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978-1-107-04418-0 - The Awakening of Muslim Democracy: Religion, Modernity, and the State

Jocelyne Cesari

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PART I

THE MAKING OF ISLAM AS A  
MODERN RELIGION

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## I

## Modernization and Politicization of Religion

The data presented in this section challenge the assumed connection between modernization and secularization that is at the core of most scholarship on political development. More precisely, two factors – separation of church and state and privatization of religion – have been central in measuring the conditions for political development and democratization.<sup>1</sup>

Drawing on the historical experience of Western countries, an academic consensus has emerged that modernization, democratization, and secularization are inextricably linked in any process of political development. However, recent sociological data show that democratization is not dependent on the separation of church and state – and that in fact, government involvement in religion often increases as democracy grows, especially in Christian nations.<sup>2</sup>

In the same vein, scholars such as Benjamin Kaplan have argued that democratization and secularization, even in the West, were not actually as smooth and linear as the narrative wants us to believe, and setbacks were inevitable.<sup>3</sup> For example, the European experience of democratization was part of a reaction to the religiously induced Thirty Years' War and to the rise of Enlightenment principles, which resulted in various forms of church and state separation. In other words, the differentiation of church and state experienced throughout Europe was the solution to several decades of bloody

<sup>1</sup> See Daniel Bell, "The Return of the Sacred? The Argument on the Future of Religion," *British Journal of Sociology* 28.4 (1977): 420–49; Peter Berger (ed.), *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Washington, DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1999); and Thomas Luckmann, *Invisible Religion: The Problem of Religion in Modern Society* (New York: Macmillan, 1967).

<sup>2</sup> See Jonathan Fox, "World Separation of Religion and State in the 21st Century," *Comparative Political Studies*, no. 39 (2006): 537–69.

<sup>3</sup> See Benjamin Kaplan, "Enlightenment?" in *Divided by Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 333–58.

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religious wars during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Ultimately, the matrix of long-term ideas – such as the necessity of separating religion and politics, the perception of religion as a disturbance in public spaces, and the idea that intertwining politics and religion creates absolute power – shapes political imagery and cultures. This imagery is continuously utilized by European political actors to build ideological arguments that secularization goes hand in hand with a decline of religion in the public space.

In the American republic, on the other hand, the separation of church and state was addressed very early on because of the initial European settlers' experiences of religious persecution. As a result, since its inception, American secularization was influenced by toleration, which at the time was defined as equality for all religious groups without political hierarchy between various religious beliefs. Such a perception of toleration, however, was very far from the modern conception that focuses on the individual freedom of belief or nonbelief, which is now considered one of the gold standards of democracy although it came to be only during nineteenth-century American democracy.

When it comes to modernization outside the West, political analysis of the historical role of religion is rare.<sup>4</sup> Instead, priority is given to unhistorical democracy models that are forged on the basis of the Western experience and therefore operate on the assumption of a uniform causality for secularization, which does not hold strong explanatory value. Surely, there have been remarkable scholarly attempts in the last twenty years to reevaluate secularization<sup>5</sup> by emphasizing that it does not automatically mean privatization of religion. Even those, however, rarely take into account political experiences outside the West.

It is not surprising then that most non-Western experiences of secularization have been measured and evaluated in comparison to *secularism*, which in this book refers to Western models of *secularity*. In other words, I define secularism as the various Western political cultures that contextualize and historicize two major defining principles of secularity: protection by law of all religions and equidistance of the state vis-à-vis all religions.<sup>6</sup> These

<sup>4</sup> See Yoshiko Ashiwa and David L. Wank, "Making Religion, Making the State in Modern China: An Introductory Essay," in *Making Religion, Making the State: The Politics of Religion in Modern China* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2009), 1–21.

<sup>5</sup> See José Casanova, "Religion, European Secular Identities, and European Integration," *Transit*, July 27, 2004, accessed June 8, 2011, <http://www.bpb.de/files/XLKRLX.pdf>; Grace Davie, Paul Heelas, and Linda Woodhead (eds.), *Predicting Religion: Christian, Secular and Alternative Futures* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003); José Casanova, "Beyond European and American Exceptionalisms: Towards a Global Perspective," in Grace Davie, Paul Heelas, and Linda Woodhead (eds.), *Predicting Religion: Christian, Secular and Alternative Futures* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> Undeniably, these principles have their origin in the political history of the West, but they can be adapted in multiple cultural contexts.

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two principles are continuously interpreted within specific political cultures that ultimately frame social expectations about the role of religion in public space and society. In the case of the West, these expectations are the separation of church and state and the privatization of religion, leading to its social decline. This Western experience is at the foundation of most secularization theories applied to non-Western countries.

As a case in point, Turkey, Tunisia under Ben Ali, and Iraq under Saddam Hussein have been defined as secular, as opposed to Saudi Arabia or the Islamic Republic of Iran, with the implicit assumption that the former are or were aligning themselves to the Western experience. These “secular” states have certainly attempted to diminish the role of religion in the public sphere. However, an irreversible decline of the social and political presence of Islam did not occur in any of these countries. Moreover, none of these states properly implemented separation of Islam and state or protection of religious diversity, which is the most critical factor of a secularization process. As described by Alfred Stepan, secularization entails a dual process of differentiation, in which “the minimal boundaries of freedom of action must somehow be crafted for political institutions vis-à-vis religious authorities, for religious individuals and groups vis-à-vis political institutions.”<sup>7</sup> In other words, states would not use religions for political purposes and would grant equality to all religions, while religious groups would refrain from capturing state institutions and politics for their specific religious purposes. While such equilibrium is never completely achieved even in Western nations,<sup>8</sup> it can serve as a criterion to evaluate processes of secularization. Almost all Muslim countries, even the ones dubbed secular, fail on both accounts – that is, state equidistance vis-à-vis all religions and no encroachment of religion on politics. We are therefore in dire need of reconsidering or at least broadening the existing approaches to regimes of secularity in order to make sense of their particular political experience.

In this regard, an important aspect to consider is the role of the state. Ahmet T. Kuru’s book *Secularism and State Policies toward Religion*<sup>9</sup> aims in this direction, as he points out the challenges and critiques of the secularization and modernization theories that relegate religion to a “‘traditional’ phenomenon, which will eventually be marginalized by the modernization

<sup>7</sup> Alfred Stepan, “Religion, Democracy and the ‘Twin Tolerations,’” *Journal of Democracy* 11.4 (October 2000): 37–57, p. 37.

<sup>8</sup> For instance, see Jocelyne Cesari, *Why the West Fears Islam, Exploring Muslims in Liberal Democracies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), for the current debates on the status of Islam in Europe. For the ongoing debate in the United States on the First Amendment, see, for example, Barbara A. McGraw and Jo-Renee Formicola, *Taking Religious Pluralism Seriously: Spiritual Politics on American Sacred Ground* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2005), or Michael Corbett and Julia Corbett Mitchell, *Politics and Religion in the United States* (Abingdon: Taylor and Francis, 1999).

<sup>9</sup> Ahmet T. Kuru, *Secularism and State Policies toward Religion: France, Turkey and the United States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

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process.”<sup>10</sup> Kuru specifically focuses on the ideological influence of state policies on religion. He differentiates them as “assertive secularism” (where the state plays an active role to exclude religion from the public sphere and relegate it to the private domain) or “passive secularism” (where religion is allowed to play a public role). He also presents two characteristics of secular states: “(1) their legislative and judicial processes are secular in the sense of being out of institutional religious control, and (2) they constitutionally declare neutrality toward religions; they establish neither an official religion nor atheism.”<sup>11</sup> In contrast, “other states have established religious laws and courts as the basis of their legislative and judicial systems (‘religious states’), [and/or] recognized an official religion (‘states with an established religion’).”<sup>12</sup>

The way Kuru defines secularism follows the taken-for-granted approach, which is a separation of state and religion as well as use of nonreligious norms in the legal system. In these conditions, Turkey is defined as secular, but as we will show in the subsequent chapters, the status of citizens, family life, and the definition of the nation involve a dominant religious element imposed on all members of the political community, Muslims and non-Muslims alike. In other words, protection of all religions as a major principle of secularity is not applicable to Turkey or to the majority of Muslim-majority countries. Furthermore, it can be argued that in the “secular” ones, like Tunisia and Turkey, Islam was indeed confined to private spaces, but it is not sufficient to make them secular because state actions did not translate into the neutrality and equidistance of the state vis-à-vis all religions. In this regard, it is true that France and the United States differ, as demonstrated by Ahmet Kuru, because the United States has a much friendlier approach to religion by allowing for its public visibility and by permitting God in the Pledge of Allegiance. In this way, the United States implements what Kuru calls “passive secularism.” However, contrary to his approach, France and the United States still have more in common than France and Turkey. This is reflected in the different French and Turkish stances on legal protection of freedom of expression and freedom of speech. Certainly both France and Turkey have adopted very aggressive policies to remove religion from social life and public space. But Turkey, as we shall see in the following chapters, puts the dominant Islamic institutions under state control and does not grant the same status to other religions. Similarly, in both French and Turkish public education, religious symbols are banned.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, the French state does not allow for religious instruction in public schools,

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 1.<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 7.<sup>12</sup> Ibid.<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 9.

whereas Turkey (after 1949) not only allows but requires Muslim students to participate in Islamic education in public schools without providing the same right for other minorities (e.g., the Alevis). In other words, the paradox is that even if the Turkish state applies “assertive secularism” as a political ideology, Turkey, because of its compulsory religious education and its discriminatory treatment of religious minorities cannot be considered a secular state.

Thus, the use of Western terms or Western ideologies should not trick us into thinking that some of these countries went through a differentiation between Islam and politics similar to the one experienced in Western democracies. Actually, quite the opposite occurred. The use of Western secular techniques in law and constitutions created a strong connection between Islam and politics and contributed to the redefinition of Islam *as a political norm* in ways unknown under the Muslim empires.<sup>14</sup> My position, therefore, is that the making of Islam into a modern religion, whereby norms, organizations, and actors have been defined as Islamic, has been closely related to the making of the modern state.

One of my major conclusions drawn from the data analysis presented in this chapter is that modern religion in Muslim countries is positioned on the platform of the state. The institutionalization of religion occurs through the reconfiguration of relationships between people, property, and organizations that were “religious” but formerly outside the political control of the state apparatus.<sup>15</sup> The state actions described in the following chapters highlight efforts by the modern nation-state to make Islam both an organizational framework and an ideology of practice.<sup>16</sup> Modernity is thus constituted not by a one-sided, state-driven project to discipline people’s thoughts but by “multiple projects or, rather a series of interlinked projects”<sup>17</sup> whereby state and religion reshape each other and, in the process, redefine themselves.

<sup>14</sup> In the Turkish case, Hakan Yavuz explains, “As a result of nation-building and militant secularization, society came to be divided along the now familiar cleavages of Turkish versus Kurdish and state versus society. In contrast, the caliphate, abolished in 1924, had represented an Islamicly sanctioned union of multiethnic groups and had recognized ethnic diversity without assigning it any political role. In other words, the caliphate was the symbol of a multiethnic polity and authority; it symbolized the unity of Muslims as a faith-based community and allowed space for diverse loyalties and local autonomy for the periphery.” M. Hakan Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 2003), 52.

<sup>15</sup> Yoshiko Ashiwa and David L. Wank, *Making Religion, Making the State: The Politics of Religion in Modern China* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2009), 45.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

Of course, this recalibration of religion by the modern state happened everywhere; in the West, its outcome was autonomy of religious institutions from political power, whereas in most Muslim countries, the trajectory has gone in the opposite direction. This counter-trajectory is a challenge for the dominant Western theories of secularization and democratization.

The difference between the Western experience and that of Muslim countries lies in the institutional arrangement of state-religion relations. In the West, secularism has translated into a legal order that preserves both the right to believe and to not believe, in essence defending their practical equality. This legal order is continuously evolving and at some moments can be difficult to maintain, as illustrated by the claims of Christian fundamentalists in the United States to take their religious convictions into account in secular law or by European tensions around Islamic dress codes in public spaces. In most Muslim countries, secularization of Islam has not led to a similar legal order. As a consequence, the “secular age” came to be embodied in ubiquitous hegemonic versions of Islam, even in countries like Turkey.

#### DEFINING HEGEMONIC ISLAM

In both domestic and international politics, Islam is often depicted as a tool of political opposition. At the national level, Islam is presented as an alternative ideological repertoire to the failed secular state. For example, the state-centered approach to the politicization of Islam, arising from the comparative politics discourse, demonstrates the influence of authoritarianism on the instrumentalization of Islam as a resource for political opposition.<sup>18</sup> The cultural duality theory and state culture theory also envision a parallel power structure of state and religion and expand upon this model by proposing that a dualist power structure occurs when an Islamist movement is formed in reaction to state ideology and policies.<sup>19</sup> These theories posit the existence of a rigid, stark opposition between the state and religious groups (as in Iran) or religious values (as in Egypt). Similarly, at the international level, most studies frame Islam as a resurgent ideology used almost exclusively as a tool for supranational political opposition. The concept of post-Islamism, promoted by Olivier Roy<sup>20</sup> and Asef Bayat,<sup>21</sup> is another version

<sup>18</sup> Seyyed Vali Nasr, *Islamic Leviathan: Islam and the Making of State Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3.

<sup>19</sup> Mansoor Moaddel, *Jordanian Exceptionalism: A Comparative Analysis of State-religion Relationships in Egypt, Iran, Jordan, and Syria* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2002), 373–4.

<sup>20</sup> See “Post-Islamic Revolution,” *The European Institute*, 2011, accessed January 21, 2013, <http://www.europeaninstitute.org/February-2011/qpost-islamic-revolutionq-events-in-egypt-analyzed-by-french-expert-on-political-islam.html>.

<sup>21</sup> See “The Coming of a Post-Islamist Society,” *Critique: Critical Middle East Studies*, 1996, accessed January 21, 2013, [https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/bitstream/handle/1887/9768/12\\_606\\_020.pdf?sequence=1](https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/bitstream/handle/1887/9768/12_606_020.pdf?sequence=1).



of the binary approach. The term qualifies political movements based on Islam that do not make the Islamic state their ultimate political goal.<sup>22</sup> While these approaches explain *how* Islam is efficiently constructed as an ideological tool for political opposition, they rarely explain *why*.

Most strikingly, the 2011 Arab Spring revolts are not decipherable within the polarized framework described earlier, as the Islamist parties were nearly absent in the initial phases of the protests. At the same time, Islam is likely to remain consequential in Arab countries' future political evolution. This is evidenced *inter alia* by the Islamists' electoral victories in the transitional phases in Egypt and Tunisia. On October 23, 2011, the Islamist party Ennahda won the majority of seats in Tunisia by a significant margin of nearly 40 percent. The Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) also won Egypt's three stages of parliamentary elections, earning 38 percent of the votes in the final round in January 2012, and in June 2012, Mohamed Morsi, the FJP candidate, won the first free presidential elections. Even the end of the Morsi regime on July 3, 2013, does not mean the end of political Islam, as discussed in this book.

In light of the Arab Spring, this book addresses the role of state policies as an unexamined dimension of the politicization of Islam. It adopts an institutional approach to introduce state actions into the analysis of political influence of religious changes at both the domestic and international levels. Institutionalization refers to the way new sociopolitical situations are translated into the creation or adaptation of formal institutions such as constitutions, laws, administrative bodies, and agencies. The adoption of the nation-state model by Muslim majority countries after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire has been the decisive political change that led to the reshaping of values and institutions. These changes have translated into the hegemonic status of Islam.

First, it is important to note the difference between a dominant religion, an established religion, and a hegemonic religion. A religion is dominant when it is the religion of the majority of a given country. In such cases, the dominant religion continues to impart historical and cultural references considered "natural" and "legitimate." Religious symbols and rituals become embedded in the public culture of the country. Examples of such dominant religions include Protestantism in the United States or Catholicism in France and Poland. An established religion is a church recognized by law as the religion of the country or the state and sometimes financially supported by the state, as with the Church of Denmark. Usually, the existence of an established church is not incompatible with the legal protection of religious minorities and freedom of speech. A religion becomes hegemonic, however, when the state grants a certain religious group exclusive legal, economic, or

<sup>22</sup> Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 5. Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2007), 10.

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political rights denied to other religions. In other words, religious hegemony refers to legal and political privileges granted to a specific religious group, which in most but not all cases is the dominant religion.

Second, hegemonic religion and state regulation of religion are not the same. The latter may assume several forms, with legal neutrality on one end of the spectrum, legal privilege on the other end, and many nuances between the two. Legal neutrality, as understood and codified in most secular democracies, entails recognition and legal protection of all religions. Separation of religion and state is not a necessary prerequisite for legal neutrality, which can be implemented even when there is state cooperation with religions (e.g., most European democracies). It is worth noting that legal neutrality does not mean the practice of law is always neutral. Frequently, the dominant religious group serves as an implicit standard for the legal work concerning other religious groups.<sup>23</sup> Most importantly, legal neutrality has been continuously challenged throughout history by discriminatory political practices. One of the most recent examples is the increase of restrictions on Muslim minorities in Western European democracies.<sup>24</sup>

Preexisting research has measured state involvement in religion<sup>25</sup> by using the following criteria:

- a) The constitution of the country officially recognizes one religion.
- b) The state finances places of worship and clerics.
- c) The legal system includes some provisions of religious law.
- d) State schools teach religious doctrines.

There are several issues with such a list. First, it does not account for the political ponderation of each feature. For example, inscription of religion in the constitution can be merely symbolic, as in the United Kingdom, or the existence of blasphemy law can be obsolete, as in Denmark. Second, each of these features can be implemented in various ways, some granting equality to all religions and others being discriminatory. For example, does the state provide funding for all religions, as in Belgium, or to one religion only, as in Greece? Are all religions taught in public schools or is only one taught? The responses to these questions allow us to identify different degrees of involvement, from legal neutrality on one end of the spectrum to legal privileges on the other end. In these conditions,

<sup>23</sup> Lori G. Beaman, "The Myth of Pluralism, Diversity, and Vigor: The Constitutional Privilege of Protestantism in the United States and Canada," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 42.3 (2003): 311–25.

<sup>24</sup> Jonathan Fox and Yasemin Akbaba, "Securitization of Islam and Religious Discrimination: Religious Minorities in Western Democracies, 1990 to 2008," *Comparative European Politics*, May 13, 2013, doi: 10.1057/cep.2013.8.

<sup>25</sup> Jonathan Fox and Shmuel Sandler, "Separation of Religion and State in the Twenty-First Century: Comparing the Middle East and Western Democracies," *Comparative Politics* 37.3 (2005): 317–35. Brian J. Grim and Roger Finke, *The Price of Freedom Denied: Religious Persecution and Conflict in the 21st Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011). Mark Chaves, Peter J. Schraeder, and Mario Sprindys, "State Regulation of Religion and Muslim Religious Vitality in the Industrialized West," *The Journal of Politics* 56.4 (1994): 1087.