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Religion and Politics: What Does God Have To Do with It?

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Abstract: Since 9/11, and even more so with the atrocities committed by ISIS in Iraq and Syria, violence in the name of God is predominantly perceived as a “different” kind of violence, which triggers more “absolute” and radical manifestations than its secular counter parts. In its first part, this article will challenge this so called exceptionalism of religious violence by questioning the neat divide between politics and religion that makes any forms of interactions between the two illegitimate or dangerous. It will look specifically at state actions *vis-à-vis* religions since the inception of the nation-state and show that the most extreme cases of violence in the name of religion are actually closely associated with specific forms of politicization of religion initiated by “secular” state actors and/or institutions. It argues that the “hegemonic” status granted to a religion by the state is often associated with greater political violence, building on research conducted in Egypt, Turkey, Iraq, and Pakistan.

Keywords: state; secularism; hegemonic religion

1. Introduction

More than a decade after 9/11, it cannot be said anymore that religion is the “black hole” of international relations scholarship (hereafter IR). In fact, one of the unexpected consequence of this tragic event has been to put religion firmly on the agenda of IR. Most of the post-9/11 literature is actually an attempt to explain “the secularizing silence” [1], scholars attributing this neglect to the nature of Westphalian state system created in 1648, and the consequential influence of secular principles on international affairs. In this regard, the discipline has for a long time lagged behind the

concrete political influence of religion both nationally and internationally, from Hindu and Buddhist nationalism to political Islam.

The end of the Cold War and the emergence of religiously motivated political groups on the international scene, however, have dramatically changed this perception among scholars of international affairs. It has been the work of Samuel Huntington, first presented in a 1993 article in *Foreign Affairs* and subsequently elaborated in his 1996 book *The Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of World Order*, which has dominated the discourse on culture as an element in international conflicts [2]. Huntington argues that Islam is uniquely incompatible with and antagonistic to the core values of the West (such as equality and modernity). This argument resurfaces in most current analyses of international affairs and globalization, notably in terrorism studies since 9/11. However, as social sciences has abundantly proven, civilizations are not homogenous, monolithic players in world politics with an inclination to “clash”, but rather consist of pluralistic, divergent, and convergent actors and practices that are constantly evolving [3]. Thus, the “clash of civilizations” fails to address not only conflict between civilizations but also conflict and differences within civilizations. In particular, evidence does not exist to substantiate Huntington’s prediction that countries with similar cultures are coming together, while countries with different cultures are coming apart.

The cultural divide is thus envisaged as the primary cause of international crises. Admittedly, the “Huntingtonian” position is based on a premise that cannot be simply dismissed: that identity and culture play a decisive role in international relations. Additionally, Huntington’s argument can be situated within the current trend of researchers attempting to understand the scope of the political revolts against the Western-dominated international order [4]. However, *what* culture and *what* Islam are being spoken of here? The idea of a monolithic Islam leads to a reductionism in which the conflicts in Sudan, Lebanon, Bosnia, Iraq, and Afghanistan are imagined to stem collectively and wholly from the domain of religion. It is, moreover, ironic that the role of religion, so long ignored or neglected in International theory is, is now exaggerated and decontextualized in an ahistorical perspective, which has elicited its fair share of criticism from scholars of religions.

Another issue with the recent scholarship on religion and international affairs, is that it focuses primarily on Islam and terrorism. This contributes to the misleading perception, so dominant in world affairs, that the scope and reach of terrorism in the name of God has grown out of control, that this violence is inspired by the specifics of the Islamic tradition and resilient to usual forms of compromise or negotiation.

This paper challenges this approach on religion and international relations by suggesting that the relevance of religion is not in the content of the Islamic tradition per se but in the interactions between religious and political actors, institutions, and ideas. In this regard, limiting Islam to beliefs or texts proves to be a dead end as the text can lead to very opposite political mobilizations. Instead, looking at belonging and behaving and the ways they are interconnected with belief helps us solve the puzzle of apparently very secular projects leading to political battles over Islamically correct social behaviors, which are currently happening in Turkey, Egypt or Tunisia. In other words, the social and political visibility of Islam is not caused by an increase in personal beliefs or religiosity. People are not stronger believers than they used to be, but their identification to Islam has certainly shifted, creating a collusion between political and Islamic belongings that facilitate political mobilization. Hence, the question is not on the nature of the religion but more on how historical processes and cultural

transformations inform the tensions between religion and politics or between secular and religious, which are at play everywhere. Such a perspective requires a “*longue durée*”, historicized analysis that drastically challenges the rational choice centered theories that still dominate the International Relations discipline.

In sum, we will take into account the long-standing processes of mutual interactions between religion and politics to demonstrate the following:

- (1) the politicization of religion in Muslim countries can be traced back to the building of the nation-state and the active role of “secular rulers” in reshaping the Islamic tradition as we will show through the case studies of countries often considered as the most secular: Iraq (under Saddam), Egypt, Turkey, Pakistan and Tunisia.
- (2) the outcome of the absorption of Islam by the nation-state is what we call “hegemonic Islam” that is defined by exclusive legal, political and cultural privileges granted to one religion over all the others.
- (3) Hegemonic forms of Islam in particular and of religion in general are conducive to more domestic and international political violence.

The politicization of religion cannot solely be found in the study of religious doctrines, which is often the bias at play in most of the analyses of political Islam [5]. In fact, the politicization of Islam has not affected so much theology or doctrines (except in the case of the Islamic Republic of Iran with the introduction of the *vilayet a faqih* concept, *i.e.*, the political guidance of the ayatollahs). However, it has certainly changed the identifications to the Islamic tradition by mingling it with national belonging. More to the point: in most Muslim-majority countries, political Islam is not the monopoly of Islamic parties but also a foundational element of the national and civic identity. Although most of the founders of Muslim-majority countries were secularized, they nevertheless included Islam in the state system, spurring its politicization by turning it into a modern national ideology, which operates as a common denominator for all political forces, secular or otherwise. As such, political Islam should be understood in a broader context that goes beyond Islamist ideology or Islamic parties. I therefore argue that both the state and the Islamists have been instrumental in politicizing Islam. In this broader sense, political Islam includes the nationalization of Islamic institutions and personnel under state ministries and the use of Islamic references in law and national education.

2. Nationalism and Pan-Islamism: Responses to the Western Concepts of Nation and State

After the symbolic inclusion of the Ottoman Empire into the Westphalian Order at the treaty of Paris that ended the Crimean war in 1856 [6], the gradual insertion of Muslim countries into the international order in the first half of the twentieth century was the result of three disparate factors: the end of the Ottoman Empire; the growing popularity of local nationalist movements in urban centers such as Cairo, Tunis, Baghdad, and Damascus; and the emergence of states under colonial power. The political and cultural resistance the imperialism of Western powers took two different but intertwined forms: Pan-Islamism and Pan-Arabism [7].

Pan-Islamists considered the universal Islamic community (Ummah) as the true basis and source of modern political unity and took as model the life and teachings of the Prophet Mohammed as well as his first four successors. In the waning days of the Ottoman Empire, the Pan-Islamism movement was

fueled by the threat of European incursions into Egypt and Tunisia in 1798 and 1881. These actions by European states influenced reformers, such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838–1897) and his disciple, Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905), who both called for *al-Wahda al-Islamiyya* (Muslim Unity) against Western imperialism in their journal *al-Urwa al-Wuthqa* (The Firmest Bond) ([7], p. 61). Consequentially, these intellectuals redefined the Caliphate as the community of all Muslim believers under the Prophet-Muhammad's vice-regent, in an attempt at buttressing the Empire's claims of legitimacy in the international system ([7], p. 33)¹. In this way, Pan-Islamism resisted the idea of the Nation-State by becoming an alternate ideological approach for the political community in Ottoman territory, making it a trans-national geopolitical tool ([7], p. 60). At the end of the Second World War, a rethinking of the feasibility of political Pan-Islam gradually led to a search for alternative propositions, more adapted to the intense nation-building that was taking place at the time. The political goal of a neo caliphate was therefore replaced by more national-centered Islamic parties and movements. It was also after the Second World War that Pan-Islamism took on a categorically anti-Western rhetoric, which was not significant at the inception of the movement.

Reaching its height in the 1960s, Pan-Arabism started around the same time as Pan-Islamism. Rather than religion, it centered on a unified linguistic and cultural community. With the growing use of print media, the movement saw its rise in conjunction with Arabic poetry and literature during the *al-Nahda* renaissance in the late 19th and early 20th centuries [8]. This “awakening”, like Pan-Islamism, was in response to the domination of Western cultural norms. Once the Ottoman Empire started to crumble and Pan-Arabism gained the support of the British power [9], the competition with Pan-Islamism intensified [10]. Both movements however, shaped the resistance to European political imperialism either through the lens of Islamic terminology for Pan-Islamists or through Arab culture for Pan-Arabists. The brief historical account below of national resistance in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey, and Tunisia is illustrative of the tensions but also the cross-pollination between the two movements.

In Egypt, Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905), reinterpreted the basic Islamic principles of his mentor and “founder” of Pan-Islamism, al-Afghani, to argue that while Islamic principles were consistent with modern Western rules of power and rationality, an intellectual battle, rather than an actual war, should be waged to fight Western imperialism [11]. In turn, one of Abduh's followers, Shaykh Rashid Rida (1865–1935), founder of the journal *al-Manar*, called for the unity of all Muslims under the banner of a reconstituted caliphate [12]. This modern approach to the caliphate as governance for Muslims only, influenced Hassan al-Banna (1906–1949), the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood. Borrowing from Abduh and Rida, al-Banna believed that Islam rather than the nation was the best tool for intellectual resistance to the Western project [13]. This anti-nationalist agenda was most prevalent with the alliance between the Muslim Brotherhood and King Faruq (1936–1952) who supported Pan-Islamist ideals instead of the nationalist and secular Wafd party. However, in the decades leading to the Second World War, the Muslim Brotherhood's ideology came in conflict with both King Faruq and nationalist

¹ In the pre-modern Islamic tradition, the Ummah is the totality of territories under the rule of the caliphate, which includes multiple religions, ethnicities and languages. In this regard, the idea of a caliphate for Muslims only, is modern and directly related to the engagements of Muslim thinkers with Western concepts of nation and nationalism.

groups. The conflict continued long after the monarchy's fall with Gamal Abdel Nasser (1956–1970) rise to power which marks the supremacy of nationalism over Pan-Islamism.

In Syria, the Ba'ath Party's created by Michel Aflaq (1910–1989) and Salah Bitar (1912–1980) in 1956 was the direct outcome of the influence of Pan-Arabism which promoted the ideal of a global Arab Nation, and translated in short-lived attempts such as the unification of Egypt and Syria into the United Arab Republic (1958–1961) [14]. A similar story to Syria was playing out in neighboring Iraq, where the Ba'ath Party gained power [15], which eventually led to the rise of Saddam Hussein in 1979 and the creation of Iraq into a unified Arab nation [16]. To this effect, Saddam penned policies emphasizing Arab unity, such as the Arab National Charter in 1980, which attempted to increase Arab cooperation towards common regional goals. At the same time, these Arab nationalists took control and deeply reshaped Islamic institutions and teaching.

As for Pakistan, although it was initially conceived as a political refuge for Muslims; Pan-Islamism itself was not the main source of inspiration that led to its partitioning from the Indian subcontinent. Prior to the calls for independence from British-ruled India, several Pan-Islamist movements, led by poet-philosopher Mohammad Iqbal (1877–1938) and Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1876–1948), gained widespread support in the subcontinent. Before the entrance of Iqbal and Jinnah to the Pan-Islamist stage, Sayyid Ahmad Raza Khan Bareilvi (1856–1921) created a populist Islamic revivalist movement in the late 1800s. Officially named the *Ahl e Sunnat wa Jama'at*, Bareilvi's ideals had both Sunni and Sufi origins and was popularly known for its more "liberal" ideology in Islam. For example, the movement championed the belief of intercession between the Divine and humans, a belief challenged by the more puritan Wahhabis and Deobandis [17]. Following this trend was the pro-Ottoman Khilafat movement, led by Maulana Mohammad Ali (1878–1931) and Maulana Shaukat Ali (1873–1938), who, during a conference in Karachi in July 1921, swore allegiance of all Indian Muslims to the Ottoman Empire [18]. The Khilafat movement quickly lost its momentum once the caliphate was abolished in 1924. The fall of the Khilafat movement set the stage for Iqbal and Jinnah to campaign for a Muslim state separate from Hindu hegemony in India. This goal would eventually become the highest ideal and course of action set by Iqbal in 1930 and adopted by Jinnah with the creation of the Muslim League [19].

Turkey's history of nation building was set around the tensions and conflict within the Ottoman Empire between Pan-Islamic and Pan-Arabist camps. By the time Western political ideas were penetrating different parts of the empire, the last of the Ottoman Sultans, Abdulhamid II (1876–1909), used Pan-Islamic ideas to promote imperial unity and maintain political control by contrasting Islamic identity to Western values [20]. As Kemal Karpat suggests, "religious" activities were used to "nationalize" the millets [21] of the Ottoman dynasty. For Abdulhamid, these religious activities buttressed his position as Caliph to those who saw Islam as a significant personal identity. Towards the end of Abdulhamid's reign, the Young Turk Movement (beginning in 1908) emerged as a political alternative to Pan-Islamism. Young Turks, such as Ahmet Riza (1859–1930), were best known for their attempts to combine Islam with Western ideals rather than pitting them against each other. Riza's attempts were an "anti-clerical struggle to refashion Islam as a private matter and as a rational belief comparable with modernization" [22]. In this sense, Riza and the Young Turks were not anti-Islam, rather they were against the religious nature of the Caliphate. With multiple independence movements sprouting up throughout the empire (Armenia, Greek, etc.), the Young Turks attempted to consolidate their hold on the Turkish areas by spreading the idea of a Turkish nation and promoting a form of

Islam where prayers and sermons were performed in Turkish ([20], p. 305). Once the empire collapsed at the end of World War I, the Young Turks were in a position to take control of former Ottoman provinces and establish what is today modern Turkey.

In Tunisia, allegiance to the Ummah, manifested by a pervasive loyalty to the caliphate, was seen as a way to resist reforms initiated by the modernist elite under French control, such as Mohammad as-Sadiq Bey (1859–1881). Pan-Islamist resistance against the urban Westernized elites lasted from 1864 to 1881, immediately after the country became a protectorate under France with the Treaty of Bardo [23]. In the wake of the First World War, Islamic belonging persisted with the creation of the Destour Party in 1920, headed by Sheik Abdelaziz Taalbi (1920–1934), a man who spoke little French and a student of Rida and Afghani [24]. The Destour Party drew its membership from the educated elite who distinguished themselves by being fluent in Islamic and Arab cultures rather than those who drew their references from the French. Ironically, the Destour Party was the precursor to the Neo-Destour Party, established in 1934 which led the nationalist movement under Habib Bourguiba (1957–1987). The main difference between the old and new Destour Party was the connection between Islam and nationalism with the Neo-Destour Party ultimately imposing nationalism over Pan-Islamism. However, while Bourguiba was widely known for his secular beliefs and the dismantling and minimizing of the *ulama* and other Islamic institutions, he was often referred to as *al-Mujahid ul-Akbar* (the great warrior), and relied heavily on Islamic institutions and symbols to mobilize in masses in the anticolonial jihad [25]. For example, during the fight for independence from France, Bourghiba often held meetings in Mosques and Sufi zawiyas and urged the public to pray five times a day for the national martyrs [26]. This is in stark contrast with his policies after achieving independence in 1956, which included the Personal Status Law of 1957 that abolished *Shari'a* courts, banned the *hijab*, and restricted polygamy. This brought to the forefront Tunisia's French influences and secular-nationalist identity overpowering its Arab-Islamic identity.

In sum, in all nationalist movements, Islam was used as a rallying cry against colonial powers. However once Independence was achieved, Islam was painted as a symbol of the past while Westernization was seen as more representative of the newly independent country's future. At the same time, it was not possible for secular rulers to remain indifferent to the Islamic dimension of their new nations.

3. Nation-Building and Framing New Norms: The Creation of Hegemonic Islam

The nation-building process in the Muslim world saw a decisive rearrangement of the society-state-religion nexus. During the Caliphate era, religious institutions were not subservient to political power and most scholars of political history [27,28] argue that separations of labor and hierarchies of power between temporal and spiritual establishments were generally well organized and established by the tenth century. This does not mean that there were not "official" *Ulama* working in conjunction with the political rulers, similarly to the modern era. The major difference, however, was that in pre-modern time, religious authorities and institutions were not financially and organizationally dependent on the political power.

The Caliphs also acknowledged the cultural and religious diversity of the empire, although not so much as to translate into an egalitarian society for all religions and ethnicities. For example, the

Ummah was established as the totality of the territories and people under the Caliphate rule, which included an extensive collection of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic groups including Muslims, Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, Bahais, and Druze. This is in stark contrast of what one would see as the original successor of the community that followed the message of the Prophet Mohammad. In reality, the Caliphate's power was limited by geography and governed in a way comparable to any secular dynasty charged with ruling multiple ethnic and religious groups [29]. This gap between the ideal community following the model of the Prophet and the political reality manifested itself in the distinction between *Shari'a* and *Syar* established by the juris consultates. While *Shari'a* referred to laws that apply to Muslims, *Syar* refers to laws applying to non-Muslims both living under the Caliphate and at the international level [6]². In contrast, the modern idea of the *Ummah* refers to a spiritual, community distinguished by those following Islam. In other words, the *Ummah* is now defined as a kind of extra-territorial citizenship for Muslims, regardless of where they live [30]. This new concept has become very pervasive in modern theological thinking.³

The collapse of the Ottoman Empire marks the end of the Islamic rule over different religious, ethnic, and linguistic communities. Nation-building in the wake of the Empire's fall, systematically omitted and in some cases, eradicated, particular ethnic, religious, and linguistics groups in hopes of creating a nation defined by a single religion and language. This homogenization had a direct influence on the politicization of religion. More generally, with the advent of the modern Nation-State, the relationship between religion and politics had been redefined everywhere. Creators of new Nation-States outside of the Western world had to contend with a major challenge: to what degree the "core" collective identity of the new country should be replaced by the Western institutions and technologies necessary to strengthen the state as a whole both militarily and economically? [31]. In the case of post-Ottoman Nations, the emergence of new political norms in concert with nationalism generally resulted in state projects that made use of Islamic terminology or vocabulary (*Ummah/Jihad*) or were articulated within an Islamic framework in order to anchor the nation-state project the vernacular mindset [32]. To put it differently, Islamic references or norms were applied to "localize" the nation-building process and legitimize state actors and policies, the outcome of which was the redefining of Islam within state institutions. The pruning and grafting of these new political norms on the pre-existing ones happened at four levels:

- (1) The inscription of Islam in the Constitution as religion of the country or religion of the state;
- (2) The Nationalization of Institutions, clerics and places of worship of one particular trend of Islam (for example Sunni over Shia);

² The concept of *Syar* was developed in the early centuries of Islam by Al-Shaybānī (748–805) and later codified by Al-Sarakhsī (d. 1101): "The *syar*...describes the conduct of the believers in their relations with the unbelievers of enemy territory as well as with the people with whom the believers had made treaties, who may have been temporarily (*musta'mins*) or permanently (*dhimmīs*) in Islamic lands; with apostates, who were the worst of the unbelievers [...] and with rebels."

³ Yusuf al Qaradawi, in the context of the Palestinian national movement. Qaradawi sees the *Ummah* as a transnational and compulsory alliance of Muslims that excludes non-Muslims. "Supporting the Palestinian people in Gaza is a religious duty on every Muslims individual (from Morocco to Indonesia) according to his capabilities, and no one is exempted from that duty."

- (3) Redefinition and adjustment of Sharia to the modern legal system as well as inclusion of Islamic references into civil law (marriage/divorce) as well as restriction of freedom of speech (blasphemy/apostasy), based on the prescriptions of that particular brand of Islam;
- (4) Insertion of the doctrine of that religion into the public school curriculum beyond religious instruction, that is in national history textbooks, civic education and so forth.

These four features concur to establish Islam as a hegemonic religion. It is important to note the difference between a dominant religion, an established religion, and a hegemonic religion. A religion is dominant when it is the religion of the majority of a given country. In such cases, the dominant religion continues to impart historical and cultural references considered “natural” and “legitimate”. Religious symbols and rituals become embedded in the public culture and the country. Examples of such dominant religions include Protestantism in the United States or Catholicism in France and Poland. An established religion is a church recognized by law as the religion of the country or the state and sometimes financially supported by the state like the Church of Denmark. Usually, the existence of an established church is not incompatible with the legal protection of religious minorities and freedom of speech.

A religion becomes hegemonic, however, when the state grants a certain religious group exclusive legal, economic, or political rights denied to other religions. In other words, *religious hegemony* refers to legal and political privileges granted to a specific religious group, which in most but not all cases is the dominant religion. Most importantly, it also related to *public culture and social identities* fashioned by Islamic references even for citizens who are not Muslims or do not believe.

The unexpected and often unseen consequences of legal privilege are state restrictions and controls over the activities of the official religion. It usually involves:

- A ministry of religious affairs and administration to manage the official religion;
- Government regulation of the use of religious symbols or activities;
- Limitations by state laws and policies on freedom of expression (apostasy law);
- Penalties for the defamation of the official religion (blasphemy law); and
- Government interference with worship (state authorization for building of places of worship. State censure of religious discourses and publications).

All Muslim countries, including Turkey, possess two or four of these features, the exceptions being Lebanon, Senegal and Indonesia (although discriminatory practices do exist). Interestingly, they are also the only ones that qualify as democracies, according to the Freedom House index. The other exceptions are the Muslim countries that were under communist rule and in which religion was banned (see table below).

While democracy can accommodate some forms of state involvement into religions, the hegemonic status granted to one religion is an impediment to democratic life or transition to democracy. Additionally, hegemonic religion is usually correlated with higher levels of violence between citizens as discussed below. In sum, states which give exclusive, rights, privileges, status, and benefits to a single religion are significantly less likely to be democratic. Additionally, Muslim-majority states, especially in the Middle East, are more likely to have hegemonic traits, although these traits are by no means exclusive to these states.

4. Hegemonic Religion and Political Violence

Data on Islam’s role in the following domains was methodically collected (see Table 1): (a) the Constitution; (b) the nationalization of clerics and religious institutions; (c) the legal system; (d) the education system. The data covers the period from the creation of each Nation-State to present. According to this systemic review, out of the 45 Muslim-majority countries listed below, 28 score between a 2 and 4 on a four-point scale measuring the hegemony of Islam.

Table 1. Hegemonic features of Muslim states.⁴

	Constitution	Nationalization	Law	Education
<u>Score of 4</u>				
Egypt				
Saudi Arabia				
Pakistan				
Algeria				
Morocco				
Malaysia				
Bangladesh				
Jordan				
Kuwait				
Somalia	√	√	√	√
Qatar				
UAE				
Sudan				
Yemen				
Iran				
Afghanistan				
Libya (under Qadaffi)				
Bahrain				
Comoros				
Brunei				
Mauritania				
<u>Score of 3</u>				
Syria				
Iraq (under Saddam Hussein)		√	√	√
Tunisia				
Oman				
Uzbekistan				

⁴ A caveat is in order: This table groups countries in a very unusual way (Saudi Arabia/Egypt for example) because it scores only institutional arrangements as they stand today. Therefore, it does not reflect nor contextualize the political and social forces at work in each country that are obviously very different and diverse. For the score of 0, countries (especially former communist countries like Albania) have no history of ties with religion. Others, like Lebanon, provide an example of confessionalism, which proportionally allocates political power and represents the demographic distribution of the recognized religions. Indonesia, Gambia, and Senegal recognize all religions and legally provide education and resources for all religious institutions.

Table 1. Cont.

	Constitution	Nationalization	Law	Education
<u>Score of 2</u>				
Tajikistan	-	x	-	√
Turkey				
<u>Score of 1</u>				
Nigeria				
Mali				
Niger	-	-	-	√
Chad				
Kyrgyzstan				
Turkmenistan				
<u>Score of 0</u>				
Albania				
Kosovo				
Guinea				
Kazakhstan				
Azerbaijan				
Burkina Faso	-	-	-	-
Sierra Leone				
Lebanon				
Senegal				
Indonesia				
Gambia				

The four conditions are not individually sufficient to secure the hegemonic status of Islam, and not all of these conditions hold the same weight, especially the inscription of Islam in the Constitution that in some countries can be merely symbolic. However, the conjunction of the nationalization, legal system, and education conditions are probably necessary to secure a hegemonic status. In other words, if Islamic institutions are State institutions, Islamic law is part of the legal system, and Islam is engrained in the curriculum of public schools, Islam has a hegemonic status. In this regard, our research confirms findings that correlate religious instruction with the role of political Islam in most of Muslim majority countries [33].

Other states outside the Muslim world, such as Sri Lanka, Butan or the Dominican Republic can also be defined by two or three traits of the hegemonic religion. It happens that they are also low on the democracy index and high on political violence and social hostility. Other research, beside our own, shows that state restrictions on religion increase social and political violence [3]. The Pew Forum surveys confirm that government and social restrictions of religion lead to higher levels of religious persecution and violence across *all* countries independent of the religious tradition. They also corroborate that the highest degree of persecution happens in countries with sociopolitical monopoly of religion or monopolistic social pressures [34], or what we call hegemonic Islam. The monopoly or quasi monopoly situation covers 90% of Muslim-majority countries and further converges with the data produced by Jonathan Fox and Shmuel Sandler on the Government Involvement in Religion, where Muslim-majority countries score the highest [35,36]. In other words, Muslim majority countries

are not distinctive when it comes to higher levels of religious persecution and violence *vis-à-vis* government and social restriction. Instead, these studies in conjunction with one another point to a different reason for increased religious violence in Muslim majority countries, which is the existence of a total monopoly or quasi monopoly over religion, regardless of the specific religion. This means that the issue of religious violence is not with Islam, but with the treatment of religion in general by the government and society.

The correlation of state-religions interactions with politicization of religion and increased probability of political violence in the name of God, obliges us to revisit the divide between religion and politics and secular and religious.

5. Conclusions

With no doubt, the work of Talal Asad or Michel Connolly has strongly questioned the definition of religion as a set of beliefs and demonstrated that this understanding, far from being universal, is the direct outcome of the historical evolution of Christianity in the West [37].

In fact, our incursion in Muslim territories shows that the belonging and the behaving are equally important in the politicization of religion. The distinction between believing, belonging and behaving has been made by sociologists to understand modern forms of religiosity. These three dimensions have historically been systematically linked or associated in the definition of a person's religiosity. They respectively refer to beliefs, religious practices and collective identity and have been for a long time defined as simultaneously part and parcel of a person's religiosity. However, recent sociological analyses have shed light on the increasing disjunction of these three dimensions and apprehended this disjunction as modern forms of religiosity [38,39]. Thus, a person can believe without automatically behaving and belonging; can belong without believing or behaving; or can behave without believing or belonging.⁵

In Muslim countries, the transformation brought by the nation-state has primarily transformed the belonging of citizens to Islam by a fusion of religious and national identifications. We have mentioned how from national historiography to civil law, the political socialization has introduced the belonging to the hegemonic form of Islam as synonymous to belonging to the nation. For this reason, what was traditionally considered religious, like belief in God is now politically discussed in public cases that address apostasy or blasphemy. It is important to stress that this politicization of religious belonging shapes the modern public space. One can argue that Islamic belonging was also key in defining the pre modern public space: after all, transgressions to Islamic beliefs in public space were sanctioned by death. But this punishment was ultimately in the hands of the Ulemas, not of the political authority. By contrast, the modern state, not the Ulemas, has taken on the punishment for apostasy or blasphemy,

⁵ In *Genealogies of Religion*, Talal Asad describes the status of religion in medieval society as very different from the place what it is that religion holds in the modern age. Christianity during this period, he argues, functioned as a "great cloak" that defined an adherent's entire experience of the world. It possessed an "all-embracing capacity"—a distinctive practice and belief system—that disciplined the religious subject and nurtured certain virtues. Religion was not some essentially distinct form of culture, process of reasoning, or experiential state—that existed apart from other cultural experiences. It encompassed the cultural horizon of the subject's practices and assumptions about the world.

even in secular countries like Egypt or Pakistan or Tunisia⁶. This state interference is not unique: some European states have maintained until now blasphemy law (most recently, the UK abolished its blasphemy law after 9/11). Nevertheless, the social and cultural secularization has actually rendered these laws obsolete in modern times. While in Muslim countries, the politicization of religion within the nation-state has made them more used and central to the public space than they were in the pre-modern Islamic periods [40].

These public and collective assertions of Islam are different from personal religious practices or beliefs. Actually, an analysis of the disjunctions between belonging and behaving can explain the intriguing and apparently contradictory political changes in Turkey, Tunisia, Pakistan and even Iraq. All started as secular national projects grounded in some Islamic references. It meant that Islam and the nation became combined in the same collective belonging in an effort to counter Islamic transnational projects (Pan-Islamism/Sufism). At the same time, in all these countries, the first national phase resulted in a secularization of citizen's religious practices in terms of dress code, gender relations, and life style. In the last three decades however, these societies have gone through a greater Islamization reflected in the increase of the *hijab*, as well as of Islamically-correct behaviors and speech. Consequentially, the political tensions are not on the belonging anymore, in the sense that Islamists have come to term with the national framework. After all, the past and present claims of Islamic state are evidence of the acceptance of what was initially seen as foreign. Although the most recent iterations of Islamism like al Qaida and now ISIS are in their respective ways attempts to destroy nation-states. What is now at stake is the behaving of believers-citizens and its consequences for women rights, freedom of speech and expression.

Additionally, our research validates what has already been hinted by other scholars, *i.e.*, religious tradition is not a good predictor to explain political violence. This finding speaks to several important debates on issues of religion and politics. For example, Huntington's clash of civilizations mentioned above, has been extensively criticized. In fact, as already discussed above, multiple surveys show that religious hegemony, not religious differences, increases conflicts and the probability of politicization of religion. In the same vein, according to the Pew data, 33 percent of countries dominated by one religion have a high level of religious-based violence, compared to 20 percent of countries where no religion dominates ([3], p. 67).

Finally, unlike what most theories of political development still assert, state involvement in religion is not necessarily an obstacle to democracy but the hegemonic status of religion may be. A worthwhile investigation, outside the scope of this article, would be looking at alternative forms of secularism beyond differentiation of state and religion, and their respective compatibility with democracy.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

⁶ In Egypt, there is no blasphemy law, but condemnation for insult to the Prophets is a penal offense, likewise in Tunisia and Turkey. Pakistan is one of the secular country that has introduced in the 1970s blasphemy and apostasy laws punishable by death, like Iran after the Islamic Revolution.

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