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Research Paper

Religiosity among the youth:

a phenomenon independent of the ideological establishment

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Contents

<i>RELIGIOSITY AMONG THE YOUTH:.....</i>	
<i>A PHENOMENON INDEPENDENT OF THE IDEOLOGICAL ESTABLISHMENT..</i>	
<i>INTRODUCTION.....</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>1. RELIGION AS A CULTURAL SYSTEM</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>2. POLITICAL ISLAM IN THE CONTEXT OF THE PLURALITY OF PUBLIC SPACES</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>3. YOUTH RELIGIOSITY AS A MODEL THAT IS INDEPENDENT OF THE IDEOLOGICAL ESTABLISHMENT.....</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>CONCLUSION: REVISITING THE CASE OF ISLAMIST IDEOLOGY.....</i>	<i>20</i>

Introduction

The coming years may prove that the moment of Tahrir Square on January 25, 2011 was a critical juncture in modern Arab history – not only because the general scene showed that the Arab peoples have bridged the gap between collective imagination and social action, but also because the scale of the spectacle made most Arab elites reconsider their former cultural agendas.

Among the new practices heralded by Tahrir Square was the infusion of the Arab Spring with a new cultural scene, one with modern collective cultural practices touching on the field of religiosity, producing new forms of religious praxis which neither contradicts liberalism in its mainstream romantic conception, nor opposes the notions of liberation, dignity, and steadfastness. This is a scene in which a member of the Arab elite can see what he wishes to see. Liberals perceive it as an expression of peaceful protest to acquire the rights of citizenship, while Salafis view it as a massive grouping of Muslims who perform their prescribed prayers and wait eagerly for Friday, due to its religious symbolism, to demand the changing of the regime.

As a result, the television cameras were transmitting unlikely images of a religious youth that does not refrain from chanting slogans, singing, and congregating with Christian and leftist youth. The novelty of that scene was that it asserted an individual type of religiosity that has grown to compete with the political type, which preoccupied the Arab elites and had been seen in the last two decades as an inescapable fate, exploited by some elites to sabotage democracy and legitimize dictatorships, while others labored to describe an exceptional cultural complex that forced the Arabs to oscillate between extremist binaries. Thus, has it now become necessary to re-inject dynamism into sociological analysis of Arab ideologies and say that the phenomenon of political religiosity, in the context of social dynamics, engenders the revivalist potentialities of these ideologies?

Through the aforementioned scene, this study will attempt to analyze the model of this new youth religiosity, which made a spectacular appearance in the Arab liberation squares. The study argues that the new communication media, notably Internet social media, were capable of weaving a virtual public sphere, which made religion – as a cultural system – escape the yoke of conventional social institutions and become the property of an individualistic/youth phenomenon that has disassembled religion into separate values and used these to define its social and legal demands. The Arab youth made use of this new public sphere to escape the clutches of the traditional public space, as previously elucidated by Jurgen Habermas.

This development followed the Arab state's abdication of its nation-building responsibilities, which include the maintenance of a public space through which dialogue can take place among various communities and sectors of society. Instead, the state acted in society as a group among

others, providing a public space solely for the state's elite, which led the opposing elites to seek other spaces through which they could engage in politics. With Arab society developing in the absence of a central state that takes upon itself the writing of the national narrative and manages the public sphere rather than constraining it, multiple models of education emerged to fill the void, contributing to the rise of political Islam as an important actor with a unique outlook on the world, i.e. in imagining the state, society, and the outside world – which led to confrontations that eroded the structure of Arab society for decades.

The approach adopted in this paper views the religious phenomenon as a subject whose study and interpretation involve the methodology of cultural sociology. Once we understand religion as a cultural system, we then need to analyze the relationship linking the cultural modes of production and the conditions of the social structure in segmentary societies.¹

1. Religion as a cultural system

It could be argued, with some caution, that the social production surrounding religion in Arab societies has been restrained by ideology in its narrow sense, especially with the rise of activist Islam following the defeat of June 1967. This pushed a large portion of the Arab cultural elite to carry the banner of secularism, combating the activist Islamic discourse with imported Western theories and equating its struggle with that of the pioneering European Enlightenment thinkers .

Most intellectual and social thought has focused on focusing on critiquing of religion, which was an act that came at the expense of religiosity, as well as conflating the two phenomena with each other – ignoring the fact that the latter expresses cultural behaviors that are more closely linked to symbols than to a coherent cultural system. As a result, the approaches of Arab intellectuals often have equated religion with ideology, and therefore resulted in theses that vacillate between the perspectives of “religion as the opium of the people” and “religion as the recreation of the society of the Pious Predecessors”.

In his “The Interpretation of Cultures”, Clifford Geertz expressed frustration at the reigning anthropological approaches towards ideology, which in his opinion alternated between two theories: the interest theory and the strain theory. For the former, ideology is but a mask and a weapon against the backdrop of global struggle for power and interest, while for the latter, ideology is the expression of social entities laboring to escape anxiety.²

¹ Al-Tahir Labeeb, **The Sociology of Culture**, (al-Muhammadiya, Fudala Press, 2006), p. 24.

² Clifford Geertz, **The Interpretation of Cultures**, translated by Mohammad Badawi, (Beirut: The Arab Organization for Translation, 2009) pp. 412-413 (in Arabic).

In the guise of one or both of these approaches, the Arab literature on the critique of religion varied between elucidating the psychological effect of the Arab defeat amid the momentum of the Khomeinist revolution and theorizing on the “false consciousness” upon which despotic regimes relied to garner legitimacy for their remaining in power. This literature failed to place any importance on the treatment of emotion, and imagination as modernist scientific hypotheses.

This has led, among other things, to the erection of imagined borders and limits, separating a “spirit” belonging to the medieval intellectual space from another imaginary entity rooted in the intellectual space of modern times, with the “rupture of modernity” taking place between these two spirits.³ Thus, a number of modernists imagined several temporal spaces coexisting within Arab societies, attributing some of them to the age of the Prophet and others to modern society, not realizing that “[t]he existence of collective institutions outside of the existing deformed modernity, and without being tainted by its character, is a mere illusion”.⁴ It goes without saying that, according to this logic, “nothing is reproduced the way it was”; the reproduction of religion assumes an ideological function answering questions of identity for the modern man⁵. People did not remain traditional in light of the modernity that was imposed from the outside: “their perspective of the world has changed completely, and nothing has remained the way it was, even the meaning of tradition has changed”.⁶

Modernity, according to Harvey, produced “the compression of time-space”, a process which had a revisionist effect on social relations⁷, which in turn engendered a transformation in “special and temporal practices involving a loss of identity with the place and a radical recurrent rupture from any sense of historical continuity”. “The ruins of the collapse of the barriers of space” exposed new meanings for social relations in a manner asserting local and doctrinal identities, prompting a new renaissance of local, regional, organic, and doctrinal politics.⁸

A cultural elite that carried the message of “Secularism” has exerted massive efforts in critiquing the foundational Quranic texts, sifting through them and demonstrating their historicity; however, they neglected the fact that people do not drink and eat texts, and that they do not practice – their daily lives – a rational reading, but seek symbolic meanings founded upon collective feelings. At any rate, a researcher’s depiction of the social and historic conditions of

³ Mohammad Arkoun, **The Unspoken and the Margins: on Contemporary Islam**, translated and prefaced by Hashim Saleh (Beirut: Dar Al Talee’a, 2007) p. 41 (in Arabic).

⁴ Azmi Bishara, **A Contribution to the Critique of Civil Society**, (Ramallah: Muwatin, 1997) p. 227 (in Arabic).

⁵ Ibid, p. 223.

⁶ Ibid, p. 233.

⁷ David Harvey, **The Condition of Post-Modernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change**, translated by Mohammad Shayya, (Beirut: The Arab Organization for Translation, 2005) page 331.

⁸ Ibid, pp. 316-318.

an event in Islamic history in no way signifies that he has founded a new relationship between religion and the people.

In response to such scientist tendencies, Geertz defined religion as an active cultural system which engenders psychological states and strong, broad, and self-sustaining motives in people, through the formulation of concepts on a general system for existence, while bestowing an aura of realism on these concepts – making these psychological states and motives seem exceedingly realistic.⁹

This definition differs from classical interpretations of religion, viewing it as more fluid than just another social institution among others, but rather as being disseminated in the public sphere. The specificity of the Arab case is that secular and leftist elites have abandoned the idea of assimilating the Arab and Islamic legacy, verging towards scientism, which has facilitated for activist Islam the task of filling this void and spreading in popular culture. The excessive verging on scientism, and the failure to read matters such as emotions and the imaginary from a scientific perspective, led to the separation of ideology from praxis and the alienation of the intellectual from the social classes, verging on elitism.

But even Geertz's contribution, which ascribed novel and unconventional meanings to religion (mostly based on the Indonesian experience), is in need of refinement in the midst of the proliferation of communication media and channels of discourse, which have broken down old modes of ideological production that had permitted certain social institutions – such as the mosque – to appoint themselves as representatives of religion. Therefore, the Arab sociological and anthropological literature made use of the conceptual capital accumulated through the efforts of early Arab enlightenment thinkers without taking into account the fact that the times have changed, and that technological evolution and the emergence of a trans-border Arab media market have engendered the dialectical opposite of political religiosity: individualistic/youth religiosity.

With this development religion became, in the words of Belrahouma, “a social value that takes its place within the hierarchy of values present in the practical lives of people and their individual deliberations, which are manifested daily through their actions, convictions, and choices”. The modern literature has averted its gaze from “the essences of values and their philosophical premises to examine instead the daily living of people, i.e.: the value of religiosity as a social experience”.¹⁰

⁹ Clifford Geertz Ibid, p. 227

¹⁰ Adil Belrahouma, “Youth religiosity as a value in seeking a meaning for personal identity”, unpublished paper.

2. Political Islam in the context of the plurality of public spaces

Bishara proposes a model that explains the emergence of activist Islam as a broad cultural phenomenon in Arab societies: “the split between the two worlds that was brought upon by modernity has led to a reaction in the religious sphere seeking to reunite religion and politics, exhibiting an aggressive tendency emanating from an awareness of alienation and suffering that result from this consciousness on the one hand, while on the other hand, this split led to a tendency towards the manufacturing of sacred icons in the political sphere, which manifested itself in the endowing of earthly values with sacredness after they were secularized, values such as the party, nationalism, blood, land, etc. ... Despite the presence of both models in the East and the West, the first model (political Islam) remained the main form of reaction to modernity in our Arab Islamic East, while the second form was the main reaction to modernity witnessed in the West”.¹¹

In the Arab case, “the Arabic language remained as a national language that did not derive from another (like French from Latin), and the local Arab dialects also did not evolve into independent languages, therefore, the sacred language also became a national language”¹², which resulted – in the modern age – in the emergence of currents of activist Islam combining nation and religion, building their thought and imagery in the context of a single religious nation since the material for the imagery is suitable and available due to its organic link with the Arabic Quran.¹³

This suggestion surpasses the hypothesis of the American author Benjamin Barber in his “Jihad versus McWorld”, which argues that globalization in its American version has engendered an identity that veers towards doctrinal unity and solidarity in Third World countries, or what he terms “Jihad”, which, in turn, has waged a war against the nation-state and democracy in the course of its search for an alternative pre-modern identity.¹⁴ Arabs have circulated Barber’s thesis obsessively, not least because it came from an American author¹⁵ and despite its obvious culturalist dimension, since the Islamist wave exploded in the Arab and Islamic worlds before “McWorldism”, and the effects of modernity have spread around the globe, North and South, even if they have taken different shapes due to varying states of development of the relations of production.

¹¹ Azmi Bishara, “An introduction for the study of democracy and types of religiosity”, pp. 57-120, in: Critical Studies (ed.): **On the Democratic Option**, (Ramallah: Muatin, 1993), pp. 100-111 (in Arabic).

¹² Azmi Bishara, in: Benedict Anderson, **Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism**, translated by Thaer Deeb, (Beirut/Damascus: Dar Qadmus, 2009), p. 35 (in Arabic).

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Benjamin Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld*. (New York: Ballantine Books, 2001), p. III.

¹⁵ See, for instance, Hashem Salih’s celebration of Barber’s thesis in his book: **The Dilemma of Islamic Fundamentalism**, (Beirut: Dar Al Talee’a, 2006) (in Arabic)

The specificity of Arab societies in our age, according to Bishara, is that they have torn down what existed without replacing it with a civil society based on a non-organic unity among individuals. In the same vein, Bishara argues that the specificity of the Arab intellectual lies in his horror at the loss of the intimacy and familiarity of organic units without the acquisition of the liberties of civil society, and without the despotism of authority being limited by any barriers.¹⁶

Bishara describes this as a deformed modernity, meaning that “it is not organic, having evolved according to the agenda of ‘others’, not our agenda or needs. The shape taken by this modernity is that of deformed and hybrid capitalization of relations of production, which led to the rise of an unproductive, comprador, dependent capitalism to respond to the tasks of modernization, alongside a state bureaucracy and a state capitalism (public sector) which failed to perform their missions at the end of the stage of initial accumulation”.¹⁷

This form of modernity disrupted rural relations without their “being replaced by a capitalist system or an industrial economy absorbing the migration to the cities. At the same time the processes of modernity, cultural exchange with the West, and becoming a market for its goods led to the generation of needs that cannot be fulfilled by the existing social/economic system – modernity in our East creates needs while producing the inability to fulfill them. The acuteness of this paramount phenomenon was increased by the influence of means of communication and their entry into every household, to the point where we can no longer treat them as a secondary topic or as part of the superstructure, but as a major actor that belongs economically to the infrastructure of society, directly contributing to the formation of the personality of the modern man”.¹⁸

This situation has engendered an intrusive state, as if it were parachuted from above, establishing the institutions that it needs while nationalizing the rest as part of the process of independence, only to practice, afterwards, close censorship upon society. And because this state was the product of a process of colonial partition, it “kept suffering from a crisis of legitimacy and the frailty of the social structure”, so it sought to form social sectors linked to it through relations of interest – and it succeeded in doing so.¹⁹

¹⁶ Azmi Bishara, , “An introduction for the study of democracy and types of religiosity”, Ibid, p. 91.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 101.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Azmi Bishara, in: Azmi Bishara *et al*, **The Problematic of the Failure of Democratic Transformation in the Arab Homeland (Minutes of the Cairo conference held between February 28-March 3, 1996)**, (The Palestinian Institute for the Study of Democracy, 1997), p. 402 (in Arabic).

To compensate for the lack of legitimacy, the state practiced in its policies a mixture of “terrorism, political pragmatism, and a political discourse combining elements of modernism, Islamism, and populism”. And because it has an inconsistent character ranging from that of the totalitarian state – which it is too weak to become – and partial infiltration of civil society²⁰, it contributes to the “hegemony of a political discourse, which is the discourse of those who stand to lose from modernity”²¹. This has led to “a crisis in national awareness and the growth of other imagined communities that are no less imagined but are less inclusive and less capable of establishing the modern state”²².

This is to say that the state in the Arab Levant, and especially since the 1967 defeat, has abstained from performing its nation-building tasks, which include the maintenance of a public space through which dialogue can take place among various communities and sectors of society. Instead, the state acted in society as a group among others, providing a public space solely for the state’s elite, which led the opposing elites to seek other spaces through which they could engage in politics. It is in this context that we can understand the emergency laws enacted by Arab regimes, which banned public assemblies in the public space, blocking internal debate except among its loyalist elite.

Since consensus, according to Jurgen Habermas’ theory, emerges from deliberations among the dialoguing parties themselves, and occurs through “the negotiation imposed by symbolic and political exchange in a society torn between the forces of conflict and the forces of consensus”, and because the public space here is a motivating idea that confirms the public sphere’s independent influence on action (specifically political action)²³, any approach to the Arab case must take into account the multiplicity of public spaces, some of which are coexisting, allying, or struggling with one another in order to assimilate various social strata and groups. Thus, the principles of consensus vary from one public space to another, and the narratives multiply between one audience and another, which signifies the edification of conflict as an authentic state in society.

²⁰ Azmi Bishara, Azmi Bishara, **A Contribution to the Critique of Civil Society**, (Ramallah: Muwatin, 1997), op.cit., page. 241 (in Arabic).

²¹ Ibid, p. 236.

²² Azmi Bishara, in: Benedict Anderson, **Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism**, translated by Thaer Deeb, (Beirut/Damascus: Dar Qadmus, 2009), op.cit., p. 43.

²³ Mohammad Nureddin Afaya, **Modernity and Communication in Contemporary Critical Philosophy: The Habermas Model**, 2nd Ed., (Rabat: Africa East, 1998), pp. 100-101 (in Arabic).

The Habermasian communicative theory intersects with the Hegelian thesis in **The Philosophy of Right**, which is a conciliatory vision of social contradictions within a broad regime, with this regime manifesting itself in the modern state, or a civil society as a transitory stage towards the state according to Hegel, and as a policing force assuring the assimilation of the particular in the general.

See: Jean-Pierre LeVivire and Pierre Machiri, **Hegel and Society**, translated by Mansour Al Qadi, (Beirut: The Universal Institute for Studies, Publishing, and Distribution, 1993), pp. 41-46 (in Arabic).

Since its foundation, activist Islam has had to seek its proper public space. At an early stage, it found no alternative to mosques, charitable societies, and clubs as arenas for its own debates and agendas, which naturally differed from those in other public spheres.²⁴ With the advance of Islamic activism in the political and cultural spheres, and instead of the state sponsoring a unified public space for all sectors, the Arab regime found itself locked in a confrontation with the public spaces founded by the Islamists, which provided competing and alternative deliberative principles. Some regimes attempted to compete in these fields. In Egypt, for instance, the ruling regime has spent vast sums since 1960 in order to attract the social strata targeted by Islamic social institutions. Furthermore, the Egyptian regime ended the phenomenon of “community mosques”, with the government instead opening thousands of new mosques publicly sponsored by the Ministry of Islamic Endowments.²⁵

Thus, instead of the Arab regional state using its authority to unite and assimilate public spaces in a unified public sphere, it tended to undermine the other public spaces that did not pledge it loyalty. The Arab regional state did not evolve “organically through the local social relations of power: the capital, the market, civil society”. Simultaneously, the state did not achieve “a national unification of the differences and particularities of civil society and its conflicting interests. Instead it was made into a receptacle that houses these variations. In such a situation, traditional powers register a form of resistance because of their centrifugal character.”²⁶ Because this last task was and remains impossible, the state plugged itself vertically into society, and any conflict became one with the state rather than within it, i.e. a conflict against social groups and class alliances represented by the state or allied with it; the situation engendered, in the words of

²⁴ Al Sadiq Nayhum has previously noted the historic specificity of the mosque, which makes it capable of serving as a public space, engendering a state of consensus. He also draws a distinction between a mosque and a prayer hall (*Masgid*). According to Nayhum, the prayer hall is a pre-Islamic institution that existed everywhere and in every epoch, is “[k]nown by all civilizations and has a name in every language”, and represents the locating of religion in a spatial formula that it does not depart from. The mosque, on the other hand, “is a different idea that has not been known by anyone before, and has not been called for by anyone except for Islam, for it represents an application of the concept of personal responsibility, which necessitated the abolishing of all mediums between Man and his Creator”. The mosque, therefore, is the legal apparatus that joins all the people who are dispersed among churches, temples, and prayer halls in “a unified administrative apparatus, free of all superficial squabbles, and directed for the production of the right of the human community in justice – by always entrusting the legitimacy of decision-making to the majority”.

The mosque system, according to Nayhum, “is an administrative formula for the achievement of the authority of the community, appearing in our history after military and religious institutions were undermined and crushed”; the party system is a value for which we have no constitution in our culture, while “the mosque is a value with a history that we are familiar with, in a constitution written in the language of our compatriots whose articles are already known and assimilated by them, and seen as their most cherished icons. Every citizen is sensitized in the mosque to the same rhetoric that he may employ outside of it with no political usefulness”.

²⁵ Center for Political and Strategic Studies in Al Ahram, **Report on the State of Religion in Egypt**, 2nd Issue, 2nd Ed., (Al Ahram Center: Cairo, 1998) pp. 50-54 (in Arabic).

²⁶ Azmi Bishara, **A Contribution to the Critique of Civil Society**, op.cit., pp. 225-226.

Hichem Djait, “a state that is unable to groom society, and a society incapable of grooming a state”.²⁷

The strategy of the Arab ruling elite did not allow one side to triumph over the other, instead, their policies helped cement the barriers between different public spheres, especially with the Islamists feeling threatened by deceptive infiltration tactics relying simultaneously on the leverage of funding and coercion policies, which further complicated the general scene and contributed to a hardening the dichotomies between the “them” and the “us” within a single societal space. This led the current of activist Islam to adopt a form of “politics of presence”²⁸, which saw it compete over different public arenas, including the waging of elections for unions, local councils, and universities. This development later helped the Arab ruling elite to use the “Islamist boogeyman” against the West, presenting Western governments with a choice between these same elites’ remaining in power, and their replacement by Islamist movements.

With Arab societies entering the last quarter of the 20th century, the influence of the Islamic Revolution in Iran²⁹, and Arab governments vacillating between the forging of implicit alliances with Islamists and the tightening of the security noose around their movements, the public space of activist Islam strengthened and took hold. Mosques and other social institutions – such as clubs, charitable associations, and unions in universities and the traditional social class – became tools of ideological production, weaving a political imaginary of the state and its relationship with society, and painting the individual personality of the Muslim, one that does not completely overlap with the other ideals produced by other means of social imagination in other spheres.

We could say, with some caution, that the ideological apparatus of activist Islam – in the Althusserian acception³⁰ – was structurally similar to the ideological establishments of leftist

²⁷ Hichem Djait, **The Arab-Islamic Personality and The Arab Future**, translated by Al Munji Al Sayadi, The Politics in Society Series, (Beirut: Dar Al Talee’a, 1984), p. 175 (in Arabic).

²⁸ The term is borrowed from the Iranian sociologist Asef Bayat, in his valuable study:

Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and Post- islamist Turn*, (Stanford: CA: Stanford University Press, 2007).

See especially the chapter entitled: “The Politics of Presence: Imagining a Post-Islamist Democracy”, pp. 187-208.

²⁹ This study has reservations towards the approach that links the Islamic Revolution in Iran with the rise of Islamist movements, and presents the linkage as one of causality, because a social phenomenon of this scale and duration cannot be explained as a mimicking of another, foreign experiment. It could be argued, as Al Filaly did, that “the success of the Iranian experiment had, in what pertains to the interaction of the Islamic movement with society and the regimes, the role of some chemical components that do not participate in chemical reactions, but whose presence is necessary for the reaction to take place”.

Mustafa Al Filaly, “The Religious Islamic Awakening: Its features-phases-future”, in: Ismail Sabri et al, **Contemporary Islamic Movements in the Arab Homeland**, (The Library of Alternative Arab Futures: The Social, Political, and Cultural Currents) 5th Ed., (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2004) p. 374 (in Arabic).

³⁰ Lou Althusser presented in the middle of the last century a manuscript on the “Ideological State Apparatus”, through which he tried to grasp “the functional character of ideology” at the time. Althusser was studying the

parties and movements. A close examination would reveal the similarities between the Quranic and religious seminars organized by the Muslim Brotherhood, and the educational sessions of communist parties, and that can be gleaned by reading personal biographies of the leaders of both movements. However, the ideological institutions of activist Islam were fated to resist due to several reasons, chief among them their self-sufficient funding, which relied on the donations of the “decent folk”, the Zakat committees, and sympathetic businessmen abroad. Conversely, communist parties and other leftist movements relied mostly on the support provided by the socialist camp, which led – following the shift of Soviet policies and then the fall of the USSR – to the waning of the ideological apparatus of the Arab left. In sum, activist Islam’s tools of imagination³¹ were not less modern than those of the other sectors, with the relationship linking the public to the social institution mirroring the master-disciple model, a variation on a patriarchal relationship also found in the leader-member relationships within leftist and nationalist parties.

As with other currents, in its initial phase activist Islam used its public space to herald an educational model based on an independent economic base and social network. This provided activist Islam with a steady flow of ideologized social subjects who view the religious project as a political project that founds “a unique world view”.³² As Arab regimes were seeking to garner tribal support through identity politics, establishing financial channels and networks of patronage to secure the loyalty of followers by distributing the spoils among them, activist Islam was fighting a war of position (in the Gramscian sense) to fill the void and to win the support of social classes not dominated by tribal relations, especially with the aid of its educational model. The best depiction of this system is what Pierre Bourdieu described as “the educational pattern”,

concept of “the reproduction of the political system”, so he pioneered the concept of the ideological state apparatus in order to define the tools employed by institutional authority in preparing individuals to represent the values determining the mechanisms of the perpetuation of hegemonic authority. Althusser noted that the ideological state apparatus should be understood alongside the Leninist conception of the state, which stresses its repressive quality by adding the symbolic repression practiced by state institutions and organs in order to maintain the regime.

See Kamal Abdel Latif, “On Ideology and Knowledge: General Introduction”, (pp. 37-74), in Hasan Hanafi et al, Abdel Ilah Belkziz, ed., **The Conceptual and the Ideological in Contemporary Arab Thought: Presentations and Discussions of the Intellectual Symposium hosted by The Center for Arab Unity Studies**, pp. 48-49 (in Arabic).

³¹ On the tools of imagination and the role of print capitalism in the establishment of imagined communities, see: Benedict Anderson, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-92.

³² The concept of the world view includes the imagination of the state and society. This process of imagination has allowed Arab dictatorships to raise slogans claiming that there is no democratic alternative to the permanent elites occupying the throne. This paper considers this imagination to have been a result and not a cause, i.e. it was among the products of the multiplicity of public spaces, which were prevented from establishing dialogue due to the absence of democracy.

On the concept of the world view, an excellent summary is to be recommended in: Sameer Abu Zeid, **Science and the Arab World View: The Arab Experience and the Scientific Foundation of the Renaissance**, (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2009) pp. 103-107 (in Arabic).

which could be used – after much adaptation – to understand the nature of political religiosity in Arab societies. In Bourdieu’s theory of self-creation, the pattern is “closed, and the borders of its identity lie in self referential internal dynamics”; “it reproduces its meanings and symbolic values from within instead of borrowing from its environment, without this signifying a complete rupture with the environment as a determinant for survival. The pattern is self-created, independent of the environment without being separate from it, [and] open to its environment due to it being self-sufficient in its reproduction, and therefore its survival”.³³

The educational pattern is distinguished by an “internalist” identity that makes outside references a marginal matter. This is what activist Islam has been able to build over decades because of the state’s failure to perform the tasks of nation-building and the manufacturing of national identity. Through continuous self-referencing and the production of unified elements and dynamics, the Islamists succeeded, in their own public space, in developing the reproduction of the pattern as an independent entity based on “cyclical self-production, and not on dependence upon the environment”³⁴. In light of the lack of intellectual production in the general environment, the Islamic educational pattern was the most apt to interpret the data originating from the outside and present answers, and thereby to transform major events and outside information into functional mechanisms.

Bourdieu terms the foregoing process, in which the pattern benefits from the outside to revitalize itself, “re-translation”. The refinement of the educational pattern makes it independent of its environment, with the outside no longer representing a reference “for its internal dynamics or necessarily a source for these dynamics”.³⁵ There is no doubt that the Islamist current’s “deliberative” capacity and its constant self-reference constitute one of the facets of its modernity, representing the foundational disposition of the self (I think), and transforming the data originating from the outside into a topic, which lies at the heart of philosophical modernity.³⁶

I have said that for Bourdieu, the pattern appears to control its internal levels “and is not affected by the environment or change except in the measure imposed on it by its internal dynamics”, in

³³ Pierre Bourdieu, Jean Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in education, society, and culture*, (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 1977, 1990. Reprinted 1992, 1994, 1996, 1998, 2000).

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Ibid, p. 36.

³⁶ Martin Heidegger says: “The fundamental event of the modern age is the conquest of the world as picture. In the great Greek age, and even in the Christian medieval world, it was impossible to witness the emergence of something such as a world view. Modernity, on the other hand, did not become itself until Man became a self and the world represented image”.

Mohammad Sabila and Abdel Salam Bin Abd Al Ali, **Modernity**, The Philosophical Notebook Series: 6, (Casablanca, Tubqal publishing, 1996), .p. 56 (in Arabic).

order to guarantee its persistence and independence from the environment, so it retranslates what emanates from the environment in a manner that serves its internal cohesion.³⁷ From this premise we can understand the mechanisms through which Quranic and religious seminars held by political Islam dealt with violent shifts on the Arab scene, from the signing of the peace treaties (Camp David and Wadi Araba accords) and the policies of economic liberalization to the Khomeinist revolution and the signing of the Oslo Accords, and the manners in which its public space reinterpreted these developments, exploiting them in the service of its educational pattern by transforming them into “internal information for the educational pattern according to the internalist logic, so that they have no meaning except through the workings of the pattern, which is based on exclusion and inclusion”.³⁸

In fact, this pattern carries a veritable universalistic character that lies in the internal dynamic of individualization: “the deconstruction and reconstruction of basic identities”³⁹ through “what could be termed the Islamic technologies of self-building, through prayer, fasting, and religious seminars, where recruitment and mobilization took place”.⁴⁰ Most likely the stage of founding this educational model was what the Islamic movements expressed in their discourse under slogans about the phase of “preparation”, “formation”, or “education”. This pretext was used to justify refraining from engagement in the political field in Egypt and Jordan, for instance, and for refraining from engagement in armed struggle in the case of the Muslim Brotherhood movement in Palestine during the 1970s, with some exceptions here and there.

One of the early byproducts of this pattern was the illusory dichotomy between national identity and Islamic identity, a slippery slope from whose repercussions activist Islam suffers to this day. The policies of economic liberalization and the state’s withdrawal from the public sphere also have led to the increase in the power and popularity of the social institutions of political

³⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, **Reproduction: In Guise of a General Theory for the Educational Pattern**, (Beirut: The Arab Organization for Translation, 2007), op. cit., pp. 36 (in Arabic).

³⁸ Ibid.

There are dozens of writings and biographies produced by the Muslim Brothers on their “Families” system and the internal charters governing their work. See for instance: Ali Abdel Halim Mahmoud, **The Educational Curriculum of the Muslim Brothers: A Historical Analytic Study**, two tomes, (Alexandria: Al Wafa publishing, 2006). Juma Amin Abdel Aziz, **The Phase of Founding (The Internal Structuring) 1938-1943, Papers from the History of the Muslim Brothers: 4**, (Cairo: The Islamic publishing, 2004). Also: Yusuf Al Qaradawi, **Islamic Education and the School of Hasan Al Banna**, (Beirut: The Resala Institution for publishing and distribution, 1995). There is also a considerable number of memoirs documenting the educational pattern of the Muslim Brothers most famous of which among the Brothers themselves, Abbas El Sisi’s memoirs series.

³⁹ Etienne Balibar, “Ambiguous Universality,” **Differences**, vol. 7, no. 1 (1995), p. 61.

Quoted from May Al Jayyusi, “The Formation of the Self and the State of Exception: The Body as a Site for Resistance”, in: Sari Hanafi (ed.), **The State of Exception and Resistance in the Arab Homeland**, (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2010), pp. 92 (in Arabic).

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 92.

religiosity.⁴¹ However, this course would not last for long, for a development of paramount importance would take place that was only noted by a small number of researchers: an “Arab media market”⁴² developed during the past two decades thanks to the effects of globalization on

⁴¹ This dichotomy reached its apex among the Muslim Brothers in Egypt during the phase of confrontation with the Nasser regime, and the violent persecution to which the Brothers were subjected, engendering what became known as Qutbism (in reference to Sayyid Qutb). But this dichotomy has its roots in the era of Hasan Al Banna. See, for example: Jum’ a Amin Abdel Aziz, **The Role of the Ikhwan in Egyptian Society 1938-1945: Papers from the History of the Muslim Brothers, 6**, (Cairo: Islamic publishing, 2006 (in Arabic)).

In Jordan, this binary was made less acute due to the conciliatory relationship linking the Muslim Brothers to the Jordanian regime, but it appeared sharply against the communist and nationalist parties, which made it lean more and more towards the regime. This binary reached its zenith in the early 1980s with the Jordanian Islamist educational pattern producing an extremist phenomenon, whose most notorious figure was sheikh Abdallah Azzam (see: Faisal Darraj and Jamal Barout (eds.), **Islamist Parties, Movements, and Groups, part one**, (Damascus/Sanaa: The Arab Center for Strategic Studies, 2006), pp. 488-489).

The book argues that the Brothers’ organization was capable of assimilating the “extremist current”, but I believe that the delay in the maturation of the educational pattern in Jordan, due to the slow pace of state-building, has served to envelop the phenomenon and draw it to other, more attractive, regions, as in the case of Sheikh Azzam.

In Syria, this binary produced the group of the “fighting vanguard”, an off-shoot of the Muslim Brotherhood led by the engineer Marwan Hadid (see: Faisal Darraj and Jamal Barout (eds.), **Islamist Parties, Movements, and Groups, part one**, (Damascus/Sanaa: The Arab Center for Strategic Studies, 2006), *ibid*, pp. 266-278). This led to the well known tragedy of Hama.

In the Palestinian arena, despite its supposed specificity, this pattern engendered a state of complete split, whose roots appeared in the charter of the Islamic resistance movement Hamas. This later led to the division of the Palestinian elite along cultural and then political lines. In a TV interview with the journalist Ahmad Mansour, Sheikh Ahmad Yassin mentioned that he supervised the printing and distribution “of a thousand or two thousand copies of the 30th part of the book of interpretation **In the Shadows of the Kuran** by Sayyid Qutb”. (see: Ahmad Mansour (interviewer and ed.), **Sheikh Ahmad Yassin: A Witness to the Age of the Intifada**, the book of Al Jazeera, a collection of the most notable talk shows produced by Al Jazeera, (Cairo: The Arab publishing house for sciences and Ibin Hazm publishing, 2004), pp. 81).

This binary had no noticeable influence, as far as I can tell, until the era of Oslo and what followed, and for several reasons, including the hijacking of the Palestinian political sphere to the exile where the PLO operated, which gave the Islamist movement relative freedom in developing its educational pattern. However, as soon as the Palestinian political arena was relocated into Palestine following the Oslo Accords, this binary exploded, with the 1996 event being among its most notorious manifestations – and recently the Palestinian division following the second legislative elections.

Based on the model of the educational pattern, we can explain the resilience of the Muslim Brothers in comparison to other Islamic groups. In the Palestinian case Fathi Al Shuqaqi (the founder of Islamic Jihad) underestimated the education pattern of the Brothers and insisted on lunging into armed struggle despite the lack of resources; this decision was among the reasons for the crushing of the organization in its early stages, especially with the lack of cumulative organizational experience among its adherents. The first waves of arrest were able to wear down the organization. (See: Khaled Al Haroub, **Hamas: The Thought and the Political Practice**, first edition (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1996), pp. 144). This may be the reason behind the predominance of clannish links today among members of Islamic Jihad; the clan – *Hamoula* – was the secret behind the organization’s resilience in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This experience is comparable to those of Islamist groups in Egypt and Jordan that did not perfect an educational pattern based on a public space supported by an economic base. It could be said that the only exception in this regard is Hizb al Tahrir, which has constructed an educational pattern, albeit one besieged by texts and rules that prevent the organization from engaging in the political sphere – and this is a different subject.

⁴² The term is borrowed from: Azmi Bishara, Preface to the Arabic translation of: Benedict Anderson, *Ibid*, pp. 34.

communication, an occurrence that will weaken the master-disciple relationship, which was – as we already explained – the main pillar of the educational model of activist Islam. As a result, an individualistic/youth model would emerge, with more advanced means of imagination, as we shall see in the coming section.

3. Youth religiosity as a model that is independent of the ideological establishment

Only a small number of scholars have noted the structural effects resulting from the spread of new media – including satellite channels and the Internet – in Arab societies. It is no wonder that progress in this regard was slow, given the conspiratorial tendencies engendered by the Arab intellectual literature vis-à-vis the globalization phenomenon. A neutral observer would come away from many of the Arab writings, seminars, and conferences discussing globalization with an impression that equates globalization with colonialism, and with dread about the calamitous effect of globalization for identity, specificity, and freedom. It may be true that these concerns are warranted, especially with the rise of neo-liberal Arab elites that have trivialized the importance of national borders and principles, but such an overwhelmingly negative depiction of globalization is seen to be lacking, for once we understand globalization as a process, we realize that while it engenders hegemony, it also engenders its opposite.

This may have been made clear during the Egyptian, Tunisian and other revolutions when the masses that came out to the squares and the streets raised slogans that mostly belonged to human rights treaties, which are often used as a veil by transnational colonialist institutions. It also was demonstrated during the Libyan Revolution that Arab rebels could – consciously or unconsciously – exploit the colonial system by employing slogans belonging to its legal discourse, which has been accumulated over centuries. This advance achieved by the Arabs through the revolutions could not have taken place had it not been for the “anxious” nature of the colonialist discourse (to use the terms of Homi Bhabha), which allowed the colonized peoples, including Arabs, to practice “conniving development”, which makes use of the contradictions in the colonial system and carves out its proper space, in which it can form its own “trouble-making” imaginary⁴³. Thus, the process of emulating imagination – according to Bhabha – makes the colonialist lose control, breaking his hegemony by emulating the very process of hegemony, which leads to the negation of any fixed and static identity for either of them as “mimicry conceals no presence or identity behind its mask”⁴⁴ as for Bhabha “mimicry marks those moments of civil disobedience within the discipline of civility: signs of spectacular resistance. When the words of the master become the site of hybridity.”⁴⁵

⁴³ Robert Young, **White Mythologies: Writing History and the West**, translated by Ahmad Mahmoud, (Cairo: the Higher Council for Culture, 2003), p. 309 (in Arabic).

⁴⁴ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, pp. 85-92

⁴⁵ Homi Bhabha, *Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817*, in *Europe and Its Others*, 2 vols (1985b), p 162

Therefore, drawing the notion of globalization in broad strokes led a number of scholars to ignore the effects of the spread of the media, including forms of social media on the Internet, in shaping the personality of the contemporary Arab youth. This study argues that this new form of media created a new public space, even if a virtual one, which limited the efficiency of classical means of ideological production, heralding a novel model of youth religiosity. This does not mean that the model of youth religiosity, which I have previously termed “individualistic religiosity”, did not exist beforehand; however, it was not present as a model capable of undermining the positions of activist Islam. In the past sociologists developed a habit of categorizing religiosity into political and popular forms, defining popular religiosity as “those religious beliefs and practices that are relatively independent from the official establishment, centering around shrines, the tombs of predecessors and saints, some of whom have a basis in history and others mainly fictive. Among the elements of this religiosity are hierarchical sacredness, metaphorical explanations, a weak relationship with the clergy, and an insistence on personifying the sacred powers and the mediums between the faithful and God”.⁴⁶ The literature tends to endow popular religiosity with a fluid character that can coexist with social and political authorities, even if they carry a principled position against religion. I see this type of religiosity as relying mostly on adherence to religious duties, respect for rituals and traditions, and interaction with the local customs in each country – but it does not represent an applicable socio-political plan or program.⁴⁷

Popular Islam respects the religious establishment and affords it a sacred place, with the interaction between the two taking place through imams, scholars, endowment administrations, and religious judges. Popular Islam does not deal with religion as a cluster of concepts, but as a constellation of everyday functions: “There is no doubt that the religious establishment exists as a function for popular Islam”.⁴⁸ The type of popular religiosity that we have witnessed was and remains at a high degree of fluidity, maintaining a position of neutrality – if not numbing broad sectors of the population – and it is suitable for exploitation by the various political authorities in society.

I have noted that youth religiosity is radically different from popular religiosity, and it is also different from individual religiosity as defined by the European Enlightenment, which mainly views religion as an ethos requiring the presence of freedom or the absence of compulsion in

⁴⁶ Halim Barakat, **Arab Society in the Twentieth Century: A Study in Changing Conditions and Relations**, (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2000), p. 449 (in Arabic).

⁴⁷ Azmi Bishara, “An Introduction for the Study of Democracy and types of Religiosity”, Ibid, pp. 114-115.

⁴⁸ Ibid, Pp. 115.

making religious choices; and as something that is exclusive to the private sphere.⁴⁹ In sum, youth religiosity is a type of religiosity that is widespread in the public space and that is liberated from the grip of social institutions.

The interactive media, which carved out a new public space that is free from the yoke of authority, and in which all ideological institutions have an equal opportunity to occupy a position, have served to herald this model of youth religiosity. There is also no doubt that the Internet revolution, which began in the 1990s, differs from the television revolution; therefore, all the theories and methodologies that were developed by scholars of television are not fully suitable for the interpretation of social phenomena produced by the age of the Internet. Furthermore, most theories discussing the authority of audio-visual media – especially television – assert, either directly or implicitly, the inaction of the receiver, i.e. the inaction of the social self. Television emits implicit messages in its images, which the viewer does not participate in formulating, negating any form of interactive relationship between the sender and the receiver. However, this hypothesis fails in the case of the virtual public space and social media; the social self has become capable of participating in the emission process, which has led to confusion among the traditional media, forcing them to respect the receiver, whose social causes and political demands are now often discussed in an unpretentious manner.

One of the most notable effects of the virtual public sphere was the breaking of the master-disciple formula, which I have already described, empowering the Arab social self to have access to multiple sources of Islamic/political knowledge, and to choose what it finds suitable, or to adopt an idea, or several ideas, without the need to enroll in the educational model of the ideological establishment.⁵⁰

One scholar in the history of religions has taken note of this new model of religiosity, studying how it formed in relation to the escalating effect of globalization, where a consumerist relationship develops with religion (to use the words of the French sociologist and political scientist Patrick Michel, who sees that “there is a tendency aiming to look at the symbolic religious resources as consumption objects. This relation with religion, based on a demanding consumer regarding the symbolic, leads to the fact that the ‘clients’ have no remorse in changing the ‘provider’. The religion has become a space for individual comfort while it served previously

⁴⁹ Ibid, pp. 78.

⁵⁰ Thus, it is not difficult to explain the famous quarrel between Sheikh Yusuf Al Qaradawi and the Islamic television preacher Amr Khaled: the former took note that the latter was part of the wave of youth religiosity that does not necessarily commit to central decisions. This approach can also explain the limited number of activist Islam youth who have joined the Salafist jihadist movements in the post 9/11 phase, which is merely an example of the Arab youth having access to an unlimited number of sources for Islamic political knowledge.

as a justification of a constraint.”⁵¹ Given this consumerist relationship with religion, the individual/audience has the ability to reject this religious offer if he chooses to, and to seek a more agreeable religious author.⁵² Meanwhile, an Egyptian specialist in the affairs of Islamist movements says: “The relationship of the audience with the religious satellite channel would not be relatively different from its existing relationship with the list of channels that are currently available; in fact, its relationship with the television preacher will not be very different from that of the video clip singer, which members of the audience can choose among many others crowding the airwaves; the standard is the same: a consumption that suits the individuals.”⁵³

However, Michel’s thesis, which describes the type of religiosity in Western societies as “consumerist”, does not apply in its original form to Arab societies which have engendered an individualistic situation that connects and separates from the social ideology, and commits to specific positions more than to personalized leaderships or specific intellectual matrix. It goes without saying that the individualistic condition may be the expression of a collective actor that goes beyond individualism engendered by the consumerist society as per the Althusserian analysis of industrial societies.⁵⁴ The collective actor may also develop “an individualistic perspective and may even defend an individualistic stance”.⁵⁵

This hypothesis would have intersected with the thesis of French anthropologist Louis Dumont in his discussion of modern ideologies, except for the latter’s tendency to limit the instance of individualism to Western societies cut from the cloth of Christianity. In his tracing of individualism as a case within the “modernity”⁵⁶, Dumont found that, since the 13th century, the evolution of Christianity has led to the birth of the notion of the “self”, thus reinforcing individualism and transporting it from being first “outworldly”, and then progressively “inworldly”, so that ideology in the modern era was cast with tendencies reinforcing individualism. At the same time, individualism contributes to a collective entity that founds social and political agendas of demands.⁵⁷ In order to define the notion of individualism, Dumont

⁵¹ Interview with Patrick Michel,

<http://www2.cnrs.fr/presse/thema/447.htm>

⁵² Cited in: Hosam Tamam, “Religion, Secularism, and Identity in the Age of the fall of Ideology and the end of Grand Narratives: an Interview with Patrick Michele”, <http://islamismscope.net/interviews>

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Althusser considers the idea of individualization, and of individuals viewing themselves as independent selves, as the ideology of the consumerist society; for further information see: Abdallah Al Larouie, **The Concept of Ideology**, 7th edition, (Beirut/Casablanca: The Arab cultural center, 2003), pp. 92-97 (in Arabic).

⁵⁵ Al Taher Labib, op. cit. pp. 44.

⁵⁶ Louis Dumont, **Essays on Individualism: an Anthropological Perspective on Modern Ideologies**, University of Chicago Press, 1994.

⁵⁷ Ibid, pp. 30-51

contrasts it with the state of the social self in hierarchical systems, where the individual is driven by social-ideological complexes that dilute his or her individuality.⁵⁸

Dumont attributes this evolution in the ideological pattern to what he dubs Christian individualism, which according to him, “does not involve social beings but individuals, i.e. men each of whom are all self-sufficient as made in the image of God, and as the repository of reason”.⁵⁹ This carries an assumption that Christianity is one and not diverse, but even if we accepted this generalization, other religions and dogmas – including Islam – stress a direct relationship between God and the self without a medium or a hierarchical institution, and Islamic societies’ adopting such beliefs did not produce a modernity in the manner described by Dumont.

Thus, were we to expunge the spirit of Euro-centrism from Dumont’s writings, his work would carry important signals on the meeting between the nationalist state and individualism as a value. “The **nation**, in the precise modern sense of the term, and nationalism, as distinct from mere patriotism, **is precisely the type of** global society which corresponds to the paramountcy of the individual as value. **Not only** does the **one historically accompany the other**, but the interdependence between them is clear, so that we may say that the nation is a global society composed of people who think of themselves as individuals”⁶⁰. Nationalism in its primitive formulation means, thus, that the nation is “**two things in one: a collection of individuals** and, at the same time, a collective individual, an **individual on the level of groups, facing other nations-individuals**”⁶¹, and the idea that “cultures are individuals of a collective nature.”⁶²

Foucault takes a different and more cautious direction in locating the birth of the modern self, specifying the Cartesian moment as the epistemological point of formation for the formula “know thyself” at the expense of the formula “care for thyself”, without the need to seek facilitators in the roots of culture.⁶³ The former formula implies that the social self is located within larger social structures whose premises it does not surpass, while the latter affords the self some independence from its origins in a wider space for movement. Despite the fact that Foucault’s lectures tended to neglect textual evolution by making the Western self oscillate between the same two formulas since the age of the Greeks, however, the Foucauldian perspective distinguishes between the ancient conception of caring for the self and the modern

⁵⁸ Ibid, pp. 227-231

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 73

⁶⁰ Ibid, pp. 10-11

⁶¹ Ibid, p. 130.

⁶² Ibid, p. 118.

⁶³ Michel Foucault, **Interpreting the Self, Lectures presented in the College de France 1981-1982**, translated and annotated by Al Zawawi Bgora, (in Arabic), (Beirut: Dar Al taleea, 2011) pp. 198-270 .

conception, which belongs to the era of modernity.⁶⁴ The same could be said to be one of the most notable facts of individualism in the modern condition: had Foucault been a contemporary of the media revolution, he would have grasped the dialectic of the “caring for the self” and “knowing the self” in a faster and more complete manner.

Thus, this study agrees that the abundance of communication media has produced a situation in which the social self moves from the collectivity to individuality and vice versa. In French anthropologist Andrea Semprini’s terms, it is “a social cultural dynamism that rearranges the partitions between the individual and the collective”, and pits the individual against modern and pre-modern social relations without “the individual abandoning his links and roots; but – at the same time – he is no longer submissive to them since the logic of his relationship to others, and his belonging, has become one of choice and always permitting revision”.⁶⁵

Returning to the main subject, this study supports the view that the abundance of the means of communication/imagination in the daily reality of Arab societies has made the individualistic dialectic strongly present as a force undermining the pattern of political religiosity, while proposing individualistic/youth religiosity as a value of self-care – to use Foucault’s terms – and as a liberation from hierarchy – according to Dumont. This means that the liberation of this pattern from the grip of the establishment of political Islam does not necessarily signify its social neutrality or its servility to any of the authorities. Just as youth religiosity is liberated from the master-disciple relationship, it also necessarily refuses to submit to any similar patriarchal relationships in any other Arab ideological establishments.

This individualism is “institutionalized within a civil society, serving as sites for the production of alternative value systems, despite it being internally heterodox”; this internal heterogeneity is the main distinguishing feature of this individualism, even if some see this characteristic as “hampering the ability of these movements to easily immobilize political authority”⁶⁶. Still, the Arab revolutions – and that of Egypt in particular – have shown that this heterodoxy was what permitted the movement to escape the clutches of the regime, which remained unable to either define it or label it with a specific identity through which it could besiege and assault the phenomenon.

⁶⁴ Ibid, pp. 67.

⁶⁵ Andrea Semprini, *La société de flux: Formes du sens et identité dans les sociétés contemporaines*. (Paris; Budapest; Torino: L’Harmattan, 2003), p. 255 cited by Adel Ben Al Haj Rahouma in: “The Formation of Individual Identities among the Youth through Communication and Information Spaces”, **Contributions to Sociology Journal**, issues 3 and 4 / summer – fall 2008, The Arab society for sociology, (in Arabic), p. 140.

⁶⁶ Paul Kingston, “Islam and Democracy: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn”, **Contributions to Sociology Journal**, Issue 9, Winter 2010, the Arab Society for Sociology, pp. 195-197.

Conclusion: Revisiting the case of Islamist ideology

The events in Cairo's Tahrir Square on January 25, 2011, and what came after, require scholars to revise the entire corpus of contemporary Islamic Arab ideology; Arab intellectuals have exerted themselves, offering noble efforts to link ideological Islam to its social institution, but they have not provided sufficient information on what would happen to ideological Islam if it were separated from the institution and became a free-floating actor in the virtual arena.

The emergence of the virtual sphere and its spread among the popular classes led to basic Islamic political concepts' losing their direct link to the establishment in its traditional form. This empowered a broad section of the youth, allowing them to employ these concepts without the fear of being linked to traditional, social, or political organizations – and in a manner more efficient than that of the activist Islam of old. This was made apparent with the youth seizing upon the symbolism of Fridays and the rituals of communal prayer in public squares as a mobilizational catalyst for the masses and resilience in a revolutionary struggle. This engendered a unique situation combining the internalism of Arab Islamic culture with the modernity of legal values that belong, by all accounts, to the cultural space of the enlightenment.

In such a case I find a collective use of the values of Arab Islamic culture, not as a legacy but as an incubator for the modern Arab imaginary leading the revolutionaries to clone internalist modernist values that prevent the Other/colonist from infiltrating it, thus contributing to the foundation of a modern national culture that is not a subaltern to the ideology of Western modernity.⁶⁷

Activist Islam, which relied in its educational model on a hierarchical institutional relationship, could not keep up with the evolution of these new means of imagination, simply because these innovations led to the acceleration of the rate of debate and interaction, which circumvented the slowness and the bureaucracy of the ideological establishment. This new sphere expanded the realm of Islamic political knowledge and exposed its existing contradictions to the educated public. This led to a further weakening of the aforementioned master-disciple relationship.

⁶⁷ There is no doubt that the Arab experience is comparable to the Indian one, which was theorized by the subaltern school, discussing the importance of tradition in the rise of anti-colonialist nationalism. See for instance Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 40-42.

As a matter of course the task is easier in the Arab case due to the nature of the Arabic language and its dynamic history, which connect to several components, chief among them Islam. The Arabic language is the only means of imagination intersecting with the Arabic tradition, on the one hand, while being a national language on the other. Its specificity as an ancient and sacred language, and then as a modern one, allowed it to acquire a double character: traditional and modernist, opening the possibility for surpassing the problematic of authenticity and modernity. See on the subject: Azmi Bishara, **On the Arab Question ... A Preface for an Arab Democratic Manifesto**, (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2007) p. 233.

In the midst of these shifts and changes taking place in the Arab region, I expect activist Islam to undergo changes in its internal structure in a manner leading to its gradual adoption of similar models, albeit more moderate and more attached to the idea of the “homeland” and an inclusive Arab identity. Such a metamorphosis would spare activist Islam the loss of a broad public whose features have begun to emerge in the past two decades. This public has been undermining the legitimacy the activist Islam derived from Islamic culture, as it belongs to political projects aimed at pursuing the achievements of political modernity.

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