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SECULAR BEATS SPIRITUAL: THE WESTERNIZATION OF THE EASTERNIZATION OF THE WEST

Steve Bruce

English, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, 199 pp.

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Steve Bruce is an eminent British sociologist who has contributed significantly to sociology, particularly religion and secularisation. Bruce started his book by recalling the secularisation of the West as a decline in religious influence in modern societies. He continued with the examination of spirituality in British society. His choice of British society also demonstrates examples of the existence of Eastern spirituality in a highly secularised Western community. He explored the new age movements in the UK by highlighting the contemporary understanding of spirituality. Mainly, he emphasised the spiritual seeking in society with a description of ‘subjective turn’. ‘Subjective turn’ can be understood as a focus on personal experience and personal benefits rather than fulfilling religious duties or obeying organised rules. He mentioned an individualistic approach to religion and spirituality in contemporary society as a way of another consequences of secularisation process. Contrary to mainstream, organised religious appearances and organisations, subjective experience becomes the main understanding of religion and spirituality. These contemporary, new age, Eastern-driven movements are mainly focused on the self and intuition. The book aims to examine the ‘secularisation thesis’ in a Western context, especially in Britain, by reviewing the Westernisation of Eastern religions and traditions.

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As Steve Bruce has discussed, the issue of “the Westernisation of the Easternisation of the West” is an example of the post secular period. Post secular society could be described as a time when a renewed interest in religion and spirituality occurs in different social locations. Bruce has described how so-called Eastern religious beliefs and practices have migrated to the West and, in the process, become westernised.

In this book, *Secular Beats Spiritual: The Westernization of the Easternization of the West* (2017), Steve Bruce provides another approach to Secularisation, highlighting the Western effects on Eastern beliefs and practices. Bruce discussed the journey of the various religions and beliefs from east to west in the British sample. He discussed these in three subsections: ‘Yogins and Yoga’, ‘Buddhism Religious and Secular’, and ‘Islam: the Un pillaged Eastern Religion’. These practices have been examined as a way of spiritual existence in modern British society, as he stated that religion has not declined; it has just changed. His view on religion and spirituality has highlighted the effects of the secularisation thesis on the practices in this book, as he stated the appearance of various traditions in the British sample. Although the book pointed out some of Eastern traditions, the depth of presentation of the traditions are needed to be extended, especially the part about Islam.

In Chapter 5, Bruce discussed Islam as an un pillaged Eastern religion. He mentioned Islam as having less contribution to contemporary religious and spiritual innovations. It is also interesting that, compared to the other traditions, Bruce has not mentioned Sufism much, a spiritual tradition in Islam quite popular in modern Britain. His reference to the Wikipedia sources for the Subud is another point to state the need for more references. However, he mentioned that the effects of the easternisation of the West had made little; he missed out on the effects of Islam and Sufism in Britain, as he did not mention Sufi groups such as the Naqshbandi community of Shayk Nazim¹. Although he stated that Islam is different from Hinduism and Buddhism and mentioned that ‘Islam is precisely the sort of religion that the denizens of the New Age milieu reject’³, he missed out on some movements that emerged

1 Ron Geaves - Theodore Gabriel, (eds). *Sufism in Britain* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013).

2 Steve Bruce, *Secular Beats Spiritual: The Westernization of the Easternization of the West* (Oxford: Oxford Press, 2017), 110.

3 Mark Sedgwick, *Western Sufism: From the Abbasids to the new age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

from Sufi Islam and developed as new-age movements, such as the Inayat Khan Sufi movement⁴. The movement is a popular and showing a sort of new age definition among the followers and extensive to the Europe.

Additionally, another study conducted in England on British Sufis also stated that many rejected materialism, secularisation, and religious tradition⁴. Hence, the emergence of people who have no formal connection with religion yet have a desire for spirituality, responds well to the contemporary post secular period. The desire for spirituality within secular British society may thus be seen in the search for other traditions – such as Sufism. Bruce has described how so-called Eastern religious beliefs and practices have migrated to the West and, in the process become Westernized. However, not provide detailed information on Islam and Sufism in that context.

Another point is that the theory of the Westernization of the Easternization of the West should be examined in detail enough to understand the difference between the Easternization of the West and the Westernization of the East. Although Bruce mentioned some points, there is still a greater need to specify what is east and what is west. While he discussed only a little about the USA, his main focus was Britain rather than the rest of Europe. Additionally, another question to ask How a religion or tradition can be understood as Eastern or Western. Can we say that Christianity is a Western religion? What makes a religion or tradition as Western? The expectation to find answer to these questions were left blanked.

In chapter 6, Counting Spirituality, he mentioned the change in the main aim of this spirituality in modern society. He mentioned that the main aim has changed in the popular involvement in religion and spiritual innovations as a reason for physical and psychological well-being rather than spiritual growth. However, the Kendal town sample and Scottish Social Attitudes study have been mentioned in the chapter; it needs a holistic approach to Britain, as more needs to be mentioned for other religions and traditions.

In the final chapter, Secular Beats the Spiritual, Bruce mentioned the main argument of his book, highlighting the understanding of secularisation in modern society. He states that the spiritual market has increased with alternative spirituality and the individualistic benefits of these popular new age or Eastern-inspired movements. He stated many British approach to new

⁴ Ali Kose, *Conversion To Islam: A Study of Native British Converts* (London: Routledge, 1996).

**694 • SECULAR BEATS SPIRITUAL: THE WESTERNIZATION OF
THE EASTERNIZATION OF THE WEST**

age, Eastern driven movements such as Yoga, retreats and activities, and the reduced number of the religious services in churches.

This book is an important contribution to understanding a secular society in the British sample from a broader perspective of the different new age, Eastern-inspired movements. The rise of spirituality in British society undermines the secularisation theory. In his book, the author showed that instead of looking at the society from the secularisation approach, religion is still in every part of life either through spirituality or the religious appearance. Although there needs to be more clarification of what West and East are or how to define some traditions as Eastern or Western, raising these questions opens a need to be answered with more reflection.

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