Political Correctness and Cancel Culture in Arabic Linguistic and Cultural Practices: Preliminary Reflections

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Abstract This paper examines the nuances of political correctness in Arabic contexts, highlighting its emergence and intersection with Islamic ethical principles. It challenges claims of early Arab politically correct sensibilities, emphasizing the need for comprehensive investigation beyond ideological and religious frameworks. Through a linguistic and descriptive analysis, the paper sheds light also on cancel culture trends across Arab contexts.

0. Introduction

This paper embarks on an initial exploration into the intricacies of political correctness (PC)[1] and cancel culture[2] trends within Arab contexts, framing the discourse as a preliminary reflection on these pertinent issues. Initially, attention is directed towards examining the Arabic terminology for PC and its nuanced connotations, probing the extent to which PC values resonate within the Islamic tradition. Subsequently, the inquiry problematizes the notion that early Arabs were cognizant of PC concepts and that their linguistic and cultural milieu was imbued with Islamic principles that fostered a disposition towards diplomatic behaviors. Following this, the paper scrutinizes the manifestation of PC within the Arab region, considering its perception as a western[3] import and assessing claims that it stifles freedom of expression. Moreover, the study engages with controversies arising from cultural and political events to elucidate the extent to which PC ideology and cancel culture trends have permeated Arab societies.

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[1] By PC I refer to Moller (2016: 1), who defines it as the standards of speech and behavior designed to «(a) protect vulnerable, marginalized or historically victimized groups, and which (b) function by shaping public discourse, often by inhibiting speech or other forms of social signalling, and that (c) are supposed to avoid insult and outrage, a lowered sense of self-esteem, or otherwise offending the sensibilities of such groups or their allies». For an overview on the origin of the expression "political correct", see Faloppa 2022.

[2] Sciuto (2022: 163) defines cancel culture as the movement that calls for the removal of works deemed racist or misogynistic from literary and artistic canons, the dismantling of statues, and the insistence that only those who have personally experienced specific situations have the right to write about them.

[3] The word "western" is written with a small "w" intentionally to subvert hierarchies and power structures.

Given the scarcity of scholarly literature dissecting the implications of PC within Arabic language and cultural contexts, the subsequent sections embark on an investigative inquiry, predominantly drawing upon resources such as Wikipedia Arabic and articles culled from esteemed Arabic journals. Through this interdisciplinary lens, the paper endeavors to offer a nuanced understanding of the interplay between PC, cultural norms, and socio-political dynamics within Arab societies, laying the groundwork for further scholarly inquiry and critical discourse on the subject[4].

1. *Ṣawābiyyah siyāsiyyah*: Bridging Terms and Concepts

Ṣawābiyyah siyāsiyyah[5] is the common expression used in Arabic for PC. It is a loan translation entered into Arabic through *al-taʿrīb* (borrowing). Initially, PC was transliterated as بوليتيكال كوريكتنس /*būlitikāl kūriktinis* (Naʿim 2021: 67), later replaced by the loan translation *ṣawābiyyah siyāsiyyah*, derived from *ṣawāb* (correctness) and *siyāsah* (politics). While the Arabic expression gained prominence in dictionaries (al-Maany Online English-Arabic Dictionary 2024; Hammouda 2020) and journalism, the loanword–*būlitikāl kūriktinis* – remains prevalent among speakers, particularly in digital platforms (Sal Gal. 2017; Abo Bakr 2020; Elobaid 2021; Aladly 2024).

The widespread use of the loanword reflects the perception of PC as a western ideological import, seen as foreign to the indigenous culture and challenging to fully embrace. Nevertheless, Wikipedia (2024) gives different Arabic terms for PC, such as *mudārāh siyāsiyyah* (political politeness), *liyāqah siyāsiyyah* (political appropriateness), *kayāsah siyāsiyyah* (political civility/politeness), and *labāqah siyāsiyyah* (political tact). Of these, *labāqah siyasiyyah* and *mudārāh* better encapsulate the difference between western PC and the Islamic teachings of good manners. They connote "good behavior" and "politeness". *Labāqah siyāsiyyah* is defined in *Muʿǧam al-luġah al-ʿarabiyyah al-muʿāṣirah* (The Dictionary of Contemporary Arabic Language) as «good behavior among people; a good assessment of what is appropriate to say and do, or what to avoid in human relations» (Omar 2008: 1991)[6]. *Mudārāh* emphasizes courteous interaction and avoidance of actions that may incite negative emotions. According to the Islamic scholar Ibn Baṭṭāl (d. 1075), *al-mudārāh* is one of «the believers' morals», encompassing actions such as «lowering one's wing to others», «being kind in speech», and «tolerating their mistakes». He adds that it is «one of the strongest motives for approaching others» (al-Badrani n.d.: 8). Moreover, *al-mudārāh* entails «the good meeting with (*ḥusn al-liqāʾ*) and good talking (*ṭīb al-kalām*) to other people, as well as showing courtesy (*tawaddud*) and avoiding what could foment hatred, anger, or boredom. All this [must be done] without abandoning the principles of religion by no means» (*Ibidem*)[7]. Hence, *al-mudārāh* can be construed as a guiding principle for Muslims' conduct and discourse in their everyday interactions. The art of behaving is a core principle of the Islamic religion. It is unsurprising that within Fiqh[8], one of the two main branches, *muʿāmalāt*, is dedicated to

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[4] A comprehensive rendition of this paper will be published in the forthcoming book *Tracking Global Wokeism*, Thorsten Botz-Bornstein (ed.), Brill forthcoming. The chapter is titled *Ṣawābiyyah and Wūkiyyah: Tracking Political Correctness and Wokeism in Arabic Language and Muslim-Majority Arab Contexts* and in addition to exploring PC, it delves into the phenomenon of Woke(ism) within Arab societies, examining it through linguistic and social lenses. It also explores proto-PC and proto-Woke language within Islam, positing that Arab societies harbor their own nuanced iterations of PC and Woke(ism) with subversive undertones.

[5] The transliteration system used here complies with the UNI ISO 233-2005 standard. The *tāʾ marbūṭah* is transliterated as "h".

[6] The translation from Arabic into English is mine.

[7] The translation from Arabic into English is mine.

[8] Fiqh, also known as Islamic Jurisprudence, encompasses the understanding and interpretation of Sharia derived from the Qurʾan and *Ḥadīṯ* (sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad).

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regulating behaviors, interactions, and exchanges among individuals. Moreover, the Qur'an invites believers not to mock or ridicule fellow believers. Believers are also prohibited from defaming, being sarcastic, or using offensive nicknames towards one another:

> O ye who believe! Let not some men Among you laugh at others : It may be that The (latter) are better Than the (former) : Nor let some women Laugh at others : It may be that The (latter) are better Than the (former) : Nor defame nor be Sarcastic to each other, Nor call each other By (offensive) nicknames : Ill-seeming is a name Connoting wickedness, (To be used of one) After he has believed : And those who Do not desist are (Indeed) doing wrong. (Q 49: 11).

In contrast to the Islamic principle of *labāqah* and *mudārāh*, which emphasizes expressing oneself with "good manners," PC focuses on eliminating discriminatory practices. PC «doesn't refer to a distinctive personal morality» (Moller 2016: 2) but aims to abolish oppressive power dynamics[9]. This objective can be compared to the Islamic theological concept of *al-tawḥīd* (the Unicity of God), which Amina Wadud employed to develop her «Tawhidic paradigm» (Wadud 2006: 24-32). According to her, *al-tawḥīd* carries ethical implications:

> As an ethical term, *tawhid* relates to relationships and developments within the social and political realm, emphasizing the unity of all human creatures beneath one Creator. If experienced as a reality in everyday Islamic terms, humanity would be a single global community without distinction for reasons of race, class, gender, religious tradition, national origin, sexual orientation or other arbitrary, voluntary, and involuntary aspects of human distinction. Their only distinction would be on *taqwa* […]. *Taqwa* is moral consciousness, not accessible for external human judgment. (*Ivi*: 28-29)

Upon reviewing the Arabic Wikipedia entry on PC, it asserts that early Arabs demonstrated a form of PC, exemplified by their usage of terms such as *abū baṣīr* (the one who sees) rather than *aʿmà* (blind) to refer to blind individuals (Wikipedia 2024). However, this cannot be considered a politically correct attitude, since PC is intended to be non-discriminatory rather than merely euphemistic. Additionally, the entry discusses contemporary translation efforts aiming to adopt more politically correct terminology. For instance, the entry discusses the translation of "homosexual" as *miṯlī* rather than *šāḏ* (*Ibidem*). The former is more acceptable term since it derives from *miṯl* (same), denoting a "same-sex relationship", while the latter implies deviant behavior (*šuḏūḏ*).

Al-Maʿlul (2016) presents a similar viewpoint, asserting that Arabic, influenced by its Islamic roots, embodies a «diplomatic language» characterized by courteous conduct and tactfulness. He argues that Arabs and Muslims were pioneers in adopting diplomatic language and behaviors, as prescribed by Islam. Al-Maʿlul builds his thesis on the linguistic phenomenon of *al-talaṭṭuf* (condescending euphemism), which he believes exemplifies Arab diplomacy through the avoidance of offensive language. For instance, Arabs demonstrated diplomacy – he argues – by using euphemistic language, such as referring to a black person as *abu al-bayḍāʾ* (the white individual), to *al-ladīġ* (a beaten person) as *al-salīm* (the recovered/survived person) and substituting terms like *mawlà* (the loyal) for potentially offensive descriptors like *ḫādim* (servant) (*Ibidem*).

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[9] The author expresses gratitude to Professor Hans-Georg Moeller (University of Macau) for his valuable insights on this aspect.

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However, al-Maʿlul's claims do not suggest that early Arabs were politically correct merely because they were diplomatic. Additionally, these claims imply that the language used in the Qur'an lacks respect. A critical examination of his assertions raises questions regarding the Qur'an's use of terms that might be considered offensive or discriminatory by contemporary standards. For instance, the Qur'an refers to a blind individual as *al-aʿmà* (blind) (Q 80: 2) and a leper as *al-abraṣ* (Q 5: 110) and describes those who lie to God as *wuǧūhuhum muswaddah* (having black faces) (Q 39: 60). Despite the Qur'an being revered as the word of God and inherently eloquent, its use of such terms challenges the notion that Arabic and early Arabs are inherently diplomatic. Instead, it suggests a language that reflects the societal norms and realities of its time.

Thus, while al-Maʿlul's perspective highlights Arabic's sensitivity and avoidance of offense, the language of the Qur'an reveals a more nuanced understanding. Words that al-Maʿlul might consider potentially offensive were used in the context of their time and societal norms, and they do not violate the values of political correctness. For example, calling a blind individual "the one who sees" would not be politically correct.

This complexity underscores the interplay between language, context, and power dynamics. As Piazza (2022: 131)[10] aptly states, «the meanings of words […] are never entirely separate from their enunciative context», including the historical background of the words, the roles and status of the participants, and their power structures. Moreover, semantically, each word possesses dual layers of meaning: denotation and connotation (Rigotti, Rocci 2006). While the specified terms– "blind," "beaten person,", "black," and "leper"– denotatively referring to color, physical appearance, and medical condition, respectively, they carry social connotations laden with negative associations. For instance, historically, the term "black" has often been intertwined with notions of malevolence and moral negativity. Al-Adaileh (2012: 6) elucidates that in dysphemistic usage, "black" is frequently associated with tainted or morally debased attributes. Therefore, it is necessary to scrutinize the historical context and social norms to understand the preference of early Arabs for euphemistic alternatives such as *abū al-bayḍāʾ* over the direct term "black".

The employment of these terms does not necessarily imply an inherent diplomatic inclination within the Arabic language or an early Arab commitment to political correctness. Conversely, in contemporary linguistic standards, *al-talaṭṭuf* (condescending language), does not denote courtesy. Avoidance of terms like "black" may indicate the speaker's negative perception of it. The suggestion of *al-talaṭṭuf* towards diversity and individuals with disabilities is now considered unacceptable. In 2019, the United Nations introduced the *Disability Inclusion Strategy* (DIS), with the aim of integrating disability inclusion across all aspects of life and work (United Nations 2024a). The Arabic rendition of the DIS (United Nations 2024b) underscores the importance of refraining from *al-luġahal-mulaṭṭifah* (condescending language), condemning the usage of terms like *ḏū al-himamm* (people of determination), which euphemistically perpetuate stigma surrounding disability. Nevertheless, such terms persist in institutional and everyday Arabic language.

The diplomatic linguistic stance advocated by al-Maʿlul can also be dissected through another linguistic phenomenon: the semantic reclamation of words (Popa-Wyatt 2020). In her theory on performativity and the politics of language, Butler (2021) examines the agency involved in speaking and how marginalized groups can reclaim derogatory language. She explores how social power dynamics make certain groups more vulnerable to harm from speech. For instance, Piazza (2022: 129-135) elucidates that certain racially

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[10] The translation from Italian into English is mine.

charged terms such as "nigger"[11] and "queer," once deemed problematic, have been reappropriated by the targeted communities. Through this process, the original derogatory connotations are diluted, and the terms acquire positive meanings that convey pride and foster a sense of group belonging. Piazza terms this approach a «disarmament strategy» (*Ivi*: 130)[12], wherein hate speech[13] is effectively neutralized and transformed into a constructive force.

A parallel tactic could be adopted among black Arabs reclaiming terms like *aswad* (black) and *sūd*, which are still associated with slavery, according to black African activist Maha Abd al-Hamid (Abd al-Azim 2014). This involves rejecting euphemistic alternatives like *asmar* (brunet) or *šukūlātah* (chocolate-colored). However, besides the imperative to discern the benefits of semantic (re)appropriation of certain words, there is also the imperative to resist casual racism. Casual racism encompasses expressions of racist attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors in seemingly innocuous or nonchalant ways, often lacking overt malice or awareness of the harm it may inflict (Australian Human Rights Commission 2011). We can see this in some linguistic practices in the south of Tunisia where black individuals critique terms like ʿ*atīq* (freed slave), which have historical associations with black slavery and persist in contemporary usage, particularly in Tunisia (King 2019; Scaglioni 2020; Elsakaan 2024), and *bāk* which originates from *bābā*, a word used by children in southern Tunisia to refer to black individuals working in households. While *bāk* denotes a black person, *sāk*, meaning "sir" in the dialect, is reserved for white individuals. Even if *bāk* no longer directly translates to "slave," still it carries a negative undertone, symbolizing the inferior social status attributed to black individuals compared to their white counterparts, who are addressed as *sāk* (Elsakaan 2024: 143).

The discussion on diplomatic linguistic practices in the Arabic context reveals a nuanced landscape influenced by historical, cultural, and religious factors. While proponents argue for Arabic's inherent diplomacy, challenges arise from the Qur'an's language and evolving societal norms. Moreover, the phenomenon of semantic reclamation offers insights into the evolving nature of language and its capacity to subvert oppressive discourse. However, alongside the potential for linguistic empowerment, there exists a need to navigate the pitfalls of casual racism, particularly evident in linguistic practices that perpetuate negative stereotypes and reinforce power differentials. Ultimately, this discourse underscores the importance of contextualizing linguistic practices within their historical, cultural, and social frameworks. While linguistic strategies may evolve and adapt over time, the underlying power dynamics and societal norms continue to shape language use and interpretation. As such, critical engagement with linguistic practices is essential for fostering inclusive and equitable discourse in diverse sociocultural contexts.

2. Navigating Political Correctness: Current Debates in Arab Contexts

PC permeates the «political lexicon of the contemporary West» (Dzenis and Faria 2020: 95), yet its presence in the Arab region is not overtly acknowledged by policymakers. Nevertheless, discussions revolving around the concept of PC are prevalent, particularly in cultural production as well as in online forums.

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[11] On the redefinition of words like the N-word, see also hooks 1981.

[12] For more about this strategy, see Piazza 2019.

[13] D'Amico (2023: 67-69) suggests that while hate speech lacks a universally accepted definition, it exhibits certain common traits. Hate speech typically directs hostility towards groups categorized as "other," "diverse," "vulnerable," or "minorities," conveying direct messages to these targeted groups. To qualify as hate speech, three key elements must coincide: a clear intent to provoke hatred, an incitement likely to result in acts of hatred and violence, and a foreseeable risk of such actions materializing.

The label *sawābiyyah siyāsiyyah* emerged in Arabic in the 1990s, with its earliest documented appearance traced back to 1996 in the Lebanese Journal *al-ʾĀdāb* (Idris 1996: 24), associating it with the policies of colonizers towards Native Americans. By 2002, it was explored in a book (Salih 2002) dissecting the Arab cultural landscape, where PC was introduced as a tool utilized by western feminists and movements advocating for minorities and people of colour. Specifically, it was depicted as a linguistic scrutiny mechanism aimed at revising representations in western contexts. Salih (2002: 40-41) hypothesized that PC would soon influence Arab feminist agendas, pressuring policymakers for legislative adjustments, and consequently catalyzing cultural and social transformations. In 2007, the Arabic translation of Steven Salaita's *Anti-Arab Racism in the USA: Where It Comes from and What It Means for Politics Today* (2006) connected *sawābiyyah siyāsiyyah* with *ḥarb al-bī sī* (PC wars), portraying conflicts between academic staff and New Conservatives at American universities (Salaita 2007).

In recent times, Arab authors and journalists have subjected PC to critical examination. In an interview, Egyptian writer and comic illustrator Dina Muhammad Yahya emphasized that any progressive initiative is scrutinized through the filter of PC (Saʿid 2022: 59). According to her, PC has divided people, with opponents of PC disregarding viewpoints from women and minority factions (*Ivi*: 60), whereas proponents of PC inadvertently empower «racist and ignorant groups» (*Ivi*: 58) by adhering to ideological stances rather than championing their grievances. Some argue that PC solely targets verbal violence, encompassing both metaphorical and artistic expressions (Samir 2023). The authoritarian nature of PC and Wokeism[14] are now evident. They suppress "the spirit of art," akin to totalitarian regimes, and inhibit artistic expression (*Ivi*: 85).

Arab journalists have raised different concerns about the West's use of PC as a tool to restrict freedom of expression. A Kuwaiti journalist cynically argues that Arab societies offer greater freedom of speech compared to the West, where individuals diverging from PC standards are branded as «reactionary, backward, and promoters of hate speech» (al-Rashid 2022)[15]. The Kuwaiti society is one of the most conservative contexts in the Arab region where PC has sparked significant controversy. A recent publication by the *Kuwaiti Center Rawasekh* characterizes PC as a western strategy aiming at imposing unethical values on other cultures. The book cites examples like homosexuality and pedophilia to illustrate western attempts to spread moral decline through PC discourse, thus stifling opposition to such behaviors (Rawasekh 2022). In December 2022, Kuwait launched a public campaign against homosexuality, featuring homophobic billboards with the slogan «Huwwa mū miṯlī. Anā raǧul wa huwa šāḏ» (He is not like me. I am a man. He is a deviant/fagot), prominently exhibited in its capital (Othman, 2022). The campaign highlights the term *miṯlī*[16] in rainbow colors to emphasize the increasing linguistic normalization, condemning not only homosexual relationships but also the acceptance of such language in terms of PC. Al-Nakib (2023) suggests that the campaign can be seen as a reactionary response to both regional and international progressive movements. Although some Kuwaiti human rights activists and academic scholars condemned the billboard campaign as offensive and promoting hate speech, their voices were drowned out by those who embraced the homophobic message. They viewed it as a defence against western efforts to promote homosexuality, particularly among children (Othman 2022).

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[14] See Thorsten Botz-Bornstein article within this same volume.

[15] The translation from Arabic into English is mine.

[16] As mentioned earlier, this term literally means "like me." Recently, it has been used to refer to a homosexual person. In fact, *miṯliyyah* means homosexuality.

Criticism of PC has escalated on social media platforms. One of X platform's users argues that PC conflicts with Islamic Sharia principles, asserting that:

> We [Muslims] are not allowed to treat unbelievers and sinners kindly. That goes against [the principles of] "Political Correctness." Muslims who adhere to PC are akin to animals and anarchists who undermine religion. PC promotes anarchic communism […] I deliberately use the expression 'Political Correctness' to highlight its foreign nature, contrasting it with the translated term *sawābiyyah siyāsiyyah*, which implies the normalization of this phenomenon (Taher 2021)[17].

Other individuals ridicule Arab criticisms of PC, claiming that such criticisms lack merit in societies where «nothing is correct» as reported in the journal *al-Quds al-Arabi* where al-Kayyal (2021) argues that discriminatory and patriarchal behaviors pervasive in Arab contexts diminish freedom, individual rights, and privacy, making critiques of PC illogical.

However, the Arab region does not lack of moderate critiques of PC. A podcast featured on a Saudi blog proposes that PC is grounded in religion and prevalent across all societies, although sometimes implicitly (Mahmud 2019). The podcast suggests that defining PC in Arabic is intricate. PC encompasses «the morals inherited from tradition» (*Ibidem*), the values imparted during upbringing, and the norms regulating speech acquired through education. Each society is tasked with defining its unique interpretation of PC, a duty that should originate from societal awareness rather than political authority. In these terms, the prevailing consensus within a society determines what is considered "correct." The podcast concludes by advocating for a reconsideration of language usage towards vulnerable groups within Arab societies in accordance with PC principles (*Ibidem*).

3. Cancel Culture Trends in Arab Contexts

Although PC may not be widely recognized in Arab contexts, various social phenomena indicate the presence of a certain iteration of it, characterized by attitudes akin to cancel culture (in Arabic *ṯaqāfat al-ilǧāʾ*) trends. There is a growing awareness and tension across the region regarding issues such as discriminatory stereotypes, gender and color-based racism, as well as hate speech. Examination of these issues reveals a dual narrative: one acknowledges both implicit and explicit violence against vulnerable groups and societal efforts to address it through diverse strategies, while the other exposes entrenched racism camouflaged within gender and national identity discourses. The ensuing examples underscore ongoing debates on racism and discrimination against minorities and vulnerable groups, illustrating the infiltration of cancel culture ideology within Arab societies, albeit alongside resistance to politically correct discourses as discussed in previous sections of this study.

Many television shows and dramas in Arab contexts are characterized by racism and aggressive verbal expressions. In 2018, a Kuwaiti comedy sketch titled *Block Ghashmara* stirred allegations of racism towards Sudanese individuals. The main actor appeared in blackface and traditional Sudanese clothing while speaking in an exaggerated Sudanese accent. The sketch provoked criticism from numerous Sudanese individuals on social media platforms who accused the actor of ridicule and racial bias (The New Khalij 2018). In response to the backlash, the actor issued an apology to the Sudanese community in a video published on YouTube, saying that he would never mock of Black Arabs anymore (World Press 2018).

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[17] Translation from Arabic into English is mine.

Stereotypical portrayals targeting African migrants and Black Arabs are prevalent in Arab television and cinema. Various films mock them, particularly Sudanese Arabs (al-Bashir, 2024), perpetuating casual racism among audiences. In a manner reminiscent of woke language, al-Khamri (2018) critiques the Arab film industry for participating in "Arab-washing," similar to Hollywood's practice of whitewashing narratives and characters. Conversely, authorities and many Arabs often downplay anti-Black racism, citing Islam's stance against discrimination and dismissing such concerns as a reflection of western issues– especially American issues– within Arab Muslim societies (Abd al-Hamid 2019).

Recently, particular attention has been drawn to racism and comedy (Black 2021). For some, the prohibitionist attitude of PC towards mockery does not resolve the problem. To the contrary, mockery and laughter could be used to "desecrating taboos". Di Piazza (2022: 89-90) highlights the interplay between verbal violence, freedom of expression and the "desacralizing laugh". By desacralizing laugh, he means the laugh that breaks the sacredness surrounding some issues and goes beyond violent and offensive terms that cannot be laughed at in public space, such as slurs. According to him, desacralizing laughter diminishes the symbolic potency of terms and facilitates the examination of topics typically deemed beyond scrutiny. Utilizing comedy to challenge taboos offers the benefit of mitigating the potential for violence inherent in prolonged taboo status, as forbidden subjects tend to gain greater potency over time (*Ivi*: 90). But this must be done on one condition. Di Piazza explains that the act of desecration is particularly potent when it emanates from members of the targeted group itself. A prime example is found in the black humor exhibited by the Jewish community, which humorously defies and disrespects a tragedy of which it has been the victim (*Ibidem*). As per the author's assertion, this type of laughter serves as a means to channel and transform violence. Regarding laughter in a broader context, Di Piazza highlights that satire is deemed acceptable as long as «it does not infringe upon other fundamental rights» (*Ivi*: 94)[18]. He then distinguishes between the satire of minorities and satire of majorities:

> [...] it is necessary to distinguish between a satire of the minority [...] which takes the form of an exercise in parrhesia in which laughter represents a kind of safe-conduct and which aims at evading the control of those in power and criticizing them, and a satire of the majority which instead rages against those in a weakened condition (*Ivi*: 95)[19].

An analogy can be drawn between the detrimental effects of the satire of majority and the satire wielded by powerful males against vulnerable females. Issues such as gender-based violence, sexual harassment, and hate speech against women have gained significant attention in recent years. Prior to the widespread #MeToo movement, which gained momentum online in 2017, various impactful social media initiatives denouncing harassment and sexual violence had emerged in the Arab region since 2011 (Basch-Harod 2019: 306). The Arab Spring revolutions also heightened social awareness regarding gendered violence in public spaces (Johansson-Nogués 2013), influencing cultural production, including the music industry. People reactions to music, similar to those in cinematography, are influenced by politically correct attitudes, particularly concerning songs addressing women's issues. One notable example is the song *Salmonella* or *If You Say No* by Egyptian singer Tameem Youness (rmediaproduction

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[18] The translation from Italian into English is mine.
[19] The translation from Italian into English is mine.

2021), which has faced criticism for perpetuating themes of gender-based violence and hate speech.

Allegations have been made against the singer, accusing him of promoting bullying and inciting violence towards women who reject male advances. The song has ignited extensive debate on various social media platforms, with opinions ranging from condemnation of its portrayal of women to arguments asserting that it promotes respect for women while ridiculing insecure men (El-Sheikh, 2020). Youness has defended his song, stating that it is intended to humorously depict the reactions of insecure men to rejection. *The National Council for Women's Rights* has expressed disapproval of *Salmonella*, citing its inappropriate content and adverse effects on public morality. Consequently, a complaint has been lodged with Google to cease the song's broadcast and remove it from all platforms (*Ibidem*). Although initial efforts to eliminate the song appeared successful, it remains accessible on YouTube to this day (rmediaproduction 2021). It's evident that the instance in question constitutes an example of hate speech, distinct from satire or taboo. Spena provides an insightful definition of hate speech, asserting that:

> Hate speech is [...] a manifestation of power dynamics [...] rooted in a societal framework where power is consolidated to the disadvantage of specific social groups and to the advantage of others [...]; the purveyor of hate speech [...] operates from a position of power, not inherently personal, but rather as a representative of a social collective whose fundamental tenet is the subjugation or marginalization of the targeted group (Spena 2019: 122)[20].

This conceptual framework is applicable to the lyrics of *Salmonella*, wherein a man employs threatening violent language towards a woman, coercing her into a romantic relationship under the threat of defamation and reputational damage.

In discussing the intersection of tensions surrounding the emergence of cancel culture trends and discourses on identity and authenticity, it is essential to acknowledge the notable conflicts that have arisen in Egypt concerning Afrocentric issues. One notable example is the backlash against American comedian Kevin Hart's scheduled show, attributed to perceived Afrocentric claims seen as jeopardizing Egyptian identity and historical fidelity. In late 2022, with the onset of ticket sales, a surge of critique surfaced from Egyptian social media users aimed at Hart, urging for the cancellation of his upcoming show, scheduled for February 2023. These objections stemmed from purported Afrocentric remarks attributed to Hart regarding ancient Egypt, with allegations of historical distortion. Despite ambiguity surrounding the context of Hart's comments, a viral hashtag campaign (#CancelKevinHartShow) was initiated, urging either the cancellation or boycott of the comedian's scheduled performance in Cairo (Egyptian Streets 2022).

The second significant controversy arose with the docudrama *Queen Cleopatra*[21], produced by Netflix (2023), which sparked debate due to the portrayal of the Egyptian queen by black actress Adele James. The controversy stemmed from the decision to cast a Black actress in the role of the titular queen. Critics contend that James' portrayal lacks historical authenticity and constitutes an act of "appropriation" (Di Placido 2023). Egyptian individuals on social media have drawn parallels with the accusations against Hart, alleging distortion of the country history. They argue that the controversy does not stem from racism but rather concerns the historical accuracy of the depiction and the potential promotion of Afrocentrism which, according to them, misrepresents

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[20] The translation from Italian into English is mine.
[21] *Cleopatra Queen* was initially presented as a "documentary," not a "docudrama".

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Egyptian identity (Manalloka 2023). Following the release of the series trailer, Netflix faced significant backlash, prompting the platform to disable comments on YouTube owing to the influx of racial abuse and contentious remarks (Di Placido 2023). Concurrently, a petition on Change.org, accusing Netflix of historical distortion, garnered considerable attention. Egyptian officials, including the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, have voiced criticism of the series, contending that the documentary of the series necessitates thorough research into accuracy, relying on historical and scientific evidence (*Ibidem*). Congresswoman Sabura al-Sayyid emphasized the necessity to mobilize and denounce the appropriation of "our history" and safeguarding the national identity from attempts to erase or alter it (ETʾ bi-l-ʿarabī 2023).

Recent exacerbations in problematic narratives concerning ethnic racism, identity and hate speech can be attributed to various socio-political factors such as economic downturns, heightened geopolitical tensions, and wars leading to mass displacements across the region. An illustrative instance of this phenomenon can be observed in Tunisia, where issues of racial discrimination intersect with political rhetoric and assertions of national sovereignty. This intersection became particularly evident subsequent to President Qais Saied's (Qays Saʿīd) xenophobic declarations in 2023, wherein he linked irregular migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa with instances of violence and criminality (Library of Congress 2023). President Saied emphasized the imperative of enforcing stringent laws against illegal migration as a measure to curb the influx of unauthorized migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa, characterizing this influx as an aberrant circumstance indicative of a purported agenda to manipulate demographic compositions (Amnesty 2023). Such discourse ostensibly aims to safeguard Tunisia's Arab Islamic identity, as Saied said. This rhetoric precipitated the mobilization of segments of Tunisian society targeting black African migrants following the president's address. Despite Tunisia's enactment of an anti-racism legislation in 2018 aimed at combating discrimination and fostering equality among its populace, the nation continues to grapple with pervasive issues of racism, including discrimination against black Tunisian citizens (King 2019; Elsakaan 2024 and forthcoming).

The debates surrounding Hart's performance, the Netflix production, and the Tunisian president's statements highlight significant concerns about historical accuracy and cultural representation, amplifying anxieties about authenticity. These discussions underscore the complex tensions surrounding race and identity in contemporary discourse, particularly in the context of problematic trends like cancel culture.

4. Conclusion

This study has delved into the terminologies and conceptualizations of political correctness in Arabic, shedding light on the emergence of this western phenomenon within Arab contexts. It has underscored that the primary difference between Islamic ethical principles and PC lies in their emphasis: Islam prioritizes treating others with respect and dignity, while political correctness focuses on adherence to correctness norms, which may not always guarantee politeness or respectfulness. Additionally, the paper demonstrates how the *tawḥīd* foundation aligns with PC values, particularly in promoting equality and combating discrimination. This highlights a parallel between Islamic ethical principles and political correctness in their shared commitment to these objectives.

Moreover, the paper has critically examined assertions suggesting that early Arabs exhibited a politically correct sensibility toward minorities and vulnerable groups. It has argued that such claims necessitate further investigation, taking into account historical, social, cultural, and political factors of the period under scrutiny, rather than solely through a religious lens.

Furthermore, the study has highlighted the existence of a distinct Arab version of PC, shaped by historical, cultural, and religious considerations, which may diverge from western notions, particularly concerning sensitive topics such as LGBTQ+ rights. However, there is a growing awareness and activism within Arab societies, particularly in denouncing hate speech against marginalized groups like black individuals and women.

Nevertheless, the region's ongoing political turmoil and wars have engendered tensions and anxieties surrounding identity, cultural appropriation, and historical narratives, which in turn have resulted in consequences related to cancel culture trends. Therefore, it is imperative to undertake further research to explore these preliminary considerations in greater depth. This study serves as a foundational step toward understanding the complexities of PC and its manifestations within Arab societies, paving the way for future scholarly inquiry and critical discourse in this field.

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