



# Arab Secularism's Assisted Suicide

A Brief History of Arab Political Discourse on Religion and the State

APRIL 25, 2019 — MARK FARHA

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Few would contest that the Arab world today is still struggling to accept, let alone institutionalize, the core pillars of secularism and a civic state. In part, this crisis of secularism might be seen as a global phenomenon in light of the proliferation of populism tinged with communal prejudice. But while there is a global component to this problem, there are also particular regional characteristics. This report seeks to go beyond the current crisis surrounding secularism as a symptom of a broader, universal failure of liberal democracy and economic inequalities, and to specifically link the enfeebled state of secularism in Arab states to the region's intellectual and political history since the nineteenth century. This indigenous history is often poorly understood or intentionally misrepresented by those seeking to discredit the secular state as a mere colonial, Western implant. This report then reviews some historical flashpoints in a longstanding Arab political discourse on secularism. It investigates the origin and popularization of the concept of a civil state or “dawlah madaniyyah,” and associated terms such as citizen, or “muwatin,” and analyzes their currency today.<sup>1</sup> Why, this report asks, has the idea of secularism, which may still rhetorically resonate with significant swaths of the Arab world, ended up being marginalized—if not outright vilified—by the region's dominant political movements and official state discourse?

This report seeks to provide historical context to today's

ideological impasse. Relying on a range of Arabic primary sources, it begins with a panoramic historical overview of the usage of the term “madani” (meaning “civil” or “civic”) among a selection of key liberal and reformist Arab intellectuals, from the nineteenth century to the present.<sup>2</sup> The report also examines recurrent patterns in the use of “dawlah madaniyyah” as a means of either asserting or avoiding an egalitarian, secular state in the present context of post-Arab-uprising states struggling with ideological and sectarian fragmentation. I explore how the concepts of the civil state and citizenship have actually been used, in some cases, to completely skirt secularism proper.

As synonym for a nondiscriminatory state free of religious or sectarian bias, secularism remains an ideal of vital importance to anchor Arab societies adrift in a sea of devastating confessional storms. While generations of Arab secular thinkers, stretching from the nineteenth to the end of the twentieth century, have died, large segments of Arab youth today emotively embrace some of the ideals of secularism. What they lack is a coherent political discourse and leadership able—and willing—to forsake cheap confessional populism for the struggle of equality. What is more, external players, including the United States, have repeatedly sponsored stridently anti-secular Islamist forces in order to gain influence over the “Arab street.” Thus, both the ideologically

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This report can be found online at: <https://tcf.org/content/report/arab-secularisms-assisted-suicide/>

charged, defamatory distortion of secularism within Arab political discourse and the Machiavellian strategy of foreign and Middle Eastern actors seeking to leverage communal passions to further their own ends continue to stymie Arab secularism and assist in its suicide.

## Origins of Dawlah Madaniyyah (the Civil State)

Why is the mention of a secular state, or even a civil state, still stigmatized in Arab political discourse? In historical hindsight, two obstacles protrude, one sociological, relating to class chasms, and one ideological, relating to the distortion of concepts.

The progenitors of secularism and political change in the segmented, confessional societies of the Middle East were clandestine and exclusive forums.<sup>3</sup> Two of the most determined and effective champions of secularism in the Middle East, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in Turkey and Antoun Saadeh in Lebanon, both abjured membership in the secret societies that had incubated their ideas, and explicitly proscribed secret society participation for members of their political parties—parties that tellingly attracted a far larger following than those of any prior or subsequent leader espousing a full-fledged, unambiguously secular platform.<sup>4</sup> Atatürk and Saadeh thus succeeded, albeit with somewhat dictatorial means, in translating bold secular ideas into well-organized parties and concrete policies. By doing so, they liberated secularism from its confinement in clandestine cells and abstract debate into the public sphere. Unlike Atatürk in Turkey, however, Saadeh could not stage a coup and rise to the top of the Lebanese political system in order to enforce his secular vision. Instead, he saw his career cut short by the collusion of Lebanese and Syrian political establishments bent on preserving the confessional status quo.

The propositions of the early elite generation of “enlightened” (“mutanawwiroun”) intellectuals who supported secularism were avant-garde. These elites saw themselves as being elevated and removed from society, and this attitudinal condescension toward the majority of their less fortunate and less educated compatriots burdened them with an additional

freight their cause could ill afford. Sheer superciliousness and lack of popular outreach has continued to bedevil the campaign for a dissemination of secularism until this day.

There are also ideological phobias which have impeded the very understanding of the concepts relating to secularism for almost two centuries. These phobias are perhaps even more fundamental obstacles. The crisis of the civil state in the Arab world can be further attributed to a yet-to-be-clarified lineage of discourse stretching all the way back to the so-called “Arab Awakening,” or “Al-Nahda.” Late nineteenth and twentieth century Arab avatars of secularism—beginning with Farah Antun (1874–1922) down to Muhammad Sa’id al-Ashmawi (1932–2013)—proposed the term “dawlah madaniyyah” (“civil state,” a term more akin to the Latin “civitas” or the German “Zivilstaat”) as all but a synonym for a secular, laic state devoid of religious discrimination.<sup>5</sup> In the words of Antun in 1908, “there is no peace and progress to be found without a division of the religious authority [‘sultah diniyyah’] from civil authority [‘sultah madaniyyah’].”<sup>6</sup>

Antun was clearly unambiguous in his use of “madani” as a synonym for “secular.” Yet as the polemic heated up, the term “madani” began to betray an effort by some writers to eschew the more explicit notion of a secular state, or “dawlah ‘almaniyyah,” due to the latter’s chronic association with atheism. In some cases, such attempts to name secularism by its proper Arabic cognate (“‘almaniyyah”) reflected not only strategic and linguistic reservations, but also a basic reluctance to endorse a nonreligious state or to accept its egalitarian premises.

Even some of the most outspoken and bold advocates of secularism, who rarely minced words in their scathing critique of religious fundamentalism, have felt the need to substitute “‘almaniyyah” with more neutral terms. Often, these carried less transparent implications with respect to a separation of religion and state, which was still a controversial idea. Etched in the collective Arab awareness is the 1925 case of Ali Abdel Raziq, an Egyptian religious scholar at Al-Azhar University in Cairo. Abdel Raziq made the bold claim that the first Muslims “were proceeding to set up a civil worldly government [‘hukumah madaniyyah dunawiyyah’], nothing

more.” He was quickly removed from his position at Al-Azhar as a punishment for what was seen to be a heretical denial of Islam’s theocratic origin.<sup>7</sup>

These controversies have continued to reverberate until the present day, and have not been settled. Some have even yielded to an uncritical, reflexive rejection of all terms associated with secularism, to the degree of identifying it as the root cause of regional religious militancy. “Religious” terrorism is still habitually misdiagnosed as the all-but-natural reaction to prior repression by “secular” dictators.

Lastly, the apologetic against secularism in the Arab world is often informed by a skewed, binary view of the political history of a Muslim, intrinsically religious Orient and a Christian, essentially agnostic Occident, whereby a secular or civil state is deemed inherently antireligious in the former and redundant in the latter. The central questions then remain: In which cases is “dawlah madaniyyah” used as a euphemism or synonym of “dawlah ‘almaniyyah,” and in what instances is the use of “madani” a discursive diversion to ward off a more substantive inquiry into the nondiscriminatory legal foundation of the state?

In many a case, the resort to “madani” does indeed appear to be a rhetorical device to distract from substantial debates about the civil state. Contemporary reformist Islamists such as Tariq Ramadan and Muhammad Imara have endorsed the declarative notion that “the civil state is the Islamic state,” echoing verbatim the first chapter of the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Freedom and Justice Party platform in Egypt.<sup>8</sup> Upon closer probing, we learn that “civil state” here is meant to denote a nonmilitary “civilian” form of governance, which is still to be governed by religious law or sharia.<sup>9</sup> Such sophistry begs the question of why these theorists have not simply affirmed an unequivocal support for an egalitarian state, particularly given the fact that, in practice, the Muslim Brotherhood and Ennahda (in Tunisia) have been reluctant to affirm the premises of full freedom of faith and equality before the law. This reluctance is understandable insofar as Islamist parties derive part of their appeal from a nostalgia for an idealized past.

Wajih Kawtharani has lamented a “veil [‘hijab’] of vocabulary” which stands in the way of a self-critical acknowledgement of the negative role religion could play in Islamic history as an instrument of political exploitation and oppression.<sup>10</sup> Rather than confront this history squarely in the way genuine secularists like Farag Foda or Sayyid al-Qemany have done, prominent Islamist-reformist intellectuals like Mohammed Abed al-Jabri or Fahmi Huwaidi have called for a removal of the very term “secularism” from the Arab political dictionary, succumbing to the facile equation of secularism with atheism.<sup>11</sup>

By contrast, barely a generation earlier, the Lebanese Sunni religious leader Abdullah al-Alayli devoted his life’s work to the obverse cause of boldly confronting and liberalizing key ossified theocratic tenets so that they might cohere with the egalitarian laws of a secular state—in his case, a secular Lebanese state—in which full freedom of belief is established as a fundamental legal and constitutional pillar.<sup>12</sup> Alayli, who was once slotted to assume the position of mufti of the republic, coined a creative, albeit highly idiosyncratic, dichotomy of secularism (“hilaniyyah”) and ecclesiasticism (“habraniyyah,” from “ahbar,” or “clergy.”)<sup>13</sup>

Unfortunately, Alayli’s school of thought, while still alive on the margins, has continued to come under fire in recent years as a polemical tone of visceral anti-Westernism threatens to distort a clearheaded academic quest for historical understanding and objectivity. Fed by pervasive feelings of political humiliation and colonial exploitation, a corrosive idea has gained currency across the region. The idea is that there is an all-encompassing demonic bogeyman of a grand alliance of secularism, colonialism, Zionism, imperialist capitalism, missionaries, and Freemasonry bent on destroying the very foundations of Arab Islamic—and Arab Christian—identity and livelihood.<sup>14</sup> This idea is nonsensical from a historical perspective. Still, even some anti-imperialist Western scholars have fallen prey to such analytical sloppiness by equating secularism with Christianity, and Western Christianity in particular.<sup>15</sup> These irrational fears have gained a new lease on life with every new regional political crisis, each additional solo American veto to shield Israel from UN measures to censure it for

its contraventions, and every new foreign intervention undertaken since the beginning of the twentieth century. As we shall see, the recent regime changes in Egypt, Libya, and Syria have further nurtured these fears, and contributed to a further marginalization of secular thought and parties in the region. The crisis of the “civil state” in the Arab world can thus be seen as a result of both internal deficiencies in Arab political discourse and external challenges to a secular order and stability.

While the term “dawlah madaniyyah” has been advertised by some reformists as a useful, culturally more successful substitute for “almaniyyah,” it risks serving as an evasive euphemism for secularism proper, and can thus cut short a vital debate. For the sake of clarity of argument, I shall simply equate in this report the dawlah madaniyyah with the nondiscriminatory state; in other words, a state that shows neutrality and equality toward the citizen regardless of confessional affiliation.<sup>16</sup> There were important premodern precedents for this idea, such as the sixteenth-century Mount Lebanon emirate of Ottoman Druze leader Fakhr-al-Din ibn Maan (1572–1635), which did not discriminate according to religion. But the notion of the civil state first gained wide currency in the Middle East in the wake of Napoleon’s conquest of Egypt, in 1798. This is the period when, arguably, the citizen in the modern context was first introduced, almost concurrently with the promulgation of the Napoleonic Code across Europe a few years later.<sup>17</sup> The introduction of the concept of the “civil state”—and its first institution in the region—was inextricably saddled with the burden of its association with foreign, colonial powers. Local, indigenous Christians suffered the brunt of Muslim suspicions of being fifth columns, a phenomenon which endures today. Even Ahmed Cevdet Pasha, one of the chief architects of nineteenth-century Ottoman reform, admitted that “in Europe, indeed, zeal for country has taken the place of zeal for religion ... but among us, if we were to adopt the term ‘vatan’ [‘nation’ in Turkish] now, all that would come to the minds of our soldiers is their village quarters.... In a tight spot, would Private Hasan obey the order of Captain Christo?”<sup>18</sup>

## Birth of the Vatan

That the still-feeble appeal of a nonsectarian, patriotic allegiance was lamented as an endemic sociological defect by Pasha, a reformist, can itself be taken as an indication of the growing ferment of nationalism in the Middle East. Even at the turn of the twentieth century, however, the rallying potential of a secular nation (“vatan”) was widely perceived as inferior to a religious, communal identity. In the November 3, 1839 edict designed to reform the Ottoman State, the term “vatan” received only a generic, passing mention in an appeal to the “defense of the fatherland.”<sup>19</sup> Likewise, the 1843 edition of Thomas Xavier Bianchi’s *Dictionnaire Francais-Turc* lists “vatanī seven” (“lover of the nation”) for patriot, but does not contain any reference to “citizen.” It was not until a poem by Mehmet Emin in 1897 that the word “Turk” was first used in a positive sense of nationalist pride.<sup>20</sup> By 1905, when Atatürk founded his secret revolutionary society Vatan ve Hürriyet Cemeyeti (“Motherland [or Nation] and Liberty”) in Damascus, the term “vatan” had obtained a greater revolutionary currency.<sup>21</sup> After Atatürk’s victory on the battlefields and proclamation of independence in 1924, Turkish national pride was not so much restored as created.

The Arab world went through a similar process, even if the final outcome varied. It is interesting in this context to note that nineteenth-century Ottoman foreign minister Shakib Efendi used the term “vatan karadeşi” (“brother of the nation”) as early as 1845 in order to exhort the Lebanese to patriotism, albeit one subservient to the imperial, patriarchal fiat. The “inhabitants of Lebanon” were thus admonished—with “high paternal solicitude”—to conform to the “duties of obedience and their status as subjects.”<sup>22</sup> This may well have been one of the earliest official usages of “vatan” prior to its popularization by the Ottoman poet and playwright Namik Kemal (1840–88) in a play of the same title.<sup>23</sup> While Kemal saw his plays banned due to the (now feared) subversive implications of “vatan” in a multicomunal empire, one might bear in mind that the playwright and poet remained a fierce opponent of the Tanzimat reforms—along with Ali Suavi and the majority of the Young Ottomans. Critics saw the Tanzimat reforms as excessive concessions by a besieged empire to the encroaching foreign powers, and

thus denounced them as heralds of increasing inequality, rather than equality.

The 1856 Ottoman “Reform Edict” (“İslahât Fermanı”) in turn contains an apparently new coinage in Turkish when it introduces a clause vowing to strengthen the “cordial ties of citizenship” (“revabıtı kalbiyeyi vatandaşî.”)<sup>24</sup> The “-daş” suffix seems to be used here for the first time in the Turkish language.<sup>25</sup> Analogous to the almost coeval Arabic neologism of “muwatin,” it signifies a relationship of reciprocity, while succinctly and elegantly underscoring the shared notion of civic identity on an equal footing.<sup>26</sup>

In response to the gruesome sectarian massacres in Mount Lebanon and Syria in 1860, Lebanese scholar Butrus al-Bustani called on the state to safeguard civil and human rights (“al-huquq al-madaniyyah wa al-insaniyyah” in Arabic) and argued against the mixture of “civil and religious matters.”<sup>27</sup> Ottoman officials such as Fuad Pasha likewise entreated the conflicting Christian and Muslim parties to treat each other as “coequal citizens” (“vatandaşlar” in Turkish), even though his point of reference for nationhood (“vatandaşlık”) was clearly pan-Ottoman rather than Syrian or Lebanese. Standing at the cusp of a new age, Pasha was a suave, cosmopolitan Ottoman statesman who sought to introduce just the right dose of republican reform to strengthen the empire—rather than subvert it. Thus, it may be an anachronistic judgment to charge these administrators for not having rid themselves of what appears to us today as paternalistic, imperial terminology such as “ra’aya” (the subject “flock”) in their correspondence.<sup>28</sup> As early as 1831, the reformist governor of Syria, Ibrahim Pasha, employed the same vocabulary in order to affirm the fundamental equality of Muslims and Christians, as would other secular-minded Ottoman administrators.<sup>29</sup> While the reformers’ intentions may have been progressive, the scholar Ilham Khouri-Maqdisi astutely points out that Fuad Pasha’s campaign for “egalitarian citizenship” (“hemişirilik” in Turkish) and “patriotism” (“hubb al-watan” in Arabic) was predicated on a demand of unqualified obedience to the “father figure” of the sultan, and thus implied a strengthening of paternalistic, imperial hierarchies.<sup>30</sup>

Be that as it may, the evolution of Ottoman political terminology in conjunction with its assimilation to the secular-republican spirit of the age would be mirrored in like transformations in the Arabic political lexicon. Indeed, the pace of the assimilation and forging of republican terms in Arabic may have, if anything, lagged slightly behind.

Indicatively, Article 21 of the 1926 Lebanese constitution—which in all likelihood was first drafted in French—contained a curious translation error: where the French text speaks of the “citoyen libanais,” the Arabic rendition reads “watani lubnani,” which would correspond to “Lebanese patriot.” Rather than fault the ostensibly poor translation skills of the erudite Lebanese drafters of the constitution, as the renowned constitutional scholar Edmond Rabbath has, one might surmise that the very Arabic term of “muwatin” (“citizen”) had still not been firmly established as part of the Arabic political lexicon.<sup>31</sup> Today, the term “muwatin” is widely used without causing controversy, while the term for “secularism” (“almaniyyah”) continues to stir controversy and allergic antipathies.

Today, the fundamental predicament of these nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century discussions remains largely unresolved: How can secularism in the Arab world be both ideologically cleansed of its negative associations and sociologically liberated from its confinement to highbrow conferences and idle debates among bourgeois intellectuals?<sup>32</sup> The champions of secularism today are forced to wistfully acknowledge the overwhelming support for religious law, and to deem the people “immature.”<sup>33</sup> Those who attempt to tie secularism to democracy, or mention both in the same breath, are bound to grapple with the inherent contradictions of making the case for both secularism and democracy, in what by many accounts seems to be a popular consensus increasingly hostile to a secular state.<sup>34</sup> Those self-avowed Arab neoconservatives, such as Fouad Ajami, who eagerly awaited the forcible imposition of democracy in the Middle East, prematurely auguring the imminent “secularization of politics,” found themselves instead confronted with the specter of duly elected theocrats in Iraq and Palestine.<sup>35</sup>

## Reckoning with the Arab Awakening

Does this mean that all hope is forlorn and the coming tide of religious and sectarian nationalisms and transnationalisms is all but inexorable? A comparison of the margins of debate during the Arab Awakening with those of today yields a less definite, more ambiguous picture. We are called to revise the overly exuberant image of the Arab Awakening as the bright dawn of Arab secularism, the ostensible opening volley of an inevitable, increasing secularization.<sup>36</sup> However gauged the writings of secularists such as Qasim Amin, Ali Abdel Raziq, Taha Hussein, or Ahmad Faris Shidyaq may have been, however calibrated their apologetics in face of their critics, they were prosecuted by the authorities, demoted from their positions, and saw their books banned.<sup>37</sup> Granted, secular-minded figures, such as Abdullah al-Alayli in Lebanon or the late reformist Islamic scholar Nasr Abu Zayd, would meet a similar fate in the late twentieth century. But state censorship in the liberal age of the Arab Awakening, including but not only under the infamous emergency laws passed by Sultan Abdul Hamid II after 1878, could be more far-reaching than even that of the most authoritarian modern state (which must, alas, contend with the ubiquity of modern communication).<sup>38</sup> To be sure, the recent prosecutions of Raif Badawi, a liberal Saudi blogger, or Turki al-Hamid, a Saudi novelist arrested for a tweet on Islamic reform, along with a campaign against a number of atheists launched in Egypt, do not bode well, especially since they fall within the scope of the Saudi and Egyptian states' banning of any publication that violates sharia.<sup>39</sup>

Still, if we take a bird's-eye view, the accustomed narrative of an effervescence of liberalism at the dusk of the nineteenth century, followed by a retrenchment after 1967 and a final demise thereafter, may well hold true as regards the general political-societal plane.<sup>40</sup> (It would be, however, fallacious to peg either the prerevolutionary Egyptian or Syrian states as genuine shining "secular" paragons.)<sup>41</sup> However, if we compare the secularist vanguard of the nineteenth century with that of the twentieth century, we must conclude that the new generation surpassed its predecessors in the outspokenness of their call for a civil, secular state. Specifically, we no longer find the forced need to pander to collective

pride in the achievements of Islam, in which even Christian writers of an earlier era, such as Michel Aflaq, Constantin Zureiq, and Antoun Saadeh felt compelled to wrap their secularism.<sup>42</sup> These newer writers also did not, until quite recently, feel the need to backtrack and resort to religious apologetics in the way that Taha Hussein (1889–1974) or Khalid Muhammad Khalid (1920–96) were pressured to "recant" in the wake of the storms of controversy their books provoked.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, Nazira Zain al-Din (1908–76), the aristocratic Beirut proto-feminist, fell silent and faded into oblivion soon after she published her cautious—and at times painfully contradictory—vision of a "reformed" Islam in her 1928 *Unveiling and Veiling*.<sup>44</sup> The book, which she wrote as an adolescent, would not raise as much as a single eyebrow were it published today. Zain al-Din was writing in the immediate aftermath of Atatürk's Turkish revolution, which she thought would herald a more, rather than less, "Islamic" social order, albeit one devoid of polygamy and slavery.<sup>45</sup> Even so, her cautious reform suggestions summoned ready repudiation from the muftis of Beirut and Damascus: no layman—let alone a Druze woman—had any business in (re)interpreting religious texts.

We may further note that the kind of secularism espoused by the likes of trailblazers such as Rifa'a al-Tahtawi (1801–73), while bolder than that of many of his immediate successors, was oxymoronic in its (wanting) definition of religious freedom as the "freedom of belief, provided it does not contradict the fundamentals of religion."<sup>46</sup> Tahtawi's caveat would reappear in subsequent Arab constitutions in which freedom of press and belief was asserted but invariably conditioned on the arbitrary clause of preserving the dignity of the heads of state and the umma (the community of Muslims in its entirety). A similar clause has been retained in the Lebanese constitution, as well as the penal and press laws, opening the door for state censorship of "defamatory" criticism, both political and religious.<sup>47</sup> In sum, celebrated as it was as an age of liberalism, the nineteenth-century Arab Awakening could not firmly establish a solid, durable foundation for secularism beyond the confines of the intelligentsia.<sup>48</sup> Even when the indispensable necessity of an impartial, secular state was averred by the likes of Ba'ath co-founder Michel Aflaq, a proviso was customarily appended

to claim exemption from comprehensive secularism. Thus, Aflaq would maintain that whereas in Europe religion was an external importation to the continent, Islam could not but remain an integral part of Arab consciousness.<sup>49</sup>

## Sect as an Untouchable Icon

More than half a century after Aflaq, an open rapport permitting an autonomous critique of religious and secular use and abuse of power remains sorely absent from Lebanon and the Arab world as a whole, as Lebanese Orthodox bishop Georges Khodr and the Syrian poet Adonis have remarked.<sup>50</sup> Yet the very fact that a Christian bishop and a Muslim poet could frame the predicament in such bold words bespeaks the evolution of secular discourse. During a 2003 public address at the American University of Beirut, Adonis offered a scathing analysis of the far-reaching consequences for politics and society alike of a pervasive culture of censorship. Just as it is anathema—and legally proscribed—to critique all things religious and sacrosanct, so too the image of the sect has become a sacred, untouchable icon.<sup>51</sup> Just as the prophets enjoy a stature beyond critical inquiry, so too the king and the politician are not to be questioned. Adonis pointed out that even the so-called liberal intelligentsia of Beirut sometimes exhibits its own form of exaggerated deference to the “image of the nation,” quite apart from the reactionary men of religion. Even self-proclaimed secular parties in the Arab world are liable to unwittingly mimic an intolerant dogmatism that is all but religious. Quoting the Shafi’i jurist Al-Mawardi (972–1058), Adonis concluded that truth, whether religious or secular, becomes a function of power and authority. In a society governed by the communal ego of the sect, Adonis wrote, truth does not exist outside of the power of the herd, the consanguineous “gens.”<sup>52</sup>

The irate reaction to Adonis’s indictment of communalism and his deconstruction of Beirut as an “uncivil civitas” would resurface with a vengeance after his critique of the Syrian uprising of 2011. Adonis wrote:

“What’s really absurd is that the Arab opposition to dictators refuses any critique; it’s a vicious circle. So someone who is against despotism in all its

forms can’t be either with the regime or with those who call themselves its opponents. The [Syrian] opposition is a regime *avant la lettre* ... I’m against the regimes of Ben Ali and Assad, and against the Islamist opposition, because I don’t want to fight one despotism for the sake of another ... If we don’t separate religion from the state, and free women from Sharia law, we’ll just have more despots. Military dictatorship controls your mind. But religious dictatorship controls your mind and body.”<sup>53</sup>

After this refusal to lend unconditional support to an increasingly violent and unabashedly sectarian revolution, the octogenarian poet was faced with death threats on Facebook and a barrage of scorn from the Syrian opposition.<sup>54</sup> Yet Adonis’s premonition of a newfangled authoritarian order and suspicion of latent sectarianism was at least partly realized in the proliferation of fundamentalist vigilante militias across Syria, and, tragically, in the raw, sectarian reaction of some ostensibly secular champions.<sup>55</sup> No less than the late Syrian secularist writer Sadiq Jalal al-Azm glibly ascribed Adonis’s sensitivity to sectarianism to the poet’s heritage as an Alawite. Yet up until the 2011 uprising it was Azm rather than Adonis who could be charged with pro-regime sympathies. It was Azm who had traveled to Damascus to receive honorific medals bestowed by Bashar al-Assad, while Adonis lived in exile and in opposition to the Ba’athist regime for decades.

## Delusions about Sectarianism

Paradoxically, the Arab intellectual world today is suffering from a contagion of noxious sectarian prejudices, even as a tendency to downplay the vigor of sectarianism persists. Thus, a certified sectarian cleric like Yusuf Qaradawi could at once agitate for a Sunni jihad in Syria that should spare no civilian ally of the regime, while conveniently claiming that “the Bahraini revolution was a sectarian revolution, and this is its problem.”<sup>56</sup> The symptom of sectarian denial was observable on all sides, including among wide swaths of the Western media and political elite. Just as reports of sectarian acts were proliferating, American secretary of state John Kerry lobbied the U.S. Congress to approve an



unpopular war against Syria, claiming in September 2013, rather counterfactually, that “the opposition has increasingly become more defined by its moderation, more defined by the breadth of its membership and more defined by its adherence to some, you know, democratic process and to an all-inclusive, minority-protecting constitution, which will be broad-based and secular.”<sup>57</sup> Opposition leader Burhan Ghalioun had dissembled when he stated in December 2011: “Let us be clear: there are no Salafist armed groups in Syria. Those carrying arms are mostly members of the dissident army. All parties are calling for a civil, democratic pluralistic state that treats its citizens as equal in front of the law. Civil is a version of secular—secular in the way that it assures it is neutral towards religions and sects, and assures the separation of state and society. The exact term ‘secularism’ has a negative connotation in the Arab world, so we prefer to use the term ‘civil’ [‘madani’].”<sup>58</sup>

These comments by Ghalioun, one of the key intellectuals and leaders of the Syrian opposition, illustrate the continued dilemma surrounding the term “almani” in Arab discourse. Ghalioun’s statement is obviously disingenuous in that virtually all “secular” opposition groups signed a declaration of solidarity with the Nusra Front early in 2012.<sup>59</sup> The line between radicals and moderates in the Islamic world was blurred by the apocalyptic killing fields in Syria and Libya. Even ostensibly “moderate” Egyptian and Tunisian Islamists openly endorsed sending young men to wage jihad in Syria. What is more, the Tunisian prime minister, a member of the Islamist party Ennahda, openly gave cover to terrorists.<sup>60</sup> In its defense, Ennahda officials claimed that punishing Salafis would only hasten their radicalization.<sup>61</sup>

## The Compounding Foreign Factor

The argument justifying the support of Islamic radicals to stave off fundamentalists has a long pedigree. Since the 1950s, the United States has again and again lent support to Islamist movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood, first against atheistic communism, and subsequently against other competing groups and ideologies. More recently, James Clapper characterized the Muslim Brotherhood as a “largely secular” group that has “eschewed violence and

has decried al-Qaida.”<sup>62</sup> Former Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) director David Petraeus went a step further by calling for the al-Qaeda-affiliated Nusra Front to be supported to combat the Islamic State.<sup>63</sup> Al Jazeera, meanwhile, instructed its staff to delete any mention of Nusra’s declared affiliation with al-Qaeda. Confirming the Nusra Front’s desire to project an image of being a locally contained al-Qaeda militia, in a 2015 Al Jazeera interview, Abu Mohammad al-Julani, the group’s leader, promulgated his order to desist from using Syria as a launchpad on Western interests.<sup>64</sup> In a somewhat more oblique fashion, Barack Obama alluded in 2014 to the same prospective controlled burning of the sectarian fire. “I think there is a distinction,” he said, “between the capacity and reach of a bin Laden and a network that is actively planning major terrorist plots against the homeland versus jihadists who are engaged in various local power struggles and disputes, often sectarian.”<sup>65</sup>

Thomas Friedman took this Machiavellian line of thinking furthest. In 1999, he agitated for the toppling of Saddam Hussein and called for action to “blow up a different power station in Iraq every week.” By 2005, Friedman was suggesting that “we should arm the Shiites and Kurds and leave the Sunnis of Iraq to reap the wind.”<sup>66</sup> Another decade later, in 2015, Friedman unabashedly insinuated the question of whether the United States “should be arming ISIS” itself, the “last Sunni bulwark to a total Iranian takeover of Iraq.”<sup>67</sup> This astonishing advice of maybe the most influential liberal pundit in America to side with the Islamic State might strike one as bizarre and irrational. Yet it can easily be seen as the logical conclusion of CIA officials Graham Fuller and Reuel Gerecht’s warped council in 2004 that “bin Laden-ism can only be gutted by fundamentalism.”<sup>68</sup> It is further congruent with the strategy of leveraging sectarianism as spelled out in a monograph released by the RAND Corporation in 2008, which suggested that, in the Muslim world, “the United States and its local allies could use the nationalist jihadists to launch proxy Information Operations (IO) campaigns to discredit the transnational jihadists in the eyes of the local populace.”<sup>69</sup> Supporting fledgling secular forces in the Arab world evidently does not rank high on the agenda of U.S. foreign policy.

## Reformists and Religious Reactionaries Colluding against Secularism

However hostile the geopolitical milieu may have been to secularism, it is important to underscore that even the most nefarious of foreign agents could never have exploited sectarian sentiments and jihadist movements to further their ends without the fertile ground of prejudices against secularism in the Middle East. That “secularism” continues to be misunderstood as a term of “opprobrium” has as much to do with the animus of the religious reactionaries as with the opportunism and recreancy of career-minded would-be reformists.<sup>70</sup> Cases of persecution of secularists, such as Raif Badawi, and reformists, such as Islam Behery, by self-proclaimed “liberal autocratic” regimes in Egypt and Saudi Arabia go to show that the mere expression of a secular predilection is liable to incur censure. It still remains far safer and easier to defend a religious form of legislation. Not just Islamists but even ostensible leftists have maligned secularism as a byword for Western Christianity. Whether secularism is glibly dismissed as an “anachronism” or branded as a heresy, both postures effectively eschew a deeper discussion of a concept whose very relevance is in continuous need of re-articulation to meet the shifting exigencies of time and context.

At present, the discourse on the civil state remains stuck between two fronts. On the one hand, Islamists and others sympathetic with the concept of a sharia state continue to stigmatize secularism (inaccurately if somewhat successfully) as a nefarious foreign concoction, while, on the other hand, Arab leftists have conveniently pinned the blame for secularism’s failure on Western intervention in the region. The third group of prominent secular Arab intellectuals who have eschewed such apologetics and instead engaged in an introspective self-critique remain pushed to the margins or into exile. Their defense of secularism continues to be defamed as atheism or equated with an automatic justification of tyranny. Yet they have been proven correct in their warnings that the continued, unquestioned paramount dominance of tribe and religion in defining Arab identity

would make the region vulnerable to both self-immolation and external exploitation of competitive communalism.

The broader question, then, still remains: whether the notion of a civil state can take root in societies that are overwhelmingly governed by instincts of fear and communal identities. As long as its ideological, sociological, and geopolitical afflictions are not boldly addressed, the discourse of “dawlah madaniyyah” and “almaniyyah” may remain stuck in a dead end. It may even be facing further setbacks as the region continues to suffer an internally and externally induced state enfeeblement and fragmentation.

This policy report is part of *Citizenship and Its Discontents: The Struggle for Rights, Pluralism, and Inclusion in the Middle East*, a TCF project supported by the Henry Luce Foundation.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> “Dawlah madaniyyah” is often translated as “civic state.” The root for the second word in the phrase is the same as for city, “medinah.” However, “civil” captures its meaning better than “civic” in the context in which it is generally used today.

<sup>2</sup> The word “madani” has been in use for centuries by Muslim scholars, including Ibn Miskawayh (932–1030), al-Raghib al-Isfahani (died circa 1108), Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (1149–1209), and Ibn Taymiyyah (1263–1328), who used the term in a manner reflecting their consensus that “madaniyyah” is simply a reiteration of Aristotle’s claim that man is a social animal. In his Quranic “tafseer” (explanation) of verse 26 in Surah Sad, Fakhr ad-Din al-Razi notes that “man is created civil by nature, for the affairs of a single man cannot be managed unless he is part of a complete and functioning city.” He uses the word “tamaddun” (from the same root) in a sense that reflects man’s intrinsic need for fellowship, for both emotional and political welfare. Later, in the nineteenth century, “tamaddun” was closely associated with the progress of the West in general. See Nasr Mohammed al-Salami, *Civics of the State*, Arabic (Cairo: Dar Al Basheer Publishing, 2014), 17–18.

<sup>3</sup> In her investigation of leftist and anarchist movements in late nineteenth-century Alexandria, Cairo, and Beirut, Ilham Khouri-Maqdisi has tried to dispel the view of a watertight elite-popular divide, maintaining that seemingly elite newspapers had a wider audience than commonly assumed. Khouri disputes the more guarded and skeptical evaluation of the efficiency and popularity of these publications contained in Ami Ayalon’s *The Press in the Arab Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). See Khouri-Maqdisi, “Levantine Trajectories” (PhD diss., Harvard, 2003), 130.

<sup>4</sup> Saadeh left his father’s Masonic lodge in 1926 and officially prohibited Freemasonry in his party before his death in 1949.

<sup>5</sup> A generation before Antun, Francis Marrash (1836–71), who was among the most eloquent of Arab Awakening luminaries, had already made the case for a separation of religion from state, though the term “madani” is not found in his writings. He does, however, elaborate profusely and with unparalleled eloquence on the “state

of civilization” (“hal al-tamadun”).

Antun was a pioneer in introducing the Arab world to the works of Karl Marx, Auguste Comte, and Friedrich Nietzsche. See Haidar Hadj Ismail, ed., *Francis Marrash: Series of Unknown Works, Arabic* (London: Riyad al-Rais, 1987).

A prominent Egyptian advocate of secularism, Ashmawi maintains that the designation of “secular” makes no sense in a non-clerical religious tradition such as Islam, going so far as to consider it a “derogatory, defamatory” designation. In an interview I conducted in 2002 with Ashmawi, however, he indicated that his avoidance of the term “secular” stems from a concern over the negative associations made with the term, whereas the term “madani” was less prone to trigger a knee-jerk reaction. Ashmawi’s notion of “civil” (“madani”) is derived from the historical expansion of the state, especially the Egyptian state, particularly in the realm of free public education toward the end of the 1930s. (Author interview, Cairo, October 20, 2002.) The claim that the Muslim Brotherhood first invoked the term in the 1950s is thus incorrect.

See Peter Hill, “‘The Civil’ and ‘the Secular’ in Contemporary Arab Politics,” *Muftah*, February 26, 2013, <https://muftah.org/the-civil-and-the-secular-in-contemporary-arab-politics/#.XHrX3c9KjVo>.

6 Farah Antun, *Ibn Rushd and His Philosophy, with the Text of the Debate between Mohammad Abdu and Farah Antun*, Arabic (Beirut: Dar Al Farabi, 1988), 260.

7 Ali Abdel Raziq, *Islam and the Foundations of Government*, Arabic (Cairo: Matba’at Misr, 1925), 93.

8 Ramadan, “Not an Islamic State, but a Civil State,” *ABC Religion and Ethics*, January 30, 2012, <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/not-an-islamic-state-but-a-civil-state/10100832>.

9 As Qaradawi makes abundantly clear, what is really at stake here is not the “separation of religion and state,” but merely the civilian nature of the state, as opposed to its military nature. “The Islamic state by nature is a civil state, it is not a military state governed by the army,” Mariz Tadros, *The Muslim Brotherhood in Contemporary Egypt: Democracy Defined or Confined?* (London: Routledge, 2012), 52.

10 Wajih Kawtharani, “Is There a Distinction between Islam and Christianity as Regards the Relationship between Religion and State?” *Afaq* 30 (2000): 16–30.

11 See Farag Foda, *So That My Word May Not Be in Vain*, Arabic (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr, 1988). Huweidi cited in Raouf Ebeid, “God’s Authority v. Power to the People: The Views of Influential Islamic Writers,” *Political Islam Online* (2010): 2.

12 Juzif Mughayzil, *Books of Juzif Mughayzil*, Arabic, vol. II (Beirut: Dar al-Nahar, 1997), 80.

13 Abdullah al-Alyali, *Wherein Lies the Mistake? A Correction of Concepts and a Vision of Renewal*, Arabic (Beirut: Dar al-Ilm lil-Malayin, 1978), 127, 133.

14 For the Eastern Catholic denunciation of secularization, see *Risalat Ri’ayat* (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1911), 22–34.

15 Gil Anidjar, “Secularism,” *Critical Inquiry* 33, no. 1 (2006): 52–77.

16 “La liberté n’est pas autre chose que l’idéologie de l’égalité devant la loi.” Francois Chatelet, *Histoire des idéologies* (Paris: Hachette, 1978), 93. To be sure, there is a great variation of forms such “equidistance” can take, ranging from the coercive French or Chinese to the more accommodative Indian or Lebanese models of secularism. See Mark Farha, “Global Gradations of Secularism,” *Comparative Sociology* 11, no. 3 (2012): 354–86.

17 On July 24, 1798, Bonaparte issued a decree establishing the first representative body composed of local Egyptians, the “majlis al-’am.” All previous Mamluk and Ottoman councils had excluded local Arabs, let alone Christians, who were also included by Ibrahim Pasha when he established similar councils in Syria. On October 6, 1798, however, the council—which was only given consultative rather than full executive powers—rebuffed Napoleon’s overtures and demanded a restoration of the ancien régime.

18 Bernard Lewis, “Watan,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 26, no. 3/4 (1991): 526.

19 Kağıt Kaynaklar, “The Constitution, First Draft” (Turkish), in *Türk Anayasa Metinleri*, ed. Suna Kili and A. Şeref Gözübüyük (Ankara: Türkiye İş Bankası Yayınları, 1985), 11–13.

20 The word “Turk” is cited as a synonym for “vigor” in the oldest Turkish document, the seventh century Orchon inscriptions. Like the analogue of national adjectives in Europe, it was initially not infused with a positive sense of national pride until the publication of Emin’s poem. Gotthard Jäschke, “Vom Osmanischen Reich zur Türkischen Republik. Zur Geschichte eines Namenswechsels,” *Die Welt des Islams* (1939): 87–89.

21 The Turkish leader would not actually take on the last name Atatürk until 1934.

22 “The inhabitants of Lebanon will come to understand that the more they conform to the duties of obedience and of their status as subjects, the more they will obtain tokens of goodwill and of graciousness from His Highness.” Maurus

Reinkowski, “Beyond the Mountain Refuge: Searching for a Wider Perspective on Ottoman Policy in Mount Lebanon,” in *From the Syrian Land to the States of Syria and Lebanon*, ed. Thomas Philip and Christoph Schumann (Würzburg: Ergon-Verlag, 2004), 233.

23 Nermin Menemencioglu, “The Ottoman Theatre 1839–1923,” *British Society for Middle Eastern Studies* 10, no. 1 (1983): 48–58.

24 Document 104 in *The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics*, ed. J.C. Hurewitz (Cambridge, Mass: Yale University Press), 315.

25 Bianchi cited in Roderic H. Davidson, “Turkish Attitudes Concerning Christian-Muslim Equality,” *American Historical Review* 59, no. 4 (1954): 852.

26 I would like to express my gratitude to Himmeh Taşkömür and Ali Yagicoğlu for kindly aiding me in translating the relevant Ottoman passages.

27 Butrus al-Bustani, *The Clarion of Syria*, Arabic (Beirut: Dawafir lil-Abhath, 1990), 22.

28 See Reinkowski, “Beyond the Mountain Refuge,” 233. After all, the term “subjects” could carry the same connotations elsewhere.

29 Asad Rustum, *Bashir between the Sultan and al-Azi, 1804–1814*, Arabic, vol. I (Beirut: Mansurat al-Jami’at al-Lubnaniyyah, 1957), 99.

30 Khouri-Maqqasi, “Levantine Trajectories,” 606. Even more portentous fusions of paternalism and patriotism are found in European analogues.

31 Edmond Rabbath, *La Constitution Libanaise: Origines, Textes et Commentaires* (Beirut: Université Libanaise, 1982), 38.

32 “Islamism is no longer represented by a peripheral group but constitutes mass grassroots movement, while secularism still consists of an internally diverse, largely avant-garde movement of critical intellectuals, writers, professionals, scholars, and students.” Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 11; and Sharabi, interview with the author, Beirut, July 12, 2002.

33 See Azzam Tamimi, “The Origins of Arab Secularism,” in *Islam and Secularism in the Middle East*, ed. Tamimi and John Esposito (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 27. Contrary to the premature and misplaced talk of secularism in Iraq (see, for instance, Kanan Makiya, “Secularism and Democracy Are the Pillars of a New Iraq,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 9, 2005), we should add that a 2005 poll showed that only 2 percent of Iraqis believe that religion should play no role in lawmaking while 74 percent indicated Islam should be the sole or main source of legislation. “Three Out of Four Iraqis Say Islam Should Be Source of Law,” *Agence France-Presse*, May 6, 2005, <https://www.org/articles/16723/>.

34 One indication of the negative stances toward secularism is provided by the popular polls conducted by the website of Al Jazeera over the past decade. Consistently, a bias against secularism is revealed. A poll on February 21, 2005, for instance, showed that 84.5 percent opposed a secular constitution for Iraq and favored sharia as the principle source of law. Mark Tessler’s attempts to disprove an incompatibility of Islam and democracy begs inquiry of the more germane relationship between Islam and secularism. Mark Tessler, “Arab And Muslim Political Attitudes: Stereotypes and Evidence from Survey Research,” *International Studies Perspectives* 4, no. 2 (2003): 175–81.

35 Thus, Ajami invokes his positivist credulousness in his rejoinder to (and dismissal of) Huntington’s thesis. “The Summoning,” *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 4 (1993): 2–4. A similar tenor informed Zbigniew Brzezinski, who pegged religion as a “waning, irrational aberration” and who as late as 1998 could defend his support of the Taliban by dismissing the danger emanating from some “stirred-up Muslims” as “nonsense.” Brzezinski, “The Illusion of Control,” in *Peacemaking: Moral and Policy Challenges for a New World*, ed. Gerard F. Powers (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1994), 31.

36 My point of reference here is Albert Hourani, who showed an unparalleled gift of nuanced scholarship but whose thesis can be reassessed with respect to the developments of the past two decades.

37 The Egyptian judge Ali Abdel Raziq published his book *Islam and the Pillars of Governance* (in Arabic, *al-Islam wa Usul al-Hukm*) before the Jerusalem conference of Islamic leaders in 1925, in which the caliphate was supposed to be claimed after it had been abolished by Atatürk in Turkey a year earlier. Raziq was subsequently fired from Al-Azhar and disbarred by a Wafdist parliament under the leadership of Saad Zaghlul. Similarly, Taha Hussein was dismissed as dean of the faculty of arts at Cairo University in 1932 after the publication of *On the Poetry of the Age of Ignorance* (in Arabic, *Fi al-Sh’ir al-Jahili*). The same fate was to befall Khalid Muhammad Khalid two decades later, after the publication of *From Here We Begin* (in Arabic, *Min Huna Nabda*). Hussein opposed declaring Islam as the religion of state in Egypt as he feared that nonbelievers and minorities would be prejudiced against. See Ahmad ‘Ulabi, *Taha Husayn: Itinéraire d’un lutteur acharné* (Beirut: Dar Al Farabi, 1990).

38 The press directives were enforced by Abdul Hamid during the Russian-

Ottoman war. It was decreed that “newspapers must first enlighten the public about the precious health of the Sultan, then they may discuss agricultural crops, and the advancement of industry and commerce in the Empire.... Lengthy articles on ethical or social issues are forbidden. The use of blank space or the use of dots in place of items censored in a newspaper is forbidden. Important official personalities should not be criticized.” Nabil H. Dajani, *Disoriented Media in a Fragmented Society: The Lebanese Experience* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1992), 27.

39 Muhammad al-Sulami, “Kingdom Amends Media Laws,” *Arab News*, April 30, 2011, <http://www.arabnews.com/node/376038>.

40 See, for instance, Ajami, *The Arab Predicament: Arab Political Thought and Practice since 1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Sadiq Jalal al-Azm, “A Critique of Religious Thought,” Arabic (Bethlehem: University Library Press, 1969).

41 In the former case, Egypt was the first modern Arab state to enshrine Islam as the official religion in its constitution of 1923, a result of a deal struck between the British and the khedive Ismaïl Pasha to quell the latter’s caliphal ambitions. The Syrian Arab Kingdom of 1920 under King Faisal spelled out a “civil government,” but likewise insisted on Islam as the religion of the kingdom. In Egypt, Law no. 40 of 1977 prohibits the establishment of any party whose tenets challenge any principle of sharia legislation, while the amended 1980 constitution reaffirmed sharia as the principle source of legislation, a clause which was also added to the Syrian constitution after it had been briefly removed in 1956. The Syrian constitution stipulates that the president must be a Muslim and that Islamic jurisprudence is a main source of legislation.

Such clauses were designed to curry favor with the populace and bestow a Sunni veil of legitimacy on what are, for all intents and purposes, a family-run, Alawite regime in Syria and a military-dominated autocratic regime in Egypt. Until the landmark fatwa of Mufti Amin al-Husseini in 1936 (and Syrian Alawites’ formal recognition by the Lebanese imam Musa al-Sadr in 1973), Syrian Alawites were always viewed as heretics by mainstream Sunnis, more despicable exponents of “pure unbelief” even than Shia, in the words of Ibn Taymiyyah. See Ajami, *The Syrian Rebellion* (Stanford: The Hoover Institution, 2012), 17.

42 Examples of such contemporary writers include Sadiq Jalal al-Azm, Fouad Zakariyya, Hisham Sharabi, Jurj Tarabishi, Mustafa Juha, Mohammed al-Atasi, Sayyid al-Qemany, Aziz al-Azmeh, and Farag Foda.

Saadeh, to be sure, unlike Aflaq, showed great awareness of the Islamist tinge and assumptions of Arab nationalist rhetoric, which he deemed but a guise for “Muhammadism.” On the other hand, Saadeh himself attempted to co-opt religious discourse in reconceiving both Islam and Christianity as part of a great religion of “submission to the One God,” a religion he incidentally baptized “Islam.” Saadeh, *The Complete Works*, Arabic, vol. IX (Beirut: Sa’ada Cultural Institute, 2001), 178.

43 After receiving death threats for apostasy, Sayyid al-Qemany—who had previously written about the political origins of Islam as an ideology of empire—recanted all his prior work in a “confession” published on July 16, 2005, claiming that he “does not want his children orphaned as those of his colleague Farag Foda.” A week later, Qemany received a letter from the alleged Egyptian al-Qaeda branch accepting his apology. Abdul Muti al-Hijazi wrote a powerful obituary to free thought in the Arab world in *Al-Ahram*.

See also Khalid Muhammad Khalid’s controversy with the late Egyptian novelist Yusuf Idris published in *Al-Ahram* on June 17, 1985. Idris contested Khalid’s defense of the Islamic state, a position Khalid famously rejected in his earlier writings of the 1950s, most notably his censored 1954 book *From Here We Begin*.

44 “It was no other than God’s kindness to women to consider her testimony worth half that of a man’s.... In fact, legal testimony is no other than a bothersome obligation.” Nazira Zain al-Din, *Unveiling and Veiling*, Arabic (Beirut: Qozma, 1928), 104.

45 Beirut in the 1930s would indeed witness waves of liberalism, first and foremost among the upper-class Sunni elite of Beirut, which for the first time saw unveiled women in public, such as Anbara Salam and Fatima Bayhum. See the outstanding social history by the late Samir Kassir, *Histoire de Beyrouth* (Paris: Fayard, 2003), 378.

Zain al-Din was writing in the same period when Ali Abdel Raziq (1888–1966) was most active.

46 Cited in Tamimi, “The Renaissance of Islam,” 53. By contrast, the defense of religious freedom in the West by Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826) was absolute and unconditional. It is only on rare occasions that we find a similar boldness among the early Arab Awakening scholars, such as Farah Antun, who in one instance spoke out for the need for an “absolute respect for the freedom of thought.” See Antun, *Ibn Rushd and His Philosophy*, Arabic (Beirut: Dar Al Farabi, 1988), 51.

47 Prosecution of libel and slander cases, as in the United States for instance, remains difficult in Lebanon, save for criticisms of religion, for which there is a near zero-tolerance policy.

48 Samir Amin contended, with some exaggeration, that the very word “secularism” remained absent from the Arab Awakening lexicology. Amin, *Eurocentrism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1989), 130. While, as we have seen, the actual term was indeed rarely invoked, secular forms of government were advocated.

49 Aflaq, *On the Way of Resurrection*, Arabic (Beirut: Dar al-Tali’a, 1978), 91 and following pages.

50 Adonis, “Open Letter to President Bashar al-Assad” (Arabic), *As-Safir*, June 14, 2006; Georges Khodr, “Secularism,” *An-Nahar*, December 12, 1992, 1.

51 See the restrictive Lebanese penal laws, Laws 386 and 385, and the restrictive press law.

52 Adonis, *Poetics and Arabic*, Arabic (Beirut: Dar Al Adaab, 2000), 90.

53 Adonis quoted in Harriet Staff, “Adonis Asks Syrian President to Step Down,” Poetry Foundation, August 8, 2011, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2011/08/adonis-asks-syrian-president-to-step-down>.

In a rejoinder, the prominent literary critic Aql al-Awit castigated Adonis for failing to contextualize Beirut’s demise by naming the political, often non-Lebanese players (such as Syria and Israel) who played a part in destroying Beirut as a “historical reference.” See “Mulhaq an-Nahar,” *An-Nahar*, November 9, 2003.

54 Maya Jaggi, “Adonis: A Life in Writing,” *Guardian*, January 27, 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2012/jan/27/adonis-syrian-poet-life-in-writing>.

55 Basel Dayoub, “Syria: Religious Police Patrol Aleppo’s Countryside,” *Al-Akhbar English*, December 19, 2012, <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article33409.htm>.

56 See Qaradawi’s speech on the Bahrain protests published to YouTube on March 19, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3tGJvR0hYg>.

57 “Senate Hearing on Syria Military Action,” CNN, September 3, 2013, <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/130903/se.04.html>.

58 When a Wall Street Journal interviewer asked whether sharia law would be accommodated, Ghalioun replied: “The source of legislation will be the parliament, and if the parliament is made up of a majority of Muslims, it will reflect their culture or propensities. In today’s Syria Shari’a is one of many sources of legislation. This is one way of satisfying religious sentiment of the people. We want a true democratic system that represents the wills and aspirations of its citizens.” See “Syria Opposition Leader Interview Transcript,” *Wall Street Journal*, December 2, 2011, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970203833104577071960384240668>.

59 John Glaser, “Syrian Rebels Pledge Allegiance to al-Qaeda-Linked Group,” *Antiwar.com*, December 11, 2012, <http://news.antiwar.com/2012/12/11/syrian-rebels-pledge-allegiance-to-al-qaeda-linked-group/>.

60 Manel Zouabi, “How Tunisia Lost Sight of the Revolution,” *Your Middle East*, June 14, 2014, <https://yourmiddleeast.com/2014/06/14/nobody-speaks-anymore-about-employment-freedom-and-dignity-in-public-or-even-private-settings/>.

61 “Tunisian Islamists Spark Fear of Culture War,” *Associated Press*, March 9, 2012, <http://beta-proxy.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2012/Mar-09/166071-tunisian-islamists-spark-fear-of-culture-war.ashx>

62 Josh Rogin, “Kirk to Clapper on Muslim Brotherhood: WTF?,” February 10, 2011, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/02/10/kirk-to-clapper-on-muslim-brotherhood-wtf/>.

63 Trevor Timm, “David Petraeus’ Bright Idea: Give Terrorists Weapons to Beat ISIS,” *Guardian*, September 2, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/sep/02/david-petraeus-bright-idea-give-terrorists-weapons-to-beat-isis>.

64 Richard Spencer, “Leader of al-Qaeda in Syria Told Not to Use Country as Launchpad to Attack the West,” *Telegraph*, May 27, 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/11634739/Leader-of-al-Qaeda-in-Syria-says-aiming-to-take-Damascus-in-interview.html>.

65 David Remnick, “Going The Distance: On and off the Road with Barack Obama,” *New Yorker*, January 27, 2014, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/01/27/going-the-distance-david-remnick>.

66 Thomas Friedman, “Foreign Affairs: Rattling the Rattler,” *New York Times*, January 19, 1999, <https://www.nytimes.com/1999/01/19/opinion/foreign-affairs-rattling-the-rattler.html>; “The Endgame in Iraq,” *New York Times*, September 28, 2005, <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/28/opinion/the-endgame-in-iraq.html>.

67 “Why is it in our interest to destroy the last Sunni bulwark to a total Iranian takeover of Iraq? Because the Shiite militias now leading the fight against ISIS will rule better? Really?” Thomas Friedman, “Go Ahead: Ruin My Day,” *New York Times*, March 18, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/18/opinion/go-ahead-ruin-my-day.html>.

68 John Mintz and Douglas Farah, “In Search of Friends among the Foes,” *Washington Post*, September 11, 2004, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/>

politics/2004/09/11/in-search-of-friends-among-the-foes/654a7d58-057b-4965-ab44-4b1045915086/?utm\_term=.1fdb6caa85f6.

**69** Christopher G. Pernin et al., "Unfolding the Future of the Great War," Rand Cooperation, 2008, [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND\\_MG738.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND_MG738.pdf).

**70** Ridwan as-Sayyid, for instance, has dismissed secularism as passé, a "no longer relevant anachronism." Sayyid, interview with the author, 2001.