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Disciplining religion: the role of the state and its consequences on democracy

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ABSTRACT

This article presents the concept of hegemonic religion and its relationship with democracy. This concept entails not only a certain type of institutional relation between state and religion but, more importantly, a kind of national culture with religion at its core. Utilizing Norbert Elias's figurational sociology, this article analyses how postcolonial states have built a national habitus that plays a decisive role in the politicization of religion. It focuses on examples from Islam and Buddhism and discusses how hegemonic types of politicised religions have negative impacts on democracy.

KEYWORDS

Habitus; hegemonic religion; nation-state

When evaluating the role of religion in politics, scholarship falls into two opposite categories: it either addresses religion as an independent or a dependent variable. The clash of civilisations has been the most discussed theory in which cultures in general, and Islam in particular, are the independent variable. Samuel Huntington states that social conflicts result from clashes across civilisations and religions. However, as abundantly proven by social sciences (Grim and Finke 2011), civilisations are not homogenous, monolithic players in world politics with an inclination to “clash.” Instead, civilisations consist of constantly evolving pluralistic, divergent, and convergent actors and practices (Katzenstein 2010). Thus, the clash of civilisations view fails to address not only conflict between civilisations but also conflicts and differences within civilisations. In particular, evidence does not substantiate Huntington's stance that countries with similar cultures are coming together, while countries with different cultures are coming apart. In fact, as the data presented in this article demonstrate, religious homogeneity increases conflicts and the probability of religion's politicisation. Pew data, for example, demonstrates that 33 percent of countries dominated by one religion experience high levels of religious-based violence, compared to 20 percent of countries where no religion dominates (Grim and Finke 2011: 67).

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Another iteration of the independent variable school bases explanations of social or political behaviors on religious traditions. Terrorist and security studies fall in this trap when they examine origins of political violence without considering cultural context or religious specificities. More specifically, a large body of literature exists on *jihād*, Al-Qaeda, and terrorism, which— with a few exceptions (Pape 2005)— considers religion one, if not the primary, cause of terrorist activities worldwide. The same essentialist approach characterises research that focuses on political Islamic movements' ideological content, without systematically linking these movements to specific social and political contexts. This is a tendency of the international relations discipline's approach to religion— particularly Islam (Volpi 2010). To a certain extent, the same critique can be made for some constructivist work when it is limited to the discursive approach, which views cultures as rhetorical practices and narratives (Katzenstein 2010).

Taking the opposite stand, another body of literature analyses religion as the dependent variable. This literature is dominated by social movement theories, which rightly point out that ideology is only one aspect of political mobilisation (Snow and McAdam 2010; Tarrow 1998). More distinctly, the politicisation of Islam is attributed to the combination of a strong ideology (Wiktorowicz 2006; Shapiro, Smith, and Masoud 2004; Jamal 2007) with several “opportunity structures.” The most significant structures are the political failure of secular national projects (Kepel 2004; Hafez 2010), the deepening of economic crises, and the demographic bulge (Kepel 2004; Zubaida 2009; Lawrence 1989). This literature is very relevant to understanding the multiple mechanisms of politicisation, but does not explain why Islamism prevails over other forms of political mobilisation.

The same limitation characterises the rational choice approach that emphasises competition between religious and political actors to explain the role of religion in politics, rendering religious ideas, norms, beliefs, and practices dependent on interests. While there is some truth to this interest-based approach, it does not address that interests also derive from cultural settings and *longue durée* processes of socialisation; interests do not emerge solely and primarily from individual preferences.

In this regard, we agree with Linklater and Mennell when they remark “explanations that reduce power struggles between states to attributes of human nature are guilty of the psychological reductionism that explains social relationships in terms of libidinal drives ‘without history’” (2010: 401). In other words, the interest-centered approach is problematic when it assumes that interests emanate from the individual as a discrete unit, operating independently from his or her social environment. More generally, most of these approaches operate on the implicit dichotomy of a secularised politics under attacks by groups using religion as an oppositional tool at the national and international levels.

We shall present an alternative perspective borrowing from historical sociology and focusing on complex state–religion interactions such as adaptation, cooperation, and competition. This approach offers several advantages. First, it

avoids the use of de-historicised models of political development that project a Western-centered approach as universal.

Second, our approach brings the state into the shaping and fashioning of religion. Norbert Elias' figurational sociology is very relevant to our investigation, even though Elias did not pay attention to religion per se. Nevertheless, he focuses on transformation of institutions in the *longue durée* and actors' efforts to control, change, or oppose them; this can explain the role of political institutions in the politicisation of religions and, more specifically, the state's transformational role. We shall show in this article that building nation-states in Muslim lands led to concentrations of power in the hands of state rulers, which changed social relations but also identified with the Islamic tradition. More specifically, it translated into hegemonic forms of Islam, unknown to pre-modern Muslim polities and empires. We shall also show that this process characterises other postcolonial countries, such as Sri Lanka, where the politicisation of Buddhism parallels the process in Muslim countries.

Third, our approach offers a different perspective from the historical sociology dominating political science. The literature on the history of state-formation is strong, with a special focus on structural changes such as shifts in the organisation of coercive power, alterations in property relations, and changes in modes of production. Nonetheless, such works—notably the extensive writings of Charles Tilly (1992), Theda Skocpol (1979), and Michael Mann (2012)—seldom refer to Elias's writings.

One reason is the perception of Elias' work as normative because of his association between civilisation and the West. For this reason we would like to assert that civilisation in our work does not presuppose the superiority of Western cultures, but relates to processes of concentration of power and changes in human psyche, behaviors, and emotions that happen in any cultural context. In other words, it is disciplinisation. We are also convinced that this approach to civilisation was the one defended by Elias himself:

“There is no zero-point of civilizing processes, no point at which human beings are uncivilized and as it were begin to be civilized. No human being lacks the capacity for self-restraint. No human group could function for any length of time whose adults failed to develop, within the wild and at first totally unrestrained little beings, as which humans are born, patterns of self-regulation and self-restraint [*sic*]. What changes in the course of a civilizing process are the social patterns of individual self-restraint and the manner in which they are built into the individual person in the form of what one now calls ‘conscience’ or perhaps ‘reason.’” (1992: 146)

In sum, our intention is to overcome false the dichotomies (individual/society, agent/structure, ideational/material, domestic/ international, and so forth) that limit our understanding of religion and politics' interactions. In David Scott's view, then, rather than approaching modern power as a force that blocks expression of native agency, it is more helpful to understand modernity as a form of power that “altered not merely the balance of forces in the struggle between colonizer

and colonized, but the terrain itself on which that struggle was engaged; that altered not merely the rules of the game of social, political, and cultural life among the colonized, but the game as such in which social, political, and cultural life was organized” (Scott 2004). Of course, Elias’s approach is not the panacea to all research questions in sociology (Layder, 1986, Goudsblom, 1994).

We consider his approach in order to present politicised religion as a continuously evolving configuration of power between state actors, traditional religious establishments, state and non-state religious actors, and civil society groups (women/intellectuals/religious minorities). In other words, it will highlight the power struggles shaping normative expectations about religion, society, and politics among different actors. Outside the West, these figurations took diverse forms, beginning during colonisation and crystallised during nation-building. We call hegemonic cases in which the state not only took control of territory, legitimate use of violence, and redefinition and re-alignment of social allegiances, but also restructuration of one religion as part of the national identity to the detriment of all other religions. From our previous work (Cesari 2014), we have shown that this hegemonic feature characterises the majority of Muslim countries today (except for Lebanon, Senegal, and Indonesia). It would be misleading, however, to conclude that it is correlated to the nature of the Islamic religion. In fact, our investigation in the religion and state data base, run by Jonathan Fox (<http://www.thearda.com/ras/>) shows that this hegemonic feature appears in other, non-Muslim countries such as Bhutan, the Dominican Republic, or Sri Lanka (see Appendix A). In our argument below, we shall compare Egypt, Turkey, Tunisia, and Sri Lanka.

We deliberately selected Egypt, Tunisia, and Turkey for the purpose of this article to shed light on the postcolonial state’s role in redefining Islam, even in countries considered “secular” by Western standards. Similarly, Buddhism’s hegemonic status in Sri Lanka is not explained by the Buddhist tradition, but instead by the ways the postcolonial state redefined Buddhism as a national feature. We shall show how this hegemonic configuration correlates with existing indexes of political and social violence across different countries, hence providing general validity to our approach.

Politicised religion as a social action field or figuration

The starting point of our analysis is the gradual processes of change either generates novel institutional reforms over long periods of time or produces unexpected breakdowns at critical thresholds. We also analyse how shared worldviews, cognitive scripts, and normative templates may interact with discursive practices to influence institutions and institutional actors. In other words, by investigating religious institutions as part of nation-building, this research shows that culture and history influence not only discourses but also material interests and organisations.

We shall begin by synthesising the socio-genesis of state institutions in Egypt, Tunisia, Turkey, and Sri Lanka.

Socio-genesis of state institutions and power

At the core of Islam's politicisation lie structural changes unleashed by the transition from pre-modern political entity to modern nation-state. This transition led to the rise of authoritarian “promethean” regimes where state actors imposed upon their societies invasive social and cultural transformations. This resulted in the construction of strong monist national ideologies with Islam at their center.

The nation-building process in Muslim countries brought a decisive re-organisation of the society–state–religion nexus unknown in the pre-modern era. Under the Caliphate, Islamic institutions and clerics were not subordinated to political power. Most scholars of political history (Enayat 2005, Lapidus 2002) argue that divisions of labor and hierarchies of power between temporal and spiritual authorities were fairly well established by the tenth century. In the medieval period, there were certainly “official” *Ulama* working on behalf of political rulers and providing religious justification for their policies, similar to the modern period. However, the major difference is that religious authorities and institutions were financially and organisationally independent from the political power.

The Caliphs also acknowledged society's cultural and religious diversity, although this did not yield egalitarian legal and political statuses for all. The *Ummah* was defined as the sum of the territories and populations under Caliphate rule, encompassing an extensive distribution of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic groups, including Muslims, Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, Bahai, and Druze. Although the Caliphate theoretically represented the original community that followed the message of the Prophet Mohammad, in reality its power was limited by geography and comparable to that of any secular dynasty ruling multiple ethnic and religious groups (Hourani 1988: 12). This tension between the ideal (a community following the Prophet's model) and the political reality was apparent in the distinction between *Shari'a* and *Syar* forged by the *juris consultes*. *Shari'a* referred to laws applying to Muslims, while *Syar* designed laws applying to non-Muslims living under Caliphate rule, or relations between the Caliphate and non-Muslims at the international level. In contrast, the modern vision of the *Ummah* differs from this imperial definition; the consensus among contemporary Muslim scholars is that the *Ummah* refers to a spiritual, non-territorial community distinguished by its members' shared beliefs. The *Ummah* is therefore often considered a type of Muslim citizenship, independent of territory (Hassan 2002: 94). Contemporary theologian Yusuf al Qaradawi, in the context of the Palestinian national movement, illustrates this vision of the *Ummah* as a transnational alliance of Muslims that excludes non-Muslims: “Supporting the Palestinian people in Gaza is a religious duty on every Muslim individual [from Morocco to Indonesia] according to his capabilities, and no one is exempted from that duty” (Hassan 2002: 94).

As the Ottoman Empire collapsed, the state's emergence as the central political institution coincided with the homogenisation of different national communities. Nation-building systematically omitted ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups in

order to create one nation defined by one religion and one language. This homogenisation also led to a politicised narrative of religion: political Islam. In this regard, Muslim countries are not exceptional; the advent of the modern nation-state redefined rules of engagement between religion and politics everywhere. The architects of new, non-Western nation-states had to determine to what degree countries' "core" collective identities should be sacrificed for Western institutions and technologies necessary to strengthen the state militarily and economically.¹ These changes stemmed from several events.

The first event occurred prior to state formation, during the Ottoman Empire's reign and the rise of Western imperialism, symbolised by the Ottoman Empire's inclusion in the Westphalian order under the 1856 Treaty of Paris. The treaty ended the Crimean War and was the first time the Ottoman Empire participated as "state" in the Westphalian order. In the aftermath of this symbolic inclusion, three disparate factors contributed to the Middle East's adoption of the Westphalian State system in the first half of the twentieth century: the fall of imperial governments in the region; the rise of local nationalist movements in urban centers such as Cairo, Tunis, Baghdad, and Damascus; and the emergence of states with demarcated territorial boundaries that pursued self-interests and experienced hostile territorial disputes with neighboring states. Pro-Western, liberal "civilisationalism" also became the dominant paradigm of the Ottoman modernists and reformists, despite strong internal resistance against Western imperialism. This opposition stemmed from the population's objection to the Western critique that the Caliphate was not "civilised" enough to gain the loyalty of its Christian subjects, which subsequently led to two different movements: Pan-Islamism and Pan-Arabism (Aydin 2007: 32).

Pan-Islamism was an intellectual and political movement that considered the universal Islamic community (*Ummah*) the ideal basis for modern political unity, as modeled by the life and works of the Prophet Mohammed and his first four successors served. Towards the end of the Ottoman Empire, a Western threat became more acute with European incursions into Egypt and Tunisia in 1798 and 1881, respectively. These imperialist exploits greatly impacted nineteenth century reformers, such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838–1897) and his disciple, Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905), who urged all Muslims to unite under *al-Wahda al-Islamiyya* (Muslim Unity) in the face of Western imperialism in their journal *al-Urwa al-Wuthqa* (The Firmest Bond) (Aydin 2007: 61). The Ottoman Caliphate's popularity also increased: the Caliph was recognised as the head of the Muslim State, on diplomatic par with the Western powers (Aydin 2007: 33). Accordingly, Pan-Islamic ideology refashioned the concept of the Caliph, emphasising his status as the Prophet Muhammad's vice-regent, in order to buttress the Empire's legitimacy in the international state system.²

Pan-Arabism emerged at the same time as Pan-Islamism, reached its height in the 1960s, and held that all Arab peoples, as a linguistic and cultural community, should unite under one banner. Its origins were in the *al-Nahda* cultural

renaissance of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with the revival of Arabic poetry and literature and the rise of the print media (Khalidi 1991).

The Pan-Islamic and Pan-Arab movements helped shape resistance to foreign domination in Muslim-majority countries after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Hence, resistance campaigns against the West depicted European modernisation, along with its nation-building and secularisation components, through the lens of Islamic terminology, and in opposition with Arab, Middle Eastern identity. For this reason, no national rulers, even the most secular, could ignore or eradicate Islamic references and norms.

For example, in Egypt, the political implementation of the *salafiyya* was embodied by the Muslim Brotherhood, which rose as the major competitor to the secular nationalist groups. At the same time, the secular state nationalised and reshaped the traditional religious establishment, hence positing itself as a major actor in promoting legitimate Islam. Consequently, the Brotherhood's political actions became increasingly confined to national boundaries.

Turkey offers a different case of norm diffusion because its nation-building project was the direct outcome of tensions and conflicts around Pan-Islamism and Pan-Arabism within the Ottoman Empire. The last Ottoman Sultans, such as Abdulhamid II (1876–1909), used Pan-Islamic ideas to promote imperial unity and maintain control over parts of the Empire penetrated by Western political ideas (Karpas 2001: 125). As Kemal Karpas suggests, “religious” activities were used to “nationalise” the millets³ of the Ottoman dynasty (Karpas 2001: 229). In the final years of the Ottoman Empire, the Young Turk movement (beginning in 1908) emerged as an alternative political project to reinforce the Caliphate. Young Turk Ahmet Riza (1859–1930) was known for his attempts to reconcile Islam with Western ideas. Riza's project was an “anti-clerical struggle to refashion Islam as a private matter and as a rational belief comparable with modernization” (Azak 2010: 5–6). In other words, the Young Turk movement was not necessarily anti-Islam but fought against the Caliphate's version of the religion–state relationship. Confronted with independence movements (Armenian, Greek, etc.) sprouting throughout the Empire, the Young Turks emphasised their own “Turkishness,” spread the idea of a Turkish nation, and promoted a local form of Islam where prayers and sermons were performed in the Turkish language (Karpas 2001: 305). With the Ottoman Empire's collapse at the end of World War I, the nationalist movement ascended in the former provinces of the empire and led to the creation of modern Turkey. As a result, Atatürk was keen to delegitimise Islamic references in social and public life but, at the same time, he took control of the dominant Sunni school, nationalised its endowments and clerics, and crafted an unprecedented Turkish Islam.

In Tunisia, people demonstrated allegiance to the *Ummah* via pervasive loyalty to the Caliphate, in order to resist reforms initiated by the French-influenced modernist elite, such as Mohammad as-Sadiq Bey (1859–1881). From 1864 to 1881, after France became the official protector of the country with the Treaty of Bardo,

Pan-Islamist ideals induced continuous unrest against the urban, Westernised elites asserting their supremacy.⁴ Subsequently, in the wake of the First World War, the sense of trans-continental Islamic belonging, stemming from solidarity with the Ottomans, persisted with the 1929 formation of the Destour Party. The party's membership drew from the educated elite, fluent in Islamic and Arabic cultures (in contrast to the Western-oriented elite). Interestingly, Destour was the predecessor to the Neo-Destour Party that arose in 1934 and spearheaded the nationalist movement under Habib Bourguiba (1957–1987). As a consequence, many of the Islamic connections to nationalism were minimised and thus began to fade, although Bourguiba relied on Islamic institutions and symbols to mobilise the masses in anticolonial jihad. For instance, his party held meetings in mosques and *zawiyas* (Sufi meeting places), and urged the public to pray five times a day for national martyrs (Boulby 1988: 592). This treatment of Islam contrasts starkly with his policy after Tunisian independence in 1956: the Personal Status Law of 1957 abolished *Shari'a* courts, banned the *hijab*, and restricted polygamy. This brought into focus Tunisia's French influences and secular-nationalist identity over its Arab-Islamic identity. In other words, during the fight for Tunisian independence, Islam was part of the rhetoric against colonial powers, but, after independence, Islam was typically painted as a symbol of the past; Westernisation was deemed representative of the newly formed country's future. Similar to Turkey, Bourguiba created a new Tunisian form of Islam by absorbing religious institutions into state institutions and eradicating Islam's social and cultural influence.

In summary, to gain popular legitimacy, and to counter pan-Islamist threats, the architects of nascent, post-colonial States co-opted Islamic educational and charitable institutions and clerical authorities. This occurred through nationalisation of endowments, creation of ministries of religious affairs, and concessions to the nations' "Islamic" characters by including Islam in the constitution as a key source of the state's legal and social roles. Al-Azhar, the world's pre-eminent Sunni theological religious institution, was co-opted by the state to bolster its legitimacy, by reducing the sheikh's authority and bringing religious schools and mosques under state control. Other authoritarian regimes exercised similar measures to control religious institutions and suppress Islamic authorities that might compete with the state (e.g. Sufi brotherhoods in Turkey). The inclusion of Islam within state institutions has nationalised Islamic discourses, authorities, and teachings, thus giving rise to a hegemonic version of Islam. While most legal codes were based on European models, the primacy of *Shari'a* in the sphere of family law was retained, and dominant forms of Islam were given legal privilege, which affected the status of minorities. For example, adherents of religions not recognised as distinct Islamic sects, such as the Baha'i in Egypt and the Alevi in Turkey, were either amalgamated to the Muslim majority or rejected as heretics. Thus, whether Islam is defined as the state religion (Egypt) or not (Turkey), Islamic institutions became part of the state system and national identity.

In the same way, local reactions to colonisation helped reshape Buddhism in Sri Lanka. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century, a “Westernised” and “modernised” form of Buddhism under British colonial influence became a distinctive feature of the emergent acculturated intellectual class. From the end of the nineteenth century, Buddhist revival movements allied with political movements seeking independence and indigenisation of culture, in ways similar to pan-Islamism. All leaders declared their aim to revive traditional Buddhist values and simultaneously harness modern achievements to improve the population’s living conditions, or to strengthen their own leading position in society (see McMahan 2008: 43–58; Lopez 1995).

After independence in 1948, the main Buddhist organisation, or sangha, demanded action to protect Buddhism and attempted to institutionalise the traditional connection between Buddhism and state. *The Betrayal of Buddhism* report, published in 1956 by the Buddhist commission from the congress, provided the narrative and historical justification for granting Buddhism the central role in Sri Lanka’s nation-building process. “In this report, the monks demanded the abolition of Article 29 (protection of minorities), the nationalisation of Christian schools, the dismissal of Roman Catholic nurses and the introduction of the Buddhist public holiday of Poya” (Weiberg-Salzmann 2014: 291). This “buddhification” of Sri Lanka received wide political support. The two monastic schools, Vidyodaya and Vidyalandara, obtained university status. In the 1956 parliamentary election campaign, monks mobilised to spread their ideas: they identified Tamils as a threat to national identity, legitimising anti-Tamil violence.

As the state and nation were increasingly defined by Buddhist, Sinhalese identity, Tamils encountered more barriers to higher education and were barred from positions in state administration. The 1972 and 1978 constitutional reforms explicitly prioritised Buddhism in the Constitution (articles 9, 10, and 14).

“The government created a ministry for ‘cultural affairs’ (i.e., the promotion of the Sinhala-Buddhist heritage), restored Buddhist shrines and commissioned a new translation of the Buddhist canon. It was of symbolic significance that the parliament moved to the earlier Sinhalese centre of power in Kotte (today: Sri Jayawardenepura). The political system was to guide the establishment of a righteous society inspired by Buddhist ideals of justice.” (292)

More generally, when Buddhism became hegemonic, it was given the “foremost place,” with the state committed to protect it, often to the detriment of other religious groups (“Sri Lanka” 2013). For example, in early 2013, the Ministry of Religion issued a non-binding circular requiring the registration of Christian churches before construction. Officials often use this circular to close existing churches and block construction of new ones, regardless of the circular’s illegality. Concerning education, despite Muslim, Hindu, and Christian students’ right to religious education, some schools have reportedly forced students to study Buddhism if they could not be taught in their own religion. Additional reports include officials blocking school entry to Christians and throwing out Muslim girls

who wore headscarves. During examinations, despite laws against this practice, non-Buddhist students were reportedly quizzed on Buddhist topics and penalised for failure through fines or expulsion (“Sri Lanka” 2015: 201–204). Concerning family law, while issues concerning family law are governed by the individual ethnic or religious group, marriages must be approved by the Ministry of Buddha Sasana. (“Sri Lanka” 2013)

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 that are considered to be “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 recognised by law as the religion of the country or state, sometimes financially supported by the state, like in Denmark. Usually, the existence of an established church is not incompatible with the recognition of religious minorities. A religion becomes hegemonic, however, when the state grants a certain religious group exclusive legal or political rights denied to other religions. It cannot be compared to civil religion, where the dominant religion’s public features are sufficiently secularised to accommodate all other religious groups. Hegemonic religion, by contrast, is the imposition of the nationalised religion on all citizens independent of their religious affiliation, simultaneously leading to the denial of public expression of all religious groups, except the nationalised religious group.

The field of politicised religion is defined by the competition amongst state, Islamist, Buddhist, and civil groups to define what is to be a good citizen and a Muslim or a Buddhist.⁵

The modern religious habitus: Conflation of national and religious belonging

One of the consequences of the rise of a hegemonic religion is the moralisation of the concept of public order as Islamic or Buddhist principles/institutions/actors provide legitimacy to state actions. Included in that process are often-unarticulated understandings about what religion in the abstract is or should be. Hence, the state is always drawing a line between religious and secular, and reserving its sole authority to do so. Hussein Agrama describes secularism in most Muslim countries as primarily a state action or what he calls “active secularism” (Agrama 2010: 495–523). One way to think about the principle of “active secularism” is to see the state as promoting an abstract notion of “religion,” defining the spaces it should inhabit, and then working to discipline actual religious traditions to conform to this abstract notion and fit into these spaces.

The state’s action created a new religious habitus linking religious belonging to national belonging and citizenship status, erecting the *Ummah* as a homogenous community of Muslims, and making the state the implementing agent of religious

rules. The socialisation post-independence built a habitus linking religious belonging and national belonging. Structures of habitus are acquired by specific social positions that are durable, generative, and transposable.

Muslim habitus in modern Muslim-majority countries is built on beliefs that Islam is one and important to citizenry and nationhood. With the creation of the state education system, curricula and textbooks socialised new generations to the idea that national identity and Islamic identity are two sides of the same coin. By inscribing Islam within the public education system, the state positions itself as the protector of Islamic heritage, assuming “the responsibility to provide children and youths with trustworthy religious guidance.”⁶

National unity comes from two sources. The first is the cultivation of national brotherhood (internal cohesion) against outsiders, including external and internal threats and enemies, regardless of sectarian divisions. Given that nationalism concerns difference, “the imagined community cannot be all-inclusive” (Durrani and Dunne 2010: 218). Consequently, the second source of national unity is exclusivist nationalist discourses, which have implications for citizenship, access to political power, and allocation of resources (2010: 230). Thus, the state excludes those who do not belong to the dominant group within its discursive project of establishing ideological hegemony and constructing national identity through education.

However, the underlying and more pervasive source of exclusion is the use of Islam within the education system to homogenise the nation. Despite more recent initiatives to focus on tolerance in school curricula, public education curricula still neglect and discriminate against religious minorities. Also, because the concept of tolerance is only promoted in the religious context, other parts of the curricula (history/social studies) that are also influenced by Islamic terms such as *jihad* remain within a militant context and continue to instill ideas of Islamic supremacy and uniting against “infidels.”

Similarly, Sri Lankan textbooks exhibit cases of Buddhist favoritism and disregarding others. In the grade 10 History book, the “myth of descent” is referenced through a pro-Buddhist lens. The “myth of descent” is a fiercely debated topic between Buddhist Sinhalese, the majority, and Tamils, a minority, concerning which group originally occupied the island. The textbook points to the inseparable link between Buddhism and Sri Lanka through the original inhabitants, who, it claims, were also descendants of the Sinhalese (Gaul 2014). Examples from this chapter clarifying this matter include the statement that “the history of Sri Lanka begins after the arrival of Prince Vijaya with 700 followers. They were the first Aryans [synonymous with Sinhalese] to come to Sri Lanka” (*ibid*). This statement is reiterated later when the textbook claims that not only were the Sinhalese the first to inhabit the island, but that the Tamils settled the island through foreign conquest: “14 to 15-year-old students, whom this text targets, would feel a sense of pride if they were Sinhalese, or a resounding sense of alienation and defeat if they were Tamil.

Additionally, Sinhalese and Tamils' education is physically and linguistically separated, exacerbating negative stereotypes of each community. In 2008, barely 5% of all Sri Lankan schools offered education in mixed mediums (Aturupane 2011). Attempts at addressing the above issues include the National Education Reform bill (1997), the National Curriculum Policy and Process bill (2000), a new curriculum adopted in 2007 (which the above references are from), and the National Policy and a Comprehensive Framework of Actions of Education for Social Cohesion and Peace (2008).

In civil society, Buddhism also takes a leading role. Textbooks draw a connection between society and Buddhism, stating: "Try to do something great every day with love and respect for your religion and the country. Give up greed for false vision. Always try to uphold the Sinhalese nation and Buddhism" (Aturupane 2011). In Grade 7 history, a Sinhala poem is used to promote Sri Lankan nationalism: "As long as I remember the brave Sinhala nation; As long as I have my great royal blood; I'll never shed tears; So, goodbye my honoured Mother Lanka." These examples, among many, create a virtually inseparable tie between Sinhalese and the Sri Lankan nation, at the exclusion of other groups.

Moreover, it is important to note that religious references are incorporated throughout the entire public school curriculum. They permeate history, social studies, civics textbooks, and even appear in mathematics.⁷ Such a "functionalization of religion," as Gregory Starrett terms it, illustrates the socialisation process at work, where the state exerts social control and assumes moral authority by promoting a "proper Islamic identity," and by extension, cultivating "good social behavior" (*âdâb ijtîmâ'îya*) of "good" citizens (1998: 10). Religion is part of the national belonging/identity even if you do not belong to this specific religion. It is understood as a tool of resistance against Western imperialism and element of good citizenship. Based on this common understanding of religion, different agents and institutions compete to define right versus wrong, acceptable versus unacceptable, in matters of political and religious behaviors. These actors are traditional clerical establishment, political parties, NGOs, state rulers, but also transnational religious and political movements. This field of actors frames claims for an Islamic state or a Buddhist nation. Thus, more than a religiously based legal order, politicised religion is part of national political culture.

The bloody borders of hegemonic religion

In his book, *The Clash of Civilizations*, Huntington has a chapter called "the bloody borders of Islam," where he attributes the level of conflicts in Muslim countries to Islam. Most existing indexes of political violence reinforce this essentialised approach to religion, with the majority of Muslim countries scoring high. Are these rankings due to Islam or, instead, a particular type of state–religion relationship? To respond to this question, we examined indexes of political violence and social

Afghanistan	Very High	Morocco	Moderate	Turkmenistan	Low
Egypt	Very High	Tajikistan	Moderate	Western Sahara	Low
Indonesia	Very High	Uzbekistan	Moderate	Lebanon	Very High
Iraq	Very High	Bangladesh	Very High	Palestine	Very High
Pakistan	Very High	Nigeria	Very High	Guinea	High
Somalia	Very High	Yemen	Very High	Comoros	Moderate
Sudan	Very High	Bahrain	High	Djibouti	Low
Syria	Very High	Jordan	High	Kosovo	High
Sri Lanka	Very High	Kuwait	High	Mali	High
Algeria	High	Kyrgyzstan	High	Burkina Faso	Moderate
Azerbaijan	High	Libya	High	Mauritania	Moderate
Iran	High	Tunisia	High	Niger	Moderate
Malaysia	High	Turkey	High	Senegal	Moderate
Maldives	High	Chad	Moderate	Sierra Leone	Moderate
Saudi Arabia	High	United Arab Emirates	Moderate	Albania	Low
Brunei	Moderate	Oman	Low	The Gambia	Low
Kazakhstan	Moderate	Qatar	Low		

Figure 1. PEW Social Religious Hostility—January 2014.

hostility to determine if they correlate with the hegemonic status of religion. If we take into account three defining traits of hegemonic religion (nationalisation of religious institutions, education, and law), we find that the hegemonic nature of the religion correlates with political violence. Countries with hegemonic religion are also characterised by high social hostility, as seen in Figures 1 and 2.⁸

In these conditions, the investigation of the national habitus is a promising way to identify ways that religion impacts democracy and politics in general. The point of the exercise above is to show that the existing statistics on political violence should not be explained by the essence of Islam or religion in general, but by the specific culture and habitus of each country. In other words, referring to grounded, historical approaches about religion and democracy would lead to different conclusions on existing data. At the same time, it raises the question of a broader approach to secularisation.

Conclusion

Norbert Elias’ approach allows us to overcome the “fixism” of most investigations that bypass historical development to privilege decontextualised, variable-centered

Country	Violent Crisis	Limited War	War
Afghanistan	0	0	1
Egypt	2	1	0
Indonesia	1	0	0
Iraq	1	0	1
Pakistan	6	1	1
Somalia	6	0	1
Sudan	2	0	3
Syria	3	0	3
Algeria	3	1	0
Azerbaijan	1	0	0
Iran	2	0	0
Malaysia	1	0	0
Maldives	0	0	0
Saudi Arabia	1	0	0
Brunei	0	0	0
Kazakhstan	0	0	0
Morocco	1	0	0
Tajikistan	1	0	0
Uzbekistan	0	0	0
Bangladesh	4	0	0
Nigeria	3	0	2
Yemen	3	2	2
Bahrain	1	0	0
Jordan	1	0	0
Kuwait	2	0	0
Kyrgyzstan	2	0	0
Libya	1	0	1
Tunisia	2	0	0
Turkey	0	0	0
Chad	1	1	0
UAE	0	0	0
Oman	0	0	0
Qatar	0	0	0
Turkmenistan	0	0	0
Western Sahara	1	0	0
Lebanon	3	1	0
Palestine	1	0	1
Guinea	0	0	0
Comoros	0	0	0
Djibouti	1	0	0
Kosovo	0	0	0
Mali	2	1	0
Burkina Faso	1	0	0
Mauritania	0	0	0
Niger	2	0	0
Senegal	0	0	0
Sierra Leone	0	0	0
Albania	0	0	0
The Gambia	0	0	0

Figure 2. Political Violence—2014 (Methodology in Appendix B).

investigation. It also avoids the teleological approach of irreversible processes of modernisation or democratisation, converging with recent anthropological work highlighting, for example, how democratisation and de-democratisation can operate simultaneously.

Historical approaches also prove relevant to break the religious/secular divide and to contextualise it. The assessment of the theory of secularisation is now a staple of the literature on religion and politics and entails objections to one or some of the core three dimensions: separation, privatisation and decline of personal religiosity. Most the critique, as noted by Jonathan Fox in his article for this issue, is aimed at the claim that religion is losing its significance in the modern era. Alternative approaches of secularisation focus on social differentiation (Wilson 1992; Casanova 2004), which insists on the increased autonomy of social segments (economics, sciences, education, etc) previously under the influence of religious doctrines or organisations. Similarly, some talk about religion's loss of relevance at the level of social institutions, but that the theory cannot address the loss of individuals' beliefs (Chaves 1994: 749–74). Reduction of secularisation to social institutions and churches has been criticised (Stark 1999: 249–73; Luckmann 1967) and even proven wrong (Fox 2015). Others reject the idea of an irreversible process of privatisation of religious actors and institutions (Casanova 2004). Another thread focuses on religious pluralism and egalitarian individualism. (Bruce 2003). At the end, we are left with some confusion: all of these critiques are highly significant, but they do not come together to create a solid alternative paradigm (Hurd 2007). The main reason for the weakness of these disparate efforts is that they do not address the same level of secularisation: institutional (separation), social (privatisation), or individual (decline of religiosity). They also rely on the assumed separation between religious and secular, while historical genealogies (Asad 2003) demonstrate the continuous plasticity of what religious and secular mean. In this regard, a genealogical study of political and religious habitus would bypass the conundrum of the current debate on secularisation by observing, instead, the continuous redistribution of influence and power between political and religious actors and institutions. More specifically, what is at stake as shown through the examples of Sri Lanka, Tunisia and Egypt, is a continuous differentiation, where states delineate domains of actions outside religious actors and norms (foreign policy, economic policy, civil and penal law) and assign a specific status and role to religion (in civil law, national identity). Differentiation is a never ending process; religious actors attempt to claim new domains of influence (criminal law), while more secular actors try to either preserve some domains from religious claims (women rights advancement) or acquire new ones (sexual rights, freedom of speech). Consequently, what is at stake in this ongoing differentiation/de-differentiation is the continuous struggle between actors to define the boundaries of the secular and the religious. These boundaries reflect the specific history of the state-society relations in a given country. For example, secular actors in the countries discussed above, do not contest the religious nature of civil law and, when they want to reform it, they operate within the existing framework

influenced by religious norms. Similarly, most religiously-inspired claims of political actors in these countries do not contest the secular nature of foreign policy or economy, but focus on civil law and penal law.

Thus, the question becomes: what level of differentiation between religion and politics is compatible with democracy? To be clear, state-religion interactions do not directly influence the move from authoritarian to democratisation, but they do influence the level of democracy in the domain of civil liberties, individual rights, and minority group rights. In other words, if we distinguish the democracy-based domains of elections, separation of power, rule of law, and civil liberties, the influence of state-religion is most influential concerning civil liberties. Most importantly, the hegemonic status of a religion institutionalises religious divides and, hence, increases the probability of social hostility between ethnic and religious groups. The highest levels of political violence and social hostility are connected with hegemon and authoritarian control of religions. A worthy investigation, outside the scope of this article, would be establishing a typology of the main differentiation processes at work and evaluating their influence on the political development of each country.

Notes

1. The adjective “core” refers to an essentialised vision of culture and identity, which often drove political reforms (Duara 1995: 239–75).
2. Additionally, it is important to note that even after World War I, Pan-Islamism did not promote indiscriminate hatred or rejection of the West. The reformulation of pan-Islamism as a categorically anti-Western ideology happened after World War II, forming the basis for anti-modernist and reactionary positions of future Islamist groups, such as al-Qaeda.
3. Millets were religious communities regulated by their own civil rules. They were the cornerstone of the Ottoman political system.
4. Signed on 12 May 1881 between France and Mohammad as-Sadiq Bey, rendering Tunisia a French protectorate.
5. It is also influenced by international and transnational forces (Salafis/Muslim states/international organisations), which is outside the per view of this article.
6. “Groups claiming independent authority to interpret Islamic scriptures and transmit Islamic culture undermine one of the basic foundations of the state’s moral legitimacy: its protection of the Islamic heritage, including the responsibility to provide children and youths with trustworthy religious guidance” (Starrett 1998: 5).
7. Pittman and Chishtie examine how Islam penetrated the mathematics curriculum in Pakistan. For example, a typical mathematics exercise addresses inheritance and distribution of an estate. In these problems, the widow is given an eighth of the estate and the sons and daughters receive the remainder, with the sons receiving twice the shares as the daughters (Daun and Walford 2004: 113).
8. Social Religious Hostility Methodology: Hostility level based on 13 primary questions, scored between 0 and 1. Each country’s results were divided by 1.3, yielding a total score on a 1–10 scale. Each country was given a level with “Low” being from 0–1.4, “Moderate” from 1.5–3.5, “High” from 3.6–7.1, and “Very High” from 7.2 and higher. Questions are available at <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2014/01/RestrictionsV-SHI.pdf>. Political Religious Hostility Methodology:

Hostility level based on 20 primary questions, scored between 0 and 1. Each country's results were divided by 2, yielding a total score on a 1–10 scale. Each country was given a level with “Low” being from 0–2.3, “Moderate” from 2.4–4.4, “High” from 4.5–6.5, and “Very High” from 6.6 and higher. Questions are available at <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2014/01/RestrictionsV-GRI.pdf>

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Appendix A: Countries with Hegemonic Traits

Country	Education	Finance	Laws	Country	Education	Finance	Laws
<i>One Trait</i>				India			X
Angola			X	Indonesia			X
Armenia	X			Italy	X		
Bahamas	X			Jamaica			X
Barbados			X	Kenya			X
Bolivia	X			Lebanon			X
Botswana			X	Lesotho			X
Brazil			X	Liberia			X
Bulgaria		X		Malawi			X
Burkina Faso			X	Maldives			X
Burundi			X	Mauritius			X
Cameroon			X	Mozambique			X
Chile		X		Namibia			X
Colombia			X	Nigeria			X
Cyprus, Greek			X	Norway	X		
Denmark	X			Panama	X		
Eritrea			X	Papua New Guinea			X
Ethiopia			X	Paraguay			X
Fiji			X	Peru			X
Gambia			X	Philippines			X
Germany			X	Portugal			X
Ghana			X	Senegal			X
Guinea			X	Sierra Leone			X
Guinea Bissau			X	Singapore			X
Haiti			X	Solomon Islands			X
Honduras		X		Spain			X
Iceland		X		Sri Lanka			X

Country	Education	Finance	Laws	Country	Education	Finance	Laws
Tanzania			X	Swaziland	X		X
Togo			X	Syria		X	X
Trinidad & Tobago			X	Turkey	X	X	
Turkmenistan		X					
Uganda			X	<i>Three Traits</i>			
UK			X	Afghanistan	X	X	X
Uzbekistan		X		Algeria	X	X	X
Venezuela		X		Bahrain	X	X	X
Western Sahara			X	Bhutan	X	X	X

(Continued)

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Appendix A. (Continued)

Country	Education	Finance	Laws	Country	Education	Finance	Laws
Yugoslavia-Serbia		X		Brunei	X	X	X
Zambia			X	Comoros	X	X	X
Zimbabwe			X	Dominican Republic	X	X	X
<i>Two Traits</i>				Egypt	X	X	X
Bangladesh		X	X	Iran	X	X	X
Belize	X		X	Iraq	X	X	X
Burma	X		X	Jordan	X	X	X
Cambodia	X	X		Kuwait	X	X	X
Costa Rica	X		X	Libya	X	X	X
Djibouti		X	X	Malaysia	X	X	X
Georgia	X	X		Mauritania	X	X	X
Greece		X	X	Oman	X	X	X
Israel		X	X	Qatar	X	X	X
Malta		X	X	Saudi Arabia	X	X	X
Morocco		X	X	Sudan	X	X	X
Pakistan		X	X	Tunisia	X	X	X
Somalia	X	X		UAE	X	X	X
				Yemen	X	X	X

Source: Religion and State Database, Jonathan Fox, Bar Ilan University

Appendix B

Dr. Frank R. Pfetsch—Conflict Barometer 2014—Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research

- The intensity levels (1 through 5) according to the conflict barometer are:
 1. Dispute: Non-violent, low-intensity
 2. Non-violent crisis: Non-violent, low intensity
 3. Violent Crisis: Violent, Medium Intensity
 4. Limited War: Violent, High Intensity
 5. War: Violent, High Intensity
- Intensity is categorized through a combination of “conflict measures” in a specific conflict in a geographical area in a given space of time
 - Conflict Measures
- Actions and communications carried out by actors that lie outside established norms of conflict regulation
- Conflict regulation is defined as a “mechanism of conflict management that is accepted by the conflict actors,” e.g. elections or courts
- Assessing the Intensities of Violent Conflicts
- When measuring the three levels of violent conflict, five proxies are used indicating the conflict means and consequences. The dimension of means encompasses the use of weapons and personnel, the dimension of consequences the number of casualties, destruction, and refugees/internally displaced persons.

