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The "Secular" in Post-1967 Islamist Thought; Revisiting Arab Intellectual History and Political Ideology towards 20th Century fin-de-siècle

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Abstract: This article gives an historical and analytical account of post-1967 Islamist intellectual production in the Arab-Muslim world and the ways it shaped political ideology in the region. By discussing Islamist approaches and debates with regards to the "secular" and secularism in the Arab-Muslim world the paper tries to answer mainly two research questions: what the perceptions over secularism were after the 1967 Naksa, and how intellectual transformations were applied on political identities, ideologies and strategies by some Islamist parties, occasionally leading to cross-ideological synergies. Using conceptual history, we divide post-1967 into two broad periods, while we argue that Islamist thought copiously appropriated notions of the secular with, however, many limitations.

Keywords: political Islam; Islamism; Arab world; Middle East; secularism; modernity; Muslim Brotherhood; intellectual history; conceptual history

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1. Introduction: A Post-Secular Age

The last decades have witnessed a mounting interest concerning religion as a driving force in history and politics. Academic research has attempted to delve into the manifold relations between religion and politics; historical, political sciences, Social Movement Theory (SMT) and interdisciplinary approaches are mushrooming in their pursuit to capture the roots of religious assertiveness (Haynes 2009; Fox 2018). Since the second half of the 20th century, political and social movements, in their turn, have also witnessed the rise of religious activism. For example, European leftist parties have discussed the rise of Islamic radicalism in the Arab world starting from several points of departure: political Islam as a problem, as a threat and, even, as a possible ally (Shabana 2022).

A "private affair", as religion was largely perceived until the first decades after WWII, it gradually became public; other than forming a personal morality, religious discourse not only was included but rather defined several modalities in articulating and transforming political and social desiderata (Taylor 2007, pp. 1–24; Roussos 2020). This post-secular age, as it was described, brought to the fore an overwhelming quest for the role of culture in the modern age, delineating the so-called cultural and linguistic turn after the 1970s. However, academic scholarship to a great extent tarried in incorporating religion as a variable in studying world history and politics (Hasler n.d., p. 138; Roussos 2020), and when it did, religion was mostly seen as an implication for international relations (IR) and not as a social, cultural or economic variable (Shabana 2020).

Research on Islamic activism has mostly focused on pragmatic and calculated itineraries by Islamist movements in given contexts (Juergensmeyer 1996; Solarz 2020). What literature often shows is the political realism expressed by Islamist movements at the expense of their ideological tenets, in their bid for political power (Mishal and Sela 2006; Daher 2016; Chalcraft 2016). The extent to which Islamic activism is adaptive to political realism depends, however, on the trans-national, local and religious context in each country and at given junctures. In several countries, such as Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine,

Islamist organizations had joined forces in the past with their secular counterparts, thus forging new political cultures and identities. However, little literature has been produced about the pathways by which Islamist thought has embedded secular ideas in its discourse. Despite religious revivalism often being debited with reactionism toward modernism and rational thought, research on Islamist intellectual history showcases a more complex reality; Islamist thought incorporated a wide range of secular hermeneutical tools—not without resistance—while it engaged in fierce debates with regards to many thorny issues, such as separation between religion and politics and political and economic independence. As Nikkie Keddie suggested, secularism and anti-secularism in the Arab world or in the West is in no way a fait accompli (Keddie 2003, p. 20); it is rather a historical phenomenon.

Therefore, this article intends to shed light on post-1967 Islamist thought and its intellectual itineraries. Thus, Muslim intellectuals and scholars from a wide geographical range from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) will be analyzed along the following issues: first, the questions and the debates—and their limitations—that emerged after 1967 that were permeated by secular tendencies and problematics; and second, the application of these ideological transfigurations on the main Islamist organizations, such as the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (MB) or Hizballah. By doing so, the aim of the paper is to understand the course Islamist thought took, its changing intellectual and political priorities and appropriations and how cross-ideological alliances were built, operated and consolidated.

Alongside religious revivalism notions of the secular coexisted; these rudiments gradually became stronger, acquiring wider space as regional, international and internal social transformations accelerated. As Jonathan Fox (2018, p. 176) stresses, though, religious politics is the competition between religious and secular elements in society. Thus, exigencies heralded not only a shift in Islamist politics, by for example dominating popular sentiment or joining electoral platforms, but also transformed their intellectual imprint. What scholarship related to religion and politics often argues is that even religious thought and practice embedded a set of secular sensitivities (Hurd 2016). Notwithstanding, very few scholars have involved the secular element in interpreting post-1967 Islamist thought and its repercussions over Islamist organizations. However, a growing number of studies with regards to Islamist movements and their political presence show that political pragmatism often prevails over ideology and doctrine (Ayoob 2008). For instance, the works of Wickham (2013) demonstrate that the largest Islamist movement, the MB, evolved historically and incorporated secular views in its thought and political practice and aspirations.

Islamist thought and praxis is the byproduct of religious and secular/modernist influences and has definitely copiously borrowed ideas from liberal, secular and even Marxist mindsets (Roy 1998). Consequently, what this article suggests is that by a new reading and interpretation of contemporary Islamist thought one can uncover both the use of modern European social methodology and at the same time the espousing of a secular mentality. However, we do not claim that by incorporating some secular views Islamist intellectual thought turns into a blatantly secular political philosophy; multiplicity, hybridity and the enrichment of political and philosophical engagements are rather detected, assisting intellectual production to have a wider popular but also electoral appeal. Undoubtedly, oscillation between Islamic values and political pragmatism exists across almost all Islamist movements. The evolution of Islamist movements, as Wickham (2013, pp. 2–5) shows, is not linear and does not necessarily lead to "moderation". Further, as J. Fox claims, religion, rather than being evidently functionalist, is more rational when it merges with politics; in this fashion, religion is transformed both as a tool and as an interpretation framework (Fox 2018, pp. 83–97). Over 5–10 June 1967, Egypt, Syria and Jordan were spectacularly defeated by the Israeli armed forces in what was to be called the Six Days War. The defeat generated great land losses, a second wave of great numbers of Palestinian refugees and a both personal and political defeat for the Arab Socialist "hero" Gamal Abdel Nasser. The Naksa of 1967 is extensively regarded as a paradigm shift for MENA. The repercussions of the defeat against Israel affected multiple realms, including politics, ideology and philosophy. Indeed, the defeat has been a turning point in reassessing modes of politics and

intellectual engagement. It paved the way for the re-evaluation of post-colonial strategies and the liberation movements of the Arab-Muslim world. Thus, the Naksa incorporates colonial legacies, fallacies for independence and the launch of a new period under neo-colonialism. Additionally, 1967 brought disillusionments and disenchantment to the point of threatening the very foundations of the Arab political mindset. Recurrent themes, such as political justice, authenticity, religion, social rights and modernism, had preoccupied Arab thought since the first Nahda of the late 19th century. Correspondingly, post-1967 intellectual production did not move far beyond these thematic lines, prompting many to describe this as intellectual stagnation but others as a sign of continuity (Kassab 2010, p. 20). Central denominators were definitely the defeat, the causes for this devastating event, its repercussions and steps forward. Nevertheless, Islamist upsurge permeated all aspects of social, educational and cultural discourse disseminated by oil-producing Gulf countries, an alarming development leading to a “retreat from secularism”. Exiled intellectuals and repatriating migrant workers from the Gulf became channels for the transmission of Wahhabi ideas, broadly affecting a whole new generation and new currents of thought in Arab intellectual history. Media also gave a dynamic boost to Islamism by promoting certain ideas, personalities and interpretations, which led to a scriptural and regressive reading of Islam, mostly omitting historical contextualization (Al-Azmeh 2019, pp. 395–96).

While scholars identify the Naksa as the death of Arab nationalism (Salem 1994; Dawisha 2016), one should distinguish between state-sponsored nationalism and popular nationalism. The latter remained—and still remains—a popular driving force in most MENA countries. The 1967 debacle unleashed, mainly, four currents of thought with regards to secularism and the “secular” element in the Arab world, as I. Abu-Rabi’ (2004, pp. 107–8) suggests: the first was the Arab Nationalist (Constanine Zurayk), the second was the critical Marxist (Sadiq al-Azm), third came the liberal (Fouad Zakariyya), and the fourth, which we mainly explore in this paper, was the Islamic current. As a result, the paper explores intellectual political Islam and not a popular version of religiosity, even though the latter was negatively affected by the state-sponsored modernization projects. One must note that modernization, the twin brother of secularization, meant for the Arab masses, broadly, the following: extended social and economic cleavages, the accumulation of power in the hands of a small rentier elite, a deepening of the military state with mounting oppression and surveillance and an escalation of the so-called azma thaqafiyya (cultural crisis) in the Arab world. As Abu-Rabi’ (2004, pp. 58–61) proposes, deep organizational, social, religious, moral and linguistic developments took place after 1967. After the initial shock intellectual production witnessed a sense of a renewed critical creativity. Reconceptualization and self-criticism were omnipresent in different intellectual strands, such as Yusuf al-Qaradawi’s *Islamic Solution* on the one hand, and Sadiq Al-Azm’s *Self-Criticism After the Defeat* on the other hand.

Post-1967 intellectual Islamist production is vast and, hence, cannot be wholly discussed in one single essay. For the sake of our argument, narrowing the scope of our investigation along very important and influential Islamist intellectuals who adhere to the current of Islamic reformism/rationalism is vital, following the distinction made by Q, Wiktorowicz (2006, pp. 221–25) concerning the politicos Islamists and their entanglement with current affairs. These intellectuals problematized a number of notions on their quest to meet contemporary needs. Put otherwise, the intellectuals involved here are not only those who systematized their intellectual production along the lines of post-1967 thought, such as cultural legacy, identity, religion, science, individual and social freedoms, etc., but also those who delved into Islamic thought associating Islam with the “secular” and a modern Arab secular state. Thus, radical and Jihadi intellectual incubators are not included in the scope of the paper since, first, they mostly comprise a different intellectual Islamist school of thought and, second, they mostly did not share liberal horizons and common understanding on a pluralist modern state. The latter, additionally, spearheaded the view that secularism is a Jewish–Christian conspiracy against Islam. In other words, while John Entelis (1975) categorizes the whole Islamist spectrum into the reactionary ideological

framework, what we argue is that, depending on local contexts and desiderata, some Islamist critics generated an Islamist discourse incorporating reformist ideas that were gradually located to political developments.

The structure of the paper goes as follows. After defining notions and ideas, the paper discusses Islamist intellectual production related to secularism, dividing the period into two phases: first, the initial post-1967 period, which witnessed a radicalization with several bifurcations including Islamism, and, second, the tanwir period since the 1980s, which witnessed an attempt at moderating Islamist discourse. Thus, a fresh periodization of intellectual production is offered. After engaging with a number of Islamist thinkers, as well as putting them in a comparative perspective with liberals/secularists, we turn to the application of these ideas over some Islamist organizations, especially after the 1980s. Further, a brief mapping of cross-ideological alliances is attempted, outlining transformations across the political ideology of the Middle East at the end of the 20th century.

2. Assumptions over the "Secular" and Theoretical Considerations

For the liberal understanding of the notion, "secular" privileges toleration, mutual religious respect and, above all, neutrality with regards to religion (Craig Brittain 2005, pp. 149–50). However, our interpretation of secularism will follow Talal Asad's argument that religion and the "secular" are not neutral but rather historically defined; they are closely related to experiences, horizons of expectations, the operation of the state and the overall culture. Predominant religion as a symbolic system frames mechanisms of reasoning and cultural interpretations, and, under these lenses, secularism in certain historical societies cannot be neutral. For example, historians and religious scholars acknowledge the fact that secularism was built to facilitate the making of stronger nation-states across early modernity while enabling greater cohesion and surveillance. As such, secularism in the Middle East, as Talal Asad in his *Genealogies of Religion* has shown, presupposes a religious orthodoxy that defines understanding and framing (Asad 1993, pp. 210–14). Therefore, Asad, while using several concepts in order to critically analyze the concept of the "religious" and the "secular" in the Middle East and their historical transformations, comes up with the term of "Muslim secularism" as a realm that preoccupies itself less with theology than with distinguishing the idea of religion and politics in the public sphere (Asad 1993, p. 229).

Secularization and the secular element have been an important variable for both political Islam and liberal forces in the age of modernity (Hourani 1983). Prominent scholar Mohammed al-Ghazali has suggested that two types of secularism exist in the Arab world: the historical–medieval one and the modern–Western one (Abu-Rabi' 2004, p. 95). Accordingly, notions of secularism and modernity may differ between the West and the Middle East. As Egyptian Marxist thinker Ahmed Sadiq Saad suggested in his examination of the ideological uses of turath (tradition), erroneous assumptions over the non-existing links between Islam and secularism are always taken for granted by both Western and Muslim scholars (Abu Zayd 2023). Thus, this study does not take for granted modernity's European origin. We understand modernity in its plural form (Zemmin and Sievert 2021). Modernities and their ramifications were, undoubtedly, not just a European invention, even though colonialism was the historical process that globally consolidated European and Christian forms of modernity (Topal and Wigen 2019). The secular element has not been embedded simply as an imposed and outlandish feature upon Arab-Muslim societies, but "indigenous modernities" pre-existed (Black 2001). Rather, it has had a long and strong historical imprint on Islamic historical political philosophy since the 9th century, as the examples of many philosophers and thinkers, such as al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd and Ibn Khaldun, reveal. In addition, concrete political ideologies, such as Iranian patrimonialism, have a long-standing history of bridging political theology with pragmatism and realpolitik (Black 2001, pp. 221–39). The idea of "justice égale pour tous", as Anthony Black suggests, could fairly also be derived from an Islamic tradition (Black 2001, pp. 281–82). Above and beyond, Egyptian reformer and one of the founders of Islamic modernism Mohammed Abduh did not reject secularization and Comtean postitivism; he advocated it as long as

it was applied in line with Islamic principles, otherwise it would cause an unbridgeable cleavage in society (Hourani 1983, pp. 136, 140).

Modernization theory primarily sees religion as a backward and reactionary component in modern politics (Fox 2018, p. 28). Many scholars (i.e., Lewis 1954; Gellner 1991) have discussed Islam as a traditional element of pre-modern societies and the lack of secular foundations. Their chief preposition, though, was to comparatively discuss Islam and communism as rigid and diehard ideological systems leading to unfettered conservatism. In the same vein, one of the main advocates of modernization theory, Samuel Huntington (1973), upends any possible versatility in Islam's contemporary esprit. Post-colonial states, he maintains, were characterized by "a lack of civic morale and public spirit and of political institutions" (Huntington 1973, pp. 5–6). Weak political and financial institutions (Ates 2005), or their modern lack thereof, rendered Arab-Muslim societies in a virulent instability. Islam and its civilizational connotations, he asserts, is one of the main roots for hindering adaptability and the root of an inimical, for the Christian West, ideological platform. Others, such as Maxime Rodinson (1977) and Peter Gran (1979), have explored Islam's capacity and structure towards integration in the capitalist mode of production and modernity. Moreover, the latter argued that this process produced elements of secular thinking. Concurrently, Hadi Enayat (2017) has discussed Islam's relation to secularism underlining Europe's per se skepticism towards secularism and the Arab world's reluctance towards imported mindsets of hegemony.

Scholarship on Islam and notions of the "secular" is rich; after the mid-1980s, Binder (1988) examined currents of Islamic intellectual production that utilized Western notions of social and political organization, coining this current as Islamic Liberalism. However, Islamic Liberalism needed to abandon illiberal tendencies, he assessed. Another scholar, Sami Zubaida, maintains that modernist intellectual production and resistance derives from local and regional forms of interpretation of the liberal. Despite drawing from Western discourses, Arab intellectuals use "cultural nationalism" to frame their perspectives (as cited in Browers 2009, p. 41). Further, Asef Bayat (2013) has come up with the term "post-Islamism". The term is applied as an analytical category to label post-modern Islamist social and political conditions as well as their attempts to conceptualize the "rationale and modalities of transcending Islamism in social, political and intellectual domains" (Bayat 2013, p. 8). Post-Islamism, he argues, acknowledges secular consensus views and admissions. On the other hand, Cihan Tuğal (2013, pp. 109–10), exploring AKP's (Justice and Development Party) Islamism in Turkey, suggests that it is highly related to right-wing politics and conservatism, rendering it thus as anti-social albeit favored by US foreign policy as a stabilizing factor. Tuğal is right in problematizing the AKP model, as well as others that have done the same with the en-Nahda or the MB governance in Tunisia and Egypt, respectively, since post-Islamism is not necessarily construed into teleological progress.

Further, as Oliver Roy (1998) has noted, "entryist" politics from several Islamist movements, such as the MB, have led them to a process of "social democratization", similar to the one that took place along post-war social democracy in Europe. Undoubtedly, all trends of political Islam subscribe to their local, national, regional and international contexts, and therefore political Islam organizations are urged to look for pathways towards local and national grievances tailored to an Islamic framework. Consequently, thought and practice reveal a political opening to a both more progressive and more regressive planning response to respective predicaments. However, the "social democratization" trend, even if overshadowed by jihadism across Western media, usually outweighs the violent trend in adherents and intellectual production. As Joel Beinin (2005, pp. 111–13) maintains, even if Islamist activism is diverse, it never fails to successfully subscribe to the local political economic context. For instance, taking as a point of reference Tunisia's en-Nahda party after 2011, Rory McCarthy has argued that the quest for electoral legitimization prompted Tunisia's Islamists to exit preaching and rigid political Islam (McCarthy 2018), becoming, thus, more functionalist.

For discussing and analyzing the post-1967 Islamist intellectual production related to secularism the paper employs methodological tools from conceptual history, in particular the notion of Sattelzeit (Saddle Period). Coined by the German historian Reinhart Koselleck, Sattelzeit is labelled as a threshold period, namely the period when "the past was gradually transformed into the present" (Zemmin and Sievert 2021, p. 11; see also Koselleck 2004), referring to the age of European modernity. By analogy, Zemmin and Sievert (2021) propose 1850–1950 as the Saddle period for the Near and Middle East; however, we may extend Sattelzeit to the post-war age, and especially after 1967, since major conceptual transformations took place. For the sake of our argument, we suggest that indigenous modernities were not solely imposed on the Arab-Muslim world but already existed or were being formed during that period not regardless of Western modernity but rather simultaneously with it. Modernities in the Arab-Muslim world existed with discontinuities and vicissitudes. Examining, for instance, the early Arab-Muslim internal Sattelzeit debates in the context of the Ottoman Empire, one can reach conclusions with regards to several conceptualizations related to one notion (i.e., democracy, caliphate, etc.). Utilizing Sattelzeit and conceptual history can drive us to establish alternative narratives for the conceptualization of secularism in the Middle East. Thus, as Gabriel Motzkin (2005, p. 147) proposes, "the concept of Sattelzeit relies on the distinction between contemporary awareness and retrospective consciousness". Put differently, it can have, as Zemmin and Sievert (2021, p. 7) suggest, both a critical and a constructive aspect.

In doing so, what we intend is to highlight "indigenous dynamics". Thus, historicizing transformations in the intellectual field can help us establish a more solid conceptual order. In other words, Sattelzeit and conceptual history will assist us to decipher the transformations in fundamental concepts and their (mis)uses, corroborating that these notions, such as secularism, are historical products of struggle, competitions, conflicts and consensuses. For instance, in MENA several actors with their intellectual labour brought about changes in both the social and the intellectual realm, disconnecting them from Eurocentric readings, paving the way for political transfigurations. Thus, the post-1967 ideological and intellectual re-working can be seen as an attempt at building a modernist intellectual framework in the Middle East in a post-colonial environment that favored culturalism and subaltern subjectivities.

3. Roots of the "Secular": Intellectual Labor in the Third World Pendulum

Secularism has mostly been a state-sponsored notion and mode of political organization. To a lesser or to a greater extent secularism has become the scaffold for modern Arab nationalist culture. Secular ideas were definitely introduced during the nahda in the late 19th and early 20th centuries; however, secularism—alongside Islam—was a core element in the nationalist project. Arab nationalist states held different angles and adopted different policies on secularism, depending on their national and regional contexts. For example, Lebanon was—and still is—a confessional state, while Baathist Syria has historically attempted to leave religion outside politics. Egypt, in the course of different presidencies, has tried to manipulate al-Azhar while utilizing it against Islamist radicalism. In the Maghreb, while Tunisia overall followed a more secular route, Algeria witnessed religious revivalism soon after its independence. As Robert Malley has shown (Malley 1996), the Algerian War, despite attracting leftist and libertarian global attention, also attracted both internal and external Islamist forces, adopting a revolutionary, anti-imperialist and social emancipatory political language. Further, *laiklilk*, that is secularism in Turkish, was fully adopted by the Kemalist state after 1924 and became fully incorporated by the Turkish Republic after 1937 (Tuğal 2013, p. 113). However, the term has witnessed a gradual re-conceptualization, since the relations between state, politics and Islam have been diachronically largely debated in middle eastern history; thus, from the control of the state over religious matters during mid-20th century the term was gradually transformed as equal to westernization, with malign connotations for many religious communities.

Therefore, top-down secularization is not alien to Arab-Muslim thought. Islamic modernism and al-nahda utilized concepts and ideas in a colonial and dependency context. Europe and its nascent secularism were at the beginning of the "short" 20th century both a mimicking model and an abhorring image. One of the first radical thinkers to employ secular ideas was the Egyptian Salama Musa (1887–1958). Writing his views from the journal *al-Mustaqbal* (Future), Musa was heavily influenced by European radicalism, provoking great controversy in the Arab world (Al-Azmeh 2019, pp. 234–35; Ibrahim 1979). Additionally, the 'Abd al-Raziq (an al-Azhar scholar) controversy, after the publication of his *al-Islam wa usul al-Hukm* (Islam and the Principles of Rule), showcased that debates on secularism were not fully endorsed with permissiveness (Binder 1988, pp. 128–46; Haddad 1993), since he advocated the adoption of political secularism. Notwithstanding, pioneering Lebanese intellectual Farah Antun (1874–1922) stressed that secularism presupposes rationalism and Enlightenment ideas and opposes religious involvement (Abu-Rabi' 2004, p. 97). Another example comes from the Republican Brothers in post-war Sudan and their leader Mahmoud Mohamed Taha, who disseminated "notions of political freedoms, economic justice and social equality", as El-Affendi suggests (El-Affendi 2013, p. 22). Taha (1987) went even further, discussing the need for giving Islam its genuine meaning, fusing sufi principles with egalitarian notions—that is the second message of Islam—in order to establish an equitable and democratic religious order tackling patriarchy and social and gender inequalities.

3.1. Debates over the "Secular" after the Naksa

Post-1967 public debates in the Arab-Muslim world initiated polemics with regards to the origins of religion. Secular thinkers, such as the Syrian Sadiq al-Azm, reposited the question of religion, positivist thinking and self-criticism in *Self-Criticism after the Defeat* (Al-Azm 2012). While he basically does not observe an attenuation of religion, he suggests that religion is based on myths and legends. In his *Critique of Religious Thought* (Al-Azm 2014) al-Azm explores with subtlety an Arab-Islamic backwardness in this discourse and views religion as the womb of social and political repression and intellectual destitution. Emphasis should be put in that the critique of religion as the mainstay of repression was pioneered by groups of young Arab intellectuals who introduced the fetal currents of Arab Surrealism and Arab Existentialism (Al-Azmeh 2019, p. 369; Di-Capua 2012). These trends, heavily influenced by Marxism, either atheist or religious, called for a broader emancipatory project in the Arab world, not only politically but also aesthetically, especially after the demise of pan-Arabism after 1967.

Intermingling between liberal and Islamist thought was reflected in several conferences across the Arab countries, revealing a mounting preoccupation with religion and modernity. These conferences included the Cairo conference of 1971, the Kuwait conference of 1974 and the Cairo conference of 1984. Some were organized by the Center for Arab Unity Studies (CAUS) in Beirut. These Nationalist–Religious debates focused on Arab unity, democracy, social justice, heritage and cultural revival. Many intellectuals from various political spectra were involved, such as the Marxist Anwar Abdel Malek, Ibrahim Abu-Lughod and Fouad Zakariyya (Kassab 2010, pp. 116–72).[1] Despite the wide range of perspectives held across these conferences, most insights were related to Islam and its mobilizing power and the embeddedness of secular ideas in Arab-Muslim thought. For some left-leaning Arabs, such debates may perhaps clear the way for some Islamists to become more "secularized" (Browers 2009, p. 80). For example, the 1984 Cairo conference was titled "al-Turath wa Tahaddiyyat al-'Asr fi al-Watan al-'Arabi (Heritage and the Challenges of the Age in the Arab Homeland). Obviously, general preoccupations were post-colonial modalities tackling several malaises, social freedoms and their positions in an overall religious milieu, history and continuity and the binary of authoritarianism/democracy. However, as the Lebanese professor of Arabic literature Mohammed Najm asserted, this conference should have been renamed "Religion or Islam and Modernization" (Kassab 2010, pp. 151–53), since it widely dealt with this problematic. Righteously, for Al-Azmeh, ideological concessions

were mostly made by liberals to the claims of Islamists, giving weight to the Islamist views of secularism. This development, he maintains, led liberal discourse to take an apologetic stance against Islamist theories (Al-Azmeh 2019, p. 413).

Many Arab intellectuals put emphasis on textual and historical interpretations in Islam and their reflections of Islamist thinking and politics. One of the major Arab intellectuals discussing ‘ilmaniyyah (secularism) has undoubtedly been the Egyptian Fouad Zakariyya. The point of departure for Zakariyya is the Islamists' preoccupation with the application of shari'a, which, in their position, would work as a panacea for the illnesses of the Arab world. In his view, this thesis is ahistorical since it does not pay attention to historical transformations in Islamic history, giving a sterile interpretation of the Sacred Text. Thus, a distinction between "textual" and "historical" Islam should be drawn (Abu-Rabi' 2004, p. 117). Dictatorship is the reason for Islamic assertiveness, and democratic ideas and forces should be in a position to confront authoritarian mindsets. Zakariyya questions the democratic perspective of Islamism, highlighting its mental poverty, irrational tenets and, therefore, its opposition to secularism (Abu-Rabi' 2004, p. 117). However, the Egyptian thinker gauges the loss from the predicament of Islam deriving mainly from the damage done by the Gulf's Petro-Islam. As he mentions:

> It is in the interest of the ruling elite to preempt Islam and reduce it to shallow formalities so that the problems of poverty, the bad distribution of wealth, the predominance of the consumption mentality, [. . .] would escape the attention of the masses. (as cited in Abu-Rabi' 2004, p. 119)

Undoubtedly a proponent of secularism and a fierce polemic against Islamism, Zakarriyya goes on to celebrate secularism, pinpointing the limits of religious activism and thought. Again, he traces a historical break with modernity's invasion of the Arab world during the 19th century and the re-definition of the notion of the self, which in many ways contradicted the Islamic perception. Thus, as many scholars note, Islam occupies a major space in the definitions and orientations of secularism in the Arab world, especially after 1967 (Abu-Rabi' 2004, pp. 120–21).

In Morocco, a fusing of secularism with religion was promoted by an Islamist reformist, Mohammed Abid al-Jabiri (1935–2010), who was much preoccupied with utilizing reason in Islamic criticism. His thought is positioned in post-1967 intellectual production and involves revisiting the past in order to reach intellectual renewal; he suggests that tackling modern Arab-Muslim challenges is impossible without referring to classical Arab-Muslim philosophical turath (heritage). Rationalism, he argues, can be used "for the purpose of reconstructing the rational foundations of modern and contemporary Arab culture" (Abu-Rabi' 2004, pp. 259–60), a suggestion proposed by many scholars and intellectuals in MENA. Reason (‘aql), and more specifically Arab-Muslim ‘aql, can remedy the cultural and political stalemate in the modern Arab world. Uncovering the past for al-Jabiri will assist modern politics to capitalize on Islamic methodological tools and ethical and social preoccupations and, ultimately, to achieve a robust hegemonic unifying discourse. Thus, epistemology should not be based on Western ideas but should rather build on Arab-Muslim turath and create a new conceptual body (Abu-Rabi' 2004, p. 261). However, the Moroccan thinker does not delve deeper to explain whether turath should be addressed in a traditional or a historical interpretation context. Al-Jabiri introduces a new set of ideas that paved the way for establishing Islamic rationalism. While acknowledging the necessity of the existence of God in encompassing man and nature and the inevitability of religious ethics, he tries to offer Islam as the basis for reason and progress in modernity, distancing himself from radical interpretations. Al-Jabiri's understanding of the relationship between religion and politics is, thus, not a revelational one but rather a historical one (Abu-Rabi' 2004, p. 270).

The Moroccan intellectual has also paid close attention to contemporary issues, such as democracy and human rights, with secular perspicacity. Since modernization has been inevitable, sweeping globalization has permeated almost every aspect of the Arab world, corroding its culture(s). Protecting local and national cultures is imperative; however, modernization and rationalization are both, beyond question, necessary for the Moroc-

can scholar. For al-Jabiri 'ilmaniyah can be employed for the common good as long as social freedoms are attributed to the people; democracy, here, plays a fundamental role. Democracy and religion are closely connected since moral codes and commons are defined by the majority's interest (maslahat al a'labiyyah). What is important for al-Jabiri is that in the wake of nationalism's failure in 1967, Islamist movements should take the lead in applying democracy in the Arab world. Following the tradition of the Islamic Left (the term will be described later), al-Jabiri notes that the backbone of Islamic activism is that it is the oppressed (mustad'afun) and they *only* that should fight against the elite's oppression (Abu-Rabi' 2004, pp. 288–92). Al-Jabiri goes further, saying that the hudud (principles) of shar'ia cannot replace a constitution, and thus a democratic constitution has to be in function.

Despite al-Jabiri's orientation towards the appropriation of Western tenets into the Arab-Muslim turath, democracy, however, is not perceived in exceptionalist terms; democracy *is* a European conception, and as such it should be applied. Democracy is fundamental for the Middle East in order to tackle authoritarianism and secure human rights. Therefore, political pluralism and secular foundations are vital in establishing a just society. As Abu-Rabi' (2004, p. 292) stresses, "a deep convergence between universal conditions of western modernity and the needs of modern Arab societies" is needed, and "democracy [. . .] is an expression of such a convergence". In contrast, al-Jabiri in his treatise *al-'ilmaniyya wa al-Islam* (Secularism and Islam) notes that Islam is essentially secular as an ideological force, entailing democratic connotations (Al-Azmeh 2019, pp. 415–16), while he believes in wahda (unity) between the religious and the secular transmuted in the Arab state (Belhachmi 2006, p. 129). Nevertheless, "wahda" is not further analyzed, creating uncertainties in how it could be applied.

Strands of post-1967 thought have encouraged Islam to familiarize itself with secularist ideas. In post-independence Tunisia, for example, state and religious authorities urged Tunisians to shift religiosity to the private environment; based on the tenets of Islamic reformism, criticism was laid not on religion per se but on religion as a factor hindering progress and liberal thought (Al-Azmeh 2019, p. 393). In such circumstances, many left-wing intellectuals moved closer to ideas akin to reformist political Islam, adopting more conservative ideas while in tandem introducing secular elements in Islamist thought. Religion, especially Islam, was attributed with a social progressive role at the same time that secular notions were ascribed to religious framework. The Lebanese communist Hussein Muruwwa (1910–1987) and the Syrian Marxist Tayyib Tizini (1934–2019) embraced this current, especially during the 1970s and 1980s with the rapprochement between classical Muslim thought and the ideas of socialism (Al-Azmeh 2019, p. 402). In his seminal work *Materialist Tendencies in Arabic-Islamic Philosophy*, Muruwwa, the 'Red Mujtahid" as he was characterized, stressed that Muslims embraced the idea that Islamic reformism was a historical continuation of the idea of progress in Arab-Muslim thought, highlighting historical materialism in Islam. That being the case, sources in both the Islamist and the secular literature of the period reveal a mutual instrumentalization of religious and secular symbols in their attempt at adapting Arab-Muslim fields of experiences and horizons of expectations.

Shaykhification, as Al-Azmeh (2019) has described the intense Islamization of both the private and the public spheres in the Arab world after the 1970s, was profane in many aspects across MENA. One of the most telltale episodes of this tug-of-war was the case of the Egyptian Nasr Abu Zayd (1943–2010) and his alleged apostasy, which led to the annulment of his marriage and his exile after death threats. A faculty member at the Cairo University, Abu Zayd was denied promotion on the grounds of anti-religious discourse. His research *Mahfum al-Nass: Dirasah fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an* (The Concept of the Text: A Study in the Sciences of the Qur'an) addressed, from a literary criticism perspective, the socio-political variables in understanding the Qur'an, highlighting how Islamic reformism advocated liberal and secular notions, such as democracy and private property (Kassab 2010, p. 184; Abu Zayd 2003). Deeply insightful, Abu Zayd discusses how modern Islamist discourse

adopts some misleading forms of reasoning, such as the conflation of religion with religious thought and the ahistorical reading of the Qur'an, which leads Muslim thinkers to reach mistaken conclusions (Kassab 2010, pp. 185–86).

Again, critique and contemporary reasoning become vital; for Abu Zayd critique in Islamic theology is fundamental since the notions of hakimiyya (sovereignty) and nass (text) are sternly used by the dominant Muslim elites, and, as Kassab (2010, p. 187) notes, they "transform(s) social and political issues into textual issues": for example, the tenet of hakimiyya brings authoritarian rulings and has been a central mechanism for the Muslim Brotherhood. Abu Zayd goes on to dispel distinctions with regards to a moderate Islam since both extremist and moderate Islam utilize similar concepts for religious interpretations. On top of it, nass, according to Abu Zayd, prioritizes the will and the judgement of God; however, a cultural and sociopolitical reading is necessary in order to acquire a contextual meaning, following modernization commands. What strikes the reader in Abu Zayd's work is the distinction made between tarikhiyya (historicity) and zamaniyya (temporality), a distinction that follows the thought of contemporary European social theorists, such as the German historian Reinhart Koselleck. Secular connotations emerge since Abu Zayd explains that interpretations belonging to a specific context and system of thought can allow a renewed and social significance of the nass (Kassab 2010, p. 189). Nevertheless, Abu Zayd does not mention what this re-reading of the nass should focus on in order to embed secular notions.

Perhaps one of the most prominent thinkers along the lines of Islamic reformism is the Algerian professor of Islamic studies Mohammed Arkoun (1928–2010). A French-trained intellectual, his main concern has been to historicize the revelation in Islam using social and philosophical methodology. Broadly influenced by anticolonial struggles, Arkoun was one of the most progressive Islamic scholars, who undertook a wide project aiming at deconstructing logocentrism in traditional Islamic studies, integrating research in humanities in order to reach more well-documented results and, maybe more importantly, to uncover the regimes of truth and power that determine the thinkable and the unthinkable in Islamic studies (Kassab 2010, pp. 175–76). Arkoun defines logocentrism as the primacy of logos over mythos, allowing little mental space for exploring alternative truths in religion; this condition has imposed a certain regime of truth, a regime which leads to a stalemate in religious critique. Informed by a "historicity of revelation", Arkoun underlines the worldly and human elements and their incorporation in history, culture and language. As he suggests:

> Islam is presented and lived as a definite system of beliefs and non-beliefs which cannot be submitted to any critical inquiry. Thus, it divides the space of thinking into two parts: the thinkable and the unthinkable. Both concepts are historical and not, at first, philosophical. The respective domain of each of them changes through history and varies from one social group to another. (as cited in Kassab 2010, p. 178)

Arkoun is a pioneer in examining historicity in revelation, a fact that has inspired wrath against his work. This allows him to detect certain regimes of truth and, concomitantly, certain regimes of power in the Arab world which entrench ideological terrains. Post-war Arab states, dominated by one-party rulers, preoccupied themselves with ideological indoctrination while paying only lip service to various components of Western imperialism (Kassab 2010, p. 181). Similarly, Arkoun deploys a critical position concerning secularism, as, as he claims, secularism is a Western notion; however, it is not clear which position he employs since, at the same time, he is favoring secular ideals in terms of

the masses and intellectuals in the Ottoman lands experienced back then due to their adjective material and intellectual backwardness in comparison with Europe (Arkoun 2019, pp. 24–25). Experiencing such "naïve consciousness", as he labels it, Arabs welcomed secularism as a "prescription" for achieving progress in European terms. Arkoun, therefore, while subscribing to a progressive reading of Islam, still holds a reluctant position with

regards to secularism, while he maintains that it should be appropriated in Arab-Muslim exceptionalism.

The Tunisian Rashid al-Ghannushi (1941–) is one of the most influential intellectuals and politicians belonging to the contemporary liberal strand of Islamism, but he has at the same time opposed the secular state as a European imposition. He is the founder of the en-Nahda party in Tunisia during the early 1980′s and has lived most of his life exiled in Britain. He has written extensively on issues of governmentality, public liberties and shari'a, with his main work being *al-Huriyyat al-'ammah fi'l Dawla al-Islamiyyah* (Public Liberties in the Islamic State). Al-Ghannushi involves the transformation of the social imaginary as the main preoccupation of Islamism, not just the takeover of power (Abu-Rabi' 2004, p. 207). He renders Islam capable of addressing modernity and its challenges, yet modernity is twofold: Western and Islamic. He acknowledges the contributions of Western modernity and, on top of it, he calls on Muslims to adopt liberating and positive manifestations of it. He rushes, though, to underline that modernity is mostly an oppression mechanism (Abu-Rabi' 2004, p. 209).

Again, modernity and secular notions are not to be transferred uncritically to Islamic culture. Islamist intellectuals have to work hard in order to build a new indigenous modernity framework, and since nationalism has dissipated Islamists should take the initiative. He stresses that fake modernism is imposed by Arab autocrats, continuing:

> Language causes us to fall in drastic errors when we state that there is a conflict on the Muslim world between modernity and fundamentalism, between democracy and fundamentalism, or between secularism and Islamism. We must be wary of this confusion. (as cited in Abu-Rabi' 2004, pp. 209–10)

For al-Ghannushi there is no contradiction between Islam and a modern, secular system built on institutional and legal principles. Affirming Islam's modernist mentality, he claims that "a democratic secular system of government is less evil than a despotic system of government that claims to be Islamic" (as cited in Abu-Rabi' 2004, p. 210). Al-Ghannushi, though, does not devote further meticulous analysis to explaining what these "modern elements" of Islam are that do not contradict the secular spirit.

Another aspect of secular–religious convergence was political Islam's adaptiveness, which prompted secular intellectuals to move to the religious camp. This transition was eased by the 1967 debacle and by the gradual use of common terminology by both ideological currents. A common understanding of the past and historical progress oscillating between Islamic symbolism and secular ideas was created. This historical congruence is best portrayed in Hasan Hanafi (1935–2021), a professor of philosophy at the University of Cairo. Engrained with leftist phenomenology from his studies in France, he travelled to the USA, where he turned towards the idea of a revolutionary religion, stimulated also by Latin-American liberation theology. Inspired by the Iranian Revolution he translated Ayatollah Khomeini's *wilayat i-faqih*, suggesting that the revolution in Iran is a broader Islamic awakening and not only that of the Shi'as (Browers 2009, p. 27). The ideas of oppression, indigenous rights, the elimination of dependency etc. and a revolutionary Islam prompted him to develop the notion of the Islamic Left, a fusion of leftist and Islamist ideologies. Islamic Left, a short-lived but influential journal, left an ideological imprint on future intellectuals, such as Tariq al-Bishri. It attempted a creative correlation of the notions of socialism and Islamism, utilizing leftist concepts of the state and revolution embedded in an Islamic framework.

Hanafi (2004) also developed the notion of occidentalism as a tool to tackle the influence of the West over Islamic heritage and history while returning to Islamic authenticity (asala). Further, he is not opposed to scientific socialism as long as it corresponds to Islamic ethics (Browers 2009, p. 28). Heritage, for Hanafi, is the basis for an anthropocentric renewal in religion which will bring the end of dependency. As far as modernization and secular ideas are concerned, Hanafi is clear: modernization is equivalent to Westernization and thus imposed upon the Arabs. The latter need to develop their own notions and mechanisms, which will fit their exceptionalism (khususiyya) and which will lead them,

first, to cultural and intellectual independence first and, subsequently, to political and economic independence. As Hanafi stresses, Western modernity is not the only itinerary to progress and civilization, and looking globally will help scholars to discover more civilizational routes and sources (Hanafi 2004). Hanafi belongs to a current of intellectual thought advocating that revisiting heritage and Islamic texts will linearly lead to a mitigation of the Muslims' dependency, without really extending on the grounds on how this de-hooking would be developed.

For most Arab intellectuals, globalization, closely connected with Western secularism, is an inevitable phenomenon. It comprises a historical phenomenon which over the course of time has been subject to transformations and limitations. The expansion of the world markets and the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991 created the environment for an overwhelming late American hegemony in the global scene. Responses to the dominance of globalization came equally from both leftist and Islamist critiques. As far as Islamist criticism is concerned, we choose to briefly refer to the example of Yusuf al-Qaradawi since he was both a leading Islamist reformist but also a proponent of the MB. Al-Qaradawi agrees with other Islamists that globalization is an aggressive and corrosive mechanism for Islamic culture, a manifestation of global hegemony. Thus, he equates globalization with Westernization and Americanization and designates it as neo-colonialism (Abu-Rabi' 2004, p. 195). Although for many Islamists, including Sayyid Qutb's brother, Mohammed, globalization is a ghazw thaqafi (cultural invasion), Al-Qaradawi suggests, nevertheless, that despite the undesirable effects of globalization one should also benefit from its positive facets. A globalized umma, he asserts, is best united and stronger for spreading the Islamic message with the means of globalization, including media and technology (Abu-Rabi' 2004, p. 195). Along the same line is the Egyptian cleric Mohammed al-Ghazali (1916–1996), who despite being critical towards the West champions its technological achievements. However, Islamist thinkers only focus on the cultural effects of globalization while omitting to delve into its social, political and economic repercussions.

3.2. Islamist Thinking in the Tanwir Age: From an Islamist Past to a Hybrid Future

Despite 1991 and the fall of the USSR being a landmark for the transformation of the global order and equilibrium, the 1980s and 1990s became a turning point for the transformation of political Islam in both theory and praxis. A cluster of inter-ideological alliances, new priorities across the political agenda and a more remarkable level of openness highlighted a more secular orientation in parts of the Islamist political camp. This transformation was undoubtedly dictated by the consolidation of the USA as the unique global power, the changing nature of social structures, the slight mitigation of authoritarian rule in some Middle Eastern countries—which generated some new political opportunities—and, at the same time, the growth of more radical currents across the spectrum of political Islam, which made it more urgent for major organizations to publicly denounce political violence, particularly amidst the bloody Algerian civil war during the 1990s. For instance, the leader of the Syrian MB, Ali Sadreddin Bayanouni, proclaimed in the early 2000s that the organization no longer longs for the establishment of an Islamic state, but rather a democratic one (Bayat 2013, p. 24), while many leading members of the Egyptian Gama'at al-Islamiyya acted accordingly during the 1990s (Abdelrahman 2009, p. 49).

Attempts to build a hybrid "Arab secularism" intensified during the 1980s and 1990s. Proponents of an Islamic tanwir (enlightening) kept on unremittingly attempting to include Islamic interpretations in contemporary secular frameworks. Particularly during the tanwir period[2], Arab states, even the most conservative ones, tried from above to renew religious discourse in order to fit (post)modernity and distinguish Islam as a faith and Islam as an ideology (Abu-Rabi' 2004, p. 106). During the 1990′s, however, a paradigm shift took place with regards to intellectual production in the Middle East. The tanwir debates no longer preoccupied themselves with the place and influence of Europe and the West in the Arab imaginary, or pre-Islamic or medieval Arab thought and its mental concerns, nor did they stress the need for a new or real nahda in the Arab world. The indigenous or

authentic roots of intellectual movements were also not at the core of the discussion. The main preoccupations in twentieth-century fin-de-siècle debates were, as E.S. Kassab (2019, pp. 2–4) notes, modern-day realities such as democracy, human rights, oppression, freedom of speech and, definitely as a response to it, terrorism whether Islamist or state-sponsored. Liberals launched their own campaign in order to counterbalance the Egyptian state's abuse of power. A progressive journal was launched in 1992 under the name *al-Tanwir* by acclaimed intellectuals Rif'at al-Said (writer of the multi-volumed history of the Egyptian working class) and Farag Fuda (who was gunned down by Islamists in 1992 shortly after publishing al-Tanwir). Further, among other initiatives, the very same year the journal *al-Hilal* celebrated its centennial with a special dedication to modernization. Islamists turned down such initiatives as "state-sponsored tanwir" while proposing an Islamic one (Kassab 2019, pp. 12–13). As seen from the Islamists' view it was prosaic to achieve intellectual liberation by utilizing the colonizer's worldview.

An adversary of the Eurocentric perception of secularism, Islamist scholar Mohammed Imarah in his book *Al-Islam bayn al-tanwir wa al-tazwir* (Islam between tanwir and falsification, 1995) in light of a confrontational stance from secularists proposes rather a tanwir dialogue on national, pan-Arab and Islamic level agreeing on central principles of secularism and modernization. In other words, he suggests a dialogue for a common ground; Imarah, however, attributes to his intellectual adversaries mental fallacy with regards to the definition of tanwir, since he stresses it was purely European; Qura'n, for Imarah, is the only source for tanwir. Imarah supports his position by saying that Western secularism was a reaction to regressive Christianity whereas Muslims do not have to undertake such a project since Enlightenment is inherent in Islam (Kassab 2019, pp. 30–31). Imarah continues by claiming that "the call for the reign of secularism is far stranger and abnormal than just being an imitation of the West [. . .] and borrowing from it a solution for a problem we don't in reality have!" (as cited in Flores 1997, p. 85). However, Imarah does not explain what a genuine Islamic secularism would look like. Additionally, during the 1990s the radical Islamist Ayman al-Zawahiri, advocated independent Islamic interpretations of governmentality, unhooking it from official theological interpretations. What he supported was a modernizing project branching off from official Islamist discourse that rejected political violence (Azzam 2006, p. 1123) and accepted secular nation-states (Gharaiba 2004).

However, most critics viewed tanwir debates as an ideological and political struggle especially in light of the Islamist threat. For example, Egyptian scholar Nasr Abu Zayd castigates both Islamic and secular tanwirees; he chastises secular tanwirees as dependent from the Arab dictatorships and both secularists and Islamists as conservatives and unable to utilize genuine emancipatory and liberational tanwir ideas (Kassab 2019, p. 38). Abu Zayd in various essays regrets that actual secularism has not taken place in the Arab world, while this happened due to a lack of a genuine religious reformation. For Abu Zayd secularism is fundamental, especially amidst mounting religious violence; he states that "it is "secularism" only—which separates the state and its political regime from religion—that is capable of opening the horizons of freedom and rationality and plurality of meanings" (as cited in Kassab 2019, p. 54). Critically joining the tanwir debates, Hasan Hanafi in his essay *Al-salafiyya wa al-'ilmaniyya . . . hal yakhtalifan?* (Salafism and Secularism . . . do they differ?) holds that both trends lie on the same precept but from different angles, Salafists with their obsession with the Qur'an, secularists with theirs with Western Enlightenment (Kassab 2019, p. 56). Tanwir debates in Sudan urged another Islamist thinker, Hassan al-Turabi, to claim that modern politics and Islamic reformism should incorporate social scientist methods, and not theological ones, in order to tackle socio-economic and political predicaments (El-Affendi 2013, p. 309).

Therefore, during the tanwir period the question on whether secularism is necessary or not recurs. As seen, many Islamist thinkers believe that Western secularism is not needed since it is an integral part of Islam and not of Christianity. These debates took place in newspapers and books, but they also took the form of public debates, such as in 1986 in the Cairo Medical Association between Fouad Zakariyya on the side of the liberals and

Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Mohammed al-Ghazali on the side of the Islamists, and in 1992 during the Cairo Book Fair (Flores 1997, p. 86). On top of it, during the end of the 1990s, Syria's publishing house Dar al-Fikr launched an open discussion forum where secularists, such as 'Abd al-Razzaq 'Id, and Islamists, such as 'Abd al-Jabbar, addressed the subject of "Democracy Between Secularism and Islam", while feminism and Islamic feminism were addressed by Nawal al-Sa'adawi and Heba Raouf, Ezzat respectively (Browers 2009, p. 78).

4. Ideology and Political Organizations

The 1990s witnessed an alternative approach to religious interpretation: religious pluralism and fragmentation, with its multiple discourses and actors, generated an augmentation in religious participation according to the supply-side explanations for religious change (Finke and Iannaccone 1993). The body of discourse reworked by Islamists and leftists as discussed above developed around particular Islamist movements. New forms of dynamic activism and accommodation were introduced involving several ex-leftists moving towards Islamism. As John Chalcraft (2016, p. 422) proposes, "this intellectual work can help explain the direction that different strands of Islamists organizing took during this period". Since the 1980s and 1990s, cultural independence has been efficiently coupled with political and economic domination and political freedoms. The Egyptians Tareq al-Bishri and Adel Hussein, both leftists before they turned to Islamism, are good examples. Islam was now interpreted not only as a cultural framework, religion and legislation but also as a social and political organization and a mobilizing force. A re-articulation of Marxist/secular tools, such as social class, were given Islamic meanings. Dependency theory was also appropriated into an Islamic framework (Chalcraft 2016, p. 428).

Several reasons enable this process: political opportunity openings, platforms concerning common Arab causes such as the Palestinian issue, electoral campaigns, human rights defense, etc. In other words, (New) Social Movement Theory can efficiently explain why and when political organizations with different ideological identities can commonly mobilize against authoritarian states in the Middle East. As Matt Buehler has shown (Buehler 2018), understanding broader convergencies requires studying micro-political alliances in order to understand social and political dynamics. For example, these alliances spread across national-level committees, unions and electoral campaigns. The reasons behind success or failure vary, covering deep ideological conflict, commitment problems and state repression (Buehler 2018, pp. 17–19).

Accordingly, a closer observation brings to light mostly temporal but still interesting synergies, based on common platforms and shared aspirations. Mushrooming political partnerships were facilitated by a growing opening of political opportunity across the Middle East. A framework theory of these cooperations has been produced by Maha Abdelrahman (2009), who perceives symbiosis mostly as short-lived, ensuring "cooperative differentiation" (Abdelrahman 2009, pp. 39–40; Bandy and Smith 2005). As Abdelrahman describes, groupings "consist of loose, informal, decentralized groups whose members reject hierarchical structures and systems of authority characteristic of traditional political organizations" (Abdelrahman 2009, p. 40). Even if principles for cross-ideological cooperation seem intangible, two principles mainly appear: consensus and independence. The first principle draws on the ability of building a scaffold for joint action upon which common demands will be articulated. Ideological versatility, undoubtedly, will be utilized in this case, and thus some thorny issues will be omitted. The second principle focuses on maintaining a level of independence. This principle allows for preserving an ideological imprint in order not to lose constituencies or create, within the organization, unbridged gaps (Abdelrahman 2009, pp. 44–46).

"Secularization" processes in political Islam have shown that it may become more liberal in terms of respecting parts of individual and social rights. Examples such as the more liberal period of 1997–2002 under Khatami of the Islamic Republic of Iran or the government of en-Nahda in Tunisia after the ousting of Ben Ali support this argument. In Egypt during the 1980s, several accommodationist electoral projects took place such as that

between the Socialist Labor Party (with an Islamist agenda) and the Socialist Liberals. This alliance sought to capitalize on the growing Islamic atmosphere that dominated politics in that period. Common struggles and open cross-ideological channels were not new; however, they mounted after the 1980s. The Tagammu' party in Egypt, a leftist/liberal oppositional party, expressed sympathy for oppositional Islamists while defending Islamist prisoners in the framework of the Committee for the Defense of Democracy. Tagammu', as seen through its weekly *al-Ahali*, prioritized the danger of local and regional imperialism rather than Islamic extremism (Flores 1997, p. 90).

As a result, Islamist discourse during the 1990s involved elements previously largely omitted: social and economic justice, political freedoms, ecology, human rights and even electoral participation. For example, the Egyptian MB (as well as other branches) followed a path of balancing moderation and reformism, hence its Islamist agenda, combining ideology and strategy. Yet, such a moderation was nailed by the "New Guard", a new generation of Islamist activists entering the MB and already active in trade unions and professional associations, such as the lawyers syndicate, a pedestal of secularism in Egypt (Chalcraft 2016, p. 433). Similarly, the MB's outreach was closely related to their social and business work and moderate speech (denouncing armed struggle since the early 1990s, participating in electoral campaigns, etc.) and not specifically to a mounting religious feeling. Further, widening its constituency, and subsequently its influence, was an issue at stake (Pargeter 2013, pp. 44–46). Such a "social democratization" lay not only on an efficient social and political networking but also upon the intellectual transformations of the Islamist movement per se. The premises of these transformations were related to the abovementioned intellectual debates and the involvement of a political culture adapted to social predicaments and to a diffused discourse based on individual and social rights.

Many secular thinkers were reluctant as to whether the gradual transformations were genuine. In addition, intellectual conflicts within the MB occurred concerning political pragmatism. In particular, after the death of Omar al-Tilimsani, the General Guide (murshid) of the MB in Egypt, in 1986, a collision between the "Old" and the New" Guard emerged. The return from abroad of the "hardliners", such as Khairet al-Shater and Ma'mun al-Hodeibi, who enjoyed support from the Nizam al-Khass group (the MB armed wing), intensified the conflict with the reformists. The latter during the early 1990s undertook several initiatives including open channels of dialogue with other ideological forces including leftists (Pargeter 2013, pp. 48–49). A casus bello between the two camps, among others, was participation in elections. Influential "hardliner" Mustafa Mashour argued in favor of electoral participation since al-Banna himself was not against elections and because MB members could gain key positions and experience along the election's trajectory that could be useful for Islam's path (Wickham 2013, p. 49). Furthermore, for the Guidance Office electoral participation during 1990s and 2000s was perceived as a form of jihad (Kandil 2015, p. 92). In 1995 the MB promulgated the *Statement to the People* in which commitment to political rights, constitutionalism and respect for the rights of Copts and other religions were attested, while it proclaimed that social and moral Islamization and democracy are not contradictory. Further, a member of the Guidance Bureau, Mahmud Ghuzlan, was tasked in 2007 with drafting and publishing a more comprehensive political program involving even more welfare and collective rights, without, however, conducting a 'roadmap" (Kandil 2015, pp. 111–12). According to Wickham (2013) and M. Abdelrahman (2009) the involvement of the Egyptian MB in public mobilizations, elections and other social and political platforms with secularists and leftists brought about an identity renewal with a more democratic imprint, despite Islam remaining the key identity element. This argument is corroborated by th Anti-War conferences in Cairo (i.e., in 2007), with participants from different ideological strands (leftists, Islamists, etc.) stressing the growing need for a political dialogue and openness (Socialist Worker 2007).

Despite the fact that the Left in the Arab world seems to draw closer for cooperation with Islamist forces, interconnectedness seems to mitigate Islamist political language espousing a more democratic discourse and even articulating demands and aspirations

along lines of class conflict. Notwithstanding, a shift from ideological issues to questions of identity has prompted several organizations to entrench their political platforms among their respective communities. For example, the Shi'a Da'wa party in Iraq began as a radical Islamist organization emphasizing communal/religious identities. Shi'a cleric and Da'wa leader Baqir al-Sadr declared that al-Da'wa intended to fight Western-imposed secularism and dependency (Louër 2008, p. 84). However, he largely developed an Islamic political economy with his treatises *Falsafatuna* (Our Philosophy 1959) and *Iqtisaduna* (Our Economy 1961), influenced by social and economic justice, inherent, he argued, in Islam. Gradually, al-Dawa engaged in a more liberal policy. As a result of the failed 1991 uprising, many Da'wa members sought to build alliances with non-Islamist groups, including Kurds and liberals, distancing themselves from religious ideology and moving closer to identity politics, though targeting a broader constituency (Hasan 2019).

In Lebanon, Shi'a identity politics was accentuated by Amal and Hizballah. Despite being an Islamist movement, many influential clerics that shaped its perceptions, such as Mahdi Shamseddine (1936–2001), called for a civic state (Chalcraft 2016, p. 452). In 1992, after the end of the civil war and the Tai'f Accords, Hizballah took the decision to bid for state and municipal elections, emphasizing the "Lebanonization" of the movement and alliance-building (cooperation with the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP) on the grounds of anti-Israeli resistance was already in progress), whereas the establishment of an Islamic state was not being prioritized (Chalcraft 2016, p. 454). Further, institutionalization became even more popular and coalition-building a key element of Hizballah's blueprint after 1992, marking a historical shift from a doctrinal to an administrative and electoral policy management, as J. Alagha suggests (Alagha 2013, pp. 244–45). Joseph Daher (2016) has also shown that Hizballah has mainly focused on its political and financial institutions promoting Shi'a doctrine. However, these institutions scarcely have an Islamic character; they rather operate defying doctrine in favor of a liberal operational model. As Ali Fayyad, a member of Hizballah's Politburo, claimed, Islamist movements, such as Hizballah, should join forces with other anti-imperialist forces not confined to the Islamic camp (Socialist Worker 2007).

Currents of Cross-Ideological Alliances until the 20th Century fin-de-siècle

While most scholars were preoccupied with the confrontation between the Left and the Islamists imposed by the Arab regimes, only a few began to notice the growing intellectual and operational convergence between the two (Kassab 2010). One of the first and important cross-ideological alliances in the Arab World was the establishment of the Egyptian Popular Committee for Solidarity with the Palestinian Intifada (EPCSPI), simply known as Lagna Sh'abia (Popular Committee), in 2001. Since oppression and censorship prevailed in Egypt, mobilization was channeled to problems of the Arab world, such as the Palestinian issue. The Committee was initiated by leftist activists but soon attracted Islamists as well (Abdelrahman 2009, p. 42). Further, in 2006 Egyptian activists from a wide political spectrum, including the Muslim Brotherhood, the Revolutionary Socialists,[3] the Karama Party and the Kefaya, organized an event against the then-ongoing political persecution of activists. (Browers 2009, p. 109). The declaration was signed by leftists, Islamists and secularists, paving the way for even closer cooperation.

Egypt is a revealing example with regards to Islamists embedding secular and liberal notions in policy designing. Alongside ideological and generational conflicts in the MB during the 1990s, in 1996 a number of politicians and activists signed the declaration forming the al-Wasat (centrist) party. According to the al-Ahram Center, the formation of the al-Wasat party signaled the emergence of a middle and moderate generation of Islamist politicians respecting ideological and political heterogeneity. According to El-Ghobashi (2005), the political articulation and discourse of many Muslim Brothers after the mid-1990s resembled those of al-Wasat. Al-Wasat "claims to be a civil party with Islamic frame of reference" (Browers 2009, p. 120), while it champions popular sovereignty, the separation of powers, democratic procedures and intellectual and political pluralism.

Further, al-Wasat declared that it was open "towards ideas emerging from non-Islamic contexts" (Browers 2009, p. 120). Al-Wasat advocated progressive views in politics, such as favoring modern democracy over Islamic shura and backing pluralism in religion (Bayat 2013, p. 218). This development created an ideological current during the fin-de-siècle which drew on political reformism, moderation, the secularization of Islamist politics (in contrast with the concomitant radicalization of the Jihadis, such as al-Qaeda) and cross-ideological dialogue; this current was to be called al-wasatiyya. While the call for tanwir was not ubiquitous in Islamic thought, in Egypt the fin-de-siècle brought a new cluster of political organizations who contested Mubarak, such as al-Ghad and Kefaya, seeking political and electoral representation.

Political accommodation may lie on internal or external political stakes—political freedoms or economic matters internally or the Palestinian issue and the "war on terrorism" (and the Arab regimes' compliance) externally. As early as 1984, the MB in Egypt joined forces to bid for the elections, marking a cross-ideological alliance. In 1992 the Islamic Action Front in Jordan, the MB branch, cooperated with seven nationalist and leftist groups in forming the "Popular Arab Jordanian Committee for Resisting Submission and Normalization", expostulating against normalization with the Israeli occupation. In a national liberation context, during the first Intifada, and especially during the formation of the coordinating committee of the Ten Front, most of the Palestinian organizations joined forces in order to oppose the Madrid talks and the imminent peace settlement. In an attempt to prioritize the nationalist cause, in 1991, Popular's Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) Rabah Mahna pushed Hamas and Islamic Jihad cadres in order to mitigate its Islamist agenda and join forces for the liberation of Palestine (Dot Pouillard 2009), something that gradually partly happened. In due course, amidst the second Intifada the majority of the Palestinian organizations, including Islamists (Hamas, Islamic Jihad) and leftists (PFLP, DFLP) formed the "National and Islamic Forces" for a more efficient coordination of the uprising (Browers 2009, p. 3). Notably, this alliance created common understandings on issues of state-building, urban-rural divisions, class consciousness, imperialism and election reform. Joseph Samaha, a historical figure of the Communist Action Organization in Lebanon (OACL), maintained that Hizballah and Hamas have benefited from joint actions helping them to adopt a more secular and progressive discourse. This idea lies in the fact that the nationalist project has largely been defeated in the Arab world and that religious discourse, according to Samaha, can effectively mobilize the masses (Dot Pouillard 2016).

Henceforth, during the tanwir period a multiple and transnational framework for the institutionalization of intellectual and political developments between left-leaning and Islamist intellectuals and organizations was gaining ground across the Middle East. In particular, the CAUS in Beirut attempted to periodically organize conferences between nationalist and Islamist groups and intellectuals, partly aiming at preventing the spread of radical Islamist ideas popular at that period. This proposal was introduced in 1993, and an organizing committee was formed to undertake this initiative. Under the auspices of CAUS several scientific conferences were also organized, as for instance in Cairo (1988) (Browers 2009, pp. 79–81). For the organizers, the fact that open channels of communication between Hizballah or Hamas and PFLP or the LCP exists is a win-win situation since, aside from the ideological breadth achieved, oppositional forces are strengthened and, subsequently, democracy is reinforced (Browers 2009, p. 81).

5. Conclusions: Limits and Perspectives of "Secularization"

This paper provided an historical and analytical account of the vibrant nature of Islamist intellectual production and its engagement with the notion of the "secular" and secularism, while it attempted to briefly discuss applied forms of ideological transformation and accommodation across some political organizations. The "secular" was not seen mainly as a progressive element, as many Islamist thinkers argued, but as a "fellow" manipulating tool of modernity, hence carrying various connotations and incongruities. What

we have argued is that during the Arab Sattelzeit modern Arab conceptions with regards to the "secular" were formed, distancing themselves from Eurocentric (mis)conceptions. However, what the paper attempted to show was that the formation of the modern notion of the "secular" in Arab-Muslim thought was historical, following conflicts, social needs and modalities, rather than cultural and "exceptional" routes. Further, different conceptualizations were created by several Islamist thinkers in order to appropriate or reject secularism, especially during the tanwir period. These developments led to multiple transformations in Arab-Muslim thought, leading to cooperations, ideological accommodation and, partly, a shift to a more "moderate" political Islam. Such a "moderate" Islam, however, does not mean that it has completely uprooted its Islamist elements or possible regressive mentalities.

After 9/11 and the paradigm shift it brought about in approaching political Islam, ideological accommodation continued extensively, with more pluralistic and multi-layered political organizations and social movements in the Arab-Muslim world. Tidal strikes in many Arab countries, such as those of the weaving and spinning company in Mahalla al-Kubra in 2006 Egypt, The Green Movement in 2009 Iran and, of course, the 2011 Arab uprisings seem to have laid the ground for transformations in political ideologies. However, by and large, it seems that Arab intellectuals, whether Islamists or liberals, while extensively preoccupying themselves with the "secular", have largely failed to come to grips with its intellectual premises. Islamist intellectual production has definitely influenced and framed transformations in thinking and organizational structures in Islamist parties. Contradictory notions of the "secular", however, have existed among Islamist thinkers and organizations, often attempting to appropriate them into an Islamic framework. Undoubtedly, while many Islamist organizations have undergone an important evolution, internal divisions and debates still exist, while additional motives alongside intellectual, such as regional and international factors, are simultaneously drivers of transformations.

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Notes

[1] As British-Iraqi Muslim activist Anas al-Tikriti asserts, CAUS was not only built for fostering intra-Arab cross-ideological dialogue, but also involved British Left partnerships inviting Labour Party members, such as J. Corbyn, T. Benn και G. Galloway (author's interview with Anas al-Tikriti, 13 March 2019).

[2] The Tanwir period, starting approximately around 1990s, was a period of debates (especially across Cairo and Damascus) that aimed at re-locating social and political discussions. Thus, tanwir debates addressed the socio-economic realities and challenges at the end of the 20th century, focusing on issues such as civil rights, citizenship, democracy and social justice.

[3] The Revolutionary Socialists (Trotskyism) in particular, devoted much attempt to open channels of communication with the MB. A member of the party, Samih Najib published a book titled The Muslim Brotherhood: A Socialist View aiming at bridging the gap between the two parties.

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