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Dressler, Markus; Salvatore, Armando; Wohlrab-Sahr, Monika

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

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### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Dressler, M., Salvatore, A., & Wohlrab-Sahr, M. (2019). Islamicate Secularities: New Perspectives on a Contested Concept. *Historical Social Research*, 44(3), 7-34. <https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.44.2019.3.7-34>

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## Islamicate Secularities: New Perspectives on a Contested Concept

*Markus Dressler, Armando Salvatore & Monika Wohlrab-Sahr\**

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**Abstract:** *Islamicate Secularities: Neue Perspektiven auf ein umstrittenes Konzept.* In the colonial era, new distinctions and differentiations between religious and non-religious spheres took shape within inner-Islamic discourses, partly as a product of encounters with Western knowledge. This introduction conceptualizes these distinctions and differentiations in relation to Islam, drawing on Marshall Hodgson's concept of the Islamicate, which we employ for our heuristic notion of Islamicate secularities. It charts the paradigmatic conflicts that shape the contested fields of Islamic and secularity/secularism studies. The introduction discusses the epistemological and political context of these debates, and argues that theoretical and normative conflicts should not hinder further empirical inquiries into forms of secularity in Islamicate contexts. It also explores promising theoretical and methodological approaches for further explorations. Particular emphasis is laid on the historical trajectories and conditions, close in time or distant, that have played a role in the formation of contemporary Islamicate secularities.

**Keywords:** Secularity, multiple secularities, Islamicate secularities, Islam and politics, Marshall Hodgson.

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\* Markus Dressler, Universität Leipzig, KFG "Multiple Secularities - Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities", Nikolaistraße 8-10, 04109 Leipzig; markus.dressler@uni-leipzig.de.  
Armando Salvatore, McGill University, School of Religious Studies, Birks Building, 3520 Rue University, Montreal, QC Canada H3A 2A7; armando.salvatore@mcgill.ca.  
Monika Wohlrab-Sahr, Universität Leipzig, KFG "Multiple Secularities - Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities", Nikolaistraße 8-10, 04109 Leipzig; wohlrab@uni-leipzig.de.  
This introduction is the product of a collaborative project and the synergies and productive tensions it has entailed. A first milestone in the project was the conference on "Muslim Secularities: Explorations into Concepts of Distinction and Practices of Differentiation," convened from June 18-20, 2017 at the Centre for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences on "Multiple Secularities: Beyond the West, beyond Modernities" at Leipzig University. Early drafts of most of the articles in this special issue were presented at the conference, and we are grateful to all who participated in and helped organize that stimulating event. The discussions at that conference influenced our thinking on Islamicate secularities. We are also indebted to Nequín Yavari, Florian Zemmin, and Nader Sohrabi for their critical feedback on (and valuable contributions to) this introductory essay. We owe our gratitude to Julia Heilen for her considerable support in the cumbersome business of proofreading the articles in this issue, and to Judith Zimmermann, who both proofread and assisted in the organization of the editing process. We would also like to thank our student research assistants Manuel Heller and Carolin Hundt. Finally, we wish to thank the numerous anonymous reviewers for their precious feedback.

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## 1. Introduction

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Critical studies on secularity, secularism, or secularization have wielded considerable influence over the academic study of Islam for at least a decade. Often inspired by scholarship in the footsteps of Edward Said (1978) and other figureheads of post-colonial studies, critiques have been launched against what was perceived as the essentialism of sections of Islamic Studies and the field's complicity with colonial and imperialist projects (see, for example: Esposito and Tamimi 2000; Anidjar 2006). The work of Talal Asad (1993; 2003; 2006) in particular has inspired an influential new school of research that challenges previous frameworks for investigating religion (Hirschkind and Scott 2006). Asad directs attention to the way in which hegemonic knowledge about religion and Islam is structured by arrangements of power vested in a secular episteme (see also the more recent contribution by Ahmed 2016). Opponents of Asad's views contend that parts of this strand of research are exposed to a high degree of politicization or even reverse essentialism<sup>1</sup> and therefore obstruct advances in scholarship (see, for example: Al-Azmeh 1996; Mirsepassi 2017, 146-87; Hughes 2012 and 2015).<sup>2</sup>

Advocates of a sociological approach to Islamic Studies have adopted an alternative approach that in fact predates the post-colonial critique of Orientalism (Turner 1978). These researchers have critically investigated selected works within Islamic Studies in order to tease out an approach that can link up with sociological classics (e.g., Weber's oeuvre) while also critiquing classic sociological theory (Stauth 1993; Turner 2013; Salvatore 2016a). This strand of research has often intersected the investigation and theorization of 'multiple modernities,' a research program that includes an initial discussion of the conditions that led to the development of a plurality of secular epistemes, rather than the colonial West having a monopoly on the contours of modernity (see, for example: Arnason, Eisenstadt, and Wittrock 2005, 6; Arnason 2005, 38-41).

This HSR Special Issue approaches patterns of secularity in contexts where Islam had a strong historical impact, while adopting a contextualizing approach that regards itself as being in dialogue with comparative historical sociology. Confronting historical data raises specific problems for research in the social sciences. While it is undeniable that Western colonial developments enjoy a primacy in the global process of establishing metrics for secularity, exclusive focus on the post-colonial often leads to unsatisfactory contextualization of pre-modern and early modern (pre-colonial) non-Western developments and their interaction with Western globalized standards (Salvatore 2016b). The modern Western concept of the 'secular' is itself part of a web that includes concepts

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<sup>1</sup> For an early critique of Edward Said's Orientalism (1978), see al-Azm 1981.

<sup>2</sup> For a recent critical assessment of Asad's work see Enayat 2017.

such as society, nationhood, citizenship, science, and history, all associated with the formation of the modern nation state. These concepts gained further traction during the 19th century as a result of the accelerated globalization of knowledge. This acceleration largely unfolded in the context of colonial domination and encounters with the political and intellectual traditions of the colonized people and territories (van der Veer 2001; Dressler and Mandair 2011; Bentlage et al. 2016). In this novel context, earlier inner-Islamic traditions were not entirely obliterated by Western knowledge, but transformed by it (Salvatore 2016a). In the colonial era, new distinctions and differentiations between religious and non-religious spheres gained shape within inner-Islamic discourses, partly as a product of encounters with Western knowledge.

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## 2. Secularities

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Against this background, our goal is to shift attention to historical and sociological questions concerning these conceptual distinctions and structural differentiations as they developed not only during the modern colonial and post-colonial eras, but also in early modern and pre-modern times. In line with the *Multiple Secularities* research project, out of which this special issue evolved, we explore this dual perspective on distinctions and differentiations in relation to the concept of ‘secularity.’<sup>3</sup>

Our use of the term *secularity* differs from that of scholarship that focuses on the critique of *the secular* as an agent, and *secularism* as a political formation (see, for example: Shakman Hurd 2007; Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2008; Hirschkind and Scherer 2011; Scherer 2011; Mahmood 2015; Scott 2017),<sup>4</sup> often aligned with a critical perspective on *secularization* as an analytical concept. This line of enquiry assumes that secularization – in the sense of structural differentiation – is closely entangled with the politics of secularism. Our project insists, however, on addressing the problem of secularity as an historical one. To that end, we demarcate secularism, secularization, and secularity as follows: We reserve the concept of ‘secularism’ for arrangements characterized by institutional separation of politics or the state from religion (Kuru 2009; Stepan 2010; Koenig 2015) and its ideological legitimation. By ‘seculariza-

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<sup>3</sup> These questions are reflected in the research currently underway at the Centre for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences on “Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities” at Leipzig University, funded by the German Research Council (DFG) since 2016, with which the authors of this introduction are affiliated.

<sup>4</sup> According to Hirschkind and Scherer (2011, 620), “the critical study of secularism” perceives secularism as a “formation” at work in a great variety of social arenas, thereby “articulating new connections between this formation and liberalism, pluralism, and Christianity, as well as biomedicine, spirituality, capitalism, the nation-state, violence, and micropolitics.” Joan Scott (2017) adds sex as a further arena of secularism to be considered in this regard.

tion,' we understand processes of functional differentiation, religious decline, and privatization of religious practice (Casanova 1994). In contrast, we use 'secularity' to indicate fundamental cultural and symbolic distinctions, as well as institutionally anchored forms and arrangements of differentiation between religion and other social spheres and practices. These may be linked to secularist ideologies in certain historical circumstances, but they may also arise independently (Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt 2012, 881).

While we maintain that the domains of the religious and the secular were discursively shaped in the context of Western modernity, we also hold that comparable (but not identical) distinctions and differentiations between religious and non-religious spheres occurred in non-Western, early and pre-modern contexts. We further assume that such distinctions and differentiations have contributed to (or intermingled with) the knowledge and institutional forms of religion and secularity that established themselves globally in the context of Western political hegemony. The present thematic issue thus addresses the ways in which modern concepts have been negotiated and/or adapted by Muslims, acquiring new layers of meaning in the process. Appropriation of hegemonic Western concepts is an integral component of Islamic discourses on secularity. Exploring such appropriations requires attention to the dynamics of colonial encounters and cultural translations within an entangled history (*histoire croisée*) framework similar to the explorations of Rajeev Bhargava on the Indian context. Bhargava (2010) notes the "critical junctures" in pre-modern Indian history (ibid., 160), which opened up "conceptual spaces" (ibid., 160, 165), and built "conceptual resources that provide the cultural pre-conditions for the development of modern secularism in India" (ibid., 170).

Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt (2012, 887) understand the historical formation of secular-religious distinctions and differentiations as responses to specific historical situations that prompted not just a cognitive separation between the two spheres but also a cultural commitment to maintaining them as such. To address the link between forms of differentiation and historical circumstances, they turn to Niklas Luhmann's term "reference problems," which he used "to compare alternative social structures in their problem-solving capabilities [...] regarding a specific functional reference problem" (Stichweh 2011, 293) without normatively presupposing the priority of a specific solution. For modern constellations, four ideal-typical reference problems have been suggested for secularity: the problem of individual freedom vis-à-vis dominant social units; the problem of religious heterogeneity and associated conflicts; the problem of social or national integration and development; and, finally, the problem of the independent development of institutional domains (Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt 2012, 887). Clearly, most of these are closely linked to the formation of modern societies and states, and the regulatory and integrative ideas (*idées directrices*) on which they are founded. Examples of pre-modern or early modern cognates of such reference problems include 'securing political

power' or 'dealing with competing truth claims.'<sup>5</sup> The underlying assumption is that once forms of division are not only practiced but also expressed in distinct categories, they develop an autonomous cultural and political dynamic (ibid., 890). Condensed into guiding ideas, they offer central motifs under which groups can coalesce to advance competing positions. It is at this level that secularity enters the political arena and connects with ideological secularism.

The *Multiple Secularities* approach involves an investigation of the historical conditions under which such distinctions and differentiations emerge as well as the consequences they engender. Concurrently, we question conventional assumptions regarding the boundaries of the 'West' and 'modernity' and aim to provide a comparative perspective in which similarities and differences as well as continuities and discontinuities can be openly discussed by drawing on different methodologies and theorizations. Examining the reach of the secular, this approach places a premium on the relations and tensions between both various Western and non-Western settings and between modern constellations and early modern or pre-modern traditions that involve distinctions between religious and non-religious concepts, practices, and spheres of life. Exploring secularity in terms of symbolic distinctions and institutional differentiations implies that religion and the secular are far from separate on the conceptual level and may even be regarded as mutually constitutive (see Asad 2006, 209 and 211). Notions of distinction and differentiation in fact presuppose interrelation.

It is the specific goal of this special issue to test the usefulness of secularity as a heuristic device for the interrogation of sociocultural constellations among Muslims, in the past as well as the present. How did Muslims tailor their understandings of *din* (the Qur'anic term that in modernity came to converge with 'religion') and Islam to cope with globalizing Western notions of religion, and how did this affect their views of society, state, and nation? Is secularity also a notion that can be fruitfully employed when researching pre-modern Muslim worlds?

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### 3. Islamicate Secularities

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When we define our subject of interest as 'Islamicate secularities,' we qualify 'secularities' through an adjective coined by Marshall Hodgson in his pioneering *The Venture of Islam* (1974). Hodgson saw the necessity to "distinguish clearly enough between studies of Islam as such and studies of Islamdom" (Hodgson 1974, 56). "Islam as such," for Hodgson, was the religion of Islam,

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<sup>5</sup> These examples have been discussed in the *Multiple Secularities* project, e.g., with reference to early Buddhism in Japan (see Kleine 2018).

which he relates to matters of cult and dogma and to a spiritual dimension reflecting a “cosmic” or “ultimate orientation” (ibid., 8, 74). This alleged kernel of Islamic religion is distinguished from the “overall culture in which religion simply takes its place” (ibid., 57-8). To segregate such cultural developments from the domain of Islamic religion, Hodgson introduced two new terms: “Islamdom” as a noun and “Islamicate” as a matching adjective: “I thus restrict the term ‘Islam’ to the *religion* of the Muslims, not using that term for the far more general phenomena, the society of Islamdom and its Islamicate cultural traditions” (ibid., 58). Accordingly, he suggested that the adjective “Islamic” be used to denote “‘of or pertaining to’ Islam *in the proper, the religious, sense.*” The term Islamicate, on the other hand, could be employed to describe things that “would refer not directly to the religion, Islam, itself, but to the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims, both among Muslims themselves and even when found among non-Muslims” (Hodgson 1974, 59). For Hodgson, the analytical distinction between religion/Islam on the one hand and the society of Islamdom and Islamicate culture on the other (“the social and cultural complex”) corresponded with Muslim practices of distinction:

What was religion and, in particular, what was Islam, was always, if diversely, kept consciously distinct from the total culture of Muslim society. In even the most pious man’s life there was much that he could not call religious (ibid., 89).

Hodgson’s concept of Islamicate is of interest to our project since it constitutes an influential scholarly intervention in the field of Islamic Studies that (1) introduces a conceptual distinction between religious and non-religious aspects of Islam at large, (2) alludes to practices of distinction within societies and cultures where Islam was the dominant religion, and (3) insinuates that the etic distinction, which we use as observers, between either religion and non-religion or religion and secularity is matched by a variety of emic distinctions used by Muslim social actors. Our investigation into how Muslims and others in their surroundings historically distinguished between Islam and/or *din* (‘religion’) on the one hand and fields and practices located outside of Islam and/or *din* on the other broadly corresponds with Hodgson’s quest. Based on this affinity, we employ ‘Islamicate’ not so much as an organizing concept structuring our research agenda, but more moderately as a notion that allows us to qualify forms of secularity that have developed in contexts where Islamic traditions have had a strong impact on society, culture, and politics.<sup>6</sup> The downside of

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<sup>6</sup> It is a possible collateral effect of such secularities that certain elements within the broader Islamic tradition become reified as ‘Islamic’ and pitted against other elements that are likewise reified as ‘non-Islamic.’ In a similar vein, Bauer (2011, 192-223) has described the discursive homogenization of Islam since the 19th century as “Islamization of Islam.”

Hodgson's conceptualization of a binary Islam/Islamdom, however, is that it appears to rest on a sharp distinction between religion and culture.<sup>7</sup>

With this complexity in mind, the contributions to this volume tackle 'Islamicate secularities' from various positions and with an eye on the broader debate about the proper way to address Islam within "formations of the secular" (Asad 2003). Our approach considers Islamicate secularities as constituted by a complex web of historical paths, shaped by the structures and contingencies of political, economic, and social powers, and the encounter between different knowledge systems and their underlying theological and political epistemologies.

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#### 4. Secularity, Religion, and Islam

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As a heuristic device, the notion of Islamicate secularities investigates processes through which forms of symbolic distinction and institutional differentiation have been debated, embraced, or rejected in the diverse contexts in which Islam has had a strong sociocultural presence, and engaged with various religious and non-religious traditions and practices. Secularity is thus the conceptual benchmark we deploy to compare differing historical and cultural contexts. We thereby take contextual variations into account without presupposing coherent religio-civilizational frameworks that could be juxtaposed against each other – such as notions of a Christian world vis-à-vis an Islamic world. Instead, we suggest pursuing comparisons, across temporal and spatial boundaries, of specific historical phenomena, constellations, dynamics, and paths that are empirically more tangible than large religio-civilizational constructs, such as those undergirding Eisenstadt's 'multiple modernities' approach and, in a much more essentializing and polemical way, Samuel Huntington's 'clash of civilization' thesis.

In probing secularity, we choose not to overemphasize the religious dimension. While the term secularity overtly points to the relation between religion and what is distinguished/differentiated from it, it has to be underlined that any analysis of the dynamics of religion and secularity is necessarily highly complex and can never be reduced to a two-dimensional religious/non-religious or religious/secular plane. The argument that a secular realm could be included

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<sup>7</sup> It has been argued that Hodgson's concept of the Islamicate reflects a rather Christian/Protestant understanding of religion, organized around notions of piety and transcendence, and relegating everything that does not fit into the matching ideal of Islam (as religion) to the realm of culture (Turner 2013 [1974]; Yavari 2017, 93). Another concern that has been raised in response to Hodgson addresses a normative dimension of his project, namely the formulation of a "moral vision of world history" directed against "triumphalist notions of Eurocentric domination" (Lawrence 2014).

within the sphere of Islam has been used both to validate an Islamic secular order (Ghobadzadeh 2015; Jackson 2017) and to reject claims to secularized societal spheres. It reminds us of the importance of cultivating a conceptual space to (re-)think Muslims and Islam beyond the religion-secularity binary without excluding the question of distinctions and differentiation from the analysis. While the term ‘Muslim’ qualifies a person or a thing as somehow related to Islam, we should not prematurely qualify everything that relates to Islam as ‘religious’ (see also Ahmed 2016). We therefore use the term ‘Islamicate secularities’ in an effort to counter the exaggeration and homogenization of the religious dimension of the lives and societies of Muslims. The adjective Islamicate does not insinuate a ‘religious’ quality, but denotes the contexts in which Muslims, sometimes in contact and exchange with non-Muslims, engage with religion and forms of the secular.

The question of what Islam ‘is’ and how it relates to ‘religion’ also undergirds the debate between holistic and differentiationist positions in the study of Islam. Broadly speaking, the holistic position argues that the religion-secular distinction is alien to Islam, since Islam claimed authority over all spheres of life.<sup>8</sup> Proponents of this position draw mostly on dogmatic, but also on historical arguments. The differentiationist position, by contrast, claims that distinctions and differentiations akin to modern secularity are a constant of pre-modern Islam.<sup>9</sup> The ideal-typical juxtaposition of the holistic and differentiationist positions on Islam is a good heuristic tool for investigating the complex entanglements of history, politics, and doxa in the formation of knowledge about Islam. We need, however, to be aware that most scholarship on Islam is more complex than this juxtaposition is able to convey, and tends to be critical of essentialisms attributed to a singularized Islam.<sup>10</sup> Reinhard Schulze, for example, has advocated complementing differentiationist approaches to religion with attention to convergences: “Religions may be understood as the result of complex processes of differentiation and convergence in the formation of traditions” (Schulze 2015, 170; our translation). For Schulze, both ‘religion’ and ‘Islam’ are products of the dynamics between processes of differentiation and conflation, which, however, can only be captured in retrospect (ibid., 37).

Schulze’s emphasis on convergence is important for our project as it remedies a too narrowly demarcated differentiationist perspective (ibid., 147-61). The idea of a relational *double face*, where differentiation does not exclude convergence, resonates with Salvatore’s understanding of a sociology of Islam

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<sup>8</sup> This proposition has been articulated by Muslim reformers since the late 19th century as *islam din wa dawla* (“Islam is religion and state”). The expression *din wa dawla* is much older and used within Islamic discourse not as a descriptor of “Islam,” but, more generally, as an expression of the principle of the interconnectedness of religious obligation and political rule. Cf. Schulze 2015, 498-501.

<sup>9</sup> Emblematic of this argument is the work of Ira Lapidus (1975; 1992; 1996).

<sup>10</sup> For a recent enunciation of this position, see Schulze (2015, 201-2).

that “can be seen as innervating a comparative sociology of religion-cum-civility that explores modes of constructing and inhabiting the socio-cultural world” (Salvatore 2016a, 15). In this issue, Florian Zemmin (2019) goes even further and explores how, at the cusp of Muslim reform in the early 20th century, the elite intellectual Rafiq al-‘Azm strove to reformulate Islam not as the source of a realm of civility distinguished from religion that could be named ‘Islamicate,’ but as a secular societal order in its own right. Zemmin astutely interprets this development as a specifically Islamic construction of secularity, and appropriate for consideration within the framework of *multiple secularities*. Al-‘Azm worked under the influence of what has been defined a “transcultural public sphere,” where European conceptualizations could be assimilated and remolded by Muslim thinkers to recombine them with elements of their own discursive tradition. In the case at hand, the novelty of Muslim reformist thought consisted not so much in singling out an Islamicate secularity (something that earlier developments had, for the most part, already yielded), but in making it coincide with a secular social order. Zemmin also argues that in the Arabic saddle period, “individuals from the Islamic discursive tradition [...] used *islam* and related terms to convey both religion and secular society.” (Zemmin 2019, 74)

The problem of how to relate Islam to religion was raised in a groundbreaking manner by Cantwell Smith in *The Meaning and End of Religion* (1962).<sup>11</sup> If we, in agreement with Smith and Hodgson, recognize that Islam is too broad an entity to be approached with a category of religion informed solely by the Western tradition, we may attempt to determine an identifiable domain within Islam that could be related to ‘religion’ more closely. This approach leads some to focus on the Islamic *din*, a term usually translated as ‘religion,’ or on *shari‘a* as designating divine normativity which humans address via *fiqh*, the discerning activity inspired by *shari‘a*, producing jurisprudential practice, methodology, and theory.

Sherman Jackson (2017) has recently attempted to discern the secular “from within Islam” (Anjum 2017, v), arguing for an ‘Islamic secular,’ constituted by the juridical debate on the domain of *shari‘a*. Jackson conceives of that which lies beyond this domain, though still within the Islamic tradition, as the realm of the Islamic secular. Jackson’s ‘Islamic secular’ is thus not contrasted with (Islamic) religion, but is an intrinsic part of it, namely that part that is not governed in any specific way by *shari‘a*.<sup>12</sup> Jackson’s historically informed inquiry conceives of secularity not only as the realm of that which is differentiated

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<sup>11</sup> See also Dalacoura, in this issue.

<sup>12</sup> A similar attempt to locate the secular within Islam, though from an outsider’s perspective, is made by Thomas Bauer (2011, 199-222). Bauer argues that differentiation based on a division of labor among Muslims has produced various specialist discourses in which religious and secular aspects coexist.

from *religion*, but also as a realm that is relatively untouched by divine injunctions and, consequently, distinct from the realm of *shari'a*. From this perspective, the differentiation operates within Islam (Jackson 2017, 11).<sup>13</sup> Focusing on inner-Islamic differentiation, the Islamic secular is more narrow and specific than what we have termed 'Islamicate secularities,' a concept that focuses on 'religion' as the starting point for processes of distinction and differentiation.

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## 5. Secularity and Islam – Contested Relations

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The assumption that Muslims' interactions with secularism are fraught with difficulties has been commonplace in public debates on Islam since the early 20th century. In this section, we briefly describe and discuss some of the existing points of dispute.

It is frequently argued that the concept of the secular developed within Latin Western Christendom due to certain features of Christianity and its history, with its dual institutional structure of Pope and Emperor, and their respective, often rival apparatuses configuring corporate bodies (ultimately church vs state).<sup>14</sup> Starting from this premise, it is argued that a clear distinction that derives from institutional differentiation is absent in Islamic traditions.<sup>15</sup> Advocates of this position often argue that Islam did not experience a long-lasting conflict between church and state, or an 'ancien regime' that had to be superseded – historical specificities that birthed the need for a "hard distinction" in Europe (Salvatore 1997, 41-79). Muslims also lack the historical experience of the confessional wars that created the need for pacification through the installation of a secular power, originating from the Peace of Westphalia in mid-17th

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<sup>13</sup> Precursors of this position may be found among early 20th century discourses of Islamic reformers, such as Ziya Gökalp (Turkey) and Rafiq al-'Azam (Egypt); see Dressler (2015) and Zemmin, in this issue.

<sup>14</sup> Humeira Iqtidar refers to the historical argument as a common trope: "As many have already argued, the secularization that happened in Europe was not needed in most parts of the world because no exact equivalent of the Roman Catholic Church's hierarchical, structured, and institutionalized control existed beyond Europe" (Iqtidar 2017, 3). Azzam Tamimi (2000, 28) turns the historical difference into a political argument: "If secularism was justifiable in the West due to the nature of religion there, it is entirely unnecessary in the Muslim world. Muslims can progress and develop without having to create a wall between their religious values and livelihood."

<sup>15</sup> In her comment on Jackson's notion of the 'Islamic secular,' Iqtidar questions the differentiator perspective: "The success of differentiation theory lies not in accurately describing an empirical reality, but in concretizing a shift in popular imagination. It is worth pausing to ask: Why do we need differentiation? What forms of human behaviour and subjectivity are endorsed by assuming that human life can or should be divided into these separate spheres? How is differentiation linked to capitalism? What role did differentiation play, if any, in pre-capitalist societies?" (Iqtidar 2017, 36).

century Europe. Ultimately, the argument goes, Islam does not fit the pattern of a 'religion' to which a 'secular' sphere can be juxtaposed. Instead, Islam constitutes a "way of life" (Esposito 2000, 10-1) that systematically includes mundane practices and domains, most prominently in the spheres of the economy, politics, and law.

It has also been argued that the secular-religious divide – conceptually and practically – was brought into non-Western contexts by colonial powers or by forms of authoritarian nation-state formation. This argument is evidenced by nation-states that have chosen to impose a secular order from above. As such, simply using this conceptual divide as a neutral instrument of research would mean neglecting this very history. Consequently, a reflexive type of research would be necessary to reconstruct the history of this duality (Asad 2003, 1-17).

The above-mentioned arguments are relevant in several respects. Firstly, they hint at the need for a historical contextualization of concepts. When using a concept steeped in the history of Latin Christendom, it is necessary to reflect on how this history affects the manner in which the concept is employed in alien contexts. Clearly, the point is not to suggest that a Christian or colonial association automatically disqualifies an analytical concept or paradigm from considerations elsewhere. The genesis of a concept has no bearing on its applicability. The concepts of the secular and secularity can (and, we believe, should) innervate investigations 'beyond the West.' The theoretical problem at hand should be investigated empirically. The forms of distinction and differentiation (and also conflation and conversion) will undoubtedly be varied, but that alone does not preclude a systematic appraisal of the manifold ways in which *multiple secularities* differ from (or converge with) the hegemonic Western model.

In a field of study that is situated at the juncture of two highly politicized academic discourses, one on the study of Islam and the other on secularism and secularity, claiming a 'neutral' observer's position may be regarded as politically motivated – not least because it is impossible to partake in a politicized debate without positioning oneself in relation to the normative presuppositions that govern it. As such, it is necessary to recognize the situatedness of not only political, but also academic perspectives on Islam and secularity (Amir-Moazami 2018). While it is important to pay attention to the historical and political conflicts related to notions of the secular and secularity, a fully-fledged rejection of the question of differentiation would impoverish our methodologies. We therefore employ secularity as a heuristic and analytical tool that provides us with a perspective on distinctions and differentiation as well as reverse processes in Islamicate contexts.

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## 6. Distinctions and Differentiations Within the Islamicate World

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The *Multiple Secularities* project, from within which we developed the notion of Islamicate secularities, is committed to an exploration of the relationship between conceptual distinctions and institutional differentiations, their history, and the conditions of their emergence (Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt 2012, 2017). This is the historical-sociological perspective that inspired our initial engagement with developments in the Islamicate realm. Which kinds of social and institutional differentiation emerged within Islamicate contexts in relation to Islam, and how were those differentiations related to conceptual distinctions?

### 6.1 Internal Distinctions and Differentiations: The Early Period

*Armando Salvatore* (2019) argues in this issue that soon after the onset of Islamicate civilization, two major, often mutually reflexive, discursive traditions emerged: the courtly tradition of *adab*, and the prophetic tradition of *hadith*. According to Salvatore, the *adab* tradition inspired a ‘soft’ and malleable type of secularity with corresponding grids of distinction. *Adab* is also closely related to *siyasa*, or governance, frequently rendered as ‘public policy’ or just ‘politics.’

It can hardly be denied that certain structural differentiations have occurred within Islamicate contexts at least since the formation of the ‘*ulama*’ as a class of specialists in textual sources of the Islamic tradition between the 8th and 9th century (Lapidus 1975). Roughly in the same historical period, we can observe differentiations between the authority of the caliphate (laying an emphasis on the charismatic succession to Prophet Muhammad) and the sultanate (a de facto, non-charismatic type of political authority, often of military origin). This bifurcation was discursively legitimized within political theories developed during the period when the power of the Abbasid caliphate declined (Yavari 2014; Leder 2015) and Sufism was established as a parallel organizational form that was initially rather critical of imperial authority.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, prevailing rationales of domination (*Herrschaft*) were challenged and a new language of authority that transcended politics as the art of good government was legitimized. Discursive differentiations charted in this period between religious and proto-secular ideas took the form either of a ‘twinning’ (Yavari 2014, 32) or of a ‘soft distinction’ as discussed by Salvatore in this issue.

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<sup>16</sup> With its institutionalization in the form of brotherhoods since the 12th century, Sufism has contributed to the creation of bridges between various interpretations of Islam and between religious and non-religious cultures (Karamustafa 2007).

Yavari (2014) implicitly points to the connection between conceptual distinction and institutional differentiation when she interprets the relationship between different political institutions as reflected in the mirrors for princes literature as an “incipient secularism”: “The vizier, the sage, is distanced from the king [...]. The giver of advice and the heeder of advice need to be divided” (ibid., 83). Further examples of practices of distinction and institutional differentiation can easily be added. In her contribution to this HSR Special Issue, *Neguin Yavari* (2019) makes explicit the imperative to emancipate ourselves from a Western-centric view of modernity and the global spread of its key grammar and dictionary. She does so by investigating what she calls “the perennial tug of war between religious and lay authority” through comparative exploration of key concepts originating from medieval Islamic and Christian texts. The singularity of European problematiques and conceptualizations is thus called into question, opening up space for an analysis of emic conceptualizations of Islamicate forms of secularity.

This is easier to understand if one considers that the outcome of differentiation processes is rarely clear-cut and without residue. Ambivalence abounds, and the boundaries between fields are drawn in uncertain ways, allowing for gray areas not just to survive but also to mediate between them. This is precisely what often prevents differentiations of secular spaces and forms of action from becoming sharply defined and producing fully autonomous spaces governed by field-specific values and norms. Differentiations do occur, but most often they are soft, ambivalent, and hazy.

In pondering Islamicate distinctions and differentiations, it is worth bearing in mind that neither the Greeks nor the Hebrews – two ancient civilizations that served as founts of Western identity – had as clear-cut a notion of religion as the one that prevailed in Rome. If Islam is found to lack a comparable word or concept, it is not alone. The Islamic keyword *din*, usually considered the closest equivalent of ‘religion,’ is certainly more complex and less functionally streamlined than its Latin counterpart. Whereas *religio* designates a functional bond between men and gods beneficial to the well-being of the state, *din* indicates the personal relationship between man and God and the potentially constructive moral tension emanating from it. *Din* also encompasses other layers of signification: one denotes the right path to reach God (a meaning close to *shari‘a*), while another extends to the moment of judgment, as in the Qur’anic notion of *yawm al-din*, the Day of Judgment. This latter meaning is reflected in the corresponding relationship between God’s judgment and human judgment. Accordingly, the community of the faithful, the *umma*, was regarded as being constructed on the basis of equal dignity among human beings, in their double identity as subjects and objects of *din* (Salvatore 1997, 5-22; see also Gardet 1965).

## 6.2 Secularity and Modern Islamic Discourses

Research on secularity in modern Islamic discourses is confronted with a wholly different problem. Pre-modern Islamic discourses knew of distinctions and differentiations in relation to conceptions, practices, and structures that we in hindsight may term 'religious' and hence analytically relate to the concept of secularity, even though a notion of secularity was not yet available. This is different for both modern Islamicate societies and modern Islamic discourses, in which secularity is clearly established. A major hermeneutic challenge lies, however, in the fact that dominant Islamic discourses outwardly deny their exposition to the influences of secularity.

While no elaboration is needed on the secularity of modern Islamicate societies (see, for example: Zubaida 2005; Krämer 2013, 630), the secularity of modern Islamic discourses remains obscure. One reason for this is the double reference of Islam to both religious and non-religious spheres mentioned above. However, a closer look at modern Islamic discourses, including those that reject the mapping of secularity to Islam, reveals that they operate with that very distinction (Schulze 2010, esp. 192-204). While leading proponents of Islamic reformism might have overtly rejected a secular regime, they ultimately operated with the same premises and even effected a secularization of Islam itself (Kerr 1966, esp. 157 and 210; Zubaida 2005, 444; Tayob 2009, esp. 18).

This section has made the importance of discerning possible links between modern Islamic elaborations of secularity and pre-modern Islamicate differentiations even more evident. Only by adding the historical dimension, to be discussed in more detail below, can we assess to what extent modern Islamic intellectuals' and activists' engagement with the modern order of secularity as epitomized by the West was due to the impact of hegemonic colonial power. To what extent, on the other hand, was it a continuation of earlier, pre-colonial (trans)formations that enabled them to reconfigure distinctions and differentiations extant in the Islamicate world in interaction with modern Western standards.

In view of the historical and conceptual concerns addressed so far, the remaining part of this introduction offers a selection of sociological and historical approaches that we deem useful for further explorations of Islamicate secularities.

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## 7. Theoretical Approaches and Methodologies I: Sociology

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### 7.1 Differentiation Theory

Theorizations of social and functional differentiation have a long history in sociological theory, including Émile Durkheim's work on the division of labor as well as his sociology of religion (Durkheim 2008 [1915]), Max Weber's conceptualization of the autonomization of value spheres (Weber 1988 [1920], 555), and Georg Simmel's elaboration on "social differentiation" (Simmel 1989; see Schimank 2007). In more recent sociological theory, differentiation has been given a central position in Niklas Luhmann's theory of social systems (Luhmann 1996). While Luhmann is interested in the emergence and maintenance of functional subsystems, his work, inspired by that of George Spencer Brown (1969), refers much more broadly to the 'drawing of distinctions.' Luhmann sees religion as having an initializing role in the process of functional differentiation, differentiating itself from its environment through the specification of roles, places, and times. According to Luhmann, this process, which he refers to as "situational differentiation," is then validated through communication (Luhmann 2013, 132-61). Such situational differentiation precedes the differentiation of an autonomous system of religion, which is distinguished from other systems through a specific communication code combined with a special function (ibid., 81-104). This perspective can be linked to the "multiple modernities" approach (Eisenstadt 2000), where the emergence of a strong distinction between immanence and transcendence, with strong implications for societal developments, plays a central role for the identification of various civilizations.

While we cannot discuss the plausibility of an elaborate concept of functional or even autopoietic subsystems here, Luhmann's focus on distinctions and differentiations has been central to the concept of *multiple secularities*. According to Luhmann (2013), distinctions and differentiations between religion and other societal spheres and practices develop much earlier than functional sub-systems and systemic forms of differentiation: on the level of social interactions, social roles, social organizations, etc.

### 7.2 Boundary Formations

When focusing on distinctions, one important field of inquiry is the processes of boundary formation that implicitly or explicitly draw on notions of religion. We see such boundary formation at work when we look at discourses in which notions of a Muslim subject – or, alternatively, of a non-Islamic religious or secular subject – are formulated, negotiated, or contested (Schrode 2019;

Dressler 2019b). The Qur'an itself distinguishes Muslims from their primary others, namely adherents of the pre-Islamic Arab polytheistic practices, as well as Christians and Jews. It entails a polemic discourse against Christians and Jews, branding them as people who received the revelation, but then distorted it and went astray.

There are also non-discursive practices in which group formation and othering overlap that can be related to the formation of religious traditions and/or inner-religious differentiations. These include (1) bodily behavior (complying or not with a hegemonic etiquette of dress and comportment in particular places), and (2) spatial orderings (be it in terms of material artefacts, such as architecture, or in terms of the social ordering of space in accordance with dominant religious knowledge). One example is the re-codification of space following the Iranian Unveiling Decree of 1936, described in *Sana Chavoshian's* contribution in the present issue as a "reconfiguration of secular and religious spaces [that] involved the segmentation of urban spaces between [the] space of surveillance and private spaces free of surveillance." [2019, 181] Chavoshian argues that the secularizing and modernizing policies of Reza Shah Pahlavi, epitomized in the Unveiling Decree, were accompanied by an active attempt to build a secular city and "[promote] transparent social relations" [ibid., 182]. Her focus is on an authoritarian form of "modernization [in] urban infrastructure, planning, and architecture" as a most relevant aspect of secularization [ibid., 182]. She argues that boundary drawing between the religious and the secular as well as the private and the public, signaled in the Iranian case by forced unveiling in the public sphere, was embedded in a more fundamental reconfiguration of the city and its affective atmospheres.

Such discursive and material distinctions may also lead to differentiations of social forms with some degree of institutionalization, for example in differentiating customs and laws, social as well as political structures and hierarchies, and spaces and embodied practices. The contributions by *Mohammad Magout*, *Yee Lak Elliot Lee*, and *Brannon Ingram* (all in this special issue) illustrate the importance of boundary formation as an analytical angle for investigating Islamicate secularities. Within a differentiationist framework, Magout discusses the markedly different ways in which East African Khodja Ismailis on the one hand and Iranian, Syrian, and Tajik Ismailis on the other conceive of and practice religion. For the Khodja Ismailis, he argues,

religion serves as the overall umbrella under which most spheres of social life are organized, yet the internal logics and rationalities of these individual spheres are largely autonomous and independent of any specific religious imperatives. (Magout 2019, 175)

This contrasts sharply with the "culture of secularity" that can be observed among Iranian, Tajik, and Syrian Ismaili communities, which developed within strongly nationalist and authoritarian modernist Muslim-majority frameworks, and were

dominated by a binary distinction between a secular, nationally defined sphere that includes most aspects of social life, and a religious one that is limited to cultic aspects, with the boundaries between these two spheres fairly clearly demarcated. (ibid., 176)

Lee's contribution studies the construction of Muslim identity in discourses among elite Chinese Muslims in late imperial and republican China. The author relates the framework of differentiation theory as developed by Niklas Luhmann and Michael Stausberg (2010) to different kinds of 'Huihui' group identity formation, which he perceives as a response to a twofold reference problem: maintaining the religio-cultural group boundary while integrating into larger Chinese society. Drawing on historical sources, Lee (2019, 228) argues "that the late imperial Muslim identity configuration was constructed in the direction of 'religiosity,' whereas the post-imperial one developed towards secularity." This observation echoes Ingram's contribution, which situates the emergence of the Islamic revivalist Deoband movement within forms of colonial secularity in British India. Re-evaluating *madrasas* under colonial rule, he argues that a sharp contrast between religious and secular as well as 'useless' and 'useful' knowledge was established that "opened up a space for Deobandi scholars to re-conceive the *madrasa* as a 'religious' institution rather than one engaged in the production of civil servants" and to reframe the knowledge produced within the *madrasas* as being distinct from "the 'useful' secular knowledge promoted by the British" (Ingram 2019, 209). The juxtaposition of religious and secular knowledge that was part of the colonial discourse, Ingram argues, was taken up by the founding figures of the Deoband movement, to abandon the rational sciences as sources of unbelief and to perceive the *madrasas* "as a space impervious to state intrusion" (ibid. 217).

### 7.3 Field Theory

Another perspective of relevance for the discussion of Islamicate secularities is the social field theory developed by Pierre Bourdieu (1991). Field theory enables us to connect individual and group agency as well as power relations to structural factors. It thus constitutes a heuristic tool that enables us to focus on the social forces that organize, and are organized by, particularly strong and effective categories, such as 'religion.' The field perspective helps to explain the rivalries and conflicts over social and cultural resources as important backgrounds against which normative notions of Islam and 'being Muslim' are enunciated, in the process of which distinctions and differentiations are produced. The differentiation of the religious field from other social fields is sustained by contestations concerning what is essential to the field and practices of social distinction in the Bourdieuan sense of the term express and support power relations within the social field. Several of the articles in this issue point to the interaction between the religious field and other social fields, such as art,

politics, law, and science. *Samuli Schielke* (2019), in his present contribution on contemporary Egypt, describes poetry as

a site of language and imagination that is secular in at least two senses: first, in the sense that it produces a differentiation between divine and human powers as well as between religion and its other; and second, in the sense that it is established as an autonomous institutional field. (Schielke 2019, 104)

The field perspective should not, however, be employed in a way that corroborates social domains to an extent that the practices within specific social fields are regarded as only being of relevance to these fields with no implications for other fields. As Schielke shows, while one could conceive of literature as a separate secular field, a specific literary practice can trigger conflicts with regard to the boundaries between religious and secular competences – even when the poet writes with “pious intention” (ibid., 101). Rather than dissonance in the literary discipline, Schielke’s analysis reveals complexities in the dynamics of secular differentiation itself, which should be carefully studied at the micro-level – and not predicted on the basis of a tight field theory approach that rests on simplified views of differentiation.

#### 7.4 Social Constructivism

A further theoretical perspective that is of relevance to our approach is social constructivism. One could argue that a perspective on distinctions and differentiations concerned with Islam as religion and its others presupposes some kind of working definition with regard to what constitutes the ‘religion’ of Islam and where to draw the lines between different dimensions of Islam, such as, for example, religion, culture, economy, politics, and law. The obvious theoretical problem that comes with such a definition, namely the reification of Islamic religion (see Smith 1962), could be addressed by resorting to a social constructivist approach that conceives of the religion of Islam and the degree of its distinguishability as an empirical phenomenon understood as the result of social world construction (Berger and Luckmann 1969; Dressler 2019a). The constructivist approach enables us to address distinctions and practices related to such distinctions without falling back on essentialism. Inquiring into the fascinating case of 20th century Indonesian religion politics, *Martin Ramstedt’s* contribution in this issue (2019) can be taken as an example of a constructivist perspective that thoroughly contextualizes secularization and religionization politics and their contest-laden interactions. Drawing on the concept of ‘religion-making’ (Mandair and Dressler 2011), he offers a detailed historical overview on the ‘religionization’ of Indonesian political discourse. He notes that this ‘religionization’ relates to three interrelated processes:

(1) the way in which the Indonesian state has reified and institutionalised ‘religion’ as a monotheistic, revealed and scriptural world religion; (2) the state-sanctioned positioning of ‘religion’ as distinct from local forms of spiritual belief, resulting in the desacralisation and secularisation of the latter; and (3) the

way in which adherents of ethnic spiritualities have reframed and transformed their respective traditions in order to reflect the state-defined notion of 'religion', and, in doing so, also accepted and strengthened the state discourse of development and modernity. (Ramstedt, 264)

The social constructivist approach may also help clarify conflicting theoretical premises and normativities in various social fields, as it enables us (1) to map these premises and normativities with a modicum of methodological self-awareness and (2) to place ourselves in the field of research on Islam and the secular. In this manner, we may be able to read scholarship on Islamicate secularities as part of the discursive field through which such secularities become legible. This, in turn, necessitates consideration of the role of academic discourses in marking the distinction between religion and the secular in Islamicate contexts.

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## 8. Theoretical Approaches and Methodologies II: History

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Venturing beyond the modern entails inquiring into historical Islamic forms of knowledge, and structures that modern Muslims (and also non-Muslim observers) would be able to interpret as precursors, to or in continuity with, modern forms of secularity. Conceptual distinctions within Islamic discourses, such as between *din* and *dawla*<sup>17</sup> as well as between *al-dunya* ("this world") and *al-akhira* ("the other world"), are examples of such historical knowledge. Even if we considered the *dunya/akhira* binary as a precursor to the religion-secular binary anachronistic, the manifold ways in which semantic ties between these binaries may have played a role in Muslim appropriations of modern secularity deserve further attention. This is significant irrespective of how we judge the continuity of these binaries in modern narratives of Islam.

### 8.1 Conceptual History, Genealogy, and Path Dependency Analysis

Addressing history as one constitutive plane of our shared concern, some of the contributions to this special issue draw, more or less explicitly, on conceptual history (*Begriffsgeschichte*) (Dalacoura, Yavari) while others draw on the method of genealogy, and sometimes both approaches are combined (Zemmin). Both address the question of change in knowledge over time with an interest in the contingencies at work in the process. One difference between conceptual history and genealogy is that the former focuses on knowledge in a narrower sense, in terms of more or less axiomatic ways of thinking and explicit concepts, whereas genealogy, while certainly not oblivious to concepts, as Asad's work exemplifies, has a primary focus on knowledge that is articulated in sub-

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. footnote 8.

jectivities and embodied practices. Whereas genealogy works from the present backwards, invalidating history as an autonomous knowledge enterprise (or recruiting it for a Foucaultian ‘history of the present’), conceptual history is more interested in pursuing the question of change (and continuity, respectively) in a direction that moves *with* historical time.

The conceptual history approach is helpful for exploring how particular Islamic concepts evolved. Putting a premium on context, it evaluates changes in the meaning of certain terms over time. It can inspire inquiries, for example, into the conceptual transformations that the term *din* underwent, or into when and how concepts that are today used by Muslims to express the idea of the secular eventually acquired that particular meaning. In her engagement with medieval Islamic mirrors for princes literature, Yavari (2014, 144-7) probes cross-temporal historical claims and thus points to the limits of contextualism and thus also of conceptual history, which rests on the recoverability of specific contexts: To what extent can historical contextualism, which emphasizes the ideational context of texts, lay claim to being a method that assists in retrieving past meanings – a precondition for making claims about the continuity and discontinuity of concepts and discourses?

The genealogical approach, on the other hand, looks backwards to ask: What were the historical contingencies, and the power constellations that made notions of secularity meaningful to modern Muslims? Here, continuity is the *explanandum*. Aside from a shared focus on contingency, conceptual history is also interested in continuity in a structural sense. From this angle, it is also compatible with path dependency approaches.

Path dependency (Mahoney 2000) addresses the gradual fixation of certain developments based on contingent historical events and the decisions taken in certain historical moments. It also addresses how earlier decisions place limitations on later decisions. Whereas it is highly plausible when applied to the longevity of certain institutional arrangements, such as differing church-state relations in various European countries, the pattern of sectarian representation in Lebanon, religious regulation in Turkey, or the religious court system in the Indian subcontinent, it has been criticized due to its strong assumptions about causality and presuppositions of linear developments (see Wetzel 2005). While this may lead researchers to eschew the term dependency, how and why certain patterns of relating ‘religion’ to notions of the ‘secular’, the ‘mundane’, the ‘profane’, or the ‘cultural,’ and distinguishing between them developed and gained a certain degree of institutionalization remains an important question. Tracing developments in, and the stability of, certain paths is also an important feature of any comparative enterprise that does not rely on using developments in the West as a blueprint for developments elsewhere in the world.

## 8.2 Entangled History

Generalized notions of the West and of “the Islamic World” (Aydin 2017) are of little use if the objective is to communicate across linguistic, religio-cultural, and political boundaries. Offering an alternative to approaches that argue for the singularity of local developments and evolution of ideas, entangled history is a useful framework for countering such essentialism.

As Zemmin shows in his contribution, Rafiq al-‘Azm wrote on the rootedness of religion in society at roughly the same time as Emile Durkheim. Had al-‘Azm lived and worked slightly later, the argument would probably have been made that he had been ‘influenced’ by the much better known French sociologist. Had it been the other way around, that is, had al-‘Azm developed his ideas significantly earlier than Durkheim, an assumption of such influence would have been rather unlikely. Beyond the power dynamics at work in academic perceptions and assessments, the counterfactual scenario outlined above directs our attention to the global dominance of Western intellectual frameworks since the colonial era. The exchange of knowledge that it entails, embedded in material interrelations under conditions of inequality, was multidirectional in qualitatively new ways. The largely simultaneous emergence of rather similar ideas in different contexts is not necessarily merely down to chance, since such contexts, in spite of their myriad differences, shared in the spread of material goods as well as technologies (from the steamship to railways and the printing press) and forms of knowledge, including awareness of other geographies and people (Feener 2011; Green 2015).

*Katerina Dalacoura’s* contribution (in this issue) on the appropriation of the concept of civilization for the formulation of an ‘Islamic civilization’ in competition with secular notions of civilization among 20th century Islamist intellectuals provides us with a pertinent example of travelling ideas and the transformations engendered in the process. This transformation, the author argues, is not unidirectional but dynamic. Diverging conceptualizations and evaluations of the concept of ‘Islamic civilization’ emerge and compete with each other even within the discourse of political Islam in Turkey. In addition, Dalacoura provides a highly instructive perspective on the interrelatedness of academic and political discourses in the formation of grand concepts such as ‘Islamic civilization.’

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## 9. Conclusion

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The working assumption of this special issue has been that modern secularities within Islamicate contexts should be historicized and compared both in terms of their inner plurality and in relation to non-Islamicate contexts. This demands inquiry in historical forms of differentiation between worldly and religious

powers within Islamicate contexts, or the establishment of conceptual distinctions that harmonized with such differentiations, which could eventually be rationalized within a secular framework. While the concept of secularity does presuppose a notion of religion, and of something that is othered from religion, we must exercise care not to succumb to static notions of ‘religion’ and its (‘secular’) outside, for this would severely limit the analytical reach of our project. The notion of Islamicate secularities should not lead to the assumption that social phenomena attributed to Islam can always be understood within a religion-secular binary. Our notion of Islamicate secularities is meant to direct attention backwards: it asks about the historical trajectories and conditions, close in time or distant, that have played a role in the formation of Islamicate secularities in the present. Considering these historical trajectories does not imply that secularities have been consistently present in Islamicate societies. There may be constellations where the notion of ‘Islamicate secularities’ is of little value. The term should thus not be understood as a fixed concept, but as a heuristic notion that invites more comparative and conceptually reflexive scholarship on the practices of distinction and processes of differentiation in that contested space that comprises Muslims’ relationship with Islam and their relationship with their social and political environments.

A cautious and preliminary summary of our findings at the end of this volume might run as follows: yes, distinctions and differentiations with regard to religion *do* exist in the Islamic tradition and, in the modern period, they have increasingly been used to legitimize domains that are autonomous from religion, especially that of politics. However, what we also find is a tendency to formulate these differentiations as ‘soft distinctions’ and keep them under the umbrella of ‘Islam.’ This paints a markedly different picture from the development that Max Weber described as an autonomization of value spheres, which he regarded as a necessary consequence of ‘occidental rationalism’ (Weber 1988 [1920]).

The encounter with Western modernity and Western hegemony, materialized in Western oriented politics of secularism in the MENA region, the Indian subcontinent, and Indonesia, had a strong impact on Muslim discourses on modernity and in particular on the role of Islam as a marker of a communal and political identity therein. In the modern Islamicate world, secularity is commonly associated with colonialism, authoritarianism, and enmity to religion – a markedly different situation when compared to contexts in which references to distinctions and differentiations related to religion could claim autonomous, emancipatory intention. This serves to explain why it is comparatively difficult for secularity discourses to establish themselves in the Islamicate world: it is very difficult not only for convinced secularists, but also for actors who are less explicitly positioned in ideological terms, to justify secularity – be it within or outside of the Islamic tradition.

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