

The West: Concept, Narrative, and Politics

8.-9.12.2016

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Western culture and traditions on Laisizm versus orientalism

Summary:

Secularism is a crucial source of political authority in the theory of International Relations as well as in practice. Secularists characterise “religion” itself, and they separate it mainly from other fields, such as state, economy and science. The separation between secularism and religion, is something that creates a consensus, that’s kept up by a strong, as well as historically constructed set of beliefs, including secularism as the comprehension of God’s will, secularism as the natural evolution towards a universal morality, and secularism as a normal byproduct of economic modernization.

To the contrary of all these aspirations, secularism is an asset serving as a common model of public life, whether domestically or internationally. The formation of the category of religion, and its delineation from politics is a highly politicized decision that is not subject to a final resting point, and the pretence of a final resting point, impassions and adds fuel to the international conflict rather than subsidence of it. The religion/politics deliberation is a perpetual issue of authority, with complex ties to the state system, the global economy, international ethics, and other more heavily theorized aspects of power in international relations.

In my paper, I will take an example from the religious politics of Turkey and Pakistan, both of whom have witnessed the ascent of powerful non-Western and non-secular parties and platforms within their borders. From a highly strict secularist perspective, both the Turkish Justice and Development Party and the Pakistani United Action Front, are essentially at odds with society, as these two parties have contributed to the role of Islam within in the public sphere, and have threatened the Westernized boundaries between the sacred and secular parties. These sacred and secular parties have not been very warmly welcomed among the secularists. The overarching point, is that the international community should consider supporting a pluralistic democracy. Rasul Bakhsh Rais, a professor at Quaid-i-Azam University in Islamabad, stated that the worst thing the Pakistani government could do was to force repression of the United Action Front. Saying, “They won’t be in a position to alter the foreign policy or domestic policy of the government, but they will be a strong voice, and that voice needs to be heard” Yet that kind of proposition as a remedy alone is inadequate. As Casanova argues, with reference to religious intervention in the public sphere, “the purpose of such interventions in the undifferentiated public sphere is not simply on “empowering public

debate” but on challenging the very claims of the secular sphere towards differentiated autonomy exempt from extrinsic normative constraints”. That is to say, the secularists claim to show preference mainly towards neutrality, as justice and democracy itself is problematic. Empirical research thus leads many to believe that economic development, either increases chances for a transition to democracy (from the theory of modernization), or serves a purpose for newly establishment, or already established democracies to consolidate.

The paper seeks to present the example of Turkey, starting from the early 2000s, and introduces the fourth stage of Turkey’s modernization. In that period, the modernization process underwent radical transformations due to the effects of development across the world, and modernism was perpetuated. The AKP (Justice and Development Party) winning the general elections in 2002, was the beginning of a so called new period in terms of so-called modernization in Turkey.

AKP constructed a “conservative democrat” ideological identity in Turkey, and it raised the profile of, as well as made an influence on the conservative democrat movement, of which its origins started becoming evident during the period of Menderes and Özal, and stems from the integration of the Islamic movements, with the conservative democrat movement, and gained the stature of a “negotiating country” through reforms, with a policy towards considering accession to EU important, followed by suspension of Turkey’s membership talks by her anti-democratic practices, such as suppression of media channels, columnists, and arresting around 150 journalists, detaining more than 2,300 judges and prosecutors, and suspending or dismissing almost 130,000 public employees in response to a failed coup in July against President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.