditions for maintaining and increasing private ownership (the sanctity of the contract); and 4) reproduction of the conditions in which the maintenance and accumulation of this ownership are ensured (the right to make profit and to use it for investment and consumption; the right to inheritance). The foundations of the value system in politics and culture are derived from this core. The starting point in the political subsystem is the state's duty to protect the aforementioned bases of the market economy (ownership, contracts, actor autonomy, etc.). Derived from this is the value of a pluralist (democratic) political order, with all of its characteristics (political rights and freedoms, equality before the law, the right to elect and be elected, separation of the legislative, executive and judicial branches, etc.). Finally, the values from within the cultural subsystem (reciprocally co-dependent), such as civil rights and freedoms (the freedom of thought and speech, public articulation of ideas and public debate), individualism, etc., rest on the foundations of the economic and political central value system.

It does not make much sense to try to list all of the values that make up the central value system in capitalism (i.e., in its three subsystems), given that their discursive formulation appears in various concrete historical guises. It is more important to instead emphasize that these values are not established only 'for themselves', as they are derived only from the manner in which capital production functions. Equally important for their formulation is opposition to alternative values, which advocate for fundamentally different principles for the organization of social reproduction, one variant of which was represented, from 1917 to 1990,[7] by the (dominant) central value system in socialism (for the purposes of brevity, such a system can tentatively be described as being 'in opposition' to capitalism; another possible alternative to the capitalist but also socialist central value system could be developed on the basis of the utopian ideal of a classless society but there is no space here for the discussion to take a turn in that direction).

At the end of this section, it is worth drawing attention to the following. Every central value system, that is derived from the way a particular type of social production is reproduced, is presented as necessarily universal, as manifestly,

7 Of course, in the case of China, this period is longer, bearing in mind that the systemic changes in this country over the last thirty years are unfolding in a direction that has not been satisfactorily theoretically resolved (the position that here too the key transition to a capitalist order has already taken place is supported by, for example, Milanovic [2019]. See also: Arighi [2009]).

or at least latently, applicable to human community in totality. A significant mediating role is played by the fact that, throughout history, some values appear to be transferred directly from epoch to epoch (justice, individual or group sacrifice for ideals, truthfulness, honor, etc.). This, however, neglects the fact that concrete definition of each of these values is historically contextualized, so that they are interpreted and understood differently in different epochs. Or, put more simply, that the criteria of justice in traditional societies are not the same as in so-called post-modern society. That is, what is taken to be a universal (trans-systemic or trans-historic) value is, as a rule, transformed by the central systemic values into forms that are adapted to these values or, at least, into a form that does not contradict them. Here is an example characteristic for capitalism: according to Christian postulates, the wealthy are expected to help the poor, either individually or via publicly controlled – e.g., state-led – redistribution. However, according to the systemic processing of this solidarity-oriented value, this assistance must not be such that it makes the poor workshy – they are, after all, presented as being responsible for their own station in life. On the other hand, partly seemingly perhaps – or rather, concretely historically mediated – the existence of such trans-systemic (transhistorical) values forces the actors operating within a central value system to such adaptation of the former to the latter.

Normative Value Dissonance

When the dominant means of reproducing social relations becomes the main source of the central (dominant) normative and value systems, then the possible existence of important disharmonies between the central normative and parts of the value system arises as one of the key problems – a phenomenon we have termed *normative-value dissonance* (NVD) (Lazić & Cvejić 2007, Lazić & Cvejić 2011).[8] The problem in the value-norm relationship can emerge for at least two reasons. One is that, as has been mentioned, along with central social relations, in every social order there are relations that are based on different grounds: those that remain from earlier orders (in capitalism, remnants of relations from feudalism or even slavery); or those that are potential alternatives to the current central relations (well-developed elements of the market economy in antiquity, for example, or socialist movements in nineteenth and twentieth century capitalist societies). Within these extra-systemic relations, values specific to them form and reproduce as developed by the actors within these relations. These values are different to those within the central value order, even to the point of being (potentially or manifestly) in conflict with the central norms protecting both the order and the dominant relations as a whole.

8 It should be noted here that we are primarily interested in the discrepancy that occurs between norms and (systemically induced) values, understood as ideals, world views or elements of the ruling ideology (trans-systemic and systemic values), which are then translated into more concrete elements of individual and group consciousness.

Thereafter, even within certain ways of producing society (or rather, certain historical epochs), social relations are dynamic (historical) phenomena, particularly in capitalism. Therefore, even partial changes, which do not intrude upon fundamental social relations and remain within the framework of the dominant order, as a rule result in changes to norms and also values – that is, to at least temporary deviations of parts of the central value system from the normative order. These two sources of possible conflict between norms and values lead to normative-value dissonance.

Due to the sources that cause it, this dissonance can appear in a number of forms. Conflict between the central norms and those values that are founded on social relations that are fundamentally different to dominant relations (and are, thus, not only external to the dominant and central value system but are also opposed to it: alternative values), will be termed *systemic dissonance* (for example, capitalist values that have, over time, taken shape within a feudal normative order, such as the appreciation of private interests as the highest values, surpassing honor).[9] This should be distinguished from *intrasystemic dissonance*, which occurs due to changes to partial structures within dominant social relations that do not intrude upon the bases for reproduction of that order (for example, the rise of neoliberal capitalist accumulation, which arose from the welfare states of the early 1970s).

Drawing a distinction between *systemic* and *intrasystemic* dissonance points to a further differentiation of these very forms. When it comes to *systemic* dissonance, conflict can arise between the central normative order and the parts of the value system that are remnants of pervious types of society. This dissonance will be termed *regressive* (the values of a feudal society within a capitalist order: for example, aristocratic titles often have a significance in terms of status even today). As a rule, this type of dissonance occurs during the initial period of constituting a new dominant system of social relations or due to the lasting survival of actors from previous periods. In other words, *regressive* dissonance appears when new social relations are being established but old social relations have yet to fully dissipate. It is, therefore, typical for individuals and social groups for whom the old values, characteristic of the previous order and inconsistent with the new central values, survive for at least a time. *Regressive* dissonance can be powerfully articulated at times of crisis during the constitution of a new order, such as is evident from the example of various countries' experience of post socialist transformation. Such powerful (or, more to the point, growing) *regressive* dissonance can slow the establishment of systemic change or can reshape changes so that they limit the development of relations that are key to reproduction of the (new) social order.

On the opposing side, conflict can occur between currently dominant social relations and potential forms of social production (an emerging alternative social order). This conflict can result in a clash between values characteristic of

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9 For a detailed historical case study (of course, using a different categorisation mechanism), see: Hirschmann (2013).

this potential, alternative order – which are external to the central value system – and the central normative order. This phenomenon will be termed *prospective* normative-value dissonance. For instance, from the late 1960s some values typical of capitalist social relations, such as the emphasizing of political pluralism (democracy) as a value or the effectiveness of market regulation, spread to socialist societies (Prague Spring, for example), intensifying from the 1980s (such as in Poland, Hungary, etc.). *Prospective* dissonance can contribute to the acceleration of the collapse of the ruling order and contribute to more rapid establishment of new foundational social relations.

Similar conflicts can arise as a result of *intrasystemic* dissonance. In capitalism, therefore, the values characteristic of the previous form of accumulation can be retained within the following regime. Structural elements of the welfare state – and the corresponding elements of the value system – survived during the period of neoliberal regulation, to differing degrees in different states, due to (political, social, etc.) pressure by actors from various social groups, as they were considered civilizational achievements and, hence, as lasting values (such as financial government assistance for the unemployed, the rights to education and healthcare and so forth). This dissonance will be termed *intrasystemic regressive dissonance*. If sustained on a larger scale, it can also slow processes of intrasystemic change. At the same time, it is clear that this deceleration need not necessarily have a negative impact on the reproduction of dominant relations. In all of the countries of the capitalist center, the 2008 financial crisis resulted in mass regulatory and financial intervention by states, primarily in the form of assistance for jeopardized financial institutions, in contradiction to previous normative and value restrictions on such interventions. This made it possible to overcome a deeper economic crisis, at least for a time. Similarly, state interventions to maintain employment levels and other forms of large-scale financial aid to private companies and employees, as evident in many countries during the current Covid-19 pandemic, are reminiscent of pre-neoliberal economic policy (Teulings and Baldwin et al. 2014)[10].

In the same manner, we will call the spread of values that support changes to certain structural elements of the prevalent social order but retain foundational values (for example, the influence of the so-called Chicago School of economic thought that appeared prior to the execution of normative changes to the regime of accumulation – characteristic of the USA during the Reagan administration or the United Kingdom under Margaret Thatcher) *prospective intrasystemic dissonance.* It is important to point out that the terms prospective and regressive must not be interpreted on a value scale (in the sense of positive/good or negative/bad outcomes). They signify exclusively a historical dynamic: indicating what came before, what may have come before, what followed or what may follow the moment that is selected as the initial point of analysis.

10 Also, see: https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/02/24/the-biden-harris-plan-to-revitalize-american-manufacturing-and-secure-critical-supply-chains-in-2022/ (last accessed: June 24, 2024).

These distinct forms are derived, of course, according to the methodological principle of constructing 'ideal types'. It should be noted, in this regard and applying the same methodological key, that it must be assumed that the normative system, due to its institutional and coercive nature, is in principle at least tendentiously internally consistent. The norms of the central normative system must consistently support the conditions that ensure the reproduction of dominant social relations. This applies to both analytical frameworks: the abstract (theoretical) and the concrete historical. When it comes to values, however, in the concrete historical case, this consistency is difficult to achieve for two reasons. Firstly, social relations in the empirical world are, as a rule, of the hybrid type (whereby their hybrid nature is confined to the framework of the dominant social form), in which alternative and peripheral values, inconsistent with the central value system, nonetheless always coexist with it. Moreover, the perseverance of transhistorical values behaves in the same way, even though they are in a permanent state of harmonizing with dominant values, they nevertheless retain a certain degree of autonomy. The absence of complete consistency in terms of values can, as a rule, be registered empirically both at the individual and the group level. In other words, it is possible to confirm on the empirical level that individuals and groups hold values that are not consistent with one another (and which exist within the central value system, which they support, as well as also existing within alternative/peripheral value systems). This phenomenon, which is all the more likely if normative-value dissonance is pronounced, can be termed *value confusion*.

The degree to which *normative-value dissonance* is pronounced is clearly directly linked to the conditions in which the reproduction of the dominant system of social relations takes place. Its growth indicates growing problems with this reproduction, while its decrease can signal progress in the unhindered development of reproduction. The harmonization of norms and values, a result of the tendency of dominant social relations to impose themselves as a comprehensive framework for the reproduction of social life, is a lasting social process. Just as is the case with rising or falling NVD, this harmonization is dependent on the concrete historical circumstances. A rising NVD can, for example, be the result of an influx of new social relations (in the case of prospective systemic dissonance) or of the persistence of old value patterns in a new order, which hinders its complete establishment (*regressive systemic dissonance*). Further, in the dynamic forms of social reproduction characteristic of capitalism, in which regimes of accumulation change at intervals of fifty years, *intrasystemic* dissonance must be more pronounced than in orders that change only slowly.

Conclusion

As we have seen, the relationship between values, norms and social dynamics is complex. Therefore, it should not be taken as a pretentious claim that our approach to values and norms is also multi-layered. On one hand, we can

consider it systemic, since it understands values and norms as the basic factors that contribute to the legitimation of the system. At the same time, this approach is suitable for grasping social dynamics, because it argues that the interplay between values and norms, which appears as a consequence of changing social relations, can itself be the agent of social change. Furthermore, this approach is critical, and, in contrast to dominant approaches in sociology, it points out that values and norms can have a disintegrative impact on the dominant system of social relations, in addition to an integrative one. Simultaneously, it represents a kind of a hybrid standpoint that combines elements of the two opposing perspectives in sociology – Marxism and functionalism – by highlighting the system's continual need to achieve integration (at trans-systemic and systemic levels), but also by pointing out that this necessity arises from the inherently conflictual nature of social relations that makes complete integration unattainable.

The innovativeness of this approach consists in the effort to point out the possibility that, when studying the relationship between values, norms and social change, the analysis develops at different levels of abstraction: at the most general level, values appear as a transhistorical phenomenon, necessary to maintain any social community; at the level of the concrete form of production of social life, they are emanations of the conflicting character of the key relations in society, and appear not only as an integrative, but potentially disintegrative factor; finally, at the level of individual or group consciousness, values are imposed, through consent or coercion, and represent landmarks of action and thought, although even at this level one should not expect complete alignment between the reproduction of the system and individually adopted values. Then, this approach argues how the dynamics of the relationship between values and norms can be a factor of social change: a discrepancy between values and norms can indicate a potential systemic or intra-systemic changes, but also reduced possibilities of reproduction of the dominant system of relations. This approach also points out that not all relationships in society should be considered as equally important for the reproduction/change of the system, and this also applies to the values and norms that regulate individual and group behavior. Having this in mind, a clear distinction is made between central and peripheral values and norms, indicating that only discrepancy between central values and norms can have a potentially disintegrating effect on the system, while in the case of peripheral values and norms this does not have to be the case. Finally, this approach clearly indicates that neither at the systemic nor at the group or individual level should we expect complete harmony between values. This value inconsistency arises from the fact that within each social order, alongside the dominant mode of production and organization of social relations, alternative modes also develop or endure, leading to emergence of competitive (dominant and alternative) value orders (which are themselves a reflection of potential or past social dynamics). However, as is clear, this alone does not exhaust the list of possible reasons for inconsistences that appear between values.

Of course, it is also clear that this approach has its shortcomings, and therefore we consider it a kind of blueprint that can be further developed and refined. This remark certainly refers to the fact that at each of analytical level we can go further in conceptualizing the nature of relations between values and norms, as well as the conditions in which discrepancy between them appear. Such further elaboration of the analytical framework may point to some other consequences that the aforementioned interplay between values and norms may have on social dynamics. Finally, despite the fact that most of the examples offered as illustrations of general claims are closely related to the capitalist system, we believe that this approach is formulated in a sufficiently general way to transcend the narrow historical context, and to offer a foundation for broad analytical utilization.

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Mladen Lazić
Jelena Pešić

Vrednosti, norme i društvena dinamika

Apstrakt

Cilj ovog rada je da ponudi drugačiji pristup teorijskoj konceptualizaciji vrednosti i normi i njihovog međusobnog odnosa. U okviru ovog stanovišta vrednostima se pristupa kao faktoru koji može da ometa integraciju postojećeg poretka i potencijalno doprinese krizi njegove reprodukcije. Odnos između vrednosti i normi je definisan kao potencijalno asimetričan. Iz ove asimetrije proizilazi koncept normativno-vrednosne disonance, koji ukazuje na dinamički karakter odnosa između promena dominantnog sistema društvene reprodukcije i promena vrednosti i normi. Normativno-vrednosna disonanca se dalje može razložiti na sistemsku normativno-vrednosnu disonancu, koja nastaje kada vrednosni i normativni poredak nisu usklađeni usled promena sistema društvenih odnosa u celini, i na intrasistemsku, koja nastaje usled promena u okviru dominantnog društvenog poretka, bez promene osnova na kojima se zasniva.

Ključne reči: vrednosti, norme, normativno-vrednosna disonanca, dominatne i alternativne vrednosti, centralne i periferne vrednosti i norme.

III

REVIEWS

PRIKAZI

ZLATKO HADŽIDEDIĆ, *NATIONS AND CAPITAL: THE MISSING LINK IN GLOBAL EXPANSION*, NEW YORK, NY: ROUTLEDGE, 2022.

Jovica Pavlović
Institute of European Studies

True to its title, Zlatko Hadžidedić's book provides an interesting and theoretically well-backed overview of the intertwined relationship between capitalism and nationalism. Divided into two concise parts – the first of which is dedicated to examining the concept and theories of nationalism, while the second demonstrates how capitalism picked and nurtured nationalism as a tool of its self-perpetuating growth – *Nations and Capital: The Missing Link in Global Expansion* sets forth to fulfil an ambitious goal of explaining the origins, history, development and the current socio-political state of the globalized capitalist world that we find ourselves in. Instead of reviewing the development of capitalism through its independent segments, such as industrialism (as done by Ernest Gellner) or mass-militarization (as accomplished by Charles Tilly), Hadžidedić attempts to understand the advancement of capitalism as a whole, using nationalism only as a prism through which he conducts his analysis. In many ways, Hadžidedić succeeds in accomplishing this challenging task, or at the very least, he provides well-developed arguments worthy of careful consideration.

The main argument is made apparent rather quickly, even though it is mostly developed only within the second part of the book, with the first part largely concentrating on providing a well-organised and thought-out theoretical literature review. The thesis goes as follows. In its essence – the author claims – capitalism represents a mode of wealth accumulation which inescapably leads to the development of nationalism, since it is through nationalism that those who are the most successful in accumulating wealth can provide their less fortunate/lower-class 'compatriots' with a false sense of shared interests and belonging. Whereas the purpose of unequal exchange and accumulation of wealth in socio-political and economic systems that preceded capitalism was to develop a social hierarchy that ultimately provided social security to almost all of the involved members of society (including those who found themselves at the bottom), with capitalism, unequal exchange became self-perpetuating and boundless, making the gap between the higher and the lower classes progressively bigger, with lower classes losing even the basic guarantee of social security (as a result). With the

emergence of the idea of nationalism and the institutions of the nation-state, capitalism managed to seemingly bridge this ever-growing gap between the upper and lower classes, without changing the capitalist-based fabric of society itself; one that relies on increasing the wealth of the already wealthy. This was achieved by emphasizing cultural, ethnic and linguistic belonging in place of social status. Compatriots were said to be born equal, with equal rights and the same political goals (with the preservation of the nation being the utmost of these goals), regardless of the blatantly unequal distribution of their wealth and other socio-political features that emphasized their dissimilarities and a lack of common interest.

Yet, while lower classes of different nations remained and still remain divided and in conflict with one another (as a result of their adherence to their respective nationalist ideologies, all of which are distinctly territorial and competitive in their nature), the capitalist elites found no issue with utilizing such a situation to accumulate even greater wealth, by cooperating trans-nationally and disregarding national identities, borders and boundaries. Such uneven globalization contributed to the creation of an even wider gap between the upper and lower classes. In order to bridge this gap, the nation-state evolved from its initially liberal-democratic to a more authoritarian globalist neo-liberal form, one which favours global capital over the interests and rights of its citizens.

However, although such reasoning provides a sufficient account of the emergence of nationalism as an ideology, and perhaps even nation-states (as institutional vessels that help to define and implement numerous distinct nationalistic ideologies), it does not say enough about the formation and development of diverse proto-national/cultural identities which already existed by the time early modern capitalism stepped onto the historical scene. In other words, it often seems as if Hadžidedić downplays the importance of national, cultural and/or territorial identity as a factor of societal cohesiveness (when compared to class belonging); a factor which was already in place before the institution of the nation-state and the modernist idea of nationalism emerged, and which certainly played an important role in state formation as such.

If national identity and the rudimentary sense of ethnic, cultural or linguistic belonging did not exist in the first place (at least in a rudimentary form), capitalist elites would not have been able to misuse it in ways that the author rightly identifies and describes, because it wouldn't have been available to them. This does not go to say that Hadžidedić denies the existence of primordial collective identities based on cultural and territorial kinship, it just alludes to the fact the author seems to accept them as historical happenstance, without sufficiently dwelling on why it is that this form of identity – rather than any other form – not only emerges on its own (without the malicious aid of capitalist elites), but also serves as a good platform for organising larger territorial communities. Namely, could it be that there is something inherently valuable in the sense of national belonging (even if it is in large part subjective, socially constructed and perhaps even ultimately disadvantageous to certain portions of each nation); something that capitalism strives to exploit, transform and utilise to serve its interests, rather than something it simply generates to fulfil its goals? It seems that Hadžidedić largely overlooks or downplays potential answers to this issue. Admittedly, he never sets out to provide an answer to the stated question. Still, a book dealing with the phenomenon of nationalism (and its relationship to capitalism) would benefit from such a discussion.

However, all in all, it should be stressed that even without paying particular attention to this segment of the discussion on the emergence of nationalism, *Nations and Capital: The Missing Link in Global Expansion* still represents a worthy piece of academic literature and an immersive work, one from which both students and scholars dealing either with nationalism or capitalism can benefit. It is an interesting read that certainly stimulates academic discussion on the matter at hand.

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