Varieties of Secularity

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Abstract and Keywords

Modern societies in the Middle East have been shaped by processes of secularization, leading to a state of secularity on two levels: structural differentiations and conceptual distinctions between religion and the secular. Overt promotion of secularism failed to gain wider societal acceptance, especially among those who perceive a tension or contradiction between secularity and Islam. While some scholars share this view, recent works point out conceptual distinctions between the religious and the secular in Islam. After a snapshot of scholarly approaches, this chapter attends first to structural differentiations and then to conceptual distinctions of secularity. It largely focuses on the formative period of modernity but also adds a historical and contemporary dimension. Acknowledging the hegemony of colonial powers in configuring secularity both historically and conceptually, but highlighting Islamic variations and precolonial resources of secularity in the Middle East, this chapter furthers a research perspective on the varieties of secularity in global modernity and their plural genealogies.

Keywords: secularism, secularity, secularization, Middle East, Islam, religion

In 1996, Ira Lapidus pointedly summarized—and subsequently criticized—a widely asserted contrast between Islamic and Western societies:

> Western societies, with their inherent separation of secular and sacred, church and state, civil and religious law, are said to have promoted an autonomous domain of secular culture and civil society which are the bases of modernity. Conversely, Islamic societies, lacking a differentiation of secular and sacred, have been tied to binding religious norms, inhibiting their potential for secularization and development.
>
> (Lapidus 1996, 3–4)

Such a contrast-centric view still lingers on. In a sense, “Islam today has in fact replaced Catholicism as the other of Western secular modernity” (Casanova 2008, 108). This view is extended to Middle Eastern societies, in cases in which Islam is said to be constitutive

for them. This argument is, indeed, shared by many Muslims. In its most trivial version, some posit an essential incompatibility of Islam and secularization (e.g., Tamimi 2000). While such essentialist claims are easily dismissible, they mirror claims of secular modernity being exclusively Western—if not in essence, then at least in its origins.

Beyond both assumptions of secularization as a uniform process of modernization (and Westernization) and postulates of regional or cultural particularism, the task today is to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of the varieties of secularity in our globalized world and their historical formations. Without discounting the normative dimensions of both "religion" and "the secular," one should note in a sober tone that both categories have become almost global (see, e.g., Casanova 2019, esp. 5; Cady and Hurd 2010, 20). Globalization does not, of course, amount to homogenization. Moreover, while colonial power and Western hegemony were crucial in the process of globalizing secularity, one must also take local actors, conditions, and precursors into account. The most comprehensive attempt at doing so is the project Multiple Secularities: Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities (first: Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt 2012; now: Kleine and Wohlrab-Sahr 2020). This chapter pursues and advances this task in regard to the Middle East—the assumptions on which it is based will best be explained via the central concepts at stake: *secularization*, *secularism*, and *secularity*.

The core of secularization is structural differentiation between religion and other social spheres. As José Casanova (1994) has argued, this sense of "secularization" has to be disentangled from the concept's two other main meanings, namely the decline of religious belief and the privatization of religion. Despite objections against the very concept of "secularization," it remains useful precisely for integrating research on processes of differentiation between religion and its others in different societies (Gorski and Altınordu 2008). In its core sense of structural differentiation, secularization also played out in Middle Eastern societies, though tending to occur without a corresponding decline in belief or privatization of religion (Krämer 2015). Major factors for bringing about this structural secularity include legal, administrative, and educational reforms of the centralizing state; the expansion of the global capitalist system; and the emergence of a transnational public. This chapter focuses on the role of the state and on the relation of religion and politics.

"Secularism" shall here designate the aim of managing religion and reducing its immediate relevance—mainly in politics but also in other social spheres. The establishment of the nation-state was crucial in this regard. Secularism tends to lead to greater differentiation but can also take the form of greater political control of religion, especially as politics and religion hold unequal power over the shaping of their relation (see Künkler and Shankar 2018, 29). Consequently, Talal Asad's influential view (2003), positing secularism as a form of power that reconfigures religion, remains a fruitful lens through which to understand relations between the state and religion in the Middle East. Colonial power influenced the formation of the nation-state, both through direct control and through providing institutional and ideological patterns. However, saving that some postcolonial scholarship in Asad's vein does so, one ought not focus too narrowly on the agency of the

(post-)colonial state or overemphasize alleged cultural or religious differences (see Enayat 2017). One should also not forget that secularism is not necessarily directed against religious belief or religious claims to truth. Still, based on historical experience, a dominant view in Middle Eastern publics associates secularism with authoritarian politics and perceives it as being directed against religion.

Following the coinage of Multiple Secularities, the concept of "secularity" is used to grasp basic differentiations and distinctions between religion and the secular, independently of any possible adherence to secularism. This is especially relevant since opponents of secularism, too, operate with a distinction between religion and the secular. This framework also applies to Islamic intellectuals in Middle Eastern public spheres: they, too, interpret the world based on the distinction, if rarely separation, between religion and society (Schulze 2013).

The first part of the chapter will attend to differentiations, focusing on religion and the state, using the cases of Egypt and Turkey to add a historical and societal dimension. The second part, on distinctions, will focus on Islamic and, to a lesser extent, Christian intellectuals in the Arab public sphere. Both parts will briefly extend the gaze beyond the formative period of modernity to more recent developments and to earlier differentiations and distinctions. The categorical distinction and differentiation of religion and the secular is decidedly modern. Moreover, like modernity at large, formations of secularity are informed by European hegemony, both conceptually and historically. This chapter's highlighting of local actors and pointing to premodern configurations follow two aims: firstly, to nullify an image of religious holism and, secondly, to further shift attention to the global varieties of secularity and its plural, if entangled, historical genealogies.

Speaking of "varieties of secularity," instead of "multiple secularities," underlines unity on the conceptual level, as opposed to historical differences, and might help to avoid a misunderstanding. Aziz al-Azmeh is right in that the multiplication of secularity yields no theoretical surplus: like any analytical concept, "secularity" still grasps different manifestations of secularity when used in the singular; however, to appreciate local varieties of secularity does not mean to succumb to a culturalist paradigm of differences (cf. al-Azmeh 2020, xxxiv–xxxv). Rather, it means to acknowledge—as is also the intention of Multiple Secularities—that non-hegemonic versions of secularity are not inferior to its hegemonic manifestation and elaboration.

Using the concept of "secularity" to bring these varieties into view reflects a particular academic perspective, which is thereby ascertained but also enriched, complexified, and modified. As a heuristic concept, "secularity" encompasses distinctions and differentiations that actors themselves would connect with different concepts altogether—for example, with, indeed, "Islam" (Zemmin 2019a). Employing the particular concept of "secularity" across times, regions, and traditions reflects a wider concern of academic knowledge production in our late modern global world: we know of the historicity and normativity of analytical concepts but still have to work with and through them in order to arrive at less particular, more inclusive understandings. In the long run, this ambivalent process of de-

construction and reconstruction could lead to either the enforcement or the dissolution of "secularity."

Differentiations: Nation-States and Religion

The building of nation-states and the drafting of constitutions form a critical juncture for the relation of religion and the state, even though the relation of religion and politics cannot be solely discerned from it (Künkler and Madeley 2018, 367–368). As a basic configuration, with effects that continue into the present day, Islam was central to the nation-building projects of Arab countries in the Middle East. This was adjacent to the institutional, constitutional, and legal levels also present in the field of education (Cesari 2014). With the exception of confessionally organized Lebanon, all constitutions came to define Islam as the religion of the state or the country. This included Iraq under the rule of the supposedly secular socialist Ba'th Party, which increasingly incorporated Islamic references into political discourse and, moreover, styled Saddam Hussein as a prophet-like figure (Jordan forthcoming). Syria, which is still ruled by the Ba'th, has seen an increase in the government's use of religion in its rhetoric, since the uprisings in 2011 (Aldoughli 2020). In Tunisia, which had, since independence, followed a rather secular politics, the Islamic party of al-Nahda agreed on the non-inclusion of reference to the *shari'a* in the post-revolutionary constitution (Marzouki 2015, 201ff.). While al-Nahda also advocates the separation of mosque and state (Cesari 2014, 158, 189–190), mosques do not amount to church-like institutions. In the Middle East, rather than state and church, the institutional relation of religious and political authority has been primarily negotiated in the field of legislation.

While the outcomes of these negotiations vary both between countries and over time (see ibid., passim), it is crucial to distinguish between symbolic references to Islam and *shari'a*, on the one hand, and practical effects of *shari'a*-based law, on the other. Practically, in most Arab states the realm of *shari'a*-based law has come to be confined to personal status law, while all other areas of legislation are decidedly secular, often appropriating French as well as Belgian, German, English, Swiss, and Italian codes (Otto 2010). This novel codification of *shari'a* can be seen as a secularizing move in itself. Notably in Saudi Arabia, Islamic law extends beyond personal status to other fields of law, including criminal and, despite recent adjustments, commercial and contract law. Still, even in Saudi Arabia, political and religious authority are differentiated, while sustaining each other in a mutually supportive, if potentially conflictual, alliance between the ruling Al Sa'ud and Wahhabi '*ulama*'. Morocco forms the one example in which the king represents both political and religious authority. Tellingly, this double representation does not necessarily ensure a greater implementation of Islamic norms and was even used to improve the legal status of women (Krämer 2015, 126).

While, and perhaps because, the practical effects of Islamic law were confined, the generic reference to *shari'a* as "'a' or 'the' source of laws" was retained in most states (Cesari 2014, 62) and came to be a "meta-norm" (Salvatore 2000) for framing public debates. In

its symbolic sense, both Islamists and secularist Muslims, and sometimes even Christians (Cesari 2014, 34), may argue for retaining the *shari'a* as source of legislation. Public debates revolve around values common to modern political order, such as democracy, equality, and human rights. These values are not specifically Islamic but can also be expressed in Islamic terms (Krämer 1999). This is also true for feminist arguments (Badran 2009). Whether framed Islamically or otherwise, such arguments are, however, hampered by applied norms of Islamic family law. In many Arab countries these continue to disadvantage women, especially in cases concerning inheritance. While the largely symbolic enshrinement of Islam and *shari'a* in national politics underpins a range of positions, it tends to disfavor minority views and facilitate claims demanding greater scope for Islamic regulations. By enshrining Islam in the project of nation-building, political elites involuntarily furthered oppositional trends of political Islam beyond their control. As we shall see, this last aspect also marks the case of constitutionally and legally secularist Turkey.

Nation-states marked by political use of Islam nonetheless both function and are structured according to more general principles and mechanisms of modern politics. This also holds true in the case of the Islamic Republic of Iran: while its formulation of an Islamic government led to almost inevitable contradictions, it transformed Shi'ite legal tradition more fundamentally than the modern, constitutional, and bureaucratic state, whose structures and mechanisms it took over (Arjomand 2016). To what extent the Jewish character of the state of Israel is religious or secular is contested (Yadgar 2020). A state functioning *solely* according to Islamic principles, based on the *shari'a*, can be declared "impossible" (Hallaq 2013), even in view of the legal monism that distinguishes the nation-state from earlier arrangements. In fact, the very idea of Islam as a political religion is decidedly modern (Cesari 2018). And yet, once the ideology of a political Islam is established, integrating secular and religious aspects, it can articulate modern statehood equally as elaborately as non-religious ideologies. Viewed this way, "there is no opposition between the state and Islam, since the nation-state is the major structural element that made political Islam possible in the first place" (ibid., 2–3). The categorical differentiation of religion and the secular, which also underlies political Islam, is decidedly modern; yet, differentiations between worldly rulers and religious authorities also figured in premodern societies under Muslim rule.

Historical Traces of Secularity

Countering the mistaken contrast of Western and Islamic societies quoted at the beginning of this chapter, Lapidus (1996) highlighted differentiations between religious and political authority in Islamic history. He identified several models in this regard: since the institution of the Abbasid Caliphate, differentiation had been the norm in the large empires under Muslim rule, with urban centers of power. While boundaries remained contested in all cases, the Ottomans, and later Safavids, arguably aimed at greater control over religious authority than the Saljuqs, who advanced a model of cooperation. It was, Lapidus argues, particularly tribal dynasties such as the Alawites that aimed at integrating political and religious authority, thereby referring to the model of the Prophet. The Alawite Dynasty still rules Morocco and, as we saw, retains the claim to religious authori-

ty. This points to historical continuities, which the critical juncture presented by the formation of the nation-state transformed fundamentally but did not overwrite fully. Lapidus' ideal-typical models are suggestive for modeling various types of differentiations.

On closer inspection, these differentiations also vary according to the sources used. An established scholarly view holds that in Muslim societies political authority was subservient to religion: religious scholars were arguably able to act rather autonomously when elaborating doctrines and norms, and the rulers acknowledged this autonomy, thereby sustaining religion. This view, Noah Feldman (2012) argues, is based on juristic literature. Ethical literature, in turn, conceives of a mutual dependence: "Political authority needs religion to provide it with legitimacy, and in turn religion needs political authority so that it can continue to exist" (ibid., 97). This view is most succinctly expressed in the image that religion (*din*, *islam*) and political authority (*mulk*, *sultan*, *devlet*) are two brothers or twins. This image was appropriated from pre-Islamic Persian writings, and thus is not particular to Islam. Underlining this point, Neguin Yavari (2019) pointed to commonalities in the twinning of religion and political rule in 11th-century Iran and 15th-century England. The premodern mutual dependence notably indicates both differentiation and interdependence. As such, it does not reflect the modern configuration of a secular domain independent from religion but rather shows that this configuration drew on earlier differentiations. This is because, while our analysis is primarily based on conceptual distinctions, these reflected upon and were tied to historical differentiations.

A very practical example of differentiation is that between legislation based on the ruler's discretion and legislation based on jurists' law. This first manifested itself institutionally when the Abbasid caliphs introduced the so-called *mazalim* courts. Initially, these courts ruled on complaints brought by commoners against members of the ruling elite but, gradually, additional fields of competence were added (Vikør 2005, 190–195). After several reconfigurations, *siyasa*, which initially referred to a ruler's discretion, came in modernity to denote public law. In the 20th century it was categorically distinguished from *shari'a*, which was then codified as religious law (Masud 2018, 16ff.). Before its modern codification, *shari'a* never formed a fixed body of law but rather connoted good order in a more abstract sense and, as "a loose container" (al-Azmeh 2020, 76), nominally united various practices of norm- and lawmaking. While the jurists (*fuqaha'*) were largely independent in elaborating Islamic law and ethics (*fiqh*), their various elaborations opened additional space for rulers to intervene. In view of these complexities, James Baldwin (2017, esp. 10ff., 136) considers the binary of jurists' law versus rulers' law misleading and instead suggests a concept of legal pluralism. Precisely because these premodern differentiations, which also occurred outside of the field of law, were less categorically established than modern arrangements, they are understood as "secularity" only in a heuristic sense.

The transition from these differentiations to the firm institutionalization of secularity in nation-states was more complex than a simple contrasting of an Islamic past against a European-induced modernity would suggest. Next to illustrating this point, the case of

Egypt will now show that secularization has, as elsewhere, initially been driven by pragmatic interests of political rule, rather than an explicit ideology of secularism.

Egypt: Accidental Secularization in the Interest of Central, Autonomous Rule

Rather than introducing modernity, as the obsolete paradigm of "modernization as Westernization" would have it, the main impact of Napoleon's invasion of Egypt was the ascent to power of Mehmet 'Ali (r. 1805–1848). Mehmet 'Ali was a Turkish-speaking Albanian officer in the Ottoman army, and, as such, Egypt remained officially an Ottoman province until 1914. His rule was marked by the securing of power of his household against rivals within Egypt and the attaining of autonomy from the High Porte in Istanbul. This he achieved through institutional reforms and social engineering, which helped create a (proto-)national society, even though his current status, being seen as the founder of the Egyptian nation, was shaped substantially after his death. His successors strengthened these centralizing tendencies and reforms, which became increasingly marked by the influence and direct control of French and, especially, English colonial powers. Mehmet 'Ali's selective appropriation of European practices and technologies was driven not by an ideology of modernization, let alone secularization, but rather by the aim of securing his rule. To this end, military strength was key, instrumental to which were, in addition, medical, administrative, and legal reforms.

While not following a program of secularization, Mehmet 'Ali's measures nevertheless had secularizing effects. Thus, secularity primarily arose from historical reality and pragmatic needs (see also Krämer 2018, 298–299; al-Azmeh 2020, esp. 2). It was, to give a striking example, Mehmet 'Ali's pragmatic attempt to create a strong army, rather than any abstract idea of individuality and equality, that was crucial to "the birth of the 'secular' individual" (Fahmy 2012). Faced with the problem of identifying deserted soldiers, identity cards proved to be the most efficient solution. In addition, the requirement to maintain sufficient numbers of healthy soldiers was the main impetus for managing and controlling the population. The techniques introduced to this end also had "an individuating logic" (ibid., 346) in the field of law, where people were now identified—and identified themselves—as autonomous subjects. This method of identification was first employed in the governmental *siyasa* councils. These councils were not novel as such (ibid., 346–347). Continuities are also visible in the Hanafization and "étatization" of *fiqh*. This process of étatization, or establishment of governmental authority, which was crucial for the formation of the early modern state, played out more systematically in the administrative center of the Ottoman Empire but did also occur in Egypt (Baldwin 2017, esp. 139). The novelty lay in the new means of the centralizing state to supplant *shari'a* doctrines. This did not yet follow a logic of religious versus secular law (ibid., 141) but yielded secularizing results. After a series of centralizing and standardizing reforms, these fully took effect in the 20th century, with *shari'a* courts fully abolished in 1955, together with Christian and Jewish communal courts (Cesari 2014, 61).

From the moment that religion is categorically configured as an object of politics, secularism indeed becomes “a lasting problem space” (Agrama 2012, 27–28). Viewed this way, the individual measures of Mehmet ʻAli, such as confiscating the *waqf* properties of al-Azhar in 1815, did not yet follow a logic of secularism but contributed to its establishment through their secularizing effect of making religion into a particular object (cf. Asad 2003, 207). In turn, when Nasser placed the Azhar under governmental administration in 1961, a politics of secularism was firmly in play; and once epistemically and institutionally established, a secular logic can be undone only with difficulty, if at all. In this sense, as argued by Agrama (2012), the reactivation of the Islamic doctrine of *hisba* by an Egyptian court in 1995 occurred within the logic, and under the interest, of the secular state.

To speak in such an abstract sense of secularism as a form of power highlights a fundamental feature of the modern state but might downplay the interests of individual actors: yes, both the Islamic government of Muhammad Mursi and Egypt’s current president al-Sisi have used religion in the interests of political power, but this insight blurs their conflicting political interests and ideological convictions. It is true that especially authoritarian governments wield the power to shape particular understandings of religion not only through law but also through education or public media (for a display of “good religion” in Egyptian media, see Aishima [2016, 83–108]). However, actors other than the state have also shaped the understanding and role of religion. Despite these qualifications, there remains the central role of the nation-state in casting religion into a permanent and categorical object of politics.

Turkey’s *Laiklik*: The Control and Promotion of Religion by a Secularist State

The centrality of the nation-state is even more evident in the case of Turkey, which instituted secularism (*laiklik*) as a principle of politics more comprehensively and explicitly than any other country in the region, inviting reflection on what this “secularism” implies. Despite similarities with the French model of *laicité*, from which the Turkish term *laiklik* is derived (Azak 2010, 7–8), the Turkish state aims more comprehensively at controlling, and promoting, religion. Indeed, in enshrining Islam in the national project, the secularist Turkish Republic shows marked similarities with the Arab countries of the region. To make this point, we shall focus on the Turkish Republic and bracket out earlier processes of modern state-building involving secularization. Despite continuities with the Ottoman Empire, the early years of the Turkish Republic constituted a critical juncture, spanning the period from its foundation in 1923 until 1937, when the principle of *laiklik* was added to the constitution (Kuru 2009, 216–226). Going far beyond constitutional reforms, nationalizing—and, indeed, Westernizing—measures included the call for prayer being in Turkish instead of Arabic (Azak 2010, 45–60), the switch from the Arabic to the Latin alphabet, and the replacement of the turban with the hat in public spaces. This was an elitist project of nationalization, modernization, and homogenization.

Laiklik denotes a guiding principle of this project, the lasting spirit and practical effects of which may be illustrated by a decision of the Turkish Constitutional Court from 1989. The previous year, the parliament had passed a law permitting students to wear the veil on campus. The court invalidated this law, arguing that secularism demanded the exclusion of religious symbols from the public sphere:

> According to the Court, secularism: "sped up the [Turkish] march toward civilization. In fact, secularism cannot be narrowed down to the separation of religion and state affairs. It is a milieu of civilization, freedom and modernity, whose dimensions are broader and whose scope is larger. It is Turkey's philosophy of modernization, its method of living humanly. It is the ideal of humanity. … The dominant and effective power in the state is reason and science, not religious rules and injunctions."
>
> (Bâli 2018, 250)

The court alluding to "the separation of religion and state affairs" might be understood as referring to an "ideal meta-state" (Dressler 2010, 124–125). In practice, the comprehensive principle of *laiklik* adduced by the court here, as in other decisions (see Kuru 2009, 173–174), primarily serves the purpose of comprehensive control of religion by the state.

The control of religion is so constitutive that it can be identified as Turkey's own model of secularism, complementing the American and French models, which exemplify freedom of religion and freedom from religion, respectively (Yavuz 2009, esp. 146). Operating with the two ideal types of "assertive" and "passive secularism," Kuru (2009) had suggested that the Turkish and French cases both represent the assertive type, whereas the United States epitomizes the ideal type of a passive secularism, held by Kuru to be preferable, that allows for the public visibility and expression of religion. Indeed, like the French Republic, the Turkish Republic disestablished religious institutions of the ancien régime and aimed at secularizing the public sphere. In the Turkish case, however, the exclusion of "bad religion" from the public sphere went along with configuring a "good" religion in the service of the nation-state. Further rendering problematic a view that contrasts Islam and secularity, the Kemalist secularists themselves promoted their vision of a "pure," reasonable, modern, secular Turkish Islam (Azak 2010, esp. 14).

The more common link between national and religious homogenization thus was especially strong in the case of Turkey. "The production of a homogenous ethno-national identity to consolidate the loyalties of the population built into the concept of 'Turkishness' a secularized *sunni* (Hanafi) identity" (Bâli 2018, 239). Not only were religious actors involved in the process of Hanafization but also the project of secularism was partially argued on grounds internal to the Islamic tradition (see also Silverstein 2011). Insofar as the secularist state took up and redefined theological concepts, one may even identify "a theological argument at the core of Turkish laicism" (Dressler 2010, 128). Moreover, the metaphysical foundations of Kemalism align with the stylization of Atatürk as a charismatic leader (Azak 2010, 17). Institutionally, the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), created in 1924, is central to promoting an Islam serving the state. Itself favoring, and even

partially resting on, a particular version of religion, the homogenizing secularist state was thus not founded against religion as such but rather against public usages of ("bad") religion outside the purview of state control.

The attempt at homogenization has never been fully successful, of course, but repeatedly encounters both demands toward diversification and rival attempts to shape the public sphere in another direction. While there have long been diverse understandings of secularism, as well as different trends within Islamism, Islamists have, in general, formed the most influential and visible opposition to the Kemalist project. This reflects the fact that, as in Arab countries, the political construction of a "hegemonic Islam" (Cesari 2014, 8–12) furthered an Islamic opposition that equally operates in a nationalist framework. In Turkey, this opposition goes back to the introduction of a multiparty system in 1946 (ibid., 155). However, it has mainly been since the 1980s that Islamic practices asserted themselves increasingly in the public sphere. The headscarf has been the most pertinent symbol linking constitutional arrangements, ideological convictions, and the shaping of the public sphere. In this sense, attitudes to body and propriety of dress perform a key function in different Kemalist and Islamist visions, differences which could also be seen in their conceptions of space and time (Çinar 2006).

With the success of the *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (AKP) under Erdoğan, power relations have shifted and "the erstwhile excluded periphery now controls the center" (Bâli 2018, 260). Contrary to earlier signs and hopes of the AKP effectively combining Islam, secularism, and democracy (Yavuz 2009; Çinar 2006, 12–13, 175–176), this has instead produced an equally assertive and exclusive Islamizing version of authoritarian politics. This politics is, however, evidently also being challenged. In a decidedly optimistic scenario, the recurrent contestations of authoritarian rule and negotiations of the meaning of *laiklik*, now under novel configurations of power, may yet produce a more democratically inclusive arrangement after all (Bâli 2018, 257–260).

Authoritarian Politics, Public Islamic Morality, and Individual Belief

In Turkey, as elsewhere in the region, authoritarianism comes in both overtly Islamic and secular versions, as do calls for greater diversity and democratization. I stress "overtly" to recall the factual primacy of the principles and mechanisms of modern politics, present in their Islamic variants too, as well as to restate the possible use of religious references and arguments, including by secularist regimes. The shifting attraction of overtly Islamic and secular politics seems to depend not least on the experiences of such politics as impacting either positively or negatively upon material living conditions and as either advancing or hampering one's ideational expectations of a good, meaningful life. Beyond that, when secular politics are continuously experienced as unjust and oppressive, Islamic politics might seem to be not only a better alternative but rather the solution to an inherently false secular outlook. In turn, the corruption of, and oppression by, Islamic governments not only further a disillusionment with Islamic politics but can even contribute to questioning religion as such. The latter phenomenon is most strong in the Islamic Republic of Iran (see Hashemi 2018; Maleki and Arab 2020) but seems in recent years to

have also taken hold in Arab societies in which either political Islam has failed or Islam has been instrumentalized by secular authoritarian rule (see, as a general source).

While it remains to be seen whether this will result in a longer-term trend of decline in religious belief, there certainly is a trend toward the individualization of religion in Middle Eastern societies, too. In *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor (2007) suggested religious belief's becoming optional to be the defining characteristic of Western secularity, not least in supposed contrast to "the majority of Muslim societies" (ibid., 3). Indeed, religious identification is legally compulsory in most Middle Eastern societies, and public morality is closely associated with a hegemonic version of Islam. Yet, while belief, too, is hegemonic, whether, and especially how, to believe is, in an important sense, optional. The legal obligation to identify as religious does not necessarily correlate with belief. Nonetheless, combined with a hegemonic public Islamic morality, and in some cases with the belonging to a religious community, this obligation makes it more difficult to openly pronounce unbelief (cf. Cesari 2014, 116–117; Künkler and Madeley 2018, 351, 379). Clearly, there are various and diverse forms of belief, which are also perceived as distinct (or, in some cases, even as not believing anymore). The spectrum is vast, and to give a finite number of concrete examples would only suggest otherwise. Digitization and social media, while obviously part of more general global trends, seem to play an especially important role in societies with restricted means of public expression, in enhancing trends toward individualization, including in regard to religious belief.

Moreover, as members of structurally differentiated societies, believers, too, operate with secular codes and share in secular practices. Ultra-orthodox Jews might come the closest to being an exception to this, even though they, too, are situated within a secular environment. With regard to Muslims, the literature has highlighted basic commonalities of human life, refuting the image of Muslim exceptionalism and Islam as a comprehensive way of life. "Ordinary Muslims" and "everyday Islam" have even become a new trend in research. While some effects of this trend can be viewed critically (Fadil and Fernando 2015), its basic impetus and argument remain important: religious and secular, as well as religiously indifferent, aspects together constitute and partially intersect in the practices, ideas, experiences, and expectations of believers. The practices of believing Muslims do not solely evolve from the Islamic discursive tradition but rather stem from references to Islam as a "grand scheme," as well as to other grand schemes, including capitalist consumption and romantic love (Schielke 2010). This complexity "in real life" is worth keeping in mind as we now turn to intellectual conceptions of secularity.

Distinctions: Coming to Terms with Secularity

An Islamic society might be formulated, by its proponents, via setting it in contrast to secular societies. Yet, these proponents, too, operate with the basic, co-constitutive categories of religion and society, even when arguing for their integration. This is due, firstly, to them reflecting upon structural conditions of secularity and, secondly, to them engaging with hegemonic conceptions of secularity. Both aspects have led to the categorical

distinction between religion and society within the Arab public since the second half of the 19th century. The resultant varieties of secularity include arguments both for greater disconnection or separation of religion and the secular (i.e., secularist arguments) and for greater connection or integration. Islamic varieties of secularity might complicate a binary understanding of secularity more intuitively than other varieties. Yet, in doing so, Islam yields a heuristic function for the broader reconsideration of secularity, as is increasingly acknowledged by European sociologists, too (e.g., Witte, forthcoming).

Christian Intellectuals, Early Secularist Ideas, and Arab Nationalism

Butrus al-Bustani (1819–1883), the Syro-Lebanese Christian intellectual, became the first to prominently argue for separating religious and political authority, writing in 1860, in view of the sectarian civil war in Mount Lebanon (al-Bustani 2019; Magout 2019, 5–6). Al-Bustani used the term *watan* to conceptualize and promote a supra-confessional, secular polity. This usage was similar to the employment of *vatan* in the Gülhane Reform Edict from 1839 (Hanssen in al-Bustani 2019, 55). The slogan that "love of the homeland is an act of faith" was likewise popularized by both Arab and Turkish reformists in the second half of the 19th century. Al-Bustani probably appropriated it from the Egyptian Muslim scholar Rifa'a Rafi' al-Tahtawi (1801–1873), along with the programmatic title of *wataniyyat*, to label his anti-sectarian pamphlets (ibid., 56). The secular implications of *watan* became ever clearer in the later, nationalist call that "religion belongs to God, the nation (*al-watan*) to all," used prominently by the later short-lived Syrian (r. 1920) and then Iraqi (r. 1921–1933) King Faysal in 1919 (al-Azmeh 2020, 372) and the Egyptian nationalist Sa'd Zaghlul in the same year (Salama and Friedman 2012, 108). While al-Bustani's promotion of *watan* thus contributed to nationalist ideas (Hanssen in al-Bustani 2019, 53–54), he, like most other early secularists, did not demand separation from the Ottoman Empire but instead envisioned a supra-confessional Greater Syria within the empire (al-Azmeh 2020, 415; Magout 2019, 4–5).

While the link between secularism and nationalism can be defended to some extent, the supposition of a link between secularism and Christianity in the Arab world stands on much weaker grounds. That the weakness of evidence for this has to be stressed comes as a result of works that wrongly attribute Arab Christians' secular views to an asserted inherent secularity of Christianity, while maintaining that Arab Muslims could only be secular against Islam (cf. Yared 2002). True, the first prominent Arab proponents of not only a secular polity but also modern secular sciences were Christian by denomination: Butrus al-Bustani founded the first private non-confessional school in 1863 (Magout 2019, 5n17; cf. al-Azmeh 2020, 103–104), and Darwinian ideas were first openly promoted by graduates of the Syrian Protestant College in Beirut in the 1880s. The Syro-Lebanese press, run largely by Christians, indeed played a central role in the early articulation of secularity and secularism in the wider Arab world (Magout 2019). However, rather than particular Christian doctrines, the early promotion of non-confessional secular political ideas can instead more accurately be attributed to a power struggle between a new Christian middle class and the clergy (ibid., 4). The most vocal opposition to Darwinian thought, too, first came from within Christian circles, whereas most Muslim reformists

viewed it rather unproblematically (al-Azmeh 2020, 233). While the embracing of secular thought and practice did not primarily depend on religious background, the increasing identification of the secular as Western (and non-Islamic) made it harder to advocate in Arab (and Islamic) publics.

Declared Secularists

The explicit advocation of secularism remained rare in Arab publics. As Paul Salem (this volume) points out, "[s]ecularism was hardly ever able to raise its own banner but had to travel under the banner of nationalism (pan-Arab or local), socialism, or liberalism." Leaving aside the extent to which this is also true for European societies, what could such a banner have stated? The concept of *dahriyya* was the first used to grasp a comprehensive secularist outlook, in the 19th century (al-Azmeh 2020, 231ff.). Derived from the Qur'anic term *dahr*, indicating a purely this-worldly time, *dahriyya* was closely associated with materialism and atheism and as such ill-suited to serve as a self-designation. To openly declare oneself an atheist remained rare in the 20th century (ibid., 289–290). The Arabic term directly rendering "secular" is *'almani*, which originally referred to laypeople living outside Christian monasteries. In the late 19th century, *'almani* was popularized to designate worldly, secular affairs more broadly, probably first in reference to missionary schools and education.

The perception of a link between science and "secularism" is evident in one of the latter term's two Arabic renderings, which differ only in their vocalization of the first letter. While the form *'almaniyya*, highlighting reference to this world (*al-'alam*), is etymologically more plausible, the use of *'ilmaniyya* remains popular and directly indicates the association of secularism with science (*al-'ilm*). In both versions, secularism was predominantly perceived as being directed against religion. Countering this wholesale rejection, al-Messiri (2002) introduced a distinction between two types of *'almaniyya*, rejecting an all-inclusive, ideological type of secularism but commending a partial type that grants autonomy to religion. Still more recently, the concept of *al-Muslim al-'almani*, secular Muslim, has entered public use, breaking up the supposed contrast between being Muslim and being secular. Since to many, however, *'almani* retains its negative connotations as "areligious" or "antireligious," it is predominantly other terms that continue to be used to conceptualize the secular. In the political sphere, the most prominent of these is *madani* (literally, "civil").

Though overt advocacy of secularism remained marginal, this did not, however, mean the absence of secular positions and practices. To the contrary, secular culture marked Arab publics from the 1920s to the 1970s, at least in the urban centers (Salem, this volume; al-Azmeh 2020, 353–384). The carriers of this culture were not necessarily less religious and partially even did not see their practices as particularly secular. Often, these practices were only marked as being so by proponents of a cultural and political Islam, which publicly asserted itself from the 1980s on. For example, literature is an important, and seemingly uncontroversial, form for expressing the secular without necessarily naming it as

such. Yet, as a result of religious criticism, even certain poetic meters can come to be marked as heretical (Schielke 2019).

Secularism and Secularity in Islamic Reformism

The Azhari scholar ʻAli ʻAbd al-Raziq (1887/8–1966) is conventionally credited with having formulated the first Islamic argument for secularism in Arabic. In his book *al-Islam wa-Usul al-Hukm* (*Islam and the Foundations of Rule*) from 1925, the Azhari scholar argued that the prophet Muhammad essentially brought a purely religious message and that both the Qur'an and the *Sunna* remain silent on the question of governance. Islam, he stressed, is a religion (*din*), not a state (*dawla*). Hence, Muslims are free to deliberate on the form of government that best suits their interests. In this age, ʻAbd al-Raziq suggests, this can only be a parliamentary democracy (see Ali 2009). ʻAbd al-Raziq's argument was of practical political relevance as it intervened in debates on whether to resurrect the caliphate in some form, this having been abolished in Turkey in 1924. Upon publication of this book, the Azhar dismissed ʻAbd al-Raziq from his position as a *shariʻa* judge.

Among the fiercest public critics of ʻAbd al-Raziq was Rashid Rida (1865–1935), editor of the journal *al-Manar*, the influential mouthpiece of Islamic reformism. In his own book *al-Khilafa aw al-Imama al-ʻUzma* (*The Caliphate or the Great Imamate*), Rida (1923) demanded the continuation of the caliphate as the Islamic form of government, albeit conceiving of a modernized version thereof. Beyond his conception of the caliphate, Rida shared basic secular premises. The integration of a secular perspective on religion with a religious perspective on society is in fact constitutive of Islamic reformism: its protagonists simultaneously demanded the reform of religion, from the perspective of the requirements of modern society, and the reform of society, from the perspective of religion. By doing so, they attempted to transform Islam into a modern, societal religion and, simultaneously, to transform society into an Islamic one. In this process, Islam came to refer to both secular and religious aspects. Moreover, both a secular and a religious perspective were elaborated from within the Islamic discursive tradition. On this basis, Islamic reformists were able to shift between a religious and a secular perspective and to loosen or tighten the connection between religious and secular aspects *within* an Islamic framework (Zemmin 2019a).

Rafiq al-ʻAzm (1865–1925) exemplifies the basic possibility of loosening this connection. It was in Rida's own journal in 1904 that al-ʻAzm made the argument for separating religion from politics, for which Rida attacked ʻAbd al-Raziq 20 years later. Al-ʻAzm identified the mixing of politics with religion (*mazj al-siyasa bi-l-din*) as the basic cause of the perceived backwardness of Muslim countries. In arguing for the separation of religion and secular politics and for a democratic government, al-ʻAzm distinguished between a religious and a worldly part of the *shariʻa*. Like other reformists, he moreover made use of the conceptual distinction between *din* and *dunya*, religion and the world, and between *ʻibadat* and *muʻamalat*, religious practices and social matters, to conceptualize secularity. These and other distinctions *within* the *shariʻa* continued to be perpetuated in Islamic political thought after the Second World War (Krämer 1999, 54–65), while the exact drawing of

boundaries and connections remains contested. Already in 1904, al-'Azm's argument was challenged in *al-Manar*, on the basis of his conceptual distinction *within* Islam; and al-'Azm himself restated his argument for a democratic government, in an article published posthumously, by validating it as an "Islamic government" (Zemmin 2019b).

The reformists' factual integration of secularity in an Islamic framework facilitated the elaboration of a comprehensive vision of Islam, covering all spheres of life. Claims of Islam being a self-sufficient system mirrored claims of secular self-sufficiency, which manifested itself most consequentially in the Kemalist project of *laiklik*. Islamist and secularist ideologies are even co-constitutive, insofar as they push each other to greater coherence and comprehensiveness, by denying that any aspect of modern society falls outside their purview. The Islamist ideologue Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966) rigidly opposed both Islamic and non-Islamic societies, on the basis that there was no need for any secular aspect in Islam. Yet, he could only make this claim, and thus fully counterpose the secular with Islam (Salama and Friedman 2012), because the secular had previously been integrated into modern Islamic thought. On the basis of this integration, arguments for distinctions are notably equally possible. Thus, while the famous modern slogan of Islam being religion and state (*al-islam din wa-dawla*) refutes a secularist separation of religion and politics, it sustains a differentiation, rather than a fusion, of both spheres. By the 1990s, there was almost a consensus among Sunni political thinkers in locating the political order in the flexible, rather than the fixed, domain of Islamic principles (Krämer 1999, 67–68).

The Islamic Secular and Religious Secularity

A more recent trend of Muslim scholars explicitly locates the secular in Islam. For instance, Sherman Jackson (2018, 11) defines "the Islamic secular" as follows: "that for concrete knowledge of which one can rely neither upon the scriptural sources of Sharia nor their proper extension via the tools enshrined by Islamic legal methodology (*usul al-fiqh*)" (italicization and transliteration adjusted). Rather than responding to an external secularist regime, the *shari'a* arguably delimited itself by acknowledging a realm of human conduct beyond its immediate purview. Jackson stresses that this realm of the Islamic secular remains very much part of the Islamic religion. Leaving aside to what extent this argument is theologically and historically convincing, two related points are of interest to us here: first, this explicit conception of "the Islamic secular" underlines the Islamic reformists' implicit conceptualizations of secularity in the formative period of modernity. After all, the latter also categorically distinguished between a realm of fixed norms and a realm of flexible principles within Islam. Second, to explicitly formulate an Islamic variety of the secular speaks of the firm establishment of secularity, which prompts variations from within different traditions.

This is also evident in recent explicit Islamic conceptions of secularity as a political principle. The Iranian context yields the most vivid and elaborate discussions in this regard. The failures of the Islamic Republic produced resistance to religious rule among the populace. On an intellectual level, the failures and contradictions of the Islamic regime

prompted the search for alternatives among clerics and religious scholars. A dominant trend perceives religion as being corrupted when put in the service of the state. Religion, they maintain, is an individualistic experience, only realizable under conditions of secularity. Such propositions of a "religious secularity" go back to a series of articles by Abdelkarim Soroush in 1989 and have since grown into a vivid discourse among Iranian Shi'ite scholars (Ghobadzadeh 2015). The Sudanese–American scholar 'Abdullah an-Na'im (2009) has made a similarly principled argument for a secular state on religious grounds, emphatically stressing: "I need a secular state to be a Muslim" (ibid., 282).

Secularity in Islamic Tradition

Viewed sociologically, it is primarily the structural developments and conditions of modern society that produce secularity and make it an issue of eminent and even unavoidable concern. The varieties of secularity elaborated under this concern, however, are elaborated through appropriation of premodern distinctions. Modern varieties of secularity are thereby sustained from within various traditions. Whether the appropriation of premodern distinctions evolves into an elaborate narrative of secularization hinges on whether secularity today is viewed as internal or external to a particular tradition. In this regard, Protestant narratives seem to have been primary and have been joined rather recently by Catholic ones (e.g., Taylor 2007). The current explicit embrace of secularity by Islamic intellectuals might yet further the establishment of such a narrative from within Islamic traditions. For now, we are mainly left with potential building blocks of such a narrative (i.e., traces of premodern distinctions).

Rushain Abbasi (2020) attended to the most pertinent conceptual pair in this regard, the distinction between *din* and *dunya*, religion and the world. While the decidedly modern vantage point from which he relates this distinction to modern secularity could be made clearer, Abbasi drives home the point that premodern distinctions never amount to a categorical separation of religion and the secular. Further, he nullifies any image of a past religious holism. Comparison between modern and premodern contexts may also focus on the function, rather than the contents, of guiding principles such as secularity. In this manner, Mahmoud Bassiouni (2014) showed how the function of human rights in preventing arbitrary rule was pursued and articulated in classical Islamic legal and philosophical literature, via the concept of *maqasid* (aims of the *shari'a*). Avoiding the categorical primacy of modern secularity, while accounting for its eventual establishment, Armando Salvatore (2019) intriguingly suggested the "soft distinction" between *adab* and *shari'a* being central in "the Islamic ecumene." Under the modern pressure for unambiguity and colonial claims to an autonomous secular civility, *adab* was arguably reworked into an autochthonous, soft expression of the secular, which grew out of "Islamicate civilization."

To designate these earlier distinctions as "secularity" is not to project the particularly modern binary backward into history but to underline that the formation of this binary intersected with earlier distinctions in complex and sometimes conflictual ways, drawing upon, transforming, and eventually often overwriting them but rarely fully replacing

them. These historical complexities, then, contributed to the varieties of conceptions of secularity in global modernity.

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