

Religion and Secularism as Problem Space in Postcolonial Occidental Discourses within the MENA Region

International Workshop at the Centre for Advanced Studies
"Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities", Leipzig University

3–4 November 2022

Hybrid event format, on-site event at Leipzig University and online via Zoom.

Convenors: Housamedden Darwish (Leipzig University), Markus Dreßler (Leipzig University)

Sponsored by: Academics in Solidarity, Centre for Advanced Studies "Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities" at Leipzig University, and Institute for the Study of Religions at Leipzig University

Approach

The workshop aims to discuss the question of religion and secularity/secularism in (postcolonial) Occidental discourses and their critiques in the MENA region. The question of religion plays a pivotal role in both the Orientalist view of the "Orient" and the Occidental view of the "Occident". While the Orientalist view is indebted to a binary perspective on religion and the secular, with stereotypical essentializations of the religious dimensions of the "Orient", the Occidental view oscillates between two apparently contradictory reductions, which present the "Occident" alternatively as Christian or as secular. Furthermore, dominant Occidental discourses in the MENA region self-identify with Islam in a way that overlaps with Orientalist imaginaries of an essentially Islamic Orient.

The workshop intends to explore the trajectories of postcolonial Occidental discourses in the MENA region. It aims to reflect on their various genealogies, forms, and contents. Postcolonial Occidentalism draws heavily on Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), and Hassan Hanafi's *Introduction to the Science of Occidentalism* (1991). Critical stances of postcolonial Occidental discourses towards the "West/Orient" are thereby often entangled with academic critiques of secularism (e.g. Asad, and Mahmood), democracy and liberalism (e.g. Massed), the modern state (e.g. Hallaq), as well as modernity and civilisation (e.g. Abdel-Rahman and El-Messiri).

This workshop endeavours to bring together empirical case studies on particular Occidental debates, including their historical trajectories with theoretical reflections on Occidentalism and Orientalism in the MENA region. The guiding research questions of the workshop are:

- What role does the question of religion and the secular as a problem space of modernity play in MENA-region Occidental discourses as well as critiques directed against them?
- What are the characteristics of Islamic postcolonial Occidentalism, compared to other forms of Occidentalism?
- To what extent and how do postcolonial Occidental discourses in the MENA region relate to postcolonial theories and (the critique of) Orientalism?
- What is the role of Occidental and Orientalist imaginaries in the formation and contestation of cultural, social, religious and political identities in the MENA region?
- What role do Occidental discourses and their critiques play in political projects in the MENA-region (within national contexts, regionally, within international Islamic publics, as well as in the political relations of MENA-region states to Europe)?

The workshop will take place as a hybrid event. The corresponding connection data will be made available to all registered participants shortly beforehand. If you wish to attend the workshop, please send a short inquiry to housamedden.darwish@uni-leipzig.de.

Schedule

Thursday, 3 November 2022

09:00–09:30 **Opening Session**

09:30–11:00 **Panel 1**

Chair and Discussant: Yee Lak Elliot Lee

09:30–10:00 Housamedden Darwish

"A New Wave of Arab-Islamic Occidentalism(s) in Post-Arab Uprisings Era"

10:00–10:30 Buket Öztaş

"Contested Secularities in the Era of Islamism and Post-Islamism"

10:30–11:00 Johanna Montanari

"Curating secularism in a curated public sphere: transnational news practices in Jordan"

11:00–11:30 **Coffee Break**

11:30–13:00 **Panel 1 – Discussion**

13:00–14:30 **Lunch Break**

14:30–16:00 **Panel 2**

Chair and Discussant: Liudmila Nikanorova

14:30–15:00 Gökçen Beyinli

"'Christmas of Muslims' or a Symbol of Religious Freedom: Mevlid in the History of Turkey as an Occidental Debate"

15:00–15:30 Gamze Tosun

"Revisiting a Proposal for Islamic Appropriation of European-Style Theatre: Occidentalism in Kısakürek's *Theatre and Its Effect*"

15:30–16:00

İlbey C. N. Özdemirci

"Escape from the Orient: An Analysis of Orientalist and Occidental Impacts on Secularization Processes in Early Republican Turkey"

16:00–16:30 **Coffee Break**

16:30–18:00 **Panel 2 – Discussion**

19:00 **Dinner**

Friday, 4 November 2022

10:00–11:00 Panel 3

Chair and Discussant: Nil Mutluer

10:00–10:30 Gamze Canlı

"Occidental Imaginaries as the Elements of Power Relations in Educational Policies of the AKP in Turkey"

10:30–11:00 Çiğdem Buğdaycı

"The problem of religion and secularism in Alafranga and Alaturka in Turkey"

11:00–12:30 Panel 3 – Discussion and Closing Remarks

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