WHAT COMES AFTER
THE CRITIQUE OF SECULARISM?

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PANEL ONE

8:30-10:30: Islam and Emancipation after the Critique of Secularism

Moderator: Karen Barkey

Nadia Marzouki, "What is Critique if it's Not Secular?"

If critique is not or should not be secular, then what is it, or what should it be?
My presentation will address this question by first drawing on the political transformations that took place in North Africa after the 2010 uprisings. The capacity of Islamist parties to elaborate a robust alternative to secular authoritarianism of the pre-2010 regimes has proven very limited. Islamist parties have either paid the price of their own excessive hegemonic strategy (like in Egypt) or accepted to be coopted and neutralized by their former adversary (like in Tunisia). While the "Islamist" category does not seem to be a significant site from which to imagine a challenge to the perceived hegemony of secularism, the question remains whether the "Islamic" can be the site for such a critique? Granted that the Islamist project is oriented towards the State, is there something like an anti-Statist project inscribed within the Islamic tradition that is currently articulated by segments of North African political and civil society?

The second part of my presentation will focus on the conditions of enunciation of the anti-secularism critique in today's Euro-Mediterranean context that is defined by both an increasing interconnection of ideas, debates and languages, and by a persisting difference in terms of civil rights, gender equality, sexual and religious freedom. What are the conditions for the articulation of a critique that takes into account both the challenging condition of religious and sexual minorities while at the same time avoids the possible instrumentalization of such a critique by European Islamophobes?

Ussama Makdisi, "History and the Limits of Anti-Secularist Critique"

What comes after the critique of secularism is what should have come with it in the first instance: a serious attention to the history of the modern Middle East where the binary of secular vs. religious has rarely operated as cleanly or clearly as it has in the Western epistemology of secularism. It also demands of more careful attention of how and why the category of the sectarian has emerged in the region as a corollary to the category of the nation: that is, I am interested in not only the historicized and contextualized criticism of the pitfalls of allegedly emancipatory secular knowledge, but also the criticism of the illiberal and xenophobic knowledge production that has always accompanied, defied, and undermined secular criticism in the modern world.

I do not doubt for a minute that the criticism by Talal Asad and William Cavanagh, and by several other scholars including Saba Mahmood and Wendy Brown, of the universal and colonial pretentions of Western discourses about secularism, religious freedom and tolerance is important. Yet Asad's necessary criticism of Western secularity as a project that both invents the idea of religion and seeks to privatize it in a specific social space seamlessly becomes a criticism of secular Arab nationalism. Lost in this conflation between Western and Arab secularism is any discernable reflection about what it is like to live outside the security and stability of the ambit of a powerful liberal and secular state—and, more particularly, what a criticism of different forms of secularism might mean. Secular Arab nationalism did not simply mimic Western thought; it was one among reactions to the historical transition from Ottoman Islamic to Western colonial supremacy.

One of my claims is that just as one might use the experience of Arabs and Muslims to understand the limits and pretensions of the secular West and its universalist claims, likewise one might use the experience and history of Arab Christians, or at any rate, the non-Sunnis, as points of departure for understanding the modern history of the Middle East where individuals operate as more than representative communal/religious types. I suggest we understand how "secular" and "religious" (and everything in-between) men and women have struggled against great odds to cohere societies in the Middle East greater than the sum of their communal parts. And I suggest we do so without losing sight of how analogous struggles have occurred across the world.

Mohamed Amer-Meziane, "Marxian Specters After Secularism? Public Theologies and the Critique of the State"

One might distinguish between two ways of going beyond the critique of secularism: a radical secularist solution and a theological solution. Some secularists, such as Étienne Balibar, call for a secularization of secularism. They assume that the critique of secularism is the critique of exclusionary forms of state secularism. Criticizing secularism should not lead, they argue, to a dismissal of secularism *per se*. The question I want to raise is the following one: Is this solution sustainable without any kind of commitment to theology? A theological solution might want to restore theological orthodoxy. The step after the critique of secularism would then be an impossible move before secularism. One might instead, try to define new kinds of theological self-critique. What kind of public theology would be able to challenge both secularism and its critique but also theological orthodoxies themselves? These questions emerged from public discussions with Étienne Balibar that eventually lead to a discussion between Talal Asad and Balibar, organized with the ICLS at Columbia University. I will try to clarify the terms of this discussion by showing how these questions might bring us back to some of the seminal questions that gave birth to Marx's philosophy.

Mona Oraby, "Rethinking the Private Public Distinction in Secular Studies"

For more than a decade, much of the scholarship on secularism has drawn significantly on, or has been based in, the Egyptian case study. Although scholars have arrived at some agreement about what secularism is, significantly less is known about how it works or what it does. I will first explore the points of convergence and difference between and among the works of Talal Asad, Hussein Agrama, and Saba Mahmood, paying particular attention to how each thinker theorizes the public-private distinction as constitutive of secularism. Whereas Asad's original formulation of this distinction was generally tentative, family and religion have since come to be thought of as relegated to a private domain, on one hand, and politics as circumscribed within the realm of the state and public life, on the other. I argue for a critical reassessment of this schematization

based on my own research on judicial politics and the administration of religious difference in Egypt. By tracing the historical conditions under which religious conversion became subject to state regulation through the modern rule of law, I specifically explain why revisiting the concepts of the family, religion, the state, publicity, and privacy must precede a rethinking of what secularism does and, in effect, its critique.

FIRST PANEL BIOGRAPHIES

Nadia Marzouki is a tenured Research Fellow (*Chargée de Recherche*) at the CNRS (*Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique*) in Paris and a visiting fellow at the Belfer Center's Middle East Initiative at Harvard Kennedy School. Nadia received her PhD in political science from Sciences-Po, Paris in 2008. She has been a Postdoctoral fellow at the Council on Middle Eastern Studies, Yale University (2008-2010). Her work examines public controversies about Islam in Europe and the United States. She is also interested in religious conversions to Evangelical Christianity and debates about religious freedom in North Africa. She is the author of *Islam, an American religion* (Columbia University Press, 2017). She co-edited with Olivier Roy, *Religious conversions in the Mediterranean World*, (Palgrave/Macmillan, 2013).

Dr. Ussama Makdisi is Professor of History and the first holder of the Arab-American Educational Foundation Chair of Arab Studies at Rice University. In 2012-2013, Makdisi was an invited Resident Fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (Institute for Advanced Study, Berlin). In April 2009, the Carnegie Corporation named Makdisi a 2009 Carnegie Scholar as part of its effort to promote original scholarship regarding Muslim societies and communities, both in the United States and abroad.

Professor Makdisi is the author of *Faith Misplaced: The Broken Promise of U.S.-Arab Relations, 1820-2001* (Public Affairs, 2010). His previous books include *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East* (Cornell University Press, 2008), which was the winner of the 2008 Albert Hourani Book Award from the Middle East Studies Association, the 2009 John Hope Franklin Prize of the American Studies Association, and a co-winner of the 2009 British-Kuwait Friendship Society Book Prize given by the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies. Makdisi is also the author of *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (University of California Press, 2000) and co-editor of *Memory and Violence in the Middle East and North Africa* (Indiana University Press, 2006). He has published widely on Ottoman and Arab history as well as on U.S.-Arab relations and U.S. missionary work in the Middle East. Among his major articles are "Anti-Americanism in the Arab World: An Interpretation of Brief History" which appeared in the *Journal of American History* and "Ottoman Orientalism" and "Reclaiming the Land of the Bible: Missionaries, Secularism, and Evangelical Modernity" both of which appeared in the *American Historical Review*. Professor Makdisi has also published in the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, and in the *Middle East Report*.

Professor Makdisi is now working on a manuscript on the history of coexistence and sectarianism in the modern Middle East to be published by the University of California Press.

Mohamed Amer-Meziane is a Research Fellow in Political Philosophy at the Sorbonne University (Paris 1) and Invited Researcher at Brussels University (ULB). He is one of the French translator of Talal Asad and a member of the editorial board of the Journal *Multitudes.* He directed a dossier titled "Decolonizing Secularism?" in *Multitudes.* His Dissertation studies the interrelated formations of the concepts of secularization and Islam as Divine Law. He recently organized a discussion with Balibar and Asad at Columbia University and presented its stakes in a short article he wrote with Balibar for *The Immanent Frame:* http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2016/11/01/beyond-the-secular-state-secularism-empire-and-hegemony/

Mona Oraby specializes in the study of comparative law and religion with a regional focus on the Middle East. Her current book project is *Administering Religious Difference: Secularism, Minorities, and the Rule of Law*. Using modern Egypt as a case study and other comparative cases in the region and elsewhere, the book examines administrative conflicts that arise from dual constitutional commitments to religious establishment and legal equality. The study considers the implications of these conflicts for minority rights, the role of religion in public life, and the possibility of interreligious relations. Mona is currently the Jerome Hall Postdoctoral Fellow in the Center for Law, Society, and Culture at Indiana University Maurer School of Law. She earned her Ph.D. in Political Science in 2017 from Northwestern University.