DANUBIUS
SUPLIMENT

XXXII
2014

RELIGIOUS
PLURALISM
IN GLOBAL
PERSPECTIVE

MUZEUL DE ISTORIE GALAŢI

DANUBIUS

XXXII

-SUPLIMENT-

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Religion and the State

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*Ibrahim Olatunde Uthman**

MUSLIM PERCEPTION OF THE MODERN SECULAR STATE AND THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE ISLAMIC COMMONWEALTH OF RELIGIONS

Abstract: This paper seeks to explore the Muslim perception of the modern secular state by answering such questions as: why do some Muslims and Muslim societies tend to reject the modern secular state and why do Muslims generally view Islam as "the lodestar" of politics? It examines the foundations of the Muslim perception of both the modern secular state and their rejection of comprehensive secularism. It also examines how this perception reflects a global Muslim commitment to both Islamic teachings and development without submitting to the secular modernist theory. Muslim engagement with secularism in countries such as modern Turkey and Malaysia shows that there is a need for the Islamic Commonwealth of Religions that fuses not Islam but religions in general with politics. This is because the Islamic Commonwealth of Religions does not make the *other* assimilate other dominant religious norms but only suppresses religious traditions and practices that are harmful and inimical to the *other*.

Keywords: *Muslim society, secular state, Islamic Commonwealth of Religions*

Introduction

The global Muslim perception of the secular modern state, despite the existence of differing Muslim groups with differing and at times competing views, is unified to a very large extent today as can be seen from the contemporary Muslim engagement in many Muslim countries, especially modern Turkey and Malaysia. A major factor responsible for Muslim rejection of the modern secular state is comprehensive secularism. Comprehensive secularism is reflected in every

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sphere of the secular modern society. While the Enlightenment regarded Religion only as a personal affair which is not allowed to occupy the public domain, modernism has heralded a revolution against the Church and religious beliefs, and embarked on the gradual secularization of the Church and religious teachings, such that what is subsisting today as comprehensive secularism, which is far more dangerous than the initial partial secularism. Consequently, people nowadays reject moral responsibility and moral values. Science and technological advancement alone, guarantees progress, to most people while morality is relative and subject to the prevailing customs, whims and flings of the society. The entertainment industry controls the life of the people including their dreams. The temples of modern religion are factories, laboratories, cinemas and discos etc. The Media, which is wielding enormous power, is employed to sell the people all forms of utopias.

Comprehensive secularism erects a barrier between the Church and the state. Accordingly, it intends the establishment of a state that is "wholly detached from religious teaching or practice," a state that is irreligious.[1] It is this brand of comprehensive secularism that has been described as "the most powerful philosophy of secularization in the nineteenth century" that was put into practice by Marxism in what was the Soviet Union back then.[2] Comprehensive secularism is a systematic and relentless all-out struggle to stamp out and eliminate religion. This was the case in the Soviet Union, Ataturk's Turkey, as would be discussed later, and to some extent, in China. Today secularization has advanced in almost all modern secular states, even in traditional Christian states, assaulting Christendom as Christianity loses its interpretative power. The European Renaissance that was a renewal of the ancient pagan Greece and Rome and European Enlightenment were enthusiastically taken up by many countries of the West without the slightest discrimination. This brought an end to the traditional Christian civilization and heralded the prevailing secular modern materialistic world, promoting the centrality of money and worldly possessions while antagonistically thwarting or distorting the expression of the spiritual, religious and Godly.[3] According to Alasdair MacIntyre, Christianity has lost its social context and become immersed in the social context of the Enlightenment, which may explain the reasons why many Christian beliefs have lost their religious and moral significance in the face of Enlightenment rationality.[4]

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[1] Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 27.

[2] Ibid, 66.

[3] M. Lings, *A Return to the Spirit* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2005), 60-64.

[4] A. MacIntyre, "Is Understanding Religion Compatible with Believing?," in *Contemporary Classics in Philosophy of Religion*, ed. A. Loades and L. D. Rue (La Salle: Open Court, 1991), 571-574.

However, this has not occurred in the World of Islam. In fact, it appears the more the Muslims are exposed to modernization and development, the more their religious devotion increases. This may be confirming the assertion of Ali Shariati, a pre-revolution Iranian scholar and critic of Western civilization, in his *Civilization and Modernization* that the Muslim World cannot experience or embrace western modernization because of the pagan roots of the Enlightenment.[5] In the words of Ernest Gellner, "there is one dramatic and conspicuous exception to all this: Islam. To say that secularization prevails in Islam is not contentious. It is simply false." To him, Islam is as strong now as it was a century ago and in some ways, it is probably much stronger.[6] Why is Islam resistant to secularism? Gellner argues that out of the three Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, Islam is most resistant to secularism because it is the closest to modernity due to its universalism. To him, the holistic message of Islam makes it applicable to the community. The Islamic principle of 'the community will not agree on error' gives the Muslim community a political authority of communal consensus. This combined with the theoretical absence of clergy makes Muslim theology egalitarian and Islam a universal worldview that allows Muslims to construct their values and practices.[7] While some Muslims may have fallen prey to the secularization theory, as suggested by Gellner, most Muslims have not been attracted by the glitters of westernization and secularization. Thus, in the wake of striving for progress and development, to many Muslims and Muslim countries, development and progress are not synonymous with embracing the West and Western modernity.[8] This is also the view of Moore when she explains what she terms "the exceptionalism of the Muslim American experience". To her, "the Muslim encounter with pluralism in American is of an exceptional nature because as an ideology, Islam represents, like modernity, a universalistic world view."[9]

It is therefore pertinent here to examine the global Muslim alternative to the modern secular state in some Muslim countries.

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[5] See A. Shariati, *Civilization and Modernization* (Houston, Texas: Free Islamic Literature, 1979).

[6] E. Gellner, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion* (London: Routledge, 1992), 5.

[7] Ibid, 5-8.

[8] Johann P. Arnason, "Civilizational Patterns and Civilizing Processes," *International Sociology*, vol. 16, no. 3 (2001): 387-405 and his *Civilizations in Dispute: Historical Questions and Theoretical Traditions* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003).

[9] Kathleen Moore, *The Unfamiliar Abode. Islamic Law in the United States and Britain* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 33-34.

The Muslim Alternative to the Modern secular state in Some Contemporary Muslim Countries

Today many Muslim societies, while rejecting the secular modern state, make Islamic ideological and cultural values such as *tawhid* (divinity of Allah on whom rests absolute sovereignty), *Khilāfah* (caliphate which carries no theocratic or prophetic privileges), *Shurā* (consultation guided by the *Sharī'ah* (Islamic Law) to arrive at and bound by political decisions) and *'adalah* (justice for all, including non-Muslims in rights and duties) the basis of their modern state, even while some of them still adopt many components of the secular modern state. Consequently while some Muslim countries, such as Iran, Turkey and Malaysia uphold such pillars of modernity like empowerment of women, elections, voting, mass education and urbanization, they also embrace or are re-embracing Islamic values which include emphasis on following: the *Sharī'ah*, introduction of Islamic institutions such as Islamic Banking, Islamic Insurance, *halāl* food and the adoption of the Islamic dress, especially the *hijāb* as it would be seen in these contemporary Muslim countries.

Contemporary Iran is the first Muslim country to engage with the modern concept of the Islamic state as an alternative model to the modern secular state. The country, which shared a lot in common with Turkey during the post-World War One eras of the Reza Khan Shah and Muhammad Reza Shah is today championing Islamic modernity. During this post-War period, the Shahs, inspired by the "success of Ataturk's Turkey;" pushed through western-style modernization through education, western dress, the press, industry, urbanization, political consciousness and empowerment of women. According to Anasri, secularization and westernization were equated to development and progress in Iran, just like in Turkey.[10]

After many years, despite the principal features of modernity during the Shah era, such as secular feminism and the abandoning of the Islamic female dress, general increases in levels of education, especially female education and the mass urbanization of the Iranian society, the whole world was shocked by the Iranian Islamic revolution of 1979 and its reverberating effects in the revivalism and reassertion of Islam in the world today. Pre-revolution Scholars of the Iranian Islamic revolution of 1979 like Shariati had predicted the collapse of western modernity in Iran because of its ideological and structural non-Islamic defects.[11]

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[10] A. M. Ansari, *Iran, Islam and Democracy: The Politics of Managing Change* (London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2000), 24-39.
[11] See Shariati, *Civilization.*

Following the Islamic revolution of 1979, which brought Ayatollah Khomeini to power, Islamic feminism which takes Islamic modernity and not western secular modernity as its sources of legitimacy was born in the Kiyan Cultural Institute with *Zanan*. This is the Iranian women's revolutionary magazine that uses Islamic texts to demand rights granted to women by the Islamic Law. Abdul Karim was the guiding and intellectual inspiration for this magazine.[12] This Islamic Feminism which has its intellectual base in the Kiyan Cultural Institute has succeeded in using the Islamic imperative to fight against many anti-woman practices in Iran. By 1982, Islamic Feminists pushed through the appointment of female lawyers as advisers in family courts, and two years later, in administrative justice courts. They also pushed for appointments in the positions of Assistant to the Public Prosecutor and Magistrates. In 1991, this Islamic model of modernity won for women bills allowing their early retirement age, granting them custody rights, ending the prejudicial treatment of women in higher education, and in the selection of University courses, as well as appointment of women into the *Majlis* and the provision of nurseries for working mothers.[13]

The juristic re-reading of the Iranian Civil Codes that discriminates against women in Iran by the *Zanan* culminated in the 1992 Divorce Amendments, which annul a supposedly Islamic divorce law that grants men powers to abuse women. The 1992 Divorce Amendments curtailed men's right to divorce, granted women financial domestic provisions known as *ujrat al-mithl* or standard wages for housework and ended the subordinate position of women in the name of men's *qawamah* (male headship) of the family, domestic violence as well as gender inequities that exist in the hitherto Islamic penal codes of fixed punishments, retribution and discretionary punishments.[14]

To the Iranian thinker, Abdul Karim Soroush Islamic modernity as an alternative to the secular modernist model is a form of "democratic religious government," which is a solution to the perceived gulf between Islam and modernity. According to his analysis, there can only be impasse between Islam and some components of western secular modernity, especially in the areas of Islamic values, ethics and religious principles. He argues further that as for the institution

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[12] R. Wright, "An Iranian Luther Shakes the Foundation of Islam," *The Guardian*, February 1, 1995.

[13] H. Afshar, "Islam and Feminism: An Analysis of Political Strategies," in *Feminism and Islam: Legal and Literary Perspectives*, ed. Mai Yamani (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 201-216.

[14] Ziba Mir-Hossein, "Stretching the Limits: A Feminist Reading of the Sharī 'ah in post-Khomeini Iran" in *Feminism and Islam: Legal and Literary Perspectives*, ed. Mai Yamani (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 285-316.

of governance, Islamic humanism is not at variance with the rights and duties of the governed and their representatives, once Islamic values are maintained.[15]

The fact that the modern Islamic state as conceived in Iran above is not at variance with the rights and duties of the governed and their representatives has been maintained by many contemporary Muslim scholars. To AbuSulayman, the principles of freedom and equality are the consequences of the Islamic teachings on justice. Hence, a person is free in Islam "to act according to one's own moral convictions, to make ideological or intellectual choices, and to take decisions on the basis of these convictions and choices."[16] He explains further that the system of *Shurā* in Islam provides that people sit together and deliberate issues of concerns and are bound by conclusions in the light of the principle of justice.

Similarly, Modern Turkey is a shining example of a Muslim country that rejects the wholesale adoption of the secular Western modernizing project. For Muslims, who adopt the wholesale modernism or secularization project and ape the West, oblivious of their Islamic heritage, Kemal Ataturk's Turkey is the best model. It is the first Muslim country to embrace the path of comprehensive secularism through liberalization of the Muslim mind from Islamic fundamentals and total secularization of all Islamic institutions in the Old Ottoman Empire. To Ataturk, progress and development was not possible for Turkey without westernization and social and cultural transformation "embracing and internalizing all the cultural dimensions that made Europe modern."[17] However this secularization was not well received by the majority of the Turkish population, who preferred the cultural values of Islam that Ataturk's Turkey sought to supplant. To overcome the popular opposition to his secularist modernization project, Ataturk used the military to enforce his modernizing project. For almost a century, Turkey deepened unbridled fascist and autocratic practices, which were at complete odds with the democratic vision of modernity to subdue the people.

Post World War Turkey, which used fascist and arbitrary military tactics to push through Ataturk's secularization and westernization project with Western style dress and other European innovations imposed on the people, is however today re-embracing the cultural values of Islam.[18] This re-adoption of Islamic

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[15] See A. Soroush, *The Expansion of the Prophetic Experience: Essays in Historicity, Contingency and Plurality in Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

[16] AbdulHamid AbuSulayman, *Crisis in the Muslim Mind*, trans. Yusuf Talal DeLorenzo (Herdon Va: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1993), 89.

[17] C. Keyder, "Wither the Project of modernity? Turkey in the 1990's," in *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*, ed. S. Bozdogan and R. Kasaba (USA: University of Washington Press, 1997), 37-51.

[18] T. Atabaki and E. J. Zurcher (eds.), *Men of Order: Authoritarian Modernization under Ataturk and Reza Shah* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000), 11-279.

values, especially of the *hijāb, values* that were banned for half a century in Ataturk's secular Turkey, is similar to what is happening today in post Hosni Mubarak Egypt in the behavior of many Egyptian educated women who are today reclaiming the Islamic dress that was earlier rejected by their urban and educated grandmothers. This return to Islamic teachings in Egypt is today confirmed by the gradual re-adoption of the *hijāb* that was discarded in Husni Mubarak's secular Egypt. This new adoption of the *hijāb* is being championed by the Muslim Brotherhood which came into power, for the first time in July, 2012 and was demonstrated by the first TV station exclusively run by veiled Muslim women before the military coup of July 2013.[19] To all these Muslim countries, progress or development does not involve comprehensive secularism, which presupposes the absence of religion in the public arena or separation between the Church and the state. In Malaysia, as it would be seen now, the Islamic state, while adopting Islam as the official religion also offers equal opportunities for all religions in state patronage and participation in the public arena.

In Malaysia, which can today be regarded as the best model for the fusion of political modernity and the entrenchment of Islamic cultural values, Islamic modernity is progressing. As by the late 90s in many Muslim countries, where many Muslim scholars had come to terms with the projection of Malaysia as an Islamic state, the country appears the most suitable model for the Commonwealth of religions, which is the trust of this paper.[20] For one, Malaysia is a pluralistic society, in terms of its multicultural, ethnic and religious composition. Muslim mosques, Chinese temples, Indian temples and Christian Churches are located at distances of a few hundred meters from each other in the country. Secondly, the Federal Constitution of Malaysia, like the Nigerian Constitution, does not declare the country a secular state. In similar vein, both the constitution of Malaysia and that of Nigeria make provisions for what has been termed "legal pluralism" that is "the provision to establish native court systems in addition to the existing common law and *Sharī'ah* law."[21] In recognition of the country's plurality, the *Sharī'ah* does not have any status of superiority and neither is it an independent law in the two constitutions.

All these provisions appear to justify the Muslims' position that the country, though being an Islamic state, is multicultural, religious and pluralistic. Yet

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[19] "Egypt Launches TV Station Exclusively Run by Veiled Muslim Women," *The Nation News*, July, 2012, 49.

[20] *New Straits Times*, Kuala Lumpur, March 24, 1997, cited in I. O Uthman, "Muslim Women in Nigeria: the Position of FOMWAN and Lessons Islamic Malaysia," *Journal of African and Asian Studies* 18 (2009): 245-265.

[21] Abdul Rashid Moten, "Malaysia as an Islamic State: A Political Analysis," *Journal of Islam and International Affairs*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2003): 1-69.

Malaysia is today using the Islamic impetus to unite its multi-religious and multicultural people and develop its society. Today, long standing multi-religious and multicultural prejudices and biases among the people[22] have been weakened by some provisions of the Malaysian Federal Constitution to bridge the educational and economic imbalance between Muslims and non-Muslims. These provisions include the adoption of the Malay language as the official national language while providing a means for the preservation of the cultures and languages of peoples of other religions and races in Malaysia. The idea of using the Malay language as the official national language and medium of instruction in all national schools is aimed at uniting all races in the country by bridging the communication gap between the non-Muslim and Muslim Malay communities. The introduction of the new economic policy (NEP) from 1970 to 1990 that grants Malays 30% equity in all economic, commercial and industrial operations in the country is also believed to have contributed to increasing interaction and interdependence between Muslims and non-Muslims in general, and Malays and Chinese in particular.[23]

Today, the Islamic Malaysian development model for gender advancement has devised approaches not only in maintaining Islamic decorum but also in eliminating practices that are harmful to women. The Malay Muslim women, while on one hand are upholding the decent Islamic dressing in their social, business, academic and official public engagements are on the other hand protected by the country's Islamic laws from the imposition of the face-veil, segregation from the public spaces, domestic violence and other harmful practices in the name of the Islamic law. In fact, as Malaysia is grasping with the concept of Islamic modernity, the *hijāb* wearing women who are usually portrayed as backward and oppressed by a patriarchal Islam and who therefore need to be emancipated, are in fact playing leading roles in all sectors of the 'Islamic Malaysian' Society.

The visibility of the Malay Muslim women who make up about half the Malaysian population today could be said to reflect what I have termed severally as the contemporary phenomenon of "authentic Islamic feminism."[24] Though this

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[22] N. Z. C. Jen-T'chiang, "Advocacy on Inhumane Practices" and Roslizawati Mohd Ramly, Muhammad Khairi Mahyuddin, "Muslims and non-Muslim relations: Bridging the Gap and Building respect", in *The World Today: Current Global Issues*, ed. Ab Rahman, A. (Malaysia: Universiti Sains Islam, Malaysia, 2007), 5.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibrahim Olatunde Uthman, "Feminism in Postmodern Society: An Islamic Perspective," *Journal of Islam in Asia*, vol. 2, no. 2 (2005): 131–150; Uthman, *The Muslim Women of Nigeria and the Feminist Discourse of Shaykh al-Albani* (Kuala Lumpur: The International Islamic University, 2008), 84–87; Uthman, "A Triadic Re-Reading of Zaynab al-Ghazzālī and the Feminist Movement in Islam," *Islamic Studies*, 49:1 (2010): 65-79; Uthman, "Rereading of Zaynab al-Ghazali's Representations of Muslim Women and Islamic Feminism in the 21st Century," *The Islamic Quarterly UK*, Vol. 55, No 3 (2011): 215-232.

phenomenon of authentic Islamic feminism could be traced in Malaysia to the publication of Kāssim Amīn Bey's *Tahrīr al-mar'ah* under the title *Alam Perempuan* in Penang in 1930, it recorded a remarkable landmark during the aforementioned Prime Minister of Islamic Malaysia that women's percentage in all sectors of the economy increased from about 30% in 1957 to about 48% in 1995. This rise was possible with the heavy investment by the Malaysian government in social reconstruction, industrialization and education, especially for women.

Today the Malay Muslim women enjoy basic constitutional rights. They enjoy the freedom to vote, run for office, pursue education and hold administrative and political positions as notable as university presidents and government ministers. Contrary to the claim of the Norwegian Professor, Ingrid Rudie, the Islamic revival in the 1980s that brought about the Malaysian model of development has not curtailed the rights of the Malay Muslim women.[25]

Malaysia is therefore most relevant today as the best model of the Islamic alternative paradigm of progress and development because of the entrenchment of Islamic cultural values in the country. Islam is, according to the Malaysian Federal Constitution, the official religion of the country while other religions are allowed to be "practiced in peace and harmony in any part of the federation."[26] The era of Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad (1981 to 2003), coincided with Islamic resurgence in the Middle East which has been defined by Chandra Muzaffar as: "a description of the endeavor to re-establish Islamic values, Islamic practices, Islamic institutions, Islamic laws, indeed Islam in its entirety, in the lives of Muslims everywhere. It is an attempt to re-create an Islamic ethos, an Islamic social order in the vortex of which is the Islamic human being, guided by the Qur'an and the Sunnah."[27]

Thus, the ascension of Dr. Mahathir Mohamad to the prime minister-ship of Malaysia in 1981 was a watershed in the boosting and entrenchment of Islamic cultural values in Malaysia. His vision was characterized by the need to give Islam and Malays, a greater role in the political and economic structures of the country. He sought to transform the Malay mindset and inculcate Islamic values in the

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[25] Ibrahim Olatunde Uthman, "Muslim Women and the Islamic State between Political Activism and the Islamic Law: An Analysis of the Jilbāb al- Mar'ah al-Muslimah fī Al-kitāb wa al-Sunnah of Shaykh al- Albānī," *IKIM Journal of Islam and International Affairs*, 2/1 (2006): 117-45.

[26] A. Ibrahim, "The Position of Islam in the Constitution of Malaysia," in *Readings on Islam in Southeast Asia*, ed. A. Ibrahim, S. Siddique and Y. Hussain (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asia, 1985), 214.

[27] C. Muzaffar, *Islamic Resurgences in Malaysia* (Petaling Jaya: Penerbit Fajar Bakti, 1987), 2.

economic and political development of the country.[28] In strengthening the position of Islam in every sector of the Malaysian educational, economic, technological, cultural, and political development plan, the government of Dr. Mahathir enlisted the cooperation and support of the global and national leadership of the Islamic resurgence.

For instance, Dr. Mahathir brought into his government, the national Islamic youth leader, the president of the Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM), the Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia, Anwar Ibrahim, thus bringing to the ruling party, the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), a renewed Islamic appeal.[29] In short, the twenty three years of the government of Dr. Mahathir laid the groundwork for Islamic resurgence or Islamization of all sectors of the country. For the first time, the entire spectrum of Malaysians became open to "Islamic input" and Islamic Banks, Islamic insurance companies and the use of the media for the propagation of Islam were officially instituted. All female news casters on radio and television stations were mandated to wear the *hijab*.[30] In 1983, the International Islamic University, (IIUM) was established to advance the Islamization of Knowledge project.

The Islamic Commonwealth of Religions Model and Future of Modern Secular States

The above, not only demonstrates the global side to the Muslim rejection of comprehensive secularism but even the legal secularist separation of religion and politics as is prevalent in some western countries like the United States of America. The Muslim world and Muslims generally tend to reject the secular modern state. This Muslim rejection of the modern secular state or a separation between religion and state, whether in form of "legal separation" or "civil religion" is understandable within the global context of the debates over the extent of the Judeo-Christian basis of Euro-American secular nations.

While secular nations such as the United States establish "a wall of separation between religion and politics," Judeo-Christian practices and symbols still express themselves in the public arena like prayers observed on July 4th,

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[28] O. Bakar, "Islamic and Political Legitimacy in Malaysia" in *Islam and Political Legitimacy*, ed. S. Akbarzadeh and A. Saeed (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 127-149.
[29] D. Camroux, "State Responses to Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia: Accommodation, Co-option, and Confrontation," *Asian Survey*, 36/9 (1996): 852-868.
[30] M. A. Haneef, "The Development and Impact of Islamic Economic Institutions: the Malaysian Experience" in *Islam in Southeast Asia: Political, Social and Strategic Challenges for the 21st Century*, ed. K. S. Nathan and M. H. Kamali (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2005), 82-99.

Thanksgiving and at presidential inaugurations, official observance of Christmas and Easter Holidays and the use of the Gregorian Calendar. Thus, "legal secularism" or what some term "civil religion" in the US has led to what, to borrow the idea of Alexis de Tocqueville, may be termed the "tyranny of the dominant secular Judeo-Christian culture" in the US.[31] That "as a nation, American celebrate Christmas, not Buddha's Birthday," and that "whatever religious diversity they enjoy is always being negotiated in what can only be described as a Christian context," shows according to Stephen Prothero that Buddhists or Muslims etc must invariably "yank their traditions around to Christian norms and organization forms."[32] This explains, in my view, for instance, the non official recognition of other religious practices in the United States such as work free hours to observe the Friday prayers and the adoption of the Islamic Calendar. For this reason also, the use of the *hijāb* in government offices, secondary schools and even higher institutions in many secular countries is almost outlawed. What is unfolding on the *hijāb* in Nigeria is the replica of debates revolving around the veil in modern society. Theodore Gabriel and Rabiha Hannan's collection of articles have shown that the western and European approach of disallowing Islamic religious symbols and individual identities within the overarching framework of secular society is sustaining the polarization between two opposites, the Muslim world and the West.[33] Hence as observed by Malika Ghamidi, the prohibition of the veil in France and elsewhere in Europe is a challenge to modern conceptions of democracy, liberty and human rights etc.[34]

However, the Muslim modern secular state alternative already discussed above is to my mind, either the direct opposite of the Judeo-Christian modern state or even more dangerous. For this state tends to replace the "tyranny of the dominant Judeo-Christian modern secular state" with the "tyranny of the dominant Islamic secular state" as is the case in Malaysia or with a worst and more dangerous form of "tyranny of a classical Islamic state' that refuses to recognize religious pluralism and the "manyness" of religious traditions. This is the case in Saudi Arabia and to a very large extent, Iran, two competing poles in Islamic religiosity. In my view, the Saudi rejection of "manyness" in whatever form, accounts for its support for the return of the military in Egyptian politics, following the ouster of the first democratically elected President, Muhammad Mursi.

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[31] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. II (New York, Vintage Books, 1945), 12.

[32] Stephen Prothero, *American Jesus: How the Son of God Become a National Icon* (New York: Farar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 6-7.

[33] Theodore Gabriel and Rabiha Hannan (eds.), *Islam and the veil: Theoretical and regional contexts*, (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 1-204.

[34] Ibid, 142-147.

For this reason, the classical Islamic understanding of an Islamic state is also not the way forward in today's global village. This is more so in Nigeria where Muslim and Christian prayers still express themselves in the public arena like prayers observed during official ceremonies, such as Independence celebrations, official observance of Muslim festivals of breaking the fast and sacrifice, Christmas and Easter Holidays, yet African Traditional Religion is given no space whatsoever. This may be changing, as for the first time, the incumbent governor of the Osun State in Southwestern Nigeria "Ogbeni" Rauf Aregbeshola now gave expression to the traditional religion of the people in all his official engagements and it is also ensured that it is taught in schools.

My contention here is that the alternative to the modern secular state is the culture of multiple religions and peaceful coexistence that can best be realized in a truly Commonwealth of Religions as demonstrated by the Prophet (SAW) in Madinah. This Commonwealth of Religions is my answer to Moore's question: how can modernity, with its moral imperatives of liberty and tolerance, accommodate an essentially "illiberal" (hostile to liberty) world view.[35] It is simply by embracing the Commonwealth of Religions, which as conceived and implemented by the Prophet (SAW) in Madinah refers to the state that fuses politics with its plural religions. The Commonwealth of Religions I propose differs from the current multicultural and religious America where "bridges are the lifelines of a society on the move" in many ways as it fails to answer the question, "what next?" after realizing "energetic bridge builders" and creating a truly pluralistic society."[36]

Though Diana Eck writes about both Muslim increasing recognition "in American public discourse" and participation "in American public life" as a "two-way traffic" of pluralism, she doesn't show anywhere in her *New Religious America*, whether this is an Active Pluralism traffic (ATM) or a Passive Pluralism Traffic (PPT).[37] The question here is: is it enough to accept Muslim participation in American public life without accepting Islamic teachings, practices and symbols/icons in the same public arena? It is also different from Catherine Albanese's "oneness amidst the manyness" of religions and "combinations among all religious peoples". I am not comfortable with her "postpluralism (the new combinations that occur as people borrow religious ideas and practices from one another).[38]

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[35] Moore, *The Unfamiliar Abode*, 34.
[36] Diana L. Eck, *A New Religious America: How a Christian Country Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation* (New York: Harper One, 2001), 335.
[37] Ibid., 335-385.
[38] Catherine L. Albanese, *America: Religion and Religions*, 5th Edition (Boston: Wadsworth/Cengage Learning, 2013), 11.

My own discomfort with the use of these terms is due to the fact that they confirm, in reality the "tyranny of the dominant secular Judeo-Christian culture" in the US. The "oneness" that is created from the "manyness" (religious pluralism meaning free existence of many faiths) is truly religions that of PPT where all other religions must invariably "bring their traditions around to" the dominant Judeo-Christian norms and ethics. This is true today of Buddhism, and of the Native American Religion as it is true of African American Religion, and Latino-Chicano Native Religions in the United States. All these faiths share one thing in common in the United States; they exist as "Judeo-Christian Buddhism, Native American Religion, African American Religion, Native American religion and Lationo-Chicano Native Religion."

Similarly, "postpluralism" and "combinations" among all religious peoples, in my view presupposes the superiority of some distinctive teachings and practices in a religious tradition, such that other religious traditions would want to borrow and imitate such teachings and practices. This questions whether humans, as the proverbial "blind people trying to feel an elephant", can ever know if what they seek to borrow or emulate is truly the best strand in a religious tradition? For these reasons, the Commonwealth of religions, rather than combining and borrowing the ideas and practices of others, embraces officially both in theory and practice the "manyness" of all religious teachings, practices and symbols and icons, whether in the private, political, economic or public arenas. Such a state while upholding such pillars of the modern state like human rights, empowerment of women, elections, voting, mass education and urbanization, it also officially embraces its plural religious practices, traditions and values   including the application of the *Sharī'ah*/the Christian Cannon Law/the African Customary Law, financial institutions such as the Islamic Banking/the Christian Banking/the African Customary Banking, and the adoption of Cultural symbols such as the Islamic dress, especially the *hijāb*/the Catholic Nun's habit or veil/the Yoruba *iborun*.

In closing, I would like to address the question of how would the state mediate on practices that may be perceived as harmful in the Commonwealth of Religion? To this, my answer is simple: all religious practices and institutions will be officially allowed and observed as long as they are not imposed on the *other*. My Commonwealth of Religions seeks, in the words of the Christian conservative leader, Ralph Reed "a place at the table" for all religions.[39] I give instances from Islam and Christianity.

The punishment for *al-Riddah* (apostasy) and other penalties in Islamic

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[39]Ralph Reed quoted by E. J. Dionne Jr. in Hugh Heclo and Wilfred M. McClay (ed.), *Religion Returns to the Public Square: Faith and Policy in America* (Washington D.C. and

Criminal Law are offered "a place at the table" of the Commonwealth of Religions.
It is immaterial whether they constitute a gross violation of the freedom of religion,
worship and practice as well the right to life or not, as long, as they are
implemented only on those who believe in them. If a person who believes in the
punishment for *al-Riddah*, for example turns round to commit the crime, such a
person, in my view, should suffer the punishment. This is despite my personal view
that *al-Riddah* is not punishable but treason, in line with the *Hanafi* School's
justification for the killing of the apostate. According to the School, the apostate is
killed under the Islamic law because of "averting his aggression and not because of
his apostasy."[40]

The second example of a religious practice that should be offered "a place at
the table" of the Commonwealth of Religions, in my view, is both the permission
of polygamy in the Islamic Law and prohibition of bigamy in the Christian Law,
which is a crime already in Euro-American modern secular states, where even the
consent of a prior spouse makes no difference to the nullity of a plural marriage.
This prohibition of bigamy, especially polygamy, in my own view, violates the
right of those women who feel they can get happiness and fulfillment in multiple
marriages. It is interesting to note that the feminist historian Sarah McDougall
argues that the Christian Euro-American insistence on monogamy and its
enforcement till today may be attributed to the 16th Century Muslim incursions into
Central Europe and the subsequent exposure of European Christians to cultures that
practiced polygamy. For this reason Christian male polygamists were subjected to
harsher punishments, such as death penalty, exile and imprisonment with hard
labor than female bigamists.[41] Yet if a Christian subscribes to this law, then such a
Christian should be punished when the law is violated.

Conclusion

Though the modern secular state is predicated on the secularization theory
that modernization can only be achieved through secularization, the modern
Islamic state in the above Muslim countries shows that Islam can also support
development and progress through the use of the Islamic imperative to provide
social justice, high standards of living, as well as good governance and a
qualitative educational system etc that guarantee not only the right to life but also

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Baltimore/London: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and The Johns Hopkins University
Press), XIV.

[40.] Dr. Wahhabah al-Zuhayli, *Al-fiqh al-IslamiWa adilatuh*, vol. 6 (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr
1996), 187.

[41.] See Sarah McDougall, *Bigamy and Christian Identity in Late Medieval Champagne*
(Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2012).

qualitative living, religious freedom, material comfort and dignity. This paper however calls for a Commonwealth of Religions that can support religious pluralism without the "tyranny of the dominant Judeo-Christian culture" in the "oneness" of "manyness" that emphasizes the PPT model of pluralism whether in the guise of "civil religion" or the "tyranny of the dominant 'Islamic' culture" in some of the Muslim countries discussed in this paper.

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