A Disenchanted Exile: Secularism and the Islamic Revival among Second-Generation Palestinian Immigrants in Chicago

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<div dir="rtl">

ليس فينا عيسوي أو مسلم
واحد نحن ألا فليعلموا
أدياننا أوطاننا فليفهموا
إنّا عرب تحاشينا الفتن
آهِ فلتحيا فلسطين لنا
ولتحيا فلسطين الوطن

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There are among us neither Christian nor Muslim.
We are one! So, let them know that
Our religions are our homelands! And, let them understand that
Verily we are Arabs! We have shunned sedition!
O! Long live Palestine for us!
Long live Palestine, the homeland!

I sat at Abū Mājid's dining room table as he recited this paean to pan-Arab unity penned by poet Iskāndar al-Khūrī al-Bayt Jālī.[1] A poster of Nājī al-`Alī's "Ḥanḍala" figure hung from the wall directly in front of us.[2] Seventy-two years old and recovering from cancer surgery, Abū Mājid hunched forward, face animated, voice deep and smoky, to denounce "the religious fever, the religious fanatics," as he put it, in Chicago and in the Middle East, especially in "what's going on in Syria." Instead of uniting to resist Western imperialism and Israeli colonialism, he said, the "fanatics" had divided the Arabs, offering illusions of divine salvation. But secularists, too, were to blame. Their passivity had enabled the

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[1] Iskāndar al-Khūrī (1890-1973) was an Arab nationalist poet from Bayt Jālā, a Palestinian Christian town adjacent to the West Bank town of Bethlehem. Abū Mājid's recitation was not entirely exact. For example, he rendered the phrase, "واحد نحن" (we are one) as "واحد منا" (one of us). Such discrepancies produced only slight variations of meaning, however, so I have chosen to use the text of the poem as the poet himself rendered it in print. The translation of the poem is my own. For more on Iskāndar al-Khūrī, see http://www.passia.org/palestine_facts/personalities/alpha_b.htm.

[2] Nājī al-`Alī (1938-1987) was a Palestinian political cartoonist whose work skewered the policies and behaviors of international political leaders. He reserved his sharpest barbs for Arab leaders, including those who headed the PLO. He was assassinated in London after receiving death threats from a PLO operative. His Ḥanḍala figure, a ten-year-old boy portrayed always as wearing rags, his back defiantly turned to the viewer, his comments or his silence expressing the bitterness but also the determination of a people forced into prolonged statelessness, has long been iconic for Palestinians of their national condition and struggle. See El Fassed (2004) for a retrospective of al-`Alī's life and work.

division and even mimicked the religious mindset: "We just cannot ignore things, thinking as if the solution comes from God," he said, "the solution does not come from God, it's us who must do the solution!" That solution was to be found in the principle that one's religion was the nation, that the nation was Arab, and that Arabs "shunned sedition."

Abū Mājid had memorized Khūrī's poem as a schoolboy in a small West Bank village near Jerusalem some six decades earlier. His teachers, swept up in the pan-Arab enthusiasm of the 1950s, had all been partisans of the Movement of Arab Nationalists (MAN, *ḥarakat al-qawmiyīn al-`arab*). Reeling from the 1948 War, they hearkened to MAN's call to unite against Zionism and Western imperialism. Now, however, six decades had passed and Arabism lay in disarray. The regimes that espoused Arab unity had either fallen or were teetering in the face of mass protests and civil war. Among Palestinians, too, the unity forged historically through the leadership of the Palestinian Liberation Organization had collapsed. An ascendant Ḥamās ruled Gaza; a sclerotic Fatah hung on in the West Bank; and, it seemed, the malaise had spread beyond the homeland. The mosques were ascendant in Chicago. Secularism had failed.

Abū Mājid was right about Palestine, and he had a point about Chicago, too. Since the 1980s, organizations like the Mosque Foundation in Bridgeview, Illinois, along with a range of other groups that individuals associated with the Mosque Foundation have helped found—for example, Muslim Legal Fund of America, Council on American-Islamic Relations, and American Muslims for Palestine—have become dominant within the southwest suburban Palestinian enclave. They also have provided the impetus for metropolitan-wide structures such as the Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago and the recently launched, Washington, D.C.-based lobby, the US Council of Muslim Organizations. The

ascendancy of these organizations has mirrored a rise in Islamic religiosity among

Palestinian immigrants—and other Muslim-majority immigrant groups, as well—since the

1990s. More women wear scarves; more men sport beards; more weddings feature gender-

segregated celebrating; more stores sell *ḥalāl* items of various sorts (personal observation;

Cainkar 2004). The September 11, 2001 attacks and their long aftermath, by intensifying a

media-driven perception of Islam as the primary identity of Muslims, generating racist anti-

Muslim backlash, and thrusting religious leaders into the role of community

representatives, have simply cemented this religious ascendancy.

Yet, despite growing predominance of religious institutions and identity, secularism

persists nonetheless. A version of Abū Mājid's pan-Arabism continues among younger

activists who staff the old community associations, lead new networks dedicated to the

Palestinian cause, and are at the forefront of Students for Justice in Palestine groups and

the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaign.[3] Other types of secularism, the

impetus and foil of which have been the religious return itself, have also emerged. Those

who express secularist sensibilities live with their families and neighbors in the suburbs,

where they accommodate yet also chafe at the piety pervading their communities. Others

reside elsewhere in the city far from the suburban enclave. To embrace the stance of a

secularist, then, is to inhabit a marginal, disconnected space, to live a disenchanted exile

within the exile.

But, if secularism is so marginal, why examine it? I have three reasons for doing so.

First, since the September 11, 2001 attacks and subsequent bombings in Europe, including

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[3] These organizations and movements include individuals who have embraced piety, too; but their political ethos bases itself fundamentally on notions of human and civil rights and national self-determination. I explore the effects of participation in these settings on piety-oriented activists in Lybarger (forthcoming).

the July 7, 2005 explosions in London, journalists and scholars have focused myopically on

the question of Islam's compatibility with the West. One consequence of this has been an

increasing emphasis on cultural-religious location in the analysis of politics and identity

(Malik 2009).[4] Islam, for example, has emerged as an explanatory frame in its own right, as

if what people who happen to be Muslims do can be comprehended through reference

solely or largely to Islamic religious precepts, practices, and history. As a result, the

contingency of Islam as a shaping force in the identities of Muslims recedes from

awareness, as does comprehension of how public debate and public policy—ranging from

police surveillance to multiculturalism—have energized "Islam" as a determinative,

homogenizing identity category (Malik 2009). Muslims in Europe and the United States,

however, do not necessarily identify primarily in religious terms; and they hold often

contradictory viewpoints on whether and how Islamic religious norms should be

interpreted and implemented (Nagel and Staeheli 2012; Pew Research Center 2011 and

2007; BBC News 2007). By shifting focus to persisting forms of secularism among Chicago's

Palestinians, I seek, in part, to emphasize this fact and, in doing so, to push back against the

Islamizing of Muslims in academic and journalistic analyses.

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[4] Books addressing the topic of Islam in the West are now legion. Even the most trenchant discussions do not escape the tendency to presume the dominant and determinative role of Islam in immigrant lives. Roy (2006), for example, provides a fine-grained analysis of Islamism and neo-fundamentalism among Muslims, globally and especially among European Muslims. One gains the impression from the book, however, that immigrants who happen to be Muslim have few if any interests and identity options beyond now decontextualized diaspora Islamic discourses and structures. Primary for Muslims globally and in the West is "the search for a new *ummah*." In another example, Karim (2008) offers an empirically rich ethnography of how race, class, and gender shape the lives of South Asian and African American Muslim women in the United States. Despite her sensitivity to these other shaping forces and interests, Karim nevertheless privileges an Islamic concept of solidarity—Karim, like Roy, invokes "the *ummah*" as the relevant trope—as the primary analytical and, indeed, normative frame through which to make sense of the lives of Muslims. Committed to the search for the *umma* herself, she seeks out others who, like her, also seek Islamic solidarity across race, class, and gender. But what of other individuals who might identify as Muslims but who may not be oriented primarily or at all toward *umma* consciousness?

My second justification for focusing on secularism has to do with how secularization, which creates distinctly non-religious milieus, and religious revitalization, which seeks to re-sacralize society, are interactive and mutually constituting processes (Lybarger, forthcoming; Casanova 2011; Riesebrodt 2010; Lybarger 2007a and 2007b). We see this dynamic interrelation manifesting among Palestinians. Combatting secularism in Gaza's refugee camps, for example, was the primary objective of Hamas's precursor, the Islamic Collective; and a main concern of the predominantly Palestinian mosques and churches in Chicago has been to inoculate immigrant families against the temptations to embrace "corrupt" lifestyles and affiliations promoted in US popular culture.[5] Any discussion of religious revival among Palestinians, then, requires a discussion of secularism as a competing orientation. Finally, analyzing Palestinian secularism can reveal how social orientations might weaken and yet still persist over time. Secularism seems marginal at the moment among Palestinians; but its persistence tells us much about the capacity of secularism to reproduce across generations either through its own institutional mechanisms or as a consequence of the contradictions intrinsic to regimes of piety.

<p style="text-align:center">Debating Secularism and Its Cognates</p>

To invoke terms like "secularism" and "religious revival," as I have just done, is to wade into a far-ranging and ongoing debate. For at least two decades now, it has been fashionable to critique notions of "secularism" and "religion" and their various cognate terms as irreversibly fused to a modernist teleology that construes any form of public

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[5] Such concerns are not exclusively Palestinian ones. As Riedel (2009) shows, the charter-education movement, backed primarily by conservative Evangelical Christian groups, also views education as a matter of instilling moral character that can anchor children in a "multicultural" world perceived as lacking moral foundations. Significantly, the Islamic schools situated around the Mosque Foundation's plaza in Bridgeview, Illinois are members of this charter-education movement.

religious assertion as regressive, illegitimate, and dangerous. "The neologism 'Islamism,'

for example," writes Saba Mahmood, "frames its object as an eruption of religion outside

the supposedly 'normal' domain of private worship, and thus as a historical anomaly

requiring explanation if not rectification" (Mahmood 2005: 189; cited also in Konieczny,

Lybarger, and Chong 2012: 401). For the critics, the "religion" problem, generally, and the

"Islam" problem, particularly, is really a "secularism" problem, fundamentally.

Such criticism has provoked debate about whether and how notions of the secular,

secularism, and secularization remain useful analytically. Talal Asad and his students have

approached the problem indirectly, arguing that whatever these terms might mean, the key

question is how modern states regulate the spheres of law and ethics. Religion never fully

disappears, and states never fully "secularize," in this view; rather, what matters in the

question of secularity and the state is the "ongoing regulation [of religion] through a

variety of state and civic institutions" (Mahmood 2008, as quoted in Starrett 2010: 635).

Responding to Asad and the many others who have followed his lead, Greg Starrett

observes that the emphasis on state power betrays a primary focus on the discourse of

elites—whether they be disenchanted "secularists" seeking to restrict religion to private

devotion, or religious virtuosi wishing to re-enchant law and ethics. Such a focus introduces

its own distortions. Modern societies like Egypt, to which Asad refers, comprise diverse

moral orders in which individuals adopt, contest, or ignore entirely the programs of

secularizing states or of the religious mass movements that oppose them. Referring to

Samuli Schielke's work, Starrett urges a finer grained analysis: "In striving to understand

religion and the secular in contemporary Egypt," he says, "we should pay at least as much

attention to Ramadan soccer matches (2009), the sensual pleasures of saints-day festivals

(2008b), and the 'moments of uncertainty and skepticism that can at times be hidden behind a performance of certainty' (n.d.: 5 [now 2012]) as we do to aspirational virtuosos and state policy" (Starrett 2010: 642).

For Starrett, however, the search for "religion and the secular" in Egypt, or anywhere else for that matter, may in fact be a fool's errand. Consensus on what the terms delimit eludes us, and their valuations shift, often radically, depending on one's standpoint. "Secularists" value "the secular" positively even if some, depending on their location, may see it in decline; by contrast, those wishing to re-enchant society view "secularism" as the corruption of the moral order they seek to reform. Invoking W.B. Gallie's notion of "essentially contested concepts," Starrett thus concludes that secularism is "a normative concept, and we make a mistake if we treat it as an analytical one" (Starrett 2010: 648). The terms function, Starrett says, "only to minimize the complexity of real lives, to obscure our understanding of contemporary history (Egyptian and otherwise), and to mislead us into thinking that we might someday experience the luxury of escaping from our interpretive rivals" (Starrett 2010: 649). If we are about "analysis," Starrett suggests, then we will do well to abandon such terms, entirely.

But, can we really abandon them? Charles Taylor and José Casanova, among others, suggest that, in fact, we cannot. Even if we were to try to come up with another, less contested term, "the word 'secular,'" as Taylor observes, "is much too entrenched in all sorts of discussion, historical and normative, to be displaced" (Taylor 2011, 36). Given this fact, Taylor and Casanova, in separate essays, have proposed that we persist in our use of the term but in doing so make every effort to undermine its modernist teleological connotations through careful study of the diverse forms and trajectories of the

phenomenon within Western and non-Western settings. This proposal seems sensible to me. The fact that individuals and groups across diverse social and cultural settings use the term "secularism" to make meaningful distinctions, especially with regard to what they take to be the religious realm, requires us to engage it analytically in some fashion.[6] The "complexity of real lives" that Starrett refers to derives partly from the terms individuals use to mark meaningful distinctions in their lives. Individuals imagine and advance projects in the name of "secularism"; and they explain their lives and the experiences that shape them by invoking "secularism." Accounting for the contemporary world's complexity requires, then, in part, that we examine what "secularism" is and how it characterizes and frames projects of all sorts.

The attempt by Asad and his students to shift analysis to questions of state regulatory power and the piety movements that oppose it is helpful in this effort. But, as Starrett and Schielke quite rightly point out, such approaches tend to ignore how secularism might figure within spheres of life extending beyond the domains of "political, economic, or spiritual elites" (Starrett 2010, 641). Asad and his followers, in casting secular liberalism as a form of imperialist imposition, effectively present the mirror image of the arguments in favor of liberal multiculturalism. In both instances, the assumption is that religious milieus constitute distinct forms of human community and human flourishing and, as such, represent an inassimilable difference that must be allowed to coexist socially and politically alongside other communities. A further implied assumption is that

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[6] There is something of an ironical, self-reinforcing loop in the invocation of the secular within academic analyses and the corresponding invocation of the term among members of different social groups for whom the terms become operative as markers of important identity distinctions. I acknowledge perpetuating this loop by arguing for the continuing need to utilize the terms "secular" and "religious." The irony of my position stems from the inescapable embeddedness of the researcher within the historical circumstances that s/he attempts to reflect on. On these matters, see Hacking (1995).

individuals associated with these distinct milieus identify wholly in terms of the unique

forms of life instituted therein. Such notions, however, are as empirically unfounded as

they are politically problematic. Even if, analytically, we grant, as I think we must, that

under conditions of secularization religions come to constitute relatively autonomous

spheres, empirically, within daily life, most individuals, including pious virtuosi, participate

in multiple institutional settings and, consequently, frequently articulate and embody

overlapping, parallel, or even hybrid identities grounded in diverse affiliations.[7] Politically,

the presumption that, for example, Islam wholly or largely explains the actions of Muslims

undermines the possibility and legitimacy of other forms of identity and affiliation that

reposition the religious as ancillary or extraneous to other solidarities defined in terms of

class, gender, nation, region, locale ("I'm a Chicagoan"), or political affiliation (in the United

States, e.g., Republican versus Democratic), among other possibilities. This reification

reinforces the narrative of cultural purity and suppresses dissenting voices, including

especially those that challenge gender discrimination (Naber 2012; Selim 2010).[8] By

exploring secularism's persistence among Palestinians, I aim to highlight, by contrast, the

possibilities for diverse and alternative forms of affiliation and self-articulation in and

beyond prevailing regimes of piety.

Defining Secularism

What, then, is secularism? The approach I take to this question, while not ignoring

questions of power, places emphasis on the analysis of individual social action in terms of

its subjective meaning. Secularism, in this view, refers ideal-typically to a recurring stance

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[7] Simmel (1922/1955) long ago comprehended this basic sociological fact.

[8] I have in mind, principally, Saba Mahmood's *Politics of Piety* (2005). Other scholars have made similar kinds of criticism (Dawes 2011; Bangstad 2011; Selim 2010; Gourgouris 2008).

that individuals can adopt across a range of diverse social contexts. As an ideal-type, secularism highlights certain selected dimensions of a complex, multi-directional orientation. The purpose of an ideal-typical approach, I wish to stress, is not to advance any particular normative position that use of the term "secular" might imply. Instead, its aim is descriptive and analytical. Inevitably, through application, the ideal-type will undergo revision. Instead of a single, undifferentiated depiction of secularism, we will end up, if our work has any integrity, with an empirically rich image reflecting different developmental possibilities.

Ideal-typically, then, I define "secularism" in its pure form as any social orientation, practice, mode of solidarity, or stance that implicitly or explicitly resists, rejects, demotes, or otherwise ignores the prior claim of religious solidarity. Secularist stances manifest in a range of forms. What makes an orientation or stance in the end "secular," however, is the explicit rejection or implicit irrelevance to it of the primacy of religious authority as a foundation for individual ethics, social identification, political unity, and governance. Positively, secularism can embrace a range of value-orientations, including pluralism, tolerance, individual liberty, and the like. In this sense, secularism does not entail the rejection or exclusion of religion per se but rather its repositioning as subordinate, ancillary, or relative to other identities—figured in terms of region, occupation or class, gender, and so on—that constitute the social whole. Organizationally, too, secularism can manifest in diverse formations and at multiple levels: state institutions defined constitutionally, as in the United States, as neutral with respect to religion; civic and business groups that eschew entirely any specific religious identification; political movements and advocacy groups that might or might not incorporate members with

religious orientations but are irrespectively focused on agendas defined in non-sectarian political terms (gay rights, women's rights, civil rights, labor rights, etc.).

The concept of "secularism" has had wide currency across different strata and milieus in various Palestinian settings (Lybarger 2007a and 2007b).[9] Abū Mājid's use of the term provides a starting point for delineating an ideal-type of secularism as it has manifested among Palestinians, historically, in Palestine and beyond in sites of Palestinian dispersion like Chicago. I do not claim that Abū Mājid is representative of Palestinian secularism as a whole. On the contrary, as an Arab Nationalist (*qawmī*), he represents a very particular and contested trajectory of specifically political secularism among Arabs and Palestinians. Still, I argue that the views he expresses convey certain common features of secularism as it has manifested among Palestinians and not just Palestinians, but generally.

One of these shared features—the importance of national unity above all else—appears in the poem Abū Mājid recited to me when we sat at his dining room table. The

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[9] The most common rendering of "secularism" in Arabic is *al-`almānīya*, a word closely associated with the term for "world" (*`ālam*) or, alternatively, with the terms connoting science, knowledge, and scholarship (*`ilm*). When the term gained currency remains unclear. The publication in 1925 of Egyptian scholar `Ali `Abd al-Rāziq's *Islam and the Foundations of Governance* (*Al-islām wa uṣūl al-ḥukm)*, in which the author appears to argue against any direct political role for Islamic institutions, marks one important origin point. On Rāziq, see Nakissa (2013). In the Palestinian context, the term is often invoked in reference to those who hold strict leftist-Marxist positions or otherwise reject the notion that religion should be the primary organizing framework for society. The latter group, in the Palestinian context, includes those who self-identify as nationalists, *waṭanī*, a term connoting love of homeland. Someone who is *waṭanī* might also self-identify as Muslim or Christian but will emphasize the priority of the nation, conceived in multi-sectarian terms, in her or his political orientation. A common slogan among nationalists is *al-dīn li-llāh wa-l-waṭan lil-jamī`* ("Religion, for God; the nation, for all"). The slogan has regained currency in the aftermath of the post-"Arab Spring" backlash against the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and against the al-Qaeda-linked *Jabhat al-Nuṣrā* in Syria. Interestingly, a new Facebook page—the origins of which remain uncertain—has appeared under the title, "*`Almānī*" (Secularist), with the subtitle, "*al-`almāniyya hiyya al-ḥal!*" (Secularism is the Solution!), an intentional and quite pointed recasting of the Muslim Brotherhood's slogan, "*al-islām huwwa al-ḥal*" (Islam is the Solution!). The page dedicates itself to promoting the concepts of separation of religion from state control, freedom of conscience and individual choice, and democratic self-determination, among others. With 77,230 "likes" and 40,170 people "talking about" it as of March 19, 2014, the site has attracted not inconsiderable attention. See https://www.facebook.com/3almani987.

poem insists that Arab fraternal bonds trump religious ties. The nation—figured as Arab and Palestinian—comes first. To promote Muslim or Christian sectarian solidarities at the expense of the nation is a seditious act. One has to understand that one's religion, in the sense of a corporate loyalty, must now be the homeland. Such a perspective does not entail atheism per se but rather a reorientation of loyalties and a reinterpretation of the purpose and meaning of religious practice. As Abū Mājid would explain later in our conversation, rituals like the pilgrimage to Mecca or fasting or prayer had to be understood in functional terms as exercises that enabled, among other things, sharing experiences and solving problems, strengthening the body, and developing empathy for the poor. Such virtues were conducive to national unity. Palestinian secularism, as it emerges ideal-typically from Abū Mājid's self-presentation, then, annexes religions as contributing "functionalized" traditions. Palestinian Christians and Muslims are, in the end, Arabs; but what it means to be Arab includes, among other things, Christian and Muslim traditions.

Palestinian secularism has proven to be historically resilient. This resiliency lies in the institutions, events, and processes that reproduce it. Earlier, I mentioned how Abū Mājid, following his father's example, participated in the 1948 war as a child and then learned pan-Arabism from teachers inspired by the rising Arab Nationalist sentiment in the Jordanian-controlled West Bank during the 1950s. Later, he would convey this pan-Arab spirit to Palestinian youth at the community center he helped to found in Chicago. Secularism, then, constitutes a tradition in its own right, replete with its own symbols and narratives passed down inter-generationally through various mechanisms and structures. The question I wish now to pursue is how the immigrant context of Chicago has shaped

Palestinian secularism as an orientation privileging ethnic national solidarity above all else in distinctive directions.

<center>The Chicago Immigrant Setting</center>

Palestinians in Chicago constitute one particular manifestation of the global Palestinian dispersion. This dispersion began as a result of the expulsion of approximately 750,000 Palestinians from their towns and villages during the 1948 war. Prior to that event, there had been various economically motivated migrations from places like Bethlehem and Ramallah to the Americas; but the mass Palestinian dispersion began with the wrenching events of the Nakba, "the catastrophe," of 1948.

There are today nearly 6,154,000 Palestinians living in various locations across the globe. Their life conditions range from the misery of the refugee camps in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Gaza, and the West Bank to the suburbs of major urban centers in Europe and North and South America. Chicago hosts approximately 85,000 Palestinians (Cainkar 2005; Amer 2013). This is the single highest concentration of Palestinians in North America (Arab American Institute, n.d.; Amer 2013). Arabs from what is now delimited as Palestine and Israel first arrived in the city more than a century ago. The early immigrants, predominantly young, single men, sold linens and other goods door-to-door. Many of these individuals, Muslims and Christians, eventually opened small shops on the north and south sides of the city. Others found employment in factories in southeast Chicago (Cainkar 1988 and 2005; Al-Tahir 1952; Oschinksy 1947).

A second wave of immigration began with the revision of U.S. immigration laws in 1965. From that time until the early 1990s, the Chicago Lawn and Marquette Park areas on Chicago's southwest side became principal points of entry and settlement—although the

north side of the city continued to host a concentration of mostly Christian Palestinians from Ramallah. During this period, cultural centers and associations dominated community life. Some of these brought people together through ascribed genealogical and regional affiliations. Others forged solidarities through ideological frameworks ranging from pan-Arabism to PLO nationalism to non-aligned anti-imperialism. Islamic centers also began to appear, but these operations were small storefront affairs serving mainly as spaces for prayers and the observance of religious holidays (Cainkar 1988; 2004; and 2005).

Beginning in the mid-1980s the demographic and institutional focus of Chicago's Palestinian community began to change. Wealth accumulation, professionalization, the desire for better schools, and fears associated with gang violence provided the impetuses for significant migration from Chicago Lawn and Marquette Park to the near southwest suburbs. Many of the participants in my study have referred to this phenomenon as an Arab version of "white flight." A principal attraction in the suburbs has been the Mosque Foundation, which was built in the early 1980s. This mosque and two adjoining Islamic schools have since become the primary institutional anchors of the Palestinian southwest suburban enclave, an area that Map Quest refers to as "Little Palestine." A sole surviving community center on the southwest side of the city does continue to operate, however, drawing young Palestinians from the suburbs into its programs. These programs immerse youth in an organizing culture that emphasizes seeing oneself as Arab and Palestinian "people of color" above all else. At the same time, leaders of this center know that their constituency has migrated, in body and mind. They are currently raising funds to move their offices to the suburbs in an attempt to reestablish connection to the Palestinians there.

The data I present below reveal the impact of these demographic and institutional shifts as they register discursively in the narratives of individuals who in one way or another articulate a secular perspective as I have defined it ideal-typically. These data derive from ethnographic fieldwork that began in summer 2010. Data gathering has entailed dozens of site observations in mosques, churches, and community centers and resulted in the completion of more than 70 in-depth life-history interviews ranging in length from an hour to two hours. Some of these interviews have entailed follow up conversations of equal length. Interview questions have focused on the social processes through which interviewees have formed their religious and political identities. The questions have probed, in particular, the impact of identity formation practices instituted in families; the effects of involvements in mosques, churches, and community organizations; the impact of attendance at universities; and the consequences of entry into professional life, marriage, and parenthood, as well as moving to the suburbs. The interviews also have explored the influence of events and family networks in Palestine. The interviewees, identified to me by referral or by what is sometimes called the "snowball method," span the age, gender, socioeconomic class, and political spectrums. With this background, I'll now turn to ethnographic examples that illustrate some of the ideal-typical variation among those who identify or act in one way or another as secularists.

<div align="center">Secularism in a Post-Islamic Key</div>

The first ideal-typical variation I'll discuss constitutes what I call "Secularism in a Post-Islamic Key." This trajectory represents a reformulation of pan-Arab and leftist secular-nationalist tendencies whose origins lie in the Arab National Movement and Marxist factions associated with the Palestinian Liberation Organization that were

ascendant from the 1950s into the 1980s. Individuals inherit these tendencies within their families and the community centers these families support. However, the forms of Arabism they articulate reflect adaptations to the ascendency of Islam in Chicago since the 1990s.

Mājid, the son of Abū Mājid, illustrates this phenomenon. Mājid is a 45-year-old father and board president of the community association mentioned earlier. As one might guess, he formed his political orientation entirely within the Arab nationalist milieu that his father helped to foster in Chicago. He speaks with great pride of his political inheritance. He told me: "Syrian Ba`athists, Iraqi Ba`athists, the Arab Nationalist Movement, the Nasserites, all of those different trends of Arab nationalism in general, that's the political background my parents came from; and, that, by osmosis, is the political background that I learned."

Mājid's metaphor of osmosis aptly describes how secularist orientations were instilled within him. "All of [my parents'] friends in Chicago when I was growing up were Arab nationalists of some kind," he told me. Immersed in their gatherings and conversations, Mājid internalized the Marxist notions of class struggle and the expressions of solidarity with other liberation movements that characterized the perspectives of these individuals. Formal organizational structures such as the community association his father helped found in the 1970s also contributed to the "osmosis" that Mājid experienced. Community life at the association revolved around nationalist activities—learning Arabic, learning about the villages destroyed in Palestine after the 1948 war, learning *dabka* folk dancing, learning the history of the struggle against Zionism, and so on. People held their wedding parties at the center. They congregated there during crises such as Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon or the first Intifada of the late 1980s and early 1990s. An emphasis on Palestinian struggles anchored this milieu but so did an internationalist outlook that linked

Palestine to other struggles in places like Puerto Rico and South Africa. Mājid, who

participated extensively in the activities of the community center as a child, consequently

learned that the Palestinian struggle formed part of the wider struggle of "peoples of color"

to secure economic and legal equality in Chicago and across the globe.[10]

A third shaping influence in Mājid's life was the anti-war activism at the college he

attended in New York during the early 1990s, a period that coincided with the first Gulf

War. His participation in campus activism, and its ethos stressing consistency of principal

and action, caused him to perceive a gap between his professed beliefs and his actual

practices. He described how one activist—someone with whom he would become close

friends and have multiple in-depth political discussions—told him he "talked a good game"

but that because he wasn't organizationally committed his words meant little. "I thought

about that comment a lot," he told me, "and when I returned to Chicago after graduating I

decided to work for social change." Initially, he found employment as a high school teacher

but became frustrated with the constraints it imposed on organizing. He decided to explore

other employment options at the association his father had founded. The association

eventually hired him as an organizer. In the years since, he has served in a range of

positions at the association, eventually becoming its board president five years ago.

Mājid's return to the association and its southwest side neighborhood marked the

arrival of a new generation of secular-nationalists. The particular historical moment of this

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[10] The very use of the term, "peoples of color," betrays the rise of identity politics in the 1990s (Gitlin 1996), when Mājid began forming his political orientations as an independent adult, and also the particular shaping effect of the inter-ethnic solidarities forged among community organizers in Chicago a decade earlier. These solidarities formed within organizations and structures like Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition, the inter-ethnic coalition to elect Harold Washington, the city's first African-American mayor, the Southwest Youth Collaborative, and Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, among many others. The pan-Arabism and Marxist internationalism of the ideological traditions that Mājid inherited thus coincided with, and evolved in relation to, the south side coalitional politics that his family became involved with in their effort to gain support for Palestinian self-determination in the Middle East and Arab civil rights locally.

transition, however, would have consequences for the further articulation of secularism, at least as Mājid embodied it. Mājid became an organizer at precisely the same time that Palestinians were migrating in large numbers to the southwest suburbs. This shift coincided with the ascendancy of a reform-oriented Islam and a corresponding loss of centrality and influence for the old community centers and the secularism they promoted. In our conversations, I often have asked Mājid about this change in the balance of institutional power and what it implied for secularists. Mājid's responses were revealing of how those who continued to express secular-nationalist orientations repositioned secularism in the context of the religious revival.

The first type of repositioning that Mājid engaged in entailed an appeal to overriding events. Like most other secularists I have spoken with, Mājid pointed to the disillusionment with the main secular-nationalist parties that set in after the PLO's signing of the Oslo Memorandum of Understanding in 1993. The turn to Islam among Palestinians in Palestine and in Chicago thus amounted, in part, he argued, to a protest against the failed Oslo process and the main PLO factions that promoted it. A second historical factor, according to Mājid, was the Soviet Union's collapse and the transition to a unipolar world dominated by a single superpower allied with Israel, which deprived anti-imperialist movements and the left, generally, of ideological support, political prestige, and strategic depth. Finally, Mājid pointed to US and Israeli support for Islamist movements in Afghanistan and the Gaza Strip. In an effort to weaken secular anti-imperialist formations—the Soviet Union and the PLO, for example—the West and its proxies had promoted Islamists, providing them with organizing space and actual direct aid.

Much of Mājid's analysis is borne out in the scholarly literature on US and Israeli policies during the 1980s and 1990s. The point I wish to make here, however, is that his appeal to history functions discursively to present the failure of Palestinian secularism as stemming from overriding political forces rather than from intrinsic factors such as the putative "religious nature" of Arab societies or the lack of appeal of secularism to Palestinians. Palestinian secularism emerges, in this narrative, as a victim of imperialism; and, by extension, the Islamic turn becomes, in essence, the instrument and result of secularism's defeat. Islamism, thus, contrary to the claims of the Islamists themselves, is an artificial development made possible only by imperialist and colonialist intervention.

The second form of repositioning that Mājid performed articulated further this denial that the religious turn among Palestinians had been substantive. This extension of the denial rested on two claims. First, Mājid asserted that the determining reality of Palestinian lives remained secular in nature, not religious. In illustration, he pointed to the continuing prevalence of poverty among immigrants, even those living in the suburbs. "Ninety percent of our social services clients are coming from the southwest suburbs," he told me, "the mosques are not institutionalized for social service provision the way we are...so they're coming here." Such economic realities imposed a "profane" reality that defied the moral imperatives and socio-moral resources of "faith-based" communities.[11]

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[11] Mājid often used the phrase, "faith-based," to refer to the mosques and their associated organizations as well as the "Islam-first" orientation they promoted. This phrase, however, has it origins in Evangelical Protestant social activism and politics. Responding to these politics, President George W. Bush adopted the phrase for his Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/government/fbci/). This initiative was extended to the US Department of State, as well, and inspired the creation of similar offices at the level of state governments. The phrase has since gained broad cultural currency as an euphemism for government sponsorship of religious charitable work and for religious social work and political activism, generally. President Bush's initiative, since continued under the Obama Administration, has generated enormous debate and criticism: http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/jesus/president/faithbased.html. Much of this debate

Second, Mājid claimed that many families did not necessarily agree with the religious ideological outlook of the mosques. If they had the option, he said, parents would likely prefer the association's youth programming, which offered education "about the Arab world, about other oppressed nationalities in Chicago and across the world, about taboo issues of the day—violence in the home, double standards, patriarchy, sexism...I don't think anybody's talking about sexism and patriarchy in the Islamic institutions on the southwest side," he said. If it were situated in the suburbs, he argued, the association would also provide chances to learn Arabic without the emphasis on Qur'an. Families were sending their kids to the Islamic schools because no other options for learning Arabic existed. These families might not subscribe to the "faith-based political Islamic trajectory," Mājid commented, "but where else [are they] supposed to go? So either they don't get involved in any institutions at all or they go to the mosque or the Islamic center; there are no other options."

In essence, for Mājid, secularism remained relevant even if secularist organizational structures had become weak. This relevance resided in the fact, as he saw it, that the social needs of immigrants and even their ideological concerns continued to be fundamentally secular in nature. Still, for many young activists working at Mājid's association, Islam was their primary identity orientation. They wore headscarves or beards and prayed in the corners of the association's premises. During Ramadan, their computers were set to timers that sounded the *adhān* when it was time to break the fast. Whatever else it might have meant, seeing oneself as Palestinian now seamlessly intertwined with the embrace of an

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has centered on the question of whether the initiative violates the no-establishment clause of the First Amendment of the US Constitution and on the potential loss of liberty for religious institutions when they effectively become institutional appendages of government.

Islamic piety that typified the religious ethos of the suburban enclave. Mājid implicitly

acknowledged this fact. He accommodated the piety of the younger activists in the

workspace, whereas a generation ago such religious expression was met with anger and

censure by the association's leadership. And, in recognition of the shift in power, he now

partnered with the mosques and with groups like American Muslims for Palestine to solicit

financial and political support for the association and its campaigns within the wider

Palestinian Muslim constituency. At the same time, Mājid preserved the priority of the

secular, discursively, by interpreting the Islamic turn as epiphenomenal or as supplemental

to the more basic struggle for Palestinian national, economic, and civil rights.

<div align="center">Syncretic Secularisms</div>

Alongside the pan-Arabism that Mājid carries forward, two other implicit, less

politicized forms of secularism have emerged in some of my field interviews. The first kind

reflects the impact of assimilation processes. The second reflects a disenchantment

ironically originating within the religious milieu itself. Both forms express a syncretic

secularism that decenters Islamic authority in daily life, redefines Islam as "culture" or

ethnicity, and expresses Palestinianness in a hyphenated, multicultural sense.

Ismā`īl, a 35-year-old automobile mechanic, computer technician, and ex-Navy

serviceman who served on warships in the Persian Gulf, illustrates the first variation—

assimilated secularism. The shaping influences that emerge as most significant in Ismā`īl's

narrative pertain to his experiences within pluralistic, multi-religious settings beyond the

immigrant suburban enclave. These sites include the public schools he attended and the

racially diverse workplaces in which he later became employed, including his US Navy

postings. Other than with his family, Ismā`īl said he passes most of his leisure time with his

non-Arab high school friends and work colleagues. Much of this time, he said, is spent going to nightclubs or watching football. By contrast, religious institutions appear to have had much less influence in his life. He recounted briefly attending Weekend School at the Mosque Foundation. This program functions in a manner similar to Hebrew schools at a synagogue or CCD courses at Catholic Churches. The objective of the Mosque Foundation program is to train children in the fundamentals of Islamic belief and practice. Significantly, however, Ismā`īl referred to the experience as "going to Arabic school" and to learning Qur'an as "studying Arabic." At home, piety figured only minimally in the everyday life of the family. Ismā`īl remembered neither his mother nor his father praying, and the family rarely went to the mosque. The single exception that Ismā`īl recalled was Ramadan, when his dad would take him to the Mosque Foundation for the special evening prayers known as *tarāwīh*.

Ultimately, what seemed to figure most centrally in Ismā`īl's narrative was an experience of US cultural pluralism, mediated through institutions like the public schools, the military, and the nightclub scene. Through these forays beyond the suburban Palestinian enclave, Ismā`īl began to see himself as other than simply Palestinian or simply Muslim. "I started to understand that I was born here, but my parents roots are there," he told me. "I'm a Palestinian-American...just like the black people are referred to as African American..." And, as a Palestinian-American, he might (or might not) pray at the mosque on Friday but then drink beer while watching football on Sunday. Ismā`īl's was a depoliticized secularism that confined religious practice to the major holidays while embracing a lifestyle that otherwise ignored religious precepts and practices entirely.

Contrasting somewhat with Ismā`īl's assimilated secularism is a second type of syncretic secularism that originates within the structures of the suburban Islamic institutions themselves. In this instance, immersion within these institutions results unexpectedly and ironically in an experience of disenchantment that delegitimizes the religious structures and provokes a rejection of religious authority entirely. The narrative of Ismā`īl's 30-year-old wife, Mūnā, illustrates several dimensions of this process. The first element entails an experience of cognitive dissonance stemming from profound inconsistencies between ideology and practice. Mūnā grew up in a household in which, unlike her husband's family, piety figured centrally; but it did so ambivalently. Her mother had grown up in a white Christian family. She had converted to Islam to marry Mūnā's father. She would "unconvert" and then reconvert every time the couple separated, a not infrequent occurrence. Her mother finally divorced her husband and left Islam completely. These actions modeled for Mūnā an impermanence of identity as well as the possibility of radical identity change. Mūnā's father, a Palestinian who had grown up in Jordan, was outwardly pious. He regularly attended Friday prayers and performed *ṣalāt* in the home. At the same time, Mūnā told me, "he had an alcohol problem even though he sent us to Islamic school...and we'd learn it's *ḥarām* [forbidden] to drink; but I'd see him at home with a beer." Mūnā also remembered him as being "very adulterous" when she was growing up. "I'm still trying to figure it out," she told me, "because I mean he still prays...my whole life, my whole upbringing was one whole contradiction." This experience of contradiction continued during her elementary schooling. Mūnā's father was very concerned that Mūnā and her sisters undergo a proper Islamic disciplining. He enrolled them in the Mosque Foundation Weekend School and then, later, in a fulltime Pakistani-run Islamic private school. The

Pakistani school required that girls wear the scarf and long coat throughout the day, and the curriculum taught "a fundamental version of Islam," as Mūnā put it. Teachers invoked the threat of hellfire, she told me, if proper practice was not followed. The threat, she said, terrified her at night when she would awake, realizing she had slept on her left side, not her right, and therefore had violated the remembered practice (*sunna*) of the Prophet Muhammad and thus was liable to be held to account according to her teachers.[12]

Gradually, Mūnā began to question the religious precepts she was learning. The factors influencing her growing skepticism included not only her perception of a moral contradiction in her father's behavior but also her transition, at the age of 14, to the public schools due to her father's inability to continue paying the tuition at the Pakistani religious institution. At the public school, Mūnā continued to wear her *ḥijāb* scarf during the first year but then decided finally to remove it for good. She recalled how "I [talked] with my aunts who wore the scarf about taking it off…I was having questions about it…They were, like, 'No, you can't! You already have put it on, you can't take it off…' But I decided it wasn't me." Immersion in a non-Islamic setting had weakened the moral influence of the Islamic institutions that had constrained and oriented Mūnā earlier in her life. By removing the scarf, and also, at this time, deciding no longer to fast during Ramadan, she signaled the embrace of an alternative value orientation made possible by her movement beyond the enclave's disciplinary structures and by her corresponding perception of moral contradiction within the piety-minded milieu in which she had been immersed earlier.

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[12] Cf. Bukhari Volume 1, Book 4, Number 247, among other references (http://www.sahih-bukhari.com/Pages/results.php5) and discussed, as well, at http://www.call-to-monotheism.com/the_sunnah_of_the_prophet_muhammad_s_sleeping_posture_and http://islam.com/questions/3007/benefit-of-sleeping-according-to-sunnan-in-the-light-of-medical-science and http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/index.cfm?method=home.regcon&contentid=20111027111270.

A second critical moment in Mūnā's rejection of the Islamic strictures that had shaped her early childhood arrived when her parents divorced. Mūnā went to live with her mother in South Dakota. Again, as in the earlier shift to the public school, the encounter with non-Islamic social milieus beyond the suburban Palestinian enclave opened new possibilities for identity. In South Dakota, she became immersed in the adolescent party scene. She recalled, "The whole [religious and patriarchal "good girl"] ingraining started to leave me…I remember my first sip of alcohol, I thought I was going to be struck by lightening…your whole life, it's like, it's so bad, you're gonna go to hell, even though I saw my dad drinking…I just remember that moment, like, 'Ahh, this is it, sinning.'"

Assimilating in South Dakota, however, proved difficult. Asked constantly about her ethnicity, Mūnā began referring to herself as Hispanic. After graduating from high school, she decided to return to Chicago "to get away from my bad influences," as she put it, and to reinsert herself in a space in which her identity, at least phenotypically, would no longer be in question. Despite her rejection of its Islamic ethos, the Palestinian suburbs of Chicago remained for her a site of authenticity and acceptance as an Arab. Soon after her return, she began attending a nearby community college that enrolled a lot of Palestinians from the surrounding suburbs. There she met Ismā`īl, who had enrolled in classes at the college, too. "I call him all my 'nevers,'" Mūnā said, "because I said I would *never* marry an Arab guy and *never* a Muslim; I didn't think he'd accept me smoking weed…but he was okay with that…and he drank alcohol and, you know, he's not conservative, not religious."

Ismā`īl was a different kind of Palestinian. Through him she found a bridge to the community that did not require conformity to the religious strictures she had rejected. Slowly, Mūnā began to see herself as Palestinian above all else. In December 2013, she

traveled to Palestine for the first time and discovered in urban centers like Haifa and

Ramallah a culture far less concerned with piety and conformity than the Chicago suburbs

she had grown up in. The party scene in those places was as active as any she had

encountered in South Dakota and, surprisingly, she met individuals there from Chicago's

southwest suburban enclave. Some of them apparently were "married men who put on a

big show of being pious," as she put it, but who nevertheless indulged themselves in

hashish and alcohol and extra-marital liaisons during their stay in Ramallah. [13] Her

discovery of Palestine, thus, seems to have heightened her perception of moral

contradiction in the piety-minded suburban Chicago enclave but also to have opened a path

beyond it through an encounter with a nation that otherwise, in certain urban locales at

least, seems to ignore piety all together in its embrace of smart phones, bar scenes, and hip

party culture.

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[13] Mūnā described how she was admired for her facility with a marijuana pipe and also for her capacity to hold her liquor. The ethos of the party scene seemed, in this instance, to have attained transcontinental scope. That this would have been the case was hardly surprising given how some of the participants apparently traveled between the US and Palestine, living in both societies for extended periods. Mūnā's presence, however, brought into relief the gendered structure of these spaces. Perhaps an extension of male-only coffee houses, the party scene Mūnā momentarily joined in Ramallah, especially, appeared to be predominantly a male-oriented leisure zone. Mūnā was made an honorary member as an "American" Palestinian for whom an exception to the androcentric norm was made. No other women, she told me, participated. There was a Palestinian woman from Haifa, however, who was living in an apartment in one of the buildings where the partiers would meet. She apparently was involved in romantic liaisons with the man from Chicago whom Mūnā had recognized. This woman may have participated in the partying; but Mūnā did not clarify this point in our discussion.

Reconsidering Palestinian Secularism

Palestinian secularism as expressed in the narratives I have just presented reflects diverse life circumstances, generational positions, and shaping influences. Despite this diversity, however, several ideal-typical features emerge that make Palestinian secularism comprehensible as a recurring social orientation within diverse settings, including sites of dispersion like Chicago. These features are processual and orientational in character. Processually, at least two distinct paths to secularism present themselves. First are the mechanisms that perpetuate secular pan-Arabism and Palestinian nationalism within the secularist milieu. We see these institutional mechanisms—storytelling in families, educative activities of community associations, political organizing of advocacy movements and the like—at work in the narratives of Mājid and his father, Abū Mājid. The second process occurs beyond the secularist milieu within the piety-oriented enclave and the wider non-Arab, non-Islamic US culture. Mūnā and Ismā`īl's narratives exemplify these processes. Mūnā arrives at her secularism through her immersion within the suburban Islamic milieu, the socialization mechanisms of which backfire. Her contact with public schools and the party scene in South Dakota, additionally, present alternatives to the milieu's ethos. A somewhat similar process occurs for Ismā`īl, for whom ethnically diverse, non-Islamic public schools, workplaces, and leisure sites (nightclubs) exert an assimilating influence.

The various identity formation processes that Mājid, Abū Mājid, Mūnā, and Ismā`īl experience produce diverse articulations of what secularism might constitute, orientationally. Abū Mājid approximates the initial "pure" type that I described at the outset of this discussion. For Abū Mājid, secular-religious lines are distinct. There is

Arabism and there is "fanaticism," universalism and sectarianism.[14] Although embracing the basic tenets of his father's outlook, Mājid's secularism softens these distinctions, asserting that one can organize on fundamentally secular issues—civil rights, for example—within so-called faith-based contexts. Ultimately, however, both men incorporate the religious into the secular, positioning the former functionally as a resource for solidarity, either on behalf of the national community itself or in place of it in periods of division. The secular, however, remains necessarily primary, even when religion is ascendant and secularism is weak.

In contrast with Mājid and his father's overtly political conception of secularism, Ismā`īl and Mūnā express a form of lived syncretic secularism that redefines Muslimness as a "cultural" identity, one connected with family and community tradition. One assumes the identity of a Muslim in this sense alongside other possible identities that one might claim— Navy serviceman, Palestinian-American, computer technician. Ismā`īl expresses such possibilities in these terms: "There's this Axis of Evil comedy tour that went around," he told me, "and there was this bit that went like this: 'A true Islamic guy drinks, has sex with girls, gambles, but doesn't eat pork!' It's true. I'll have a drink occasionally. I used to drink a lot more when I was active duty in the Navy. I also like Bingo and scratch off lottery cards and I love playing Texas hold 'em. But, I don't eat pork." Ismā`īl's comments here appear at odds with orthopraxic Islamic prescriptions; yet, he is perfectly at ease in claiming an

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[14] Abū Mājid's formulation echoes political and philosophical-historical types of secularism occurring in Europe and the United States. According to Casanova, political secularism comprises "political theories that presuppose that religion is either an irrational force or a non-rational form of discourse that should be banished from the democratic public sphere" (Casanova, 2011: 66-67). He contrasts this with "philosophical-historical" secularism that "relegate[s] religion to a superseded stage." Palestinian secularism draws on both ideas but also has "softer" versions that allow religion into the public sphere as long as it does not seek an all-determining role.

identity as a Muslim. Mūnā, for her part, speaks of herself explicitly as a "secular Muslim" or a "cultural Muslim." In her usage, "cultural" refers to Arabic expressions in speech and shared culinary tastes. She feels ambivalent about this culture and the religion it carries, however. She says she still believes in God. Yet, she also speaks of refusing an Islamic burial: "This might sound bad," she told me, "and I know my family would eat this up, but when I die, I don't wanna be buried in a Muslim cemetery because I feel like my whole life I've struggled against that and to be right next to everybody I've tried to distinguish myself from? I don't know."

Conclusion

Secularism, as it emerges in each of the examples that I have discussed, constitutes a particular stance that individuals assume in response to a situation of religious revival that has reoriented the ethos of the families and neighborhoods and organizations within which they live out their lives. Yet, to characterize secularism in these terms—as a stance that one might consciously adopt—doesn't quite get at how social orientations become possible for individuals. As I've hopefully shown, secularists come to articulate their orientations through immersion within very specific kinds of institutional settings and in reaction to specific events that shape their lives in Chicago and elsewhere. Their trajectories also reflect encounters with other possible lifestyles. This encounter occurs as individuals travel into spaces beyond the enclave, becoming partially integrated into other milieus bearing other moralities. The secularisms of my interlocutors might be marginal; but they persist nonetheless as an articulation of a once dominant Arab nationalist orientation or as the consequence of contradictions within and possibilities beyond the pious milieu.

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