Comparative Secularisms in a Global Age

Edited by

Linell E. Cady and Elizabeth Shakman Hurd



BL 2747.8 .C645 2010



COMPARATIVE SECULARISMS IN A GLOBAL AGE
Copyright © Linell E. Cady and Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, 2010.

All rights reserved.

First published in 2010 by PALGRAVE MACMILLAN® in the United States—a division of St. Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Where this book is distributed in the UK, Europe and the rest of the world, this is by Palgrave Macmillan, a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

Palgrave® and Macmillan® are registered trademarks in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe and other countries.

ISBN: 978-0-230-62124-4

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Comparative secularisms in a global age / edited by Linell E. Cady and Elizabeth Shakman Hurd.

p. cm.

Chiefly proceedings of a series of conferences held 2007–2009. Includes bibliographical references and index. ISBN 978-0-230-62124-4 (alk. paper)

Secularism—Comparative studies.
 Religion and politics—Comparative studies.
 Secularism—Congresses.
 Religion and politics—Congresses.
 Loady, Linell Elizabeth, 1952–II. Hurd, Elizabeth Shakman, 1970–

BL2747.8.C645 2010 211'.6—dc22

2009036683

A catalogue record of the book is available from the British Library.

Design by Newgen Imaging Systems (P) Ltd., Chennai, India.

First edition: May 2010

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in the United States of America.



- Mic The Wines of Julia Separation 14, 2007
- 24 Falmout "Black at Registe" The Times of finite, September 15, 2000
- 42) Makesh Bungarupu, "A Beidge Teo Ear," The Telegrope, September 12, 5007.
- 4th Moines Statem. Hancope State State and Abuses of the Law of Han State State State Side and 2007.
- 887 PM
- 50. Philade's standing of leaders Transplat at Godeless Durgs carrie a han the rid. 100 at Penart, palities "always the Emergency imposed by Prime Manietor feeling Line Handlin between 1875 and 1977.
- Secularisms Retracted through 15
- Colinia Tamana I smainile S
- 3). Mont Shouking Area, Childhall H. Shoukar Fundamentalise (Delhi 13 Propole, 7-300)

Chapter 12

Islam and Secularism

Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na`im

Introduction

The premise of this chapter is that Islam is consistent with the secular state, defined as neutral regarding all religious doctrine, because the neutrality of the state is more likely to facilitate the authenticity of the religious experience of believers by conviction and free choice. In my view, the notion of an Islamic state is conceptually incoherent, historically unprecedented, and practically unviable. I am not suggesting that Muslim ruling elites never claimed that their state was or is Islamic, or that the general Muslim public has always been clear on the true nature of the state. If this was the case there would be no need for me to make this argument. What I am suggesting is that claims that the state is or can be Islamic are false, and that upon reflection Muslims in general would accept the point I am making. Instead of trying to summarize in this brief chapter the whole theory, as presented elsewhere,1 my purpose here is to argue that the sort of secular state that is compatible with Islam and therefore more likely to be accepted by Muslims is one that is characterized by what I call "weak" secularism. This version of secularism is more characteristic of India and the United States than of France and Turkey. Its defining feature is a willingness to acknowledge and mediate a positive role for religion in public life, instead of attempting to suppress or control religion. This is not easy to do in practice, but should at least be the objective. However, as states are deeply historical and contextual, with each being specific to its own society, I am not calling for the Indian or American models to be copied by other countries.

The quality of being secular is often defined or described in contrast to being religious.² Since it is impossible to define what is religious in universal terms, the definition of the two terms becomes circular, whereby each is the opposite of the other. Beyond such difficulties, it is unwise in my view to contrast the religious and secular. Regarding the state in particular, it cannot be religious because it is a political institution that is

incapable of religious belief or practice. It is incoherent to define the state in contradistinction to what it cannot be anyway. More broadly, it is misleading to contrast the religious and secular in such binary terms because they are in fact mutually interdependent. For Muslims in particular, such a binary distinction tends to confirm their worst apprehensions about the secular state as "anti-religious." In this light, the question is how can the secular state be understood apart from being the opposite of the religious? What are the characteristic features of a secular state, and how is it distinguishable from other types of states?

The response I propose to argue for from an Islamic perspective can be stated as follows. To perform its necessary functions, the state must be neutral regarding religious doctrine, while recognizing and regulating the equally necessary connection between religion and politics. This can best be done, I believe, by a deeply contextual, normatively minimalist secularism of the state as a necessary though insufficient condition for securing the space for the robust and civil debates of pluralism. Conversely, a broader, normatively assertive, and ideologically prescriptive secularism of the Turkish and French variety is in fact counterproductive for inclu-

sive pluralism as a framework for self-determination.

The argument for the sort of secular state I am calling for can be made at several levels and for a variety of reasons. First at a personal level, I need a secular state to be a Muslim by conviction and free choice, while respecting the right of others to subscribe to whatever religious or other belief they wish. More fundamentally, the secular state is a necessary means to facilitate the full potential and flourishing of human life, which is a matter of free and sustained self-determination. Second, at a social and political level, the secular state is necessary for achieving sustained pluralism as distinguished from merely factual demographic diversity. To enable political community in the reality of religious and moral diversity, the state should make minimal moral claims as necessary for keeping the peace and providing essential services. The minimal secularism of the state I am calling for to ensure and facilitate a public role for religion is necessary because society needs the moral depth of religion as a resource for public policy, and as a basis for individual as well as collective self-determination for citizens who happen to be believers. Moreover, since the legitimacy of the secular state among believers depends on its ability to mediate the public role of religion, rather than relegate religion to the so-called private domain, it is misleading and counterproductive to define the secular state by the negative quality of being the opposite of religious. It is equally important to emphasize that the dynamic and multiple role of religion for believers should never be at the expense of unbelievers. It is as wrong to deny unbelievers their commitment to whatever beliefs they choose to adopt as it is to impose those beliefs on believers.

However difficult it may be to achieve and maintain this balance in practice, there is simply no viable alternative. As Charles Taylor argues,

The state can be neither Christian nor Muslim nor Jewish; but by the same token it should also be neither Marxist, nor Kantian, nor Utilitarian. Of course, the democratic state will end up voting laws which (in the best case) reflect the actual convictions of its citizens, which will be either Christian, or Muslim, etc, through the whole gamut of views held in a modern society. But the decisions can't be framed in a way which gives special recognition to one of these views. This is not easy to do; the lines are hard to draw; and they must always be drawn anew. But such is the nature of the enterprise which is the modern secular state. And what better alternative is there for diverse democracies?³

It is especially important to avoid the collapse of religion and the state because of the inherently nonnegotiable nature of religious claims, in contrast to other philosophies and ideologies. Moreover, I would emphasize that even the religious convictions of citizens, when reflected in state law and policy should not be framed as religious. Attributing the quality of religion itself to state laws and policy is not only alienating for non-believers, but it also makes it harder for Muslims to accept change or amendment of those laws and policies through the regular democratic process. It is therefore wiser to refrain from identifying laws and policies in religious terms, though different groups of citizens may ground their political views and choices in terms of their own religion or philosophy.

In short, I am proposing that weak secularism of the state is necessary for a principled and consistent commitment to pluralism as a political and legal framework for enabling individual and collective self-determination, including freedom of religion. Weak secularism makes the least normative claims that are necessary for sustaining pluralism without violating the neutrality of the state regarding religious doctrine. This is not to suggest that the state can or should be neutral in all matters, because the performance of its legitimate functions, like keeping the peace and providing essential services, requires it to make choices among competing views (which are, of course, subject to the safeguards of constitutionalism, human rights, and equal citizenship for all). The secular state must be historical and deeply contextual if it is to secure self-determination for each particular population, which is inherently undermined by any prescriptive or preconceived blueprint of a secular state. It is of course possible to engage in comparative analysis of similarities and differences among various experiences with the secular state, but that is different from using any one historical embodiment of the secular state as normative or representative of the secular state for all others.

An Analytical Model of Weak Secularism

The objective of my proposed theory of the relationship among Islam, state, and society is to ensure the institutional separation of Islam and the state, despite the organic and unavoidable connection between Islam and politics. The first part of this proposition sounds like secularism as commonly understood today, but the second part indicates the opposite. This relationship is always the product of a constant and deeply contextual negotiation, rather than the subject of a fixed formula of either total separation or complete fusion of religion and the state. The paradox of the separation of religion and the state and the connection of religion and politics can only be mediated through practice over time, rather than completely resolved by theoretical analysis or stipulation. The question is how to create the most conducive conditions for this mediation to continue in a constructive fashion, rather than hope to resolve the paradox once and for all.

The two poles of this necessary mediation in the case of Islam can be clarified as follows. First, the modern territorial state should neither seek to enforce Shari'a as positive law and public policy, nor claim to interpret its doctrine and general principles for Muslim citizens. Second, Shari'a principles can and should be a source of public policy and legislation, subject to the fundamental constitutional and human rights of all citizens, men and women, Muslims and non-Muslims equally and without discrimination. In other words, Shari'a principles are neither privileged by being enforced as such by the state nor necessarily excluded as a possible source of state law and policy. The belief of even the vast majority of citizens that these principles are binding as a matter of Islamic religious obligation is not sufficient reason for their enforcement by the state as such, though Shari'a continues to be the basis of individual and collective observance among believers.

The rationale of all public policy and legislation should always be based on what might be called "civic reason." Muslims and other believers should be able to propose policy and legislative initiatives emanating from their religious beliefs, *provided* they can support their proposals in public, free and open debate by reasons that are accessible and convincing to the generality of citizens, regardless of their religion or other beliefs. But since all decisions about policy and legislation are in practice made by majority vote in accordance with democratic principles, all state action must also conform to basic constitutional and human rights safeguards against the tyranny of the majority. In this way, claims that particular policy or legislation is supported by civic reason cannot override objections that it violates the fundamental requirements of equality and nondiscrimination.

It is not possible, nor desirable in my view, for the people of any society to keep their religious beliefs, commitments, concerns, and doubts

out of their political choices and decisions. It is healthier and more practical to recognize and regulate the role of religion as a legitimate source for informing political decisions than to force religious reasoning into the domain of secretive politics, and thereby constrain or distort the political participation of believers. It is also necessary to challenge the superiority of an abstract notion of a purely secular reasoning over a religious reasoning, as if the former is rational and scientific, while the latter is irrational and superstitious. The categories of understanding people employ in their everyday lives cannot neatly be compartmentalized into mutually exclusive secular and religious realms.⁵

It is equally important to emphasize that the model of secularism I am proposing does not accord less value to secular modes of being and thinking in the world than to religious modes. The object is to respect both types of approaches to life, and to bring people who hold them into mutually respectful interaction, rather than to privilege one over the other. This is why I distinguish between Islam and the state, on the one hand, and Islam and politics, on the other, to ensure institutional separation in the first relationship and to regulate continued connectedness in the second. Securing institutional separation of Islam and the state is necessary for affirming and regulating the relationship between Islam and politics to ensure that the religious convictions of the majority of the population are not imposed on the minority except by their own free and voluntary acceptance through civic reason. Majority rule is always subject to the human rights of every single citizen, even if those rights are not asserted in practice.

The proposed framework seeks to establish a sustainable and legitimate conceptual and institutional structure for an ongoing process, where perception of Shari'a and its interaction with principles of secularism, constitutionalism, and democratic governance can be negotiated and debated among different interlocutors in each society. In all societies, Western and non-Western, the interaction of these principles is a highly contextual formation, contingent on sociological and historical conditions, and entrenched through specific norms of cultural legitimacy. In this gradual and tentative process of consensus-building through civic reason, various combinations of persons and groups of different religious or philosophical persuasion may agree on one issue but disagree on another. Alliances among different constituencies may succeed or fail in achieving the adoption of some policy or legislation by the state, but none of that will be permanent and conclusive. Whatever happens to be the substantive outcome of political strategies regarding any issue, it is made by and can change through a process of civic reason that is equally accessible to all citizens.

Shari'a principles should not be presented for enactment into law only because Muslims believe them to be binding because that claim cannot be the subject of civic reason, whereby all citizens can freely debate the issues

and negotiate the outcomes. It is true that people will always disagree about reasons and their rationale, but for the purposes of public policy and legislation that is binding on all citizens reasoning should always be open to debate and contestation among all citizens. This is not possible when the reasons and their rationale for the position of one side are simply assertions of their religious conviction or ideological imperative.

For the success of the proposed framework, it is necessary that the state does not itself join as a partisan in the negotiation of the role of Islam and Shari'a in the community. Since the state and its institutions are not human agents who can act, any action taken in the name of the state is in fact that of the officials who control and operate the relevant organs of the state. This reality only emphasizes the imperative of neutrality of all state institutions and actors on matters of religious doctrine and practice in the community. The state should also not intervene in civic reason on the basis of nonreligious or secular rationale, except to uphold the constitutional and other safeguards of free and fair debate and contestation. In other words, the role of state institutions as such should be limited to protecting civic reason and adjudicating dispute according to established constitutional and judicial criteria and process. This does not mean that the state will actually be completely neutral in these matters because that is not possible for the human beings who act in the name of the state. Rather, my point is that state neutrality should be the objective that all actors and institutional safeguards should strive to achieve. The neutrality of the state must be pursued through a variety of safeguards and processes of political and legal accountability for any degree of neutrality to materialize. The critical and delicate role of the state is the reason why the distinction between state and politics is both necessary and difficult to maintain. In fact, the necessity and difficulty of achieving and sustaining this balance are related because the state itself is a political institution. The distinction between state and politics in any society will not be a permanently settled boundary and will vary depending on the government in power at any time. These considerations remind us of the critical role of institutional and normative safeguards such as constitutionalism, human rights, and citizenship as the essential framework for civic reason.

That said, it is unrealistic to expect people to fully comply with the requirements of civic reason, because such choices are made within the realm of inner motivation and intentions. It is difficult to tell why people vote in a particular way or justify their political agenda to themselves or to their close associates. The requirement of civic reason and reasoning processes does not assume that people who control the state can be neutral. On the contrary, this requirement must be the objective of the operation of the state precisely because people are likely to continue to act on personal beliefs or justifications. The requirement to publicly and openly present justifications

that are based on reasons that the generality of the population can freely accept or reject will over time encourage and develop a broader consensus among the population at large, beyond the narrow religious or other beliefs of various individuals and groups. It is also relevant to note here that the ability to present public reasons and debate them publicly is already present in most societies, and what I am calling for is its further development consciously and incrementally, over time, rather than suggesting that it is totally absent now or expecting it to be fully realized immediately.

Further Reflections: Secularism as Mediation

Muslims tend to be apprehensive about the term "secularism," which they associate with hostility to religion. Yet, many Islamic societies, from Senegal to Turkey to Central, South and Southeastern Asia, have apparently accepted the term "secularism" in their own domestic constitutional and political discourse. Although the meaning and implications of such usage must be understood and assessed in relation to each particular case, the general currency of the term makes it useful for comparative reflection. It should also be noted that the term carries a wide variety of meanings, including decline of religion, conformity to the present world, disengagement or differentiation of society from religion, shifts from the source of divine power to phenomena of human capability and creation, and "desacralization" or "sacralization" of rationality. The cluster of meanings associated with the term varies by society at different moments, and by different groups within each society. Hence for our purposes here, the point is that any conception of secularism is so contested within and among different societies that there is simply no uniform systematic model that fits the wide variety of meanings and experiences of different societies.

I am therefore presenting a model of secularism as a framework for mediating permanent tensions in the relationship between religion and the state on the one hand, and the connectedness of religion and politics, on the other. Any conception of secularism will necessarily be multidimensional, reflecting elements of the historical, political, social, and economic land-scape of each country. Accordingly, secularism for various Islamic societies must account for the religious dimension of the lives of local communities, instead of being seen as an effort to impose preconceived notions of categorical relegation of religion to the private domain. The notion of secularism as mediation confronts a permanent paradox: on the one hand, the various organs and institutions of the state are conceived and operated everywhere by persons whose religious or philosophical beliefs will necessarily be reflected in their thinking and behavior. Yet, ruling elites will probably attempt to impose their religious views on others, perhaps in the

name of majority rule or divine command, but to the severe detriment of political stability, fundamental human rights, and social justice in the country. In my view, the tension between such competing claims should be acknowledged and mediated, instead of insisting on the illusion of either

complete separation or total fusion of religion and state.

Allowing religious principles to play a positive role in public life without permitting them to be implemented as such through law and policy is a delicate balance that each society must strive to maintain for itself over time. For example, such matters as dress style and religious education will normally remain in the realm of free choice, but can also be the subject of public debate, even constitutional litigation, to balance competing claims, This can happen, for instance, regarding dress requirements for safety in the work place or the need for comparative and critical religious education in state schools to enhance religious tolerance and secularism. I am not suggesting that the context and conditions of free choice of dress or religious education will not be controversial. In fact, such matters are likely to be very complex at a personal and societal level. Rather, my concern is with ensuring, as far as humanly possible, fair, open, and inclusive conditions for the negotiation of public policy in such matters. These conditions, for instance, are to be secured through the entrenchment of such fundamental rights of persons and communities as the right to education and freedom of religion and expression, on the one hand, and due consideration for legitimate public interests or concerns, on the other. There is no simple or categorical formula to be prescribed for automatic application in every case, though general principles and broader frameworks for the mediation of such issues will emerge and continue to evolve within each society.

Another aspect of the notion of mediation is that the ability of secularism to politically unite people of divergent religious and philosophical commitments depends on its making minimal moral claims on the community and its members. It is true that secularism should not be completely morally neutral, as it must encourage a certain civic ethos to achieve its own objective of safeguarding inclusive pluralism. It is also possible for minimal moral neutrality to evolve into stronger consensus on some public policy and legislative choices. In practice, however, the ability of secularism to politically unite diverse communities diminishes to the degree that it is taken to require specific outcomes of some morally divisive issues. In fact, the more morally charged an issue, the greater its threat to the credibility of a view of secularism that seeks to prescribe the answer. The point can perhaps be illustrated with reference to controversies over abortion or euthanasia. On the one hand, the imperative of separation of religion and the state would preclude the implementation of a policy outcome that is based on purely religious doctrine. On the other hand, denying those believers the right to express their views on such matters in religious terms would undermine their commitment to

the principle of secularism. The challenge is how to permit religious discourse among those who wish to engage in it, while ensuring that public policy and legislation in all matters are based on civic reason, especially

if they are highly morally charged.

It is also important to challenge the fallacy of a binary distinction between the religious and secular, as noted at the beginning of this chapter, because the meaning and relevance of religion to believers is in their every day "secular" lives. It is unrealistic to view these two dimensions of human experience in strict separation since religious considerations often provide the moral foundations of public policy, even in so-called secularized societies. Questions of public policy, such as how to determine fair and equitable grounds for legal dissolution of marriage, division of matrimonial property, or how to adjudicate custody of children after divorce, necessarily draw on moral and ethical underpinnings that are strongly influenced, if not definitively shaped, by religion in any society. Secularism, as simply the separation of religion and the state, is not only incapable of meeting the collective requirements of public policy, but it also fails to provide sufficient guidance for individual citizens in making important personal choices in their private lives or public political participation. I am not of course suggesting that religion is the sole basis of morality for all people, but it is certainly of paramount importance in the moral reflection of believers, who remain the majority in most societies today.

A perception of secularism as simply the separation of religion and the state is not sufficient for addressing any objections or reservations believers may have about specific constitutional norms and human rights standards. For example, since discrimination against women is often justified on religious grounds in Islamic societies, this source of systematic and gross violation of human rights cannot be eliminated without addressing the commonly perceived religious rationale. This must also be done without violating freedom of religion or belief for Muslims, which is also a fundamental human right. Although a secular discourse in terms of separation of religion and the state can be respectful of religious sensibilities, it is unlikely to succeed in rebutting religious justifications of discrimination without invoking a religious argument against discrimination. In contrast, including a public role for religion can encourage and facilitate internal debate and dissent within religious traditions that can overcome such religiously based objections. Requiring the state to be neutral regarding religion precludes use of the coercive power of the state to suppress debate and dissent, but that safe space still needs to be actively used by citizens to promote religious views that support equality for women and other human rights. Moreover, religious discourse is needed for promoting the legitimacy of the doctrine of separation of religion and the state itself, as well as other general principles of constitutionalism and human rights.

Concluding Remarks: Comparative Reflection

There is a dialectic relationship between local deeply contextual experience of various societies and universal norms or principles that can be extrapolated from those experiences. For instance, there is no universally shared "blueprint" of what concepts such as secularism, constitutionalism, citizenship, and civic reason mean. Whatever generalizations we can make about these and related ideas are based on comparative reflection upon actual experiences, after the fact and over long periods of time. No society or region of the world has the power or authority to define these concepts for others, but all societies can and do learn from each other's experiences, even when that is not realized or acknowledged. The balance of power and differential in resources, which is currently still in favor of Western over non-Western societies, may make it harder to appreciate these realities of autonomy and interdependence of human societies. The point I am trying to make may be clearer when we consider the longer range of human history, but it can also be observed in our daily experiences of resisting coercive imposition, while accepting friendly and respectful efforts to influence our views or behavior.

In this light, any relevant idea and argument in the debate about a secular state, constitutionalism, democracy, and so forth, in Islamic settings should not be reduced to misleading and untenable dichotomies of "Western" and "non-Western" concepts and institutions. These debates in any part of the world are about the achievement of shared visions of human dignity and social justice under similar conditions in the present local and global context. There is also a long history of exchange of ideas and experiences among a wide variety of religious and cultural communities, regardless of perceptions of internal or external origins or pedigree of those influences. While elites or ideologues may assert fundamental difference between "them" and "us," there has always been profound dialogue and exchange across ancient and medieval civilizations, into the colonial and postcolonial era. There are and will be in the future some Muslims and non-Muslims who will insist on the "them and us" dichotomy, indeed, those holding confrontational and competitive attitudes tend to seek out and promote their counterpart on each side of this imagined divide.

To reiterate, the model I am proposing is closer to the forms of secularism located in India and the United States than to those of Turkey and France. However, the deeply contextual and historical nature of secularism everywhere not only precludes imposing the experience of one society on another, as emphasized earlier, but also indicates that the experience of the same country can change over time. The distinction between weak and strong secularism I am employing is sometimes expressed in terms of passive and assertive secularism:

Passive secularism, which requires that the secular state play a "passive" role in avoiding the establishment of any religions, allows for the public visibility of religion. Assertive secularism, by contrast, means that the state excludes religion from the public sphere and plays an "assertive" role as the agent of a social engineering project that confines religion to the private domain. Thus, passive secularism is a pragmatic political principle that tries to maintain state neutrality toward various religions, whereas assertive secularism is a "comprehensive doctrine" that aims to eliminate religion from the public sphere.⁷

The concept of weak secularism I have outlined in this chapter can also be called passive secularism, provided the objective of promoting pluralism is emphasized. As I emphasized at the beginning, the problem with assertive/strong secularism is that it fails to take seriously the challenge of pluralism to facilitate constant negotiation and contestation among different views in society, including religious perspectives. Assertive secularism diminishes possibilities of inclusive pluralistic discourse and favors a monolithic secular discourse, thereby undermining the individual and collective right to self-determination of religious believers.

In proposing state neutrality regarding religion in the interest of pluralism, I would also note that neutrality and pluralism are not contextually independent concepts—their meaning and practice are outcomes of constant negotiations and contestations among social and political actors operating and interacting in local contexts. To take the call for a historically contextual secularism seriously is to focus on how locally defined notions of neutrality and pluralism interact in practice to enable people to negotiate difficult moral issues like abortion, or urgent practical questions like religious education, matters of dress and lifestyle. Moreover, since no community remains static, and communities can change significantly and rapidly in the present globalized context, one should expect the locally determined meaning of secularism to shift and change over time. In other words, local understandings and practices of neutrality and pluralism and processes of their interaction and outcome are all constantly contested and changing everywhere, and not only in countries of the global south.

In the final analysis, the model of weak secularism I am proposing should be both robust and flexible. It must be robust in the sense of being effective in refereeing the negotiation of policy and legislative matters in a pluralistic society, while ensuring the neutrality of the state toward religion. The model of weak secularism should also be flexible to accommodate and adapt to mounting and increasingly complex realities of diversity. In accordance

with this combination of efficacy and flexibility, I have attempted to present a sufficiently specific understanding of weak secularism, while trying to avoid preempting how and why issues and controversies are bound to arise, or prescribing uniform solutions for all societies. By mediating competing religious perspectives of the public good, while remaining responsive to local concerns, this model facilitates genuine personal commitment to Islam precisely because it secures freedom of religion for all citizens. To be the Muslim I choose to be by choice and conviction, I need the state to remain neutral regarding all religions and beliefs, while enabling the interplay of various dimensions of personal and social life, whether perceived as secular or religious. All such dimensions are integral to being human.

Notes

- Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, Islam and the Secular State: Negotiating the Future of Sharia (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).
- For instance, Edward Bailey suggests that "Secular is really quite easy to define! Its meaning keeps changing yet remains consistent. It always means, simply, the opposite of 'religious'—whatever that means." Quoted in William H. Swatos, Jr., "Secularization Theory: The Course of a Concept," Sociology of Religion 60, no. 3 (Fall 1999): 213.
- See Charles Taylor's post "Secularism and Critique," The Immanent Frame, http://www.ssrc.org/blogs/immanent_frame/2008/04/24/secularism-andcritique/ (accessed April 24, 2008).
- 4. I use this term to distinguish my conception from John Rawls' notion of "public reason," which I find to be too prescriptive and U.S.-specific. See An- Na'im, Islam and the Secular State, 97–101. As I understand it, Rawls' conception of public reason is too prescriptive for participants and the sort of reasoning they should deploy. For instance, he distinguishes between the scope of public reason and what he calls the "background culture" of civil society, which includes such associations as churches, universities, and the like. He also excludes the media from the realm of public reason. See, John Rawls, Political Liberalism (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 443, 444.
- Ashis Nandy, Talking India: Ashis Nandy in Conversation with Ramin Jahanbegloo (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 103–104.
- 6. On the contested meaning of American secularism, for instance, see, John Witte Jr., Religion and the American Constitutional Experiment: Essential Rights and Liberties (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999); Noah Feldman, Divided by God: America's Church-State Problem—and What We Should Do about It (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005); and Bruce T. Murray, Religious Liberty in America: The First Amendment in Historical and Contemporary Perspective (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008).
- Ahmet T. Kuru, "Passive and Assertive Secularism: Historical Conditions, Ideological Struggles, and State Policies toward Religion," World Politics 59 (July 2007): 571.