Religious and secular challenges related to social justice
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The famous British social theorist and philosopher Ernest Gellner (1925-1995) claimed that civil society cannot be developed within Islam, because of Muslim exclusivist favourizing only one religion and sacralization of the religious view which makes pluralism impossible.

Like many others among the modern western theorists, he also argues that the main condition for civil society are democratic pluralism and individualization of human rights and freedom. This is thus the modern civil society which emerged within the Western societies.

My goal now is not to discuss whether Islam allows or closes for the development of democracy and individual rights, for it is a very broad theme and because neither Islam nor democracy are monolithic sizes. My goal is rather to draw attention to some aspects of Muslim political life, historically and currently, which can throw light on possibilities of civil society and secularism in a Muslim society.

Civil society in Islamic history

Firstly let me say that civil society, understood as a society in which people organize their lives without direct intervention from the state and without an exclusive government by a religious power, is not unknown in Islamic history, the history where the ulama (and not a central power) had a crucial role in people's everyday live. They had a key role not only in religious life but also in other spheres like education, social and economic life. And this is a well-known phenomenon from Muslim history.

The Indonesian political theorist and philosopher Madjid Nurcholish (d. 2005), known as Chak Nur, perceives thus the first Muslim community, the contract-society established in Medina by prophet Muhammed, as an example of a pre-modern civil society. Religion, particularly Islam, was an important but not the only determinating factor for organization of this society. The old Arab tribal traditions also had a very significant role.

Civil society in Indonesia

Nurcholish was interested in developing a civil society in Indonesia, and he found inspiration in both the history of Islam, including Medina society, and modern Western history. He found it useful to combine the ideas of Islamic political theory with the modern Western theory of civil society and ideas of civil religion (found in Harvey Cox and Robert Bellah and their theories on American civil religion as a common cross-ethnical form of ideology which integrates economic, social and religious elements) And he managed, together with other reform-oriented Indonesian intellectuals and politicians, to institutionalize the idea of civil society in Indonesia. The Indonesian government introduced into its constitution a document called "pancasila" (1984) which contains 5 elements, confirming national identity, solidarity, social justice and democracy and which are acceptable for all ethnic and religious groups.

It should be mentioned that Nurcholish has made himself remarked by his claim that secularization, as a process of rational interpretation, and not as an ideology, may be a direct consequence of the doctrine of tawhid. This is a very radical and unexpected claim from

Muslim site. But Nurcholish´s argumentation is quite logical: If the goal for Muslims is to maintain separation between the absolute and the relative, between the divine and the human, than this means that every interpretation must be regarded as secular in its nature, and if the goal for idjtihad is to realize khalif-role that relates to this world, than it means to be engaged with the secular, social conditions.

I am referring to Indonesia, the largest Muslim country, as a good example of tackling the issue of religious pluralism, democracy and civil society from an Islamic perspective. But democracy is taking over in many others Muslim countries.

Challenges to Muslims in the West

The conditions secularism and challenges for Muslims, living as minorities in the West, are different. Of course they are also facing religious pluralism, but they are experiencing various forms of civil society as an everyday reality, and they are experiencing secularism as a basic condition. Accumulation of experience, intensifications of relations whit others and extension of knowledge also leads to the change of one's understanding of the world.

As Abdol Karim Soroush point out, the main issue in this context is to understand the relationship between the religious and not religious. To think critically about how we define the boundary between these two areas? According to him, one cannot talk about a permanent boundary between religion and non-religion, and therefore one cannot talk about a fixed frame of the religious or the secular.

The religious and the secular realms were put in a special context during the Arab Spring. Religious and secular people were, in their struggle against dictatorship on the same side. They probably didn't have the same motivations to engage themselves in the revolution. Obviously they also have different views on the role of religion in the post-revolution period, but they can hopefully agree on a framework for political cooperation and the goal of social justice.

And the common point is that neither one can deny the new political and social conditions, the role of media, internet and internet based network for development of the people's socio-political consciousness and the change of social reality.

Precisely because of the new modern forms of communication and accessibility of information it is now impossible to maintain a monopoly on religious interpretations, and to maintain political censorship when it comes to the social life. The Arab Spring has confirmed this in a convincing manner, and at the same time it has opened up a new understanding of social dynamism in Muslim societies and meaning of establishment of social justice.