



RESEARCH PAPER

Content Analysis of Ahmet T. Kuru's Passive and Assertive Secularism: Historical Conditions, Ideological Struggles and State Policies towards Religion

Mahnoor Mansoor*¹ and Rehana Saeed Hashmi²

1. Ph.D. Student at the Department of Political Science, University of the Punjab Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

2. Professor, Department of Political Science, University of the Punjab Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

***Corresponding Author**

drasia@sbbusba.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

This research paper is about the content analysis of Ahmet T. Kuru's article, *Passive and Assertive Secularism: Historical Conditions, Ideological Struggles and State Policies Toward Religion*. The research is based on the relative perspectives of religion, secularism, and other like concepts and their underpinnings at international levels. The interplay of religion and secularism has always been the talk of the town owing to the sensitivity of the matter. It has been a traditional debate that ideological struggles and state policies must be separated or integrated. The traditional fight between state and the church is almost the same as Kuru describes in his article. He looks more scientific in his explanation and specify the state-church fight with passive and assertive secularism in different countries. It is interesting piece for brain storming but lacks few research gaps that we are going to fill in this content analysis. We may say that our knowledge gap is different because of living in different parts of the world and the perspectives change everything in social sciences. Different countries adopt varied policies according to their internal circumstances. While indulging in the content analysis, a qualitative approach and descriptive method are used. It provides a critical analysis of the article with an oriental perspective. In conclusion we analyzed that it is elite capture and monopoly that determine every aspect of human life. Therefore, people living in the developing world have different perspectives of life and their ideology as compared to the people of the developed part of the world think about religion and their ideologies.

KEYWORDS

Assertive Secularism, Ideology, Passive Secularism, Religion

Introduction

Ahmet T. Kuru's article regarding his typology of passive and assertive secularism fundamentally discusses the church-state relationship in the US, France, and Turkey. He explains secularism in controlled circumstances and derives his conclusions from a positivist approach. However, Kuru does not define secularism in the article or relation to other researchers or writers. Yet, he explains the concept of secularism with his mentioned typologies (passive and assertive). He tries to define religion but not secularism in a footnote on page 569 of his article. He intentionally avoids defining secularism because secularism has different definitions in different phases of history. Therefore, it becomes almost impossible for the author to continue his argument. Here are a few definitions from the literature:

"Secularism is any movement in society directed away from otherworldliness to life on earth" (Britannica, 2023). The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines secularism as

an irrelevance to, denial, or segregation of religion and religious deliberations. (Merriam-Webster, 2023). Jacob Holyoake defines secularism as based on individual ethics, attitudes, and civilization in politics. (Capson, 2023).

In the course of history, the definition of secularism served the purpose of the West. Therefore, Kuru explains his typology of passive and assertive secularism without indulging himself in any meanings of secularism. It destroys his concept as an inept effort to interpret the phenomenon. He wrote the whole article based on his self-acclaimed concepts and perspectives. Research is all about finding out anything with the help of the scientific method, which involves systematic chronological underpinnings based on accepted order in social sciences.

Secularism may be defined as denying any religious interpretation of any human phenomenon. The literal meanings of secularism have changed throughout history. Secularism, at its best, may be defined as non-intervention. In this perspective, only Islam is a secular religion in the world, and it is constantly misunderstood.

Sociologists observe that the growing importance of technology and science gives rise to secularism. Secularization came about because more and more questions are now answered by scientific reasoning, so, at least in theory, people no longer need divine answers and mysticism to guide them in their everyday lives. At the same time, governments (in the Western world) now base their decisions on scientific research, advice, and technological advancements rather than on religious dogma. (Economic Development and Religion, n.d.)

While modernization undermined religion, religious belief has been argued to have hurt the development of the economy. Modern science and technology are necessary for economic development, much more than religion and spiritualism. Science and technology, coupled with the rationalist worldview upon which they are based, are seen as eroding traditional religious beliefs.

The groups/tribes/ or states with proportionately high levels of religious following are found against any economic development owing to their leadership's exploitation of the religion. They are wary of their religious and cultural practices being erased or replaced. As a result, they may have lower economic growth and prosperity than nations that embrace secularization and modernity. (Economic Development and Religion, n.d.)

Literature Review

In 2023, Halim Rane wrote Higher Objectives (maqasid) of Covenants in Islam: A Content Analysis of "ahd and muthaq" in the Quran, published in Centre for Social and Cultural Research, Griffith University, Nathan, QLD 4111, Australia. This study recommends that the study of Quranic knowledge be integrated into courses and discourses about Islam corresponding with its universality in the Quran and Prophet Muhammad's approach to constructing peaceful interreligious relations between Muslims and non-Muslims. Our analysis is based on the terms Kuru used for his research.

In 2022, the Qualitative Report, The Shift in the Authority of Islamic Religious Education: A Qualitative Content Analysis on Online Religious Teaching, authors Maemonah, Sigit Purnama, Rohinah Rohinah, Hafidh 'Aziz, Abda Billah Faza Muhammadkan Bastian, and Ahmad Syafii, explains in this how pandemic Covid-19

has changed the social and religious behavior of the people. In Kuru's article, the same level of understanding is equated to how people react to passive and assertive secularism. This work is different from the source because the researcher is giving its interpretation based on empirical evidence.

In 2021, Anthony-Paul Cooper, Joshua Mann, Erkki Sutinen, and Peter Phillips wrote *Understanding London's church tweeters: A Content Analysis of Church-Related Tweets Posted from a Global City*. It is also qualitative research that made a content analysis of tweets and their impact on the sociological aspect of human life. Our analysis is different because it relates to public sector universities and the kinds of secularism operating in academic institutions.

In 2021, Sayeed Al-Zaman wrote *A Content Analysis of Social Media Users' Reaction to Religious Disinformation in Bangladesh*, published in the University of Nebraska – Lincoln digital library. He explains the three crucial social media factors: disinformation and constructive and destructive interpretations of any phenomenon. Our content analysis explains how the author made tall claims about the kinds of secularism without defining the phenomenon.

In 2018, Shafqat Munir Ahmad wrote about *Content Analysis of Hate-Speech Discourse in Religious Publications in Punjab, Pakistan*, and published in the *Journal of Contemporary Studies*. He used the framing theory to understand intolerance in society. He used six frames: inter-religious hatred, sectarian hatred, criticism of mainstream media, gender bias, criticism of educational institutions, and criticism of civil society. This work is very much relevant to our work.

Methodology

The content analysis is based on the analysis of the given text in the article, along with the evidence the researcher provides. It is a qualitative analysis based on the researcher's explanations.

Hypotheses

- Religious policies vary between countries. These policies impact each state's sociopolitical and economic conditions.
- Political and non-political elite are influential people in a state who make all policies with individual choices, not the state's ordinary people.

In the Kuru article, here are the dependent variables

- 1- Varied policies of the three different governments, the US, France, and Turkey
- 2- Economic development, civilization, and dominant ideology are alternative explanatory variables

Passive and Assertive Secularism

Kuru claims that the U.S., France, and Turkey all three are secular states but with different policies on wearing school attires. It denies the secularism of these states when the state has any policy about any subject; it means it is intervening in that domain. It is against the basic definition of secularism. Therefore, all the content becomes irrelevant. Kuru insists the U.S. permits students to wear garments and symbols that may be

religious, while France prohibits such signs in public schools. On the contrary, Turkey bans such things in all private and public schools. If you notice, Kuru did not initially mention that the U.S. or France allow or deny which schools, private or public; he kept silent, only explaining about the public schools in the case of France, and used the word all educational institutions for Turkey instead of private and public schools.

Kuru gives a strange kind of argument when he writes that all three under-discussed countries are constitutionally secular but highly concerned about religion. He further argues that in all three states, “education is the main battlefield in state-religion controversies.

Kuru believes in his work varied policies on the religion of these three states, the U.S., France, and Turkey, a dependent variable. He describes two types of secularism: passive and assertive. First, it allows the students to show or not show their religion publicly and later believe religion is private. Both enable individuals to practice religion in private domains. However, in the U.S., individuals have the freedom to express or not to express their religion. His discussion is based on church-state relationships instead of passive and assertive secularism.

Alternative Theories

In the second part of his document, Kuru explains three theories as an alternative to interpreting his argument from a scientific point of view. He relates modernization theory with economic determinism, civilizational theory with religious determinism, and rational choice theory with the choices of individuals. Keeping all three perspectives in view, Kuru explains the different perspectives of modernization and emphasizes how economic development transforms traditional states into modern states. In Figure 1, he claims that in the first stage, the presence or absence of an ancient regime is based on Monarchy and hegemonic religion. In the second stage, Ideological struggles with the dominance of assertive and passive secularism. However, it should be tolerant and assertive, as per his description. In the third stage, exclusionary or inclusionary policy tendencies toward religion are depicted in the figure. He also believes that in Figure 1, there are explanatory and dependent variables. All dependent variables can be transformed into independent variables or vice versa.

Kuru refers to Robert Barro and Rachel McCleary’s findings regarding the reasons why some states have religion as an official state religion, and others do not. Conducting a study in 188 out of 192 countries with the U.N. seems like an arduous task.

While explaining the civilizational theory, he claims that Islam and its different sects, directly or indirectly, impact the socio-political lives of its followers. It may be the same for other religions like Christianity or Judaism. The individual actions may not be considered as the depiction of that specific religion an individual is pursuing. Divine Religions are different from their practitioners for diversified reasons.

The author claims that the third rational choice theory is attached to three factors: individual preferences, rational calculations, and structural constraints. Researchers find it weird that the other two earlier theories are unrelated to the same factors. The author makes sweeping statements in his research without any valid arguments. For example, he claims that it is “Jamaat-i-Islami defends an Islamic state in Pakistan.” He writes it without any sustaining argument. We all know that JI usually talks about democracy, but the author himself claims that democracy is against religious connotations. It shows the dichotomy (contradiction) in his claims and argument. While

explaining Anthony Gill, as one of the rational choice theorists, explains the facts that should be discussed under the theories of modernization and civilizational approaches addressed.

Kuru writes, "Yet very frequently the 'world images' that have been created by 'ideas' have, like switchmen, determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamic of interests." This claim makes no sense; can anyone help understand this sentence? He mistakenly mentioned 'world images' instead of 'word images.'

Kuru used the first person singular 12 times in his article, which is highly disapproved in research; usually, the third person singular or plural is used for any claim.

Results and Discussion

Kuru's understanding of secularism provides a simplified explanation. It does not impress social science students but makes them confused owing to the misinterpretations and over-interpretations of many concepts. For example, he initially explains two interpretations of passive secularism: accommodationists and separationists. Still, at the end of his argument, he introduces another interpretation of passive secularism as mixed decisions.

Political elite, decision-makers, civil and military bureaucracy, and establishments determine the causes of actions in any prevailing society, not the ordinary individuals. State-church, catholic-protestant, accommodationists-separationists, secular-religious, etc., all are determined by the influential people of the state, not by the ordinary people. We may say that the individual choices of the leader of a state matter, not the individual choices of the ordinary citizens, in determining any phenomenon in the state.

In conclusion, the author again starts another debate on the ideological constraints in Russia and Iran in post-communist and post-monarchic eras, respectively. He also gives other examples of Iraq that are irrelevant to the topic and his argument. It has nothing to do with the article's main argument about a church-state relationship, which he calls passive and assertive secularism.

The article's content gives the impression that Kuru observes religious policies and their impact on different states. It is not religious policies or decision-making on the part of the political elite in any state. Still, it is a matter of time before a state becomes dominant in the global community owing to its strong economy, culture, political ideology, and civilization. Muslims dominated the global community and dictated their terms from the fifth to the thirteenth centuries. From the thirteenth century to the twentieth century, the West dominated. In the twenty-first century, China dominates because of its strong economy, culture, and ideology, and it dictates its terms.

State-Church/Religion-Individual

The state gives an individual identity, and church or religion strengthens an individual when he becomes helpless before the material world. The individual, as a unit of the state, remains busy in worldly affairs until he becomes helpless, and at that moment, he looks towards God for divine help. We may say that sometimes individuals try to hide behind religion for their weaknesses.

Any economically strong state always makes a difference in the lives of people in other parts of the world. The debate of secularism is inept when there is a weak economy. It is not religion that determines an individual's course of action; it is his financial condition that drives him in his life.

God is the only secular individual in this universe Who allows the disobeying creature (devil and his followers) to consume, produce, and distribute unless you live on the earth. No other institution, government, state, individual, structure, agency, or actor permits the transgressor of their set rules and regulations to live independently, but Allah does.

We know that movements like black life and Muslim Lives Matter in the twenty-first century emerged as a result of discrimination and racism that has been dominant in the USA, France, and other Western countries. Therefore, Kuru's claim that the USA is a more tolerant state than France becomes irrelevant. It gives us a manifestation that the elite class of any country intends to keep the poor or oppressed class in a conflict that has no end. Religion is such a factor that unites the people of the world in their surroundings. The elite or aristocracy keeps people divided in the name of religion to control and rule over them. On the one hand, the same elite use the name of religion for uniting people as well as for disuniting the same. The world's elite exploit different factors at different times to control the middle, lower, and lower middle classes for their economic objectives, which they achieve through the ordinary people of the world.

We observed a swing from secularism to one type of religion to another in the middle of the twentieth century. François Gauthier claims that social scientists, especially on religious affairs, usually overlooked the rise of economics as a leading and shaping social force at the beginning of the 1980s and, as such, how consumerism and neoliberalism have shaped religion. (Gauthier, 2023) He believes that commercial types of religion and those providing a culture of validity and eloquence face liveliness and enrichment. (Gauthier, 2023)

Two combined balancing forces, globalization of consumerism and neoliberalism, caused this transformation. It was a uniform and unidirectional force, but as the two heads of a process that has dilapidated our cultures, we favor a new configuration in which the mechanisms and the idea of the global market are determined. Consequently, we are shifting from religion to commercialism.

Kuru could not comprehend that consumerism came before neoliberalism in the West. Consumption became a popular standard of life in the late 1950s, especially in the 1960s. It was not only an economic activity but a cultural and social transformation at a large scale. Since then, consumerism has become a lifestyle and a source of identity for a class. It became a fashion in the West to seek a lifestyle that differentiated them from other social classes. The concept of consumerism captivates and explains how consumption is more than buying goods in a market. It encompasses different means of socializing symbols, connotations, individualities, and belonging.

Strangely, most religious scholars could not comprehend the power of the economy at the outset of 1980. It was the economy that was shaping the lifestyle of individuals and making them more satisfied and content. We observed that all segments of society started perceiving the economy as the source of strength for health and education.

Charles Taylor claims that consumption is a demanding source for democratizing the culture of genuineness and fluency. Society's individuals consider themselves incomparable and unique in style or consumption. Furthermore, this contended individual is free from external environments, such as political and religious institutions. Their lifestyle articulation forces others to notice their grandeur.

The question is how it has been relevant to religion. On the one hand, it provides the origin for the liberal displacement of religion; it gives way to innovative expressions. Religion should be confined to the private lives of the individuals. National religion concedes the way to imagined global communities, intercontinental fluxes, and anthropological, parochial, and traditional belonging.

It transforms the environment and gives way to new means of development. Conventional spiritual establishments started minimizing their staff and trying to manage their resources within their limits. They started increasing their communication networks and outsourcing the managerial work to fulfill the people's needs and demands in time. In the meantime, convincing and attractive religious organizations started exerting their influence on society.

The individual lifestyle and capitalist ideology combine to distort the borders amid the religious and secular domains to diminish the apparent distinction between the two. Religion starts blending with a society that believes more in social mixing through tourism, media, entertainment, political activities, psychological and entrepreneurial engagements, medication, and relative curatives. The public and private sectors that used to divide on religious grounds started working efficiently for social welfare and community uplift. More concentration was on healthcare, education, environmental protection, and the rule of law than spiritual considerations.

The religious flavor started vanishing, and society was bent on transforming itself on a community basis. Commercialism was at stake and started evolving as a need-based gesture for individuals. People generally realized that religion needed to play a role in their private lives instead of creating any seeds of consternation among neighbors or close societal ties. The increased interconnectedness owing to the tools of globalization, namely, advertisement, marketing, and multinational corporations, transformed the religious touch into an accommodative societal setup for individuals. The Muslim families started opting for five-star Makkah visits and performing their rituals more fashionably and stylishly. Not only this, stylish veils transformed the viewpoint of the West toward Muslims for their openness and adaptability in the globalized environment. The Western Muslim diaspora transformed the Muslim identities in a way that it was hard to differentiate between a Muslim and a non-Muslim.

Therefore, the transformation from religiosity to market commercialism reflected that this century is more prone to economic gains than fighting for any community's religious or spiritual dominance. Such developments are phenomenal and mark a difference in the lives of individuals on a large scale. It also explains that individual needs are beyond any religious impositions. No religion confines individuals from flourishing with new developments and phenomena. It also reflects that religion does not marginalize individuals who adopt the lifestyle that suits them. (Gauthier, 2023)

It is the twenty-first century, and democracy or any other form of government is no longer operational to run a government. We need to think beyond democracy and freedom, as these have been masquerading concepts to date. From Adam to date, there

has been one law of nature in the depths of the seas, the vastness of jungles, or the nation-states; that is, might is right. (Ahmad, 2021)

In the 21st century, religions have assumed a new role due to 'glocalization' after globalization, spreading from countries where they began. Today, we can observe that religion is more prevalent in urban areas than in rural areas. Religion is adopting a global attire instead of being any local setup. The spiritual world is rising at a demographic level. Europe's belief system has increased because of Muslim and Christian migrations—the latter coming from Latin America, Africa, and the Philippines, where Christianity found a new stronghold. Megapolis affects religion's development. It is easing the mass of religious supporters' communities.

Professor Thomas believes Christianity is questioned because of its origin in Europe or the Middle East. If we observe closely, Christianity began spreading to China and India. Therefore, we may talk about global Christianity and its Occidental roots, now moving away from its origin and mixing itself with other cultures. Christian movements in Europe try to connect with other parts of the world. We also see the political interpretations of the Bible while explaining the relationship between political and religious globalization.

Brazil, India, Mali, Nigeria, and Senegal are just some countries where Christianity launches itself firmly, exerting culture and policy for the mentioned states. Professor Thomas forecasts the same developments for China and other Far Eastern countries, where the phenomenon is already substantial.

Sharia is the basis of sociopolitical life for Muslims in Nigeria and Uganda. But at the same time, there are also some Christians who consider the Bible as a sacred law in the same countries. The president of the IAI Guarantors Committee, Mr. Cesare Merlini, notices, as commented about in Professor Thomas' analysis, that religions are response and antagonism to spark a post-secular era controversy. Thomas considers religion's role in the Islamic Arab Spring to have had an impact, but not in terms of what we usually think about it. In the Northern African rebellions, Religion was not the driving force behind them. (Global Politics and Global Religion in the 21st century, 2012)

The present-day Chinese churches display an exciting privatization inclination, encouraging that religion is a private matter and irrelevant to politics. Christians are only about the salvation of their own personal souls, and they do not care about all public affairs. To avoid the facts, they do not hesitate to twist the factual defiance of separation of church and state, and even recurrently utter the words of Jesus, "God belongs to God, and Caesar belongs to Caesar," to demonstrate that religion must separate itself from politics. At the same time, it is also not good for the church to support any organization or candidate who used to support the church. The church is a sacred entity, not any instrument for a politician. The church is the spiritual salvation of the people, regardless of their affiliation or no affiliation with the church. Although the Bible can interpret a variety of different scriptural themes, political dogmatics, peace divinity, human rights doctrine, liberation divinity, women's dogmatics, ecological theology, etc., it will always be for the freedom of the sufferers, the oppressed, and the censure of the slayer of misery. The uprightness of the victim and suffering people is the most essential part of Christians' love for their fellow citizens and, ultimately, society. It is the only indication of a Christian's love for the Omnipotent. (Qin, 2023)

Conclusion

Therefore, we may conclude that Kuru's forms of secularism are his observations and a way to understand religion. The elite class makes the states' policies without considering the ordinary people. This method of elite class is not confined to the West only but everywhere in the world. The elite class or the aristocracy used to dictate its terms to distribute the economic fruits as per their wish. It is a perfect way to indulge the intellectual and ordinary people in a debate that has nothing to do with their lives. Kuru's article or research will not make any difference in policy making or the lives of the individuals but make them busy in understanding a futile debate of passive and assertive secularism. It is not religion but the economy that is a driving force in people's lives. Religion treats the people's souls, and the economy manages the routine affairs of human society.

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