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multiple secularities

Florian Zemmin

**How (Not) to Take 'Secularity'
Beyond the Modern West**
Reflections from Islamic Sociology

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How (Not) to Take ‘Secularity’ Beyond the Modern West

Reflections from Islamic Sociology

1 Introduction: ‘Secularity,’ Sociology, and Normativity

The scientist’s personal characteristics (personality structure and values) and scientific priorities (such as the standard work methods or questions considered urgent in his era), and likewise factors external to the scientist himself or the field (political, economic, and social circumstances), sow the seeds leading to the growth or rejection of an original idea that on (rare) occasions manages to transcend the hypothetical and provide a practical answer to a problem. In fact, theories are actually proven or refuted by these internal and external factors, and not on account of the success or failure of a laboratory experiment or the wording of a formula and an equation.¹

The concept is not merely a sign for, but also a factor in, political or social groupings.²

Debates about the usability of the concept of ‘secularity’ in academic research are not merely theoretical. Standpoints are also politically informed and arguments are sometimes emotionally charged. To some, merely using the term ‘secularity’ seems to inflict violence upon certain objects of research or even upon themselves. Others object to applying the concept beyond a particular arrangement of secularity, lest that defense-worthy arrangement be undermined. Taking a step back, however, the actual hermeneutical problem and historical question still seems rather clearly to be this: is it possible to uncouple the link between secularism as a political regime and secularity as an analytical concept with broader historical purchase?

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- 1 Miri Shefer-Mossensohn, *Science among the Ottomans: The Cultural Creation & Exchange of Knowledge* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), 4.
 - 2 Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past. On the Semantics of Historical Time*, transl. and introd. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press), 156.

The research program of *Multiple Secularities*³ hinges on this being possible indeed. Well in view of arguments for the inapplicability of ‘secularity’ beyond the modern West, Monika Wohlrab-Sahr and Marian Burchardt, the sociological architects of the theoretical program of *Multiple Secularities*, “pursue a strictly analytical understanding of secularity,”⁴ which they aim to categorically separate from the political concept of ‘secularism’. The analytical category of ‘secularity’ is meant to make sense of “distinctions and differentiations” between religion and the secular, also for contexts in which both spheres were not yet identified as such.⁵ Highlighting religious-secular distinctions – that is: secularity – before ‘secularity’ is not least meant to counter claims that before the impact of Western secularism, non-Westerners lived in an undifferentiated wholesomeness.⁶

If claims to wholesomeness form the fiercest frontline of the program of *Multiple Secularities* to apply ‘secularity’ as an analytical concept beyond the modern West, a second line of criticism objects to the pluralization of ‘secularity’, since this would open the door to historical and cultural relativism.⁷ Schematically, one may characterize claims to wholesomeness as “post-colonial” or even “anti-modernist,” and the argument for the singularity of ‘secularity’ as “modernist,” whereas the program of *Multiple Secularities* in its very name and concerning some premises is drawing on the concept of “multiple modernities.” Post-colonial critics of ‘secularity’ often fall short of offering a viable constructive alternative, due to some

3 The paradigm of *Multiple Secularities* was first presented in: Monika Wohlrab-Sahr and Marian Burchardt, “Multiple Secularities. Towards a Cultural Sociology of Secular Modernities,” *Comparative Sociology* 11 (2012). The project program was formulated by its directors in: Christoph Kleine and Monika Wohlrab-Sahr, “Research Programme of the HCAS ‘Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities,’” *Working Paper Series of the HCAS “Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities”* 1 (Leipzig University, 2016). While the main premises and arguments have remained consistent throughout, this is an evolving debate and I shall in the following refer to the latest programmatic article on *Multiple Secularities*: Monika Wohlrab-Sahr and Marian Burchardt, “Revisiting the Secular: Multiple Secularities and Pathways to Modernity,” *Working Paper Series of the HCAS “Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities”* 2 (Leipzig University, 2017).

4 Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt, “Revisiting the Secular,” 6.

5 Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt, 12.

6 Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt, 10.

7 This line of criticism is represented by: Aziz Al-Azmeh, “Vindicating Post-modern Obscurantism,” *Working Paper Series of the HCAS “Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities”* 15 (Leipzig University, forthcoming 2019).

theoretical inconsistencies⁸ and their not addressing factual historical distinctions before modernity. The objection against the pluralization of ‘secularity,’ in turn, is worth considering in view of the potential relativist effects of this wording. The program of *Multiple Secularities* could indeed equally be named *Varieties of Secularity*. After all, the basic intent and approach of *Multiple Secularities* is not to take one standard model of secularity for granted, but rather to inquire into different varieties of secularity. In this scheme, then, *Multiple Secularities* appears as the sensitive, least normatively informed middle way between two -isms, which seem to sustain each other: both identify ‘secularity’ too narrowly with the modern West, either as something to be retained (modernism) or to be rejected (anti-modernism).

In this paper, I argue that the basic approach of *Multiple Secularities* is indeed the commendable way forward, but could be refined and improved, also by learning from the valid points of its critical alternatives. Thus, this paper aspires to shed light on two basic questions, namely, *how* to take ‘secularity’ beyond the modern West, and, as a logical prior, *why* take ‘secularity’ beyond the modern West in the first place?

This second, logically primary question concerns the normativity of *Multiple Secularities* itself. For, unlike the above positioning of a sensitive middle-way may have suggested, it is hardly plausible to attribute a normative underpinning and political intention only to the other parties. Empirical usages of ‘secularity’ are always normative, as Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt rightly mention.⁹ Viewed from the outside, however, the protagonists of *Multiple Secularities* themselves also represent an empirical usage of ‘secularity,’ in addition to observing other actors’ usages via their analytical usage of ‘secularity.’ On what epistemic premises, then, does the program of *Multiple Secularities* rest? Which political context informs and allows it, also in view of the fact that the function of sociology tends to be bound to one national society? Asked simply: why would one want to take ‘secularity’ beyond Leipzig University, beyond German society, beyond the modern West? Part of the answer seems to be the intent to affirm a secular understanding and arrangement of society at a (post-secular?)¹⁰ moment

8 See: Hadi Enayat, *Islam and Secularism in Post-Colonial Thought: A Cartography of Asadian Genealogies* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

9 Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt, “Revisiting the Secular,” 6.

10 For a critical assessment of the concept ‘post-secularism’ and its proponents, see: Aamir

when this arrangement has become questionable. This affirmation does not merely want to reproduce a particular secular(ist) understanding and arrangement, but, in our globally connected present and in face of increasingly plural societies, wants to take other variations into account.

Under this basic intent, which I do share, two basic challenges present themselves regarding as to *how* to take ‘secularity’ beyond one’s own understanding: first, to avoid merely subsuming other understandings and arrangements under one’s own. Secondly, not to expand the concept of ‘secularity’ beyond its recognizability. These challenges are partially inherent to any comparative enterprise, but become especially important in light of the political ramifications of ‘secularity’: those understandings and arrangements that are grasped with the concept of ‘secularity’ and are thus presented as variations of secularity are thereby also posited as acceptable versions or parts of secular society. Thus, the limits of expanding and applying the concept of ‘secularity’ have to be equally addressed as the potentials of doing so. Moreover, it is crucial to ensure that in this process of expanding ‘secularity’, the relation to one’s own starting point is consistently retained.

This starting point, it cannot be doubted, is informed by and even forms part of the hegemonic (self-)understanding of modernity. As part of the modern order, ‘secularity’ can never be a merely descriptive concept, but always contains a normative dimension, too. That dimension needs not always be explicit, and in non-politicized usages of the concept it will not be, but it can readily be explicated by problematizing the meanings and functions of that concept. In this regard and like other concepts of the modern order such as ‘religion’ and ‘society’, ‘secularity’ – which itself rests on the aforementioned concepts – is a “thick concept.”¹¹ This is certainly one reason why the intended usage of ‘secularity’ as a mere analytical

R. Mufti, “Why I Am Not a Postsecularist,” *boundary 2* 40, no. 1 (2013). It is also worth recalling that Habermas, who coined the term ‘post-secular’ did not mean to indicate the end of secular societies but rather acknowledged, from his own non-religious perspective, the continuing existence of religious communities within a secular environment; see: Jürgen Habermas, *Glauben und Wissen. Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels 2001* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2001), 13.

11 Reinhard Schulze, *Der Koran und die Genealogie des Islam* (Basel: Schwabe, 2015), 15. Schulze takes the notion of “thick concept” from Bernard Williams. A difference to Williams, not explicated by Schulze, is that Williams referred only to concepts whose evaluative character was either inherently positive (e.g. bravery) or negative (e.g. murder), while concepts like ‘religion’ and ‘society’ can be imbued with either a positive or a negative sense.

concept can readily be challenged. More importantly, configuring ‘secularity’ as an analytical category does contain the risk of primarily confirming hegemonic modernity by subsuming under its order other kinds of distinctions. In turn, treating ‘secularity’ as a historical category primarily inquires into the formation of the modern distinction of secularity while asking for possible variations of secularity and for alternative distinctions, not least with the purpose of establishing which aspects of modern (Western) secularity are particular and which are shared more widely. Ultimately, ‘secularity’ can indeed hardly be a mere analytical category, and hence is preferably treated as a historical category.

This suggestion does not fundamentally depart from the program of *Multiple Secularities*, but rather, I think, spells out the consequences of basic insights formulated in that very program and avoids some normative pitfalls, while retaining the importance and fruitfulness of analyzing different variations of secularity. Crucial are the following insights: ‘religion’ and ‘the secular,’ and concomitantly ‘secularity,’ were only identified as such at a given historical moment;¹² secularity is a common condition and self-interpretation of modern and contemporary societies; the hegemonic elaboration of secularity, which is associated with secularism as a political doctrine, is but one variety of secularity; other modern varieties of secularity were elaborated in engaging the hegemonic variety, conventionally dubbed “Western”; also hegemonic secularity did not evolve in a self-contained West but was shaped in and by more plural encounters;¹³ non-hegemonic elaborations of secularity are not only due to the impact of Western secularity, but draw on other resources and earlier distinctions and differentiations.

The question though is – and here I suggest modifying the approach of *Multiple Secularities* – which distinctions and differentiations one considers as ‘secularity’. In other words, can and should we speak of secularity before or without ‘secularity’? This question implies that my focus in this paper will be on only one of the two lines of inquiry of *Multiple Secularities*,

12 Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt, “Revisiting the Secular,” 12.

13 This crucial aspect has not been the focus of *Multiple Secularities* thus far, but is basically acknowledged in core contributions to the program, see: Christoph Kleine, “The Secular Ground Bass of Pre-modern Japan Reconsidered: Reconsidered. Reflections upon the Buddhist Trajectories towards Secularity,” *Working Paper Series of the HCAS “Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities”* 5 (Leipzig University, 2018), 7n6; Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt, “Revisiting the Secular,” 27.

namely on distinctions, rather than differentiations. To trace ‘secularity’ as a historical category of order rather than using it as an analytical one – and one inevitably has to decide for either one of these two lines of inquiry – in a sense turns a problem (the normativity of ‘secularity’ as a thick concept) into a topic, since it asks how different varieties of secularity evolved.

A critical appraisal of two other contributions to this Working Paper series might help to elucidate my own perspective. Since ‘religion’ and the ‘secular’ are hardly universal categories expressing some anthropological given, there can be no question that ‘religion’ and the ‘secular’ were constructed at a contingent historical moment or moments to both interpret and order the world. In this regard, I share the arguments for a constructivist approach recently made by Markus Dreßler.¹⁴ Dreßler, however, largely limited his considerations to the modern context.¹⁵ In order to establish in which ways the construction of ‘religion’ and the ‘secular’ is particularly modern and in which ways it drew on and evolved out of earlier constructions, one inevitably has to inquire into possible earlier constructions or alternatives to them. Christoph Kleine, in this same Working Paper series, has done so for the case of Japan.¹⁶ He argues that in pre-modern Japan, as early as the 8th century, a distinct category to be likened to ‘religion’ was established, concomitant with its counterpart of the ‘mundane’ or ‘secular.’ Kleine further argues that this “secular ground bass” of Japan facilitated the appropriation of Western secularity in modernity. While this is plausible indeed, it remains somewhat unclear how Japanese concepts likened to ‘religion’ and ‘the secular’ – and clearly so from within the contemporary academy – intersected with modern Western concepts, and also what the main differences between these two are. Thus, both Dreßler’s and Kleine’s arguments are convincing in themselves, but might benefit from strengthening the links between their own understanding of ‘secularity,’ modern concepts of ‘secularity’ and pre-modern varieties or alternatives.

The question whether and to what extent ‘secularity’ as a historical concept can be traced beyond modernity, has to be posed as an open one. Hermeneutically, this is a genealogical enterprise, due to its starting-point

14 Markus Dreßler, “Modes of Religionization: A Constructivist Approach to Secularity,” *Working Paper Series of the HCAS “Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities”* 7 (Leipzig University, 2019).

15 Dreßler briefly mentions constructions of religion also before modernity (Dreßler, 6). I do find it difficult to reconcile this statement with his overall argument.

16 Kleine, “The Secular Ground Bass.”

within contemporary, hegemonically shaped secularity. In order to bring in potential alternatives, a genealogical perspective on the makings of modern concepts ought however to be complemented with one of conceptual history, all the while ensuring the connection between historical concepts and modern secularity. Moreover, in order to not merely subsume earlier distinctions under ‘secularity’, one needs a historical model depicting distinctions before secularity. Relating earlier distinctions to secularity in the absence of direct historical connections requires a *tertium comparationis*, which, it ought to be clear, cannot be ‘secularity’ itself. I will return to these suggestions on handling ‘secularity’ in the conclusion.

In order to illuminate the suggested perspective from a distance, the main part of this paper takes another step back and addresses the historicity and normativity not of secularity, but of hegemonic sociology and its potential alternatives. As with ‘secularity’ later, I will also discuss sociology and its alternatives with a focus on Islamic varieties. I consider this move illuminating due to, firstly, historical and theoretical connections between secularity and sociology and, secondly, fundamental analogies between ‘secularity’ and ‘sociology’ as modern categories to be potentially expanded.

Firstly, sociology, in its hegemonic variety and also beyond, is itself inherently secular and, moreover, the very usage of ‘secularity’ as an *analytical* concept is a sociological enterprise. As the institutionalized theoretical analysis and interpretation of modern secular societies, sociology also elaborated the concept of secularity and thereby formulated conditions and criteria for being modern and secular. To *explicitly* interpret and order the social world via ‘secularity’ means to uphold a particular interpretation of the world that is neither objective, nor universal. As Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt rightly stress, ‘secularity’ is not an analytical category for all actors, not even those who are actually operating with distinctions identified as ‘secularity’ by sociologists.¹⁷ While the normative position of other actors not explicitly sharing in the paradigm of ‘secularity’ can be brought out from the analytical perspective of hegemonic sociology, the latter is not a purely academic, neutral perspective either. Rather, I suggest, the particular normativity of hegemonic sociology itself came to recede into the background with the discipline’s increasing professionalization and success.

17 Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt, “Revisiting the Secular,” 14.

Secondly, while the paradigm of ‘secularity’ is of course also contested within sociology, my concern here is with the basic normativity of Eurocentric sociology and its potential alternatives. In our global present, the aim ought to be a less-Eurocentric, more-inclusive sociology. Under this aim, the history of sociology and possible earlier sociologies are also to be reconsidered. Aiming for a more plural sociology, however, equally needs to reflect upon the limits to this endeavor, has to inquire into the particularity of one’s own perspective and has to ask to what extent and on which level alternatives are actually possible and whether these alternatives can still meaningfully be called ‘sociology.’ I argue these hermeneutical challenges present themselves analogously in regard to ‘secularity’ and its potential expansion.

I will flesh out the above aspects concerning sociology in sections 2 to 4. Section 2 discusses post-colonial challenges to the alleged Eurocentrism of mainstream sociology and alternatives proposed from within the English academy. This discussion provides the background for engaging in propositions of an Islamic Sociology, formulated in Arabic, in section 3. After some information on the formation of sociology in the Arab world, I will use propositions of an Islamic Sociology to refer back to hegemonic sociology and to reflect upon the premises and criteria of sociology. Building on this, in section 4, I will then discuss the possibilities of including non-hegemonic Islamic sociologies in a common understanding of sociology, both concerning present propositions of Islamic Sociology, as well as the pre-modern sociological tradition highlighted by these propositions. Section 5 will then return to ‘secularity,’ hopefully illuminated by the related discussions on ‘sociology.’

2 Towards a less-Eurocentric Sociology

2.1 Engaging the Problem of Eurocentrism

First voiced from the periphery, criticisms of sociology being Eurocentric or colonialist have by now entered the center of the discipline, especially in the English-speaking academy. In the Arab-Islamic world, the first explicit demands to “decolonize sociology” were put forward in the 1970s, already then in English and in reference to European post-colonial

thought.¹⁸ Nevertheless, in 1997, Raewyn Connell still rightly positioned her experiment at making knowledge production in the social sciences more democratic globally at the margins of her discipline.¹⁹ Today, however, sociologists show increasing awareness for the colonial heritage of their discipline and discuss its Eurocentric aspects more widely. This is exemplified by two collective volumes, one on *Decolonizing European Sociology*²⁰ and one on *Postcolonial Sociology*.²¹ Moreover, while the aim to “decolonize sociology” often remains on a rather abstract level,²² it also produces more practical attempts, such as the social science program at the African Leadership University (ALU) inaugurated in Mauritius in 2015.²³

Calls for decolonization have clearly both a theoretical and political dimension, questioning both the salience of hegemonic sociological theories and demanding greater diversity among sociologists. While these dimensions are doubtlessly related, they should be distinguished as far as possible. Politically, who could object to the goal that peoples of all backgrounds and identities ought to be able to participate equally in sociology, as in the overall academy? One can also hardly deny that the question of who is included and excluded from the historical and theoretical canon of the discipline also depends on the diversity of sociologists themselves. This awareness, fought hard for by (previously) marginalized groups, is important in that it prompts to reflect upon the nexus of knowledge and power in one’s own discipline and upon one’s own positionality.

Things get out of hand, however, when the diversity of identities is transposed onto the theoretical level. This becomes most manifest in a culturalist relativism that posits that people have not only different, but

18 Abdelkader Zghal and Hachmi Karoui, “Decolonization and Social Science Research: The Case of Tunisia,” *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 7, no. 3 (1973); Tahar Ben Jelloun, “Decolonizing Sociology in the Maghreb: Usefulness and Risks of a Critical Function,” in *Arab Society: Social Science Perspectives*, ed. Saad Eddin Ibrahim and Nicholas S. Hopkins (Cairo: American University of Cairo Press, 1977).

19 Raewyn Connell, *Southern Theory: The Global Dynamics of Knowledge in Social Science* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

20 Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez, Manuela Boatcă and Sérgio Costa, eds., *Decolonizing European Sociology: Transdisciplinary Approaches* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

21 Julian Go, ed. *Postcolonial Sociology* (Bingley: Emerald, 2013).

22 For example: Gennaro Ascione, *Science and the Decolonization of Social Theory: Unthinking Modernity* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

23 Jess Auerbach, “What a new university in Africa is doing to decolonise social sciences,” *The Conversation*, May 13, 2017, <https://theconversation.com/what-a-new-university-in-africa-is-doing-to-decolonise-social-sciences-77181>.

mutually incompatible views and identities. A focus on culture can also gloss over more significant differences shaping one's position in the world, such as economic resources and social status. Most importantly, at a theoretical level, diversity is hardly a value in itself. In other words, the salience and fruitfulness of a theory does not hinge on it being as diverse as possible, let alone on the diverse identities of sociologists following a theory. The charge of Eurocentrism also occasionally leaves unclear what Eurocentrism consists of theoretically or methodologically.²⁴ And at what point would the allegedly colonial or Eurocentric aspects of sociology be finally unthought or sufficiently diversified? Expanding and diversifying sociology thus entails the risk of undermining the very basis on which sociology stands. In that sense, some postcolonial critics might unwillingly undermine the bases on which their own knowledge-production rests.

Theoretically, then, the aim in our global present – and *Multiple Secularities* shares this aim in regard to secularity – has to be to go beyond both the hegemonic universalism of sociology as well as particularisms in the name of diversity. Today, one can hardly disagree with the attempt of the *Handbook of International Sociology* “to move beyond the binaries of universalism versus relativism/particularism to posit a third position that suggests sociological traditions are both universal and diverse.”²⁵

Among the concrete attempts to not only criticize Eurocentric sociology, but also to push for a constructive alternative, the work of Gurinder Bhambra stands out. In her book, *Rethinking Modernity: Postcolonialism and the Sociological Imagination*, published in 2007,²⁶ Bhambra forcefully criticized the absence of non-Europeans from mainstream sociology, both concerning its historical self-understanding and its analytical frameworks. She ends that book with suggestions as to how to overcome these defects by working towards “connected histories;”²⁷ suggestions that she then

24 For critical remarks on this point, see: Gregor McLennan, “Eurocentrism, Sociology, Secularity,” in *Decolonizing European Sociology: Transdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez, Manuela Boatcă, and Sérgio Costa (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), esp. 122–25.

25 Sujata Patel, “Introduction: Diversities of Sociological Traditions,” in *The ISA Handbook of Diverse Sociological Traditions*, ed. Sujata Patel (London: SAGE, 2010), 16.

26 Gurinder K. Bhambra, *Rethinking Modernity: Postcolonialism and the Sociological Imagination* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

27 This paradigm is taken from Subrahmanyam. See first: Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia,” *Modern Asian Studies* 31, no. 3 (1997): 735–62.

elaborated in her monograph on *Connected Sociologies*, published in 2014.²⁸ Bhambra's aim of "connected sociologies" is meant to construct a more inclusive sociology by connecting, rather than simply adding different perspectives. This prospective aim has to go along with retrospectively inquiring into the power structures that have come to shape and still shape the canon of sociology. However, Bhambra argues, expanding that canon must not merely add new instances to what came to be established sociology, but must transform the understanding of sociology itself. Earlier attempts at diversification had failed to do so, she claims. A major target of hers is Eisenstadt's theory of "multiple modernities"; and Bhambra is right in pointing out, as others had done before,²⁹ that this theory remains Eurocentric in nature. After all, Eisenstadt conceived of modernity as only originating in Europe and then being multiplied through different appropriations. Bhambra also criticizes calls for "indigenous sociologies" as impasses, for they merely added to and confirmed hegemonic sociology.³⁰ Here I would submit that indigenous sociologies have made a difference to the understanding of sociology, even though they did not change it fundamentally. Overall, while Bhambra forcefully and convincingly demands to reflect upon the nexus of power and knowledge in sociology, the question remains to what extent and from which position it is possible or even desirable to change sociology fundamentally.

On a more critical note, Bhambra does not complement her plea for expanding and diversifying sociology with criteria for the possibilities and limits of this operation. She might indeed be willing to take the risk of transforming sociology in a more open process, with the possible outcome not being sociology anymore. Here, I would object that a sociological mode of viewing and interpreting the social world is worth maintaining. In general, and unlike some critics of modernity suggest, what also came about in a contingent, historical process – and from my secular perspective that includes every aspect of human thought and behavior – can be of value. The fact that sociology was established in a historically contingent

28 Gurminder K. Bhambra, *Connected Sociologies* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

29 See, for example: Sujata Patel, "Are the Theories of Multiple Modernities Eurocentric? The Problem of Colonialism and Its Knowledge(s)," in *Worlds of Difference*, ed. Saïd Amir Arjomand and Elisa Reis (London: Sage, 2013).

30 Attempts at indigenous sociology had been criticized already at an early stage; see, for example, Abdelkebir Khatibi, "Double Criticism: The Decolonization of Arab Sociology," in *Contemporary North Africa: Issues of Development and Integration*, ed. Halim Barakat (Washington, DC: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1985).

process, which inevitably included a power dimension, can thus not be in itself an argument against its premises and structure. It also means that the contours of sociology can and do change, but that core constituents of sociology, while historically made, cannot be simply unthought or undone. What is definitely ironic is the lack in Bhabra's work – and tendentially in post-colonial scholarship more widely – of engagement with contributions in languages other than English. After all, the importance of language and concepts in theoretically understanding and partially even constructing the social world should be obvious. The following section will bring such non-English, in my case Arabic, contributions into the discussion in order to reflect upon and potentially expand the hegemonic understanding of sociology. The self-reflective starting point for this potential expansion lies within the secular, English-speaking academy, with its particular hegemonic categories.

From this starting point, I do consider the expansion and modification of hegemonic categories to varying contexts to be the most plausible strategy to arrive at more inclusive understandings, a strategy that amounts to a heuristic Eurocentrism, or rather: heuristic Academicentrism. A heuristic Eurocentrism is advisable for both historical and hermeneutical reasons, as I elaborated elsewhere³¹ and can summarize here only very briefly. Historically, one first needs to acknowledge – in a very sober tone – that one cannot write power out of history. Whether one likes it or not, European ideas and concepts were widely engaged and appropriated in colonial modernity. They are more widely shared due to these appropriations, but also due to them being only a particular variation of more common aspects. With the hegemonic variety, however, one can see further than with any other particular variety. This does not mean that Europeans are the subjects and non-Europeans the objects of knowledge. Rather, and adding to the fact that there is a lot of non-European in Europe and vice versa, this heuristic Eurocentrism is an explorative strategy that precisely inquires, in an open-ended process, how particular the hegemonic assumptions and understandings one departs from actually are, and accordingly how widely they are shared. Thus, one's own starting-point is transforming in this very process, as are the contours of what is considered hegemonic.

31 Florian Zemmin, *Modernity in Islamic Tradition. The Concept of 'Society' in the Journal al-Manar (Cairo, 1898–1940)* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 17–26.

While historically shaped hegemony might be of a temporal nature, the hermeneutic reason for departing from European, English concepts is more fundamental. It is due to us, in the secular, English-speaking academy, operating with these very concepts. Inevitably, at one point or another in one's research, one will translate the concepts and categories of the objects of research into one's own contemporary categories. Trying to avoid this by only using object categories is likely to fail since it will be necessary to translate eventually to be understood by contemporary readers. In any case, it naively suppresses the implicit starting point of one's inquiry within the secular academy. If this strategy amounts to Academicentrism in the end, its aim is to inquire into the genealogy of one's own assumptions and categories and then to discern how far these categories can travel and in which regards they ought to be expanded and modified to reflect wider conceptual usages and historical realities.

2.2 Alternatives to Eurocentric Sociology from within the English Academy

In order to inquire into actual consequences of post-colonial criticisms of Eurocentrism for the production of sociological knowledge, I shall now discuss at some length an attempt at applying a non-Eurocentric and more inclusive sociology to actual case studies, namely James Spickard's work *Alternative Sociologies of Religion* from 2017.³² Spickard starts from his impression that "default sociology" has a too narrow understanding of religion, which fails to account for many actual religious experiences and practices in different societies. Mainstream sociology, according to Spickard, namely identifies religion rather closely with belief, organization, and moral teachings and considers it a distinct sphere of society. He attributes this narrowness to the particular European, mainly French, historical experiences of religion that shaped sociology, and explores the additional insights that could be gained by drawing on alternative sociological approaches, that is, by looking at religion "through non-Western eyes," as the book's subtitle reads.

Spickard considers three alternative approaches to religion, each of which he first summarizes and then applies to practical case studies to test their potential. These alternatives are a Chinese Confucian one (focusing on ancestor worship and questioning the notion of individuality); the

32 James V. Spickard, *Alternative Sociologies of Religion: Through Non-Western Eyes* (New York: New York University Press, 2017).

concept, or rather experience, of religion in rituals by the Navajo tribe in the American Southwest; and, concerning the Islamic world, Ibn Khaldun's discussion of religion as guarantor of social integration. For obvious reasons, we shall focus here on Spickard's usage of Ibn Khaldun, a usage that was prompted by "accepting the post-colonial challenge," as the title of an earlier article by Spickard reads.³³ While Spickard's empathetic call for a more inclusive and plural understanding of sociology is politically important, it will transpire that he – in the end – very selectively integrates into hegemonic sociology alternative perspectives that do not alter the latter's theoretical assumptions.

The Arab judge and philosopher of history, Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406) is widely acclaimed for his sociological ideas or even, as some claim, for having been the founder of sociology. I shall discuss such characterizations in greater detail in the following section. Here, it matters how Spickard is making use of Ibn Khaldun. In his famous *Muqaddima*, Ibn Khaldun distinguished between Bedouin and cultured life (according to Spickard in the sense of Weberian ideal types)³⁴ and inquired into the reasons for the supposed cyclical alteration of both types of collective life. The motor and sustainer of collective life for Ibn Khaldun is 'aṣabiyya (group solidarity). 'Aṣabiyya is predominantly based on kinship and is strongest among Bedouin peoples, not only because of external threats but also as an internal motivator. 'Aṣabiyya strengthens the solidarity and force of a collectivity and allows it to advance in cultured life and to overpower a more advanced collectivity. However, after a given time, usually four generations, this collectivity will be overpowered itself, for its 'aṣabiyya inevitably gets weaker under the conditions of cultured life. While 'aṣabiyya in the primary form of kinship naturally weakens with the growth of a collectivity, according to Ibn Khaldun, it can to some extent be substituted with religion. The Arabs more than others needed such an alternative source of 'aṣabiyya, because of their savagery. Islam provided that source, which allowed for a wider integration of the Arab's collectivity. However, it too could not completely halt decline, which is inevitable in Ibn Khaldun's cyclical understanding of history. Spickard finds special interest in Ibn Khaldun connecting in his

33 James V. Spickard, "Accepting the Post-colonial Challenge: Theorizing a Khaldūnian Approach to the Marian Apparition at Medjugorje," *Critical Research on Religion* 1, no. 2 (2013): 158–76.

34 Spickard, *Alternative Sociologies*, 140.

core concept of *‘aşabiyya* religion and ethnicity – “two things that standard Western sociology (and the sociology of religion) typically keeps apart.”³⁵ Spickard suggests that an alignment of religion and ethnicity would allow for a more adequate understanding of recent conflicts in Muslim societies.

To test how “a Khaldūnian sociology (might) work in practice,”³⁶ Spickard applies it to two cases. The first is Medjugorje in former Yugoslavia. Medjugorje was visited by different confessional groups as a site of a supposed Marian experience. The ensuing ethnic-religious conflict in Yugoslavia is better understood, Spickard suggests, if one views with Ibn Khaldun the heightened religiosity displayed in Medjugorje as also contributing to group solidarity and therefore to later conflicts:

Unlike the standard Western approach, a Khaldūnian sociology would not be surprised by the eruption of communal violence. Intense group-feeling can stimulate conflict with outsiders. It does not matter whether the feeling comes from religion or from ethnic ties. In short, a Khaldūnian approach is not surprised by the eruption of ethnic conflict at a religious pilgrimage site.³⁷

Such a Khaldunian approach also avoids standard sociology’s false opposition of static tradition and dynamic modernity, Spickard argues.³⁸ In his second case study, Spickard argues that Europeans joining the Islamic State as fighters “are clearly driven by a form of group solidarity: one of ideology, not of origin.”³⁹ These people arguably lacked a sense of *‘aşabiyya* in their home societies and thus resorted to religious solidarity in the imagined community of the Islamic umma.⁴⁰ Ibn Khaldun, according to Spickard, made a similarly fruitful “theoretical move” as Olivier Roy in his analysis of European jihadis, namely, “[h]e has looked to people’s concrete social situations to see what kind of social solidarity they can develop.”⁴¹

Now, while one could also discuss the plausibility of Spickard’s reading of Ibn Khaldun, more crucial is whether the resort to Ibn Khaldun actually improved sociological analysis, and in which sense it made for

35 Spickard, *Alternative Sociologies*, 153.

36 Spickard, 159.

37 Spickard, 168.

38 Notably, he also discusses the limits of this approach, which obviously cannot account for all factors in play: Spickard, 172.

39 Spickard, 177.

40 Spickard, 177–78.

41 Spickard, 178.

an alternative sociology. Whereas Spickard argued that “looking through non-Western eyes” brings into sight aspects that a Eurocentric gaze is missing, it seems rather clear that these aspects were visible *before* turning to Ibn Khaldun and that Spickard appropriated the latter very selectively to highlight those aspects and support their analysis with a conceptual toolkit. Thus, for example, it did not take Ibn Khaldun to see structural commonalities between religion and ethnicity. Comparisons between Islamism and ethnic nationalism testify to this. Spickard is thus less formulating a “Khalduñian approach,” but rather is appropriating Ibn Khaldun from within contemporary sociological discourse to make a critical intervention that would have been equally possible without reference to Ibn Khaldun. Spickard, in the end, offers less an alternative sociology with alternative premises, theories or methods, but rather a call for critical self-reflectivity of sociology, and for incorporating non-Western intellectual resources in the construction of a more inclusive sociology, appropriate for “living in the global world.”⁴² Spickard’s sociological appropriation of Ibn Khaldun is thus primarily a political move.

This also holds true for the works of Sayid Farid Alatas, the one scholar who most intensely and sophisticatedly engaged with Ibn Khaldun in a sociological perspective.⁴³ Alatas applied selected concepts of Ibn Khaldun to several case studies.⁴⁴ He notably did so by combining Khalduñian concepts with others from modern sociology. For example, he combined the concept of *‘aşabiyya* with Marx’ theory of the mode of production to explain the rise and decline of the Safavid dynasty (1501–1772) in conjunction with its political economy.⁴⁵ Moreover, Alatas made sure not to simply equate Ibn Khaldun’s thoughts with modern sociology, but to situate them in Ibn Khaldun’s historical context and thought-world. Overall, it becomes clear from Alatas’ oeuvre that he is consciously appropriating selected

42 Spickard, 251. Indeed, despite the book’s title, Spickard argues more for a global sociology, than for different alternative sociologies. He does not argue that different societies require different sociologies, even though he suggests Ibn Khaldun is especially fruitful in the analysis of Islamic societies because of his own Islamic attitude.

43 There is no point in listing Alatas’s numerous works here. For a rightfully appreciative summary, see: Nurullah Ardiç, “Khalduñian Studies Today: The Contributions of Syed Farid Alatas,” *Journal for Historical Sociology* 30, no. 1 (2017).

44 For a collection, see: Syed Farid Alatas, *Applying Ibn Khaldun: The Recovery of a Lost Tradition in Sociology* (London: Routledge, 2014).

45 First in: Syed Farid Alatas, “A Khalduñian Perspective on the Dynamics of Asiatic Societies,” *Comparative Civilizations Review* 29 (1993).

aspects of Ibn Khaldun's thoughts to make them fruitful for contemporary sociology. However, Alatas sometimes uses phraseology that suggest an ahistorical or teleological reading, such as when he characterizes Ibn Khaldun's writings as "sociological in nature"⁴⁶ or stresses that a "sociology of sorts"⁴⁷ was practiced outside the West and before modernity. I would insist on the fact that 'sociological' aspects of Ibn Khaldun were only identified with hindsight of and from within modern sociology – as the reader might suspect from my introductory remarks and as will become ever clearer later. What is certain for now is that after several decades of work on and with Ibn Khaldun, Alatas has in fact managed to firmly inscribe Ibn Khaldun into the sociological canon.⁴⁸

If expanding the sociological canon to include Ibn Khaldun was primarily a political move, it is a desirable one. First, let us not forget that the earlier construction and maintenance of that canon also had an inherent political dimension. The rather narrow and allegedly self-sufficient understanding of European sociology was itself borne out of a contingent historical moment. In this regard, it is worth noting that several European scholars around the turn of the 19th century had in fact included Ibn Khaldun within sociology, even though sometimes primarily for validating their own sociological approach.⁴⁹ In general, as Bhambra had also forcefully argued, European sociological thought did not plainly evolve in a self-sufficient Europe, but was inspired and shaped by encounters.⁵⁰ This is to say that a more plural sociological canon is not only desirable in our global age, but also has historical arguments to show for, which will come increasingly into view as paradigms of national or civilizational history are being replaced by global and entangled history.

46 Alatas, *Applying Ibn Khaldūn*, 9.

47 Alatas, 154.

48 Syed Farid Alatas, "Ibn Khaldūn," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Major Social Theorists: Classical Social Theorists*, vol. 1, ed. George Ritzer and Jeffrey Stepinsky (Chichester: Wiley & Sons, 2011); Syed Farid Alatas and Vineeta Sinha, *Sociological Theory beyond the Canon* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

49 See: Ludwig Gumplowicz, "Ibn Chaldun, ein arabischer Soziologe des XIV. Jahrhunderts," in *Soziologische Essays* (Innsbruck: Verlag der Wagnerschen Univ.-Buchhandlung, 1899 [1898]).

50 In 1977, Pankoke had already pointed to the importance of discovering the "new world" for the "sociological imagination"; see: Eckart Pankoke, "Fortschritt und Komplexität. Die Anfänge moderner Sozialwissenschaft in Deutschland," in *Studien zum Beginn der modernen Welt*, ed. Reinhart Koselleck (Stuttgart: Klett Cotta, 1977).

Moreover, the expansion of the sociological canon goes along with an enlargement and diversification of the conceptual toolkit that can play out fruitfully at a theoretical level. Thus, the concept of *‘aşabiyya* might, once established, become equally as fruitful as other sociological conceptualizations of social cohesion or solidarity, even though it was included in sociological theory primarily for political motives. To claim that the applicability of *‘aşabiyya* is confined to Arab or Islamic societies would be to fall into the culturalist trap. One may however ask, given that sociology is “both universal and particular,” whether *‘aşabiyya* helps to express the universal idea of group formation in a particular conceptual framework, in the same way as ‘social cohesion’ does. In this sense, and following the more productive understanding of indigenous sociology not as separate sociologies, but as variations of common sociology,⁵¹ both *‘aşabiyya* and ‘social cohesion’ are indigenous concepts. In other words, *‘aşabiyya* and ‘social cohesion’ are particular guiding ideas to address the same underlying reference problem. The link to ‘secularity’ as one particular guiding idea also appears rather clearly here, but will be spelled out in the fifth section.

3 Arabic Propositions of an Islamic Sociology

3.1 Sociology in (Post-)Colonial Arab Countries

While the history of sociology as an academic discipline in the Arab world leaves much to be explored, two aspects are rather clearly established: first, the centrality of Egypt in the founding stage of sociology; and second, the influence of European colonial power and of European sociologists. I highlight European influence here also because it became the target of Islamic Sociology. It should be clear that European ideas were not plainly adopted by Arab actors or even implemented simply as part of a colonial project. In fact, the local demand for social sciences partly stemmed from aims at creating national sovereignty.⁵² Moreover, in acts of creative appropriations, Arab sociologists also re-configured the thought of towering figures such

51 For a critical discussion of different understandings of indigenizing social sciences, see: Syed Farid Alatas, “Indigenization: Features and Problems,” in *Asian Anthropology*, ed. Jan van Bremen, Eyal Ben-Ari, and Syed Farid Alatas (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005).

52 Alain Roussillon, “Projet colonial et traditions scientifiques: aux origines de la sociologie égyptienne,” in *D’un Orient l’autre: les métamorphoses successives des perceptions et connaissances*, vol. 2: *identifications*, ed. CEDEJ (Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1991), esp. 364; Ahmad Zayid, “Seventy Years of Sociology in Egypt,” *Cairo Papers in Social Science* 18, no. 3 (1995): 48.

as Durkheim in fundamental ways.⁵³ It should also be clear that the following sketch cannot account for differences between individual countries, but only highlights the most significant and general trends. These qualifications in mind, the influence of European, initially mainly French and later Anglo-Saxon sociology in Arab countries remains crucial to the discipline's development; as does the centrality of Egypt.

Prior to its institutionalization, European sociological ideas were already present in the Arab world, and specifically in Egypt. Saint Simonians had brought their program of social engineering to Egypt in the 1830s, and did gain a certain influence in the following decades.⁵⁴ Attention to societal issues was a more widespread concern at the time, and overviews of the history of modern social thought in Arabic more broadly tend to begin with Islamic reformers of the 19th century,⁵⁵ who some Egyptian sociologists consider as crucial for the shaping of their discipline.⁵⁶ European 'sociology,' explicitly designated as such, was first discussed, appropriated and disseminated in Arabic journals, which mushroomed from the 1870s onwards. Most important in this regard was the journal *al-Muqtataf*, edited by Syrian Christians and moved from Beirut to Cairo in 1884;⁵⁷ but also the most prominent Islamic journal, *al-Manar*, validated sociology as a science necessary for the present age and referred to European sociologists in a positive, if superficial manner.⁵⁸ Most prominent among these was Herbert

53 See, for example, Ali al-Wafi's appropriation of Durkheim: Alain Roussillon, "La représentation de l'identité par les discours fondateurs de la sociologie turque et égyptienne: Ziya Gökalp et 'Ali 'Abd al-Wahid Wafi," in *Modernisation et mobilisation sociale II, Egypte-Turquie*, ed. CEDEJ (Cairo: CEDEJ – Égypte/Soudan, 1992), <http://books.openedition.org/cedej/1047>. Omnia El Shakry worked on the formation of the social sciences in Egypt, focusing not on sociology, but on anthropology, human geography, and demography: Omnia El Shakry, *The Great Social Laboratory: Subjects of Knowledge in Colonial and Postcolonial Egypt* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007). El Shakry somehow overstretches the argument though: while she argues that Egyptians played an active role in the very construction of these sciences, her sources instead suggest creative appropriations of these sciences.

54 Muhammad T. 'Isa, *Atba' Saint-Simon: Falsafatum al-Ijtima'iyya wa-Tatbiqaha fi Misr* (Cairo: Matba'at Jami'at al-Qahira, 1957).

55 'Izzat Qarni, *Tarikh al-Fikr al-Siyasi wa-l-Ijtima'i fi Misr al-Haditha (1834–1914)* (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Misriyya al-'Amma li-l-Kitab, 2006).

56 Roussillon, "Projet colonial," 362.

57 See, for example: Nasim Efendi Birbari, "al-Susiyluljiyya ay 'Ilm al-Ijtima' al-Insani," *al-Muqtataf* 21, no. 8, 9, 11 (1897).

58 Zemmin, *Modernity in Islamic Tradition*, 367–73.

Spencer,⁵⁹ who was also the central source for the first Arabic monograph on sociology, published in 1924/25 by Niqula al-Haddad.⁶⁰

It was also in 1925 that the first department of sociology was established at the Egyptian University in Cairo,⁶¹ the year of its nationalization. The institution was founded in 1908 as a private institution. It took non-religious European universities as its model, and European scholars and orientalists also influenced the project directly.⁶² It is no contradiction to stress that this orientation at European models and ideas was an attempt at improving their own capability to master the modern world and to gain sovereignty. Concerning sociology, it nevertheless holds true that it was European scholars who offered the first courses in sociology from 1913 and then also held the chair of sociology established in 1925. The department for sociology at the Egyptian University was closed in 1934, and only reopened after the Revolution of 1952.

The first Egyptian to then hold the chair in sociology was 'Ali 'Abd al-Wafi, who had studied in Paris and was visibly influenced by Durkheim, but at the same time highlighted the sociological contribution of Ibn Khaldun.⁶³ He thereby did not attempt to formulate a particular Arab or Islamic Sociology, but rather meant to legitimize the novel discipline of sociology. The validity of sociological approaches was indeed anything but obvious, not least when it came to religious subjects. This shows up, for example, in the scandal around Mansur Fahmi, who had been the first Egyptian to obtain a degree in sociology in 1913 in Paris under the supervision of Lévy-Bruhl. On learning of Fahmi's arguments on the role of women in Islam, the Egyptian University, which had sponsored his studies in Paris, tried to prevent the defense of Fahmi's thesis. While this did not succeed, the University banned Fahmi from teaching.⁶⁴ Four years after Fahmi

59 See also: Marwa ElShakry, "Spencer's Arabic Readers," in *Global Spencerism: The Communication and Appropriation of a British Evolutionist*, ed. Bernard Lightman (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

60 Niqula al-Haddad, *'Ilm al-Ijtima': Hayat al-Hay'a al-Ijtima'iyya wa-Tatawwuruha* (Cairo: al-Matba'a al-'Asriyya, 1924/25).

61 From 1940 to 1952, it was named "King Fua'd University" and since then "Cairo University."

62 For the history of the university from 1908 to 1952, see: Donald Malcolm Reid, *Cairo University and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); for the influence of orientalists in particular: Donald Malcolm Reid, "Cairo University and the Orientalists," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19, no. 1 (1987).

63 Roussillon, "La représentation de l'identité."

64 Reid, "Cairo University and the Orientalists," 64–66.

and also in Paris, Taha Husayn defended his PhD thesis on Ibn Khaldun, written under the supervision of Emile Durkheim and the orientalist Paul Casanova.⁶⁵ Husayn, who considered Egypt to be part of European culture, placed Ibn Khaldun as an oriental outside of modern sociological thought. This again illustrates the identity politics involved in constructing a sociological tradition. According to Alain Roussillon, a Durkheimian approach remained dominant in the universities, while private associations more concerned with the societal application of knowledge were oriented more towards Anglo-Saxon approaches.⁶⁶

The first formation of sociology in colonial Egypt remained rather limited in scope, but did impact the much wider establishment of sociology in the newly independent Arab nation states of the 1950s and 60s. Cairo University had been a model for a number of newly founded universities in other Arab countries, and Egyptian teachers were in high demand.⁶⁷ Today, sociology and other social sciences are present at the majority of universities in Arab countries.⁶⁸ The expansion of higher education in Arab countries of course mirrors developments in Europe, as does the influence of Marxist teachings from the 1960s onwards. The Egyptian president Nasser characterized revolution as “the science of complete societal transformation (*‘ilm al-taghyir al-ijtimā’i al-shāmil*)”⁶⁹ and sociologists were expected to help with this task. The link between sociology and socialism, which illustrates the political dimension of sociology, is apparent in Arabic and European countries alike: for example, Niqula Haddad not only authored the first Arabic monograph on *Sociology* in 1925, but also the first book on *Socialism (Ishtirakiyya)* five years earlier.⁷⁰ In Morocco, the first generation of sociologists from the 1960s combined Marxist convictions

65 Taha Husayn, *La philosophie sociale d'Ibn-Khaldoun* (Paris: A. Pedone, 1917); Taha Husayn, *Falsafat Ibn Khaldun al-Ijtima'iyya: Tahlil wa-Naqd* (Cairo: Matba'at al-I'timad, 1925).

66 Roussillon, “Projet colonial.”

67 Katharina Lange, *Zurückholen, was uns gehört: Indigenisierungstendenzen in der arabischen Ethnologie* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2005), 43–44.

68 See: Mohammed Bamyeh, ed., *Social Sciences in the Arab World: Forms of Presence [First Report by the Arab Social Science Monitor]* (Beirut: Arab Council for the Social Sciences, 2015), 17.

69 Jamal 'Abd al-Nasir, quoted in: Alain Roussillon, “Sociologie et société en Egypte: le contournement des intellectuels par l'Etat,” in *Les intellectuels et le pouvoir*, ed. T. Al-Bishri et al. (Cairo: CEDEJ, 1996), 95. Compare: Judith Zimmermann, ‘Sozialismus ist aktive Soziologie.’ *Religion, Politik und Gesellschaft im Leben und Werk von Robert Hertz* (PhD thesis, Leipzig University, 2017).

70 Niqula al-Haddad, *al-Ishtirakiyya*. (n.g.: Dar al-Mada li-l-Thaqafa wa-l-Nashr, 2002 [1920]).

and criticism of colonial power in their activist understanding of sociology.⁷¹ It is certainly no coincidence that it is generally “difficult to imagine a Nazi or Stalinist sociologist and almost impossible to imagine a racist sociologist.”⁷² If sociology in general not only analyzes, but also helps to order society, authoritarian regimes in the Arab world aimed at using sociology directly for their socialist policies.

The lack of political freedom continues, to varying degrees, to restrict the practice and quality of sociology in Arab countries, as does the underfunding of the university system. Political and economic restraints have already been criticized for half a century and are still rightly criticized today.⁷³ The translation of sociological works into Arabic also arose from pragmatic concerns: While the first Arab sociologists were versed in French or English and had received their education abroad, the expansion of sociology and the vastly increasing number of students created a demand for translating sociological works into Arabic.⁷⁴ Still, translations into Arabic also had a political aspect when considered as part of nationalizing or Arabizing sciences. It is

71 Muhammad al-Idrisi, “Tadris al-Susiyulujjiyya fi al-Maghrib: al-Mu’assasat al-Bahthiyya wa-Rihan al-Ma’ssasa al-Ibistimulujjiyya li-l-Mumarisa al-‘Ilmiyya,” *al-Majlis al-‘Arabi li-l-‘Ulum al-Ijtima’iyya: Silsilat Awwaq al-‘Amal* 1 (2017), 3–4.

72 Alain Touraine, “The End of the ‘Social,’” in *Comparing Modernities. Pluralism versus Homogeneity*, ed. Eliezer Ben-Rafael and Yitzhak Sternberg (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 232.

73 See, for example, several contributions in the following three volumes from 1984, 1986 and 2014: Ahmad Khalifa and Lutfi Suhair, eds., *Ishkaliyat al-‘Ulum al-Ijtima’iyya fi al-Watan al-‘Arabi* (Beirut: Dar al-Tanwir, 1984); Markaz Dirasat al-Wahda al-‘Arabiyya, *Nahw ‘Ilm Ijtima’ ‘Arabi: ‘Ilm al-Ijtima’ wa-l-Mushkilat al-‘Arabiyya al-Rahina* (Beirut: Markaz Dirasat al-Wahda al-‘Arabiyya, 1986); Sari Hanafi, Nouria Bengehbrit-Remaoun, and Medjahdi Mustafa, eds., *Mustaqbal al-‘Ulum al-Ijtima’iyya fi al-Watan al-‘Arabi* (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2014). See as additional glimpses into these structural issues: Sari Hanafi and Rigas Arvanitis, “The Marginalization of the Arab Language in Social Science: Structural Constraints and Dependency by Choice,” *Current Sociology* 62, no. 5 (2014); Saha Hamzawy and Samya Kawashi, “Ishkalat ‘Ilm al-Ijtima’ fi al-Watan al-‘Arabi: Qira’at Tahliliyya li-I’tirafat ba’d ‘Ulama’ al-Ijtima’ al-‘Arab,” *Majallat al-‘Ulum al-Insaniyya wa-l-Ijtima’iyya* 28 (2017); Khaled Fahmy, “The Crisis of the Humanities in Egypt,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 37, no. 1 (2017).

74 In the early years of the Egyptian University, demands at Arabizing the institution had already been voiced (Reid, *Cairo University*, 99–100). A bibliography of Arab sociological works, compiled in 1979 with the aim of strengthening Arabic sociology, comprises no fewer than 5153 titles: Muhammad Fathi ‘Abd al-Hadi, *al-Dail al-Bibliyujrafi li-l-Intaj al-Fikri al-‘Arabi fi al-‘Ulum al-Ijtima’iyya (‘Ilm al-Ijtima’ wa-l-Anthrubulujjiyya wa-l-Fulk-lur)* (Cairo: al-Munazzama al-‘Arabiyya li-l-Tarbiya wa-l-Thaqafa wa-l-‘Ulum, 1979). As a bibliographical resource, see now: Ahmad Zayid and Muhammad al-Jawhari, *al-Intaj al-‘Arabi fi ‘Ilm al-Ijtima’: Qa’ima Bibliyughrafiyya Mashruha* [vol. 1: 1924–1995; vol. 2 1995–2000] (Cairo: Markaz al-Buhuth wa-l-Dirasat al-Ijtima’iyya, 2001, 2003).

crucial to bear these more structural and pragmatic dimensions in mind, lest we suggest that the criticism of sociology as Eurocentric, to which we now turn, is the only aspect under which the state of sociology in Arab countries and its aspired improvement has been discussed.

3.2 Arabic Criticisms of Hegemonic Sociology

Despite wider efforts at Arabizing sociology there exist only two Arabic monographs that actually try and formulate an Arab sociology,⁷⁵ and both authors would later in fact turn to “Islamic Sociology.” Salih al-Fawwal, who in 1982 had posited an indissoluble link between Arab and Islamic identity in his *Introduction to Arab and Islamic Sociology*,⁷⁶ followed up with an *Introduction to Islamic Sociology* in 2000.⁷⁷ Ma'n Khalil 'Umar granted a central role to Islam in his book *Towards an Arab Theory of Sociology* from 1989, but accorded primacy to Arab society and culture.⁷⁸ Twenty-five years later, 'Umar's book was republished under the title of *Islamic Sociology*, with only very minor changes, primarily replacing “Arab” with “Islamic” and “Arabs” with “Muslims.”⁷⁹ The shift from “Arab” to “Islamic Sociology” indicates two things: first, the construction of a sociological tradition greatly hinges on the society one envisions (primarily as Arab or as Islamic); second, the paradigm of an “Arab sociology” was plausible in conjunction with pan-Arab politics and the vision for an Arab society,⁸⁰ but had run its course rather quickly, whereas “Islam” continues to be a more widely shared concept of order.

75 A third was published in German, but quickly debunked as unacademic, and seemingly without wider reception: Abdulkader Irabi, *Arabische Soziologie: Studien zur Geschichte und Gesellschaft des Islam* (Darmstadt: WBG, 1989); Werner Ende, “Arabische Soziologie. Studien zur Geschichte und Gesellschaft des Islam by Abdulkader Irabi,” *Die Welt des Islams* 31, no. 2 (1991).

76 Salih Mustafa al-Fawwal, *al-Tarikh al-Nazari li-'Ilm al-Ijtima'*; vol. 2: *al-Muqaddima li-'Ilm al-Ijtima' al-'Arabi wa-l-Islami* (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr al-'Arabi, 1982).

77 Salah Mustafa al-Fawwal, *al-Madkhal li-'Ilm al-Ijtima' al-Islami* (Cairo: Dar Gharuba li-l-Tiba'a wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzi', 2000).

78 Ma'n Khalil 'Umar, *Nahwa Nazariyya 'Arabiyya fi 'Ilm al-Ijtima'* ('Amman: Dar M. Lawi, 1991), referred to from here on as *Arab Theory of Sociology*; also published, seemingly identical, as: Ma'n Khalil 'Umar, *Nahwa 'Ilm Ijtima' 'Arabi* ('Amman: Dar Majdalawi li-l-Nashr, 1991).

79 Ma'n Khalil 'Umar, *'Ilm al-Ijtima' al-Islami* (n.g.: Dar al-Zahra' li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzi', 2013).

80 Sociological works positing Arab society as their frame of reference could of course be included in a wider understanding of “Arab Sociology”; see, for example: 'Ali Ahmad 'Isa, *al-Mujtama' al-'Arabi: Dirasat Ijtima'iyya 'Amaliyya* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1961).

Propositions of an Islamic Sociology are indeed much more numerous than those of an Arab Sociology, and they also extend to the present. The twenty Arabic monographs entitled “Islamic Sociology (*‘Ilm al-Ijtima‘ al-Islami*)” that I am aware of were published between 1970 and 2013. To these, one could add other works not carrying *Islamic Sociology* in their title, but sharing in the fundamental criticism of Western⁸¹ sociology from an Islamic perspective, such as the *Islamic School of Sociology*,⁸² an *Islamic View on Sociology*,⁸³ a *New Islamic Understanding of Sociology*,⁸⁴ *The Islamic Formation of Sociology*⁸⁵ or *Sociology between Islamic and Foreign Conscience*.⁸⁶ By fundamental criticism, I here mean a challenge to the very epistemic foundations on which sociology rests. This challenge is also formulated in the two English books presenting an *Islamic Sociology*.⁸⁷ Propositions of an Islamic Sociology that posit a distinct Islamic epistemology share a concern with broader attempts to Islamize sciences. The International Institute for Islamic Thought (IIIT), founded in Herndon (Virginia) in 1981 is the most prominent location of such attempts,⁸⁸ which were also promoted in and by Saudi Arabia in the 1970s and 80s.⁸⁹ While Arabic

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- 81 It is the proponents of an Islamic Sociology themselves who are identifying a distinct and hegemonic Western sociology, which they are then criticizing to various degrees.
- 82 Mustafa Muhammad Hasanayn, *al-Madkhal ila al-Madrasa al-Islamiyya fi ‘Ilm al-Ijtima‘* (Cairo: Matba‘at al-Kilani, 1975).
- 83 Tal‘at Ghannam, *‘Ilm al-Ijtima‘ min Manzur Islami* (Cairo: Matba‘at al-Fajr al-Jadid, 1987).
- 84 Muhamamd ‘Ulwan, *Mafhum Islami Jadid li-‘Ilm al-Ijtima‘; al-Juz‘ al-Awwal: al-Jama‘a* (Cairo: Dar wa-Maktabat al-Hilal/Dar al-Shuruq li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzi‘, 2007).
- 85 Mansur Zuwayyid al-Matiri, *al-Siyagha al-Islamiyya li-‘Ilm al-Ijtima‘* (Qatar: Ri‘asat al-Mahakim al-Shar‘iyya wa-l-Shu‘un al-Diniyya, 1992).
- 86 Muhammad Ahmad Bayyumi, *‘Ilm al-Ijtima‘ bayn al-Wa‘y al-Islami wa-l-Wa‘y al-Mughtarib* (Alexandria: Dar al-Ma‘rifa al-Jami‘iyya, 1993). Bayyumi, an Egyptian scholar, had gained his PhD at Temple University in 1976 with a Weberian reading of the Muslim Brotherhood, which is noticeably sympathetic to the movement: Muhammad Ahmad Bayyumi, “The Islamic Ethic of Social Justice and the Spirit of Modernization: an application of Weber’s thesis to the relationship between religious values and social change in modern Egypt.” (PhD thesis, Philadelphia, Temple University, 1976).
- 87 Ilyas Ba-Yunus and Farid Ahmad, *Islamic Sociology: An Introduction* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1985); and, in a much more populist and superficial manner: Farid Younos, *Principles of Islamic Sociology* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2011).
- 88 Stenberg distinguishes four sub-trends in the Islamization of Science, of which the IIIT represents one: Leif Stenberg, *The Islamization of Science: Four Muslim Positions Developing an Islamic Modernity* (Lund: Novapress, 1996).
- 89 For example: Baqidir, Abu Bakr Ahmad, *Aslamat al-‘Ulum al-Ijtima‘iyya* (Jidda: Jami‘at al-Malik ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, 1981). For the development of social sciences in Saudi Arabia, see: ‘Abdallah bin Hussayn al-Khalifa, “al-Takwin al-‘Ilmi fi ‘Ilm al-Ijtima‘: al-Sa‘udiyya,” in *Mustaqbal al-‘Ulum al-Ijtima‘iyya fi al-Watan al-‘Arabi*, ed. Sari Hanafi, Nouria

propositions of an Islamic Sociology have to be viewed together with these broader intellectual trends, as well as with post-colonial critiques of Eurocentrism formulated in English or French, the authors themselves rarely make these connections explicit.⁹⁰

Concerning chronological trends within propositions of an Islamic Sociology, Kerim Edipoğlu identified an “increasing degree of disconnection from Western models of thought”⁹¹ between the years 1980 and 2000. Edipoğlu depicts this as a shift from “apologetic” to “confrontative” approaches, in the sense of ideal types. It seems logical that the failure of apologetic attempts to actually improve sociology and society gave rise to efforts at more fundamentally rethinking sociology and its underlying epistemology. That being said, also early on, there existed efforts to establish Islamic Sociology as a discipline of its own, separate from Western sociology, as is also noted by Edipoğlu. Moreover, also the apologetic works dealt with by Edipoğlu argued for certain particularities to Islamic society and thus to Islamic Sociology and asked for a modification of (Western) sociology. In any case, our aim here is not a detailed reconstruction of the field of Islamic Sociology and its evolution, but rather identifying central lessons for hegemonic sociology and its potential expansion.

Under this aim, the following three sections present two rather different propositions of an Islamic Sociology, next to ‘Umar’s above-mentioned *Arab Theory of Sociology*, which was republished as *Islamic Sociology*. In an ideal-typical sense, ‘Umar represents the attempt to merely *indigenize* sociology in and for Arab society, without challenging the premises, theories or methods of mainstream sociology. This challenge is most strong in Nabil al-Samali’s vision of an Islamic Sociology, which *confronts* Western sociology outright. Samiya Mustafa al-Khashshab’s work, in turn, can be read as *complementing* hegemonic sociology, not least by showing that secular, sociological inquiry is also possible within a transcendental framework. Next to the relation to hegemonic, secular sociology, the following

Benghabrit-Remaoun, and Medjahdi Mustafa (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2014).

90 For an Arabic publication coming out of the IIIT, see: Mihwar Basha, ‘Abd al-Halim, *‘Ilm al-Ijtima’ fi al-‘Alam al-‘Arabi min al-Naqd ila al-Ta’sis: Nahwa ‘Ilm al-‘Umran al-Islami* (Herndon, Virginia: International Institute for Islamic Thought, 1981).

91 Kerim Edipoğlu, “Islamisierung der Soziologie oder Soziologisierung des Islam? Indigenisierungsansätze in Malaysia, Iran und der arabischen Welt,” (PhD thesis, Tübingen University, 2006), 222, transl. FZ.

presentation will focus on the (re)construction of an Arab or Islamic sociological heritage or tradition.

3.3 Indigenizing Hegemonic Sociology: Maʿn Khalil ʿUmar

Born in 1939 in Iraq, ʿUmar obtained his PhD in the United States, worked at several Arab universities and published more than a dozen introductory works to different fields of sociology. In his *Arab Theory of Sociology*, he stresses that he does not call for a distinct Arab sociology. This rests on his argument that Arab society is not so different as to require a particular sociology. Rather, like every society, the Arab society shares certain aspects with other societies and has its particular characteristics, ʿUmar maintains. His intent to highlight Arab contributions to sociological thought is based on the premise that sociology is a recent science that was only established after the First World War, but that Arabs had been reflecting upon society before. Moreover, other than modern European and US-American sociologists, they have been focusing less on the characteristics of their own society, but instead have dealt with human society in general. It is also for this reason that the heritage of Arab sociological thought can be benefitted from today.⁹²

ʿUmar however gives a culturalist twist to this seemingly universal understanding of sociological thought, which leads him to claim superiority of Arab over Western sociology: the Arab sociological heritage remains alive and relevant today since Arab society has deep roots and unchanging cultural characteristics.⁹³ Western sociologists, by contrast, could not build on a given tradition, which is why they had to appropriate the heritages of other cultures.⁹⁴ According to ʿUmar, most Arab sociologists neglect their own heritage and only orient themselves to modern Western sociological theories; theories that do not conform to the reality of their own societies.⁹⁵ The Arab sociological heritage, in turn, is relevant for this present reality, for it dealt with aspects that continue to shape Arab society, chief among them family and blood relations.⁹⁶ To uncover this heritage, which has allegedly remained alive in the Arab unconsciousness, is to ʿUmar a means

92 ʿUmar, *Nahwa Nazariyya ʿArabiyya*, 5–6.

93 ʿUmar, 7.

94 ʿUmar, 7ff.

95 ʿUmar, 9.

96 ʿUmar, 10–11.

to both understand the current Arab society more adequately and also to reform it.⁹⁷

In the end, ‘Umar combines these universal and particular lines of argument, when he says that returning to the Arab sociological heritage is a means to supporting broader sociological theories:

There is no doubt that returning to our sociological heritage (*al-rujū‘ ilā turāthinā al-ijtimā‘ī*) will bring us to the fundamental bases of contemporary Arab societal life (*al-qawā‘id al-asāsiyya li-l-ḥayāt al-ijtimā‘iyya al-‘arabiyya al-mu‘āšira*) and spare us from adopting the heritage of other societies and employ it in the study of our present social reality, since [that other heritage] differs from our reality in its tradition, its structure and its orders. This is not a call for separation from the courses of theoretical sociology (*majrayāt ‘ilm al-ijtimā‘ al-naẓarī*), but in our conviction it will make us support the theories of sociology by a heritage (*narfid naẓariyāt ‘ilm al-ijtimā‘ bi-turāth*) rich in experiences which continue to have an influence and remaining power in contemporary Arab society; and we will have a share in laying the fundamental bricks of Arab sociology or a sociological theory that concerns the past, the present and its future manifestations.⁹⁸

In the first chapter, ‘Umar presents the structure and characteristics of the Arab society, starting in pre-Islamic times. The main effect of Islam, according to him, was to unite the different societal structures in one comprehensive order (*niẓām wāḥid*).⁹⁹ The Arab personality (*al-shakḥsiyya al-‘arabiyya*), which remains the primary reference for ‘Umar, subsequently carried the characteristics of the Islamic religion.¹⁰⁰ In the second chapter, ‘Umar then constructs an Arab sociological heritage, which arguably emerged during the height of Arab civilization between the 8th and 13th centuries. The third chapter presents different methods used by ancient Arab sociologists. In the fourth chapter, ‘Umar first discusses central topics of sociology today, and then shows how the Arab sociological heritage, in comparison with Western theories, is relevant to these topics and can thereby enrich Western theories of sociology. ‘Umar finds that the ancient Arabs – whose thinking, according to him, qualifies as academic in the modern sense –¹⁰¹ had dealt with these topics more adequately than contemporary Western sociologists.

97 ‘Umar, 10.

98 ‘Umar, 11.

99 ‘Umar, 55.

100 ‘Umar, 56.

101 ‘Umar, 243–46.

Concerning our two main aspects of interest – first, the relation of alternative sociologies to hegemonic sociology and its normativity and, second, the pre-modern sociological references it includes – we note: ‘Umar, first, understands himself as participating in modern sociological discourse and does not at all question its epistemology or normativity, nor its theories or approaches. Rather, he wants to uncover the Arab sociological heritage and contribute it to contemporary sociology. This is meant to enhance the latter in general, especially when it comes to analyzing and reforming Arab societies, to which ancient Arab sociology remains particularly relevant. Secondly, ‘Umar ends his list of Arab sociologists with Ibn Khaldun and does not address subsequent figures or intellectual developments. ‘Umar’s equation of Arab sociologists and their approaches with modern sociology, and the posited superiority of the first over the latter, has to be considered an apologetic and ahistorical move that is based on culturalist premises, even though ‘Umar also stresses commonalities between Arab and other societies.

3.4 Confronting Hegemonic Sociology: al-Samaluti

Nabil al-Samaluti, Professor emeritus for Sociology at al-Azhar University in Cairo has been producing a steady output of works on Islamic Sociology and related topics since 1970¹⁰² to the present day,¹⁰³ and has also been involved in international debates.¹⁰⁴ His works overlap greatly in content and several of them are of remarkably poor quality, not only concerning academic conventions of referencing, etc., but also as regards technical formatting. Thus, for example, instead of a Qur’anic verse, we in one book find a string of emoticons, including skulls and bones and smileys.¹⁰⁵ The misprinting of a Qur’anic verse is ever more ironic, since the Qur’an could not be more central to al-Samaluti, who reads it as, among other aspects,

102 Nabil Muhammad Tawfiq al-Samaluti, *al-Manhaj al-Islami fi Dirasat al-Mujtama’*: *Dirasat fi ‘Ilm al-Ijtima’ al-Islami* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1970).

103 In 2016 alone, he published the following three works: Nabil al-Samaluti, *al-‘Ulum al-Ijtima’iyya fi Misr bayn al-Taghrib wa-l-Tawtin*: *‘Ilm al-Ijtima’ fi Misr Namudhajan* (Rabitat al-Jami’at al-Islamiyya, 2016); Nabil al-Samaluti, *‘Ilm al-Ijtima’ fi Misr bayna al-Taghrib wa-l-Tawtin*: *Dirasa fi ‘Ilm al-Ijtima’ al-Naqdi* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma’rifa al-Jami’iyya, 2016); Nabil al-Samaluti, *Azmat ‘Ilm al-Ijtima’ fi al-‘Alam al-‘Arabi* (Dar al-Ma’rifa al-Jami’iyya, 2016).

104 al-Samaluti temporarily served at the Ibn Sa’ud University in Riyadh (Edipoğlu, *Islamische Soziologie*, 245n595). He also participated in debates about Islamizing sociology in Malaysia; see Kerim Edipoğlu, “Islamische Soziologie: Menschen- und Gesellschaftsbild,” *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 15, no. 2 (2007): 134n9.

105 al-Samaluti, *al-‘Ulum al-Ijtima’iyya fi Misr*, 8.

a sociological textbook about modern society. Given the great timespan of al-Samaluti's written output, one may suspect certain shifts over time, and a more detailed analysis of his works might be informative in this regard. However, his basic position and approach seem to have remained the same. To illustrate his conception of Islamic Sociology and, intrinsically related, of Islamic society, here I will use his work on *The Structure of Islamic Society and its Systems: A Study in Islamic Sociology* from 1981.¹⁰⁶

Al-Samaluti's work is useful for reflecting upon criteria for participating in sociological discourse, since, despite its self-designation as "sociology," it mainly reads like an Islamist program for society. The topic of sociology, al-Samaluti sets out, is the scientific study of society through historical, statistical, empirical or comparative approaches; all this under the aim of conforming with social and historical laws or – and now he equates this positivist view of early sociologists with an Islamic one – with the laws that God placed in human history and society. The aim of sociology has to be to implement these laws for the sake of human felicity. Arab-Muslim sociologists ought to critically attend to the different European theoretical schools, which are still dominant in Arab universities, and ought to return to the Qur'an to develop a study of society that is based on and directed towards true values. While al-Samaluti is oriented at Western sociology, and not only shares a modern view of society as consisting of inter-connected sub-systems, but also introduces several technical sociological concepts in English, his overt aim is to resurrect an ideal Islamic society, which allegedly existed in the early days of Islam and can be reconstructed from the Qur'an.¹⁰⁷

Al-Samaluti wants to reach back to the Qur'an directly and does not aim to (re)construct a historical Islamic sociological tradition. It is only in his last chapter on an Islamic economy that al-Samaluti refers to earlier Muslim thinkers, namely to Ibn Khaldun and to the legal theorists al-Mawardi (d. 1058) and Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), however without discussing their views at any greater length, let alone contextualizing them. He strikingly does not refer to Ibn Khaldun or the philosopher al-Farabi (d. 905) at passages that would be most pertinent in this regard.¹⁰⁸

106 al-Samaluti, *Bina' al-Mujtama' al-Islami wa-Nuzumuhu: Dirasa fi 'Ilm al-Ijtima' al-Islami* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1981).

107 al-Samaluti, 8.

108 For example, al-Samaluti does not refer to Ibn Khaldun's concept of *ʿaṣabiyya* when ad-

Moreover, al-Samaluti does not even seem interested in an actual study of historical and social circumstances. Rather, he posits that the Islamic shari‘a has stipulated a complete and perfect structure of social systems, including the family, economy, politics, administration, legislation, education, etc. In contrast to the positivist (read Western) view on these systems, the Islamic view considers God as their source.¹⁰⁹ For the good of society and humanity, the Islamic view has to prevail over the positivist one, al-Samaluti exclaims, and begs God to grant Muslims victory over the infidels, that is, to have Islamic sociology prevail over positivist sociology.¹¹⁰

3.5 Complementing Hegemonic Sociology: al-Khashshab

Samiya Mustafa al-Khashshab’s proposition of an Islamic Sociology differs from al-Samaluti’s in both aspects we focus on here, namely the relation to hegemonic sociology and the Islamic sociological resources or heritage adduced. In 1980, al-Khashshab argued that the time had come for a new branch of sociology to emerge, namely Islamic Sociology.¹¹¹ At the time, al-Khashshab – who is supposedly related to the Egyptian sociologists Mustafa and Ahmad al-Khashshab – taught sociology at Cairo University. While she later focused on family sociology,¹¹² the only other monograph by her that I am aware of is a book on *Sociology of Religion*, published in 1998.¹¹³ Her book on *Islamic Sociology* was extensively quoted and paraphrased, sometimes without appropriate referencing, in 2013 by Huda al-Shamari, the only other woman to author a book on *Islamic Sociology*.¹¹⁴ Islamic Sociology, according to al-Khashshab, fulfills every

dressing “group cohesion” (al-Samaluti, *Bina’ al-Mujtama’ al-Islami wa-Nuzumu*, 21) or to al-Farabi’s *Virtuous City (al-madina al-fadila)* when promoting the concept of *Virtuous Society (al-mujtama’ al-fadil)* in distinction to Plato’s or Thomas Moore’s utopia (al-Samaluti, *Bina’ al-Mujtama’ al-Islami wa-Nuzumu*, 36). The absence of al-Farabi might not seem surprising given his standing as a rational philosopher, rather than as a religious thinker. However, al-Farabi figured prominently in ‘Umar’s work and even more so in al-Khashshab’s, as we shall see. Al-Farabi being absent from al-Samaluti’s work thus further characterizes al-Samaluti’s perspective and position.

109 al-Samaluti, *Bina’ al-Mujtama’ al-Islami wa-Nuzumu*, 8.

110 al-Samaluti, 9.

111 Samiya Mustafa al-Khashshab, *‘Ilm al-Ijtima’ al-Islami* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma’arif, 1980), 5.

112 A series of lectures she gave on family sociology can be viewed online; see, for the first episode: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IBZwq520W9Q>.

113 Samiya al-Khashshab, *‘Ilm al-Ijtima’ al-Dini* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma’arif, 1998).

114 Huda al-Shamari, *Mabahith fi ‘Ilm al-Ijtima’ al-Islami: Islamic Sociology* (Amman: Dar al-Manahij li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzi’, 2011).

requirement to be considered a proper branch of sociology: it has its specific topics (such as social thought in Islam); its own goals (such as highlighting the Islamic sociological heritage in the study of social phenomena); and it contains different approaches (legal, anthropological, structural, etc.).¹¹⁵

One premise on which al-Khashshab conceives of Islamic Sociology as a particular branch of sociology is that Islam is a societal religion. While pre-Islamic Arabs did have their share of social thought and organization, it was Islam that established a firm social order, al-Khashshab maintains.¹¹⁶ She considers this social order as part of religion, but clearly operates with the modern distinction between different societal spheres when she goes on to sketch the political, economic and family structure in Islam.¹¹⁷ Moreover, she posits contemporary values as inherent to these structures, such as freedom of expression and belief in the field of politics.¹¹⁸ Al-Khashshab also stresses that Islamic Sociology is a descriptive science, not normative (*'ilm taqrirī yudarris mā huwa kā' in wa-lā yataṣadā li-mā yanbaghī an yakūn*)¹¹⁹. She does not follow up on this claim consistently though. For example, she aims at sociologically establishing whether Sufism had a positive or negative influence on society.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, and beyond the example of Sufism, al-Khashshab posits Islam not only as the subject, but also as the object of society and of sociological inquiry.¹²¹ She thereby prompts the question, whether the extent to which sociology is conceived of as secular or religious, that is at explaining society purely by society or as grounding it in revelation, is a consequence of the extent to which society is understood as secular or religious.

Concerning the construction of sociological tradition, al-Khashshab presents earlier sociological approaches in Islamic thought. To her, the Qur'an is not a resource or even a central reference in this regard. She rather extensively adduces and engages Islamic sociological thinkers. In a manner not dissimilar to 'Umar, she identifies the following approaches: the "sociotopian approach" of al-Farabi (d. 905);¹²² the "socio-ethical approach"

115 al-Khashshab, *'Ilm al-Ijtima' al-Islami*, 5–6.

116 al-Khashshab, 15.

117 al-Khashshab, 16–36.

118 al-Khashshab, 17.

119 al-Khashshab, 37.

120 al-Khashshab, 47, 50.

121 Most explicitly: al-Khashshab, 49–50, 57, 63.

122 al-Khashshab, 70–82.

of Ibn Miskawayh (d. 1030) and the Ikhwan al-Safa, a largely anonymous group of philosophers who lived in the late 10th and 11th centuries,¹²³ and the “anthropological approach” pursued by, on the one hand, scholars and political advisors that were sent to foreign lands to conduct studies beneficial for the ruler, such as Ahmad ibn Fudlan (10th century),¹²⁴ and, on the other hand, by historians and travelers who independently longed for discoveries, such as al-Biruni (d. 1050).¹²⁵ Finally, al-Khashshab discusses at length Ibn Khaldun, who – to her – is the foremost representative of the “empirical positivist approach.”¹²⁶

Moreover, according to al-Khashshab, Ibn Khaldun went far beyond the ideas and approaches of the earlier thinkers and ought to be considered the true founder of sociology. Al-Khashshab quotes Ibn Khaldun’s distinguishing his own approach from that of philosophers like al-Farabi, who discussed social association primarily as a utopian ideal. She takes this as a call for actual historical and empirical investigation of society.¹²⁷ In general, al-Khashshab reads Ibn Khaldun in a very selective and modernizing manner and outrightly equates some of his thoughts with those of modern sociology. Among the seven arguments she gives for considering Ibn Khaldun the true founder of sociology are the following: Ibn Khaldun addressed all the fields of contemporary sociology;¹²⁸ he conceived of a theoretical and an empirical dimension of sociology; he distinguished between “Microsociology” and “Macrosociology.”¹²⁹ Moreover, Ibn Khaldun also directly influenced modern sociology, al-Khashshab claims, namely through his influence on Voltaire, Toynbee and other Europeans.¹³⁰ This claim is however not substantiated historically and thus remains a mere assertion. The purpose of this assertion seems to be the political intent to appropriate sociology as one’s own and the theoretical intent to challenge the exclusively European genealogy of sociology. Stressing in the conclusion

123 al-Khashshab, 82–89.

124 al-Khashshab, 91.

125 al-Khashshab, 91–93. See also: Akbar S Ahmed, “Great Muslim Philosopher Al Beruni Was World’s First Anthropologist,” in *Caravan Daily*, December 22, 2018. <http://caravandaily.com/portal/great-muslim-philosopher-al-beruni-was-worlds-first-anthropologist-akbar-ahmed>.

126 al-Khashshab, *‘Ilm al-Ijtima‘ al-Islami*, 98–132.

127 al-Khashshab, 104.

128 al-Khashshab, 102.

129 al-Khashshab, 103.

130 al-Khashshab, 133–134.

again that Islamic Sociology historically and presently needs to be acknowledged as a branch of sociology, al-Khashshab also sees the revival of the Islamic sociological heritage as a means to remedy contemporary societal ills.¹³¹

4 How (Not) to Take Sociology Beyond the Modern West

4.1 Expanding Sociology Today: Potentials and Limits

Which lessons do the propositions of an Islamic Sociology discussed in the previous section yield for the possible expansion of hegemonic sociology and its limits?

First of all, Islamic Sociologies clearly share in the modern understanding of society as functionally differentiated. This became especially clear in al-Samaluti's work, even though he overtly confronts a Western secular understanding of society. While asserting that the Islamic religion comprehensively covers all spheres of social life,¹³² and has done so since the beginning, al-Samaluti conceives of a "functional interdependence" (he uses the English term) of the different systems of society, in the sense of each sub-system being connected to others, such as the system of the family (*nizām al-usra*) being connected with the religious, economic, political and legal systems (*al-nizām al-dīni/al-iqtisādī/al-siyāsī/al-qānūnī*).¹³³ According to Edipoğlu, other works aspiring to an Islamic Sociology do not even attempt to participate in broader sociological debates. Rather, they only accept the body of Islamic law (*fiqh*) as a basis for reasoning about society or rather for normatively prescribing how society ought to be. However, as Edipoğlu rightfully points out, even these works are markedly influenced by modern sociological concepts, something which distinguishes them from the classical body of Islamic law to which they refer.¹³⁴ Being part of modern society, Islamic Sociologies do not and probably cannot propose an understanding of life in common other than as society, but might substitute Islam for society as the overall principle of social organization.

Islamic Sociologies namely differ from hegemonic sociology, but also among each other concerning the normative vision of how society ought

131 al-Khashshab, 135.

132 Most explicitly: al-Samaluti, *Bina' al-Mujtama' al-Islami*, 17–18.

133 al-Samaluti, 58.

134 Edipoğlu, "Islamisierung der Soziologie," 249.

to be sustained and organized. Such a normative underpinning informs every sociological interpretation of society, and Islamic Sociologies help to bring out the normativity of hegemonic sociology. They remind us that the bases of the sociology envisioned directly result from the society envisioned – in their case, an Islamic society to whose explanation a reference to God is indispensable. Hegemonic secular sociology, in turn, assumes that God is no explanatory factor in the making of society, and may figure in its understanding only insofar as members or institutions of society refer to God, conventionally in the sphere of religion (only). It is at this point that Islamic Sociology pushes me to explicate my own normativity and to actually define criteria for being considered as sociology.

Against both a secularist and religionist bias in the conception of sociology, my argument in this regard would be twofold: first, the ontological premise of God existing, of God having created humans as social beings or even of God having instituted social laws does not prevent a sociological analysis of society, including its religious aspects; second, the criterion to be considered sociology has to remain that God only figures in the actual analysis as far as S/He is referenced in society. Moreover, the representatives of different varieties of sociology ought to acknowledge that their own perspective rests on certain metaphysical assumptions and at the same time is particular and was shaped in a contingent process. While this demand is based on historical and empirical observations of factual plurality, it obviously issues itself from a particular perspective, but one that acknowledges its own particularity and takes it as the starting point for entering into conversation with other particular perspectives.

In this conversation, both possibilities and limits for expanding and modifying one's own perspective will show up, as is illustrated by al-Khashshab and al-Samaluti, respectively. From al-Khashshab, I take the insight that a secular analysis of society is well possible within a theological framework. While she does not spell this lesson out as explicitly herself, al-Khashshab posits Islam as both the subject of society and subjected to societal and historical developments. Al-Samaluti, in turn, plainly posits Islam as the subject of society and formulates normative demands as to how society ought to be. He does not adduce societal or historical circumstances, let alone actually analyze them. One may even ask if al-Samaluti, who after all is a professor of Sociology (*'ilm al-ijtimā'*) and in his books directly engages established sociologists, is actually part of sociology as understood here.

The answer hinges on whether one departs from a functional or a substantial understanding of sociology. In the latter case, one would exclude al-Samaluti from an understanding of sociology as secular and self-reflective in the above sense. This exclusion also again brings out one's own normativity. Functional definitions in general tend to allow for a broader inclusion of positions. This is also the case here. The basic social function of sociology is to provide answers as to how society is to be understood and organized, and this under the modern conditions of contingency, in which the need to reflect upon life in common and its order has become permanent. Sociology is successful if it is able to provide theoretically informed answers to the social questions identified in society. Different strands of sociology will cater for different social milieus, even within one society. Al-Samaluti's elaboration of an Islamic Sociology might fulfill this function by catering for a milieu that wants to subsume modern society under a comprehensive Islamic viewpoint. Al-Samaluti's lack of attention for concrete societal circumstances or problems can be partially explained by him questioning the very basis of social life and order. After all, it is in rather stable and more or less well-functioning societies that sociology is attending to more concrete societal questions and problems. Nevertheless, if al-Samaluti is considered part of sociology, his sociology is of poor quality, due to the lack of theoretical and methodological reflection and the absence of producing insights about actual social formations.

In fact, when it comes to the actual production of scientific knowledge, Islamic Sociologies in general hardly produce any alternative theories or methods. Moreover, their critical calls for a more value-based and value-oriented science can also be voiced from within secular sociology itself. Katharina Lange has shown this concerning propositions of an Islamic Anthropology.¹³⁵ Precisely because there is ultimately only one sociology as a particular mode of interpretation across modern societies, this sociology should aim to integrate the different conditions, experiences and resources of these societies.

On a practical level, the creation of a more inclusive sociology, constructed from a greater variety of perspectives, hinges on globally improving economic, educational and political conditions for producing sociological knowledge. This is not trivial, for it is to say that to aim for a more

¹³⁵ Lange, *Zurückholen, was uns gehört*, 82.

inclusive sociology – from a self-critical hegemonic perspective – does not mean to endorse calls for alternative sociologies from the margins, but rather to support initiatives that aim at improving local socio-political, economic and educational conditions for participating in global sociological discourse.

4.2 Sociology before ‘Sociology’?

The aim of constructing a more inclusive sociology for connected modern societies entails the aim of also establishing more connected, non-Eurocentric genealogies of sociology. This aim, on the one hand, necessitates interrogating critically the narrative that sociology evolved within a self-sufficient European tradition, as Bhambra and others have done. On the other hand, it means probing into alternative genealogies of sociology and bringing other sociological traditions into view. The attempt to identify sociology before its academic institutionalization means questioning the view that sociology was a completely novel and exclusively European mode of looking at and interpreting the world. This is an instance of the wider critique of the view that modernity was a complete rupture, which in the case of non-European countries was moreover induced externally. This view in general is mistaken and in the case of sociology, we have seen that in Arab countries sociology was instituted under the sign of colonial hegemony, but in acts of creative synthesis of different intellectual resources; for example, reading Durkheim together with Ibn Khaldun. However, it is a crucial difference whether one maintains, as one may well do, that thoughts of Ibn Khaldun can be put to fruitful sociological use or whether one posits Ibn Khaldun to have produced works of sociology, to have been a proto-sociologist or to have even founded sociology. It is a crucial difference whether one aims to construct a genealogy of sociology from within contemporary sociology or whether one claims to reconstruct the history of sociology. In this regard, the central lesson from the above-discussed propositions of Arab and Islamic Sociologies is the primacy of the present in constructions of the past. To acknowledge this primacy of the present might sound trivial in the first place, but yields several hermeneutical consequences for the interplay of present and past categories.

Whereas most propositions of an Islamic Sociology, like al-Samaluti’s, project sociology directly back onto the Qur’an, some works, like al-Khashshab’s, adduce a pre-colonial, historical Islamic tradition of socio-

logical thought. Moreover, they assert that this tradition contributed to or even shaped modern European sociology. This assertion was, however, not supported anywhere with actual historical findings. Others, like ‘Umar, argue for a continuity of sociological thought based on culturalist postulates of essentially unchanging features of Arab collective life. Such challenges to the claim that modern society and its interpreting science of sociology mark a full rupture, thus remain unsubstantiated historically. Rather, these constructions of alternative sociological heritages in the end affirm contemporary, hegemonically shaped sociology, in view and in hindsight of whose establishment they occur. Put otherwise, histories of ‘sociology’ will always be histories of the hegemonically shaped present – for which ‘the West’ is a cipher – since the hegemonic elaboration of sociology remains the starting point for constructing alternative sociological traditions.

Then again, this does not at all mean that from this starting point one can only affirm, but never modify, existing hegemony. For once, ‘the West’ – again: as a cipher for hegemony – is a rather elusive and increasingly plural construction. Moreover, to make hegemonically shaped concepts travel – whether ‘sociology,’ ‘secularity,’ ‘religion’ or, indeed, ‘the West’ itself – is a double move: on the one hand, it subsumes other contexts under present hegemony; but on the other hand, it undermines claims to hegemonic exclusivity by fueling non-hegemonic varieties into present concepts. In this sense, constructions of an Arab or Islamic sociological heritage are not merely ahistorical, apologetic endeavors, but show that a presently shared mode of sociological thought can be justified and critiqued from within various constructed traditions, of which the European tradition is but one. Put more generally, our common present can be sustained via different constructed traditions.

That being said, to identify sociological aspects before the institutionalization of sociology seems, at least as of now, possible only in a comparative sense and not as an outgrown genealogy, let alone a history. Trying to write a history of sociological thought would be naive in that it would project sociology back to an asserted point of origin. Genealogically, one may of course trace back the immediate pre-history of institutional sociology in individual countries.¹³⁶ At least in the Arab-Islamic context, the traces would disappear rather early back in time though. This is partially due to

136 See section 3.1 for hints in that direction concerning Egypt.

the lasting effects of the now outdated paradigm of intellectual decline in the Islamic world prior to the onset of colonial modernity. It is, however, also due to sociology being a particular mode of looking at the world that is bound to the epistemic and political conditions of modernity. While this suggests that one should speak of 'sociology' only in regard to its modern formation, it still allows for identifying individual aspects of sociological thought or, as functional equivalents, earlier modes of reasoning about life in common. Since this primarily comparative enterprise is inquiring into both ruptures and continuities in the formation of sociology, it further informs about the modern specificities of sociology, but might also facilitate more connected genealogies of sociology in the end.

Substantial aspects of sociological reasoning will never amount to sociology in the modern sense, but always only represent partial aspects of 'sociology.' To posit Ibn Khaldun as the founder of sociology is an ahistorical assertion and to characterize him as a proto-sociologist falls into the teleological trap. To extract individual aspects of Ibn Khaldun's thinking for the purpose of present sociological reasoning and to on this basis consider Ibn Khaldun to have been a sociologist both ignores the epistemic foundations of sociology and does not appreciate the thinking of Ibn Khaldun within its own epistemic and historical context.¹³⁷ That being said, it is of course not for no reason that sociologists have been appropriating Ibn Khaldun so widely. Thus, his famous concept of *'aṣabiyya* shows that also before sociology humans theorized the integration of human collectivities. Contextualized within its metaphysical assumptions, however, *'aṣabiyya* recalls the particularly modern claim of sociologists to order social formations according to their human insights, too. Or take al-Farabi's differentiation of different types of association (*ijtimā'*) and his formulating the principles of a well-ordered human collectivity that is able to attain felicity. To ask and answer these questions is clearly not particular to sociology. However, one cannot actually understand al-Farabi's reflections on collective life outside his cosmological, metaphysical and epistemological

137 Recent works situating Ibn Khaldun within his own times are: Allen James Fromherz, *Ibn Khaldun, Life and Times* (Edinburgh University Press, 2011); Robert Irwin, *Ibn Khaldun: An Intellectual Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018); see also Aziz al-Azmeh, *Ibn Khaldūn. An Essay in Reinterpretation* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2003 [1982]).

assumptions,¹³⁸ which – through their contrast with sociology’s assumptions of independent human reason and agency – make the latter’s specificity ever more obvious. It is thus rather through contrasts that the present may learn something from al-Farabi’s utopia.¹³⁹ The bottom line of this is that those earlier sociological aspects identified with hindsight of sociology were a far cry from having constituted sociology in themselves and can even only be characterized as ‘sociological’ if one leaves aside that the fundamental epistemic and political underpinnings of ‘sociology’ are present in the semantics of ‘sociological’.

This suggests considering both sociology and sociological reasoning as particular responses to more widely shared questions and consequently searching for functional equivalents to sociology. The basic function of sociology, we have said, is to provide answers as to how society is to be understood and organized, and this under the modern conditions of permanent contingency and the assumption of an “immanent frame.”¹⁴⁰ Under this definition of the reference problem that prompts sociological thought, al-Samaluti also formed part of sociology, even though he has an open spin on the immanent frame, rather than a closed one as most secular sociologists do. When asking for functional equivalents to sociology outside the modern political and epistemic conditions, the reference problem obviously has to be defined more broadly. A very basic suggestion in this regard would be the problem of how life in common (not: ‘society’) is to be understood and organized. In pre-modern times, this was largely under the condition of only temporary contingency and the assumption of a transcendent frame – whether mediated by reason or prophecy. Recurring reference problems prompting reflections about life in common seem to have been moments of instability and crisis. This is very obvious

138 Pertinently, if briefly: Geert Hendrich, *Arabisch-islamische Philosophie: Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Frankfurt a. M.: Campus, 2005), 64.

139 In this sense, a reading of al-Farabi such as the following can be inspiring, precisely because it issues from contemporary concerns, rather than situating al-Farabi in his own times: Alexander Orwin, *Redefining the Muslim Community: Ethnicity, Religion, and Politics in the Thought of Alfarabi* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017).

140 For Charles Taylor’s metaphor of the “immanent frame” in the context of Islamic modernity, see: Florian Zemmin, “A Secular Age and Islamic Modernism,” in *Working with A Secular Age. Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Charles Taylor’s Master Narrative*, ed. Florian Zemmin, Colin Jager, and Guido Vanheeswijck (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2016), 309–10.

in Ibn Khaldun,¹⁴¹ but was implicitly also in the background of al-Farabi's utopian formulation of an ideal human collectivity.¹⁴² Another impetus to theorize about life in common more generally were comparisons between different human collectivities, as is again most evident in Ibn Khaldun.¹⁴³ Thus, one may assume that moments of theorizing life in common did not continuously evolve or even accumulate over time, but rather emerged and receded, before sociological reasoning became a permanent requirement of modern society.¹⁴⁴ While it is again only with the hindsight of sociology that such earlier moments of theorizing are being identified as 'sociological,' they served as functional equivalents to sociology concerning commonly shared reference problems.

The above arguments sustain a more general, threefold argument that I would also want to submit concerning the case of secularity, namely: it is under the primacy of the present that histories are being constructed, whence they are hermeneutically always genealogies; it is from within the present that earlier instances of presently central categories are being identified, but these are at best only partial instantiations of present categories; it is as functional equivalents that earlier instances can best be viewed on a par with present ones, even though that function has to be conceived of in a rather basic sense so as to be applicable to different epistemic conditions.

141 See, for example: Fromherz, *Ibn Khaldun*, 123; Alatas, *Applying Ibn Khaldūn*, 154; Alatas, "Ibn Khaldūn," 12–13.

142 See, for example: al-Khashshab, *ʿIlm al-Ijtimaʿ al-Islami*, 71, 81; Orwin, *Redefining the Muslim Community*, 160–61; Hendrich, *Arabisch-islamische Philosophie*, 71.

143 For example: Fromherz, *Ibn Khaldun*, 119; see also: Friedrich H. Tenbruck, "Was war der Kulturvergleich, ehe es den Kulturvergleich gab?" in *Soziale Welt, Sonderband 8: Zwischen den Kulturen*, ed. Joachim Matthes (Göttingen: Otto Schwartz & Co., 1992).

144 Bhargava interestingly assumes conceptual spaces to open up and close again at different historical moments: Rajeev Bhargava, "Forms of Secularity before Secularism," in *Worlds of Difference*, ed. Saïd Amir Arjomand and Elisa Reis (London: Sage, 2013), 95–96.

5 Conclusion: Secularity Beyond the Modern West

It is, in fact, impossible to predict based on religious affiliation which position a Muslim might take in regard to human rights.¹⁴⁵

[F]or my part, I sincerely believe that no one owns the notion of human rights. You know, when you support human rights, a certain nationalism comes forward: for an American human rights are the invention of Jefferson, for a Frenchman it is 1789, for an Englishman something else. Well, in these circumstances, I can also cite [the second caliph] Omar ibn al-Khattab, who said ‘How can you enslave people when their mothers brought them into the world free?’. So, if each human community is going to search in its own history for an origin to human rights, it will always come up with something.¹⁴⁶

In our widely connected present, different historical references are used in order to provide answers to shared questions. These answers differ not least due to differences in social and economic status, political convictions and biographical background, in short: based on one’s standing in and experience of the world. On this basis, religious affiliations or cultural resources at one’s disposal primarily provide particular modes for elaborating individual answers. This might sound counter-intuitive given that religion and culture are ubiquitously adduced not as *modes*, but as *causes* of different positions. That is understandable insofar as particular traditions are more visible than common epistemic conditions. Moreover, it is easier to embrace and identify with particular narratives than entangled genealogies. As of now, there seems to be a need to legitimize or critique widely shared contemporary conditions or convictions through particular modes of legitimization. Mohamed Charfi has identified this need and possibility in the above quote, and from Mahmoud Bassiouni, who in the most sophisticated and convincing manner elaborated an Islamic legitimization for the universal value of human rights, we can take the insight that this very legitimization is not determined by the Islamic tradition, but stems from a reading of that tradition in light of more widely shared demands and convictions in the present. Bassiouni moreover definitely brings to

145 Mahmoud Bassiouni, *Menschenrechte zwischen Universalität und islamischer Legitimität* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2014), 77, transl. FZ.

146 Mohamed Charfi quoted in Kevin Dwyer, *Arab Voices* (London/New York: Routledge, 1991), 175.

naught claims that human rights exclusively stem from and can only truly be sustained within one particular tradition. The primacy of the common present in regard to human rights is at least as clear as it was concerning the different constructions of sociological heritages. What about secularity, then? Is secularity, despite resounding claims of being tied to one particular tradition, also a commonly shared condition that can be legitimized and critiqued from within different discursive traditions?

To address that question, I think it is useful not to equate ‘secularity’ with the hegemonic distinction between religion and the secular, but to consider ‘secularity’ as one particular variety of conceptualizing and legitimizing the distinction between religion and the secular or rather, to put it more broadly and thus more productively for our purposes, between religion and society. In regard to Islamic contexts, we briefly note, first of all, that structural differentiations between religion and other societal spheres are in place in modern Islamic, as in other modern societies.¹⁴⁷ But also on the level of conceptual distinctions, modern and contemporary Islamic actors, too, operate with the distinction between religion and society.¹⁴⁸ This holds true also for those actors who overtly reject the notion of ‘secularity’, as we have seen in the case of al-Samaluti. After all, on the basis of distinction one can argue either for separation or connection. It is true, the overt rejection not only of ‘secularism’ but also of ‘secularity’ still has wider purchase among Islamic actors, and this is despite the increasing usage of concepts such as ‘secular Muslim’ and ‘Islamic secularism’. Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt rightly stress that “the rejection of concepts such as secularisation or secularism in large parts of the Islamic world is not necessarily bound up with the absence of differentiations between the religious and the secular.”¹⁴⁹ They further assume, and plausibly so, that this rejection is due to the absence of “readily accessible guiding ideas of secularity with which such distinctions could be legitimised.”¹⁵⁰ If, however, we shift the perspective and consider ‘secularity’ itself a particular guiding idea to distinguish between religion and society, alternative guiding ideas to conceptualize this very distinction come into view.

147 See, for example, in spite of its title: Gudrun Krämer, “Modern but not Secular: Religion, Identity and the *ordre public* in the Arab Middle East,” *International Sociology* 28, no. 6 (2013): 630.

148 Zemmin, *Modernity in Islamic Tradition*, 164–76.

149 Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt, “Revisiting the Secular,” 14.

150 Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt, 14.

These alternatives can least problematically be related to ‘secularity’ when they are directly engaging ‘secularity’ or are clearly operating with the distinction between a religious and a secular sphere. Guiding ideas to conceptualize this distinction from within the Islamic tradition include the distinctions between *‘ibādāt* and *mu‘āmalāt* or between *dīn* and *dunyā*. These distinctions are notably formulated within Islam. If in general it was from a religious perspective that society first appeared as secular, then Islam also can be used to address both religion and the secular.¹⁵¹ On this basis, one can Islamically argue for either connections or disconnections between religion and society. But also in the latter case, the Islamic mode of the argument tends to blur the factual distinction between religion and the secular, a distinction that is hegemonically conceptualized as ‘secularity.’ Due to the obvious relation and oftentimes direct interaction of hegemonic secularity and other modes of distinction in colonial modernity, ‘secularity’ is the evident starting point for discerning such alternative modes within modernity.

To trace the formation of these alternative distinctions between religion and society back in time ought however not to depart from ‘secularity,’ but rather from the alternative conceptualizations of this distinction themselves. This means taking the actual terms conceptualizing this distinction as the guiding units of inquiry, and this as historical concepts, not analytical ones. To trace the historicity of these concepts and their changing semantics is primarily a genealogical enterprise, which interrogates the formation of the present or of modernity. It can, however, be complemented with conceptual histories that trace the evolution of the historical terms under interrogation forward in time. After all, conceptual history can well be conceived of as a genealogy of the present. More importantly, taking the historical terms that came to conceptualize the distinction between religion and (secular) society as one’s guiding units, ensures that the connection to that modern distinction, and hence to ‘secularity,’ is constantly retained.

This implies, in turn, that one might not bring into view other possible distinctions not directly connected to one’s starting point of ‘secularity.’ This significant restriction follows from the interest in how the present evolved, rather than in trying to uncover what has been lost. Other pre-modern distinctions – as in the Islamicate case, the distinction

151 Reinhard Schulze, “On Relating Religion to Society and Society to Religion,” in *Debating Islam. Negotiating Religion, Europe, and the Self*, ed. Samuel M. Behloul, Susanne Leuenberger, and Andreas Tunger-Zanetti (Bielefeld: transcript, 2013), esp. 336, 346–47.

between *adab* and *shari'a*¹⁵² – might be most significant historically, but to directly equate them with ‘secularity’ would mean to subsume them under this present category.¹⁵³ One can, of course, avoid this pitfall by saying that one merely *understands* them as ‘secularity,’ but this gives up on the aim of actually bringing other understandings into view. In general, for identifying aspects of the secular before ‘secularity,’ the same restrictions apply as for identifying sociological aspects before ‘sociology.’

Also analogous to the above considerations concerning ‘sociology,’ one might however identify functional equivalents to ‘secularity,’ that is, to the distinction between religion and society. This amounts to connecting earlier distinctions to ‘secularity’ on theoretical grounds, rather than on grounds of historical connections. In this regard, Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt’s configuration of reference problems¹⁵⁴ was indeed a most convincing and fruitful move. The next step, it seems to me, would be to identify reference problems that are less particular to modern societies, but also applicable to earlier formations of collective life. The aspired connection to ‘secularity’ still seems most firmly ensured, when sticking to those historical terms that came to conceptualize the distinction between religion and (secular) society. Either way, tracing back the modern distinction between religion and the secular will inevitably reach a point at which it no longer makes sense, but dissolves into something else.

Not to suggest that this something else was some undifferentiated wholesomeness, but also not to conflate it with ‘secularity,’ requires a model of distinctions before secularity. Reinhard Schulze has fruitfully suggested such a model that accounts for the evolution of distinctions in Islamic contexts and beyond.¹⁵⁵ According to this model, the first distinction one can grasp is the one between sacred and profane, that is, between objects with and without meaning. Those sacred objects are then differentiated into transcendent and immanent ones, that is, into those whose meaning is induced externally and others which hold their meaning within them. In a third distinction, the transcendent is then differentiated into the religious

152 Armando Salvatore, “The Islamicate Adab Tradition vs. the Islamic Shari’a, from Pre-colonial to Colonial,” in *Working Paper Series of the HCAS “Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities”* 3 (Leipzig University, 2018).

153 See: Armando Salvatore, “The Islamicate Adab Tradition,” 15; Armando Salvatore, *The Sociology of Islam: Knowledge, Power and Civility* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 263.

154 Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt, “Revisiting the Secular,” 20–24.

155 Schulze, *Der Koran und die Genealogie des Islam*, 109–47.

and the secular.¹⁵⁶ This last distinction follows upon the insight of humans that it has been they who inflicted meaning on objects or did not do so. To be religious is thus to continuously affirm that objects in the world, including humans, gain meaning through reference to something beyond. To be secular, in turn, means to, as a human being, attribute the meaning of worldly objects, including humans, to themselves. One may wonder if we – keeping in mind that earlier distinctions remain as semantic layers to which we can resort – are currently living through a fourth distinction, which might work towards bounding meaning within individual human beings alone.

Be that as it may, the importance of this model for tracing back secularity lies in the fact that it helps to not depict earlier distinctions as expressions of the modern distinction between religion and the secular. Thus, for example, al-Farabi clearly distinguished between prophetic and rational knowledge. However, following the above model, this was no distinction between religion and the secular. Rather both types of knowledge mediated the same transcendental truth.¹⁵⁷ The most basic reference problem bringing together as a *tertium comparationis* secularity and earlier distinctions might be the need of humans to make sense of, give meaning to and order the world. This basic problem is obviously too vague to be useable in research on varieties of secularity. However, this very vagueness again underlines that secularity itself cannot be readily transposed onto earlier epistemic conditions. Moreover, from this most basic *tertium*, more particular ones evolve, such as the distinction between actors responsible for maintaining spheres of meaning.

Finally, it ought to be clear – and there is no escaping this – that the above suggestions are again formulated from one particular perspective in the present. The hegemonic coinage of ‘secularity’ is obviously still present in the above argument that ‘secularity’ is but one variety of conceptualizing the more widely operative distinction between religion and the secular. More fundamentally still, the aim of including earlier distinctions either as functional equivalents to secularity or on grounds of a historical model

156 See also: Reinhard Schulze, “Die Dritte Unterscheidung: Islam, Religion und Säkularität,” in *Religionen – Wahrheitsansprüche – Konflikte. Theologische Perspektiven*, ed. Walter Dietrich and Wolfgang Lienemann (Zürich: TVZ, 2010).

157 Pertinently: Ulrich Rudolph, *Islamische Philosophie: Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (München: Beck, 2004), 32–33.

does not result in a distanced view of these different distinctions, of which one is currently operational. After all, it is from within the current moment that one theorizes other possible moments. The first thing a social theory that aspires to integrate non-modern orderings of the world has to do, is to view the modern approach to the world as a particular one next to others, as Gesa Lindemann argues.¹⁵⁸ However, ultimately, one has to acknowledge with Lindemann that the general force of order that underlies the different particular orderings of the world and makes it possible to relate them to each other cannot be defined by necessity.¹⁵⁹

158 Gesa Lindemann, *Weltzugänge: Die mehrdimensionale Ordnung des Sozialen* (Weilerswirst: Velbrück, 2014), 20.

159 Lindemann, 71.

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