Universalism from Below: Muslims and Democracy in Context

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Abstract

This paper examines the complex relations between the global concepts of modernity and democracy, and the local perception of culture and religion in the context of the Muslim world. The paper attempts to answer the following questions: Is the Muslim tradition/culture "exceptionally" immune to the process of democratization? If not, what does it mean to be a modern progressive Muslim today? Is the Western version of modernity a universal concept, or should Muslims seek a particular path to modernity? To what extent a Muslim democracy is a universal concept and to what degree is a particular model? The paper suggests that neither a hegemonic universalism nor an essentialist particularism can explain the complex relations between Islam and modernity. "Universalism from below" can better lead Muslims to democracy, given its equal distance from an Islamist cultural essentialism and a holistic hegemonic universalism. The paper applies the concept of "universalism from below" to the public role of religion in the Muslim world. The findings suggest that neither political/state-sponsored Islam represented by culturalists nor private/isolated Islam advocated by monist-universalists contribute to democratization in the Muslim World. The paper examines the extent to which an alternative concept of *public civil Islam* would contribute to resolve the tension between the universal and particular paradigms in the Muslim world.

Introduction

Three Theoretical Approaches

The central argument in this paper represents the central conflict that characterizes the Muslim world today that is the relation between the universal and the particular paradigms, or between universalism and culturalism. The paper attempts to answer the following questions: Is the Muslim tradition/culture "exceptionally" immune to the process of democratization? If not, what does it mean to be a modern progressive Muslim today? Is the Western version of modernity a universal concept, or should Muslims seek a particular path to modernity? To what extent a Muslim democracy is a universal concept and to what degree is a particular model?

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To answer these questions, I propose that a dialectical and critical approach can better explain the complex relation between the universal and the particular paradigms, or between the global concept of modernity and democracy, and the local perception of culture and religion. This approach provides us with a third alternative synthetic path; this path is not, however, a simple half-hearted compromise between a holistic hegemonic concept of universalism and a conservative essentialist perception of particularism.

This paper examines the theoretical significance and empirical relevance of this alternative path to democracy in the Muslim World, while keeping an equal distance from wholesale advocates and radical opponents of modernity, or, to use Charles Taylor's (1992) concepts, "boosters" and "knockers" of modernity.[1] More specifically, Taylor's "knockers" and "boosters" are identified as the culturalists and the monist-universalists, respectively (Parekh 1999). Culturalism is defined as an essentialist interpretation of Western and Islamist traditions where these traditions are perceived to be in constant collision. Monist-universalism is identified as a holistic and ethno-centric interpretation of modern values where an abstract and hegemonic universalism of the Western Enlightenment overlooks the unique experience of other traditions. The third alternative is identified as an inclusive universalism – a *universalism from below*, or minimum-universalism where the dialectical relation between the universal and the particular models construct a democratic and inclusive project of modernity/modernities; it also produces a "radical and plural democracy," which appreciates the role of tradition but abandons traditionalism/conservatism (Mouffe 2005: 10-11,15).[2] Minimum/inclusive/bottom-up universalism advocates diverse cultural interpretations, avoids cultural determinism, rejects a holistic concept of universalism, and appreciates the inclusive and grassroots version*s* of universal values.

The paper is in two major parts. The first is both descriptive and critical in discussing the above mentioned three theoretical approaches in the context of Muslim world's experience of modernity and democracy. I shall examine how and why bottom-up/minimum/inclusive universalism – universalism from below – can better lead Muslims to democracy, given its equal distance from Islamist culturalism and holistic arrogant universalism. The second applies the concept of universalism from below to the public role of religion in the Muslim world. I shall argue that neither political/state-sponsored Islam represented by culturalists nor private/isolated Islam advocated by monist-universalists contribute to democratization in the Muslim World. The paper examines the extent to which an alternative concept of *public civil Islam* is capable of resolving the tension between the universal and particular paradigms in the Muslim world. The conclusion is twofold: it will demonstrate how and why Muslims must *critically* and *publicly* participate in the completion of the "unfinished project of tradition" in the Muslim world. A success of an inclusive, bottom-up and democratic project of modernity and the rise of a grassroots, sustainable and radical democracy in the Muslim world profoundly depend upon a critical and public engagement of Muslims with their own tradition. Participation of Muslims and their religious traditions in public sphere could contribute to democratization of both religion and public policy. Public arguments about the place of religion in politics, about the level of its engagement and the scope of its contribution, are vital to the success of democratization in the Muslim World. Democratic versions of religion provide a genuine alternative to those who use God against humanity; it offers a solution from *within*.

Part I

1. Culturalism: From Essentialism to Relativism

"Culturalism" Ken Booth (1999: 36-37) argues, is a strong form of "cultural essentialism" and "cultural relativism." It advocates the "uniqueness and exclusivity of each culture." Cultural essentialism represents the "ethnocentric generalizations" of cultures whereas

cultural relativism suggests that "each culture or society possesses its own rationality." Both forms of culturalism reject a universal set of cultural standards.

Cultural relativism suggests that different societies hold different moral beliefs; each culture holds to its particular beliefs, which best suite to its own society. The unintended consequence of this argument is where cultural relativism often serves authoritarian politics where the ruling autocrats argue that democracy and human rights are a softer version of Western triumphalism and have no place in non-Western cultures. Cultural relativism ignores that the prevailing system of beliefs/cultural norms may harm a great number of people in society. The victimized majority often appreciates democratic values but is silenc*ed* by the ruling minority elite. As Peter Baeher (1995) reminds us, such a paternalistic approach implies that,

> those who say that people in the developing world are not ready for, or would not appreciate, political freedoms are not only being patronizing but are also playing into the hands of repressive regimes who want to deny civil and political rights as long as there is economic underdevelopment.

Cultural relativists often ignore that we need to examine who speaks for a particular culture. The voice of essentialists and the claim of cultural authenticity is often the most powerful voice within a community. The fact is such claim of authenticity is not simply cultural, but "profoundly political" (Booth: 38). Culturalism is not about protecting traditions; it is a political discourse where traditions are instrumental in the making of political projects. Moreover, cultural relativism overlooks the internal diversity of cultural traditions. It assumes that "there is an objective reality to cultural authenticity." It simply undermines that cultural traditions are "disputed *within*." This raises a significant question as to who represents the community/nation where it is disputed within. Culture is not neutral; cultural norms are thoroughly linked with power and legitimate the established social order. Moreover, why does culture and not class, gender, generation, or any other factors represent a particular community? What makes culture so exclusive of other factors?

Culturalism overlooks the importance of human agency. Culture does not exist by itself; it does not descend from the heaven. Culture both influences and is deeply influenced by socio-economic and political development of a society. Moreover, people in the society are not locked into particular elements of their culture; they do change and make change, too. They are not merely passive objects of their own society. History suggests that borrowing from other cultures and adapting to local use has been the central phenomenon of human history. Culture is not a static homogeneous, sealed-off phenomenon; it is a dynamic evolving process. "What leads to cultural changes," argues Ronald Inglehart (1997:26-27) "is that life experiences of a new generation give rise to new perceptions of reality."

In the context of the Muslim politics cultural essentialism is a form of scripturalism, which suggests that Western and Islamic civilizations/cultures are essentially in collision. This approach is shared by two seemingly opposite schools of Western Orientalists/neo-Orientalists and Muslim apologists. They suggest that the crisis of modernity and the absence of democracy in the Muslim world is the fact of "Muslim Exceptionalism." On this view modernity, rationalism, and democracy are Western in origin and uniquely suited to the Western culture. Ernest Gellner, among others, argues that Muslim societies are essentially different from others in that "no secularization has taken place in the world of Islam" (Gellner 1994:15-29). In *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion* (1992) he argues Islam has been exceptionally immune to the forces of secularization and modernization has actually increased this immunization. Likewise, Bernard Lewis (1990) and Samuel Huntington (1996) argue that Western culture is unique and essentially differ from other civilizations in general and Islam in particular. While "in Islam, God is Caesar," in the West "God and Caesar, church and state, spiritual and temporal authority, have been a prevailing dualism" (Huntington 1996:70). According to Huntington (1996:217), "the underlying

problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism. It is Islam, a different civilization whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture and obsessed with the inferiority of their power." Huntington's argument, Casanova (2001: 1050-1051) argues, essentializes the problem by suggesting that "democracy may be a civilizational achievement of the Christian West and therefore not easily transferable to other civilizations other than through Western hegemonic imposition or through the conversion to Western norms." As such, it is not *Islamic fundamentalism* but the *fundamental* essence of Islam that makes it incompatible with modernity and democracy. Similarly, for Bernard Lewis (1988) the inevitable fusion of religion and politics is something that historically and intellectually attach to Islam. Implicit to his argument is that "Islamic mind" and democracy are mutually exclusive.[3] In his critique of cultural essentialism Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid (2002) argues,

> it is hard to accept the claim that there something inherently wrong with the "Islamic Mind". To speak about an "Islamic Mind" in abstraction from all constrains of geography and history, and in isolation from the social and cultural conditioning of Islamic societies, can only lead us into unrealistic, even metaphysical, speculations. Instead, it is more realistic to look for the root of this panic reaction to critique in the crisis of modernization and complicated relationship between the Islamic world and the West.

On the other side of the spectrum, Islamist essentialists argue that Islamic state is inherently different from the world's democracy. The most famous version of Islamism, Khomeinism in Iran, is a form of cultural essentialism. The founding father of the Iranian post-revolutionary polity, Ayatollah Khomeini (1981: 55, 61), introduced his theory of the *velayat-e faqih* (the Guardianship of Jurist) into the existing modern structure of state. The theory implies that "Islamic government does not correspond to any of the existing forms of government," because "the rulers are subject to a certain set of conditions in governing and administrating the country, conditions that are set forth in the Noble Quran and the *Sunna* of the Most Nobel Messenger." Moreover, Ayatollah Khomeini refused to add the word "democratic" to the title of Islamic Republic of Iran. He argued Iran's political system would be "the Islamic Republic, not one word less, not one word more!"[4]

Similarly, Ayatollah Khamenei (2002), Ayatollah Khomeini's successor, describes the exclusive merits of so-called Islamic democracy. When the 12th Shiite *imam* known as the *Mahdi* return from his occultation, he argues, he will rely on the pious to lay the foundation for a universally popular government. "But this popular government," he argues, "is *totally different* from the governments that claim to be popular and democratic in today's world….. The world's democracies are based on propaganda, whereas the democracy of the Lord of the Age, [the 12th Shiite *imam*, Madhi] religious democracy, is totally different." In reality, however, what makes this polity different from the world's democracies is that the highest authority that is the office of the *velayat-e faqih* is exclusively hold/run by a male clerical Muslim jurist (*faqih*). The scope of people's rights and the degree of people's inclusion are subject to the interpretation of the *faqih*. The nature of people's sovereignty remains ambiguous and instrumental in the hands of political authorities.

Both Islamists and Western Orientalists, Talal Asad (1997: 190-191) reminds us, share "the idea that Islam was originally – and therefore essentially – a theocratic state;" but, for the Islamists "this history constituted the betrayal of a sacred ideal that Muslims are required as believers to restore;" and for the Orientalists "it defines a schizophrenic compromise that has always prevented a progressive reform of Islam." The Islamic state is not that much product of some Islamic essence as "it is the product of modern politics and the modernizing state." Like other forms of culturalism, Islamist essentialism is a modern political discourse because modernity demands an essentialist standardization of the world. The rise and consolidation Islamist culturalism is a response and reaction to the complex experience of modernization in the

Muslim world. We need to examine such a complex experience if we need to understand the root causes of Islamist essentialism.

2. Monist-Universalism: Holistic Modernity, Absolute Universality

All human ideas have their own dark side, and universality is not an exception. The dark side of universality is a monist/hegemonic/totalitarian universalism. Monist-universalism acknowledges that "different societies have different histories, traditions, and cultures," but never appreciates the "moral significance" of these cultures/histories. Monist-universalism is a form of false and naïve universality, a totalitarian project with "one answer and a final answer" to all questions (Booth 1999: 57); it is a new version of old "imperial civilizing mission" (Parekh 1999: 130).

Monist-universalism suggests that human morality is a matter of "rational reflection" and is "universally valid." However, it overlooks the significance of culture, which mediates and reconstitutes human reason. Monist-universalism ignores that rationality is not an abstract concept, and human agency is not a passive object. Human agencies and social contexts define and determine the meaning of good life; good or bad life are nor "universally recommended." A way of life "cannot be abstracted from the capacities, traditions, dispositions and historical circumstances of its members" (Parekh 1999: 137).

Monist-universalism implies that modernity began in the West and is a uniquely Western phenomenon. "All 'other' cultures, those who lived on the darker side of the Renaissance must emulate the Western experience, if they want to be modern. Modernity is an ideology, Western culture is an essential part of modernization and non-Western cultures are fundamentally hostile to modernity and democracy. This line of argument implies that the West must enjoy the material, cultural, and institutional supremacy. It endorses a single form of rationality and denies a prospect for a local and cultural experience of the universal. Such a totalitarian and conservative version of universal values overlooks the possibility of different notions/paths to modernity and democracy.

Epistemologically, the major flaw of universalism exists in the central truth it claims; it assumes that Western theories are scientifically objective, culturally neutral and universally applicable to all societies. In sum, "the universal culture of modernity is explicitly associated with a "sol-less" materialism that preys upon the "natural order" of things" (Mirsepassi 2000: 188). For a monist-universalist there is only one essential path to modernity and that path has already experienced in the West. The Rest has to follow the same path, because the Rest/global South is defined not in terms of its own character, but in terms of the qualities of the Global North, which it lacks. In this depiction, the West is the ideal model while the Rest's existence can be summed up in terms of what it is *not* in relation to this ideal. The cultures of the Rest "are constructed as the 'local' existing in opposing to the universalist ideals of Western modernity" (Mirsepassi 2000: 8).

In the 1950s and 60s the dichotomy of tradition/modernity was adopted within the framework of modernization theories. Tradition was defined as the reality of non-Western societies and modernity as the reality of the West. Tradition was interpreted as the absence of modernity, while modernity was seen as the socio-cultural liberation from tradition. This was a simplified/false binary, because a closer examination of the historiography of modernity suggests that modernity was never a Western privilege and a tradition/modernity dichotomy existed in the West. All societies can modernize themselves when they reinterpret their *own* culture. No culture or society is by nature futile. To achieve modernity, a local representation of modernity is absolutely warranted.

The monist interpretation of modernity often overlooks two opposing faces of modernity, which carries two opposition expressions: liberty/democracy and violence/totalitarianism. Such

interpretation caused many socio-political crises in the Muslim world and the rise of Islamist culturalism remains the most significant one. The crisis of democracy in the Muslim world is not due to the clash between tradition and modernity; it derives from a quarrel between the best and worst aspects of modernity. The 1979 Iranian Revolution is a case in point: the revolution was not a transition from a modern open system to a traditional, backward Islamic culture. The transition took place within the context of modernity itself. The discourse and politics of Islamist authenticity in Iran sought to bring about modernity, not to return to the past. The Shah's unpopular project of modernization and his uncritical embarrassment of Western modernity constructed a strong opposition to the universal West. The absence of a "local" experience of modernity, or cultural representation of modernity and the presence of a brutal, egocentric, and imposed universalism gave rise to Islamist culturalism. Islamism is a modern culturalist/essentialist phenomenon and can be examined in the context of the failure of monist-universalism.

Although long and painful, the Western experience of modernity and democracy was gradual, consistent and harmonious. In the Muslim word this experience was definitely bitter, enormously rapid, and absolutely alien and oppressive. The predicament of modernity in the Muslim world is circumstantial to their peripheral situation. Modernity struck the Muslim world in its most traumatizing militaristic/imperialistic ways. The ethnocentric interpretation of modernity undermines the colonial face of modernity. Under humiliating experience of colonialism and modern authoritarianism, Muslim world has lived with the instrumental/hegemonic side of modernity and eclipsed the emancipatory side of modernity. The West proudly proclaimed itself a model of modern democracy but it was seen as propping-up modern secular authoritarian regimes.

Furthermore, history has revealed that the monist-universalist and linear approach of modernization was wrong and inaccurate. Modernist theorists of development, as Peter Berger (1999: 3) reminds us, argued that "modernization necessarily leads to a decline of religion, both in society and in the minds of individuals." Iran is a classic example in the Muslim World where a Muslim society under the intense project of modernization turned to a revolutionary society with an Islamist discourse in power. In his critique of modernization theory, Daniel Bell (1989) argues "from Voltaire to Marx every Enlightenment thinker thought that religion would disappear in the 20th century because religion was fetishism, animistic superstition. Well, it's not true, because religion is a response, and sometimes a very coherent response, to the existential predicaments faced by all men in all times."

In sum, Monist-universalism and culturalism lack a critical re-conceptualization of modernity and tradition. A blatant ethnocentric narrative of modernity forecloses the possibility of real particular experience and of local contribution to the realization of modernity. Culturalism and monist-universalism are two opposing approaches towards the local and global models; yet, they reinforce and feed each other. They are two one-sided approaches and fail to provide us with dialectical relations between the particular and the universal paradigms. Monist-universalism and culturalism are false responses to the universal and to the particular, respectively.

3. Universalism from Below/Minimum-Universalism: Plural Modernities and Alternative Democracies

The world of culturalism is small, but not always small is beautiful (Booth 1999: 5,7). The world of monist-universalism is big, but not always big is the best; it is big but not inclusive enough to appreciate diversity. The third alternative is minimum/inclusive/grassroots universalism; it is a democratic approach. It opposes cultural relativism and cultural essentialism and advocates pluralism. Minimum-universalism is "true universalism;" it is "an inclusive multi-community multi-logue, aimed as standard-setting in ways that will reduce human wrongs, and

balance a tolerance of diversity with a diversity of tolerance". It is a "politics of I-that is-an-other," meaning "the universal 'I' totally embraces the universal 'an other'" (Booth 1999: 57, 65).

Minimum-universalism suggests that there are several different moral lives and yet they "can be judged on the basis of a universally valid body of values." Values can be "combined in several equally valid ways" and cannot be "hierarchically graded." In other words, there are universal values that constitute "irreducible minimum" and once "a society meets these basic principles; it is free to organize its way of life as it considers proper" (Parekh 1999: 131, 143). Minimum-universalism derives from an open and un-coerced cross-cultural dialogue between and within various moral values. It is true that moral values have no indisputable objective basis, but they are not arbitrary because they "do have grounds in the form of well-considered reasons" Reasoning promotes cross-cultural dialogue and provide us with a solid base to agree on a set of universal reasoned moral values. All we need to do is to appreciate other forms of rationality and advocate true dialogue among equal moral values. Minimal-universalism is universalism from below.

How do we keep the balance between "cultural mediation" and "integrity of universalism"? The answer is threefold: first, this "minimalist" approach relies on the principles articulated in the United Nation Declaration of Human Rights. Second, universal values are general and therefore should be articulated in the language of society's *norms*. They can be articulated in the language of rights, as we see in Western liberal democracies, or in the language of duties/obligations that can serve those universal values. Third, values differ from institutions. Societies may materialize the same universal values through different institutions most suited to their culture and history (Parekh 1999: 151-152).

Likewise, Michael Walzer (1994: 7, 9) observes minimum universalism as a reflection of the character of human society: it is universal because it is about humans; and it is particular because it is about society. The philosophical standards of minimum-universalism suggest that "it is every one's morality because it is no one's in particular; subjective interests and cultural expression have been avoided or cut away." Walzer (xi, 6) invites us to read George Orwell's analogy to make sense of his argument: "'There is a thin man inside every fat man,'" George Orwell once wrote. In the same way, "there are the making of a thin and universalist morality inside every thick and particularistic morality." This "thinness does not describe a morality that is substantively minor or emotionally shallow. The opposite is more likely true: this is morality close to the bone." Minimum universalism is pluralistic and negotiable. It implies an "inevitable dialectical" interplay between the relatively thin universal values and the thick particular society. In sum, minimum-universalism suggests that "the *other* is an alien: *an other* is all of us" (Booth 1999: 31).

Minimum-universalism offers a third way; an alternative path. A path, to use Fred Dallmayr (2002: 97) words, "acknowledges the beneficial or emancipating dimensions of modernity while refusing to canonize its defects." *In The Ethics of Authenticity,* Charles Taylor (1992: 11, 22-23) has charted this path where he differentiates between wholesale advocates and radical opponents of modernity: "boosters" and "knockers" of modernity, respectively. Taylor's path is not a "half-hearted" compromise favoring a "simple trade-off" between the advantages and costs of various aspects of modernity, but "to renew serious reflection on the meaning of modernity and its possible future directions." In *A Catholic Modernity* (1999: 16-19)*,* Taylor explicitly points to this different direction as he refers to "multiple modernities." Modernity is a complex and dynamic relationship between polity, society, economy and culture, and each society has a different institutional and intellectual configuration. Each society moves along different path towards modernity and represents different versions of modernity. There are as many roads to modernity and democracy as there are societies. Alternatives *to* modernity and democracy are risky and dangerous paths, but alternative modernities and democracies are constructive and practical paths.

Minimum universalism is the combination of *universalism* and *politics of difference.* "The two are not necessarily incompatible, though their simultaneous success is bound to pluralize democracy in a radical way. It will produce a number of different "roads to democracy" and a variety of "democracies" at the end of the road" (Walzer: 1994, ix). The danger, however, remains whether *difference* or *universalism* triumphs at the expense of each other.

Part II

Universalism from Below in Practice: Religion and Democracy in the Muslim World

Each of the three theoretical approaches discussed in the first part of this paper— culturalism, monist-universalism, and minimum-universalism—proposes a different public role for religious traditions in the Muslim world. Culturalists—the Western Orientalists and the Muslim apologists—argue that Islamic tradition essentially advocates Islamic state; it endorses a state-sponsored religion. The political implication is that Islamic tradition and modern democracy are incompatible; the public role of Islamic tradition violates the very foundation of democracy. Monist-universalists propose a universal solution to this problem: privatization of religion or the elimination of religion from the public sphere is a pre-condition of democracy. Islamic tradition/religion and democracy, the arguments goes, can leave together only if religious domain remains in the private life. The third alternative proposed by the principle of minimum-universalism suggests that neither a state-sponsored Islam nor a private Islam is conducive to democracy, because they reduce the complex relation between religion and politics to a simple binary of state versus private religion. The novel concept of "public civil religion" provides us with a practical solution to the question of Muslims and democracy. This concept avoids particularism but appreciates the importance of the particular. It rejects, as Chantal Mouffe (2005: 16) would argue, "traditionalism" but respects "tradition." Traditionalism is a conservative, static approach to defend the status quo; however, "tradition", Chantal Mouffe argues, "allows us to think our own insertion into historicity, the fact that we are constructed as subjects through a series of already existing discourses, and that it is through this tradition which forms us that the word is given to us and all political action made possible." Hence, it is through articulation and de-articulation, development and de-construction of "tradition" that we actively participate in the making of our modernity and democracy. We make our modernity while we *critically* reinvent our tradition.

This dialectical approach suggests that the relation between tradition and modernity, religion and democracy, revelation and reason, particular and universal paradigms are not simple relations of mutual exclusion. As Fred Dallmayr (2002: 95-96) argues, the great political achievement of modernity is that it has brought about dis-aggregation of traditional holistic worldviews and decentralization of power structures monopolized by privileged traditional elites. The major shortcoming of modernity, however, may actually be a corollary of its primary achievement: radical disenchantment and dis-aggregation or division of domains. The solution to this problem, Dallmayr reminds us, is not to repeat what has been already experienced in the past: nostalgia for ancient forms of spirituality, political abuse of tradition, "the concentration of power in a few hands, the collusion of political and religious domination, and the exclusion of women and marginalized classes from the public sphere." The solution remains in the form of a third alternative, which at once "resists the lure both of totalizing synthesis and radical segregation or mutual negation." The third way leads us to rethink about a non-antithetical and non-synthetic relation between tradition and modernity, and religion and democracy. Tradition and modernity are not holistic sacred concepts; they are unfinished projects. A successful completion of these projects relies on the active participation of the people. It is the people who should ultimately decide how much religion could/should play a role in public sphere, given the prevailing socio-

cultural and historical context. For all this to happen, one has to challenge two opposing discourses in the Muslim World: politicization of religion and privatization of religion. Public civil religion offers a solid alternative, a practical answer to the question of Muslims and democracy.

1. Why Public Civil Religion?

There is no doubt that the "relocation" of the religious institutions from the state/political society to "civil society" is the first necessary step for democracy. This relocation, however, should not be interpreted as the "privatization" of religion (Casanova 2001: 1047).[5] It is generally accepted that if religious domain remains in the *private* life, religion and democracy can live together, because democracy is not atheistic and it does not demand that citizens be so either. Yet, in many democratic countries, religious symbolism is strongly present in the *public* sphere, and the eliminating religion from the public sphere is not a condition of democracy. The public role of religion does not harm democracy if religion does not consider itself as the legitimate holder of power irrespective of people's vote. There are, however, two critical questions as to what public civil religion is and why it does matter.

What do we mean by public civil religion? The critical point is to define what exactly public means in public religion. Many confuse public with political. Public does not mean to replace the private or "political". The concept of "public religion" should not resemble public church/public theology. It is not civil religion as introduced by sociologist Robert N. Bellah (1967). Inspired by Jean-Jacques Rousseau's and Emil Durkheim's concept of religion, "civil religion" tends to endorse a top-down religious development. While Rousseau's civil religion has governmental or national auspices, Durkheim's is a "collective representation" of the people. "Public religion" is instead an alternative notion, which characterizes a bottom-up societal expression (Wilson 1979). It refers to a form of "civic faith" within a republic—a phrase coined by Benjamin Franklin (Martin 1987). This concept may also comport well with Alexis de Tocqueville's well-known observation and celebration of voluntary associations. Such associations are not governmental and they may challenge the top-down civil religion or a religion aimed at homogenizing a nation/society. Public civil religion differs from state-sponsored religion because it is about the separation of religious institutions and state.

Why public and not private religion? The answer is threefold. First, the Enlightenment philosophers had pictured that religion will survive only in a private, ceremonial, recessive, and tolerant form. Yet, we all know that along with its private form, it is precisely the more politically aggressive and publicly enthusiastic forms of religions that have survived. If religion will inevitably find its own way to influence the public sphere "it is better to recognize this and make such religion a subject of citizen observation and debate than to keep it covert and leave it unacknowledged" (Thiemann 2000: 85). Unlike many Enlightenment philosophers, Tocqueville remained skeptical of the predication that religion would decline and becomes politically irrelevant with the process of modernization and the advancement of democracy. Interestingly Tocqueville "thought that the incorporation of ordinary people into democratic politics would only increase the relevance of religion for modern politics" (Casanova 2001: 1057). Religions traditions are forced to confront and possibly come to terms with modern normative structures by entering the public sphere. Such public encounter may permit the reflexive rationalization and democratization of religious discourses. This is not to dispute that "pluralistic societies can no longer be organized around the religious beliefs of a single faith or tradition. Cultural, religious, and moral diversity is a fact of modern democratic life. It is only disputing the conclusion that this pluralism inevitably leads to the banishment of religion to the private sphere" (Thiemann 2000: 85). Religion can play a part in public sphere and yet coexists with democracy. Public religion is participation of religion in *civil society*. This relocation can potentially set the stage for *democratization of both religion and public policy*.

Second, public civil religion may be conducive to democracy by questioning the absolutist inhuman policies of state as well as amoral self-regulated principles of market; it can provide a counter balance to the absolutist power of state and market (Habermas 1996: 21-30). Jurgen Habermas divides public sphere into three spheres of state, market, and civil society. Civil society, he argues, must control two other major centers of powers, i.e., state and market. Public civil religion may strengthen the power of civil society vis-à-vis the power of state and market. Furthermore, public religion and in particular transnational religions could remind us the transnational nature of human rights and the supremacy of the *human common good*. Public civil religions can remind us that "morality can only exist as an intersubjective normative structure and that individual choices only attain a "moral" dimension when they are guided or informed by intersubjective, interpersonal norms" (Casanova 2001: 1049-50). Moreover, environmental and ecological concerns are not well addressed by hidden or individualized religions. It is only with the public expression of religion that society, politics, economy, and nature can benefit from ethics.

Third, religion can best be overcome by religion: democratic versions of religion can successfully challenge those who use God against humanity (Martin and Blumhofer).[6] According to Abdullahi An-Na'im (1999: xii), "intelligent and enlightened Muslims are best advised to remain within the religious framework and endeavor to achieve the reforms that would make Islam a viable modern ideology." The "place of religion in politics is particularly related to its place in the public." If public religion can contribute to democratization of religious discourse it would contribute to democratization of public sphere and political system. Public civil religion is about individuals' dialogue at societal level. It never means "an official, legal, governmentally monitored religion"(Martin and Blumhofer).

It is worth mentioning that public religion and "de-privatization" of modern religion could take place in various violent or peaceful versions. The rise of radical religious fundamentalism is a case in point. The argument, however, is that "religions and normative traditions are forced to confront and possibly come to terms with modern normative structures" by entering into public sphere. Such a public encounter may permit the reflexive and practical rationalization and democratization of both religious individuals and religious discourse (Casanova 2001: 1048-49). Privatization of religion is turning blind eyes to the real world.

2. Public Civil Religion: Public Reasoning for Democracy

According to Fred Dallmayr (2002: 169), the relations between religion and politics can be identified in a number of ways: first, "there is the paradigm of complete separation or isolation (an extreme version of the Augustinian formula of "two cities")' where "religious faith withdraws onto a "holy mountain" while politics maintains a radical indifference or antagonism vis-à-vis scriptural teachings." Such "mutual segregation", Dallmayr argues, is harmful to both sides because faith forfeits any relevance in worldly affairs and politics shrivels into an empty power game. Second, the relations between religion and politics can be explained in terms of "fusion or amalgamation". The third alternative is public civil religion. It maintains a balanced two-way relationship or, to use Amy Gutmann's concept (2000), "two-way protection" of religion and politics. Similarly, a proper relation between religion and politics, Alfred Stepan (2000: 39) argues, is "twin tolerations" where religion and politics respect their boundaries. Alfred Stepan's institutional approach clearly challenges what we have identified as culturalism and monist-universalism. The concept of "twin tolerations" respects minimum boundaries of freedom for both political and religious authorities. It recognizes the value of cultural core of democracy while appreciates the minimum institutional requirement of democracy. Such minimalist approach guarantees "minimum freedom for the democratic state and minimum religious freedom for citizens" in the public sphere.

According to Stepan (2000: 39-43), there are "four possible misinterpretations" about the relation between religion and politics. He invites us to avoid such misinterpretations by a careful reading of "the 'lessons' of the historical relationship between Western Christianity and democracy". "*Empirically,*" the defining feature of democracy, as it exists in fifteen European Union Countries, is not the "wall of separation," but the political reconstruction of "twin tolerations" of religion and politics. Some of these states have the official religion and yet they remain democracy. Moreover, Christian-Democratic parties have frequently been in power without challenging democracy. "*Doctrinally*," one has to avoid simple temptation that a religion is univocal on democracy or human rights. The question is who speaks for a particular religion. Moreover, like Christianity, a democratic transformation can take place in Islam. "*Methodologically,*" we should pay a close attention to the "fallacy of unique founding conditions." This implies that the founding conditions for democratization in non-Western societies are not necessarily the same as the conditions were present at the birth of Western democracies. "The fallacy is to confuse the conditions associated with the invention of something with the possibility of its replication, or more accurately, its *reformulation* under different conditions." "*Normatively,*" one has to be cautious of taking "the truths of religion off the political agenda." According to John Rawls (1993: 15), "public arguments about the place of religion are appropriate only if they employ, or at least can employ, freestanding conceptions of political justices." What is missing in Rawls' argument, Stepan argues (45), is a prior question that "how actual polities have consensually and democratically arrived at agreements to "take religion off the political agenda.'" In many democracies the core conflict for a long time "was precisely over the place of religion in the polity…this conflict was politically contained or neutralized only after long public arguments and negotiations in which religion was the dominant item on the political agenda." For this reason, Stepan (2000: 45) argues,

> in polities where a significant portion of believers may be under the sway of doctrinally based nondemocratic religious discourses, one of the major tasks of political and spiritual leaders who wish to revalue democratic norms in their own religious community will be to advance *theologically* convincing *public arguments* about the legitimate public reasoning; they are vital to the success of democratization in a country divided over the meaning and appropriateness of democracy.

Moreover, as Joseph Schumpeter (1976: 245) put it, populous should have right to define itself in whatever manner it chooses. A society might choose to practice religion as a public matter and public religion could be used for public debates; people or parties could utilize religious reason to refuse or admit different argument and yet respect for pluralism and democracy. This practice facilitates participation of people in public debates, empowers the public and establishes a genuine public reasoning.

According to John Rawls (1993:1), religious discourses are excluded from public reasoning because they are not reasonable. The fact, however, is that religious reasoning can be both reasonable and democratic: "belief", Abdolkarim Soroush (2002: 145) argues, "is a hundred times more diverse and colorful than disbelief. If the pluralism of secularism makes it suitable for democracy, the faithful community is a thousand times more suitable for it." Soroush (2002: 127-128) adds,

> a precondition for democratizing religious society is "historicizing and energizing the religious understanding by underscoring the role of reason in it" – where "reason" does not mean an isolated individual capacity but "a collective reason" or public "common sense" arising from "the kind of public participation and human experience that are available only through democratic methods." Democratic religious societies…thus do not need to "wash their hands of religiosity" nor turn their backs on revelation; however, they do need to absorb "an adjudicative understanding of religion" in such a way that an

"informed religiosity can thrive on in conjunction with a democracy sheltered by common sense.

A successful and sustainable democracy in the Muslim world can only come about when a successful synthesis has been worked out between Islam and modernity. What this mean in a wider historical sense is the requirement of Muslims to *publicly* engage in a new hermeneutics of their own religion. Public arguments about the place of religion in politics, about the level of its engagement and the scope of its contribution, is vital to the success of democratization and essential to the making of an alternative democracy, which correspond to both universal standards and particular values.

Conclusion: Muslims and Democracy in Context

In his critique of universalism, Ernesto Laclau (1996:23-24) suggests that universalists argue that "the particular can only corrupt the universal;…either the particular realizes in itself the universal – that is it eliminates itself as particular and transforms itself in a transparent medium through which universality operates – or it negates the universal by asserting its particularism." I called such an extreme position as monist-universalism where the resistance of non-western cultures is presented as the struggle between universality of the West and particularism of the Rest, not as the struggle between two particular paradigms. I also discussed how and why the failure of monist-universalism has contributed to the rise of "pure particularism" in the form of Islamist culturalism. "Pure particularism," to use Ernesto Laclau's concepts (26, 33), is "self-defeating;" it is "the route to self-apartheid," because there are shared universal values without which a sense of belonging to a community larger than each particular group is not possible. Hence, the third alternative approach acknowledges a critical dialogue between the particular and the universal paradigms, or between tradition and modernity. In this paper I argued that the relations between the local and the global paradigms are not simple relations of mutual exclusion.

The significance and relevance of such alternative approach in the Muslim world is twofold: theoretically, it suggests that categories such as modernity and pre-modern, religion and democracy, and tradition and change are not mutually exclusive; this is a false dichotomy. According to Jurgen Habermas (1983), modernity is an "incomplete project." Similarly, some social theories suggest that ""tradition" is likewise a perpetually unfinished project – that is how people understand their traditions and apply them to practical situation" (Anderson *et al.* 1998: 122). The notion of the *unfinished project of tradition* implies that tradition and change are not mutually exclusive concepts; there is a constant and critical dialogue between tradition and modernity, and religion and democracy. A discursive dialogue with culture and tradition could revel that modern values such as freedom, democracy, and justice are universal and have native roots in the intellectual soil of every society. This is universalism from blew, a top-down and inclusive approach.

Practically, it suggests that democratization in Muslim countries will not be achieved against the will of the *demos*/Muslims. It will be accomplished with them, or not at all. A dialogue with people's traditions and cultures empowers civil society, facilitates active and deliberative engagement, and provides the most effective path to challenge the status quo. It brings change from within. Democratic ideas are ineffective if they are not reached by the common people. As Max Weber (Turner 1992) reminds us, ideas are powerless unless fused with material forces. Ideas "cannot be separated from their social settings; that is, they cannot be separated from the institutions and social groups that keep systems of ideas in the socialization process" (Downing 1992:8). In the final analysis, democracy and democratization in the Muslim World is blessed by civil public religion, because democratization and democracy are about

people and how they come together in shaping their destiny. Democracy can last longer if a strong and organized civil society appreciates democratic values.

When autocratic regimes utilize non-democratic religious discourses to legitimize their rule, democratic interpretations of religion and tradition in the public sphere are vital to the success of democratization. The autocratic version of religion can best be overcome by a democratic religion. To this end, a *public* expression of democratic religion can defeat autocratic religion. When the polity appeals to religious doctrines and the society remains a relatively religious one, a private and isolated religion will not serve democratization. In such a condition, Abdullahi An-Na'im (1999: xii) reminds us that democrats must not "abandon" the public field to the autocrats who manipulate religion for their own political purpose. Traditions are unfinished projects and able to accommodate with modern normative values. Hence, public civil religion can provide a viable alternative to the autocratic political religion, since it directly communicates with the people and facilitates their active participation in politics.

Islamists or citizens of the faith should learn from their fellow secular citizens that the institutional separation of religion and politics is a necessary condition for a modern democracy. The secularists need to learn that the intellectual and mental separation of religion and politics is neither possible nor desirable. Instead, they should know that in a "post-metaphysical" or "post-secular" era, as Jurgen Habermas (2005: 11-13) reminds us, secularists "must open their minds to the possible truth content" of religious discourses and enter into "dialogues" with their fellow religious citizens. According to Habermas, "post-metaphysical thought draws, with no polemical intention, a strict line between faith and knowledge. But it rejects a narrow scientific conception of reason and the exclusion of religious doctrines from the genealogy of reason;" in other words, it "is prepared to learn from religion while remaining strictly agnostic." Secular citizens should distance themselves from the post-Enlightenment cliché which suggests that religious traditions are "archaic relics of pre-modern societies that continue to exist in the present." The "ethics of citizenship," Habermas argues, requires that both religious and secular citizens stop behaving in an uncivil and "paternalistic," way, and step into a "*complementary* learning process."

Both secularists and religious citizens must avoid cultural essentialism. Secular citizens need to understand that their fellow religious citizens can appreciate freedom, democracy, and social justice and even extract these ideals from their religious soils. Religious citizens should know that extracting ideals such as democracy and social justice from religious texts does not make them religious concepts; they are neither religious nor anti-religious notions. As Soroush (1995: 11) reminds us

> We do not have religious and non-religious water or religious and non-religious wine. The same is true for justice, government, science, and philosophy. Even the subjects were to have an essence then their Islamization would be rather meaningless. As such, we can not have a science of sociology that is essentially religious or a philosophy that is essentially Islamic or Christian, the same way we can not have a system of government that is essentially religious.

Likewise, secularists should stop essentializing such concepts by suggesting that religious traditions and modern democracy are mutually exclusive. Instead, they need to support a progressive, democratic Islam. In the Muslim World, the vitality of religious reform is not so much a religious obligation but a civic responsibility. According to Ali Shariati (1980), an Iranian reformist Muslim, religious reform "makes the weapon of religion inaccessible to those who have undeservedly armed themselves with it…eliminates the spirit of imitation…extracts and refines the enormous resources of the society and converts the jamming agents into energy,...and bridges the ever-widening gap between the 'island of the intelligentsia' and the 'shore of the masses.'" Religious reform can contribute to socio-political reform; democratization of religious discourse

can serve political democratization. A progressive and democratic Islam, a civil public religion, is a powerful challenge from within. It can provide a viable alterative to the orthodoxy of clerical political Islam. Religious and secular citizens need to challenge the political version of clericalism either on behalf of divine duty, or civil responsibility. "Anti-clericalism," as Richard Rorty (2005: 33) observes, "is a political view, not an epistemological or metaphysical one. It is the view that *ecclesiastical institutions*, despite all the good they do – despite all the comfort they provide to those in need or in despair – *are dangerous to the health of democratic societies*.

The challenge is to find a theoretical outlook that is equally free from the self-congratulating arrogance of the universal West and the self-misleading illusion of the local/particular paradigm. The goal of a critical dialogue with culture and mining the tradition is not to claim that all universal values derive from our culture; the goal instead is to show that such values as democracy have deep native roots in non-Western intellectual soil. Ideas like freedom and justice have roots in all cultures. By uncovering the native roots of such ideas democracy will be seen as an idea that is at once deeply local and universal. Instead of forced assimilation, we need to celebrate and underscore differences, and also appreciate the universal norms and values.

Calling for different modernities does not correspond to nostalgic traditionalism. Nostalgic traditionalism is "narcissistic retirement within oneself, which "can only lead to a suicide exile and self-marginalization." The alternative path, Al-Jabri (1999) reminds us, is a "modern vision of tradition," a critical completing of our "unfinished project of tradition." Public civil religion may contribute to this critical path leading up to democratization in the Muslim world.

Endnotes

[1] Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, Cambridge: MA: Harvard University Press, 1992, pp. 11, 22-23, quoted in Fred Dallmayr, 'Dialogue among Civilizations: Some Exemplary Voices, New York: Palgrave, 2002, P.97.

[2] I refer to Chantal Mouffe's concept of 'radical and plural democracy' where she appreciates the political project of modernity (democracy and self-assertion) but abandons the epistemological project of modernity (universalism and ethno-centric rationalism). This notion of democracy explicitly advocates the role of particular, different forms of rationality, and the significance of tradition and yet abandons conservative thinking. See Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, London: Verso, 2005, pp, 10-11, 15.

[3] For best models of this approach, see Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of world Order*; Bernard Lewis, *What went Wrong?: The Clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East*, New York: Perennial, 2003; Bernard Lewis, 'Islam and Liberal Democracy,' *The Atlantic Monthly,* February 1993.

[4] *Ettela'at*, March 11, 1979, p. 8.

[5] Also see Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994; see, Robert Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia,* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

[6] See Martin E. Marty and Edith L. Blumhofer, *Research Projects*; *Public Religion in America Today*, available at: http://www.emory.edu/central/NEWS/emoryedge/pdf/witte_edge.pdf. Also see, Martin E. Marty http://marty-center.uchicago.edu/research/publicreligion_today.shtml#public. For further discussion see, J. Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* , Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

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