



The Vocabulary of Secularism in Modern Iran

- i) Translating Secularism
- ii) The ongoing dialectic of secularization and desecularization in Iran
- iii) Historical legacies



On Translation

- Is Islam/Iran as 'untranslatable' in terms of the 'secular' or 'secularism'?
- Iran as part of the wider 'developing' non-European world subject to the same universalizing process (though at the same time following a specific trajectory).
- When a term like "secularism" is transplanted from one civilisational and historical context to another the useful question may not be "is this the right?" But rather "what in our understanding of the term has to change if we are to make sense of the transfer?" (Taylor)
- Translation is itself a form of 'critical secularism' (Said).



The ongoing dialectic of secularization and de-secularization in modern Iran

- No theory of secularism in post-constitutionalist/Pahlavi Iran.
- Secularism became associated with colonialism and post-colonial dictatorship under the Pahlavis.
- A crypto-secularist discourse developed under the Islamic Republic with indigenous roots.
- The contested meanings of 'secularism' in Iran and amongst the diaspora.



Historical Legacies

- 1/ Religion-state relations in Iranian Shi'ism compared to Ottoman Sunnism.
- 2/ The ambivalence of the Shi'i ulama towards *urf* (secular customary law) and secular judicial authority compared to Ottoman Sunnism. *Urf* not codified until the 20th century. *Qanun* was codified in the Ottoman empire from the 16th century.
- 3/ The pattern of secularization under the Pahlavis was 'separationist' and 'passive' compared to the pattern in Republican Turkey which was 'integrationist' and 'active'.