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Book Review

Karamo Faruk Konneh

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Book Review

Anna Triandafyllidou and Tariq Modood (eds), **The Problem of Religious Diversity: European Challenges and Asian Approaches**; Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2017, \$53.61 (Paperback), pp. 352, ISBN 9781474419093

Karamo Faruk Konneh 

Department of Migration Studies, Ankara Social Sciences University, Ankara, Turkey

Religion and religious diversity are two of the most critical aspects of European diversity today. Older models of republicanism and multiculturalism appear to be in crisis, but no new “third route” between laïcité and state religion is emerging. The book titled “The Problem of Religious Diversity: European Challenges and Asian Approaches” was unpacked by a group of authors who dissect “the problem and complications of religious diversity in European and Asian societies.” They begin with the questions of whether equalizing upwards or downwards is the best way to deal with religious diversity, what challenges stand in the way of more egalitarian religious pluralism, and what lessons can be drawn from Middle Eastern and Asian policies and practices where religious plurality and integration taking place in public spaces are the rule rather than the exception. In both regions, religious plurality and public religion are the norms.

The authors provide a comprehensive account of the type and degree of secularism as the requirements to address the theoretical or normative difficulties of religious diversity in modern western societies. The authors also investigate how Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and Oceania administer and accommodate multiple religious populations under the rule of a single state. The writers also discuss whether separating church and state in Europe or North America is a more successful method to deal with religious diversity than appreciating and accepting religion as part of public and political life.

The book is divided into two thematic parts. In the first part, the book explores the idea and practice of secularism, focusing on Modood’s concept of “moderate secularism” across Europe and beyond. Triandafyllidou’s chapter on the nation and religion sets the background by noting that religious minorities in Europe are considered more problematic than ethnic and national minorities. Islamophobia is a result of a comeback of nationalism and religion as an identity marker, which she calls a “revival of rootedness” in response to globalization’s unsettling effects. Modood promotes moderate secularism, currently prevalent in most European nations. In its most common form, political secularism is about the two-way mutual autonomy of the state and religion, or “twin tolerations” (2001). Modood’s moderate secularism is already existent in most European countries and is defined as a “historically evolved collection of structures and practices” (p.

CONTACT Karamo Faruk Konneh  karamofaruk.konneh@student.asbu.edu.tr

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58). He prefers a multiculturalist secularism that isn't "intrinsically terrified of religious communities and religion in public life" compared to Rawls' strict separation or its reverse (the reassertion of Christianity in society) (Ch. 3, p. 60-64).

In the first part of the book, Gurpreet Mahajan discusses India's secular paradigm. Those who assume Europe can learn from how the "world's greatest democracy" accommodates religious diversity will be disappointed. Mahajan states neither India nor its moderate secularism "can handle strong religious divisions" (p. 85). Mahajan parodies France's "laïcité" to illustrate her uncertain and unfortunate views. Tariq Ramadan, a frequent visitor to France, is derided by those who claim to protect French secularism and knows what is at stake. Ramadan demonstrates that secularism, at least as a legal framework, is not inherently antagonistic to religious minorities in France, despite what some may say about its allegedly confrontational nature. However, the interpretation of "neutrality" is problematic as a direct response to worries over the presence of Muslims in the western world, who "are perceived to disturb or even destroy the alleged neutrality of public space." (p. 97). Ramadan believes secularism is the best way to govern multiple religions.

Marie-Claire Foblets' concluding contribution to part one of the book, is arguably the most fascinating, as she argues for a form of reasonable accommodation and integration as a strategy to prevent the judiciary from being inundated with issues involving religious freedom and its protection. Foblets criticizes "the instrumentalization of religious freedom for political goals" (p. 120). She suggests that many religious issues could be addressed amicably without litigation if a legal right to reasonable accommodation were applied.

The second part of the book examines case studies that can help Europe manage religious diversity. Alfred Stepan examines Indonesia and the Pancasila philosophy, which explains the country's commitment to democracy and non-confrontational religious pluralism despite calls for an Islamic state. Pancasila explains Indonesia's commitment to democracy and non-confrontational religious diversity. Despite the majority of the Muslim population, other religions' holidays are celebrated. Stepan thinks that European democracies may adopt this strategy because "none of these 60 religious festivals in Western Europe is for a non-Christian minority faith" (p. 146). Due to the Malaysian and Indonesian cultural similarities in terms of religious practices, Europe can't learn much from Indonesia's experience, but Malaysia can imitate and learn much from Indonesia's history. According to Ahmad Fauzi, Abdul Hamid, and Zawawi Ibrahim, "soft secularism" is threatened in a country where state-driven Islamism is harming religious minorities.

Rochana Bajpai thinks that India has secular potential. In the book's last two chapters, Rochana contends that Hindu nationalism is a test case for secularism and diversity in India. Modood's moderate secularism is upheld in India as "equal consideration of

all religions” and “religious freedom rights of groups and minorities” (p. 217). Given the current political climate in India, one would question if other nations should be emulating India’s type of constitutional secularism, which allows for a wide range of religious and ethnic groups to coexist peacefully. It is worth noting that Muslim minorities are almost always at the center of political issues in India and Europe involving secularism and multiculturalism. This analogy isn’t developed enough in the chapter, and it would have been nice to hear more about the implications of Hindu nationalism.

Australia, which combines secularism and multiculturalism, is one of the three final nation scenarios that yield more concrete European lessons. State and federal laws prevent bigotry in public institutions. According to Geoffrey Brahm Levey, “Australian diversity works in some ways, not others” (p. 235). Particularly, he condemns what he sees as a rising tide of cultural nationalism, which has been boosted in the United States as it has in Europe by people’s worries about the integration of Muslims. The evaluation of Israel by Raphael Cohen-Almagor is far more damning since it “offends and discriminates against non-Orthodox Jews as well as non-Jews.” If Australia is unable to live up to expectations as an ideal example, then the judgment of Israel is much more scathing.” (p. 258).

Haldun Gülalp expertly explains how, while having been long cited as an example of “assertive secularism” alongside France, Turkey now employs the precise tools the state uses to marginalize religion in order to establish religious legitimacy. This might be one of the best sections of the book, since it corrects common misconceptions about Turkey’s secular government.

The collection is completed by two thought-provoking works by Joseph Weiler and Bhikhu Parekh. The editors have done an outstanding job of bringing together a remarkable collection of scholars to discuss these issues, which are important not only for political reasons in theory but also for practical policymaking. This book will be very helpful to anybody interested in studying secularism and diversity as they are practiced in other parts of the world. Those who were hoping to get insight into how Europe may meet the challenge posed by its many religious communities may be left dissatisfied. None of the authors argue for Europe to embrace the models and approaches discussed, and one of the main reasons for this is that many of these nations are “tending to move away from religious pluralism and/or secularism toward institutionalized religious majoritarianism” (p. 22). The most essential thing to learn from this situation is perhaps how we can prevent a situation like this from occurring in Europe. At this point in history, it would be a very valuable lesson.

Orcid

Karamo Faruk Konneh  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5785-2023>