2.1 The concept of secular humanism: The necessity of emancipating Islamic thought from religious and nationalist conceptions

This chapter explores Mernissi's concept of modern secular humanism and examines the reasons for the failure of the modern secular concept in most Muslim countries. It presents the various positions of nineteenth-century Arab Muslim reformists, to show that most Arab Muslim reformists did not take a clear position on the concept of secularity. Mernissi uses linguistic and social historical approaches to try to explain why most Islamic cultures rejected concepts such as freedom and individualism. She believes that freedom and individualism are not implemented in most Muslim cultures due to the social history of the pre-Islamic era, when these terms were associated with disorder and perception of arrogance, traits that Islam forbids. The chapter ends with an examination of Mernissi's reinterpretation of Arabo-Islamic humanist thought, which aims to reveal an Islamic social contract that is based on notions of equilibrium and equality.

It is important to begin by examining the modern history of secular humanist thought in its Western tradition to identify the perspective from which Mernissi views this concept. It was in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century that the term 'humanism' emerged, in the work of the Italian humanist Giovianni Pico della Mirandola entitled *On the dignity of Man* (1486). Pico used the term to emphasize the value of human achievements: as the faculty of reason permitted human beings to understand natural laws, they had a responsibility to detach themselves from their desires and cultivate their genius in the understanding of existence by studying rhetoric, grammar, poetry, history, and ethical philosophy. Indeed, this humanistic knowledge remained intricately linked to the influence of the Christian Church.[46]

In the early nineteenth century, the term 'humanism' came to be linked more closely with the rejection of religious beliefs and detached from the authority of the church. The renewal of the term 'humanism' during the Renaissance was advanced through the work of the German historian and philosopher Jacob Burckhardt entitled *Die Kultur der Rennaissance in Italien* (1860), and also by the English poet and literary critic John Addington Symonds in his book, *The Renaissance in Italy, the Revival of learning*, (1877). Both thinkers see a division between the Church and humanistic knowledge.[47] Consequently, the liberation of human beings from orthodox religious belief guides us toward what came to be called modern secular humanism, a school of thought which was more readily embraced by French enlightenment philosophers, who shared an outright rejection of orthodox religious belief. Scholars of the enlightenment appealed to reason and experience to go against orthodoxy and

46 Noram 2012: 8–9.

47 Noram 2012: 8–9.

tradition, to criticize prejudice and superstition, as well as to reject the tyranny of religion.[48] In the early nineteenth century, scholars and intellectuals from France, Germany, and Britain no longer used the terms 'humanist' and 'humanism' to describe themselves, instead preferring to use such labels as 'freethinker,' 'secularist,' or 'rationalist.'[49]

This brief historical sketch aims to distinguish between diverse kinds of humanism. First of all, humanism emerged under firm religious domination. Renaissance humanism emphasized the rejection of orthodox religious belief and the liberation of human beings from the domination of the church. Lastly, modern secular humanism focused on human reason and criticized religious and political tyranny. Its proponents expounded humanistic notions of freedom of thought, freedom of belief, and tolerance.

Mernissi's concept of modern secular humanism

Mernissi's definition of secular humanism is in line with that of James Davison Hunter. She focuses on his book entitled *Culture Wars: The struggle to control the Family, Art, Education, Law, and Politics in America* (1992), published in the same year as her *Islam and Democracy* (1992–2002). Hunter's book describes 'culture wars' as a proxy for the conflict between the sacred and the secular, and argues for the necessity of religious pluralism in American democracy. Nevertheless, one could argue that this view of secularism, which protects religious pluralism, ignores the complexity of secularism in our day. Secularism has become a dispute about the language and limits of acceptable religious pluralism; about where and how and on what terms the boundaries of tolerable diversity should be drawn.

Mernissi develops her notion of secularity by stressing its conflict with the contemporary religious monarchies in many Arabo-Islamic countries. Her interest is to emphasize the privileges that secularity provides to human beings. Thus, she argues:

> Secular humanism, as defined by the American sociologist James Davison Hunter, is one of the things taught by American public schools: "Public school curricula tend to reflect an emphasis on the individual as the measure of all things and on personal autonomy, feelings, personal needs, and subjectively derived values—all of which are independent of the transcendent standards implied in traditional theism." American secular humanism was developed not so much against religion as against state interference in religion and especially manipulation of it.[50]

48 Noram 2012: 8–9.

49 Noram 2012: 8–9.

50 Mernissi 2002: 45.

Thus, secular humanism is not an attack on God, but on the officials who used religion as an authority to sustain their despotism. Furthermore, secular humanism was established within the preaching of humanistic ideas, which Mernissi describes as follows:

> By this I mean the secular humanism that has allowed the flowering of civil society in the West. Humanistic ideas—freedom of thought, the sovereignty of the individual, the right to freedom of action, tolerance—were propagated in the West through secular schools.[51]

It is clear that Mernissi emphasizes the humanistic values of a secularity that ensures the freedom of women in Muslim countries. In this sense, modern secular notions protect women's rights against religious authority.

According to a postcolonial perspective, secular humanism traces its roots back to the Western Enlightenment. This would make modern secular humanism Eurocentric in nature. According to postcolonial theorists, the Enlightenment expresses secular humanism in its explicit discourse by staking out universalistic and transcendental principles and linking them to the conquest of non-European humankind, viewed as inferior to Europeans. Indeed, the European existence was felt to be qualitatively superior to other forms of human life.[52] In line with the postcolonial criticism, Mernissi declares:

> To tell the truth, moving from one institution to another had no bad effect on me. Perhaps it was because the spirit of Descartes and Enlightenment philosophy, reflected through the mirror of a French colonial lycée and taught by Catholic teachers, didn't succeed in shining through. In any case, no one ever taught me tolerance, and I never saw it practiced during my long period of schooling. I learned it not from my teachers but in chance encounters with humble people in the shops, alleys, and neglected areas of the Fez medina.[53]

This statement by Mernissi shows her resilience against colonization. Mernissi is aware of the failure of French colonization to spread the universal values of the Enlightenment in her colonies. From a different perspective, Mernissi presents modernity in terms of the basis of the secular humanist concept of freedom. One could argue that Mernissi defines the concept of modernity in its ideal form. However, modernity as a category is much more contradictory and dialectical. It also contains colonial and totalitarian political constructs, from secular to religious authoritar-

51 Mernissi 2002: 42.

52 Serequeberhan 1996: 333.

53 Mernissi 2002: 179 fn.15.

ian forms.[54] It will soon become clear that Mernissi not only revives the tradition of Western humanism, but also rereads the tradition of Islamic humanism. In the following, I shall first explain Mernissi's theory of modern secular humanism, and then highlight the reasons she provides to explain why the secular process failed in most Muslim countries.

The Arab reformists and nationalists against a modern secular notion

Mernissi refers to Arab intellectual history from the nineteenth century to explain the ban on secular rule in most Arab Muslim countries. In this context, she argues:

> On the contrary, individualism always held a rather ambiguous place among the "reformers" of the nineteenth-century nationalist movement. This movement, focused on the struggle against colonization and therefore viscerally anti-Western, was obliged to root itself more deeply than ever in Islam.[55]

Facing the "militaristic, imperialistic" power of the West, the Arab reformers chose to take shelter in their past by reactivating the tradition of Islam based on the tradition of obedience, *ta'a*.[56]

The concept of individualism is one of the cornerstones of secular thought. This concept is seen as contradictory to the tradition of obedience, *ta'a*, rooted in the Islamic tradition, because it implies that people are free and can make their own decisions as individuals. Most post-independence Muslim societies prefer to preserve their traditional heritage by reviving the Islamic tradition based on obedience—obedience to the leader—rather than adopting the Western concept of individualism, in which they see a threat to their conventional understanding of the Islamic religion. Their goal is to use the obedience-based religion to protect their political despotism.

Looking at the term 'obedience' from the perspective of a feminist register, one might assume that Mernissi means women's obedience to men. Mernissi highlights this concept because it implies the diminishment of a woman's personality in order to make her passive and dependent on a man. On the political level, the concept of obedience implies that citizens should obey the leader.

Mernissi does not say exactly who the reformists of the nineteenth century were. In this respect, she could be accused of generalization and inaccuracy with regard to her reactivation of Arab intellectual history. Indeed, to shed light on this sociohistorical context of the nineteenth century in Arab Muslim countries, one needs to understand that the most famous of the Arab reformists were both important

54 Mirsepassi 2014a: 180.

55 Mernissi 2002: 42.

56 Mernissi 2002: 42.

thinkers and political agitators, namely Jamal al-Din Al Afghani (1839–1897) and his pupil Muhamed 'Abdu (1849–1905).[57] In fact, Afghani and Abdu are considered the founders of pan-Arab nationalism for their advocacy of the concept of the Islamic community at the expense of building Arab national states. In their understanding, the Muslim community encompasses all Muslims, regardless of their countries of origin, cultures, nationalities, and languages, insisting on their justification that all of them belong to Islam. Thus, they argue that the purpose of Islam is to unite Muslims of all countries and to obliterate all traces of race. Consequently, and ultimately to defend their claim for Arab nationalism, most Islamic reformists proclaim that it was Western foreigners who touted the conception of secularism to fight Arab nationalism. They maintain that the defenders of secularism are the allies of the West because they would like to expound Western secular ideas in order to divide the Islamic ummah (community of Muslims).[58] The Arab reformists and nationalists reject the idea of secularity in this colonial context because it contradicts their interpretation of Islam and their desire to unite all Muslims politically. They realize that Western promotion of secularism is a form of colonial aggression.

Hence, it is incorrect to suggest that the slogan of secularism is not prevalent in the Arab World, and therefore that the Arab does not embrace secularism. In the Arab World, secularity was used by Syrian Christian intellectuals during the Ottoman Empire's rule of Arab countries in the East, and when the Ottoman sultan promoted himself as caliph and protector of all Muslims. In fact, the secular ideology was developed by Syrian Christians who wanted to oppose the Turkish rulers who used religion—Islam—to expand their political power. Syrian Christian intellectuals advocated an Arab nationalism that would uphold Arab unity, independence, and the concept of secularity. However, secular Arab nationalism is no longer maintained when Islamist politicians and intellectuals proclaim that the separation of state from religion, one of the secular principles of Western thought, calls into question the Islamic religion.[59] This historical context of the history of Arab nationalism and its relationship to secularity and colonialism of the nineteenth century highlights the division between Arab Muslim nationalists who wanted to build a Muslim community in line with the Islamic tradition, and Arab non-Muslim nationalists who pushed for secular rule to be advocated in Arab countries.

One might object that Mernissi does not comment on her attitude of humanist secularity toward religious minorities, the Christian and Jewish communities, even though they have a long tradition in the Arab world, and the Maghreb region is known for its religious and cultural diversity. It is important to highlight this observation because secular humanism in its Western tradition advocates freedom of be-

57 Dawisha 2016: 18–19.

58 Dawisha 2016: 20–21.

59 Dawisha 2016: 27.

lief in order to protect the notion of religious diversity and pluralism. Consequently, Christian nationalists in Arab countries realized that secularism means respecting their religious freedom in a country dominated by Muslims.

To support Mernissi's idea that religion and politics must be separated in order to establish secular rules, I refer to the Moroccan philosopher Mohammed Abed al-Jabri (1935–2010) who advocates secularity along the same lines as Mernissi. Thus, Al-Jabri argues:

> What a Muslim society needs, in the absence of a religious organization, is to separate religion from politics, namely, to avoid the exploitation of religion for political purposes, as religion represents what is constant and absolute, while politics represents what is relative and changeable. Politics is motivated by personal or group interests, while religion must be above all this; otherwise, it will lose its essence and spirit.[60]

Al-Jabri evokes the notion of religious organizations, a connotation to describe religious fundamentalism and modern Islamist politics (political Islam). This refers to an earlier tradition of Islam with a claim to the past based on historical authenticity. It is a dangerous enemy to rational Islamic thought. An example of modern religious organizations are the Muslim brotherhoods.

In Islamic thought, the concept of a civil state/government (dawla madaniyya) to refer to the separation of religion and state is used as a reference to secularism. Yet Mernissi does not explain this idea in her book (2002). A year before she died, she stated in an *al-Jazeera* Arabic documentary that she uses the term 'civil state' or 'government' (dawla madaniyya) to explain the Islamic approach to the separation of religion and politics.[61]

The next section discusses Mernissi's combining of socio-historical with linguistic approaches. Here I explore how modern secular principles of freedom and individualism were interpreted and received within most Islamic tradition, from the perspective of Mernissi's reactivation of Islamic humanist thinking.

The connotation of freedom in Arabic etymology: A sense of social discrimination

The notion of freedom is the foundation of modern secularity. Freedom is equated with individual freedom, freedom of belief, and freedom of thought. In her book *The forgotten Queens of Islam* (1993), Mernissi argues that etymologically, in the Arabic

60 Al-Jabiri 2009: 57.

61 See the link to this documentary: https://www.aljazeera.net/programs/almashaa/2014/7/10/والسندباد-فاطمة-الرباط (last accessed August 16, 2021).

language the words free (*hurr)* and freedom (*hurriyya)* have the sense of the opposite of slavery, and therefore they have nothing to do with that sense described in the first article of the UDHR, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights".[62] Consequently, Mernissi explains, when French children say "*liberté,*" associations come to their minds of the people's demonstrations and struggles in the streets of Paris in 1789 to fight for their rights and to demand freedom. In contrast, when Arab children say freedom (*hurriyya*), the images that come to their minds are of the dichotomy of slaves and aristocrats, wherein the etymological sense of free (*hurr*) describes the master, the aristocrat, the free man, and (*al- hurra*) describes the free woman—both of aristocratic descent—as opposed to slaves.[63] To put simply, the Arabic etymology of the word 'freedom' does not refer to a political claim or a matter of constitutional rights, but rather remains, in the consciousness of most people socialized in Arabic, correlated with the narrow sense of a person of aristocratic descent.

One could argue that the etymological significance of the link between freedom and aristocracy has other implications in most Arabo-Islamic societies. In the same line of thought, the veil in the Islamic tradition was a sign of the free, aristocratic woman. This creates a social hierarchy between the veiled aristocratic free woman and the unveiled slave woman. It can be seen that the practice of veiling has a religious foundation based on ideas of honor and virtue.[64] These ideas were reflected in most Muslim societies across time, with veiled aristocratic nobles and unveiled marginalized women. The collective memory of Arabs also associates the notion of being free with aristocracy. This interpretation demonstrates social discrimination.

Is there a contradiction between Islamic tradition and the notion of freedom of belief?

Through etymological, genealogical, and socio-historical analyses, Mernissi clarifies the reasons behind Islam's probation of freedom of thought and belief. She first explains the notion of freedom of thought and its relationship to Islam. She argues that

> the word *islam* refers to a relationship: submission. The Arabic linguistic root *istislam* means "to surrender"—to lay down weapons ending a state of war (*harb*). *Istislam* and *tasallum* (to receive) result in a truce halting hostility; *salam* is one of the words for prisoner of war.[65]

62 Mernissi 1993: 14.
63 Mernissi 1993: 14.
64 Youssef 2012: 28.
65 Mernissi 2002: 85.

Mernissi emphasizes the etymology of Islam, which implies that Islam spreads peace between individuals to eliminate war and violence. Before the advent of Islam, freedom of thought led to diversity of opinion and plurality of opinions, which contribute to divergence and disagreement among Muslim communities. In this sense, Islam bans the notion of freedom of thought in order to spread peace (*salam*).

Mernissi then underlines the connection of the polytheism of the pre-Islamic era and the notion of freedom of belief declared in the modern legacy of UDHR. She writes:

> *Shirk* is the most appropriate word for translating the word "freedom" in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is posed as an ideal to be attained: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion…." This article is the very definition of the *jahiliyya*, the chaotic pagan world before Islam … It is in that brief Article 18 and the concept of *shirk* that the conflict between Islam and democracy lies. [66]

In other words, in the collective memory of most Arab Muslim individuals, the modern concept of freedom of belief, which admits of the possibility of heresy, poses a major challenge to the principle of Islam that affirms the belief in one God.

To support her argument Mernissi refers to a famous statement attributed to the prophet Muhammed, indicating the rejection of polytheism and freedom of religious practices in Mecca with the phrase "even if you succeed in capturing the sun and bringing it and placing it in the palm of my hand, I will never change my mind".[67] This Hadith relates to the socio-historical circumstances prevalent when the prophet was spreading Islam in Mecca. During that time, the Quraysh tribe said to the prophet Muhammed that they would not convert to Islam and yet would demand the possibility to live together with the Muslims in Mecca. The citation above, quoted by Mernissi, was the prophet's reaffirmation of his answer to the Quraysh tribe, which was his refusal to allow them the freedom to practice their religion. There could be other interpretations of the story revealed by Mernissi. One could argue that the idea of religious diversity and, thus, pluralism, which is thought of as a modern secular concept, was discussed in the early days of the rise of Islam.

Huff notes that Mernissi's analysis of the matter of freedom in the linguistic realm was interpreted as her most radical work, because she associates the freedom of belief with *shirk*, which means disorder and confusion. In this regard, Huff argues

66 Mernissi 2002: 87.

67 Mernissi 2002: 99.

that Mernissi employs a provocative argument in which she links the freedom of belief, as a principle of modern human rights, to the Arabic substantive *shirk*, which means polytheism and, in its evident meaning, atheism.[68]

Contrary to Huff's assertion, one might suggest that Mernissi's message is not to explain the incompatibility of Islam with the modern principle of freedom and liberty of thought and religion, but to emphasize that Islam rejects the idea of polytheism (*shirk*, belief in multiple gods) due to the historical context of the pre-Islamic era when religious freedom led to disorder and violence. Mernissi makes this argument to show how this context still shapes contemporary understanding of the secular concept of freedom of belief in many Muslim societies. In doing so, she deconstructs this contradiction by historicizing it.

The social contract of Islam: From freedom to a strong notion of equilibrium

Besides reviving Western secular humanism, Mernissi revives the humanistic heritage of Islamic thought. Her interpretation of *rahma* combines several humanistic meanings, including love, forgiveness, and tenderness. The spread of these notions leads to the spreading of unity among Muslims. Accordingly, she argues:

> *Rahma* is a rich concept with multiple facets: sensitiveness (*al-riqa*), tenderness (*al-ta'attuf*), and also forgiveness (*al-maghfira*). It is everything that is sweet and tender, nourishing and safe, like a womb. … The *umma*, the mythic Muslim community, is overflowing with *rahma*, as is the relationship of love that links the members of a family and makes each one concerned about the fate of the others.[69]

Like Mernissi, one could interpret the Islamic humanist concept of *rahma* (care of each other) as an ethical value in Islam that should be achieved through the sharing of the rational soul between Muslims and the worship of divine power. Among other concepts that connect humanity in Islam are perfection (*kamal*), friendship (*mahabba*), affection (*tawaddud*), compassion (*tahannun*), and friendliness (*ra'fa*).[70]

In this context, Mernissi maintains that the Islamic humanist value of *rahma* can be established only through the sacrifice of *ahwa*, which means desire and passion. She writes:

> *Hawa* means both "desire" and "passion," but it can also signify "personal opinion." It is the unbridled individual interest of a person who forgets the existence of others in thinking only of his own advantage. Desire, which is individual by

68 Huff 1995: 514.

69 Mernissi 2002: 88.

70 Daiber 2013: 300.

> definition, is the opposite of *rahma*, which is an intense sensitivity for the other, for all the others, for the group.[71]

In other words, the sharing of rationality and rational conduct among Muslims are the principles upon which to establish the ethical value of *rahma* and renounce individualism, seen as the pursuit of individual interests (*ahwa'*). Moreover, we note that Mernissi maintains that desire, *hawa,* can also signify personal opinion. Thus, desire is the uncontrolled individual interest of a person who thinks only of his own advantage and interest.

Mernissi further clarifies that the aim of Islam should not be understood as rejecting desire. On the contrary, the proposal of Islam is to deal with the negative and positive poles of human conduct. According to Mernissi, the ideal of Islam is equilibrium. She writes:

> But—and this is the genius of Islam—*hawa* is not to be excluded or eradicated; it must rather be managed in such a fashion that it will not exceed the *hudud*, the sacred limits. Islam doesn't reject anything; it manages all things. Its ideal schema is … equilibrium which does not put the security of the group in danger.[72]

Mirsepassi comments on Mernissi's reactivation of the Islamic humanist ethics. He perceives Mernissi acting on her conviction that "the macro-institutional counterpart to the 'task of memory' in revitalizing traditional Islamic humanist concepts such as … *ra'y* (personal opinion), and *rahma* (care for others), is open public debate intended to resolve inherited discursive ambiguities over power and public life."[73]

Is there a contradiction between Islamic thought and the notion of individualism?

Mernissi follows her linguistic approach to clarify the role of individualism in the history of Islam. She affirms that the substantive 'individual,' in Arabic etymology, describes the characteristics of a *taghiya,* who was "a man such as a tribal chief, a king, or an aristocrat who held earthly power through the cult of personality and despotic ambition."[74] She points out that in the Qur'an, "*taghiya* means 'tyrant,' a holder of power that knows no limits." The word *taghiya* is used to describe "the leader who is contemptuous toward everything, including the divine." [75]

71 Mernissi 2002: 89.
72 Mernissi 2002: 90.
73 Mirsepassi 2014 a: 189.
74 Mernissi 2002: 105.
75 Mernissi 2002: 105.

Referring to the socio-historical context of pre-Islamic Mecca, Mernissi explains that the call for individualism was conceived of as the characteristic of an arrogant and aristocratic Arab in pre-Islamic times. According to her, Islam is against arrogant individualism and boundless self-confidence; hence the prophet Muhammed demanded that Arabs give up their striving for individualism, which implies arrogance and self-confidence, and submit their destiny to God.[76] In contrast to individualism, Islam promotes equality among individuals.

The submission to one God: from individualism to a strong notion of equality

In what follows I reconstruct and discuss Mernissi's argument concerning the idea of equality in the tradition of Islamic humanism as exchange to individualism. Mernissi declares "it is the absolute equality of all, men and women, masters and slaves, Arabs and non-Arabs, which Islam guarantees, in exchange for the surrender of individualism."[77]

To support her argument Mernissi quotes the Qur'anic verse 13 of chapter 49: "O mankind! We have created you male and female and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another."[78] This verse, as Mernissi explains, articulates two messages: first, that the ummah, the community of Muslims, is formed of equals, making no difference between the male and female. The second is the message of solidarity between nations and tribes despite borders and cultures.[79]

One might argue that the submission to one God promotes the egalitarian notion of justice. Equality in this sense comes to establish equal relations between individuals. All humans are equal in front of God; equality refutes the arrogance of individualism. Hence Islam comes to establish an egalitarian community, where there is no difference between an aristocratic Arab and others.

In line with Mernissi's thought, in his book entitled *The Islamic conception of justice* (1984), Khadduri emphasizes the notion of equality that Islam comes to foster. He claims the prophet Muhammad found widespread inequity and oppression in the society in which he had grown up and sought to establish order and harmony within which a distinct standard of social justice would be applied. As a prophet, he naturally stressed religious values, but he was also a social reformer. The idea of justice was of particular interest to him. The prophet noticed the discrimination and inhuman acts in his society and in fact he acted to improve the status of women, end slavery, and prohibit infanticide and other unjust acts and practices.[80]

76 Mernissi 2002: 110.
77 Mernissi 2002: 110.
78 The Qur'ān: chapter 49: The Private Rooms, Verse 13.
79 Mernissi 2002: 110.
80 Khadduri 1984: 8–9.

In summary, this chapter examined Mernissi's position on secularity. Secularism allows for the separation of state and religion. As a feminist, Mernissi's call for secularity makes sense because it promises equal rights for women. Thus, in a secular state, women's rights are protected without being compromised by male interpretations of religious legacy. Mernissi seeks to understand why most Muslims reject the concept of freedom and individualism, the fundamental concepts of secular thought. She notes that the socio-historical context of pre-Islamic culture, which reminds most Muslims of disorder and atheism, is behind this rejection. Her *Islam and Democracy* was referred to as "ethnography rather than a philosophical or historical work."[81] Since she uncovers the socio-historical context of the pre-Islamic period within a limited systematic study of individual culture, her examination cannot generalize to all Muslim societies.

Last but not least, Mernissi puts forward the notions of tenderness and equality as virtuous ideas of Islamic ethics. Critics contend that Mernissi's use of Arabic etymology to explain several words (*rahma*, *ahwa'*, *taghiya*) is a limited approach. There exist Muslims who cannot understand the role the implication of these notions in the history of the Islamic thought. Therefore, one might argue that Mernissi "does injustice to the plurality and richness of the Muslim world"[82] in that her account is addressed to Muslims who are familiar with the Arabic language.

2.2 The concept of justice in the modern era: The entanglement of descriptive and normative claims of justice theories

This chapter examines justice as defined by Mernissi. It speculates on the notions of political justice, legal justice, social justice, and epistemic justice which one could interpret from Mernissi's thought. The first section examines a notion of political justice which is interpreted from Mernissi's claim about the concept of representative democracy, in which she asserts that individuals must have equal participation in political decision-making. Using a model of Western political tradition, Mernissi also clarifies Islam's relationship to democracy. Mernissi maintains that a plausible newer reading of Islamic thought may lead to an accordance between Islam and the concept of democracy.

The second section analyzes a notion of legal justice which is established based on Mernissi's call for egalitarian access to laws by every individual. I outline her reference to modern treaties concerning human rights such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which she compares with the Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights (UIDHR). Her argument is that the UIDHR remains

81 Mirsepassi 2014a: 178.

82 Mirsepassi 2014a:179.