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Anticolonialism and the Secularity/Coloniality of Being

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ABSTRACT: This article interrogates the secularity/coloniality of Being in the context of the colonization of Algeria, taking the works of the Algerian Muslim philosopher Malek Bennabi as a point of departure for theorizing the colonial processes of dehumanization. I engage Bennabi in conversation with Frantz Fanon—particularly in relation to "the peasantry"—to illuminate their divergent and convergent critiques of colonialism. I begin by laying bare Eurocentric mono-humanism as it is elaborated with an assimilative colonial logic. While the Euromodern colonial story is conditioned by anti-Muslim sentiments articulated within religious as well as secular language, this paper teases out the secularity of anticolonialism that silences religious elements in the anticolonial struggle during and after Euromodern colonialism. This operation requires interrogation of the epistemic and ontological superiority of the secular that was born with the second modernity and that became an epistemic and political yardstick deployed by European modernity to subalternize its others. I build on the concept of coloniality of Being and propose reformulating it as a secularity/coloniality of Being. Finally, I conclude with an invitation to think with "pluri-humanity" as a *common ground*, a human horizon for imagining just futures beyond secular colonial regimes.

KEYWORDS: Anticolonialism, Malek Bennabi, coloniality of Being, Frantz Fanon, secularity

Introduction

In 1953, one year before the beginning of the last phase of the Algerian war for independence, the anticolonial Muslim philosopher Malek Bennabi (1905–

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1973) wrote an article titled "The Advent of the Human" ["L'avènement de l'homme"]. He argued for redeeming the human being from the distortions of racism and colonialism, which classified human beings into two demarcated categories: "indigenous species" and "civilized species" (2023 [1953], 175). While the former is degraded as a kind of "hominin" that emerges from the reign of the beast, the latter is "a fabulous being, a demi-god who has barely ascended from Olympus to regulate the affairs of the earth" (2023 [1953], 175). This type of classification was made possible through a colonialism that had become, by the nineteenth century, what Bennabi calls a sort of sacred mission—"*une sorte de mission sacrée*"—but it also generated "a concrete, codified, legalized relationship between the 'hominin' and the 'civilized being'" (2023 [1953], 176). One may recall here Aníbal Quijano's insight that central to these codifications of relationships between Europe and its others—to the coloniality of power—is the idea of race: the division Bennabi observes being made between the hominin, or the indigenous species, and the fabulous being, the demigod or the civilized being, gestures toward Frantz Fanon's diagnosis of how colonialism institutes the "zone of nonbeing" (2008, vii), a hellish zone to which the colonized and the Black are condemned. This is not incidental, given that Bennabi and Fanon share the French "colonial wound"; each of them came to be located in Algeria, a colonized space of apartheid and racial segregation in which Islam and Muslims were the immediate targets of racial classification.

I try to unravel, following Bennabi's work, the unnamed history that undergirds the emergence of this racial classification. I would like to show how this Eurocentric mono-humanism is elaborated within an assimilative colonial logic predicated on the assumption that European humanity is at once Man-normality.[1] This colonial story is conditioned by anti-Muslim sentiments articulated within religious as well as secular language. Then, I move to tease out the epistemic superiority of the secular that was born with the second modernity and that became an epistemic and political yardstick deployed by Eurocentric mono-humanism. In view of this, the secularity of anticolonialism that silences Islam as a force in the anticolonial struggle, during and after colonialism, is interrogated. Here, I revisit what Nelson Maldonado-Torres calls the coloniality of Being and reformulate it as a secularity/coloniality of Being. Finally, I conclude with an invitation to think with pluri-humanity as a way of thinking about common ground for liberative praxes.

Coloniality as an Assimilative Machinery

The colonial assimilative machinery that is at work, whether in secular or Christian language, is a mono-human machine that governs the plurality of

being human through the pre-codes of what Sylvia Wynter termed the ethnoclass of Man. This specific genre of being human, which is at once normative and ontological, tells the story of what is and ought to be human. This explains the curious assumption—still at work—that what is found in Euro-America is what ought to be found elsewhere. In this section, by bringing to light the unnamed or unelaborated history that informs Bennabi's theorization of colonialism, I tease out the multiple dynamics of colonialism as assimilative machinery in the name of Christianizing and/or civilizing missions.

Early in 1949, Bennabi located the historically decisive moment in which Europe embraced the colonial culture of the Roman Empire: "Since the discovery of America, which marks its inauguration, the contemporary [European] civilisation has resorted to honor the entire Roman tradition, so strongly marked with the colonial notion" (2000, 308).[2] As with many philosophers and theorists, the history that underpins Bennabi's formulations remains largely unnamed. When Bennabi mentions Europe's return to the Roman colonial notion, he is not only referring to the doctrine of divide-and-rule and the decisive feature of Roman order, i.e., its discrimination between two closed categories: the citizen and the barbarian. He is also referring to a return to worship of imperial power (Dussel 2024, 142). In the context of colonizing Algeria, this invocation of Roman culture took the form of inventing and circulating the story that "North Africa had been the granary of Rome," a fertile land that was destroyed and turned into desert in the hands of Arabs, who caused environmental degradation (Davis 2007, 2–4).[3] This narrative was woven to consolidate the belief that France, as the heir of Rome, should undertake a "reconquest" of the land of Saint Augustine—a land the Romans had conquered well before the Arabs (Lorcin 1999, 20–21; Davis 2007, 5). Perhaps more importantly, this invocation gestures toward the Roman doctrine of "terra nullius" that Bennabi identified as the nub of colonialism. I will return to this point later; it suffices to mention here that this doctrine, which the Romans applied to territories falling outside Roman occupation, continued throughout medieval Christendom and eighteenth- and nineteenth-century imperial and colonial states, and that it did so precisely via the axis of colonial difference.

Racial classifications that engendered the rupture between Europe and the rest of humanity, according to Bennabi, are predicated on the myth of the superior race that had saturated European cultural, academic, philosophical, and scientific productions, and even European society as a whole. He remarked:

> The superiority of the 'race of masters', source of the bloody myth, of the monster that has fathered the anti-human colonialism and

> anti-European Nazism. This myth has demolished the entire Christian moral philosophy and has committed an outrage against God himself by striving to supplant Him in the European conscience. It resides in the hearts, dwells in the ideas, animates the wills, and untiringly inspires the vocations of the young. History of the past century is a saga of the colonised spirit. The child in Europe feels himself pre-detained for colonialism. Even if he misses his vocation, he continues, nonetheless, to feed his spirit on colonialism, just as he feeds himself on colonial products. (Bennabi 1999, 69)

Bennabi quite explicitly links racism with colonialism, but he also implicitly links "religion" and humanism with colonial metaphysics—here, racism/colonialism animates a colonial form of life in whose metaphysics European Man replaces God. In *L'Afro-Asiatisme* (1956), he lays out a world order in which the West, through its will to power, wants to save "white supremacy" at all costs (Bennabi 2021, 50). In Bennabi's theory of colonialism, there is an intimate relation between colonialism, (hyper)nationalism, and racism. His intuition was confirmed recently by Mahmood Mamdani, who convincingly showed that modern nationalism and colonialism were mutually constitutive (Mamdani 2020, 1–2).

For Bennabi, apart from racism, there are two historical movements that engendered Euromodern colonialism: "Christianism and Cartesianism came to complete the physiognomy of this [European] society, profoundly, perhaps excessively, penetrated with the sense of utility. The former brought to it the sense of the universal and through it the dynamism that its static temperament lacked; the latter tailored its fundamental activities for efficiently integrating them in the industrial vitality that was going to surge from its revolution. . . . Christianism also deposited the ferment of moral expansion that would serve as justification for the crusades and the colonial enterprise" (Bennabi 1999, 16). While Christianity and Cartesianism have been acknowledged by many scholars and historians of colonialism as decisive factors, the role of the Crusades has been either neglected or downplayed. Bennabi saw the Crusades as crucial to the configurations of Euromodern colonialism, given their role in laying out the historical and theological-political conditions that made the Euromodern colonial enterprise possible and avowedly justifiable in Algeria and elsewhere.

> The crusades offered the European civilisation an opportunity to turn towards the exterior, and to reap a profitable harvest in the Muslim civilisation. The same tendencies pushed it to the *discovery* of America, and one could here discern *the beginning of a profound rup-*

> *ture between a dominating Europe and the rest of humanity,* that explains the politics of the world for the last four centuries as well as its present disequilibrium. Howsoever it may be, it was this society marked with the genius of the soil, but where possibilities of inter-human relationships were almost completely stifled that, towards the 18th century, *discovered* the Muslim world. (1999, 16, emphases added)

Indeed, the colonial conquest and invasion of Algeria was mired in anti-Islam sentiment, with relics of crusading language: "Islam thus remained the religion whose fanaticism and violence had altered little over the ages. Islam, the belligerent religion: the notion was as alive in the nineteenth century as it had been between the eleventh and the thirteenth" (Lorcin 1999, 21).

Thus, the genealogy of racial division and colonial relations, for Bennabi, harkens back to the Crusades, well before the consequential year of 1492. Before this rupture, Europe treated Islam, to use the words of Ashis Nandy in another context, as the "intimate enemy" (1983). Instigated by the Crusades and anti-Muslim tendencies, Columbus sailed westward in the hope of "reconquering" the holy lands and taking them from the Muslims. The fall of Granada and the subsequent Inquisition are arguably crucial moments in the formation of the racial/colonial world order. However, the story of the emergence of this order often misses its logically formative period and largely ignores how the European story figured the Muslim as quintessential enemy/other, as the measure of enmity and otherness (Abbasi 2020). The role of anti-Muslim crusading sentiment in colonizing America, and especially in shaping Columbus's colonial enterprise and his perception of the indigenous people of America, has been well documented (Abbas 1979; Mikhail 2020; Mastnak 1994). The figure of the Moor, the Muslim, was the archetypical radical other that informed early Euro-American perception of difference. That is to say that the theopolitical system by which Columbus classified humans was already shaped by the climate of the Crusades: "The mental framework within which Europeans related to a new outer world, was—to a large degree—shaped by the interaction of Medieval Western Christianity with the World of Islam" (Mastnak 1994, 127; see also Powell 1990, 280).

Enacting an epistemic standpoint that emanated from the exteriority of Europe, Bennabi, who experienced racial/colonial relations in France as well as in Algeria, points out that Europe is marked by two coexisting temporalities: while it technologically lives in the twentieth century, its psychological infrastructure—saturated by its "will to power"—belongs to the nineteenth century. To this Bennabi adds: "Sometimes he [the Western man] even seems to be lagging behind in the Middle Ages, when he draws his 'spiritual nourish-

ment' from the chronicle of the Holy Inquisitions and from the actions of the Conquistadores" (Bennabi 2021 [1956], 47). This point may be elaborated via the famous Valladolid debates on the conception of the human vis-à-vis the indigenous population of America. These debates are arguably formative and constitutive of the present racial logic and thus provide a context for understanding Bennabi's concept of colonialism as a regression in history, a return to Roman culture's division of humans into citizens and barbarians.

A key aspect of the Valladolid debates is often ignored. While Las Casas and Sepúlveda differ in their attitude toward the Indians, the Muslim (then the Moor and Turk) remains the quintessential other, the stubborn, warring other that is classified as having a wrong religion. Las Casas and Sepúlveda agree on two things (apart from their moral superiority): the natives of America are of no threat but are convertible; the Muslims and the Jews are unconvertible. (Even the remaining "Saracens" and Jews that were tolerated within Europe, as long as they posed no threat to Christianity, remained under suspicion.) Though Las Casas is sometimes perceived, unlike Sepúlveda, as humane toward the Indians, his humane attitude was conditional: the Indians were to be tolerated, even when resisting, in the hope that they would soon assimilate and accept Christianity; toleration depended on posing no threat to "truth" (Brunstetter 2010).[4] Las Casas's philosophical and theological attitude was quite different concerning the Turks, Moors, and Saracens, for they were unconvertible, bellicose, and still with power. His justification for treating the natives of America humanely was thus produced via a constructed difference between them and the "Turks": "if one speaks of his love for the Indians, one should also speak of his hatred of the Turks. Indeed, his love for the former fed on his hatred of the latter" (Mastnak 1994, 15). His "repudiation of the Turks as 'scum,'" then, "is a powerful statement about the status of the Other that refuses to assimilate" (Brunstetter 2010, 428). It points to a distribution of affects in relation to the other that draws on what Bennabi refers to as "colonialist spirituality"—the spirituality on which colonialists are nurtured.

The racial legacy of the Valladolid debate is a familiar colonial strategy in states of apartheid. It was preserved not only in the Americas but also, quite forcefully, in French colonial discourses and technologies that distinctively bifurcated racialized Muslim subjects and European citizens: the former are governed by "customary" law, while the latter are governed by "civil" law.[5] The Algerian Muslim is subordinated through law and violence. Bennabi describes the logic by which the colonial framework makes Muslim indigènes belong to a different, nonhuman species in terms of centripetal humanism. "There apparently remains the possibility of defining a centripetal humanism: in this case,

it signifies 'Europeanism' within and 'colonialism' without—the latter based on the most scandalous and most odious political equation according to which a *man* multiplied by *coloniser co-efficient* is equal to an *indigene*" (Bennabi 1999 [1954], 3).[6]

Introduced in Algeria on February 9, 1875, and later extended to other French colonies, the notorious Native Code [Code de l'indigénat] was a collection of decrees that replaced the constitutional rights of French citizens in the French metropole and colonies with a different set of laws reserved for the natives, French indigènes. This code regulated the entire life of the colonized people in Algeria. Bennabi had it in mind when he differentiated between liberal colonialism, which *appears* to give a free hand to the colonized, and totalitarian colonialism, which "intervenes directly in all the domains of the life of the colonised, penetrating into even the details of their religious life" (Bennabi 1999 [1954], 55). The colonized can be saved from the hellish zone of indigènes by being fully French and renouncing themselves as Muslim. Thus, French citizenship was used as a colonial tactic to flatten the sensibilities of some Algerians. This policy of recognition was evident in the 1919 Jonnart Law, which was introduced to ease access to French citizenship for colonized Algerians on the condition of meeting certain requirements: working for the French army, demonstrating knowledge of the French language, having a public position, being married to or born of an indigène with French citizenship. Later, in 1935, the Blum–Viollette bill was introduced to grant citizenship to some thousands of French-educated Algerians while still allowing them to be subject to Islamic law (but it did not pass).

Indigeneity in colonial Algeria was a secular marker of an uncivilized population, while religion collided with race as the marker of inferiority. This racial logic is revealed by the disagreement between the distinguished professor at the University of Algiers, Emile Larcher, and his student Georges Rectenwald. The source of their disagreement is whether the criterion for legally justified discrimination against colonized Algerian Muslims is based on religion or simply on being an indigène or non-European (Brett 1988, 440). Notwithstanding this disagreement, they seem to agree on the legality of discrimination, and this amounts to the fact that not all are equal before the law in colonial Algeria. It is interesting to note that this took place after the Laïcité Code of 1905. Commenting on the Senateus-Consulte of July 14, 1865, Brett writes: "The act remained in force down to the end of the Second World War. On the one hand, it ascribed to the Muslim population an inferior status, which provided a legal foundation for the various forms of political and administrative discrimination practiced by the French against "their" *indigènes*. On the other, it defined

that inferiority as a product of Islam, thus justifying Larcher's contention that the basis of this discrimination was religious" (1988, 441). In effect, this religious difference has already been racialized.

Rectenwald's contention is probably due to the fact that by the beginning of the nineteenth century, the classification of humans based on religion—common in the Occidentalism of sixteenth-century Christianity and persisting through Orientalism—was not the order of the day. The secular imaginary of Europe formed and took over in the late-eighteenth and the nineteenth century, when, following Edward Said's analysis, the secularized geocultural racial classification of "Orientals" had already been initiated and instituted. And, following Gil Anidjar, we should remember the lesson that "Orientalism *is* secularism" (Anidjar 2006, 56).[7] It can thus be said that in the first Euromodernity, "religion" was entangled with race and the other was classified as having the wrong religion or no religion (Maldonado-Torres 2014), but in the second modernity, Europe made the Christian system of classification "forgettable by foregrounding religion as a generic category and a target of criticism"—Europe redeemed itself from religion and secularized its colonial language (Anidjar 2006, 69). Religion came to be seen by the colonizer as a sign of primitiveness—one among many attributes of lack and inferiority in the secular discourse.[8]

In Algeria, French colonialism started literally as a "modern Crusades," as the colonial language was very much entangled with Christianity and deeply rooted in crusading language (Fontaine 2016, 23). Christianity and Frenchness "provided the ultimate model of humanity" (Weiss 2011, 147) and thus established an assimilationist logic: the model of being human was identified with Frenchness, so the more you became French, the more you became human. This kind of logic, whereby conversion to Frenchness or Christianity was rooted in the language of progress and civilization, engendered a racial classificatory paradigm accompanied by techniques of assimilating or annihilating Algerians, along with their cultures, languages, and modes of being (Hannoum 2010, 8).[9] Islam was clothed with orientalism and declared as the source of "decadence," and Algerian Muslims were declared as not properly human. Colonialism, entangled with secularism, was an enterprise of managing and controlling the religion of the Algerian Muslims; it was coupled with relentless efforts to negate Islam and its languages. Given that being French was the model of being human, the management of Algerians was almost literally an exercise of locating the Arabs and Amazigh (for the latter, the French invented the word Kabyle) on the scale of being human, which was identified as French, secular, and Christian. This produced what came to be called the "Kabyle Myth": The "bad" Arabs, due to their "alleged" adherence to Islam and thus their distance from

being French, were contrasted to the "good" Kabyles, who ascended the scale of being human due to their "allegedly" easy assimilation and their distance from Islam (Benrabah 2013, 27–28).[10] Drawing on the assimilationist logic of the Valladolid debate, it can be said that the Arabs are unconvertible "religious fanatics," while the Kabyle are easy to convert to Frenchness (or Christianity).[11]

Additionally, Muslims, whether Arabs or Amazigh, were classified as "good" for being either pro-colonialism or anti-anticolonialism. The Governor-General of Algeria, Thomas Robert Bugeaud, sought (with the help of a proto-Lawrence of Arabia, Leon Roches) what one could call an anti-anticolonial fatwa to "pacify" the Muslims.[12] Here colonialism literally needed theology, albeit a pro-colonial theology.[13] The colonial solidification of "Marabutism" as a form of publicly accepted religiosity, along with the exploitation of internal religious (and ethnic) differences to achieve secular/colonial ends, engendered political divisions within the nascent national elite of colonial Algeria. These divisions were apparent before the war of independence, but after the war they were invisibilized in favor of a focus on confronting the unspeakable terror of colonialism. As is well known, scientism played a pivotal role in formulating narratives justifying the colonial enterprise: relegating non-Europeans to a closed past while Europeans took the future, it served to bifurcate humans into superior and inferior species.[14] Within the European secular imaginary, scientific advances and the "Industrial Revolution" conferred on Europeans a sense of superiority over the rest of humanity.

Bennabi points out that industry and science became the absolute scale for measuring the value of human beings. This tendency was carried out through other Euronormative categories, such as modernity and its condition, secularism, which continue to be employed as the absolute scale for valuing or devaluing humans. This engendered a "colonialist Psychology" so deep-rooted that one can think of a colonialist form of life, one where human problems outside Europe are always translated into "quantitative aspects, that is to say, economic and strategic" aspects (Bennabi 2021, 56)—a logical consequence of "technical reason" and "pure rationality" (Bennabi 2021, 56). This purely instrumental rationality transformed everything non-European into nature to be conquered by the sovereign autonomous individual, whose imperative is to maximize their joy and profit. Having won its well-known power struggle with the church, secular scientism emerged as the theology of modern Europe, as a "colonialist spirituality" that imposes an epistemic regime and renders everything beyond it irrational and primitive.

This explains the absence of a sense of ethical human relations between the colonizer and the colonized. Bennabi points out that, apart from Joseph

Arthur de Gobineau's infamous account of the inequality of human races and quasi-scientific justification of racism, it was Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection, introduced and translated into the human domain by Herbert Spencer, that engendered both colonialism and Nazism:

> Europe has felt the emptiness of the non-European world devoid of science and industry: it rushed into this void like a torrent. This, in its essence, is colonialism: the feeling of a void to be filled in the world. This is what Europe, possessor of science and power, called its "civilizing mission". It was the ferment that had been deposited in its soul by the scientific spirit crowned by the theory of selection inherited from Darwin. . . . Translated into the human domain, this spirit was bound to engender colonialism and Hitlerism. (2006, 380)

Thinking of (settler) colonialism as underpinned by the doctrine of "terra nullius," Bennabi maintains that Europe considered non-European geography an empty space and rushed into it armed with science and power. This is the underlying racialized, secular logic that engenders a colonialism masquerading as a civilizing mission: *to think of non-European geography as a void, devoid of humans, that needs to be filled*.[15] Fanon clearly indicates this doctrine's logic: "In Algeria there is not simply domination but the decision, literally, to occupy nothing else but a territory. The Algerians, the women dressed in haiks, the palm groves, and the camels form a landscape, the natural backdrop for the French presence" (Fanon 2004, 184). Thus, while colonialism in the first Euromodernity is a historical experience engendered by taking Christianity's theological and political concept of the human as the absolute measure of humanity, colonialism in the second modernity secularized its racial framework. The order that marked much of the so-called Age of Discovery and its religious classification in the first Euro-modernity was translated, in the aftermath of the Age of Science and the Industrial Revolution, into secular classifications (Mignolo 2012, 280).

The Shift to Secular Anticolonial Language

The mechanism of the colonial assimilationist paradigm was violently monolingual, erasing the languages of the Algerians and replacing them with French, but the more insidious element was its imposition of a new political language as the only accepted language of anticolonialism.[16] Throughout the Algerian history of resistance, Islam challenged French colonial authorities, who considered it a problem to be annihilated, controlled, or managed. Algerian re-

sistance movements (peaceful or armed) were unapologetically Muslim in character and led largely by ulama (Muslim scholars), from Emir Abdelkader to Cheikh Bouamama (Mnwar 2006). The post-Bouamama anticolonial struggle in Algeria was largely marked by its political means up until the Setif massacre of May 8,1945. This period witnessed the emergence of the secularized national elite and Algerian political parties. Significant changes occurred, and national elites were educated in colonial institutions that were secular and monolingual (French). Ranged against them were equally monolingual Arabic-speaking elites who were invested in teaching Islam and Arabic, and who refused the colonial assimilationist policies that demanded the abandonment of Islam. The paradigmatic example of such elites is the ulama who formed *Jam'iyat al-'Ulama al-Muslimīn al-Jaza'iriyyīn* [Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama]. For them, the field of education was a space for regenerating the self and resisting the secularist/assimilationist paradigm. A third fraction of anticolonial fighters and intellectuals are of the Amazigh people.[17]

This classification of the ulama and national elites does not encompass the majority of colonized people, who often eluded such binaries. However, taking a cue from Bennabi's account of the problem of bilingualism (Al-Zayed 2025, 108), one can note that the colonial function of French as lingua franca of political discourse gave rise to a discernible division between secular (French) and religious (Arabic) languages, which continued to operate during Algeria's anticolonial struggle. A case in point is the journal *El-Moudjahid*, the organ of the Front de libération nationale (FLN), whose Arabic and French editions addressed different readers and adopted markedly different registers. While the French edition addressed "pieds noir" (people of European descent born in Algeria between 1830 and 1962) and the broader French public speaks in a secular political language, the Arabic edition, addressed to the Algerian rebels, deployed an Islamic language (El Tayeb 90–91). Likewise, *The Voice of Algeria*—broadcasted on radio from Cairo, Damascus, and Tunis—began with a Quranic recitation and used religious language to galvanize rebellion (El Tayeb 95). However, this Islamic language of anticolonialism was muted and subalternized by the internationalist secular anticolonial language of solidarity. In this discourse, the overrepresentation of anticolonial voices like Fanon's and the absence or underrepresentation of voices like Bennabi's is a manifestation of epistemic injustice produced by the assumption that secular humanism is the only language and the condition of anticolonial solidarity.

All national and political actors—liberal, Islamic, socialist, communist; assimilationist, anti-assimilationist; secular, religious—rallied around the values of equality, freedom, identity, authenticity, and sovereignty and were

compelled to operate within a discursive and political sphere that the colonial power left as a space of maneuver. In this context, liberal political language underpinned by the French Revolution's ideals—*liberté*, *egalité*, *fraternité*—and the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen encroached into the political language of Algerian political actors, including Islahi (reformist) figures, and across ideological divides. This peculiar dissemination of liberal values was facilitated by the education of many nationalists, who adopted the French political language and demanded its extension to colonial Algeria. Liberal language facilitated the transaction of political life between colonized intellectuals and the colonizer, yet the demands of the former—concerning democratic legislation and representation, as well as equality and nondiscrimination—were resisted by the colonizers, who refused equal treatment in principle. Bennabi understood this invisible and dominant liberal language as a language of rights addressed only to the colonizer, and he was critical of the Islahi movement's participation in the 1936 Algerian delegation that demanded equal treatment and rights from the French government (Al-Zayed 2025, 104–105). This indicates how the modern colonial episteme significantly altered—perhaps irretrievably, even to the point of destruction—the ethical and political languages and praxes of the colonized. It forced its secular political language, categories, and values on anticolonial language, culminating in the inheritance of the structures of the colonial state; these significant changes had dominated the colonial and postcolonial political life of Algeria as well as other postcolonial nation-states.

All political actors, including the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama, were under the domination of the French colonial authorities that governed the demarcations between secular and religious, private and public; political language or mobilization was almost always constituted in response to the protocols of colonial secular ideology. In this sense, nationalism is entangled with secularism. Secularization meant the absence of God or the translation of *din* (religion) as culture, ethnicity, or political ideology in the service of nationalism. While Algerian anticolonialism took sustenance from Islam, a large number of the national anticolonial elite embraced secularism, publicly and/or privately. At the turn of the twentieth century, mass politics and Algerian political nationalism emerged as a unifying force, and toward the end of the anticolonial struggle, secularism in politics emerged as a promise of tolerance that could deliver protection for minorities, mirroring the colonial discourse. Yet this secularization was not entirely successful: the nationalist elites—liberal and socialist alike—who viewed themselves as having successfully embodied the secular model of the human failed to transform Algerians in their own im-

age due to the very anticolonial processes of fighting against assimilation and total annihilation. The political aim of entirely secularizing the masses was a daunting task due to that fact that the peasants, who formed the majority of the anticolonial militants in the war of liberation, were unapologetic Muslims. Additionally, Islam offers an origin story of humans and the world that is antithetical to secular modernity's biocentric story, which presupposes European historical experience as the normative model of human existence.

In the Algerian context, secularism was historically imposed as part of the structural conditions instituted by settler colonialism, and it shaped nationalist responses to these very conditions. For example, a nationalist response is often compelled to adopt a secular liberal language to articulate its claims. Moreover, nationalists share with the colonial language of secularity an unquestioned reliance on the category of religion (as a stable and universally applicable category) and an instrumentalization of the religious as a means for secular ends. Some even thought—making a comparison with the role of Protestantism in the history of European secularism—that the work of the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama was necessary simply for nationalism and the fulfillment of secularism.

A remarkable representative of such a line of thought is Amar Ouzegane, a former secretary of the Algerian Communist Party and later a member of the FLN, who thought socialism from within Islam and acknowledged the role of ulama and Islahism (reformism) in fighting Marabutism, which was deemed complicit with colonialism and semi-feudalism. Ouzegane points out that "Islamism" provided the ideological infrastructure for Algerian revolutionary nationalism. He further explains that "this religious aspect of our national struggle for freedom of Muslim worship and the separation of *church and state* within the very framework of the colonial regime is a positive legacy. It will help us to make secularism, *the modern form of Islamic tolerance*, triumph tomorrow" (Ouzegane 1962, 305, emphasis added). Though this conclusion seems to be problematic, one can easily sense that Ouzegane thinks from his location in Algiers, while using conceptual and historical frames shaped by the histories and categories of Europe. However, one should stress here that this triumphant formulation of secularism is instituted—even with modifications—by the secular/colonial paradigm, where secularism ensures a tolerance that, as French colonial history demonstrates, was systematically denied to the colonized.

Nonetheless, Maxime Rodinson, the French Marxist historian of Islam who was then a celebrated figure among the Arab intelligentsia, spoke against this attempt to construct "Muslim Marxism." For him, atheism seems to be the ideological infrastructure of secularism. In a somewhat condescending tone,

Rodinson brings Ouzegane to task for his inability to understand the history of Europe and himself, his inability to follow—if we may use rather anachronistically a terminology that became current later—the secularization thesis completely. Rodinson is unsettled by Ouzegane's failure to be a true "disciple" of Marx and his thesis on Feuerbach, as well as by Ouzegane's alignment with the faith of the peasantry. The protagonists in Rodinson's account of the place of Islam in the newly independent Muslim countries are two true secularists cum modernists: Ataturk in Turkey and, to a lesser extent, the "militant atheism" of the Muslim countries of the Soviet Union. What Rodinson seems to demand from Ouzegane is to be not only privately but also publicly secularist, to offer an uncompromising critique of religion and to construct a disenchanted world in which there is no place for God. Rodinson's text is, however, ambivalent: On one hand, he questions Ouzegane for failing to question the Algerian peasants' faith in Allah, in the ascendance of the prophet to heaven on a Buraq mare with the head of a woman, and in a Paradise populated by houris (Rodinson 1963)[18]—Rodinson finds this faith to be the most shocking to "*modern rational mind*." (Notably, Rodinson fails to understand that it is this modern rational mind that justified the colonization of Algeria.) On the other hand, he favorably cites Ataturk's success in secularization without questioning the inquisitorial nature of this process.

Still, he concludes that the state can secularize without being antireligion. Bennabi reads Rodinson's account as an apology for secular ideology or pure secularism vis-à-vis "religious ideology" (2006, 406). While Rodinson seems to be a staunch devotee of the secularization thesis, his analysis suggests, though implicitly, that secularism without secularized people is just a futile project. Moreover, another presupposition is the secular management of the relationship between politics and religion.[19] This early post-independence debate overshadows all postcolonial state politics, in which the secularization of the masses that was necessary for modernity and secularism as a political project remained the dreamscape of nationalism and the nation-state. However, the nation-states continued the colonial/secular management of religion.

Fanon famously replaced the proletariat with the peasantry as the engine of change. I think this was precisely because they were undefeated by the colonial culture. "Peasantry" is the secular name for the Algerian Muslims who formed a large part of the Algerian liberation force. According to the secular modern colonial order, the peasants are locked up in their "tradition"; they are defined as uncivilized, in opposition to the European, who is defined as civilized, modern, and secular. The latter is conceived as the achievement of European Christianity while colonizing the world. Islam, on the other hand,

is presented as a failure to achieve these so-called "gifts." These peasants, who were religious, occupied a large part of Fanon's theory of decolonization.

Therefore, I suggest that we read Fanon's account of the peasants vis-à-vis the national parties and their elites—who adopted their colonialist counterparts' secular attitudes toward the peasants and the countryside—as a critique of modern secular liberal values in the French empire vis-à-vis the beliefs and forms of life of the colonized. The colonized make "mockery of" these values; the colonized "shower them with insults and vomit them up" (Fanon 2004, 8). In this context, Fanon points to the parallel worlds that existed in the colonies, which are cut not only between the colonized and the colonizer but also between the colonized and the colonized intellectuals that adopted "the abstract, universal values of the colonizer" (Fanon 2004, 9). As I pointed out above, this liberal secular language was the dominant political language of dialogue with the colonizers pre-1954. Fanon suggests that this continued post-1954 through the colonized intellectuals, who were "pulverized by colonialist culture" (Fanon 2004, 11), and that this continuation concealed another praxis that totally rejects liberal secular language. In Fanon's text, I suggest that this is the Islamic praxis of the peasantry, which does not succumb to the presuppositions of the modern rational minds that conveniently make God forgettable.

Moreover, Fanon's critique of the national elite reveals his uneasiness with the secular liberal order that underpinned both colonial and nationalist projects. While Fanon has been taken to task for failing to acknowledge the role of Islam and "religion" in the architecture of colonialism and anticolonial resistance, a more careful reading reveals the epistemic constraints within which he was writing. By the time Fanon arrived in Algeria, the figure of the colonized, particularly the fellah, had—through French secular management of religion in public space and the emergence Algerian "secular" nationalism—already become a code for the Muslim, and culture had already become a code for Islam. If we take this into account, then it becomes apparent that the interlacement of race and religion was integral to the colonial machine, which produced the categories of supra-human, not-properly-human, or "nonbeing." Thus, instead of reproaching Fanon for failing to name Islam's role in the war of liberation (see Slisli 2008), it may be more productive to read his anticolonial language within the epistemic order of internationalist (largely secular) anticolonialism. Fanon may have been uninterested in naming the obvious—particularly given that this issue of acknowledging the role of Islam in the war of liberation was itself contested among the Algerian anticolonial elites. In his book *Jihad al-Jaza'r: Haqa'q al-Tarikh wa Mughalatat al-Idiojughrafiya* [*The Jihad of Algeria Historical Facts and the Fallacies of Ideo-geography*], first published in 1982, the Algerian

sociologist Ahmad Bin Na'man presents divergent perspectives on this issue. He understands jihad in a broad sense: to fight injustice (1982, 46). According to him, three positions were offered as testimonies of Algerian fighters: some fought for a national cause without invoking the "creed of Jihad" and others saw no contradiction in the roles of nationalism and jihad, while the majority prioritized the role of jihad. Taking this debate into account makes one appreciate Fanon's intimate knowledge of the Algerian fighters: "During the course of recent years I have had the opportunity to witness the extraordinary examples of honor, self-sacrifice, love of life, and disregard for death in an Algeria at war. No, I am not going to sing the praises of the freedom fighters. A common observation the most hard-lined colonialists have not failed to note is that the Algerian fighter has an unusual way of fighting and dying, and *no reference to Islam or Paradise can explain this spirit of self-sacrifice when it comes to protecting his people or shielding his comrades*" (Fanon 2004, 221, emphasis added). If one reads this alongside Fanon's letter to Ali Shariati, one can appreciate Fanon's awareness of the religious sensibilities underpinning anticolonialism and *understand* his apprehension of sectarianism and revivalism.

One should note, however, that Fanon witnessed different forms of religiosity in Algeria and elsewhere. He tells the story of how a world saturated with "superstition" and "fatalism" was transformed through the war of liberation into a force at liberation's service. Among the religions Fanon here refers to is Islam (and more specifically in the form of Marabutism). Nevertheless, he acknowledges the Ulama in fighting certain forms of pro-colonial religiosity (2018, 669)—a view shared by Bennabi and Ouzegane. Fanon's insight on the transformation of religiosity in the service of anticolonial struggle attests to the fact that the "alphabet" of Islam was used as a language of liberation as well as a language of resignation—a language that can fight or justify colonialism.[20] Moreover, Fanon's intimate knowledge of the lived experiences of Muslims in Algeria attests to Islam's ability to cultivate self-esteem. Hence he is fascinated with the peasants who do not wear white masks, while he detests the national bourgeoisie who are defeated by the colonialist culture.

Moreover, Fanon was not a secularist (Maldonado-Torres 2022). He was an anti-sectarian "nationalist" in the sense that his nationalism is a truly nonsectarian humanism. Fanon affirms the plurality of routes to such humanity and to another civilization (Fanon 2018, 668–669). He sees very well, through his praxis in Algeria and other African countries, that Islam provides a source for fighting against "alienation and depersonalization" (2018, 669). He points out clearly in the same letter to Shariati that though their struggles are of a different order, they are ultimately joined in their ends: "both paths will ultimately

join up towards that destination where *humanity lives well*" (Fanon 2018, 669). Therefore, he found it incumbent on Muslim intellectuals not to be alienated from their religion and their cultural and social resources in the project of liberation.

Fanon was not secularist but secular: secular, in the sense that he is committed to the nonreligious worldview; not secularist, insofar as he remained critical of the European conception of rationality and rejected secularism's sovereign authority over public life. Moreover, he was cognizant of anti-Muslim racism in Algeria, even among the left-leaning "Algerian Europeans" who were sympathizers with the national rights of Algerian Muslims.[21]

The unnamed history that underpinned Fanon's theorization is that of European colonization, so the "we" of Fanon is inclusive of all the *damned* of the earth. His writings span various registers—scientific, journalistic, and philosophical—but one should bear in mind that in his philosophical language, Fanon sought to make the language and experience of the dammed generalizable. Fanon the psychiatrist, for instance, remained faithful to the "principle of sociogeny"—to use Wynter's formulation (Wynter 2001). This attributes every trauma or form of alienation to the human's reaction to the social environment and its Man-normality, which forces a certain form of being human on them. Fanon departs from biocentric psychoanalysis in order to consider the social web within which a human being is placed. He thereby theorizes the ways in which the Black is placed within a social reality textured with stories and myths constituting a symbolic system that privileges the white as "the standard" of being human (Gordon 2015, 23). As Gordon and Wynter observed, this generates certain pre-codes and genres that identify being French/white with being human. The perpetuity of this problem was an incentive in Fanon's rebellion against French colonialism in Algeria. In his famous resignation letter, Fanon writes:

> If psychiatry is the medical technique that aims to enable man no longer to be a stranger to his environment, I owe it to myself to affirm that the Arab, permanently an alien in his own country, lives in a state of absolute depersonalization.
>
> What is the status of Algeria? A systematized de-humanization. (2007, 53)

Fanon opposed the colonial Algerian school of psychiatry and other colonialist scholars who attempted to justify scientifically colonialism by attributing a web of negative inborn traits to the Algerians based on "primitivism." Fanon

repudiates the quasi-scientific, biocentric explanation of traits that seek to render Algerians less human—like being "deprived of a cortex"—in order to justify colonial paternalism and racism (2004, 225–26). When faced with cases of criminality, Fanon attributes them to the colonial context, which deprives the colonized of the minimum needed to sustain life (2004, 230). Through his medical practice in Algeria, he emphasized the interdependence of psychiatry and sociality and explored the methods that take the cultures and religion of Muslims seriously and make them feel at home in their environment. Pitting Fanon against the secularist Rodinson, one can say that the former was not interested in the secularization thesis, but that his decolonial project aligns more with what Maldonado-Torres calls "non-secular or post-secular accounts of reality" (2022).

Anti-Muslim Racism and the Secularity/Coloniality of Being

Anti-Islam and anti-Muslim racism were constitutive of colonial modernity/civilization (see Hannoum 2010, 8–9), which was itself deployed as a means of justifying France's domination and colonization of Algeria (and later other colonies)—of usurping material resources and consolidating geopolitical sovereignty and expansion. In the words of Fanon, the racial taxonomy, coupled with hegemonic colonial oppressive authorities, "manages to impose on the native new ways of seeing, and in particular a pejorative judgment with respect to his original forms of existing. This event, which is commonly designated as alienation, is naturally very important. It is found in the official texts under the name of *assimilation*" (1964, 38). French colonialism represented anticolonialism as a form of terrorism or as religious fanaticism by reactivating the logic of the civilization-barbarism divide. Fanon observed, at the height of the Algerian war for liberation, the operation of colonial propaganda: "The concept of barbarism appeared, and it was decided that France in Algeria was fighting barbarism" (1964, 79). This colonialism as racism justifies the killability of the other, who is stripped of their humanity (Hannoum 2010, 9).

Maldonado-Torres, drawing on Fanon as well as other decolonial thinkers, theorized the coloniality of Being as a racial logic that condemns the other to a zone of nonbeing; in order to justify the annihilation, domination, or exploitation of the other and their worlds, the other is labeled as barbarian or savage. By racializing and permanently questioning the very humanity of the colonized, the coloniality of Being renders their lives disposable (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 245). This is coupled with the naturalization of war's non-ethical aspects, which Maldonado-Torres describes as a process of damnation; the lives of the colonized are transformed into hell through wars, conquests, and

genocides (2007, 246–247). He terms this the "racist/imperial Manichean misanthropic skepticism" that sustained the superiority of the imperial white Man (2007, 245).

Maldonado-Torres traces this rupture in humanity to the entanglement of race, religion, and empire during the conquest of the Americas, where the very humanity of the encountered others was questioned because they were perceived as having no religion and, thus, no soul. While Wynter insightfully gestures toward the translation of religion into race, her story overlooks a crucial aspect: the close identification of blackness (color) with religion (Islam), as the European economic and racial encounter with Islam was identified in the European mind with African Black Moors (Robinson 2000, 89, 99–100). Maldonado-Torres does not overlook this genealogy of racial classification in which the Moor and the Muslim are positioned as the paradigmatic other, but his argument, which is similar to that of Bennabi, locates the rupture in the conquest of the Americas, where cultural or religious differences were translated into differences in the degree of humanity (2014, 653).[22] Colonizing the Americas thus set in motion the spread of "a model of power" that maintains the colonial systems of domination (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 244).

Maldonado-Torres's concept of the coloniality of Being exposes how colonialism permeates the very structure of existence, determining who is considered a human being and who is denied existence; it "raises the challenge of connecting the genetic, the existential, and the historical dimensions where Being shows most evidently its colonial side and its fractures" (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 243). Maldonado-Torres himself built on the work of Wynter, Quijano, and Walter Mignolo, among others, as he brought to light "religion" as another axis, alongside "race" and "gender," that operates within and shapes colonial power.

Maldonado-Torres argues that Being has a colonial underside and that Martin Heidegger takes "European Man as his model of Dasein"—a move with far-reaching implications (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 251). Heidegger, he argues,

> forgot that if the concept of Man is a problem, it is not only because it is metaphysical, but also because it does away with the idea that, in modernity, what one finds is not a single model of human being, but relations of power that create a world with masters and slaves. He needed to break with the idea of Europe and the European as models, in order to uncover the complex dynamics of Dasein in the modern period both of European and colonized Dasein, to which we will refer here as the damné. (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, 251)

Heidegger's philosophy claims that authenticity (whether collective or individual) is found through facing death, but this is undermined by the historical experience of the damné (the damned), where death is a foreclosed and banal enterprise: it "is no extra-ordinary affair, but a constitutive feature of the reality of colonized and racialized subjects" (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 251).[23] Death in the colonized land replaces the They, the collective or the people, in Heidegger's philosophy, while the colonized population is denied even the status of people. Drawing on Fanon, Maldonado-Torres thus reconfigures Heidegger's Dasein according to the damné, the condemned of the earth, who bears the heavy colonial conditions of Being. While Dasein grounds European (colonial) subjectivity, the insertion of the damné exposes its underside: the negation and the erasure of the colonized from the realm of Being. As the coloniality of Being is articulated through racial hierarchies and normalized violence, dehumanization, and invisibilization; racial classifications reduce human alterity to subalterity and transform exceptional war conditions into an everyday reality for the colonized, thereby naturalizing "the non-ethics of war" (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 256). As Maldonado-Torres points out, this "sub-ontological difference . . . is legitimized through the idea of race. In such a world, ontology collapses into a Manicheism, as Fanon suggested" (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 256).

In Maldonado-Torres's reading, Heidegger makes Being "the [secular] horizon of understanding all beings" (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 249). Could this shift to Dasein have occurred without a secularized worldview? The problem of Western civilization is not only the forgetfulness of Being, but also the forgetfulness of coloniality that is constitutive of this civilization, as Maldonado-Torres has rightly put it; even more so, it is the forgetfulness of God, or, worse, the forgetfulness that European imperial Man acts as god. The peasants, as elaborated above, are not tempted by the Euromodern epistemic and ontological regime, because they live by another one, which gives them and all humans a divine value—an equality in value, not equality as sameness.[24] This itself enables politics, because if they reject this imposition of the classification of nonbeing, they act as equal to the colonizing being and thus injure this being's hubris. Colonized Muslims do not accept this damnation, nor do they accept the religious category of the damné. This is why, as I indicated above, Fanon is fascinated by the peasantry and scornful of the Westernized elite. This also entails that the ontological questions in the colonized space are those of replacement: Why are there colonizers rather than us, the colonized? Why are there colonizers rather than noncolonizers? The colonized works toward turning colonial Dasein into Nicht-Dasein: *not-being there, not being in their land as colonizers*.

The underside of Euromodern Being is not only coloniality but also secularity. If there is no colonial modernity without coloniality, and if that colonial modernity is unthinkable without secularity, then is it possible to disentangle secularity from coloniality? Maldonado-Torres points to this intrinsic link between the secular and coloniality and invites us to interrogate the coloniality of secularism (Maldonado-Torres 2008). He shows "how secularism creatively reproduces imperial discursive structures that have been historically embedded in European Christianity" (Maldonado-Torres 2008, 361).[25] I have mobilized critiques that unpack the way secularism—through its use of binaries (mythical/historical, modernity/traditional, rational/irrational, private/public) that characterize nonsecular, nonmodern traditions as lacking full humanity—has colluded with modernity/coloniality. As Hallaq has argued, the European transition from the Christianizing mission to the secularizing/civilizing mission arose from Christianity's inability to provide the necessary conditions for achieving and legitimizing the colonial/capitalist ambitions of total domination over humans and nature (Hallaq 2018, 86; see also Maldonado-Torres 2008, 364–365). In this story, Europe's secular scientism provided colonialism with a theology whose apologetics used scientific evidence to assimilate, devalue, and destroy all modes of being that did not fit its new secular scientific worldview:[26]

> The first modernity, with its imperial project baptized by religion, now had to give space to the second modernity, with its scientifically based racism and with the notion of ''civility'' as its main slogan. The discourse of secularism was needed both to maintain popular groups at bay through a clear differentiation between the civic space and the public or private, and to legitimize colonization. Colonization found a justification in secular discourse because, ultimately, the colonial others were conceived as primitives living in stages where only religion or tradition dominated their customs and ways of being. (Maldonado-Torres 2008, 366)

Colonial others were made part of a nature whose instrumentalization and exploitation, justified by secular scientism, ultimately led to ecological collapse. Nivedita Menon (2024) insightfully lays bare the secular regimes of invisibilization—those that invisibilize casteism, the nonsecular (spiritual) self, and capitalism and its effects, namely, environmental degradation. If, as Asad points out, Euro-American secularism is not thinkable without secularity as a *Weltanschauung* that builds on a peculiar conception of the world (social and natural), then one should think with the entanglement between seculariza-

tion and environmental degradation (Nasr 1997; Hallaq 2018; Amer-Meziane 2024). Thus, the idea of the secularity/coloniality of Being makes sense of the sustained superiority of white/secular Man not only over other human beings but also over non-human beings and nature itself.

If invisibilization and dehumanization are the primary mechanisms and expressions of the coloniality of Being (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 257), then secularism, one can argue, is complicit in this operation. The metaphysics of coloniality were constituted through the replacement of the vertical relation between God and man by a hierarchical relation of superiority and inferiority between imperial Man and non-European, colonized being (Maldonado-Torres 2009). Thus, secular modernity does not simply abandon God. It aspires to replace God with secular gods that claim all godly attributes—a familiar story of modern Man. Secularism, here, is fetishism insofar as it divinizes what is made by humans. Bennabi critiques the modern reductionism of all truth to matter within a physical system and juxtaposes it with a metaphysical system in which truth is not reducible to matter, and science is not divinized (Bennabi 2010). Central to colonialism, for Bennabi, is a shift, similar to that which Wynter also identifies, in the European context: from a theocentric conception of the human to a secular, Man-centered worldview that instrumentalizes other human and non-human beings and nature itself. Bennabi insightfully tells us what happened in this shift: "This myth [of a superior race] has demolished the entire Christian moral philosophy and has committed an outrage against God himself by striving to *supplant Him in the European conscience*." This emergence of European Man was a series of valorizations through identification with God.[27]

Iskander Abbasi brings "the Muslim question" to bear on the coloniality of Being formulated by Maldonado-Torres, and he invites us to take note of the racialization of Muslims and Islamophobia, which profoundly informed the mechanisms of coloniality in the Americas and coloniality/modernity more generally (Abbasi 2020, 26).[28] This is crucial for thinking the coloniality of Being, especially in contexts where Muslims are the target of coloniality. In the context of colonial Algeria, Dr. Abd-el-Aziz Khaldi (1914–1972), an anticolonial thinker and a close friend of Bennabi, offered, in the wake of the massacre of May 8, 1945, a kind of indictment of the French people for the double mechanism of the coloniality of Being: elimination and invisibilization. Khaldi sought an explanation for the fact that while French people were enraged against Nazism and Fascism, they remained largely silent about and showed no sympathy for the plight of Algerians who were massacred. He attributes this phenomenon to an entrenched "Arabophobia,"[29] and this Arabophobia manifests itself not only in sentiments and cultural production but also in a systemic ideology that

sustains colonial economic relations. This systemic Arabophobia is sustained through propaganda about and misrepresentations of the Algerian people that render them objects of fear and disdain, and that are used to justify subjecting and killing them. This Arabophobia shaped the so-called French Muslim policy that Khaldi summed up in four words: repression, misery, massacre, assimilation (Khaldi 1946, 96).

Secularity allows its believers and enactors to misrecognize their biases and violence because of its pretentious neutrality and because it is supposedly constructed in a scientific, objective, and nonreligious manner. Hence, secularism allows its adherents to have a good conscience, despite all their violence and crimes (when committed), as they believe in science, not religion, which is deemed the source of all problems, including intolerance. This fanatical certainty of secular neutrality takes the form of fanatic religiosity; it is paradoxically derived from the faith that it is not a faith. Thus, it becomes blind to its own positionalities and problems, failing to recognize—or actively misrecognizing—other discourses and ways of life that lie outside its fold. This colonial mechanism of intolerance is invisibilized by secularism's self-presentation. Secular intolerance, just like any other form of intolerance,[30] operates through the desire to erase otherness—to make the other cease to be an other. This constitutes the organizing principle of colonialism: devaluation of different modes of being human, which are subjected to either assimilation or elimination.

The Secularity/Coloniality of Being

Fanon was not a zealous secularist, while Bennabi was a kind of antisecularist. However, both of them reject tendencies that, through emulation or rejection, make European Man the (in)visible but dominant point of reference. Ashis Nandy points to this tendency in post-colonial discourses on religion, politics, or their relation (Nandy 1988, 186). He problematizes the claim that secularism, by separating religion from politics, ensures tolerance. In his extensive work on violence in the Indian subcontinent, particularly on the Partition, Nandy affirms that the main cause of violence is not religious communalism, and that violence was instead executed for secular political ends (2010, 41).[31] Nandy is concerned less with whether this figure of Western Man is historically accurate than with how it is constructed and responded to outside Europe. Here, he seems to be alluding to critics who challenge assumptions about the homogeneity of secular European Man and secular modernity. Talal Asad acknowledges such critics, but he cautions against overlooking the power such assumptions hold for people who seek modernity: "These people *aim* at 'modernity' and expect others (especially in the non-west) to do so too" (Asad 2003,

13). This aspirational and seductive dimension of secular modernity, Asad affirms, "doesn't disappear when we simply point out that 'the West' isn't an integrated totality, that many people in the West contest secularism or interpret it in different ways, that the modern epoch in the West has witnessed many arguments and several irreconcilable aspirations. On the contrary, those who assume modernity as a project know that already" (Asad 2003, 13). Though in different ways, Nandy and Asad help us understand how the West, despite its multiple interior or contradictory faces, presents an exterior single face (whether real or fictive) to its others—one that is predominantly secular and liberal and functions as a normative ideal against which other human societies are measured.

Asad understands the secular as "a variety of concepts, practices and sensibilities" that are not reducible to secularism as a political doctrine, but precede it (Asad 2003, 16). He seems to suggest thinking of the secular as embedded, or rather embodied, in forms of life. Asad problematizes the power of claims and assumptions that the secular is neutral, "self-authenticating," and self-sufficient, something stripped of the religious yet able to rearrange and govern the latter's boundaries. It is a system of classification and valuation that is articulated through multiple dualities: public and private, autonomy and submission, authentic and fantastic, historical and mythical, and so on. In this order, the origin story of life becomes *authentically* a secular story. The secular thus emerges as an epistemic and ontological category that excludes God, or the sacred, from the story of human origin and the story of life itself. This exclusion does not mean total abandonment but remains, as Gordon aptly puts it in another context, "the grammatical other side of modernity's story" (Gordon 2003, 17). The secular system of classifying the religious and secular is, at the same time, a system of classifying human forms of life that are marked by the dualities instituted by the secular. Asad seems to suggest precisely this:

> *Modernity is not primarily a matter of cognizing the real but of living-in-the-world*. Since this is true of every epoch, what is distinctive about modernity as a historical epoch includes modernity as a political economic project. *What interests me particularly is the attempt to construct categories of the secular and the religious in terms of which modern living is required to take place, and nonmodern peoples are invited to assess their adequacy*. For representations of "the secular" and "the religious" in modern and modernizing states mediate people's identities, help shape their sensibilities, and guarantee their experiences. (Asad 2003, 14)

In the dominance of the secular, what are other, nonsecular modes of existence required to do? They are "invited to assess their adequacy." This is the insidious aspect of secularization, a process that, whether conducted by the state or empire or coloniality, assumes and enforces its model of what it means to be human. This model is set as the measure through which people are molded, whether violently or not. Secularity names a totality and a habitus, a secular sociopsychological infrastructure, that becomes the invisible normative mode of being (with all its tastes, norms, pre-codes, and dispositions) and sets the roles and rules, the judgments, and the codes of being and living in the world.

The trick of secularity lies in its posture: its neutrality, its claim of zero-point epistemology that does not pose itself as a *belief system* among others and that thereby avoids engendering a clash of different belief systems. These unspoken assumptions, sensibilities, pre-codes, and experiences that regulate what is "truly human" (usually defined by the state) led Asad to call for the anthropology of secularism (Asad 2003, 17). What does secularism as a project do to the human being? How do the state's policies and discourses shape or regulate human forms of life? What model of being in the world is instituted through the formation of political subjects as "citizens," "nationals," etc.? One should reckon with Saba Mahmood's point that secularism does not only produce (or aspire to produce) a secular self; it also produces a specific kind of religious subjectivity suitable for a secular liberal project (Mahmood 2006, 344). This problem has its roots in colonial culture, but it still endures. The "secular liberal matrix," as Schirin Amir-Moazami (2022) recently shows, is entangled with the nation-state and its projects as well as with a colonial matrix of power. What underpins the logic of this secular liberal matrix is a model of being human against which humans are measured.

The epistemic and ontological privilege of the secular and its posture of neutral judgment is constitutive of coloniality. Without epistemic supremacy, which is a necessary condition of modernity/coloniality, the secular remains a position among others subsumed within an encompassing normative worldview. The modernity that self-declares its rupture from tradition privileges the secular self as a god or a demigod and their epistemologies as normative of being in the world. It is this institution of secularity/coloniality that produces its others, who are devalued as religious, fanatic, unmodernized, uncivilized selves (read: irrational, traditional selves) because their ontologies and epistemologies could not achieve the "gifts of Enlightenment." Sans this claim and coloniality, secularism and the secular are inconsequential. It remains among the plurality of the modes of being in the world—a world with so many different ways of being and thinking about the self, the anti-self, the human, the

nonhuman, with various ways of co-living. This plurality, akin to the pluriversality and plurality of human beings in the world, subverts secular epistemic supremacy and allows for ways of thinking and being in the world without the interpellation of secularity/coloniality and modernity.

The secularity/coloniality of Being is the ideology that takes the modern categories of civilization, culture, development, and progress as weapons of judgment that justify the killing or colonization of all those who lag behind or do not fit. This is the long durée of the global colonial design that the nation-state has taken up. The secularity/coloniality of Being is at once ontological and normative in a world reduced to being isomorphic with Euro-American Secular Man's form of life, which is taken as the master model against which all forms of being human are compared, measured, evaluated, and judged, and thus valued or devalued. *The Secularity/coloniality of being is a matrix of determinations and devaluations of forms of life that depart from Euromodern model of being human*. The secularity/coloniality of Being justifies all kinds of violence meted out to humans, nonhumans, and all that is living. As Wael Hallaq aptly puts it: "secular humanism, like liberalism, is not only anthropocentric, structurally intertwined with violence, and incapable of sympathy with the nonsecular Other . . .; it is the psychoepistemic substantiation of *a particular subject* who articulates the world wholly through disenchanted modern categories that are inherently incapable of appreciating intellectually, and much less sympathizing spiritually with, non-secular-humanist phenomena" (Hallaq 2018, 5).

My interest is in disclosing the normativity of secularity and secular Man that Hallaq puts at the center of his critique and that Wynter identified as being over-represented as the human being as such (Wynter 2003). Such normativity is epistemically and ontologically privileged within the narrative of modernity/coloniality (Mignolo 2009). This is not to say that secular and religious are rigidly definable or completely separate categories or modes of being. But even if we think of secularism and religion as co-constitutive, in modernity/coloniality, the secular is privileged within the epistemic hierarchy. The secular governs the meaning of religion and the religious self and their place within modernity/coloniality. Thinking with Mignolo's ontological and "colonial difference" as the governing principle of the secular, the "spiritual" forms of life, with all their epistemic and ontological edifications, are locked into a "double bind": either they are considered not properly human and their epistemic and ontological edifications are negated or devalued; or, in order to be valued and recognized as truly human, one needs to assimilate and follow the protocols of Western epistemologies and ontologies. This is the logic of the assimilatory machinery.

Against the Secularity/Coloniality of Being

If the chief concern of the coloniality of Being is the lived experience of colonization and its impact on language (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 242), then colonialism's first operation is to dehumanize the lived experience of the colonized and to devalue or erase their language and replace it with a secularized, modernist language. In order to decolonize, therefore, one also needs to abandon the metaphysics of secular/colonial modernity. Bennabi is antisecularist in the sense that he is against the "credo that deifies matter," "a secular modern religion," as Achille Mbembe calls it (Confavreux 2022, 130). Therefore, the story of modernity is not about displacing theology, but about replacing theology with imperial secular anthropology that strives to make God forgettable while allowing all kinds of secular gods to live on and be constantly remembered.[32] In this world, the triumphal story of the secular as the necessary condition of secularism becomes not only an aspirational political project, but also a weapon of colonial power that classifies human beings into two demarcated categories: "hominin" and "civilized being." Fanon recognized this racial logic during and toward the end of the Algerian war of liberation: "Because it is a systematized negation of the other, a frenzied determination to deny the other any attribute of humanity, colonialism forces the colonized to constantly ask the question: 'Who am I in reality?'" (Fanon 2004, 182).[33] Bennabi and Fanon provide descriptions of settler colonialism that make us understand racism, whether anti-Muslim or anti-Black, as something that renders an entire people, regardless of their internal differences, nonhuman.

In the face of racism and colonialism, Bennabi asserts the humanity of the human on metaphysical grounds—grounds that are not contingent on recognition by colonial or secular order. Precisely because it is not rooted in immanent or anthropocentric grounds, it is indeed a humanism that measures the world rather than being measured by it. Humanism as antiracism requires, Bennabi seems to suggest, abandoning secular and colonial epistemologies and their origin story. In an article titled "al-Asas al-Ghaiby li Falsafat al-Insan" [The Metaphysical Foundation of Humanism], Bennabi critiques the view that fully attributes Eurocolonial contempt of non-European humans only to the emergence of the capitalist system. For him, this Eurocolonial contempt for humanity, rendered as a "thing" or a "need" in the colonial scheme, stemmed from Europe setting itself above humanity, which harkens back to colonial conquests and the Roman imperial culture. The production of lower humanity through racial machinery, according to him, is encapsulated in the formula: "Everything that is not European is a savage native" (Bennabi 2019 [1950], 1530).

But this order of the world is itself made possible with the emergence of modern secular deities such as the goddess science, who recognizes only what is calculable and quantifies everything with the help of her worshippers. If the ontological and epistemological landscape of the secular is not abandoned, then all critique will be captured by matrix of secularity/modernity/coloniality.[34] The axioms and ontology of science should be subsumed by an ontology with a metaphysical source that accords value to all creation, including humans. Bennabi articulates the first principle of this metaphysical anthropology via Islam: "We have indeed honored the descendants of Adam, carrying them on land and sea and providing for them from the good things; we have favored them in blessings over most of the beings we created" (Quran 17:70). This is what he elsewhere calls the "incommensurable *value*" of the human, a value that is immeasurable in human terms and does not belong to the secular system of valuation (Bennabi 1993, 166). The assertion of the value of humans should be understood alongside the Quranic idea that the plurality of earthly existence is ontological and a sign (*ayah*) of God's creation. Since God is One, everything else *is* plural. Part of the idea of *tawhid* (oneness of God) is to see all creation as a sign (*ayah*) that gestures to one God, but also to avoid the tendency to oppress, dominate and erase differences inherent among humans and other creatures and their varied forms of life. This is pitted against the tendency of modern epistemologies to name the human not as the immeasurable but as the measured and the quantifiable, the disposable. This is the first principle of "humanism" in Islam, which advocates for an antiracist politics that leaves the secular ground of valuation and racialization. If colonialism, within its racial machine, brutalizes others that are deemed nonhuman, Bennabi shifts the entire ground of valuation and takes as axiomatic the value of all humans, regardless of their place in the social or colonial setting. This axiomatics of human value generates exactly what Jane Anna Gordon (2006) calls "potentiated double consciousness"—an awareness that not only recognizes and resists systemic racism and its oppressive structures but also refuses to accept its dehumanizing logic. This potentiated Muslim double consciousness preserves a sense of the incommensurable value of humans that is not affected by but rather ontologically resistant to the epistemic, affective, and genocidal violence of the value system imposed by the racialized social structures of colonialism.

While both Fanon and Bennabi can be considered to converge in their diagnosis of the colonial racial matrix, their responses to it diverge. While Fanon advocates a nonsectarian secular (not secularist) humanism, Bennabi abandons secularism and its origin stories and mobilizes Islam against racism.

However, Fanon's final call to reinvent the human without the interpellation of Europe is not a subscription to a certain mode of being human, whether installed by colonialism or the national state, or religion; it is just an open call for recognizing the plurality of being human in the project of liberation. In a similar vein, Bennabi asserts that the colonially imposed conceptions of humans and their relationships have nothing to do with the human species, but are instead a series of distortions, and thus the possibility of new relationships results from the advent of the human as such, neither degraded nor idolized. This invites us to think with the plurality of concepts and praxes of being human and to retain and reenact the traditions of the human in a democratic polity grounded in "pluri-humanity," a human horizon for imagining just futures beyond secular colonial regimes.

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NOTES

1. Man-normality, if I can use this term in parallel to Sudipta Kaviraj's Euronormality (2009, 189), names the emergence of European Man, as theorized by Sylvia Wynter (2003), Lewis Gordon's critique of "colonial normative life" (2018, 33), among others, as an at once descriptive and normative model of what it means to be a human. More importantly, Man-normality names the implicit, sometimes explicit, ontological and epistemic orientation of all humans (along with their sciences) everywhere toward Euro-American Man and his particular universals, either by force or seduction.
2. In this session, I elaborate on some ideas I presented earlier. See Al-Zayed (2025).
3. For a history of the entanglements between secularization and empire (and its heir, the nation-state) with the ecological degradation, see Meziane (2024).
4. It is worthwhile to consider the long durée of this assimilatory paradigm that Brunstetter lays bare in his article. This paradigm still governs the relationship between the self and the other in most liberal democracies of Europe and America in relation to those constructed as "minorities" or internal others. For the relationship between nationalism, colonialism, and the construction of permanent minorities, see also Mamdani (2020).
5. See Mamdani (1996).
6. Bennabi refers here to the colonial logic and dehumanizing force that apply the colonial violent policies to render the colonized into subhuman, whose legal, administrative and racialized name in the French colonial context is the indigene.
7. See also Hallaq (2018), especially the introduction, and n42.
8. As Lorcin points out, "the notion of a barbarous Islamic tradition pitted against a civilized Roman/Christian tradition had been present in Algeria since conquest" (Lorcin 1999, 205). For the porous relations between race and religion in the context of Algerian settler colonialism, see Davis (2022), especially chapter 1.
9. See Benrabah (2013).
10. For more on the "Kabalye Myth," see Lorcin (1999).
11. In the colonial classification and production of categories, *Arabe*, as category that signifies inferiority and indigeneity, could refer to the Algerian and the Magrhrebin in general and in certain times could even include the Kabyles or Amazigh. See Hannoum (2023), 78–79.
12. Leon Roches took the name of Omar bin Abdullah and went to Tunis to get the fatwa from some ulama, and from there, he travelled to Egypt and Hijaz to get the approval for that fatwa from Alazhar and other ulama in Mecca and Medina. Jules Cambon, who wanted to use the influence of Sufi order (turuq, pl. of tariqa) for his service, sought a similar fatwa in 1895 (see Sa'adallah 1998, 328). One should not rush to conclude that these Muslims were themselves pro-colonialism, for it is precisely because there is no central authority in Islam that one finds different approaches to dealing with foreign rule.

13. Though several anticolonial resistance movements in Algeria belonged to the Sufi orders (turuq), there were some Sufi orders (turuq) that succumbed to colonial administration. Such Sufi turuq were encouraged by the colonial administration, and they theologically justified colonial orders and practices by issuing fatwas and holding conferences to declare their loyalty to the French colonial administration—to "manufacture consent," as it were (see Sa'adallah 1998, 325–42). But this diversity of Islamic attitudes toward colonialism and foreign occupation stems from the fact that Islam has no single central, unified authority in understanding and interpreting the Islamic traditon. The French 1905 Laïcité code was brought into effect (or, some would say, no-effect) in colonial Algeria on 27 September 1907. While it was applicable to Christianity and Judaism, the colonial administration used it to continue managing Islam, Muslims, and their religious affairs. It is in this context one can understand the demand of many Algerians across the political and ideological spectrum that the Laïcité code be applied to Islam. One may question the collapse of coloniality into secularity and suggest that this can be partly explained by French colonial policy, which was entangled with the secular colonial state. While this partly explains the link, it is insufficient, as similar mechanisms unfolded in other colonies, such as Indonesia (see Benda 1958). A more plausible explanation lies in the target of colonial and secular policies: Islam and Muslims, whose social and epistemic structures resisted the secular worldview, making them a central target to the articulation of colonial power. In the French context, the secular principle of separating church from the state was denied to Muslims, who remained the subject of colonial policy that intervened in all aspects of their religious life. The demand of Muslims for this principle to be enacted equally was a demand for equal treatment so that they can have complete control of their religious life and institutions. Here again, this is an example of a secular/colonial policy made to manage Islam and Muslims.
14. For more on the entanglement of natural, social, and human science with race and religion, see Locrin (1999), especially part II, "Social sciences and military men." See also Said (1979), Ch. 2.
15. For more recent work on the doctrine of terra nullius in settler colonialism, see Pateman (2007), 35–78.
16. My discussion of the anticolonial languages is indebted to Kaviraj's deliberations on languages of the secularity (2023).
17. There emerged three major competing nationalisms: Arab (secular and socialist), Berber (secular and Tamazight), and Islamic (religious), see Hannoum (2010), 191–194. All these kinds of nationalisms carry the imprint of violent modernity that French colonialism instituted, but with the emergence of the postcolonial nation state as an heir of this violent modernity, the secular came to occupy a privileged position in the hierarchies that ensued from modernity.
18. This is the construction of Rodinson (1963).
19. This should be read in the context of transregional politics in a global order that is still constituted by Secularity/coloniality. With the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Kemalization/secularization of Turkey, the emergence of Arab nationalism within a colonial modern/secular imaginary and its binaries (modernity/tradition,

rationality/irrationality, progress/traditionalism, secular/religious, right/left politics) had become part of the anticolonial language and politics. That has had long shadows in postcolonial times. Along with these binaries and their colonial legacies, there were a plethora of other binaries in which Islam is interpellated as one side: Islam/modernity, Islam/democracy, Islam/secularism. Thus, Islam became the center of all debates about modernity/secularity.

20. "Alphabet" is deployed here, in Sudipta Kaviraj's sense, as "something like a structure, an alphabet-like limited collection of elements which its users use in various combinations and recombination to produce the doctrines they require" (Garrick Cooper, Charles W. Mills, Sudipta Kaviraj, and Sor-hoon Tan 2017, 166). One should extend this to include not only doctrines but also the set of embodiments produced through such engagement with traditions.

21. This awareness is evident in his report of the experience of an Algerian European whose anti-Arab prejudice was unsettled by an Algerian Jew, see Fanon (2007), 164–65.

22. All these colonial/racial classifications bear unmistakable signs of continuity and affinity that remain as the colonial duress translated into a series of "recursions" (Stoler 2016, 27) or to what Bennabi calls "colonialist spirituality." This invites us to consider the complex interconnections between racial codifications and classifications across the Atlantic.

23. Similar operation occurs in the Cartesian Cogito, where the assertion of European rationality and being reveals its underside: the denial of rationality to non-European entails the denial of their very being (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 252). Thus, the formulation of Dasein and, before it, the Cogito, rests upon the negation of the non-European rationality and being and the erasure of their worlds.

24. This is different from much of the humanist understanding that foreground humanism on sameness of human reflected in an articulation such as: we are all humans or am I not a human like you.

25. One needs to mention the critical accounts that, challenging the view that affirms the origin of secularism in European/Christian history, argue, as a strategy to salvage secularism, that there are multiple secularisms embedded in non-European histories. I do not think that the critique of secularism rests *only* on unpacking its Christian genealogy, nor do I think that secularism can be salvaged by proving its multiple origins or historical trajectories. Rather, without its historical entanglement with colonial and capitalist expansion and the global spread of Europe's projects, secularism would hardly have emerged as a problem or as a solution. As Danielle Haque puts it, even if one acknowledges the plurality of a secularism that is by no means universal (see Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2008), "secularization narratives are connected in that they are used to tell progressive stories of liberal forms of governance, global capitalism, and human rights discourses. Secular logics are used, for example, to buttress the moral certitude of settler colonialism globally in order to historically and persistently disenfranchise Indigenous peoples, take their lands, and make them subjects of state violence" (Haque 2019, 34). Moreover, secularism's complicity with Europe/Christianity is often interrogated because the former assumed the latter's forms of constituting the public and de-legitimizing other

ideologies and religions (Maldonado-Torres 2008, 369–370). There have recently been attempts to argue for the secular within Islam, and thus for an Islamic secular that abandons the whole ideological and political package of secularism (Sherman 2024).

26. The secularity/coloniality of Being is also to be understood as implicated in the political project of colonialism and its heir, the nation-state, through its secular policies (see Asad 2003, 191; Asad 1992).

27. This kind of tendency to identify with God took its ultimate form in the work of Ferry (2002); see also (Hallaq 2018, 89). Lewis Gordon insightfully and powerfully calls attention to the self-sufficiency and self-justification of the racist man, who positions himself as the standard of being human or as above the human while constantly questioning the humanity of the other and demanding that they justify their humanity. For further discussion, see Tunstall (2013). Notice that this position of the racist man mirrors that of the secular.

28. Furthermore, Abbasi insightfully draws on the "Dalit question" to problematize the formulation of the coloniality of Being. However, though one can point out that Maldonado-Torres does not question Heidegger's secular and secularized philosophy, Abbasi's main critique of Maldonado-Torres's seemingly secular approach seems not to pay enough attention to Maldonado-Torres's larger project that offers critiques of secularism and "religion" as sorting tool employed by coloniality (Maldonado-Torres 2006; 2014a; 2008; 2014b; 2009; 2017; 2022).

29. This is an early use of the term Arabophobia, and given that in the Algerian colonial context, Arab and Muslim were produced as equivalent, a genealogy of the concept of Islamophobia should not overlook Khaldi's writings.

30. Of course, this pretentious neutrality that allows secular intolerance and violence to hide itself while other forms of intolerance like the religious one cannot assume such neutrality.

31. This point is corroborated by Asad (2003, 10–12) who invites the more important question of "what it is we do when we assign responsibility for "violence and cruelty" to specific agents" (12).

32. Recently, Yasmin Moll (2023) took up the question of secularism in the doing of anthropology and posited Godly ethnography or Islamic anthropology as a challenge to the establishment of anthropology as a practice and discipline.

33. In a speech in the Constituent Assembly in Algeria, from which he later resigned, Haj Ahmed Cherif Saadane just uttered this baffling question: "M. Saadane. — I am really embarrassed at these interruptions, because until now I have not known what I am. [Interruptions right and centre.] Am I a French subject? Am I a French citizen . . ." (Lüthy, 1955, 222). The peasants as figured in Fanon's narrative would have not uttered this question because despite the processes of dehumanization, the source of their value as humans is metaphysical. That's why Bennabi insists on the metaphysical basis of humanism (more on this below).

34. For an extended theorizing of this nexus of secularity/modernity/coloniality in the Americas, see An (2024), especially chapter 1.

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