

## Article

# The Pioneering Formulation of the Concepts of Secularity and Secularism in the Arab-Islamicate World(s): Butrus al-Bustani's *The Clarion of Syria*

Housamedden Darwish

Centre for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Leipzig,  
04109 Leipzig, Germany; housamedden.darwish@uni-leipzig.de

**Abstract:** This paper critically discusses the pioneering formulation of secularity and secularism in the Arab-Islamicate world(s) found in Butrus al-Bustani's *The Clarion of Syria* (1860–1861). This discussion is conceptually based on the distinction between 'secularity' as an analytical concept, and 'secularism' as a normative and ideological concept. Here, secularity is understood to refer to (structural) distinctions, whether practical or theoretical or cognitive, between the religious and the non-religious. Secularism refers to the ideological promotion of such a differentiation and distinction between religion and, in particular, politics or the state. This paper provides a conceptual analysis of secularity, secularism, and secularization, highlighting the differences between them, as well as the epistemological and methodological requirements for drawing a distinction between them in modern and contemporary Arab thought. It also reflects on the linguistic and historical context, looking at the concepts of secularity and secularism in Arab thought prior to al-Bustani's *The Clarion of Syria*.

**Keywords:** secularity; secularism; Butrus al-Bustani; *The Clarion of Syria*; Arab-Islamicate world(s)



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## 1. Introduction

In contemporary Arab thought, the concepts of secularity, secularism, and secularization are so ambiguous that definitions can vary to the point of contradiction. Indeed, their ambiguity may be the only idea unanimously agreed upon. 'Abd al-Wahab al-Missiri, for example, claims that the term secularism is "one of the most common and exciting terms for division", failing to have any "definite meanings, dimensions and implications" (al-Missiri and al-Azmeh 2000, p. 11). Muhammad 'Abed al-Jabri goes so far as to say that "there is no motto adopted by modern Arab thought which has been a cause of ambiguity and misunderstanding like the slogan secularism" (al-Jabri 2009, p. 53). On this basis, Ahrari seems justified in claiming that "the most serious problem which the issue of secularism faces in the Middle East today is definitional" (Ahrari 1996, p. 103). To understand and resolve this definitional problem, this paper will rely on the conceptual framework adopted and developed by the Centre for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences "Multiple Secularities—Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities" at the University of Leipzig (Kleine and Wohlrab-Sahr 2020b; Darwish 2022b). According to this conceptual framework, secularity, as an analytical concept, concerns what *is*. It refers to the institutional and practical differentiation, and the theoretical or epistemological distinction, between the religious and the non-religious. The normative concept of secularism, by contrast, concerns what *should be*, taking a position in favour of secularization, and highlighting its advantages. Of course, as I shall demonstrate, the distinction between the two concepts does not prevent them from overlapping, nor deny the juxtaposition and entanglement of the analytical and normative dimensions of both concepts. However, the normative dimension inherent to the concept of secularism is thicker or stronger than the normative dimension to the concept of secularity.

The conceptual framework on which this paper is based is a heuristic methodological tool that “can serve as a tertium comparationis in historical-sociological research on religion and its relation to its environment” (Kleine and Wohlrab-Sahr 2021, p. 288).<sup>1</sup> It assumes that secularity, as a distinction and differentiation between the religious and the non-religious, is multifaceted and goes “beyond the west and beyond modernities.” It is not based on a particular or specific understanding of religion, nor of what should be classified as religious or non-religious. The paper aims to show how secularity has been formulated in the Eastern and Arab-Islamicate context(s). It argues that al-Bustani’s pioneering formulation of the concepts of secularity and secularism in *The Clarion of Syria* is (one of) the best-case studies in the distinction between secularity and secularism from outside of a Western context. It also provides a deep insight into the distinction between the religious or spiritual and the non-religious, civil, or political in the Eastern and Arab-Islamicate world(s). Through a critical discussion and analysis of secularity and secularism in the Arab-Islamicate world(s), it is argued that Butrus al-Bustani’s *The Clarion of Syria* has played a pioneering and significant role in the formulation of these concepts. Moreover, *The Clarion of Syria* offers us an opportunity to show that secularism is not necessarily anti-religious, but that it can also take a neutral stance towards religion, or even exist as a religious secularism. By exploring and demonstrating the heuristic features of the conceptual framework, the paper will also highlight the limitations of such a conceptual framework or methodological tool. The conceptual framework should not be reduced or limited to a dualistic or dichotomous oppositional structure.

This paper begins by providing a conceptual analysis of secularity, secularism, and secularization, highlighting the differences between them, as well as the epistemological and methodological requirements for drawing a distinction between them in modern and contemporary Arab thought. This is followed by a section reflecting on the linguistic and historical context, by looking at the concepts of secularity and secularism in Arab thought prior to al-Bustani’s *The Clarion of Syria* (al-Bustani 1990, 2019).<sup>2</sup> The rest of the paper analyses al-Bustani’s secularist conception of secularity, and his pioneering formulation of the two concepts of secularity and secularism in *The Clarion of Syria*.

## 2. Conceptual Distinctions in the Arab-Islamicate World(s): Secularity, Secularism, Secularization

The analytical concept of secularity refers to the structural or institutional differentiation and the theoretical or conceptual distinction between the religious and the non-religious. One Arabic translation for secularity is al-‘almānīyya. This definition retains only one of José Casanova’s three traditional theses of secularization theory, these being (1) the decline of religion or religious beliefs and practices, (2) the privatization of religion and its gradually increasing absence from the public sphere, and (3) the differentiation between religion and other social spheres, or between the religious and the non-religious or secular (Casanova 1994, pp. 11–39). In the same vein, the definition retains only one of the three criteria in Charles Taylor’s conceptualization of secularity: the institutional differentiation between religion and other levels of society, particularly between religion and the state or politics (Taylor 2007, pp. 1–2).

The analytical concept of secularization refers to the process of institutional differentiation between the religious and the non-religious. It is useful here to distinguish between two Arabic terms expressing two different aspects of secularization: ‘Almana as the act of secularizing and Ta‘alman as (the process of) being secularized; both could be translated by the English term secularization. Ta‘alman refers to the objective process of being secularized, the result of secularization, and its structural foundations. It is an internal process that is not (necessarily) the result of an external and intentional agent. It could instead exist as a “secularity without secularism”, i.e., a process of institutional differentiation or conceptual distinction, without an ideological stance or attitude towards this process. By contrast, ‘Almana highlights human agency in the intentional activity of secularizing. The distinction between these concepts is important, as the process of secularization is not

always an intentional process or the realization of a prior desire, intent, or vision. The secularization process is not necessarily accompanied by secularism.

Secularism is a normative concept, referring to an ideological position that adopts, advocates for, and praises the process of secularization, stressing its advantages or necessity. It can be mapped onto the Arabic term *al-‘almānawīyya*.

The analytical nature of secularity and secularization, which are conceived as ideal types, means that they describe and analyse what *is*, while striving to avoid reference to what *ought to be*. Nevertheless, contrasting a descriptive or analytical nature with a normative or ideological one does not negate the possibility of there being a normative dimension to an analytical concept. Secularity and secularization are closely related to the ideological political field and to other normative concepts, such as modernity, democracy, and religion. Therefore, it is important to simultaneously distinguish between descriptive analytical and ideological normative concepts, on the one hand, and to highlight the relativity of this distinction, on the other. The normative aspect inherent to the concept of secularism is more thick and clear, which is why it can be said to be a “thick normative concept”, meaning that it includes two main dimensions at the same time: a non-normative analytical dimension and a normative or evaluative one.<sup>3</sup>

Secularity, as differentiation and distinction, is not limited to the political field, but may occur in any and all fields of human society, including education, science, the economy, or sports. By contrast, debates in the Arab-Islamic world(s)<sup>4</sup> often refer to secularism, and its relation to the state, politics, and religious authority, taking a normative and ideological stance. Among the most important and prominent definitions in this regard are the separation of religion or the Church from the state or politics, or the separation of religious authority from political authority. The focus on ideological and normative secularism, and the denial or ignorance of the other dimensions to this phenomenon and related phenomena, has led to widespread misunderstanding in many debates (Darwish 2022a).

Distinguishing between the concepts of secularity and secularism does not mean the two are entirely separate. As mentioned, both concepts may have a normative dimension (to varying degrees). In addition, their descriptive content also intersects. Secularism necessarily includes, or is based on, a distinction between the religious and the non-religious. Nevertheless, there is no (necessary) correspondence between secularity, secularism, and secularization. There may be secularization, a process of differentiation, without the existence of a consummate secularity, a theoretical or epistemological distinction. Secularity may exist without a secularism promoting it. Secularism may exist without successful secularization. In other words, society can be secularized without a clear distinction at the cognitive level, and without an ideological position on this secularization. In this regard, an important thesis is that the “problem of secularism” in the Arab-Islamic world(s) does not lie in the extent to which the political system has been secularized, but rather in the extent of ideological, public, and popular acceptance of this secularization.<sup>5</sup>

In Arab (secularist and Islamist) ideological discourse, secularism is sometimes considered a necessary feature of democracy, where citizens must be treated equally regardless of their religious affiliations. However, it is sometimes presented as going beyond this, being a comprehensive philosophy in its own right—an ideological, cognitive, ethical, and political view of the world and human existence, in contradiction and conflict with the religious view. This is the case, for example, in the “comprehensive secularism” of ‘Abd al-Wahab al-Missiri (al-Missiri 2002), and the “secular humanist paradigm” of Sadiq Jalal al-‘Azm (al-‘Azm 2005).

It should be noted and emphasized that the analytical concept of secularity is, in fact, not in an oppositional relationship with religion. Secularity includes both the religious and the non-religious and refers to the differentiation and distinction between the two. It does not demand the existence of a separation, estrangement, or mutual exclusion between them, as is found in the common ideological definitions of secularism in the (Arab) political field (with a particular focus on separation of religion from the state or from politics). Differentiation does not negate overlapping, interlacing, and intersection, nor does it

mean there is complete or absolute heterogeneity between the two parties. The concept of secularism could relate to a duality, instead of a dichotomy, and that duality need not become a dichotomy with two contradictory poles, except in a particular form of secularism. Distinction and differentiation may sometimes take the form of complete separation, but this is only one of the possible forms of secularity. Indeed, secularities are multiple and variant, as are secularisms.<sup>6</sup> Secularity and secularism can form part of a religion itself. For example, it can be understood that Christianity—in saying “Give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s” (Matthew 22:21), for example—includes a secular(ist) vision that distinguishes between the religious and the non-religious and promotes this distinction. The same could be said of Islam. The distinction between religion and the world is present in the hadith “You are more knowledgeable about the affairs of your worldly life”, and even more clear in the Islamic and Islamist slogan “Islam is religion and state”. The latter includes a distinction not only between religion and state, but also, implicitly, between religion and Islam. In this sense, Islam includes both religion and non-religion (Jackson 2017).

Why has the terminological and conceptual distinction between secularity and secularism been so rare in (contemporary) Arabic language and thought?<sup>7</sup> In order to answer this question, one should consider two issues; one etymological, relating to the grammatical rules of the Arabic language, the other conceptual, relating to the meaning, and normative or pejorative dimension, of “secularism”.

Concerning the etymological issue, the word al-<sup>ʿ</sup>almānawīyya (secularism) does not comply with the rules of derivation and suffixes in the Arabic language. On this basis, many have denounced and rejected its use. The suffix wī/wīyya is normally used to derive an attributive adjective or noun in cases in which it is not possible or convenient to add either yāʾ, or a combination of yāʾ and tāʾ marbūṭa together. For example, it is added to the word yad (hand) to become yadawī (done by hand), because adding the suffix yāʾ/ī to form yadī creates the meaning “my hand”. According to these rules, the grammatically correct counterpart to the English suffix “ism/ist”, with the hyperbolic meaning of ideology, doctrine, theory, or religion, is the suffix āni/āniyya. For example, the word al-tārīkh (history) becomes al-tārīkhāniyya (historicism).<sup>8</sup> On this basis, attention should be paid to the etymological peculiarity of the word al-<sup>ʿ</sup>almānīyya. Customarily, al-<sup>ʿ</sup>almānīyya is derived from the word <sup>ʿ</sup>alam or <sup>ʿ</sup>ālam (world), through the unfamiliar deletion of the letter ā after the letter <sup>ʿ</sup>ayn (the initial <sup>ʿ</sup>). However, the most significant peculiarity lies at the end of the word, which already includes the suffix āni/āniyya. It is considered undesirable to add the same suffix twice, which would render the word <sup>ʿ</sup>al-<sup>ʿ</sup>almānāniyya. Using a different suffix for this term to designate what is expressed by the English suffix “ism/ist” is considered preferable. The Arabic suffix wī/wīyya, in use since its theorization by Yasin Al-Hafiz, Abd-Allah al-<sup>ʿ</sup>Arwi, Tayeb Tizini and other intellectuals in the 1960s, appears to be the only common and reasonable option in this regard.<sup>9</sup>

With regard to the ambiguity between al-<sup>ʿ</sup>almānawīyya’s analytical and normative dimensions, terms ending in the suffix wī/wīyya appear to have such a pejorative connotation that it might be hard to grasp their descriptive or analytical meaning. Nevertheless, it should be stressed that the prevalence of a pejorative usage does not negate—or should not negate—the descriptive meaning included in the concept. As mentioned earlier, it is important to distinguish between the phenomena of secularity or secularization and the ideology that adopts or supports them. The word “ideology” is itself often used in a negative, insulting, or derogatory sense in Arab discourse. However, the use of these words should not be restricted to that negative sense. A conceptual and terminological clarification is therefore needed to designate and distinguish the precise normative and descriptive dimensions of these concepts and terms. Terminological diversity, i.e., using a variety of terms to refer to different concepts, is necessary to allow and enrich a multiplicity of meanings.<sup>10</sup>

### 3. Secularity and Secularism: On Linguistic and Conceptual Analysis, History and Genealogy in the Arab-Islamicate World(s)

In Arabic language or culture, the word al-<sup>ṣ</sup>almāniyya is predominantly used to refer to both the concepts of secularity and secularism.<sup>11</sup> This word has a long history in the Arabic language and culture; it has been in use since at least the tenth century when it was used to distinguish between lay priests and monastic priests, in an Arab-Christian context (bin al-Muqaffa<sup>ṣ</sup> 1978, p. 95; Tarabishi 2006, p. 2017). In the nineteenth century, the word appeared in a French-Arabic dictionary (Bocthor 1828, p. 310), and in the first modern Arabic dictionary (al-Bustani 2009, Mujallad 6, Bab al-<sup>ṣ</sup>Ayn, p. 289). In the French-Arabic dictionary, “séculier, ère” is given two definitions. It refers firstly to the secular clergy “qui vit dans le siècle”, not committed by vows to a religious community, as opposed to the regular clergy who do take vows committing them to this religious community and life. Secondly, it refers to the laity (séculier, mundane, laïque) as opposed to the clergy. The first modern Arabic dictionary mentions only this second definition.

In the nineteenth century, the term “secularity” (al-<sup>ṣ</sup>almāniyya) did not refer to an ideological position either praising or denouncing the differentiation or distinction between the religious and the non-religious. The contemporary, normative usage of this word did not arise until the twentieth century (al-<sup>ṣ</sup>Azmeh 2020, p. 7). Nevertheless, the prior absence of use of the term al-<sup>ṣ</sup>almāniyya (secularity) for this purpose does not mean that the concept of “secularism” did not exist beforehand. Indeed, this ideological concept was already present in the second half of the nineteenth century. One should take care to distinguish between the terminological history of words, and the history or genealogy of concepts. There is a distinction between the history of the concepts of secularity, secularism, and secularization in the Arab-Islamicate world(s), on one hand, and the history of the words associated with them, on the other.

The advent of the concept of secularism in the Arab-Islamicate world(s) did not occur simultaneously with the first uses of the terms al-<sup>ṣ</sup>almānawīyya or al-<sup>ṣ</sup>almāniyya. The concept existed prior to and formed independently of the terms. There is no doubt that the words we choose to express an idea or a concept influence that idea or concept, and its reception and understanding by others. However, we must not lose the separation between concepts, their history, and analysis, on one hand, and the words used to express them, on the other. This is because concepts can exist without being associated with a particular term, or they may be expressed differently in different languages (e.g., secularity, al-<sup>ṣ</sup>almāniyya, laïcité, Säkularismus, etc.) or even within the same language (e.g., Arabic having al-<sup>ṣ</sup>almāniyya, al-duniyawīyya, al-dahriyya, al-dahrāniyya, etc.). History and conceptual analysis should not rely, either exclusively or primarily, on linguistic or terminological analysis or the terminological history of words.<sup>12</sup>

Al-Bustani’s *The Clarion of Syria* provides clear evidence of the relative independence of concept and words. In it, the concepts of secularity and secularism are formulated without the terms al-<sup>ṣ</sup>almāniyya or al-<sup>ṣ</sup>almānawīyya.<sup>13</sup>

Arguing that al-Bustani provided the first historical formulation of the (modern, positive) concept of secularity does not encompass a denial of the existence of precursors to this concept in Arabic texts prior to *The Clarion of Syria*. Al-Bustani was the first to both present a clear secularist discourse calling for the separation of religious or spiritual and political or civil authorities, and to theorize, promote, and justify it. Apart from Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq’s text, *Leg over Leg or The Turtle in the Tree* (al-Shidyaq 2013), no Arabic text preceding Bustani’s included an explicit call for such separation. It is absent, for example, in the texts of Rifa‘a Rafi‘ al-Tahtawi (1801–1873) (al-Tahtawi 2004) and Khair al-Din al-Tunisi (1810–1890) (al-Tunisi 1967). These authors “attempted, using Islamic concepts, to justify the adoption of Western institutions, considering such adoption a return to the true spirit of Islam, not the introduction of something new to it” (Hourani 1983, p. 69).

In Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq’s text, *Leg over Leg*, we find real signs or harbingers of secularism—a proto-secularism, perhaps—in an Arab text that predates *The Clarion of Syria*. Al-Shidyaq was a Maronite who converted to Protestantism, and then later to Islam. His



strong criticism of the (Maronite) Church was closely linked to the death of his brother As'ad al-Shidyaq, who, because of his conversion to Protestantism, was excommunicated by the Church, and subjected to arrest and torture for six years, until his death in 1830. In his severe attack on the Maronite Church, Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq stressed that it had no right or authority to interfere in such cases, especially given that that Christ himself recognized civil authority as being "Caesar's authority", respecting its independence from, and superiority over, religious authority. His argument was based on Jesus' famous phrase: "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's" (Matthew 22:21). Al-Shidyaq focused more on attacking the (Maronite) Church than on developing and promoting secularity, however. He based his stinging criticism on the idea that the clergy had no religious, civil, or political authority with regard to his brother's actions (al-Shidyaq 2013, pp. 1, 19, 297). Thus, we find in al-Shidyaq's *Leg over Leg* a general distinction between the civil and the religious, one of the two basic dimensions of the concept of secularity. However, al-Shidyaq never developed this into a secularism with clear outlines and foundations, with a clear call for a separation between the religious or spiritual and the political or civil.

Although al-Bustani's texts in general, and *The Clarion of Syria* in particular, were central in creating the pioneering formulation of secularism in the Arab-Islamic world(s), many researchers fail to give this foundational contribution sufficient consideration. For example, the chapter in Azzam al-Tamimi's book *Islam and Secularism in the Middle East* dealing with "The Origins of Arab Secularism," (Tamimi 2000, pp. 13–28) fails to mention al-Bustani at all. In fact, he is only referred to once in the entire book, where his dictionary Muhit al-Muhit is cited. In a general study of secularity, secularism, and secularization in the Arab world(s), another scholar, Wu, confined himself to two and a half lines to point out that both al-Bustani and al-Shidyaq had criticized the Church. Wu agreed with Nazik Saba Yared (Yared 2002, p. 25) that al-Bustani and al-Shidyaq's positions were identical—or at least similar—as both "sought the separation of the spiritual from the temporal power of the Church, and not from that of the Ottoman Sultan" (Wu 2007, p. 58). This paper argues that al-Bustani's contribution to the formulation of Arab secularism in *The Clarion of Syria* was pioneering, foundational, and an important turning point.

#### 4. Secularity and Secularism in Butrus al-Bustani's *The Clarion of Syria*

*The Clarion of Syria* is a periodical, newspaper,<sup>14</sup> or series of eleven pamphlets<sup>15</sup> that was published between September 1860 and April 1861, directly after the "strife" (fitna) or sectarian civil war that erupted in 1860 in what is now Lebanon and Syria.<sup>16</sup> The first three pamphlets were titled *The Clarion of Syria* (1–3), the subsequent eight pamphlets (4–11) followed the format of, for example, *Syria's Clarion or the Fourth Patriotism* (substituting in fifth, sixth, etc.) (Khuri 1995, p. 45). Although the content of the pamphlets makes the motivation behind them and their connection to the civil war clear, it is not clear why al-Bustani stopped writing them. It may be that he "stopped publishing them after the situation calmed down and people's conditions in general settled" (de Tarazi 1913, p. 46). Equally, al-Bustani continued to publish his ideas in newspapers, texts, and other projects that can arguably be considered a continuation of *The Clarion of Syria* in other forms.<sup>17</sup> Al-Bustani did not announce himself as the author of this series of pamphlets when they were first published, instead signing them "from a patriot". They were directed specifically at those whom al-Bustani addressed in the pamphlets as "countrymen". Later, in 1869, he revealed in Muhit al-Muhit that he was the author (Hanssen and Safieddine 2019, p. 7).

In the following two subsections, we will show al-Bustani's pioneering contribution on the question of secularity and secularism in the Arab-Islamic world(s). The first part focuses on the concept of secularity in *The Clarion of Syria* through a discussion of its forms of analytical distinction between the religious and the non-religious. The second part concerns the normative secularism present in the text; that is, al-Bustani's ideological attitude vis-a-vis this distinction.

#### 4.1. Secularity in *The Clarion of Syria* by Butrus al-Bustani

Jens Hanssen states that al-Bustani “categorized and divided the world into conceptual opposites”, but only gives examples that express binary or dualistic oppositions: “past/present, religion/politics, civilization/barbarism, Europe/Africa, victims/perpetrators, civil war/civil society” (Hanssen 2019a, p. 37). Despite the strong presence of such binaries, the conceptual world in *The Clarion of Syria* is not composed exclusively of binaries or even dualities. There are also triple and quadruple conceptual oppositions or relations. Additionally, the dualities Hanssen lists, whilst having distinct components, are not necessarily contradictory binaries, not being normative dichotomies with two mutually and normatively exclusive poles. In other words, the conceptual world al-Bustani presents in *The Clarion of Syria* is neither limited to, nor centred on, either a dualistic or a binary view. The text includes a significant number of descriptive or analytical contrapositions that do not take on a binary or dichotomic form. The three-sided distinction between the religious, the civil, and the moral is one of the most prominent examples that show that al-Bustani’s conceptual world is not purely dualistic, nor necessarily dichotomic. With these issues in mind, it can be said that there is a strong presence of dualities and non-binary conceptual distinctions in many of the contexts and issues addressed by al-Bustani in *The Clarion of Syria*. In some contexts, these conceptual distinctions are presented as merely descriptive and analytical pairs, but it is not uncommon for this to be accompanied by an explicit or implicit evaluative and normative dimension, praising one side, and highlighting its advantages or necessity, whilst condemning the other(s). With the presence of the normative dimension, dualistic distinctions are turned into binary and dichotomic hierarchies. However, the normative dimension sometimes takes a different form, not being based on a hierarchical comparison of opposing sides of conceptual distinctions, but on the need for such distinction and differentiation to begin with.

In *The Clarion of Syria*, secularity appears in the form of a repeated and emphasized distinction between what is religious or spiritual, on one hand, and what is civil, moral, or political, on the other. As for secularism, it manifests itself in the call to separate these two aspects, especially when they are embodied as two authorities: a religious or spiritual authority and a civil or political authority.

In the first six pamphlets, al-Bustani confines himself to describing the differentiation or distinction between the religious and the non-religious. The secularist normative attitude toward this distinction starts in the seventh pamphlet, where the call for adopting this distinction and not mixing or merging the two spheres appears quite clearly. In the following I present some examples, from *The Clarion of Syria*, of secularity as the distinction between the religious and the non-religious.

In *The Clarion of Syria*, al-Bustani makes a continuous and stable distinction between the religious, the literary, and the civil or civic. In the third pamphlet, he distinguishes between “religious, moral, and civic duties”, arguing that, according to such duties, “the treacherous oppressors and those who are in positions of responsibility” should immediately take the initiative to help the oppressed and victims of the civil war, and provide them with what they need by any means possible (al-Bustani 2019, p. 73). In the fourth and seventh pamphlet he distinguishes between “civil, moral, and religious freedoms/rights”, with these being among the rights that the “people of the homeland” should enjoy in the country (al-Bustani 2019, pp. 77, 96). The same distinction can be found in the sixth pamphlet, where he writes about the rejection or ignorance of “religious, moral, and civic duties” as one of the negative effects of the civil war (al-Bustani 2019, p. 91). In the fifth pamphlet, he also distinguishes between “religious, moral, and civil interests and public welfare” (al-Bustani 2019, p. 80), which was disrupted and damaged by the civil war. In the seventh pamphlet, he considers the lack of three types of wisdom (religious, moral, and civil) as a source of enmity, social division, and family factions (al-Bustani 2019, p. 94).

It is noticeable that, in the contexts referred to here, the distinction between the religious, the civil, and the moral in al-Bustani’s conceptual world does not dissolve into binaries or dichotomic oppositions with contradictory sides. There is an overlapping

entanglement between the two sides, and the distinction and differentiation by which secularity is defined does not necessarily include a separation or normative hierarchy between its two ends.

In this regard, one of the most important distinctions is that between the religious and the civil. In the fifth pamphlet, al-Bustani writes of “civil and religious prejudices (al-aghrād)” (al-Bustani 2019, p. 73).<sup>18</sup> In the ninth pamphlet, he distinguishes between “religious and civil interests”.<sup>19</sup> He also distinguishes between Sharia and custom, and between religion and politics (al-Bustani 2019, pp. 86, 96, 109). Al-Bustani’s distinction between religion and the world (al-Bustani 1990, p. 27; 2019, p. 83) is an extension and evocation of an old distinction in Arab-Islamic culture. In his book, *al-ʿIqtisād fī al-ʿIqtisād*, Al-Ghazali distinguishes between “religion order” (nizām al-dīn) and “world order” (nizām al-dunyā) (al-Ghazali 2013, 2014). In *Adab al-Dīn wa-l-Dunyā*, al-Mawardi distinguishes between Adab al-Dīn and Adab al-Dunyā, as is clear from the book’s title (al-Mawardi 2013). The distinction between religion (al-dīn) and the world (al-dunyā) can be seen as one of the precursors of secularity that already existed in this culture before the establishment of modernity and import of Western secularity. This is Rushain Abbasi’s main thesis in his recently published paper: “Did Premodern Muslims Distinguish the Religious and Secular? The Dīn—Dunyā Binary in Medieval Islamic Thought.” (Abbasi 2020).

Secularity in the Arab-Islamic world(s) is founded upon a tripartite distinction between the religious, the civil, and the moral (ʿadab/ʿadabī). The distinction and differentiation between the religious and the moral is of particular significance here, having been present almost from the start of Arab-Islamic culture. Armando Salvatore has argued that the “soft distinction” between ʿadab and religion, shariʿa, or hadith is the “mother of the distinctions” between the “religious and non-religious” in Arab-Islamic culture (Salvatore 2018, 2019, pp. 35–51). Salvatore concludes that “ʿadab provides a narrative and normative umbrella to a proliferating grid of concepts, practices and institutions that have been identified as potential carriers of a secular ethos of distinction within pre-colonial, Islamic history” (Salvatore 2019, p. 38). He calls this secularism “secular civility” (Salvatore 2018, pp. 14, 17).

The distinction between the religious and the civil is the one that is most central to the secular vision expounded upon in *The Clarion of Syria*, and may be seen as the “father” of the modern distinction between the religious and the secular in the Arab-Islamic world(s). Albert Hourani claims that it “is through al-Afghani above all that [the idea of ‘civilization’] reaches the Islamic world” (Hourani 1983, p. 114).<sup>20</sup> However, we should not forget that the concepts and terms civil (madanī) and civilization (madaniyya) have existed since the early Arab Renaissance, and thus were used before al-Afghani’s writings. The distinction between the religious and the civil is present not only in the texts by al-Shidyāq, it is also one of the most prominent and important “secular” distinctions in *The Clarion of Syria*. What is interesting about the term “civil” is that it can be used in one context to express what is religious or Islamic, and in another to describe what is secular or non-religious. This ambiguity can be seen in its dual use, on the one hand, in contemporary Islamic discourse about the civil state as an Islamic state, and, on the other hand, as a synonym for the concept of “secular” or one of its components or dimensions. The latter is the case in *The Clarion of Syria*.

ʿAziz al-ʿAzmeḥ is correct in stating that the term “civil” was once used to refer to what came to be seen later as “secular”, (al-ʿAzmeḥ 2020, p. 7) such that that the word “secular” became a direct replacement for the word “civil”. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that the concept of civilization (madaniyya) is not (necessarily) a mutually exclusive negation of the concept of “religious”, but is (also) intertwined with it. This overlap is clear when there is an equality between the concepts of the religious and the Islamic. This broad, double, and “fuzzy” meaning of the concepts of the civil (madanī) and civilization (madaniyya) may help to explain why it has positive connotations for many religious “Islamists” and non-religious “secularists” alike: Butrus al-Bustani, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Farah Anton, Muhammad Abdo, Francis al-Marrash, and Rashid Rida, for



example, all see these concepts in a positive light. We will show the centrality of the ideas of the civil and civilization in al-Bustani's thought, in our discussion of the secularist vision of *The Clarion of Syria*.

#### 4.2. Secularism in *The Clarion of Syria* by Butrus al-Bustani

In *The Clarion of Syria*, al-Bustani not only draws a distinction between the religious and the non-religious, but also emphasizes the paramount importance of this distinction. He adopts an explicit and firm normative stance towards it, especially regarding its embodiment in political authorities or forces. One should note, however, that the first pamphlet, which outlines most of the various distinctions between the religious and the non-religious, does not adopt an explicitly normative stance on those distinctions. Moreover, al-Bustani does not use the terms "politics", "political", or "politician" in any of the first four pamphlets, and hardly uses them in the fifth and sixth. However, from the seventh pamphlet, al-Bustani's secularist position appears explicitly and directly. In this, he writes:

Anyone who studies the histories of religious communities and peoples knows the harm visited upon religion and people when religious and civil matters, despite the vast difference between them, are mixed. This mixing should not be allowed on religious or political grounds. But how often has it had a hand in the present destruction? God knows, and so do you. And since this patriot is not from the band of fools, he also knows.

(al-Bustani 2019, pp. 95–96)

This text mixes description with evaluation, with what *ought to be* being intertwined with what *is*. In this mixture, evaluation is based on description, implicitly or explicitly including it, and description establishes evaluation, necessarily leading to it. Al-Bustani first presents the necessity of distinction or separation of the religious and civil spheres in his description of the "histories of religious communities and peoples". Here, he asserts the negative effects of mixing (or not differentiating between) religious and civil matters. The damage resulting from such mixing affects both politics and religion, something that the "patriot" who is "not from the band of fools" must necessarily be aware of. This implicit normative judgement is nonetheless still stated in terms of a description of what *is* or *was*. He moves on from this to talk explicitly of what *should* or *should not be* permissible in religion and politics, stating that the lack of differentiation and distinction between religious and political matters should not be permissible from either a religious or a political perspective.

Further, al-Bustani emphasizes the necessity of treating all people equally, providing them with full rights regardless of their (religious or sectarian) affiliation. This call includes a distinction between decrees and laws, i.e., between distinct rights granted to specific persons, sects, or groups, and the equal "religious, civil, and moral rights" applying to all, regardless of "their affiliation to particular persons or communities" (al-Bustani 2019, pp. 95–96). This distinction between (religious or sectarian) affiliations and the rights of citizens, or "countrymen" as al-Bustani puts it, forms a constituent basis of the secular demand for democratic, legal, political, and moral equality between citizens, regardless of their different religious affiliations. *The Clarion of Syria* contains a repeated presentation and clarification of this distinction, as well as a strong emphasis on its importance and urgent necessity.

In the ninth pamphlet, al-Bustani strengthens his secularist discourse, and begins to formulate it in the language of a "separation" that must take place, or the "dividing line" that should be established between religious and civil matters, if the two are to both be successful:

As long as our people do not distinguish between religion, which is necessarily an intimate matter between the believer and his Creator, and civic affairs, which govern and shape social and political relations between the human being and their fellow countrymen or between them and their government, as long as our

people do not draw a sharp line to separate these two distinct concepts, they will fail to live up to what they preach or practice.

(al-Bustani 2019, p. 107)

At this juncture, it is useful to recall the distinction between the concepts of secularity and secularism. The analytical concept of secularity refers to the distinction or differentiation between the religious and the non-religious, while secularism, an ideological vision that favours, desires, defends, or promotes secularity, often speaks in the language of separation, seeking to establish clear and strict borders completely separating the religious from the non-religious. The prevailing (secular) definitions of secularity and secularism in the Arab-Islamic world(s) are the separation of religion, church, or religious authority from the state, politics, or political authority. Undoubtedly, separation is a form of differentiation, but this special case only occurs in three possible scenarios: (1) within the framework of an ideological discourse, as is generally the case in the contemporary Arab-Islamic world(s); (2) stemming from the secularization of the political sphere following a violent struggle between political and religious authority, as in revolutionary France or Atatürk's Turkey; or (3) within the framework of an authoritarian or totalitarian political regime, as in China and North Korea today, and in the Soviet Union in the past. Such separation is often the result of a negative view of religion and is carried out to spare the state and society its actual or perceived dangers. In such cases, secularism is conceived and presented as protecting the state and society from religion, as part of a continuous effort to exclude it from the public sphere. This is the case, for example, with French *laïcité*. Separation can, however, also aim to protect religion and religious people from state interference, control, or limitation of (religious) freedoms and rights, especially when the separation is only partial. A case in point is secularism in the United States.

Although al-Bustani used the language of separation, his secular discourse was not at all anti-religious. In order to understand his language of separation, it is necessary to look at the historical context in which al-Bustani was writing, and to which he was responding in *The Clarion of Syria*. The separation that he demanded is closely linked to the bloody and violent conflict that was taking place at the time, in the form of civil war and religious sectarian strife.<sup>21</sup> Al-Bustani was aware of the risks surrounding the process of separation, so showed flexibility by pointing out that it could take place gradually, and in stages. He believed that the historical context should be considered when implementing these procedures, that it “depends not only on place, time, existing mood, and circumstance, but also on the informed opinion and the judicious will of those entitled to rule” (al-Bustani 2019, p. 117).

The secularist discourse in *The Clarion of Syria* reaches its climax in the tenth pamphlet, where the strongest and clearest call for secularism is to be found. Here al-Bustani emphasizes the necessity of erecting “a barrier between leadership or spiritual authority, on the one hand, and politics or civil authority, on the other” (al-Bustani 2019, p. 117). He seeks to justify this necessity, not only pragmatically, but also with a theoretical justification based on the natures of (and essential differences between) the two fields of religion and politics. He emphasises their fundamental differences, claiming that

The [leadership or spiritual authority] is linked—by itself and by nature—to interior and fixed matters that do not change with time and circumstance, whereas [political authority] is related to external matters that are not fixed but can change and be reformed depending on place, time, and circumstance. The two are distinct and incompatible. It is well nigh impossible to reconcile both in one person.

(al-Bustani 2019, p. 117)

Al-Bustani expands on the damages and negatives that can result from mixing (or not separating) religious or spiritual authorities with civil or political ones and goes as far as claiming that: “without separating both types of authority, it is no exaggeration to say that no civilization can exist, live, or grow” (al-Bustani 2019, p. 117).

Civilization is a central concept in *The Clarion of Syria* and is attributed great significance in all of the pamphlets. Furthermore, al-Bustani dedicated the entire last pamphlet, *On Civilization*, to clarifying his vision of the concept. In *The Clarion of Syria*, al-Bustani justifies the necessity of a separation between religious and political authorities by appealing to its impact on, and relevance to, civilization (as he describes it). As we have seen, al-Bustani believed “the existence, life and growth of civilization” to be necessarily conditional on the occurrence of secularization in the political sphere. The close relationship between the concepts of “civilization” and “the civil” in al-Bustani’s secularist ideological vision, his stressing of the importance of being civilized, and the separation between the civil and the political, may give the impression that his secularism adopts an anti-religious and hostile discourse toward religion. Indeed, the belief that secularity is necessarily anti-religious is common in Arab–Islamic culture, with some Arab secularists providing a partial justification for such a belief.<sup>22</sup> The impression of al-Bustani’s secularism possibly adopting an anti-religious stance is reinforced by the close interrelationship, in traditional theories of secularization and modernization, between modernity, democracy, the decline in religious beliefs and practices, the privatization of religion, and the differentiation between the religious and the non-religious (secular).

However, al-Bustani’s belief in separating the religious and the civil was certainly not accompanied by a negative view of religion. On the contrary, al-Bustani adopted a positive, essentialist view of religion, seeing it as an indispensable condition and a necessary aspect of civilization. In the eleventh pamphlet, in his discussion on the most appropriate and important aspects of civilization, he emphasizes that “the first of those is religion. [ . . . ] True religion is the foundation of true civilization” (al-Bustani 2019, p. 128). A similar sentiment is to be found in the seventh pamphlet, where he states that the return, existence, and persistence of peace between people, and the overcoming of the factors that led to its loss during the civil war, depends on certain conditions, the most important of which are:

[ . . . ] living and attentive religions to teach their children to view those who hold different beliefs neither with contempt nor with scorn, as is now often the case, but with care and affection, as among members of one family whose father is the homeland, its mother the Earth, and God the single creator, with all members created out of the same substance, sharing the same destiny [ . . . ].

(al-Bustani 2019, p. 95)

In the ninth pamphlet, diagnosing the causes of the civil war and the many great crimes committed in it, al-Bustani states that “those despicable wars and terrible atrocities were the logical consequences of irreligious and uncivilized proclivities. Without reforming their ways, they will likely fall deeper into misery, and not recover from their downfall” (al-Bustani 2019, p. 107). He is careful not to criticize religion, not wishing to offend the sensibilities of religious people. Instead, he emphasizes that true religion is free from all negatives, “because a true religion is from God, who is the truth and its source [ . . . ]” (al-Bustani 2019, p. 100).

According to al-Bustani, secularity and secularism are not anti-religious at all. The secularism he theorized and practiced is in fact a “religious secularism” in more ways than one. Firstly, it considers religion and secularity to be inseparable and necessary conditions for civilization. Secondly, it sees secularism as itself being based on religion, not contradicting or fighting against religion. Thirdly, its explicit and primary goal is to improve the condition of religion, not to harm it; al-Bustani’s religious secularism seeks to act for the good of religious people, not their exclusion. It should be stressed once again that secularity and secularism are not necessarily antagonistic nor external to religion; they can overlap and intertwine with it, and even be based on it. Al-Bustani’s secularist position takes religion—though not any specific religious text—as its basic and fundamental foundation. There is rarely any explicit or even implicit reference to religious texts in *The Clarion of Syria*. When such reference is made, it is usually to Islamic texts or sayings, rather than to the Bible or other Christian texts (al-Bustani 2019, p. 68). One should, therefore, not rush to label al-Bustani’s view as a “Christian secularism” or a “secular(ist) Christianity”,

as many have. Abdulatif Tibawi linked al-Bustani's writing in *The Clarion of Syria* to his Christian religious lineage or affiliation, and his evangelical milieu (living among American missionaries), despite acknowledging that al-Bustani "had become somewhat estranged from the American mission by 1860" (Tibawi 1963, pp. 137–82; Hanssen 2019a, p. 37; Zeuge-Buberl 2017, p. 173).

By the time of the writing of *The Clarion of Syria*, Albert Hourani demonstrates, al-Bustani "had himself broken out of the closed community of the Maronites to become a Protestant, and self-exile may well have turned his mind to the thought of some wider community to which he could belong" (Hourani 1983, p. 101). Nevertheless, Hourani considers that "in a sense he is still writing as a Christian to Christians [ . . . ]" (Hourani 1983, p. 101). The most prominent claim about al-Bustani's Christianity (or Christian thought) and secularism can be found in Hisham Sharabi's book *Arab Intellectuals and the West*. Sharabi classifies all Arab intellectuals primarily on the basis of their religious lineage, in particular "Christian Westernizers" versus "Muslim Secularists" (Sharabi 1970, pp. 7–23). In this context, Sharabi adopts the hypothesis that the distinctive nature of the Christian approach to Arab heritage lies in its secular orientation (Sharabi 1970, p. 17).<sup>23</sup> What about secular(ist) Muslims, though? How can we talk about a secular(ist) orientation being unique to the Christian standpoint, whilst at the same time talking of secular Muslims? The answer, for Sharabi, is clear: "Obviously, the Muslim secularist could never be as truly secular as the Christian Westernizer" (Sharabi 1970, p. 21). According to this logic, a Christian can only be secular, and the secularism of a Muslim cannot live up to the secularism of a Christian.

Despite the rich and insightful knowledge provided by Sharabi's approach, it suffers from a three-dimensional unilateralism: religious, non-dialectical, and external. Its religious unilateralism can be seen in the way it takes religious lineage as the fundamental criterion for classifying thought and thinkers. It does not consider the possibility of thinkers transcending this involuntary affiliation, at least partly and relatively, through the voluntary adoption of ideas, values, and orientations that are different or even contrary to those prevalent in their religious milieu. Its non-dialectical unilateralism can be seen in its focus on involuntary religious lineage, without considering the effects of voluntary adoption of thought, resulting from voluntary affiliation. It also does not consider the possibility of other intellectual, moral, political, and economic influences that may outweigh the influence of religious lineage. Sharabi's approach is also characterized by an external unilateralism, interpreting texts by factors that are external to them, and claiming a necessarily causal link between religious lineage or affiliation and intellectual stance.

Sharabi therefore considers texts as mere reflections and expressions of an author's background, without addressing the logic or content of those texts independently. According to such an approach, *The Clarion of Syria* is thus an expression of Christianity, regardless of its content, and regardless of what views its author had actually adopted. Such a unilateralist approach, however, cannot explain the fact that, on the subject of secularism, for example, the "Christian" 'Azmi Bishara agrees more closely with the "Muslims" Muhammad Abid Al-Jabri and Burhan Ghalioun than he does with his fellow "Christian" George Tarabishi.

Al-Bustani's secularism is, in reality, much closer to that of the "Muslim" Fouad Zakaria, than to Tarabishi. However, Tarabishi's hard secularism is closer to that of Sadik Jalal al-ʿAzm and ʿAziz al-ʿAzmeh. Even in the so-called Arab Renaissance, there was an anti-secular trend in a group of Christian Arabs, whose voice became prominent in the Catholic weekly newspaper al-Bashir, published between 1870 and 1947. Mohammad Magout points out that, "Al-Bashir was for the most part concerned with European politics and the issues of Catholic denominations in the region. It defended the Catholic Church against any perceived attacks by other periodicals, asserting the rights of the Pope to temporal power and rejecting any claims that the authority of the Church is limited to spiritual matters only" (Magout 2019, p. 10).

Neither Al-Bustani's secularism, nor Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq's earlier proto-secularism, are directly related to the alleged Westernization of Arab Christians and their alienation

from their Islamic milieu, as Hisham Sharabi suggested. In the case of al-Shidyaq, it was directly, closely, and publicly linked to problems within Christianity, occurring between Catholic Maronites and Protestants. Al-Bustani's writing was rooted in the context of a religious or sectarian civil war that was, particularly at its outset, between Druze and Maronites. While al-Shidyaq focused his critical discourse on Maronite ecclesiastics in particular, al-Bustani viewed matters from a broader and more comprehensive perspective. His call for separation had a theoretical basis in his analysis of the essential natures of religion and politics, and a practical basis in the negative effects of non-separation, and the positive effects of separation.

In agreement with Butrus Abu-Manneh, and counter to the unilateralist view, we suggest that al-Bustani's thought "led the way to Arabism, politically to Ottomanism, and inevitably to Syrian nationalism" (Abu-Manneh 1980, p. 300). In addition to his call for the separation of religious or spiritual and civil or political authorities, al-Bustani's secularism in *The Clarion of Syria* is also embodied in his nationalism or patriotism, and his call for unity, harmony and solidarity among Syrians, regardless of their religious and sectarian affiliations. With this, al-Bustani was calling for a non-religious national association to be prioritized over religious associations. To use the terminology of distinction and differentiation, we can say that the patriotism that al-Bustani theorized and promoted in *The Clarion of Syria* is distinguished from allegiances or political units based on religion, sect, or denomination. He lays out, by way of contrast, the practical impossibility of, or lack of logic in, the idea of an "Islamic nation"<sup>24</sup> or a "Christian nation" (al-Bustani 2019, p. 108). It was these concepts that al-Bustani devoted most of his efforts to countering, in his eleven pamphlets highlighting the disadvantages of sectarianism, religious fanaticism, and intolerance among religious communities. From al-Bustani's point of view, patriotism does not contradict religion. In fact, he was keen on repeating the phrase "love of the homeland is an element of faith" (al-Bustani 2019, pp. 106–107, 59–61), using it as a slogan for the magazine *Al-Jinan*, which ran from 1870 to 1886.

## 5. Conclusions

Al-Bustani wrote *The Clarion of Syria* as a direct response to the events of the civil war and religious sectarian strife that took place in what is now Lebanon and Syria in 1860. In diagnosing the causes of these events, he focused almost entirely on internal religious factors, which he saw embodied in religious and sectarian fanaticism and intolerance. To address the effects of the war, and to avoid its recurrence, al-Bustani distinguished between the religious or the spiritual and the political or the civil, pushed for a separation between them, and called for political groupings not to be based on religious or sectarian ties and affiliations. He believed secular or non-religious patriotism to be the solution, or an essential part of the solution, without adopting a negative stance towards religion itself. In fact, he saw complementarity and positive interaction between religion, secularism and nationalism as a necessary condition for "the existence, life and growth of civilization". Although we find the seeds of secularity or secularism, as a distinction between the religious and the non-religious, in Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq's work, and even in Arab-Islamic culture since its inception, al-Bustani was the first in the Arab-Islamic world(s) to properly theorize secularism, and take a clear, positive stance towards secularity. Al-Bustani's theorization of secularism, and his secularist defence of it, include arguments and ideas that are still present in the Arab-Islamic world(s) today. His formulation of secularity and secularism represents their positive conception, while the negative conception of them as hostile and anti-religious crystallized and spread later. Jamal al-Din al-Afghani presented the first such negative formulation in the modern Arab-Islamic world(s), in his text *Refutation of the Materialism* (al-Afghani 1968). It is necessary to study the descriptive and normative implications of both the positive and negative formulations and consider the arguments of those who adopt them. Doing so furthers our understanding of the concepts of secularity and secularism in contemporary Arab-Islamic culture as thick normative concepts.



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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> For more details concerning the broader contemporary transnational discussion on the role of religion, and the “identity crisis of the academic study of Religion”, see (Kleine and Wohlrab-Sahr 2020a, 2021).
- <sup>2</sup> I will generally refer to the English translation of al-Bustani’s text (al-Bustani 2019), unless a reference to the Arabic text (al-Bustani 1990) is necessary.
- <sup>3</sup> Bernard Williams was the first to coin the term “thick ethical concept” in his book *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, in 1985. Here, he describes this concept as having only one normative dimension, either negative or positive. However, numerous scholars in (meta-)ethical philosophy have argued that thick ethical concepts can be characterized by an “evaluative flexibility,” which means that “a thick concept can be used to indicate some pro stance in one case, and a con stance in another, and yet we can still be talking of the very same concept” (Kirchin 2017, pp. 4, 49–53; Williams 2006).
- <sup>4</sup> Marshall Hodgson (1922–1968) distinguishes between two adjectives, “Islamic” and “Islamicate”, the former referring to Islam as a religion, while the latter refers more broadly to the culture historically associated with Islam and Muslims, even when it is present among non-Muslims (Hodgson 1974, pp. 56–59).
- <sup>5</sup> Gudrun Krämer stresses the existence of a strong (political) secularization in the Islamic context: “Since the modernizing reforms of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Arab governments have been secular in the sense of being non-clerical and making no claims to religious authority” (Krämer 2015, p. 126). The exception here is the Moroccan king, who combines political and religious authority. Based on his descent from the Prophet, and his ability to grant religious blessing (baraka), the Moroccan king possesses religious authority alongside his political authority. Kramer notes: “Significantly, then, the one contemporary Arab ruler credited with religious authority has used it not to implement Sharia but to adapt it to modern conditions, a policy widely acclaimed by secular human rights activists” (Krämer 2015, p. 126).
- <sup>6</sup> Concerning the idea of “multiple or variant secularities”, see (Kleine and Wohlrab-Sahr 2016; Zemmin 2021). Regarding the idea of “multiple secularisms”, see (Stepan 2010, pp. 114–144).
- <sup>7</sup> The distinction between these two concepts often occurs in the context of translated texts (specifically from English and French). See, for example, the translation from French (Arkun 1996). For texts translated from English, see (Mahmood 2018). One of the rare and important exceptions in this regard is (Barut 1994, pp. 229–245).
- <sup>8</sup> ‘Abd al-Jalil al-Kur, one of those who strongly objects to the use of the suffix wī/wīyya as the counterpart to the English and French suffix “ism/ist”, wrote in this regard: “Arabic has three suffixes of attribution, the first of which (ī/īyya) is used as a regular suffix at the end of every noun to derive an attributive adjective and noun (sha‘bī/sha‘bīyya, ‘ilmī/‘ilmīyya [scientific], ‘islāmī/‘islāmīyya [Islamic]), and the second (wī/wīyya) is used as a regular suffix for a noun where it is not possible to use the first suffix (yadawī/yadawīyya, shafawī/shafawīyya [oral], lughawī/lughawīyya [linguistic]); and the third (ānī/ānīyya) is an irregular/unusual suffix because it exceeds the other two by two letters (ānī) and is used to denote the meaning of exaggeration (sha‘bānī/sha‘bānīyya [popularist/popularism], ‘almānī/‘almānīyya [secularist/secularism], ‘islāmānī/‘islāmānīyya [Islamist/Islamism], similar to rūḥānī/rūḥānīyya [spiritual/spirituality or spiritualism] ... )” (al-Kur 2013).
- <sup>9</sup> Yasin Al-Hafiz uses the terms ‘iqtiṣādawīyya (economism) and tiqnawīyya (technicism). See (al-Hafiz 1975, p. 24). In many of Tayeb Tizini’s texts, the suffix wī/wīyya is used as counterpart to the English suffix “ism”, seen, for example, in his use of the terms al-salafawīyya (salafism) and al-‘asrawīyya (modernism) (Tizini 1994, pp. 17, 18, 29).
- <sup>10</sup> On this basis, the term “Islamicate” is used in this text to refer to the culture associated with Muslims and Islam, in order to distinguish it from Islam purely considered as a religion, as is referenced by the word “Islamic”, and from the ideological adoption of Islam, as is referenced by “Islamism”. The concept of “Islamicate” allows for consideration of the Christian Arab, Butrus al-Bustani, and the Iranian Muslim, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, under one umbrella, that of “Arab-Islamicate culture”.
- <sup>11</sup> In the second half of the twentieth century, an intense debate took place between Arab intellectuals over whether the word “secularity” (‘almānīyya) derives from “science” (‘ilm) or “world” (‘ālām). The eventual near-unanimous consensus was that the correct linguistic derivation is from ‘ālām, and not ‘ilm. ‘Aziz al-‘Azmeh is one of the many scholars who argues this. See, (al-‘Azmeh 1992, pp. 17–18). However, in the recently published English translation of this book, the two paragraphs in which al-‘Azmeh expressed this belief were not included. See, (al-‘Azmeh 2020, pp. 7–8). This debate was not limited to texts in Arabic. See, for example, (Ahrari 1996, p. 113, n.).
- <sup>12</sup> Fou’ad Zakariyya believes that “the uproar over the derivation of the term ‘Ilmānīyya’ from either ‘ālām or ‘ilm’ is highly ex-aggerated, since the meanings are intertwined” (Zakariyya 2005, pp. 14–15). Arguing for avoiding excessive focus on the

linguistic and historical analysis of the word when seeking to understand the concept it refers to does not mean underestimating the importance of understanding the meaning of the word and its derivation, especially when terminological change relates to a conceptual change in meaning. On this basis, I agree with Zakariyya that current Arab thought places an excessive focus on the linguistic, terminological and historical analysis of the term, but I wish to stress that one should not underestimate the importance of this debate. We should equally avoid becoming indifferent toward its content, stating that all terms and meanings are equal and acceptable.

- 13 This issue is not only related to the concepts of secularity or secularism, but extends to many others. I agree with Ussama Makdisi and Jens Hanssen that the idea or phenomenon of “(anti)sectarianism” is one of the main themes of *The Clarion of Syria*, even though the text does not contain any distinct, clear, or specific term referring to this phenomenon. Hanssen wrote in this regard, “If, as Kosellek has argued, history does not depend on language to happen, then sectarianism can exist avant le mot” (Hanssen 2019b, p. 60). See also, (Makdisi 2019).
- 14 Jurji Zaydan describes *The Clarion of Syria* as “the first Arab bulletin that appeared in Syria” and the first “unofficial Arab newspaper among Arabic language readers” (Zaydan 2011, p. 39). Ibrahim Abdo points out that it was “the first newspaper in the Levant” (Abdo 1948, p. 45).
- 15 Philippe de Tarazi and Ibrahim Abdo claim that the number of issues of *The Clarion of Syria* reached thirteen. However, there is no evidence to support this. See (de Tarazi 1913, p. 64; Abdo 1948, p. 46).
- 16 Jens Hanssen and Hicham Safieddine point out that al-Bustani coined the Arabic terms “civil war (al-ḥarb al-ahliyya)” and “homeland (al-waṭan)” (Hanssen and Safieddine 2019, pp. 6, 10).
- 17 It should be noted that Butrus al-Bustani later issued or contributed to three newspapers or journals bearing the following names: Al-Jinan 1870–1886 (a bi-monthly scientific, political, literary, and historical journal), al-Janna 1870–1886 (a political and literary newspaper, published once or twice a week), and al-Jinina, 1871–1875 (an almost daily political newspaper).
- 18 Al-gharaḍ, pl. al-aghrād, is a term used by al-Bustani to denote sectarian orientation, which was the target of fierce criticism in *The Clarion of Syria*.
- 19 There is an error in the English translation. The Arabic text concerns religious and civil interests, and not political and religious interests, as the English translation suggests. See, (al-Bustani 1990, p. 52; al-Bustani 2019, p. 111).
- 20 Hourani wrote, in this regard: “The idea of civilization is indeed one of the seminal ideas of nineteenth-century Europe, and it is through al-Afghani above all that it reaches the Islamic world. It was given its classical expression by Guizot, in his lectures on the history of civilization in Europe, and al-Afghani had read Guizot and been impressed by him. The work was translated into Arabic in 1877, and al-Afghani inspired ‘Abduh to write an article welcoming the translation and expounding the doctrine of the book.” (Hourani 1983, p. 114).
- 21 For more details on this issue, see (Makdisi 2000, pp. 118–165).
- 22 ‘Aziz al-‘Azmeḥ and Sadiq Jalal al-‘Azmi’s work represent expressive examples of the secularist vision that reacts to religion with contempt, and considers it practically and fundamentally incompatible with modernity, democracy, secularity, and human rights, or what al-‘Azmi later calls the “secular humanist paradigm”. According to al-‘Azmi, “As for religion; because of the nature of its firm, stable and circumscribed beliefs it still lives among eternal verities and looks backward to seek inspiration in its infancy. Thus, it has always provided the metaphysical and obscurantist justification for the social, economic and political status quo, and it has always formed and continues to form the best bulwark against those who expend great efforts to make a revolutionary change” (al-‘Azmi 2015, p. 23). This secularist negative view of religion is echoed in some of his other work published in the same period, including (al-‘Azmi 1968, 2007). Al-‘Azmeḥ expressed a similar secularist view of religion in his discussion with ‘Abd al-Wahab al-Missiri, establishing a dichotomy between what he called the “scientific secular view and the superstitious religious view”. See, (al-‘Azmeḥ 2000, p. 156).
- 23 In the same vein, he emphasized that “A distinctive characteristic of the Christian’s attitude, and another product of his existential situation, was a strong tendency toward rationalism” (Sharabi 1970, p. 16).
- 24 Many, such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, saw religion as offering a potential social and political bond, and advised Muslims to adhere to the religious association in which “the Turk meets the Arab, the Persian meets the Hindi, and the Egyptian meets the Moroccan” (Rida 2006, p. 324).

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