

**IBN HALDUN UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPY**

MASTER THESIS

**ABDULWAHAB ALMASIRI'S VISION OF SECULARISM AS
AN ESSENTIAL ASPECT OF UNDERSTANDING
SECULARISM IN THE ARAB WORLD**

ENAS AHMAD YAHYA AL-AWAMI

THESIS SUPERVISOR: ASSOC. PROF. BURHAN KÖROĞLU

ISTANBUL, 2020

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by

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**A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
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THESIS SUPERVISOR: ASSOC. PROF. BURHAN KÖROĞLU

ISTANBUL, 2020

APPROVAL PAGE

This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Philosophy.

Thesis Jury Members

Title - Name Surname

Opinion

Signature

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_____	_____	_____
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This is to confirm that this thesis complies with all the standards set by the School of Graduate Studies of Ibn Haldun University.

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I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

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ÖZ

ABDULVAHAB AL MASRİ'NİN SEKÜLERİZM VİZYONU

Yazar: Enas Ahmad Yahya Al-awami

Felsefe Yüksek Lisans

Tez Danışmanı: Doç. Dr. Burhan Köroğlu

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Laiklik genellikle insanları dinin pençelerinden kurtaran bir ilke olarak algılanır ve tartışılır. Laikliğin savunucuları, genellikle dinsel kurumlar ile devletin ayrılmasını işlevsel ve adil bir toplumu sürdürmek için rasyonel bir yaklaşım olarak görürler. Abdulwahab Almasiri (1938–2008), sekülerizmin analizine yapısökümcü bir yaklaşım benimseyen bir edebiyat eleştirmeni, Müslüman bir bilim adamı, yazar ve filozoftu. Çalışmalarında, sekülerizmin modern yorumunun arkasındaki fikirleri ve etkileri, toplumun ona ilişkin anlayışını ve tezahürlerini sorgulamak için inceliyor. Bu tez, konuyu ele almaya yönelik kapsamlı yaklaşımı nedeniyle Almasiri'nin laiklik kavramına ve tanımına odaklanmaktadır. Almasiri'nin 'laiklik' terimini kısmi ve kapsamlı sekülerizm olarak iki kavrama yapısökümü, sadece sekülerizmi kendi başına ele almasına değil, aynı zamanda kavramsallaştırmasının tam ve kapsamlı bir anlayışını vermek için onu etkileyen tüm kavramları incelemesine izin verir. kökleri ve Arap dünyasına uygulanması. Bu tezin ilk bölümü, Almasiri'nin kendine özgü laiklik yorumuna götüren entelektüel yolculuğunu ele alıyor. Almasiri'nin laiklik anlayışını akademik söylem içinde bağlamsallaştırır ve tanımladığı şekliyle laikliği tartışır. Bu tezin ikinci yarısı, Almasiri'nin kapsamlı laiklik kavramını onun Arap dünyasındaki yorumu ve uygulamasıyla ilişkilendirecek ve Almasiri'nin "yeni İslami söylem" adını verdiği reform projesinin bir eleştirisini sunacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bireycilik, Emperyalizm, Feminizm, Laiklik, Materyalizm, Modernizm.

ABSTRACT

ABDULWAHAB ALMASIRI'S VISION OF SECULARISM AS AN ESSENTIAL ASPECT OF UNDERSTANDING SECULARISM IN THE ARAB WORLD

Student Name: Enas Ahmad Yahya Al-awami

Ma in Philosophy

Thesis Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Burhan Koroğlu

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Secularism is often conceived of and discussed as a principle that frees people from the clutches of religion. Advocates of secularism often view the separation of religious institutions and the state as the rational approach to maintaining a functional and fair society. Abdulwahab Almasiri (1938–2008) was a literary critic, a Muslim scholar, author, and philosopher who took a deconstructive approach to the analysis of secularism. In his works, he dissects the ideas and influences behind secularism's modern-day interpretation to question society's conception of it and its manifestations. This thesis focuses on Almasiri's notion and definition of secularism due to his comprehensive approach to addressing the subject. Almasiri's deconstruction of the term 'secularism' into two concepts, partial and comprehensive secularism, allows him not only to address secularism on its own, but to study all the notions that influence it in order to give a complete and comprehensive understanding of its conceptualization, roots, and application to the Arab world. The first part of this thesis deals with Almasiri's intellectual journey that led to his unique interpretation of secularism. It contextualizes Almasiri's understanding of secularism within the academic discourse and discusses secularism as he defined it. The latter half of this thesis will relate Almasiri's concept of comprehensive secularism to its interpretation and application in the Arab world and offer a critique of Almasiri's reform project, which he calls the 'new Islamic discourse'.

Keywords: Feminism, Globalization, Imperialism, Materialism, Modernism, Secularism.

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To my dearest partner, who supported me with everything he could, who has endured with me all the smooth times and the struggles. To my precious family and beloved daughter. To my invaluable father, who supplied me with academic advice all along. To me. Thank you.

Enas Alawami

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Global news outlets usually attribute conflicts in the Arab region to sectarian religious conflict. Take for example how conflicts in Arab countries like Yemen, Syria, Libya, and Iraq, are portrayed as sectarian.¹ When politicians, activists, or global institutions discuss remedies to this form of conflict, secularism is often instinctively touted as an appropriate prescription. The thinking behind this instinct usually revolves around the belief that religion in authority is the problem, so separating religion from authority must be the solution. For example, Sayed Alqimni is an academician and advocate for secularism and has published many articles claiming secularism as the only solution for the region to thrive.² However, while the world debates secularism's practical implications in the Arab world, academicians still debate its foundational definition. Without a definition that can reliably apply to the Arab world, any discourse on secularism in the region is sure to be fruitless.

Secularism is commonly discussed as an ideology or a doctrine that argues for the separation of the church and state. On a global scale, secularism is usually viewed as an ideology that can serve as salvation to humans from war and conflict. After around four centuries since the birth of the term, has it led to the utopic goals on which it was founded to achieve? What is secularism's relationship with religion and other doctrines? Many Western and Arab scholars have pursued these questions. However, as scholars continue to pursue academic discourse on the questions surrounding

¹ Robert, Fisk. "The Independent." The Independent. Accessed July 26, 2020.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/topic/middle-east-conflict>.

Salmoni, Barak. "Conflict in Yemen Fueled by Tribalism, Religious Conflicts." Accessed July 26, 2020. <https://www.rand.org/news/press/2010/05/03.html>.

² "Special Report ." Alhurra T.V, January 24, 2018.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_p5BjcQ7cE4.

Many contemporary Arab scholars and activists adopt similar dissertations where they claim secularism as a solution, such as the Nobel laureate Tawakol Karman, the Saudi activist Loay Alsharif, and academics like Dr.Hameed Tawfik and Burhan Gilyon.

secularism, questions surrounding the definition of the term 'secularism' have similarly multiplied.

Many scholars studying secularism question the view of secularism as an ideology and instead frame it as a mindset or a way of thinking. This way of thinking deals necessarily and exclusively with the human mind and interacts with its method on conceiving existential facts and comprehending basic behaviors through accumulated experience. However, with this shift, more definitions of secularism continue to be theorized and presented, showcasing the lack of a cohesive understanding of the term. For example, Charles Taylor (b. 1931) divides secularism into three stages throughout history, spanning from its original conception as an ideology to its modern manifestation as a condition of society.³

Secularism is commonly conceived of as a Western concept, so its application in and discussion by the Arab world is typically more hostile towards it. For instance, Mohammed Abed al-Jabri (1935 – 2010) was one of the most significant social theorists of the Arab world and did not believe that secularism, in its various definitions, is helpful or even useful to be applied to the Arab world.⁴ Mohamed Arkoun (1928–2010) tries to overcome the traditionally perceived conflict between the secular and the religious by redefining secularism and applying different names such as 'secular positivism,' 'secular struggle,' 'conflict secularism,' 'realist secularism,' 'open secularism,' 'actual secularism,' and the 'new secularism.'⁵ Abdulwahab Almasiri (1938–2008), who is the subject of this paper, divides secularism into two definitions based on how secularism affects and interacts with society.

This paper discusses the discourse on secularism in the West and Arab worlds, and how these various discourses interact with each other and with examples of secularism applied to the Arab world. Agreeing on a basic concept of secularism is essential to discuss its implications on society productively. Without deciding on a term, the

³ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (New York,: Harvard University Press, 2009) 10.

⁴ Sonja Hegesy, "Mohammed Abed Al-Jabri: Pioneering Figure in a New Arab Enlightenment - Qantara.De." *Qantara.de - Dialogue with the Islamic World*, 2010.
<https://en.qantara.de/content/mohammed-abed-al-jabri-pioneering-figure-in-a-new-arab-enlightenment>.

⁵ Montgomery, David W. "Reset DOC." *Reset DOC*, November 23, 2006.
<https://www.resetdoc.org/story/mohammed-arkoun-and-the-modernization-of-islam/>.

discourse will become more saturated with differing definitions and complicate secularism's necessary dialogue in the Arab world. Because Almasiri's proposed definition of secularism enables a productive discourse on secularism in the Arab world, this paper will focus on Almasiri's definition as a possible, reliable definition.

For this paper's purpose, we define 'transcendentalism' as the ideology that explains the sublime aspect of human beings beyond their material dimension, and that exceeds every earthly explanation. 'Humanism' is defined as the system of ethics that places a priority on human rationality rather than any other earthly creature or natural matters, and is the term I use to implicate humans feeling distant from general material interests and benefits, such as solidarity, scarification, nobility, generosity, chivalry and the desire of art, music, and beauty. According to the precise scholar that is defining it, we will define the term 'secularism' within the text. As for Almasiri's secularism, he separates secularism into two parts, 'partial secularism,' which as the simple procedure of separating the authority of the state from religious institutions and clergy, and 'comprehensive secularism', which is defined as separating values, constants, and absolutes from human action and earthly matters.

In the first chapter, I will briefly cover Almasiri's personal and academic pursuits to shed light on the influences that shaped his thoughts and his unique perspective on secularism. The chapter will touch on his experiences with Islam, the Muslim Brotherhood, Marxism, classism, studying in the United States, learning about Zionism and Judaism, and modernism, all of which he drew on in his studies of secularism.

The second chapter addresses the ongoing discourse on secularism in the Western and Arab deliberative fields. By dealing with the two groups separately, this paper gives the differences between the discourses more context. For example, the Arab deliberative field must continuously recognize and address the effects of colonialism on secularism in the Arab world.

The third chapter covers the core of this dissertation as it discusses the concepts and the meanings of secularism, as discussed by Almasiri. The structuralism method that Almasiri uses in his argument is essential to the development and understanding of his definitions of secularism. As he breaks down the meaning of secularism, he realizes

the importance of separating secularism into two forms, ‘partial secularism’ and ‘comprehensive secularism’, as defined above. The ways that these two forms of secularism interact with each other and why they are essential to understand as two separate but interrelated concepts are then explained and analyzed.

The fourth chapter of this paper traces the history of partial and comprehensive secularism in the Arab world and the impact of secularism in the region. It then explains the manifestations of comprehensive socialism that penetrates Islamic and Arab communities and governments. Finally, it criticizes Almasiri’s approach to studying secularism in the Arab world.

In the fifth chapter, I explain Almasiri’s reformation project, which he calls the new Islamic discourse.’ He develops and proposes the new Islamic discourse to address the problems he sees as posed by secularism to the Arab world. I provide an explanation of the different advocates of this discourse to analyze how different members of society viewed Almasiri’s new Islamic discourse. Lastly, I translate and elaborate on the features of the new Islamic discourse and critique it.

My conclusive chapter will argue the importance of Almasiri’s definition of the study of secularism in the Arab world and recommends that future discourse analyzes secularism in the Arab world using Almasiri’s definition. It will support this conclusion using examples in the Arab world that thus far, only Almasiri’s definition can compensate for and explain.

Overall, this dissertation aims to analyze the discourse on secularism to propose a definition that can be used as a foundation for further studies on the implication of secularism in the Arab world. I argue that Almasiri’s definition of secularism, which separates the term into partial and comprehensive secularism, is an essential aspect of understanding secularism in the Arab world and should be the conception of secularism applied to future discourse on the subject.

Abdulwahab Almasiri (1938–2008) was an Egyptian literary critic and philosopher who published many books on English literature and Western civilization.⁶ Almasiri started his intellectual pursuits studying romantic poetry, but by the end of his life, he was arguing for a radical reformation project addressing secularism in society. Between these two intellectual moments, Almasiri published books on Western and American civilization, post-modernism, Judaism, and Zionism. This chapter seeks to elucidate Almasiri’s intellectual journey by taking into account his academic works and the transformations in his personal life. His personal life and academic works are intrinsically and cyclically linked, with his academic works informing his perception of the world and his personal decisions, and his personal experiences informing his academic works. For this reason, this chapter will analyze both his personal life and academic works in parallel. This analysis will shed light on how Almasiri came to his unique perspective on secularity, which is the subject of this paper.

1.1. Early Years in Egypt, Globalization, and Introduction to Marxism

Almasiri was born in Damanhur, Egypt, a governorate capital outside of Alexandria. Then he studied his elementary and secondary education there. In his biography, *My Intellectual Journey in the Roots and the Fruits*, he credits the culture of his community and his hometown’s society as greatly influencing his perceptions.⁷ One aspect he emphasized was the distinct gap of understanding between his generation and that of his parents’. In elementary school, he noticed that this gap was much more significant than that between previous generations and that there was a noticeable acceleration in the widening of generational differences. While his generation had many things in common with his parents, the inference of new inventions like the cinema and the abundance of goods meant that Almasiri’s generation had a vastly different experience than prior generations.⁸

⁶ “About Almasiri,” Almasiri website, accessed July 13, 2020,

https://www.elmessiri.com/showpage.php?page_id=1?i=1&selected_item_id=2

⁷ Abdulwahab Almasiri, *My Intellectual Journey*, (Cairo: General Authority of Cultural Palaces, 2000), 563-18.

⁸ *Ibid*, 21

Despite this generational difference in experiences, the community's commonly accepted morals and norms were similar. Islam was an entrenched part of his upbringing and community, and he joined the Muslim Brotherhood in his early years while in Damanhur.⁹ There was no substantial intellectual space between generations, unlike today when we can see that this intellectual space between generations is widening as the pace of globalization continues. While recounting his memories, Almasiri documented the time before "globalization" crashed into the Arab world and changed its face. Details from Almasiri's childhood lifestyle give insight into how globalization has shaped his critique, specifically in the 1950s and 1960s. These decades were the last of the pre-cultural assimilation era, after which he witnessed his lifestyle change roughly and many social appearances change suddenly. These changes shocked him, and he was left to process them internally, which led to his constant nostalgia as an adult. Later on, he would insist on looking for the factors that caused this transformation and the reasons that his world developed a rigid secular character rather than with intimacy and compassion.

Another integral part of Almasiri's youth was his experience witnessing and questioning classism in Egypt. Almasiri was from a bourgeois caste but was always concerned about those who had less and questioned the reasons behind class discrimination¹⁰. These questions led him to discover and ascribe to Marxism as a teenager when he found his path to defend those of a lower socioeconomic class. We can see from this that Almasiri was concerned with defending humanity from his early years.

He later gained his bachelor's degree in English Literature from Alexandria University in 1955, where he found himself surrounded by like-minded Marxists who further inducted him into the ideology.¹¹ He became a member of the prohibited Marxist party at the University, for which the Egyptian government temporarily imprisoned him.¹² Marxism led Almasiri to recognize and criticize modernism's influence on economic disparity. Despite his critique of modernism based on what he considered to be its

⁹ Ibid, 23

¹⁰ Ibid, 66.

¹¹ Ibid, 100.

¹² Ibid, 101.

inhumane consequences, Almasiri did not suggest abandoning or rejecting modernism,¹³ although he might sound like an advocate for refusing it. Instead, he recommended that non-Western societies, especially the Arab world, need to filter modernism instead of absorbing it outright without thinking critically about its implications.¹⁴

Almasiri believed Marxist thought was the best solution to the dilemma of poverty and classification in the world, and his interest in it enabled him to absorb different global ideologies. This exposure gave him an open mind, a global mindset, and the ability to take into account and understand perspectives other than his own. This openness and flexibility was a unique intellectual privilege considering his roots in the village of an Arab city with an Islamic culture that considered discourse outside of traditional Islamic discourse completely wrong and unworthy to be studied. As the idea of Marxism gained traction in the Arab world, he insisted on travelling to the West to study Western philosophy and civilization through their literature.

1.2. Graduate Studies in the United States, Zionism, and Modernism Criticism

Almasiri travelled to the United States in 1936, where he obtained his master's degree in English literature from Columbia University in 1964 and then completed his doctorate at Rutgers University in 1969.¹⁵ Still heavily influenced by Marxism, he focused on studying romanticism and poetry that rejected social stratification and capitalism. It was an essential shift in Almasiri's interest and focus when he moved from studying romantic poetry and materialistic Marxism to studying Zionism, the history of its ideas, and humanistic faith.

Almasiri had been aware of the Arab-Israeli conflict throughout his earlier years in Egypt because the Palestinian cause had been common knowledge and discourse in the Arab and Islamic Nations for decades. Since the Ottoman empire's collapse, many arguments built on this issue, such as the right of resistance and refugees. Although

¹³ Abdulwahab Almasiri, "The new Islamic discourse", Contemporary Muslim Magazine, no. 86 (Nov 1997): 9

¹⁴ Ibid, 7.

¹⁵ Almasiri website, "About Almasiri."

Almasiri had been aware of the Arab-Israeli conflict, he admitted that he travelled to America without any interest in studying the Arab-Israeli conflict or Zionism.¹⁶ At this time, he believed that the conflict could be solved by focusing on Arab-Israeli co-existence and finding homes for the refugees.

Interestingly, while he was studying in the United States, he noticed a fault in the discourse surrounding Zionism. In an interview with Dr. Jasem Almetawie, Almasiri spoke of his beliefs before this realization, “I had believed that Zionism was a media creation because Arab Media always said that Israel is a false claim and does not exist, but then if it is a false claim, why is there all this furious propaganda against that false claim?”¹⁷ He then said that while he was studying in the United States, he recognized that the Western media was not debating Israel’s existence, but had instead accepted and justified Israel’s existence. This realization led him to consider the problem of the Palestinian refugees not just as a humanitarian crisis but instead as a strategic political problem that the West was addressing with a colonialist mentality. Due to this discovery, he felt that the Arab-Israeli conflict needed to be studied differently, not just as a clash between two nations, but as the fruit of utilitarianism and materialistic philosophy.

On behalf of the apparent bias towards Israel from the Western perspective, Almasiri’s insisted on breaking into the field of studying Jews and Zionism. This effort eventually led to him developing one of his most famous works, eight volumes of the *Encyclopedia of Jews, Judaism, and Zionism: A New Interpretive Model*, which took him fifteen years to accomplish and was controversial at the time it was published in 1999. It became well known in the Arab world, and his name became known publicly in the region, resulting in incidents of political danger due to the sensitivity of the topic.¹⁸

On his journey of studying and writing on Zionism, Almasiri became aware of Zygmunt Bauman (1932–2017), one of the most prominent Jewish anti-Zionists

¹⁶Almasiri, *My Intellectual Journey*, 44.

¹⁷ Brilliant scholars, “Memories with Almasiri”, drjasemtv, 2011, youtube\
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=57z8Gn1et64&feature=youtu.be>

¹⁸ TV, Aljazeera. “Out of the Text.” Edited by Aljazeera TV. YouTube, October 27, 2019.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qtlmkgz_6E4.

criticizing Zionism and Israel. Bauman was a philosopher and a sociologist who will be discussed further in later chapters as a furious critic of postmodernism. Bauman related all ecological problems and psychological problems to the nihilism of postmodernism, which he called the 'liquid era' due to its features of constant change and instability.¹⁹ Bauman's books discussed many concepts and contemporary facts and events within the frame of criticizing consumerism. He referred to consumerism as the main feature of the postmodernity era. Bauman's books and views on modernism heavily influenced Almasiri. Later in life, Almasiri lectured and discussed many different facts and concepts within the critique of modernity, including within his critique of comprehensive secularism,²⁰ which we will discuss in later chapters.

Another scholar who influenced Almasiri was Roger Garaudy (1913–2012), a French scholar who converted to Islam in 1982 and has since gained enormous fame among Islamic scholars and thinkers.²¹ Garaudy was a prisoner of war of Vichy France, a brutal experience that confirmed to him that the Western philosophical paradigm is riddled with hypocrisy. After that, he married a Palestinian woman and converted to Islam. What earned Garaudy fame in the Arab and Islamic world was his controversial book, *The Founding Myths of Modern Israel*. In that book, he wrote about what he calls the myth of the death of Jewish victims of the Holocaust. Because of this breach of French law concerning Holocaust denial, the court banned further publication of any future works, and on February 27, 1998, the government fined Garaudy FRF 240,000, (equivalent USD 41,812 at July 2020 exchange rate). The French government also sentenced him to a suspended jail sentence of several years. Garaudy appealed this decision to the European Court of Human Rights, but his appeal was not accepted.²²

While he was doing his research for his encyclopedia on Zionism, he studied and read many of Garaudy's works, which later influenced Almasiri's study of modernism.

¹⁹ Little, Dan. "Liquid Modernity?" Edited by Dan Little. Understanding Society (blog), May 3, 2014. <https://understandingsociety.blogspot.com/2014/05/liquid-modernity.html>.

²⁰ In later chapters, the concept of comprehensive secularism is detailed analytically. Refer to Chapter IV.

²¹ Tony Cross, "From French Resistance to Holocaust Denial", RFI, June 15, 2012.

<http://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20120615-french-resistance-holocaust-denial-roger-garaudy-dies-98>.

²² Inadmissibility Decision in the Case of Garaudy v. France, European Court of Human Rights, July 7, 2003.

Almasiri even quoted Garaudy in his article “Modernism and Scent of Powder” saying, “Regarding his criticism of Darwinian modernity, Roger Garaudy said (before his conversion to Islam): ‘The battle of our time is against the myth of progress, and growth along the Western lines, it is a suicidal myth, and it is also a battle against the ideology characterized by the separation of science (knowledge) and technology (the application of that knowledge) from practical wisdom (the meaning and goals of our life)’”²³ As this quote shows, Garaudy carried a severe critique towards modernism, Darwinism, and therefore the Western thoughts and ideology. Additionally, Almasiri quoted Garaudy in many more of his articles, elucidating the similarities of their critiques, and the influence of Garaudy’s works and thoughts on Almasiri.

Although Almasiri quoted many scholars, he was likely more greatly influenced by Garaudy while forming his ideas and thoughts as there are many unique Islamic parallels between their visions. Almasiri ended up constructing his vision of secularism with an Islamic reference, directly mirroring Garaudy’s approach to forming an Islamic theory to present as a replacement for the Western paradigm in his critique. Likely, if Almasiri had not pursued the study of Zionism, he would not have been exposed to Bauman and Garaudy, and he would not have pursued a critique of modernism as fiercely as he did.

1.3. Later Years, Ali Izetbegovic, and Return to Islam

Almasiri returned to Egypt in 1969, and in the following years, worked as a professor in the English department of Ein Shams University in Cairo, a visiting professor at Nasser Military Academy and Islamic University of Malaysia, and was a member of the Assembly of Experts at Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies (1970–1975).²⁴ He spent the following decade between Egypt, where he continued to work as a professor at Ein Shams University; Saudi Arabia, where he taught at King Abdulaziz University; and the United States. During these years, he continued his study of Zionist intellectual structures and published his first book on the subject in 1972.²⁵ In the

²³ Abdulwahab Almasiri “Modernism and the Scent of Powder.” *Alahram*, February 1, 2003. https://www.elmessiri.com/articles_view.php?id=49.

²⁴ Almasiri, *My Intellectual Journey*, 9.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 10.

1990s, he continued to publish books in Arabic on other topics, such as *Problems of Bias* in 1992 and *Encyclopedia of Jews, Judaism, and Zionism* in 1999. In conjunction with this work during the 1990s, Almasiri began to read more about Islam, which led him to the Bosnian scholar Ali Izetbegovic (1925–2003), one of the most prominent personalities who shaped Almasiri's life and work.

Almasiri once said of Izetbegovic's book *Islam between East and West*, that "if I read Izetbegovic's book earlier, he would have saved me 18 years of converting from Marxism to Islam."²⁶ *Islam between East and West* argues that human beings have a transcendental divine element for which Darwinism does not account. He makes this argument by comparing the unique qualities of humanity to the nature of other animals. He concludes that humanity has a dual nature composed of material nature (the biological explanation of the body) and a divine element (the unexplainable feelings and features of humans such as passion or reactions to art). In Izetbegovic's analysis of Western civilization, he argued that the West has a nihilist paradigm that underlays its sciences and is its dominant paradigm. Then Izetbegovic used this paradigm as a framework to explain what he refers to as the West's extermination attempt in Bosnia. However, as Almasiri pointed out, while Begovic criticized the West in his argument, he simultaneously benefited from the jurisprudence of Western intellectuals who defended human beings. Most likely, the fact that he believed human beings have a divine element was one of the main reasons that made him and his people stand and fight against the unfairness they saw until they earned their victory. That belief of humanity (which came from his belief of Allah and the nature of duality in humanity) enabled him to play this double role of being the Mujahid and Mujtahid (the knight and the priest).²⁷ Almasiri wrote the introduction for a translated edition of Izetbegovic's book. In this introduction, Almasiri summarized the main points of Begovic's book. He explained to the reader the importance of believing in the transcendental aspect of humankind and applying justice on Earth relative to that transcendental aspect. Moreover, he highlighted the remarkable life-changing ideas of Izetbegovic, such as Izetbegovic's argument that humans do not belong to this earthly

²⁶ Abu Alola Madi, "People That I Knew Part 2: Abdulwahab Almasiri the human", Alwasat party, Dec 4, 2017

²⁷ Ali Ezzet Begovic, *Islam between East and West*, TR: Muhmed Ads, (Cairo, Dar Alshrooq, 2002), 9.

world and that we cannot apply this ethic to the community without religion.²⁸ This analysis shows the extent of Almasiri's understanding of Izetbegovic's work, how Izetbegovic's argument for the duality of humanity influenced Almasiri, and the consequences he extracted from this definition—a defence for humanity that defies imperialism, colonialism, and materialism.

Izetbegovic was one of the first thinkers who conceptualized humans as having the same essential base without reference to race, origin, religion, or otherwise, but instead focused on the common humanity we all share.²⁹ To argue in this way, he used mental proofs as compelling evidence, instead of referencing religious or otherwise biased arguments. Izetbegovic based these mental proofs on the idea that there is no sense in providing Islamic evidence to prove the authenticity of Islamic theory for those who do not believe in Islam. To present Islamic theories to the world, one needs to address the reader within their comfort zone and argue using commonly held beliefs. Otherwise, it will appear like presenting different points of view and will not achieve the goal of reaching a universal understanding of humanity's base nature. Almasiri embraced this approach as he similarly thought in a rational philosophical way based on mental demonstration due to his Marxist background. Begovic's writing convinced Almasiri that Islam was a solution to combat philosophical materialistic theories, and that a deconstructive approach to philosophical discourse was the best presentation.

Another aspect of Izetbegovic's work that affected Almasiri's was Begovic's approach to studying Western society. It is clear from what Almasiri wrote in the previously mentioned introduction of the translated edition of Izetbegovic's book that he admires Begovic's awareness of the contradictions in Western civilization's morals and norms and his determination that the root of these contradictions lay in its nihilistic materialistic paradigm. Also, Izetbegovic understood the accumulative importance of the knowledge of Western civilization and the importance of studying it, engaging in it, and transcending it academically. The idea that one can intellectually benefit from Western civilization by developing a profound understanding of it to deconstruct and criticize it thoughtfully is central to Almasiri's reform project.

²⁸ Ibid, 20.

²⁹ Ibid, 10.

The similarities between Almasiri's and Izetbegovic's criticism of modernity and the pursuit to strengthen the Islamic authority are evident. In his critique of materialism and his writings on secularism, Almasiri did not deny that Izetbegovic's ideas and methods influenced his critical writings. However, Almasiri worked on developing these critical theories, adopting the project, and adding to it, and Izetbegovic became an intellectual axis in all of Almasiri's later work on secularism.

1.4. Characteristics of Almasiri's Writing

When Almasiri discussed his intellectual journey in his works, it is noticeable that Almasiri himself was aware of the importance of documenting his journey and how the principal and simple events of his life helped to shape his vision and path. Almasiri was a philosopher who studied himself before any academics studied his intellectual and academic life. In his book, *My Intellectual Journey: The roots and the fruits*, Almasiri mentioned in the introduction that it is both a non-objective biography and not a biography at the same time. He explained that while it is true that the book's subject is a discussion of the events that happened in his life that influenced the shape of his thoughts, he was writing the book as an Egyptian thinker and academic. In this analysis, Almasiri's belief that every human being is a transcendent entity that can affect and is affected differently from one human to another is evident. This belief made him tell his own experience and journey to demonstrate that humanity cannot be a subject to study in the same way as any other earthly subject or phenomena because the human experience varies considerably based on an individual's transcendental nature.³⁰

While presenting his theories, Almasiri used the methodology of structuralism. Structuralism is a methodology that reviews the historical situation in which theories and intellectual terms originate. It also enables the reader to absorb the most substantial amount of historical information, learn the most terms and their meanings, and project those terms onto events at the international intellectual level and personal level. The focus of Almasiri's studies was to study humans while taking into account the unique

³⁰ Almasiri, *My Intellectual Journey*, 7.

qualities that differentiate them from other living things. This focus makes his readings interesting for any reader, regardless of his or her field or specialty.

Finally, at the intellectual and philosophical level, Almasiri's writings and intellectual contributions are often considered essential teachings in the Arab world due to their comprehensiveness and intellectual accessibility. Although Almasiri did not obtain his academic degrees in philosophy, he managed to communicate a significant amount of intellectual and philosophical ideas and theories to the Arab world in an uncomplicated way and projected it on the everyday problems faced by average citizens. In summary, Almasiri was not an academic who studied ideas purely academically. Instead, he saw academic thought and philosophy as tools to search for the truth and salvation for a human being. Throughout his life, his main goal always remained to change the reality that he saw as unfair to humans.

CHAPTER II

THE ONGOING DEBATE SURROUNDING SECULARISM

Secularism has been a controversial topic since the term ‘secular’ was first introduced to the English language in the 17th century. For a long time, both theologians and secularists debated secularism within their groups, making amendments and adjustments to the meaning of the term and their philosophy. As the internal discussions developed on each side and how each perceived secularism to function and interact with their other beliefs, the gap widened between the religious defenders and the secular advocates, both sides assumed fiercely that one term opponent the other.

2.1. Secularism in the West

The meaning and philosophy behind the term secularism is still a contested subject with no agreed-upon definition by scholars and philosophers. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, the current debate on secularism is ongoing not only in the East but also widely in the West, the originator of secularism. Originally, secularism was presented merely as the separation between the Church and the state. This conception emerged in response to the Church’s domination over the state in the middle ages before the 15th century. At this time, the pope was the chief authority ruling in the name of God over the state. The priests and the Church’s hegemony created the need for an alternative way of life that granted individual liberties while protecting the rights of the religious minority. A movement of religious reformation led by Martin Luther introduced the idea of secularism to fill this need.”³¹

³¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, (Cam-bridge: polity, 2000), 25.

2.2. Secularism as Defined by Western Philosophers: Bauman and Taylor

Zygmunt Bauman (1932–2017) was a Polish sociologist and philosopher known for his critique of modernity and was an anti-globalization theorist. He was driven out of Poland by a political purge in 1968 engineered by the Communist government. He moved to Israel where he was forced to give up his Polish citizenship. In 1971, he moved to the United Kingdom and became a Professor of Sociology (and later emeritus) at the University of Leeds. Bauman was one of the world's most prominent social theorists, writing on diverse issues such as modernity, the Holocaust, postmodern consumerism, and liquid modernity.³²

Bauman believed that by the late end of the 20th century, there was a shift in modern society from functioning as a society that revolved around producing and creating to functioning as a consumer society. According to Bauman, this shift occurred at the time when modernity changed into postmodernity. As discussed in the previous chapter, this postmodern consumer society is what Bauman called 'liquid modernity.'³³ In his classic work, *Liquid Modernity* (2000), Bauman realized and illustrated the dark side of modernity in his chapter on emancipation: "We move and are bound to keep moving not so much because of the 'delay of gratification', as Max Weber suggested, but because of the impossibility of ever being gratified."³⁴ Bauman suggested that being fulfilled is unattainable, therefore, no matter how much we try to change and run away from our past by doing things such as criticizing our grandfathers or building new identities, we always end up in the same place: chasing fulfilment through consumption. Through this analysis, Bauman explained the tangible but previously unrealized side-effects of consumption and postmodernity.

In his book, *The Holocaust and Modernity* (1989), Bauman linked the Nazis' genocidal politics to the radicalization of demands for uniformity and utility made by

³² Dariusz Brzeziński. Turning points of 1956 of 1956, 1968, 1980, 1989 in the works of Zygmunt Bauman. (UK: POMP, 2015).

³³ Bauman, liquid modernity, 25.

³⁴ Ibid, 40.

the secular nation-state.³⁵ The aims of modernism and Darwinism rely on the ‘survival of the fittest’ model and natural selection. This mentality separates religion from humanity by insisting that whatever needs to be done for ‘progress’, should be done, a belief that is incompatible with religious morals. Bauman went on to say that the holocaust was a “hidden face” of modernity and that "each of the two faces can no more exist without the other than can the two sides of a coin."³⁶

Charles Taylor (b. 1931) is a Canadian philosopher from Montreal and professor emeritus at McGill University known for his contributions and writings on political philosophy.³⁷ He concentrates his interests on secularism, a topic that he views as having three distinct stages of understanding and discourse throughout history.

In defining secularism, Taylor divides secularism into three phases of how secularism was defined over time. The first phase was the classical understanding that distinguished ‘the secular’ from ‘the sacred’ in terms of the communal meaning of believing or worship. According to Taylor, this first usage started as a way to categorize work (i.e., the clergy work in the Church to attend to the sacred, while non-clergy attend to the secular, work related to the current earthly realm). This first definition was the understanding of secularism when it transferred to the Arab world in the 19th century. The Arab world did not implement secularism at this time, so the Arab world considered secularism only theoretically. Without witnessing any actual implications of secularism, the Arab world could make no critique of it; therefore, the definition did not evolve in the region. Currently, this understanding remains dominant in the perception of secularism among Arab secular advocates. However, the Western world attempted to apply secularism and became aware of its many faults, impracticalities, and obstacles, therefore the meaning and the practice of secularism changed over time in the West. In this first definition, fulfilling ‘secular’ work said nothing of your belief or disbelief in God. Most people were religious, even though their daily roles and responsibilities were separate from religious leaders’ ‘sacred’

³⁵ Bauman’s influence on Almasiri can be seen to manifest here as he links secularism to the Holocaust and the radical politics of the Nazis on the grounds that secularism’s principle is to separate humanity from any useless morals or virtue and to thrive only through utility.

³⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity, and the Holocaust*, (Cornell University Press, February 23, 2001), 15.

³⁷ Wikipedia. “Charles Taylor (Philosopher),” August 12, 2003. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Taylor_\(philosopher\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Taylor_(philosopher)).

activities. According to this definition, most religious people were busy with secular tasks.³⁸

In Taylor's second definition, he believes that during the enlightenment era of the 18th century, in the West, the word 'secular' shifted from being an adjective that differed itself from the sacred to being a stand-alone philosophy within which individuals could refer to themselves as secular when they lacked belief and religion. According to Taylor, this lowered the perceived importance of religion by putting 'being religious' as an equal alternative to 'not being religious'. Essentially, the philosophy put 'being religious' and 'not being religious' on the same level by implying that whether you believe or do not believe, it does not matter, as both are equally valid options. As a result, the philosophy demoted the previous deference that religion received from society and led to fewer believers in God.³⁹

Taylor believes that society's transition from viewing transcendentalism as an unquestioned position to merely one option among many worldviews as responsible for the transition from the second phase to the third phase of secularism's understanding.⁴⁰ He considers this third stage as society's current stage of secularism. Now, belief is one of many options that one can adopt or embrace, but it is not the easiest. Therefore, Taylor concluded that his new vision of secularization required a new conception about the self. In the current secular age that Taylor describes, all beliefs are discussable. According to this third definition, religious and non-religious people are both secular because they dwell in an era in which faith is one of many options.⁴¹ For Taylor, opposing secularity in the current era is akin to opposing the medieval era while in the medieval era. In that sense, Taylor believes that society needs to stop debating which positions are correct, and instead unpack, explain, and diagnose the current situation to understand how secularism is applied to society fully. In explaining current society, people exposed to a wide variety of belief systems in the

³⁸ Trevin Wax, "3 Definitions of "Secular" and Why They Matter for Our Mission," the gospel coalition, October 21, 2014, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/3-definitions-of-secular-and-why-they-matter-for-our-mission/>.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ethan B. Katz, *Secularism in Question: Jews and Judaism in Modern Times*, (University of Pennsylvania Press, July 17, 2017), 7.

⁴¹ Trevin Wax, definitions of secular.

Western world can be defined neither with religion nor with atheism, leading to uncertainty and a need for fulfilment, which is reminiscent of Bauman's explanation of this postmodern age (liquid modernity). For Taylor, this uncertainty makes everyone secular, regardless of religious affiliation or creed, which leads everyone to a feeling of emptiness, seeking fulfilment obsessively.⁴²

Taylor's conception of current secularism did not only prevent the Church from intervening in political affairs (which is not anti-religion or anti-human), but it also restrained people from choosing to pursue their sacred duties and traditions, as society began to consider religion akin to myths and against science and rationalization. As people became distanced from Christianity, other doctrines and religions were permitted to ascend, such as Buddhism, yoga rituals, the worship of nature, and Islam. With the noticeable incline in the adoption of other doctrines, the West is reopening the debate on secularism and modernism in general. As the West reconsiders its perspective on secularism and modernism, society may witness a rise in discussions defending certain aspects of the medieval age. The typical current view of the medieval age is that of a cruel and backward time. However, as the West begins to discuss the faults of mass consumption and the rise in existential disillusionment, the benefits that the era offered, such as a community-centered mentality, religious affirmation, and moderated consumption, may be seen as advantages worth revisiting to curb the impact of the postmodern era.

2.3. Secularism in the Arab World

The movement of secularism outside of Europe was synchronized with the ascension of modernism, in the Arab world specifically. As Saba Mahmood (1962–2018) says in her book *Religious Difference in a Secular Age*, people and organizations which advocated for adopting modernity and secularism arrived in the Arab world in the 19th century, mainly Egypt, stimulating the interwar era and attempting to create sectarian strife between the different sects in the area.⁴³ Subsequently, these colonists presented

⁴² Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 40.

⁴³ Saba Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age* (United States: Princeton University Press, 2016), 17.

secularism to the Arab world as a solution to the problem that was initiated by colonists.

The previous section outlined how the term secularism was and still is contentious within Western thought. The debate surrounding secularism rose sharply due to the consequences and crises of the 20th century, but how was it that an issue as contentious as secularism leaked into the Arab thought? The word ‘secularism’ in English was used for the first time in 1648 CE during the Peace of Westphalia.⁴⁴ The term was initially meaningless, for instance, Church property was referred to as ‘secular’ in the sense that it was transferred to the authority of the state and was no longer under the authority of the Church. The pope refused to sign the peace treaty, but others ignored his protest and succeeded in limiting the Vatican’s authority for the first time.⁴⁵ To understand the historical roots behind the idea of rebelling against the Church and calling for the separation of the Church (sacred) from life affairs (secular), we must go back to when the Islamic sciences travelled to the West during and after the Crusades. The Crusades brought Islamic texts to Europe, and Western scholars were influenced by Islamic philosophy, especially that of Ibn Rushd, often Latinized as ‘Averroes’ (1126 – 1198).⁴⁶ This critical historical fact is not often mentioned in the literature on secularism but should be taken into consideration when studying secularism and the rebellion against the Church.

Some researchers link the crystallization of secularism to the intellectuals of the Renaissance, which goes back to Constantinople’s fall under the reign of Sultan Muhammad al-Fatih in 1453. Researchers have also said that the disadvantages of the Church, such as using “instruments of forgiveness,” confiscating people’s money, and practising injustices in God’s name, produced secularism.⁴⁷ However, the beginnings of the conflict between the masses and the Church can be attributed to the translation

⁴⁴ The Peace of Westphalia refers to the pair of treaties (the Treaty of Münster and the Treaty of Osnabrück) signed in October and May 1648 which ended both the Thirty Years' War and the Eighty Years' War. (Osiander 2001)

⁴⁵ Ahmed Altaan and Ahmed Dadosh, “secularism,” *Alsabeel*, 23\8\2017, <https://al-sabeel.net/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9/>

⁴⁶ Mohammed Abed al-Jabri, *Criticizing the Need of Reform* (Beirut: Arab Unity Studies Center, 2005) 66.

⁴⁷ Joshua J. Mark, “The Medieval Church.” *Ancient History Encyclopedia*, June 17, 2019. https://www.ancient.eu/Medieval_Church/.

of Ibn Rushd's philosophy into Latin at the beginning of European-Muslim friction following the Crusades. The Jews who penetrated the clandestine movements played a significant role in the consolidation of secularism as well.⁴⁸

Michael Scot (1175– c. 1232), a European author and translator, was the first to translate and introduce Averroes' thoughts to Europe in the 13th century.⁴⁹ The transmission of rational (Rushdi) thought to the West coincided with two factors: the first was the Islamic and Arab cultural conquest of the European countries, and it should be noted that it was not Ibn Rushd alone that occupied the European cultural scene, but many scholars. The second factor was the state of intense hostility that the Church had for everything Arab and Islamic during the Crusades. Although Ibn Rushd followed Aristotle and the Church, the Church banned him because he was originally Muslim.⁵⁰

As a result of Ibn Rushd's influential knowledge and the nature of the Islamic civilization, which was not only accepting of the sciences but an environment for the birth of new sciences and inventors, many of those who followed Islamic Scholars started to view the Church as a false and unfair religion that was applied by force. These Islamists believed they could rationally see all the fallacies presumed by the Church and Clergy. Therefore, the beginning of the rebellion was directed at the Church alone; only later was it applied to all religions, the idea of the sacred, and metaphysics.⁵¹

In this sense, we can say that the modern idea of secularism, which Taylor would define as the third phase (separating religion from the state), was the original Islamic doctrine; only when it reached Europe was secularism understood as opposing religion, due to the hegemonic nature of the Church. Islam views the relationship between the sacred and the secular as compatible, not conflicting. This idea of sacred and secular compatibility is what the European culture could not digest from the Islamic

⁴⁸ Al-Jabri, *Criticizing the Need of Reform*, 66.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 67.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 67.

⁵¹ Josep Palau Orta, "The Protestant Reformation." *National Geographic*, October 12, 2017. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/magazine/2017/09-10/history-martin-luther-religious-revolution/>.

civilization's translated books. As Taylor explained in the previous section, secularism as a term evolved dialectically throughout European history until it arrived at the modern understanding of secularism.

In the Arab world, when discussing the idea of secularism as ensuring religious freedom and ensuring the right of people to choose what they believe, even people who are against secularism will agree that secularist ideals such as power-sharing and the freedom of belief and speech are positive ideals compatible with how the second and third caliphate operated after the prophet's time. Moreover, they cite Omar Ibn Alkhattab's positions and actions as compatible because he acted upon earthly demands taking into account contextual considerations. In summary, many secular advocates and scholars in the Arab world consider secularism to mean the separation of Church and state, an identification that Almasiri referred to as 'partial secularism', which this paper will discuss in further chapters.

2.4. Secularism as Defined by Arab Philosophers: Al-Jabri and Arkoun

Mohammed Abed al-Jabri (1935–2010) was one of the most significant social theorists of the Arab world, especially in the western part of North Africa. His 1970 dissertation on Ibn Khaldun, a pioneer of modern sociology, brought him the first doctorate awarded by the University of Mohammed V in Rabat following Moroccan independence. Al-Jabri was both a critical philosopher and a proponent of a left-wing program of social policy.⁵² The project for which al-Jabri is known is "The Critique of the Arab Mind." He was unconvinced by the answers that the Arab world had provided to the question of how to repair and revive the Islamic nation. He views the 'past-ism' (a term created by al-Jabri that defines the mentality of people who 'live in the past,' so to speak) or Salafism's point of view as irrational because it does not consider how time and history factor into the discussion. This point of view also assumes that if the Arab world brought back the experiences of the past from when the Islamic and Arab

⁵² Sonja Hegasy, "Mohammed Abed al-Jabri: Pioneering Figure in a New Arab Enlightenment," *Qantara.de*, 06.05.2010, <https://en.qantara.de/content/mohammed-abed-al-jabri-pioneering-figure-in-a-new-arab-enlightenment>

nation was a dominant civilization, it would ascend and thrive again. This point of view, which was started by Jamal Aldin Alafgani, did not achieve its goals.⁵³

Additionally, al-Jabri considers the project of Westernizing the Arab world to be trivial nonsense; he believes that the Arab world cannot detach from its roots and heritage.⁵⁴ The Age of Enlightenment occurred in response to the West's specific problems; it cannot impose itself on different needs, minds, heritages, and experiences. Al-Jabri does not believe that secularism, in any of its various definitions, is helpful or even useful to be applied to the Arab world. In this line of thought, al-Jabri saw the need to develop *The Critique of the Arab Mind*, which discussed the main factors (historically and intellectually) that made the Arab mind. As al-Jabri expressed in many interviews, the 'Arab mind' refers to the ideology of language, not ethnicity.⁵⁵ Through his project, al-Jabri concluded that the mindset and circumstances that led to the birth of secularism were not the same as the factors and heritage that formed the Arab mind. Al-Jabri believed that, when calling for reparation in terms of synthesizing Western modernity and eastern Arabic and Islamic thoughts, the Arab world must use rational democracy instead of secularism because rational democracy is more compatible with the Arab situation.⁵⁶

According to al-Jabri, the term 'secularism' was translated to the Arabic term *Al'almaniya*, which comes from the Arabic root 'lm or 'lam, which translates to 'realm.' Al-Jabri concluded that this meant the term was supposed to mean 'world' or 'earth' (*donya*) as the opposite of sacred.⁵⁷ However, the word 'lm is rarely used to mean 'realm.' If it were to mean 'realm,' the translation of secularism in Arabic would be 'realm-ism,' which would lead to the question: which realm? The realm of angels? Of people? Of matter? Therefore, when stating the concept of secularism, al-Jabri likes to call it 'seculareyah.' Even the basic term level, al-Jabri criticizes secularism; he refuses to use the Arabic translation before discussing the applications and manifestations of secularism.

⁵³ Al-Jabri, criticizing the need of reform, 20

⁵⁴ Ibid, 25.

⁵⁵ Aldakheel, Turki . "Idaat(Lights)." Aljazeera T.V, July 25, 2011.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7cmTUDy8fsw>

⁵⁶ Aljabri, on criticizing the need for reform, 83.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 82

Al-Jabri refers to himself as a modernist scholar, unlike Almasiri, who identifies as an Islamist scholar.⁵⁸ However, they both had a similar methodology and position on secularism, starting by dismantling the terminology in Arabic and then redefining the term and criticizing it. Nevertheless, they had a different point of view on proposed solutions. Unlike Almasiri, al-Jabri does not have a problem with combining Western thoughts or modernity with Islam. Instead, as he explains and shows in his book, *Criticizing the Need for Reform*, he believes that modernity and the religious reformation in Europe during the 16th century were based on Islamic thoughts, books, and the translation of the Quran into Latin.

Here, Almasiri's position and al-Jabri's position on secularism become clear: al-Jabri takes issue with the term, whereas Almasiri believes that universal secularism is anti-human and leads to injustice. The critique of Almasiri was not on the term itself, and it was on the idea behind the term; he believed that combining modernity (which is the root of secularism) and Islamic thoughts is impossible.

The debate on secularism among Arab scholars is ongoing. Arab fascination with Western civilization led to the adoption of its philosophical visions. Thus, the secular system and its controversial understanding were introduced to the Arab world by scholars who advocated for it as the solution to keep up with the demands of the global Western civilization. Therefore, due to the intense debate between Islamists and secularists, the voices of scholars like al-Jabri had to rise and present different dissertations that synthesized Islam and the ideas of secularism. Almasiri and al-Jabri had very similar visions, and al-Jabri was not a figure that Almasiri discussed and criticized in his encyclopedia on secularism.

Research into the relationship between secularism and Islam is crucial for anyone attempting to understand the characteristics of Mohammed Arkoun's critical project. Mohammed Arkoun (1928–2010), a French academician of Algerian origin, was an emeritus Professor of the History of Islamic Thought at the Sorbonne (Paris III), and

⁵⁸ Brilliant scholars, "Memories with Almasiri", drjasemtv, 2011, youtube\
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=57z8Gn1et64&feature=youtu.be>

a visiting professor at universities in the United States, Europe, and the Arab world. As a philosopher and historian, he was a Senior Research Fellow and member of the Board of Governors of The Institute of Ismaili Studies in London, and Scientific Director of the magazine *Arabica*.⁵⁹

Arkoun spent most of his academic life studying in France, where he became interested in studying French social and political situation, which led him to study the concept of secularism or in French '*laïcité*'. Since he is originally Algerian, the Algerian-French colonial history was present in his studies, thesis, and examples. Like many scholars affected by Western studies, Arkoun was fascinated by the French political and intellectual experience. However, because his background was religious, he was just as fascinated with Islamic thoughts and teachings,⁶⁰ and he was annoyed with the false reputation that was spreading about Islam through Europe, specifically France. Thus, Arkoun dedicated himself to correcting the false ideas and generalizations of the Islamic religion.

The ancient Arab-Persian philosopher Ibn Miskawayh (932–1030) was one of the leading scholars that influenced Arkoun's thoughts. Arkoun's wrote his doctoral thesis on Miskawayh, where the former interacts with this Islamic scholar's thoughts.⁶¹ If al-Jabri believes that there is no issue of secularism in the Arab world and that the dictionary of Arab thought should exclude secularism, then Arkoun believes the complete contrary. Arkoun sees secularism as helpful and applicable to the Arab world when the Arab world can realize and control its concepts and implications. The rest of this chapter will explore Arkoun's position on understanding secularism.

Arkoun rejected the traditionally perceived conflict between the secular and the religious. He tried to overcome this conflict by redefining secularism and even applied different names such as 'secular positivism,' 'secular struggle,' 'conflict secularism,'

⁵⁹ Wikipedia. "Mohammed Arkoun," November 12, 2004. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohammed_Arkoun.

⁶⁰ n.d, "Passing of influential professor of Islamic Studies leaves 'a gap that will be impossible to fill,'" the institute of Ismaili studies, September 17, 2010. <https://the.ismaili/news/passing-influential-professor-islamic-studies-leaves-%E2%80%98gap-will-be-impossible-fill%E2%80%99>

⁶¹ Lonis bin Ali, "the sacred text on Arkoun", *ultraalgeria*, June 22, 2019. <https://ultraalgeria.ultrasawt.com/>

‘realist secularism,’ ‘open secularism,’ ‘actual secularism,’ and the ‘new secularism.’⁶² When he theorized about the secular positivism or rational secularism, Arkoun criticized these kinds of secularisms based on the fact that he believed they started when humans began to value human reason as the only tool for discovering in the world, as had occurred in the West. Moreover, he criticized the Turkish Kemalist secularism, as proposed by Kemal Ataturk, saying that it occurred during what he calls the ‘naive state of consciousness.’

John Esposito (b. 1940)⁶³ analyzes in his research, “Secularism and Secularization in the Arab World,” the relationship between Islam and the establishment of the nation-state. He holds that the leaders of independence movements in the Arab world always make use of Islam as a symbol, slogan, and organizational force to gain their legitimacy and mobilize the masses. However, after becoming independent, they adopt a development model influenced by the Western secularist model.⁶⁴ In response, Arkoun agrees that this phenomenon exists but points out that the phenomenon’s intellectual base is Kemal Ataturk’s concept of Islam and secularism. Kemal is not an isolated case but represents a generation of Muslim intellectuals and political elites that influenced Islamic thought. During 1880–1940, something termed the “naive state of consciousness” by Arkoun could be found among the Muslim intellectuals.⁶⁵ He believes they experienced a kind of cultural shock during their study in Europe and failed to recover from it all their life. The contrast between the advanced West and what they deemed to be their backward homelands impressed them much, which made them captivated by their discoveries in the West and revolt against all the indigenous traditions in their homeland. On this, Arkoun expresses:

Such is the psycho-cultural background common to all political activity of every Muslim leader at least until the end of World War II. It was the period of naive consciousness because these generations naively believed that it was enough to take the prescription for Western civilization’s success and apply it to Muslim countries. Secularism was perceived as one of those effective prescriptions to be applied to societies where religion controlled all the happenings and gestures of daily life. Those generations of Muslim

⁶² Abdulwahab Almasiri, *The Partial and Comprehensive Secularism* (Cairo: Dar Ishoroq, 2002), 27.

⁶³ Georgetown University professor of Religion and International Affairs, and Islamic Studies.

⁶⁴ John Esposito, “Defending Radical Islam .” [investigativeproject.org](https://www.investigativeproject.org/documents/misc/304.pdf). Accessed July 27, 2020. <https://www.investigativeproject.org/documents/misc/304.pdf>.

⁶⁵ Mohammed Arkoun, and Robert D. Lee. *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers*, (Routledge, 2019) 25.

intellectuals did not have a sufficient grasp of history to pin down the ideological genesis, sociopolitical functions, and philosophical limits of secularism in the West.⁶⁶

In his criticism of the thinkers and activists from the beginning of the 20th-century era, Almasiri shares a similar opinion with Arkoun when discussing the prominent intellectual Islamic figures of that age, such as Mohammed Abdu and Refaa Altahtawi, as we will read in the following chapters.

There are many similarities between Arkoun and Almasiri's criticisms. One similarity is their deconstruction of the meaning of secularism and their consideration of the secularism crisis as an ideology. Moreover, both divided the term into two separate terms. Arkoun calls one type of secularism 'simple secularism,' referring to the conception of secularism that thinks and works inside an isolated rational frame unattached to the religious dimension because it considers religion an unimportant superficial superstructure. The other type of secularism that Arkoun refers to is the 'complicated secularism' or the secular concept involving the religious dimension. He believes that it is impossible to detach people from projecting nonmaterialistic meaning to all aspects of their life.⁶⁷ Almasiri also divided secularism into two conceptions, which the following chapter will discuss, and he sees Arkoun's project as one that swings between using Almasiri's two conceptions interchangeably.⁶⁸

Arkoun predicted a new stage of secularism that he called 'new secularism,' which he believed will result because humans in the West disconnected with anything transcendental after the French revolution and fell into believing in pantheistic metaphysics or the inherent materialistic reference. Humans will seek out a transcendental connection to fill the hole of spiritual emptiness this has left. Furthermore, since political parties (presenters of secularism) chase authority, they will adopt a symbolic connection to religion to gain support. Then, as the Church begins to see itself in a new symbolic position of power, it will cooperate with the state.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Mohammed Arkoun, tr. By Robert D. lee, *Rethinking Islam: Common Question, Uncommon Answers*, (New York: Westview press, 1994), 25.

⁶⁷ Almasiri, *The Partial and Comprehensive Secularism*, 74.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 72.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 76.

For the situation of secularism in the Arab Islamic world, Arkoun believes that with modifications and consideration of cultural and other differences, secularism would help to change the West's corrupt picture of Muslims and Islam in the Arab world. However, before that, Arkoun emphasizes the need to revive and study Islamic and Arabic heritage under the light and awareness of modern social and empirical science.⁷⁰

While reading Arkoun's project, it is essential to link all his writings together and analyze his collection of work comprehensively because reading Arkoun as separate stand-alone essays will lead to a misunderstanding of his critique and project, or sometimes will lead to the incomprehension of his thoughts entirely.⁷¹ Without the notion of his interest and concern with defending Islam as a religion and ideology from the extreme generalizations and stereotypes held by the West and specifically by France, his proposed reformation project will appear trivial. For instance, Almasiri labeled Arkoun's project as incomplete, and believed that it focused on an odd interest that forgot his primary purpose of solving the crisis of "pursuing the meaning."⁷²

In his project, Arkoun calls for institutes to open in the West for spiritual and theological studies, including the study and history of religions. This action would enhance the secular meaning in France by adding an aspect of a comprehensive understanding of religion, which would redeem the holistic quality of secularism. Likewise, Arkoun directs a call for action to the Arab world within his reform project:

All I ask for, to insert the correct process of secularization into the Arab and Islamic community, is to cancel the standard educational program and to cancel the nonhistorical, ideological, and missionary method in teaching religion in the public schools, and substitute the history of religion and religious anthropology instead. Then teach the history of theological systems as a cultural system, not as an ultimate system that excludes each other, and forces itself on the young student, whether he is Muslim, Christian, Jewish, or Buddhist. This approach would enable the community to weaponize their knowledge scientifically against radicalism and that which encourages sectarianism and entrenches the division in civil society eternally.⁷³

⁷⁰ Mohammed Arkoun, tr. by Mahmood Azab and Dar Altaleah, *Humanism et Islam*, (Paris: librairie philosophique j. vrin, 2006), 9.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 11.

⁷² Abdulwahab Almasiri, *the Partial and Comprehensive Secularism*, 79.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 79.

Almasiri believed that Arkoun's critique shrank into a demand for the theological institute. This classification was unfair and reduced the whole project because Almasiri did not view Arkoun's works comprehensively and therefore had an incomplete understanding of Arkoun's perspective. Arkoun embodied his reformation project in a corporeal method that could transmit abstract ideas into practical application, which would feed the educational field with broader perspectives and ideas. The main difference between Arkoun and Almasiri is the approach they took in their reformation projects. Arkoun's reformation project's approach to religious reformation was to build on pre-existing structures that humans already accept, thereby tolerating social problems and concentrating on reforming religion generally and the way education and social structures present religion. Meanwhile, Almasiri's project was conceived from a different dimension and focused on reforming the modern concept of humanity in general and how it related to secularism. However, both held the same basic vision, which is an understanding that humans need to dismantle the Western notion of secularism.

CHAPTER III

ALMASIRI'S CRITIQUE OF SECULARISM

3.1. Dismantling the Term 'Secularism'

Dismantling the term 'secularism' means defining it by its philosophical and contextual meaning, as well as describing the linguistic meaning of the root of the word, from which the secular system emerged. The term 'secular' emerged from the Latin word *saeculum*.⁷⁴ In the late nineteenth century, secularism was defined as the separation between the Church and state, a definition that allows religious practices while restricting the authority of the Church. The Oxford English Dictionary defines secular as "belonging to the world and its affairs as distinguished from the Church and religion; civil, lay, temporal."⁷⁵ In the Age of Enlightenment, the term 'secular' was used by thinkers to refer to the notion of earthly affairs and issues independent of the authority of religion or its classification.⁷⁶ Since then, the movement toward secularism has accelerated with the entire course of modern history, and through that, secularism became redefined as being against Christianity or being anti-religion. However, in the latter half of the 20th century, some theologians began to advocate for secular Christianity. They suggested that Christianity is not only concerned with the sacred and the afterlife but also with finding the opportunity to reinforce Christian principles in life on Earth.⁷⁷ These theologians stated that the real meaning of the message of Jesus could be consolidated and performed in the daily affairs of a secular dynamic.⁷⁸ Hence, it is clear that secularism in accordance to its root, was launched from a specific religious issue, precisely Christianity, and correlated with the religious reformation movement that existed in the 17th century. In an optimistic secularism

⁷⁴ John Shook. "Secularism and Nonreligion." *Secularism and Nonreligion* 9, no. 0 (July 17, 2017). <https://doi.org/10.5334/snr.124>.

⁷⁵ John Shook, "secularity and secularism explained", Center for Inquiry, April 20, 2010, https://centerforinquiry.org/blog/secularity_and_secularism_explained/

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Encyclopedia Britannica, s.v. "secularism," accessed December 25, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/secularism>

⁷⁸ Ibid.

definition, secularism would mean that freedom of thought and conscience apply equally to all, believers and non-believers alike:

Secularism is simply a framework for ensuring equality throughout society – in politics, education, the law, and elsewhere – for believers and non-believers alike. Religious people have the right to express their beliefs publicly but so do those who oppose or question those beliefs. Religious beliefs, ideas, and organizations must not enjoy privileged protection from the freedom of expression. In a democracy, all ideas and beliefs must be open to discussion. Individuals have rights; ideas do not.⁷⁹

The explanation above, provided by the National Secular Society, uses the definition of secularism that Almasiri calls ‘partial secularism’. Although other philosophers use this definition as the general definition of secularism, Almasiri declines this line of thought because he believes that secularism is beyond a mere procedure and that this simple definition does not indicate the real meaning of the term.⁸⁰ Thus, he deconstructed secularism into two forms: ‘partial secularism’, which he identified as the form defined in the above quote that dismisses doctrine as non-essential, and ‘comprehensive secularism’ (also referred to as ‘universal secularism’), which is a doctrine itself that opposes and dominates other doctrines and religions.⁸¹ For Almasiri, ‘secular’ literally means ‘separate’ and it separates all fields from any ultimate background or prior base; humans invent for the sake of invention, work for the sake of work, and separate these tasks from any unified teleological reference for why they perform these tasks. However, when the definition of secularism has initially been conceived to empower the state, the state at that time was only concerned with and controlling the political and economic spheres of life, it was not the current meaning of the state that we currently witness: a state that dominates most if not all areas of life including but not limited to education, media, and entertainment. Also, the state that existed at the time secularism was originally conceived was not supported by a massive security service; it was a weak entity, not yet dominant, and many spheres of life were not under its control. As Almasiri explains:

The dreamy definition that was set for secularism wasn’t what secularism achieved on the ground, especially when the state became the first controller of individual life, even at the personal level, and especially when the economy had taken over all aspects and gained totalitarian control. To define secularism

⁷⁹National secular society editors, “what is secularism,” national secular society, accessed December 25, 2019, <https://www.secularism.org.uk/what-is-secularism.html>

⁸⁰ Harfi, Abdulwahab Almasiri: Secularism, Modernism, and Globalization, 103.

⁸¹ Ibid, 131.

by separating the state from religion means to remain silent regarding humans' personal lives and remain silent towards the greatest universal and ontological questions, such as the teleology of existence, birth, and death. Moreover, that definition does not handle the problematic issue of finding an ultimate ground or mutual system of values that can be a reference for members of a single community. The evolution of this definition that caused insignificance for it, embodied in the hegemony of the state and the incursion that is made by improving its dominance of deferent pedagogy and security foundations, allowed them to reach and control the personal lives of individuals in all aspects. The growth of media and its extreme expansion allowed the state to reach its citizens anytime and anywhere and interfere even with the smallest details of their lives and their kids' lives, thereby shaping their dreams and consciousness. It is paramount to mention and remember that the people did not elect mass communication foundations, and it has no regulatory institution to investigate and question it. Besides, the market is also not just a market; it has become an octopus' entity that dominates the media and other areas. The market also directs people's visions and rewrites their dreams and expectations. The inexistence and the atrophy of personal life have led to that conclusion. Now, how can we speak about separating the state from religion in this framework! Isn't it necessary to speak about the predominance of the state, market, and media, not only on religion but on humans' personal and general lives?⁸²

As stated above, Almasiri's main reason for separating partial secularism and comprehensive secularism stems from how state control of human life has evolved. Partial secularism was implemented when the state was tangentially involved in daily human life. However, now that the state is integrally involved in daily and personal aspects, this partial secularism can no longer exist, as society operates under comprehensive secularism. Almasiri's separation of the terms allows him to critique the secularism that society currently experiences, without confusing it with how secularism operated in the past. Almasiri's quote reflects how his refusal of comprehensive secularism emerged from its transition from the separation of the state and religion to a separation of the human and humanity, or in another word, 'dehumanization'. Through examining the relationship between the state and humans, it became apparent to Almasiri that secularism practices reductionism on the human being, reducing it to matter simply, and deals with humans by the same rules that it deals with nature, without a transcendental element.⁸³

⁸² Abdulwahab Almasiri, "Feathers of New Islamic Discourse," researches (blog), March 20, 2010, http://bohothe.blogspot.com/2010/03/blog-post_2730.html

⁸³ Abdulwahab Almasiri, *Comprehensive and Partial Secularism-Second Volume-*, (Cairo, Dar Alshoroq, 2017), 71.

Empirical philosophy, or empiricism, theorizes that knowledge comes only or primarily from sensory experience.⁸⁴ It is one of several views of epistemology, the study of human knowledge, along with rationalism and skepticism. Empiricism emphasizes the role of empirical evidence in the formation of ideas, rather than innate ideas or traditions.”⁸⁵ Therefore, it emphasizes on interacting with the corporeal as it is more beneficial and fruitful for humans. Hence, logically, the more you benefit from the procedures you use, the more beneficial that procedure becomes. In contrast similarly, materialism emerged after the consolidation of empiricism and states that a man cannot truly know unless he experiences the external world with senses and tangible tools, and what cannot be perceived by the facilities of humans cannot be given the status of truth.⁸⁶

3.2. Secularism and Materialism

As previously mentioned, Almasiri sees secularism as taking two forms: partial, which separates the state and religion, and comprehensive, which does not only mean separating the state from religion but separating all humanistic, ethical, and religious values from nature and human personal life. Therefore, comprehensive secularism removes the sanctity and sanctification of the world’s holiness and turns it into a useful tool utilized for the most powerful people.⁸⁷ According to Almasiri, comprehensive secularism, which will be the focus of this chapter, started to become its form of epistemology.⁸⁸ Within epistemology, the term of secularism is isolated from any ultimate reference, so it remained defined the same way. However, in the real world, the term no longer stated a procedure’s system, it turned into a historical comprehensive or total phenomenon. Almasiri outlined in his work his argument that modern society operates under comprehensive secularism: “Why is secularism comprehensive? Because the secularization process that occurs through daily urban products or common ideas and social transformations creates a productive ambiance

⁸⁴ Ibid, 9.

⁸⁵ Encyclopedia Britannica. “Empiricism | Philosophy.” Accessed July 27, 2020.
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/empiricism>. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/empiricism>

⁸⁶ Abdulwahab Almasiri, *Materialism and Dismantling of Human* (Beirut, Dar Alfikr, 2016), 15.

⁸⁷ Almasiri, *Partial and comprehensive secularism*, 16.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 23.

that is convenient for spreading the comprehensive vision of secularism, that is why the process of globalization for the world goes hand-in-hand with the transformations of the society into secular society, because the process of secularization lays in urbanized products and global ideas, unable to be divided from one other.”⁸⁹ Ironically, while Islamic countries argue against partial secularism (an idea that is compatible with Islam), it unknowingly accepts and participates in comprehensive secularism, which is insidious and entrenched in all societies.⁹⁰

When secular civilization appeared in the renaissance era, two different visions of ‘human’ emerged. The first vision was centred around the human and humanity as an ultimate reference and assured human’s centrality and priority in the universe. The second version centralizes around nature, glorifies nature as the source of creation, and views humans as equal to other creatures and all other nature/matter.⁹¹ Because nature is viewed as superior to humans, humanity loses centrality. The latter vision for humanity views humans as having a physical and material component but lacks a compassionate view on humanity.⁹²

The European renaissance mainly launched underneath the emancipation of man and revised human dignity and liberty. Humans were the leading center for the renaissance, but because that center had no reliable reference to hold onto, such as having a solid philosophical base or transcendental reference,⁹³ other paradigms gain ascendancy. These paradigms assumed the superiority of matter and nature. ‘Superiority of nature’ does not presume the superiority of nature as in protecting or worshipping nature, but as adhering to nature’s law and survival of the fittest, seeking to be the greatest at all costs. Under this mentality, the human was extracted from its rights as a special entity and from its right in claiming centrality, as humans became part of nature and matter. As a result of that philosophical base and in parallel with Darwinism, which enforced the principle of objectifying the human and reducing it to matter, most of the social and political issues were fixed and built upon utilitarianism, which draws its principle

⁸⁹ Ibid, 24.

⁹⁰ I will explain in a later chapter Almasiri’s thoughts on the aggression between religion and partial secularism.

⁹¹ Almasiri, Partial and Comprehensive Secularism, 30

⁹² Ibid, 30.

⁹³ Explaining the principles of the Renaissance raised with the idea of disenchantment of the world and rejecting nontangible things “empiricism”.

from the properties of nature. For instance, stating that nature proceeded by using a natural selection principle that allows the strongest gene to be passed on to the next generation justifies the ‘law of the jungle’ where the weak are prey for the predators. Utilitarianism and imperialism use these types of Darwinist justifications to negatively affect humans and nature, colonizing other lands to drain their resources and utilize the land for the colonizers’ people.⁹⁴ This is seen in the current era, where the main reference is the extent of material use, and success is measured with the extent of consumption.

3.3. Manifestations of Comprehensive Secularism

Almasiri considers the appearance of globalization to be a significant manifestation of comprehensive secularism. Globalization infers that the world is a small country— a European country.⁹⁵ For instance, the global media represents one world, the Western world, because it is the dominant power, and therefore the global market represents Western products and ideals.

The global media and market tell the world how to dress and eat, whether you are cool or not according to what and how you consume, how you are following trends, and it even evaluates and labels your personality per the global Western image. We can call this the ‘globalization of culture’, this globalization of culture forces unilateral culture that cancels individual cultures gradually and creates a constant sense of uncertainty for individuals as they struggle to reach the standards expected from them based on global standards, uncertain if they fit into the mould that the West sells.⁹⁶ Uncertainty is the only particular fact in the comprehensively secular world because comprehensive secularism’s principle of separating and neutralizing everything has no specific limit or stopping point, it devours every new social phenomenon like a black hole. It separates it from its value, reference, and history then recycles and edits it to be ready for consumption.

⁹⁴ Almasiri, *Materialism and Dismantling of Human*, 81.

⁹⁵ Harfi, *Abdulwahab Amasiri: Secularism, Modernism, and Globalization*, 295.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 295.

One of the other manifestations of comprehensive secularism is the appearance of the liquid life of liquid modernity, which Bauman calls ‘the liquid times.’⁹⁷ According to Bauman, liquid time “is an age of consumption that makes the world, including its living beings and non-living beings, an object for consumption. It loses its utility value once it’s used and loses its enchanted beauty and temptation.”⁹⁸ The standards for evaluating individuals according to their ability to consume creates a system where the more you consume, the more value you gain. Therefore, in a modern liquid world, the individual is under siege in all aspects; individuals look for promises of acceptance and freedom, but indeed the modern liquid world always surrounds humans with new consumption needs.⁹⁹ This liquid life causes constant anxiety and fear of failure to keep pace with the world, which principally comes as a result of globalization and picturing success in the world from a single perspective, a perspective with which either keep pace or that consider it as a failure as you swim towards the abyss. Because globalization globalizes the world based on the measures and standards of its inventors, global success is measured according to a eurocentrism perspective.

The displays mentioned above are manifestations of comprehensive secularism, which naturalizes the human from anything transcendental, considers humans simply as matter, and eventually turns a human into a figure or a number. When a human being is hollowed out, he or she becomes more available and likely to fill the resulting hole with anything, whether temporary or permanent, purposeful or nihilistic. Because the desire to fill this void is a primary human need, humans will continue to dig for answers before they build a solid philosophy or transcendental base to build on.

Also, to further expand on the need for the process to dismantle comprehensive secularism, Almasiri clarifies that the existence of modernity and post-modernity is a result of the comprehensive secularization process. Almasiri listed many resulting crises of modernism, illustrating the far reach and implications of comprehensive secularism:

The crisis of modern civilization; the crisis of man in modern times; the price of progress; the adverse effects of modernism; environmental pollution; the

⁹⁷ A Polish sociologist and philosopher who authored a group of books about liquid times, first published in 2007.

⁹⁸ Almasiri, *Partial and Comprehensive Secularism*, 101.

⁹⁹ Heba Raouf, *The Introduction of the Liquid Modernity* translated by Hajaj Bin Jabr, (Beirut: Arab Network for Research and Publishing, 2016), 8.

dominance of physical, quantitative and mechanical models; alienation; the crisis of meaning; the atrophy of the moral sense; the dominance of utilitarian values; the absence of the center; the prevalence of cognitive and moral relativism; the fragmentation of society; the supremacy of contractual relations rather than compassionate ones; the domination of the state over the individual through its agencies; the dominance of institutions and bureaucracies; the erosion of the family; the beginning of the disappearance of humanism; the emergence of anti-human philosophies; philosophical nihilism; internationalization; the retreat of individuality and privacy; the Americanization of the world; profiling; the control of the media on humans; the modern world as an monolithic iron cage (Max weber)¹⁰⁰; commodification (human transformation into a commodity); objectification (human transformation into an object); the death of God (the fall of the “wholeness” concept); the dissolution of identity; the displacement of the ego; and the end of history.¹⁰¹

While the principles of modernity, in essence, emerged to free man from fear and restrictions, the crises, as mentioned earlier, resulting from modernism display how it is hostile to humanity. The results were still fear and restrictions but embodied in a different face. Instead of being chained by social traditions and religious institutions, humans became restricted under the state, which controls what one eats, how one dresses, or what one thinks. The state additionally limits one’s career and intellectual direction by facilitating opportunities for specific professions and tracks. It also destroyed the idea of corporations serving the common good in communities, and there became no common good but the one authorized by the state and promoted by the media. Humans believe they are practicing their freedom and are more in control of their decisions; meanwhile, they cannot diverge from what is offered by the state, authorities, or the market (the market is the highest authority in the current world).

The American stand-up comedian George Carlin,¹⁰² explains sarcastically in his poem “The Paradox of Our Time” that the humanitarian term ‘modernity’ has stolen many human aspects. In the poem, he says, “We have taller buildings and shorter tempers, wider freeways but narrower viewpoints. We spend more but have less, we buy more,

¹⁰⁰ Maximilian Karl Emil Weber was a German sociologist, philosopher, jurist, and political economist.

¹⁰¹ Abdulwahab Almasiri, *Partial and Comprehensive Secularism*, 42.

¹⁰² The poem was misattributed to him, some say that the text was written by Dr. Bob Moorehead, a priest in Washington state.

but enjoy less... These are the times of fast foods and slow digestion, big men and small character, steep profits and shallow relationships.”¹⁰³

The text describes details of the postmodernism era and the cost of modernity on humanity. Likewise, it shows the realizations of that cost among the masses in the West, specifically in America. It is worth mentioning that despite the many damages, greedy taxes, and irrationality of the industrial civilization, the West’s current civilization has a mindset that is adjustable and flexible in changing its opinions. Therefore, these voices or realizations can be read as attempts to push against the current state of society and reconsider the irrational acceleration of this industrial and anti-human civilization. Likewise, Almasiri’s critical reformation project plays a crucial role in presenting a reasonable criticism and reform project that can be presented as a moderate vision on the global level. The following chapters will examine how comprehensive secularism has manifested in the Arab and Islamic world and the reform project that Almasiri believes is needed on the global level due to the inevitable costs of comprehensive secularism.

3.4. Criticism of Almasiri’s Definition of Secularism

Many scholars in the Arab world reacted to Almasiri’s definition of secularism. Almasiri identifies and presents himself as an Islamic scholar; therefore, his critics were primarily other Islamist scholars. Some did not accept Almasiri’s vision, especially his definition of partial secularism, which some, such as Ahmed Aldagashi, considered to be “only a wish in Almasiri’s dream.”¹⁰⁴

Ahmed Aldagashi (b. 1955) was a professor and scholar who critiqued Almasiri. In addition to describing Almasiri’s idea on partial secularism as only a dream, he also criticizes how Almasiri classifies the secular scholars in the Arab world as either using the partial or comprehensive version of secularism in their arguments. In his categorization of secularism, Almasiri describes leading scholars who defended secularity, like Fouad Zakariyya, Mahmoud Alaleim, and Ahmed Amin as defenders

¹⁰³ Bob Moorehead, *Words Aptly Spoken* (UK, overlook Christian bookstore, 1995) 70.

¹⁰⁴ Ahmed Aldagashi. “The Problematic of Secularism Vision on Almasiri,” *Albayan*, 3rd of June 2011, <http://www.albayan.co.uk/mobile/MGZarticle2.aspx?ID=748>

and advocates for partial secularism. Aldagashi thinks that Almasiri tries to merge secularism (on the partial level) and religion even though the mentioned secular scholars advocated for a complete separation of politics and religion. According to Aldagashi, this would mean the cancellation of parts of religion. In this respect, Aldagashi says that Almasiri tries to accommodate these scholars and advocate that the separation of religion and the state is compatible with the Islamic religion.¹⁰⁵

Additionally, in Aldagashi's paper, he criticizes Almasiri by saying that the latter defines comprehensive secularity as a method that separates human beings from humanity but does not explicitly mention how it separates human beings from religion, thereby, in Aldagashi's view, designating religion as a little ritual individual matter.¹⁰⁶

Mohamed Ibrahim Mabrouk (1943–2014), a friend of Almasiri who wrote a criticism of the concept of the comprehensive and partial secularism, would agree with Aldagashi's point of view. Mabrouk does not agree with the discrimination between partial and comprehensive secularism because he believes that both secularisms are the same, just that the partial concept is a historical concept raised before the introduction of the comprehensive concept. By this, he means that comprehensive secularism is a consequence of partial secularism and that historically, partial secularism began when philosophical thought started to rely on the rational human faculty as the primary source to distinguish right from wrong and eliminated the credibility of any other source, including religious texts or divine inspiration.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Aldagashi, "the problematic of secularism"

¹⁰⁶ An explanation of Almasiri's categorization of secularism will come in later chapters.

¹⁰⁷ Ebrahim Mabrouk, *Secularism: Biggest Enemy of Islam since the Beginning till the end*, (Arabic Civilization Center: Egypt, 2007), 199.

CHAPTER IV

SECULARSIM IN THE ARAB WORLD

4.1. Modernity Arriving

The terms ‘Arab’ and ‘Islamic’ are often used interchangeably. This paper will interchange these terms because Islam is an essential part of the formation of the contemporary Arab mind, and the implications of comprehensive secularism on the contemporary Arab mind is a focal point of this paper. This paper will not strictly use the term ‘Arab’ because the implications of secularism also discussed manifest in other Islamic non-Arab societies. As previously mentioned, the appearance of comprehensive secularism affects the whole world, even those states that call their system an ‘Islamic system’ and claim that they are holding onto their identity by rejecting secularism (the meaning of which they have reduced to the separation of religion and the state). If we consider the final ultimate value of comprehensive secularism as the consuming value, then most of the Islamic world is already considered secularized the moment they engage with the global market. It is just a matter of time before these countries start to face the same shortcomings, problems, and crises inflicted by comprehensive secularism on the West.

In his criticism of comprehensive secularism, Almasiri considers it a consecutive and successive phenomenon to modernity, not a long-standing phenomenon that emerged on its own.¹⁰⁸ Modernity, even in its most moderate manifestations, dehumanizes humans and empowers the state to dominate through its organs that control the market, the media, and individuals’ personal lives. It naturalized the general meaning of humanity and poured out individuals’ insight, until humans started to act on their desire to fill the gap inside them with material goods, thereby buying meaning and replacing

¹⁰⁸ Abdulwahab Almasiri, “The Features of the New Islamic Discourse,” *The Contemporary Muslim Magazine*, no. 86, November 10, 1997. <https://almuslimalmuaser.org/1997/11/10, 8>.

it on demand. Then existentialism ascended, not because it holds meaning but because individuals embrace nihilism and periodically look for meaning in existentialism.

The Arab world first interacted with Western civilization around the 18th century, which is when the West decided to export modernity to modernize, develop, and free the world like how the West was freed by modernism, which enhanced education and developed sciences during the Renaissance. This portrayal is at least how the West presented itself to the Arab world in the 18th century. The French campaign led by Napoleon Bonaparte first came to Egypt in 1798, where the French presented themselves as saviours and champions of democracy. Their campaigns travelled with scholars and scientists in various fields such as physics, chemistry, astronomy, and archaeology. Moreover, they presented themselves as allies to Muslims and Muslim scholars, including the Alazhar institution.¹⁰⁹

People of the Arab world were impressed and shocked by the significant scientific and technological gap between the East and the West during the modern ages. Many of them were fascinated by Western civilization and tried to imitate it.¹¹⁰ It is essential to mention that modernity adopted a human-centered approach in its beginning, which is why Almasiri said that comprehensive secularism naturally followed modernity:

It is better to conceive comprehensive secularism as a consecutive paradigm instead of an independent paradigm that took action to be formed gradually in time and space. We can also say that many of the crises of these consecutive actions had not yet occurred by the end of the 19th century. The personal life was still isolated from the secular operations at that time, the Western human as a secularist in their general life was religious and committed to the values of virtue and his Christian religious system in his personal life. Therefore, Western civilization was not completely a materialist civilization; humanoid and religious values played a significant and advantageous role in Western civilization, which granted it a measure of cohesion and teleology.¹¹¹

Almasiri goes on to say that at this time, the Arabs did not realize the drawbacks and the problems in the West, as modernism and Western thoughts were not critically

¹⁰⁹ Andrew Knighton, "Disaster in The Desert: Napoleon's Egyptian Campaign," war history online, Dec 20, 2017. <https://www.warhistoryonline.com/napoleon/napoleons-egyptian-campaign.html>

¹¹⁰ Abdulwahab Almasiri, "Features of New Islamic Discourse," *The Contemporary Muslim Magazine*, no. 86, November 10, 1997. <https://almuslimalmuaser.org/1997/11/10, 9>.

¹¹¹ Abdulwahab Almasiri, "Features of New Islamic Discourse," 9.

researched and analyzed until the middle of the 20th century. After the two world wars, the world was stunned by the horrors, massacres, and tragedies suffered and started to reconsider modernism.¹¹² For instance, the Frankfurt School was established in the 1950s in Germany. After the Ottoman empire's demolition, several trends emerged in the Arab world, including strong support for enrolling the Arab world in the global cultural fold without consideration of the philosophical basis for the Western modernity school of thought. The opposite trend chose to resist the West by declining anything that came from the West or modernity. The latter established groups that called for the revision of Islam by applying and reviving Islamic heritage.¹¹³

It is worth mentioning that this situation is still the same in the Islamic world, with extremism growing in some groups and the gap widening between the conflicting schools of thought. In speaking about the Arab scholars of the 19th and 20th centuries, Almasiri described the first trend previously mentioned as represented by Rifa'a al-Tahtawi (1801–1873) and Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905).¹¹⁴ He felt that their view of the West was narrow, incomplete, and blinded by their fascination with the West. Almasiri believed that those who suffered from the scourge of Western colonialism had seen Western civilization's real face and knew that its goals are obviously against humanism. The West's democracy, Almasiri proceeds, was a claim to cover the West's real intentions to loot others' lands and resources:

One history book says that once an Algerian Master (Shaikh) was told 'The French troops are here in Algeria only to spread the Western civilization in the Algerian region,' so he replied roughly and quickly, 'Then why have they brought this huge amount of powder with them?' We are like this Algerian Shaikh, we have smelled the scent of powder, we watched the flames of the fire, we heard the clatter of the guns, we saw their horses' horseshoes trample everything. We saw the powder when it spread widely, and saw its capability improving fascinating until it became bombs, rockets, bacterial weapons, atomic weapons and deadly weapon manufacturing became one of the largest industries in our modern world. If al-Tahtawi and Abduh smelled the powder scent like the Algerian Master (Shaikh) did, and as we did, they would not have written about Islam with no Muslims.¹¹⁵ Back then, the powder scent was hidden, and the bright side of modernism was blinking, which is why these

¹¹² Harfi, Abdulwahab Almasiri: *Secularism, Materialism and Globalization*, 257.

¹¹³ Almasiri, "Features of New Islamic Discourse", 6.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 7.

¹¹⁵ Referring to the West, Shaikh Muhmmmed Abduh once said that when he visited Western Europe, he saw their Islam but no Muslims, and in the Islam world, there are Muslims but no Islam, in a criticizing context to the Islamic world.

scholars' cause focused on how to remake and adjust with modernity and how to reconcile and pair Islam and modernism.¹¹⁶

The West aimed to expand influence and extend control, and those who suffered from this could see the danger of the thoughts on which the Western civilization was based.

4.2. Comprehensive Secularism in the Current Arab World

At the beginning of the 21st century, displays of comprehensive secularism ascended despite the widespread influence of Islamists in the Arab and Islamic world, and despite the acceleration of a cumulative Islamic discourse since the middle of the 20th century. However, this Islamic discourse was incapable of presenting a new and different vision that could serve as an inclusive universal vision. Although Islamic discourse claims that Islam is a universal vision, its actions and rhetoric have not yet presented a practical vision of how a universal Islam could be applied. Instead of creating this practical universal vision, Islamists separated into two methods of dealing with the West. One method consists of a complete rejection of Western civilization to the point that they block the outside world. However, the far-reaching influence of the West ends up breaking in and reaching these Islamists who then serve as conduits for Western civilization. The other route for Islamists who wish to resist Western influence is to work within radical groups. However, these groups, at their core, serve political ideologies and their interests; even though these Islamists intend to defend their Islamic identity, instead they serve a political purpose.¹¹⁷

As a result, the Islamic system became part of the overarching Western model that has dominated the developing world since the beginning of this century:

When everyone was doing their best to catch up with the West and compete with it on its soil, the liberals in the Arab world called for adopting the modern Western system. The Marxists rebelled a little and offered the possibility of entering Western modernity through the gates of Marxism and defending social justice. The Islamists, however, understood the possibility of embracing Western modernity and blending it with Islam. Moreover, despite their divergent beliefs and trends, everyone has made the West an inclusive,

¹¹⁶ Almasiri, "Features of New Islamic Discourse", 8.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 8.

comprehensive vision, and silent reference for their viewpoint. This [Western vision] is the vision of the universe behind most secular and religious ideologies in the Arab and Islamic world.¹¹⁸

Of course, the Islamic system has declined, its dimensions have been reduced, and its comprehensiveness as a vision of the universe has been lost. Instead of presenting Islamic perceptions of all aspects of life, the Islamic system has become an Islamization of some aspects of modernity. Most of the time, this Islamization takes the form of Islamists attempting to remove taboos from society without considering why certain things are considered taboo, confirm the *halal* aspects of Western civilization, or search for those aspects in the Islamic system that have an equivalent in the West. This external application has meant the atrophy of other aspects of the very core of the Islamic system.¹¹⁹ To illustrate this point, take, for example, a café owner who intends to Islamize his store. He may do this by refusing to serve wine, separating men from women, and choosing not to play music with *haram* lyrics. However, he fails to consider that most of the food served at his café is sugary desserts. The high sugar content of these desserts may be more damaging to the body than a glass of wine, and their ingredients are produced at a factory that exists due to Western industrial influence. However, the store owner is more concentrated on the idea of what is *halal* or *haram* on a superficial level.

The previous chapter of this paper discussed how globalization is a mainstream manifestation of comprehensive secularism. The entire world is in globalization's grasp through the globalization of the economic system, which has become the central core of living through modernity. It is difficult for an individual or a single country to walk against the global wind because globalization has affected the core engine of living: money and the economy. If a country decided to isolate itself from the global world, it would surely suffer from poverty. Regression in healthcare would also be inevitable. Additionally, staying in isolation from global politics would lead to economic sanctions, which would accordingly cause the isolated country to suffer from a deteriorating economic situation that would affect every citizen. Because the world has become a small village with one place imposing its ideology on the rest of the

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 9.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 9.

world and leaving no alternative through the rule of capitalism, going against the secular global trend would be difficult or impossible.

With the weak philosophical and mental principles that exist in the Islamic and Arab world and also with the persistence of tyranny in the Arab world, the Arab world is under the weight of the negative manifestations of comprehensive secularism. Although there is a culture of intellectual resistance to Western ideas, this rejection is more of a refutation of displays than principles. For instance, Islamic groups that launched campaigns in the last century to revive religion and its sciences focused on the recitation of worship and religious practices and the strictness of and the prohibition of Western displays.¹²⁰ These Islamist groups reject every Western display, good or bad, but for pragmatic reasons, they engage with Western inventions and technology until they fall into the global consumption-focused secular trap.

The Arab world has become a large consumption market, and the concept of consumption is widespread and exaggerated in many Arab countries. Arab Gulf countries have a substantial commercial market due to the abundance of purchasing power and cash liquidity. Nevertheless, the Islamists and advocates for reviving Islam in the Arab world still focus on worship and are interested in reforming the relationship of the individual to God rather than the relationship of the individual to the individual, society, civilization, and earthly matters. All external expressions of faith, such as rituals and traditional dress, have become a signal of the existence of a religious society. Meanwhile, those focused on external expressions may not consider the philosophical thought behind these expressions. Additionally, they may not feel a moral burden to build and develop their society or even to reconsider the consumer situation or the excessive involvement in globalization and its outputs of technology, information, clothing, restaurants, brands, and the luxury of excessive prosperity, all which interest the global capitalists and often do not fit the ideals of an Islamic system. When Islamists in the Arab world respond to secularism, they rejected partial secularism but unintentionally accepted comprehensive secularism. This contradiction becomes clear through an examination of the current intellectual and political positions in the Arab World. The groups and countries who lash out and reject partial

¹²⁰ i.e. Muslim brotherhoods and Salafism.

secularism's separation of state and religion are often the most affected by comprehensive secularism and its manifestations, penetrated by pragmatism and market ethics. For instance, the Saudi Regime, which refused the ideology and the principles of secularism (until 2018, after which it has embraced both forms of secularism), is currently considered to be one of the most consumption-based societies, where relations among individuals fall under the following principle: "the more you consume, the more you matter."¹²¹

Another example of the embodiment of the pragmatism of Islamic groups' approach to secularism is the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) in Yemen. Pragmatism appeared in MB policy in Yemen after the latest events in the Arab world,¹²² which also affected Yemen. Despite their principle slogans that refuse, whether explicitly or implicitly, Americanization and secularization, both Shiite and Sunni Islamist groups raced pragmatically to satisfy the global European and American world to gain international support. So, while they publicly refused partial secularism, comprehensive secularism dominated the groups' sentiments and their leaders. Both sides were subjected to the global and international community's gaze, and while racing to gain international support and legitimacy, they declared that the international and global community was more civilized, developed, and had the power for a conflict resolution. In summary, after the waves of revolutions and anti-revolutions, the Arabic nation called clearly for subjecting itself to the global system and looked forward to the Western ideas and practices it starkly presented.

The occurrence of Islamic groups buying into comprehensive secularism was the consequence of consenting to the international global economic system. The groups and governments that did this made all citizens and states affiliated with the market rules, and therefore, their ethics became saturated with the principles of comprehensive secularism, which believes that the ends justify the means. There have been many bloody controversies and disputes over the separation of the state and religion. Combatants fought under the pretext that secularism leads to atheism and the destruction of religion, but they forgot that their actions went against the concept that

¹²¹ Bodor Alraai, "Report: Consumers Spending Increases In KSA 4.3% in the Last 10 Months," December 2019, Mubasher.info, <https://www.mubasher.info/news/3568240>.

¹²² The Arab spring revolution and the anti-revolutions

at its core, religion exists to protect humanity. In the Arab Gulf countries, the saturation of market ethics in the community is evident in the everyday discourse surrounding work. Community members will often compete to prove that they are the most committed to their job or career. While this may be called ‘professionalism in work’ by individuals in the Arab Gulf, this mentality has its roots in market ethics and, therefore, in Westernization.

4.3. Criticizing Almasiri’s Approach to the Arab World

Almasiri’s criticism of modernism, secularism, and American civilization stemmed from his life background. Even though he grew up in an Islamic environment in Damanhor, he adopted Marxism because he always was looking to advocate for humanity. Marxism abstractly shapes around the idea of lifting injustice done to the poor and claiming their rights. When Almasiri spent a long time in the West and deepened his Western civilization studies, he could see many more unjust points towards humanity. He had believed in Marxism for much of his early life, so when he found Marxism lacking in answers, he realized he must sew together different ideas to shape his criticism of modernism and secularism displays.¹²³ Because his focus was on the West, modernism, and secularism, Almasiri did not clearly outline his criticism towards Islamists in his criticism of inhumane practices.

For example, when he criticized pragmatism in the West, he did not mention the existence of similar manifestations of pragmatism in the Islamic civilization and the thoughts of old and modern Islamic groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafism, Shiites, and others.¹²⁴ Perhaps his focus was on dismantling the Western philosophical system, which he considered the leading supplier of anti-human manifestations.¹²⁵ However, the manifestations criticized by Almasiri in the American and global systems also exist in the Islamic world. For example, the mufti, a scholar who is authorized to interpret qur’anic text in a jurisprudence context and give judgments, believes in human transcendence, of course, yet many of these judgments fall under

¹²³ Harfi, Abdulwahb Almasiri: Secularism, Modernism, and Globalization, 19.

¹²⁴ Almasiri slightly directed a critique towards them when he was forming his reformation project, as we will see later when discussing Almasiri’s reformation project

¹²⁵ Almasiri, Partial and Comprehensive Secularism, 80.

the displays of comprehensive secularism that were criticized by Almasiri. For instance, Almasiri mentions the secularization of the body, saying that the West objectifies women and has reduced her into a body/object, which many indicators prove is true.¹²⁶ On the other hand, the Islamic and Arabic world calls for the covering of women to make her invisible or completely covered. This call was not for protecting women, but for the sake of men who only see women as objects, based on the idea that a woman would mislead a man to sin. Therefore, they suggested covering the women as a private possession. Instead of rejecting the idea of objectifying women and emphasizing the idea of humanism at the core of Islam, a decision was made only with consideration of males' physical and sexual needs.

Almasiri was not in contention with the Islamic curriculum, which is a mandatory subject to be studied in some Arab countries. He was similarly not attached to the Islamic groups. Therefore, he did not have the proximity to these issues to spot them and highlight them somewhat. He slightly referred to a problem with the Islamic discourse by calling it an 'old' discourse;¹²⁷ however, Almasiri did not point out that the discourse was against humanism but just under transcendental names. Moreover, he usually justified the underdeveloped situation in the Arab countries and economic regression by referring to globalization's effects, and he usually blamed Arab countries' failures on the colonialism era. For instance, when Almasiri criticized the fact that old terms from Islamic heritage have been very rarely reviewed, revised, or renewed to account for changes in civilization, he blamed this gap between Arab Muslims and their civilization on colonialism.¹²⁸ While the impact of colonialism on this topic is undeniable, he failed to refer to other reasons such as mental rigidity and the reluctance of Islamists to criticize the Islamic heritage itself. For example, Almasiri failed to mention that in the last centuries of the Islamic civilization, the Ottoman emperor tried to freeze intellectual creativity. Almasiri evades the question of Muslim responsibility by not mentioning these types of historical facts. Perhaps the lack of criticism of Islamists results from the fact that Almasiri dedicated his life to studying the Arab-Israeli conflict, where he came to strongly believe that the essence of unfairness in the world relates to the roots of ideas. At this point, he started to study

¹²⁶ Ibid, 331.

¹²⁷ Almasiri, "Features of New Islamic Discourse," 5.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 5.

the origins of dehumanized philosophy and deepened his criticisms on the origins of the modernization era.

Almasiri focused on critiquing Western civilization and modernity as a world-wide appeal. This criticism came in the context that Almasiri introduced and presented a new vision of Islamic discourse to the Arab and Islamic world based mostly on his criticism of the West. He attributed the lack of solidarity and the regression of the Arab and Islamic world to the West; moreover, he blamed it for the uncivilized and retrograde situation in the Islamic and Arab world. He believed that religious thought or ideas based on the divine reference would not result in the same disastrous consequences that came from comprehensive material and secular philosophy.



CHAPTER V

ALMASIRI'S VISION

5.1. Partial Secularism and the Problem of its Definition

After reviewing Almasiri's criticisms of secularism, a question remains: what did Almasiri suggest as an alternative? In his criticism, Almasiri did not agree with any projects proposed by the scholars who tried to tender alternatives such as Arkoun, Bauman, al-Jabri, and Taylor, as covered in former chapters. When others claimed that Almasiri's thoughts resembled those of Bauman, Almasiri responded by saying that he had gone further than Bauman by offering a solution that did not stop at dismantling the current ideological problem or postmodernism cons.¹²⁹ This chapter will address Almasiri's conception of partial secularism, explain how this conception led to his reformation project (which he referred to as the 'new Islamic discourse'), and critique his reformation project.

Almasiri's encyclopedia discussed both partial and comprehensive secularism. Previous chapters of this paper have focused primarily on the negative consequences of comprehensive secularism but did not discuss in detail partial secularism's consequences on modern society because Almasiri believes that partial secularism does not pose a significant threat to humanity. As Almasiri defines partial secularism, it does not conflict with the process of societal stability and reformation. It is important to note that the reason Almasiri must redefine many terms and concepts, including secularism, is that he believes in the existence of a remarkable misunderstanding or ambiguity of the methodology of defining philosophical and intellectual terms.¹³⁰ Further, he believes that this ambiguity is at the core of the endless intellectual conflict. As he describes, "there is confusion and interference between two types of definitions,

¹²⁹ Hajaj Abu Jabr, *Criticism of Secular Mind* (Beirut: Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2018), 35.

¹³⁰ Harfi, Abdulwahab Almasiri, *secularism, modernism, and globalization*, 101.

the dreamy delineation that explains the hopes and expectations, and on the other hand, what has been achieved from these hopes in reality.”¹³¹ On the topic of secularism, Almasiri feels that reducing the term to the “separation of the state and religion” is problematic because it limits its scope. For Almasiri, picturing secularism as a set of clear thoughts, rules, practices, and concepts leads to a neglect of secularism’s underlying and structural base. Also, understanding secularism as a stable thought and not as a sequence of thoughts led to vagueness.¹³²

Secularism is more than a term; it has a history. Therefore, when researchers studied the term before Almasiri and focused on secularism as it imposed itself in the modern-day, they lacked an understanding of how it had evolved and developed from other philosophies. In this way, Western sociology failed to develop a composite and comprehensive paradigm, which led to the creation of multiple terms to describe the different manifestations of the same phenomena. Studies discussing secularism from new perspectives emerged recently in the Western world even after it was believed in the 1960s that secularism’s meaning was set and secured.¹³³ The emergence of various new meanings serves as proof that many studies on secularism have failed.

Moreover, the new meanings generated in attempts to fix issues with the earlier definitions continuously added vagueness to the term. On behalf of these issues, Almasiri dedicated his secularism project to reveal the ambiguity of the problematic term by dismantling it and breaking it into two terms. For partial secularism, Almasiri says that there is a definite and relative separation between religion or theology and the state in almost every human society (except for some primitive societies, where the chairman of the tribe is the priest, prophet, or descendant of a God or Goddess, or in the case that daily rituals are religious, for example, in Israeli worship before the appearance of central Eucharistic worship).¹³⁴ In the composite communities, there are different authorities with differing purposes, even in the pagan empires that rule by a deified king, for instance, there may be a deified king, a high priest, and the leader of

¹³¹ Ibid, 102.

¹³² Ibid, 29.

¹³³ Almasiri, *Partial and Comprehensive Secularism*, 16.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 22.

the army.¹³⁵ The religious foundation cannot unify with the political foundation in any composite, civilized, and political community, just as any state's internal security cannot unify with the foundation of the military when their job is external security¹³⁶. Therefore, Almasiri believed that in the prophetic Islamic state, this kind of separation or variation between foundations in the state occurred, which the prophet elucidated when saying, "You know your world, or you know better at your worldly matters."¹³⁷ As that hadith explains, in planting (farming), people can use their worldly knowledge to complete their career or delegations. Moreover, there is the concept or the order of jihad (fighting), which contains this aspect:

Said Ibn Ishaq in his context on the perpetration of the *Badr* Battle: the prophet Mohammed, PBUH, was looking for the water, so he settled with the people in a well nearby Badr, then AlHubab Ibn AlMonther Ibn AlJamoh went to the prophet and asked him, 'Oh, Prophet, have you seen this place that you sat with; has Allah told you about it or is it battle and scheming?' The prophet replied, 'It is battle, opinion, and scheming.' Then Alhubab said, 'Oh, Prophet, this is not a good place to set by, what if we move on and come nearer from the enemy then we dig a well then build a tank and fill it with the water, so we drink and fight while the other people, the enemy, won't be able to drink?' The prophet replied 'Well said, you indicated the opinion.'¹³⁸

From this hadith, Almasiri indicates that in Islam, there is a differentiation between revelations, which cannot be argued, and battle issues where the mechanism of the war ascends under-recognition of the instantaneous circumstances. Thus, there is a difference between the theological foundation and military foundation, and, with the acceleration of the Islamic state's composition and complexity, the diffraction between the foundations accelerates.¹³⁹ Therefore, the separation between the theological foundations and the foundations of the state is not just limited to secular societies; it also exists in many of the composite communities by some means.

On that basis, many scholars who define secularism have seen no opposition between secularization and being religious. Almasiri aligns with this view and also sees no conflict between the two. Moreover, Almasiri sees the implications of this separation

¹³⁵ Ibid, 23.

¹³⁶ Ibid, 23.

¹³⁷ There is a disagreement on the validity of stating the hadeeth <https://fatwa.islamweb.net/ar/fatwa/61047/>

¹³⁸ Mention by Ibn Hasham in his book of the journey of prophet -Alseerah-

¹³⁹ Almasiri, Partial and Comprehensive Secularism, 18.

(which applies only to technical procedures) as an effective mechanism for a reformation project if the ultimate reference is transcendental and goes beyond utilitarianism, materialism, and relativism.¹⁴⁰ The problem with partial secularism lies with the fact that sweeping, comprehensive secularism follows it and partial secularism can then no longer exist. Because the mission of the modern state is not only to control infrastructure but also the superstructure of the community, it goes beyond the separation of the Church and state.¹⁴¹ So the question of partial secularism becomes: what if partial secularism inevitably leads to a comprehensive secularism paradigm? Advocating partial secularism might seem like a way to rid society of the current comprehensive paradigm of secularism, and it also might seem like a way to advocate for the Islamic prophetic example of a state. On the other hand, the goal of partial secularism might be a trap that advocates for a system that will naturally cycle back to the current comprehensive paradigm of secularism. The first scenario takes us back to the words of al-Jabri when he said that when the pioneers of the religious reformation movement in Europe claimed reformations for the Church and advocated for humanism at the beginning of the reformation in the early ages of the Renaissance, they were affected by Islamic civilization.¹⁴² More specifically, they were affected by Ibn Rushd and the translation of the Quran. Therefore, the partial secularism promoted at this time most likely had no conflict with the Islamic religion. As Almasiri assured, many moderate Islamists who believe they oppose secularism would accept this partial separation or differentiation after becoming aware that secularism as ‘separation between religion and state’ is only applied to technical procedures.¹⁴³ These moderate Islamists would just need to understand the alliance between partial secularism and Islam’s grand teleology and meanings. Almasiri wanted to ease and reduce the high sensitivity that Islamists tend to have toward the term ‘secularism’ because his reform project depended on the mass of the Muslim majority to participate and to bear the responsibility of delivering the project to the world, as will be discussed in the following section.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 19.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 20.

¹⁴² Aljabri, *Criticizing the Need of Reform*, 30.

¹⁴³ Almasiri, *Partial and Comprehensive Secularism*, 19.

5.2. Features of the New Islamic Discourse

In Almasiri's paper "Features of the New Islamic Discourse," published in 1997, Almasiri clarifies his interest in critiquing modernism, which he calls the 'Islamic critique of modernism.'¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, Almasiri elucidates what varies his Islamic critique from others by saying that, "Unlike the Western critique, the Islamic critique towards modernism is optimistic and sanguine, while the Western critique is gloomy and nihilist."¹⁴⁵ Also, when explaining the features of the new Islamic discourse, he emphasizes that his reformation project is a universal vision. After he formed his critique and terminology by redefining the terms in his works and encyclopedia, Almasiri presents his vision not only to the Western world or to the Islamic world but as a universal vision. The Islamic vision does not appear as a tendency in his project but as a complete dye and a comprehensive applicable spirit. Almasiri's interest in preserving humanity in different thoughts and intellectual ideas led him to the Islamic intellectual system.¹⁴⁶ This interest manifested itself clearly in the features he mentions in the new Islamic discourse that he presents as a reformation project.

Currently, there are no English translations of the features of Almasiri's new Islamic discourse, so translating the features correctly, clearly, and with his intent in mind is extremely important to understand his reform project. This paper attempts to do this below.

Almasiri starts by dividing Islamic discourse into two types, the old and the new, because he wants the reader to understand his position and audience. According to Almasiri, the old Islamic discourse ascended before Western colonists entered the Islamic world. During and after the colonists' arrival, the old Islamic discourse tried to respond to modernism and colonialism. This anti-colonialism discourse was dominant in the Arab world until the 1960s.¹⁴⁷ Almasiri's analysis of Islamic discourse started in the twentieth century, and he calls the discourse which ascended in the 1960s

¹⁴⁴ Almasiri, Features of New Islamic Discourse, 4.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 8.

¹⁴⁶ Harfi, Abdulwahab Almasiri: Secularism, Materialism and Globalization, 17.

¹⁴⁷ Almasiri, Features of New Islamic Discourse, 8.

the ‘new Islamic discourse.’¹⁴⁸ Almasiri makes this distinction based on the change in its stance on modernism.

Almasiri further divides the new Islamic discourse based on the groups that advocated for it. He classifies discourse advocates as either ‘populist advocates’, ‘political advocates’, or ‘intellectual advocates’. The populist advocates originated when the masses felt intuitively that the process of modernization, globalization, and secularization was not good for the nation. They noticed that modernization was a Westernizing process despoiling the Arab cultural and religious heritage while giving no advantages. Additionally, they can see that the process leads to more colonial hegemony and class polarization.¹⁴⁹ Almasiri expresses their attitude towards the Westernizing process, saying, “These masses try to hold onto Islam (they know it very well), they cocoon inside it until Allah comes with rescue and salvation.”¹⁵⁰ In this description of populist advocates, Almasiri implies that they are oppressed masses who do not think of any resistance other than sticking resolutely to their religion. Perhaps this opposition to Westernization made the old Islamic discourse rigid and strict to some extent, and the rigidity of this discourse sometimes expresses itself through violent protests.¹⁵¹ The poorer classes widely accept this populist discourse, but Almasiri adds that wealthier people espouse this discourse because they firmly believe in the importance of religious and cultural heritage and realize that if they were to lose this heritage, they would lose everything.¹⁵²

The second type of discourse advocates who argue for Almasiri’s new Islamic discourse are the political advocates, who are primarily members of the middle-class, including academics, college students, and professionals who feel the need for an Islamic movement to protect the Islamic nation. These political advocates believe in the importance of political organizations; they realize the significance of building a political entity to attain their main aim, which is to protect the Islamic nation.¹⁵³ In describing the timeline of this group’s formation, Almasiri adds, “They organized

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 12.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 11

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 2.

¹⁵¹ E.g. Al Qaeda, Taliban...etc.

¹⁵² Almasiri, Features of New Islamic Discourse, 3.

¹⁵³ Ibid, 3.

themselves in a political form that did not resort to violence. Likewise, educational foundations and youth organizations followed the group, some of whom attempted to seize power by force, but after 1956... a general trend towards working through legitimate channels ascended. However, the main interest of this group's discourse was mostly confined to the political and educational field."¹⁵⁴ The third and final type of discourse advocates are the intellectual advocates, who address the Islamic movement's theoretical and intellectual side.

The previous classification by advocate type does not mean that the three types of discourse are separate. The populist and political discourses are entangled, and likewise, the political and intellectual discourses intersect in many ways. Even though the intellectual discourse is separate from the populist discourse, they both interact through political speech. However, an analytical purpose needs to assume their independence from one other.

The classification above aims to elaborate on the differences between the advocates of the new Islamic discourse. Although Almasiri emphasized the new Islamic discourse as it involves his reformation project, he believed that it needs to be revised again because, "Every political and intellectual movement needs to pause from time to time, to review its thoughts and ideas to deepen its dissertation and to evolve itself."¹⁵⁵

This paper recapitulates the translation and interpretation of the main features of the new Islamic discourse below:¹⁵⁶

- The new Islamic discourse rejects the idea of Western centralism (eurocentrism).
- The new Islamic discourse does not dedicate itself to glorifying the past nor improving the West's perception of Islam. Likewise, it does not definitively reject the West altogether or picture it as the source of evil.
- The new Islamic discourse advocates know their position on modernism, they do not see any need to import the West's modernism with its sweetness and

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 4.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 4.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 8-18.

bitterness, nor do they believe that Western modernism should be rejected and refused completely.

- The new Islamic discourse stays rooted in its Islamic ground and then interacts with Western modernism with openness by developing and criticizing it. It is also a practical discourse, contrary to the old Islamic discourse, which swings between altogether rejecting Western modernism and being its silent recipient. However, the old Islamic discourse is an accumulative discourse that accepted many Western modernist ideals without knowing its relation to the Western universal vision. It then takes existing and established parts of the Islamic system without realizing that Islam presents a comprehensive universal vision.
- The new Islamic discourse can utilize from the Western modernity, realize different humanitarian dimensions, and discover productive potentials from the Islamic system¹⁵⁷.
- The Islamic system has always discussed issues such as class struggle, equitable distribution of wealth, women's rights, and the environment's impact on the formation of human personality. The awareness of the new Islamic discourse to these issues deepens through its interaction with the Western discourse. The new Islamic discourse advocates do not mind utilizing solutions or discoveries from modernity to approach these issues if these solutions do not contradict the Islamic paradigm.
- The new Islamic discourse realizes that the human sciences are neither global, accurate, nor natural. Instead, the Western perspective from which the human sciences developed has filtered them and steeped them in bias. Likewise, the new Islamic discourse realizes that the human sciences do not operate under ethics like the old sciences. It also realizes that Western vocabulary and linguistics are based on cultural biases. In this way, a Western dictionary could function as a societal dictionary because every word has its roots in and is embodied by a complicated cultural concept. For example, a term like

¹⁵⁷ Abdulfattah Ismail and Abdo Ibrahim, "the new Islamic discourse's features in Almasiri's vision", (research, civilization center for researches and studies center, 2002), <http://hadaracenter.com/pdfs/%D8%A8%D8%AD%D8%AB%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%8A.pdf>

'modernity' embodies concepts and exists within a complex cultural context that identifies its meaning.

- One of the main issues recognized by the new Islamic discourse is that the West detaches science, technology, and democratic procedures from teleology and religious values. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that the new Islamic discourse relates meaning and a universal vision to every Western philosophy, science, technology, and invention to ensure that they work beneficially for humanity.
- Unlike the old Islamic discourse, the new discourse does not narrowly limit what is *halal* and *haram* or what is allowed and what is prohibited. It recognizes the component and the cultural dimension of the phenomena. For example, having a car is not prohibited by the Islamic Sharia law, but the societal impact of the car and the idea surrounding the car was never wholly analyzed by the old Islamic discourse (to be fair, the implications of the car was not realized by the West either).
- Repeatedly, the new discourse emanates from a comprehensive cognitive vision that can benefit from Western modernity, recognize new human dimensions, and discover the creative potential of the Islamic system.
- The new Islamic discourse believes that there is a need for the Islamization of human knowledge and the establishment of an integrated and independent cultural dictionary that would distinguish and separate the West's achievements from its core values. It crucially recognizes the need to establish an independent Islamic vision for development.

The above points were the main points of the features that Almasiri elucidates in his reformation project. It is clear that he does not use an approach that merely compromises Islamic values and western values; instead, he highlights significant intellectual narratives. Almasiri directs his calls for reformation to specific people, the Islamists, whom he counts on for his reformation project. He believes that by guiding them to change their underlying thoughts and adjust their practices, they can lead and continue his universal reformation project and present it as a global reformation project. The central issue of his project lays in this belief.

Almasiri's reformation project requires people who already view Islam as a universal vision. The groups that most surely possess this view are the Islamic jurists and scientists, yet the evidence and facts do not support the idea that Islamists are readily able to adapt and reconcile their conservative ideas. In his last years, Almasiri realized that his reformation project was harder than he had expected. His aspirations were higher than reality permitted, and we can sense that he knew this from his last interviews and by watching him engage with the media and sometimes with the political field such as his participation with the Alwasat party.¹⁵⁸ He knew that his books were not enough to convince people of and form a new Islamic discourse and spent his last years attempting to engage with populist platforms.

5.3. Obstacles of Almasiri's Reformation Project

Since Almasiri's vision was in defense of humanity at its core, it draws on humanism ideas and promotes any thoughts that exult humans, such as religious thoughts. Because the project uses Islamic doctrine as its base, Almasiri identified religious Muslims as the aptest advocates and bearers of the reformation project.¹⁵⁹ This is where Almasiri's reformation project met its main obstacle. Many religious Muslims are involved in groups and blocs that are isolationist, and these groups typically contain intellectual and practical shortcomings. This section attempts to highlight these shortcomings and suggest alternatives. From the title of Almasiri's reformation project, it is clear that the project's advocates should be fully aware of the Islamic discourse. However, the main problem with the Islamic clergy is its exclusivity and how it pushes away any scholars who have not studied in their Islamic schools or scholarly entities. Moreover, many Islamic schools focus on Islamic studies and disregard other subjects; this monopolization of the Islamic sciences and Islamic platforms is a pervasive phenomenon. Therefore, any project that appears to contain revisions of the heritage of the studies is usually attacked.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Abu Alola Madi, "People that I knew: Abdulwahab Almasiri the Human", Alwasat party, Dec 25, 2017.

¹⁵⁹ Almasiri, *Features of New Islamic Discourse*, 4.

¹⁶⁰ Jassem Sultan, *Islamic Organizations' crisis: Muslim Brotherhood as an Example*, (Beirut: Arab Network for Research and Publishing, 2015), 25.

Additionally, the central ideology of Almasiri's reform project includes studying, examining, and criticizing the outcomes of Western civilization from the Renaissance to contemporary thoughts, inventions, and manifestations. Unfortunately, this kind of studying is restrained and prohibited for most Islamic scholars, especially in Arab countries.

The main obstacle that faces Almasiri's project is that it requires the leaders of the new Islamic discourse to be Muslim with a firm intellectual base in both the Islamic and Western sciences. Because it is improbable that Islamists or current Islamic scholars would be able to carry out Almasiri's reformation project, there is a need to build a new generation of philosophers to carry out his vision. Implementing this idea is challenging because it requires a mentality that understands the core of Islamic studies and philosophy as well as a comprehension of Western heritage, studies, science, and technology.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The difference between partial secularism and comprehensive secularism lies in the degree to which they affect a citizen's life. Partial secularism demands only the separation of religion from the state and is silent regarding ultimate truth, absolute values, private life, and political, economic, and educational decisions. Contrarily, comprehensive secularism is the separation of religion from the state and the separation of religious, moral, and human values from the totality of human life in its public and private aspects. It also separates the final reference of the state from all decisions regarding humanity. Therefore, holiness is removed from the world, all matters become relative, and man and nature are transformed into a useful material that the strongest employ for their benefit. As a result of this, knowledge separates from value, the body separated from value, and life separate from value. The Darwinian system appears as the only possible system of values in such a world. As such, Almasiri sees secularism in its comprehensive version as incompatible with all religions. Due to the entrenchment of the modern nation-state in individuals' private lives through media, education, healthcare, and various other aspects, Almasiri argues that while partial secularism is the definition and application that secularists desire, it is not realistic in modern society. Instead, as it is applied in modern times, secularism takes its comprehensive form.

This paper seeks to deliver a complete understanding of Almasiri's definition of partial and comprehensive secularism. To achieve this, I followed Almasiri from his personal and intellectual roots, through his structuralism methodology and definitions of secularism, and then explained and analyzed his reformation project based on his definition. While his reformation project was not entirely successful, I found it necessary to present it because critiquing the manifestations of the definition is just as relevant as studying its roots. A full critique of Almasiri's new Islamic discourse is outside the scope of this research but should be further studied and critiqued in line

with the application of the definitions of partial and comprehensive secularism to the Arab world.

This paper also addresses other scholars' contributions to the study of secularism, both in the West and the Arab world. I discussed the influences that these scholars had on Almasiri and how Almasiri differed from these scholars to elucidate the position of Almasiri's work in the field.

Although Almasiri had a well-rounded academic and personal life that lent itself to a holistic approach to secularism, he considered himself an Islamist scholar and therefore tailored his research to the context and language of the Arab world. One of the main challenges I faced in developing this thesis was language because the primary sources were in Arabic. Translating the texts and complicated philosophical ideas into English consumed ample time. When translating philosophical ideas, it is crucial to consider interpreting the logical base of those ideas. Therefore, many ideas were reduced due to the translation process, and sometimes the ideas became less profound as a result.

Secularism is a central debatable issue in the current age as contentious changes accelerate politically and socially on the regional and global levels. Stakeholders in conflict zones fight over what actions to take and philosophies to implement to stabilize and develop the region. Occasionally, a new dispute regarding the application of secularism emerges between different ideological entities at both the intellectual and populist levels. In this manner, this paper gains its significance, as the term 'secularism' needs to be represented by an applicable definition to have any practical discussion. Few scholars have addressed secularism and analyzed its notional and intellectual roots to simplify the term's complications without falling into reductionism.

Almasiri's speciality lies in his comprehensive method when addressing the topic. As the first chapter explains, he gained his doctorate in English Literature. His background in comparative literature empowered him to compare other's thoughts and their impact. Likewise, as a literary critic, Almasiri recruits critical literature terms, such as structuralism, to deconstruct the philosophical base of secularism, materialism, and

modernism. That allows him to reach the comprehensive intellectual level of chef d'oeuvre. He deconstructs the term as he deals in detail with the rest of the philosophical terms that had a significant role in forming the concept of secularism. Therefore, when reading Almasiri, the reader becomes familiar with the details of its Western philosophical and intellectual references.

Another feature that makes Almasiri's definition significant is that his answers are related to reality. Unlike many other Islamic scholars who wrote about secularism, dealt with its definition, or even went to the roots of the term linguistically or conceptually, Almasiri does not stop his critique on the theoretical level. He can relate his definition and theories to everyday life. Due to this rare feature of Almasiri's approach, which has its base in the unique perspective he has from the features of his personal and intellectual life, his definition is accessible in a way that other scholars fail to achieve.

Manifestations of secularism in the Arab world also support Almasiri's definition of secularism. Take the Gulf countries as an example, which the fourth chapter elucidated. Gulf countries have fallen into the spiral of consumption and objectification of humans and operate mainly on market ethics. Gulf societies have shifted gradually from being a community into being a society. Meanwhile, these Gulf countries openly claim to rebuke secularism even though their market and society operate under the principles of comprehensive secularism. His definition can also be applied to Islamic groups in the region, as discussed in the fourth chapter. Islamist groups often adopt the pragmatic approach of engaging with Western manifestations of comprehensive secularism to try to obtain seats in governance, even though they run on anti-secularist platforms. The definitions of secularism proposed by other prominent scholars in the field, including Taylor, Al-Jabri, and Arkoun, cannot explain these state and political structures in the region.

Despite studies that outline secularism's negative human and environmental consequences, secularism is still championed as a saviour and rescuer of society. The conversation on secularism in the Arab world continues, and as such, an appropriate definition needs to be studied further. The basis on the principles of comprehensiveness, accessibility, and applicability to the Arab world, this paper

argues that Almasiri's contributions to secularism are central and vital to the study of secularism in the Arab world. Scholars who critique secularism in the Arab world should avowedly study and use Almasiri's definition of partial and comprehensive secularism as an essential aspect of their work.



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CURRICULUM VITAE

Personal Information:

Name - Surname: Enas Ahmed Yahya Alawami

Education:

2004-2008 BA in Mass Communications, Sana'a University, Yemen

2017-2020 MA in Philosophy, Ibn Haldun University, Turkey

Experience:

2003 – 2007 English teacher, Oxford Institute, Sanaa Yemen.

Jan- Aug, 2009 Journalist, Yemen Times Magazine, Sanaa Yemen

2010- 2011 English Teacher, Seeds Institute, Sanaa Yemen.

2013-2014 Marketing Manager, Yemen Cable Company, Sanaa Yemen

Courses:

Oct- Nov, 2011, Leadership Program, US State Department, USA.

2012-2013, Neuro Language Programming (NLP), consulting Institute, Yemen.