

Between Secularism and Multiple Establishment: Rajeev Bhargava's Typology of Relations between State and Religion(s) and the example of Germany¹

My presentation draws largely on Rajeev Bhargava's work, which has informed me ever since I joined JNU as a lecturer in German Studies in the monsoon semester of the year 2000. In the following, I will try to benefit from his work on secularism in the Indian context for an analysis of the current state of relations between religion and politics in Germany. I am thereby following his advice that

'To discover its own rich and complex structure, western secularism can either look backward, to its own past or else look sideways, at Indian secularism that mirrors, not only the past of secularism, but in a way also its future.' (Bhargava & Acharya 2008: 296)

By focussing on state institutions, I will leave aside the critique of the *secularisation thesis* that is less focussed on institutions but takes into consideration the society at large.

'The world today, with some exceptions...is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever. This means that a whole body of literature by historians and social scientists loosely labeled "secularization theory" is essentially mistaken.' (Berger 1999: 2)

The *secularisation thesis* originated with particular theories of modernity that held that religion was designed to become less and less significant in the social and political life of a modern society. This could mean two things. Firstly, it could have meant that religion loses ground in society and that people generally become less religious. Secondly, it meant that the process of secularisation continues, that is the continuous functional differentiation of society and the growing independence of its subsystems from the erstwhile all-embracing system of religion. It is generally held, nowadays, that the first alternative is false whereas the second one holds by and large true.

Generally speaking, it seems that the secularisation of society as a whole is quite independent from the secularity of its political institutions. In countries with strong walls of separation between church and state, religiosity can thrive, like in the USA, or linger, like in France. Equally, in countries with close church-state relations, religiosity can thrive, as in Poland, or linger, as in Germany (Bertelsmann 2007).

In this presentation, I am not concerned with degrees of religiosity in society and their possible explanation. It may be the case that even in an environment such as Germany, where church membership stagnates, new forms of religiosity emerge that side-line the forms offered by organised religion. I mean "New religious movements" (John Saliba) and the "vicarious" practice of religion (Grace Davie) as they have been studied extensively since the 1990s.

Neither am I concerned with the question of religion continuing to play a role as "public religions" (José Casanova) in spite of a tendency recognisable in some, but not all, secular contexts to relegate religion into the private domain where it becomes an "invisible religion"

¹Key note address held at the Centre for European Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University on occasion of the national seminar on Faith and Secularism in India and Europe, 8 March 2013.

(Thomas Luckmann). Whether religion thrives in a society or whether religiosity dwindles, there seems to be no direct correlation between the secularity of the society and the secularity of its institutions.

My focus here will be on political institutions rather than on society at large. Institutions, of course, emerge from society and the way they emerge, get established, are subject to change, and eventually decline, is embedded in the general normative outlook and the value economy of the particular society in question, which is in turn part of a global society with its own structures of dominance and hegemony.

Both at home and in the world at large, the normative framework underlying institutions is an expression of the hegemonic ideas of the dominant classes of society, or of the dominant societies globally, and as such they are always contested. They are contested often in the very same language that the dominant framework dictates. Thus in an age where the predominant discourse in the West was nationalistic, nationalism provided the grounds to resist the colonial regime in India.

Today in a world dominated by the United States of America and US-based, but globally active, business corporations, the discourse on secularism and religion is dominated by the US-American discourse on liberal secularism. A counter-hegemonic discourse often consists in nothing but a negation of ideas received with the US-American hegemonic discourse. This counter-hegemonic discourse often treats liberalism on a par with religion and thereby attempts to re-establish religion as a normative framework for politics, the very opposite of secularism (Talal Asad 2003).

Against this tendency, Rajeev Bhargava draws our attention to the fact that the US-American model of secularism is not the only one available as a standard. Not everywhere has secularism erected such strong walls of separation between the state and religion as in the US. Faced with a multi-religious society, India, as Rajeev Bhargava has argued, and Germany, as I am going to argue are offering two instances where the state has related to religion in a collaborative manner without privileging one religion over the other and without betraying individual rights for the sake of rights for religious communities.

Rajeev Bhargava needs also to be credited with having drawn our attention to the historicity of the idea of secularism itself. With late colonialism and processes of decolonisation after the Second World War the discourse of secularism gained global hegemony. This and other global discourses are best explained in terms of an overarching global cultural system in which nation states, supranational and transnational organisations as well as individuals partake (Meyer et al. 2007). The sociological school of neo-institutionalism defending this view cites as evidence the strong isomorphism in processes of nation state formation. These similarities could not be explained by an accidental convergence. They are an expression of a homologous evolution.

Until the process of decolonisation in the decades following the Second World War, the world was dominated by erstwhile colonial and newly hegemonic western powers and thus it is no surprise that Western ideas of political organisation retained their hegemony in the period accompanying the emergence of new states. Secularism was one such idea, its major proponents being the newly arising twin hegemonies of the Cold War era, the United States of America and the Soviet Union. Thus no matter where one placed oneself, whether at the right

of the political spectrum, emulating the US, or on the left, either way progress came with the idea of a state neatly cut off from religion.

Everywhere after the Second World War newly emerging polities chose the model of the nation-state to organise themselves. Pervading even the bounds of their alleged cultural autarky, patterns of internal organisation became astonishingly isomorphic throughout the society of nation-states. Sociologists cite example over example regarding education, birth control, the opening up of educational institutions for women, human rights regimes, environmental protection, economic policy, welfare, and medicine, etc.

We are going to look at only one such feature, namely the model of the secular democratic state. I will investigate the relationship between the state and established religious bodies in terms of Bhargava's typology. Further, I will examine the role of religion in education. It is important to note that there is a considerable amount of ambiguity around the notion of a secular democratic state and it is not evident which was the ideal type exerting the highest global influence. For one, the meaning of democracy until the end of the Cold War was divided between a liberal, western notion and the notion of the People's Republics prevailing in the real-existing socialist camp. Correspondingly, the concept of secularism was divided into a liberal notion, distancing the state from religion precisely in order to warrant religious liberty to all citizens, – and a real-existing socialist notion that regarded religion as a potentially dangerous specimen of false consciousness and attempted to suppress it.

Non-aligned India felt the pull from both sides, which partly accounts for the on-going controversy about secularism even today, a fact insufficiently explored in the recent literature. Germany of course did not only *feel* the pull from both sides but was literally pulled apart. Whereas West-Germany readjusted the system of church-state relations it inherited from the Weimar Republic, East-Germany ventured to erase religion from public life as best as it could. While being less successful in most of its other objectives, it achieved quite a success in sustainably curbing religiosity within its sphere of influence. With two thirds of the population in former East-Germany even today not professing any religion, the long term effects bear witness to this 'success story'. According to a recent poll by the Bertelsmann foundation, 63% of the population in former East-Germany calls itself "not religious". In former West-Germany, non-religious people account for only 19% of the population.²

Thus in order to understand the great variety of church state relations in Europe today, we not only need to understand the prevailing normative ideals available from the global cultural reference frame. We also need to take into account the individual trajectories that each statetakes when adjusting to these new paradigms. For India, this trajectory is determined by the already quite secular colonial state. For Western European states their trajectories involve their respective, very divergent histories of church-state relations in continuity from 1648 to the present. For post-revolutionary France and real-socialist Europe between 1945 and 1990, the rupture with pre-existing forms of church-state relations is more pronounced. In the latter, of course, this is not *sui generis* but due to the dominant influence of the Soviet Union on the states belonging to the Warsaw Pact.

²Cf. Bertelsmann Religionsmonitor: http://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/cps/rde/xchg/bst/hs.xsl/nachrichten_84470.htm (accessed 1 March 2013).

While India as a newly founded nation stood in the continuity of an already quite secular colonial state, Western European states could only adjust to the now predominant model by starting from where they had arrived in 1945 on their own paths. To describe and compare the various models that result from this interactive process between individual path dependency and the global normative pull, however, we need to resort to a terminological framework. Such a framework is offered by Rajeev Bhargava who has developed a typology of church-state relations that can help us to characterise the institutional relations between religion and politics in terms of their forms of secularity or establishment.

Bhargava distinguishes secular states broadly from theocracies and from states with established religion(s) and offers a pattern by which to distinguish further within each of these categories. A state, thus can be theocratic (A), singly established (B1), multiply established (B2) and secular (C). A theocratic state is governed by divine law, administered by priestly order and claims divine commission. An established state grants official, legal recognition to one or several religions either through their churches or otherwise. If singly established, it may compel individuals to congregate for only one religion and punish those who fail to profess a particular religion. An established state levies taxes in support of religion, makes religious instruction mandatory in schools or media and gives financial aid to religious institutions like schools, churches, hospitals and charities. Finally a secular state disestablishes all religions, excludes all religions from the narrower public domain, and it may act neutrally towards all religions. In its benign form, it maintains a principled distance towards all religions and intervenes on behalf of individual rights of members within communities based on previously defined constitutional values. As Bhargava puts it “On this interpretation of separation, a secular state neither mindlessly excludes all religions nor is blindly neutral towards them” (2002: 89). In its less benign form, it tries to suppress religion and disadvantages overtly religious individuals.

State	Germany	India	classification	
Governed by divine law			theocratic (Iran since 1979)	
Administered by priestly order				
Claims divine commission				
Grants official, legal recognition to one religion			single establishment (Europe 1648 – 19 th / 20 th century)	establishment of one or many religion (s) through their churches or religious associations
Compels to congregate only for one religion				
Punishes for not professing the official religion				
Levies taxes in support for the official religion				
Mandatory school education in the official religion			multiple establishment	
Grants official, legal recognition to several religions	X			
Levies and redistributes taxes on behalf of religions	X			
Financially aid schools run by religions	X			
Punish people for disrespecting religion				
Is indifferent to religious liberties within community				
Disestablishment of all religions	X	X	Secular (India since independence)	
Exclusion of religion from the political arena	X	X		
Neutrality vis-à-vis religion in the public domain	X	X		
Protection of individual liberties within religious communities (principled distance)	X	X		
Exclusion of religion from the wider public domain			laïc (France since 1905)	
Disadvantaging or persecuting professors of a religion			Real-existing socialist (GDR)	

While India clearly falls into the category of the secular state in Bhargava’s typology, the case of Germany is less clear.

On one hand, Germany, since the constitution of the Weimar Republic of 11 August 1919, explicitly disestablishes religion. The Weimar constitution in article 137 (1) states that “there shall be no established church”. This article was incorporated under Article 140 into the Basic Law of 23 May 1949, which served as an auxiliary constitution until a future reunification of Germany. On the other hand, the Basic Law contains an explicit reference to God in its preamble, which reads:

‘Conscious of their responsibility before God and man, inspired by the determination to promote world peace as an equal partner in a united Europe, the German people, in the exercise of their constituent power, have adopted this Basic Law.’

In Germany, the Christian churches enjoy a special legal status as Corporations of Public Law (*Körperschaften öffentlichen Rechts*). This does not incorporate them into the state but it establishes them as authorities with legislative and administrative powers over their members and privileges them in their dealings with the state.

The legal basis of the German model of public law corporations dates back to the times of Bismarck and was successively taken over by the post-revolutionary constitution of the Weimar Republic, the post-war constitution of the Bonn Republic and the post-unification constitution of the Berlin Republic. Other examples of public law corporations are the Jewish communities in the states of Berlin and Brandenburg, the associations of health service doctors of the various states, and the public broadcasters in Germany.

The public law model of church-state relations has recently come under fire from humanist associations who point out that the two Christian churches in Germany, aside from having the German state raise 9 billion Euros in taxes for them every year from their own members, receive about 19 billion subsidies from the general tax payer (Frerk 2010). This includes 270 million Euros subsidies for missionary activities abroad which are paid by even those taxpayers who are not part of any Christian church (ibid.).

This seems particularly unjust given the fact that more than 38 per cent of the German population does not belong to any of the two major Churches. In present day Germany, a little less than one third of the population is protestant; less than one third is catholic and a little less than one third profess no religion at all. While both of the major Christian churches, i.e. the Catholic Church and the united Lutheran and Reformed (Calvinist) churches, enjoy public law status, some of the altogether 100,000 strong orthodox Jewish associations as well as some Alevi Muslim associations have attained a similar status by way of a public law contract (*Staatsvertrag*).

By recent estimates of the German Islam Conference (*Deutsche Islamkonferenz* 2013) four million Muslims account for nearly five per cent of the German population. Except for some Alevi communities in some of the federal states, Muslim communities do not yet enjoy public law status. The main reason is that they have so far not complied with the requirement to account for their members as individuals instead of counting only heads of families as official members, as is the custom in most mosque organisations or Muslim religious associations. By not allowing women as members in their own standing, they violate German laws of voluntary association and, ultimately, the constitutional laws of non-discrimination.

Recognition as an officially established religious community is thus used by the German state as an incentive to abrogate patriarchal structures within Muslim communities in the name of

the individual liberties of their own women members. This resembles a case of principled distance as in Rajeev Bhargava's terminology.

To understand the German particularity regarding church-state relations, we need to look far back into history. In addition to the often militant process of Christianisation under the Roman Church throughout the middle ages, the Lutheran Reformation continues to have an effect on the religious situation in Germany until today. Since the peace treaty of Augsburg in 1555, established protestant churches (*Landeskirchen*) were presided over by the local princes who, while being secular rulers, assumed the highest authority in their state-church. Catholic bishops, on the other hand, ruled the dominions of Trier, Cologne and Mainz. They were not only the ecclesiastic leaders but also wielded secular power.

Today, the organisation of the Lutheran or Reformed (Calvinist) churches into *Landeskirchen* continues to exist, however without any secular ruler presiding over them. The *Landeskirchen* together form the Evangelical Church of Germany. The Catholic Church in Germany, on the other hand, continues to be subdivided into the old Roman dioceses which ultimately fall under the jurisdiction of the Holy See in Rome. Since the Vatican is a sovereign state, the rules regulating the collaboration between the Catholic Church and Germany fall under international law. They were fixed in 1933 with the *Concordat* between Nazi-Germany and the Vatican. Nazi-Germany would have preferred a more radical secularisation as can be seen in their church-state policies in the annexed Polish *Warthegau*. Here the Church was organised as a voluntary association under civil law with the state regimenting it. For opportunistic reasons, however, both sides agreed to the *Concordat*. Hitler was interested in ensuring that Catholic clerks would refrain from engaging in politics while the Catholic side strove to save Catholic associations in Germany from falling prey to Hitler's policy of forcible coordination (*Gleichschaltung*).

Post war, the German Democratic Republic nominally retained the system of public law corporations of the Weimar Republic. In practice, however, a person openly professing his religious allegiances was barred from attaining any leading position in politics, society or at the work place. With the youth initiation ceremony (*Jugendweihe*) the state offered secular alternatives for Christian *rites de passage* like confirmation. Christmas angels were renamed "winged year-end figures". The state spied on church activists who played a leading role in the peaceful revolution of 1989.

The history of two militantly secular systems like Nazi-Germany and the GDR make it hard to conceive that the present system of church-state relations be further disentangled in view of a global ideal of separation between state and religion. Today this system is guided by three core values which have to be seen in conjunction with the principle of positive and negative religious freedom guaranteed by article four of the Basic Law.

Neutrality: The State must not have specific preference for a religious community or interfere in their belief or practice as long as it conforms to the constitution and the law of the land. Religious communities regulate and administer their own affairs in conformity with the laws of Germany and without intervention by the State. All religious institutions have to be treated alike by the state.

Tolerance: The State is obliged to recognise all religious communities in the same way, as well as to afford the same space for religious needs as well as for the need, not to be solicited

by religion. Treating everyone as an equal may sometimes require unequal treatment of religious communities in so far as they themselves treat their members differentially.

Parity: The principle entails the public obligation to treat religious communities alike provided that they follow the general laws governing voluntary associations in Germany. They are recognized if they can guarantee a certain amount of consistency over time and if they can show a minimum number of members. As we have seen, the application of this principle leads to a form of principled distance towards religious communities as in Bhargava's account.

Churches and other religious associations in Germany run care homes and hospitals, kindergartens, private schools and universities. Most public universities have theological faculties where the Churches organise the denominational curricula. Lately, some chairs of Islamic theology have been established in order to train German Imams and possibly Muslim school teachers in the future. Religious education is part of the regular curriculum in state run schools, except in non-confessional schools. The lessons are held in accord with the religious communities. The decision whether children are supposed to participate in religious education or not, is incumbent on the parents or guardians. From age 14, children may choose themselves whether or not they want to participate in denominational classes or opt for ethics or the like instead. No teacher can be forced to teach religion against her will.

The question of religious education for Muslim school children is still in the process of being answered. In a few of the states, pilot projects of Islamic religious education under German state supervision have been launched but a regular Islamic school curriculum has not yet been established, mainly because of the lack of representative associations on the side of the Muslim communities that could take charge of the denominational content of the curricula. Muslim pupils are allowed to wear religious symbols like the headscarf. In principle, teachers are also allowed to wear religious symbols, barring exceptions in a few states where the headscarf is forbidden for school teachers based on the assumption that is a political symbol rather than a religious one. Generally, teachers are barred from politically indoctrinating children in a one-sided manner.

Churches have a public mandate, which offers them a say and a right to information concerning aspects of public life. This includes the review of legislation prior to having it passed in the central or state parliaments. Moreover, Churches have free broadcasting time on public television and radio and can send representatives to the supervisory boards of public institutions.

Now coming back to Rajeev Bhargava's typology of multiply established and secular states, it seems that Germany displays some of the features of each, multiple establishment as well as secular state (Bhargava 2002). The table shows those features in which Germany conforms to both, the multiply established state, and to the secular state of Bhargava's typology.

Germany	Legal basis
Grants official, legal recognition to several religions	Art. 137 (5) WRV; Art. 140 GG
Levies and redistributes taxes on behalf of religions	Art. 137 (6) WRV; Art. 140 GG
Financially aids schools run by religions	Art. 138 WRV; Art. 140 GG; Art. 7 (3) GG
Punishes people for disrespecting religion	§ 166 StGB (if utterance threatens public peace)
Explicitly disestablishes all religions	Art. 137 (1) WRV; Art. 140 GG
Excludes religion from the political arena	Art. 137 (1) WRV; Art. 140 GG
Is neutral vis-à-vis religion in the public domain	Art. 137 WRV; Art. 140 GG

In what follows, I shall discuss those features of Bhargava typology that do not quite fit the German situation. In these respects, Germany can neither be called a multiply established state nor a secular one. According to Bhargava, the establishment of religion can be through a church or through other forms of organization, given that not all religions are organized in the form of a church. If we understand that in Germany religions are not established in the strict sense of the term but still bear an official status as corporations of public law, then it must be said that Germany confers this status not only to the two Christian denominations that traditionally organize as Churches but also to religions that traditionally do not do so like Jewish communities, Alevis and any other association sharing a common world view (*Weltanschauungsgemeinschaft*). This world view (*Weltanschauung*) may also be secular.

Furthermore, according to Bhargava, states and religions may be intertwined on three different levels:

1. At the level of the overall ends of the institution
2. At the level of institutional organization
3. At the level of laws and policies

While secular states try to disentangle state and religion on all three levels, established states may separate state and religion on the level of institutional organization but maintain an identity of ends and of policies.

By German constitutional law, the ultimate ends of the state include human rights, constitutionality and the rule of law (*Rechtsstaatlichkeit*), the advancement of equality between men and women, social solidarity, protection of the environment, protection of minority rights, the advancement of culture, European integration, and economic growth and stability. None of these correspond to the exclusive ends pursued by any particular religion. In this sense therefore, Germany does not fit into Bhargava's category of a multiply established state for it has disestablished religion not only formally but also substantially.

Another feature of multiply established states mentioned by Bhargava is its indifference to the freedom of members within any religious group. This is clearly not the case in Germany, where individual liberties in general and religious liberty specifically are protected by the Basic Law under *Freedom of Religion* (Art. 4 GG; Art. 140 GG; Art. 137[2,3] WRV) and also by the *European Convention on Human Rights* to which Germany is legally committed. Thus regarding this feature, Germany partially fits Bhargava's category of multiply established states, partially it doesn't.

The same is true for the typological category of the secular state. While Germany disestablishes all religions substantially and is neutral vis-à-vis religion in the public domain, it actively furthers the role of religion in civil society following a principled consideration. Religions, in the German constitutional view, are an important resource for the values upon which democratic society is built, but which a secular society cannot generate out of its own resources according to the famous view of one of the fathers of the constitution, Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde:

The liberal, secular state lives off prerequisites that it cannot guarantee out of its own resources. This is the great venture it undertook for the sake of freedom. The state can only survive as a liberal one if the liberty that it grants to its citizens can rely on the individuals' own moral resources and on their collective homogeneity. The state

cannot itself generate these moral resources, nor enforce collective homogeneity without forfeiting its liberality and without regressing – on a secular level – into the same totalitarian aspirations from which it emerged out of the confessional civil wars.³

The common interpretation of Böckenförde's dictum in Germany has been that the state needs to support religions because they continue to foster these moral resources that the liberal, secular state has to rely on but cannot produce. Therefore the state supports confessional kindergartens, schools, university education, adult education, nursing homes, hospitals and charitable organizations and it subsidizes church buildings as part of the cultural heritage. All this is meant as recognition of the religious community's work for public welfare. As argued before, this framework is part of a policy of principled distance, as in Rajeev Bhargava's framework, where active respect is given to religions for some of their dimensions and active opposition for those dimensions that interfere with the fundamental rights of their adherents.

Conclusion

I have focused in this presentation on the recent evolution of the global standard of secularism and its translation into two local contexts, India and Germany. I have outlined the evolution of this standard after the Second World War, where a split had occurred in the global cultural reference frame with both the US-American and the Soviet variant of secularism attaining a hegemonic position in their respective spheres of influence. At the same time I have hinted at the historical trajectories of both India and Germany that informed the process of assimilation of global standards into the local normative framework.

In India, the interplay of global standards with the inheritance of the colonial state has led to a new form of secularism as demonstrated by Rajeev Bhargava. I have hinted at the possibility that the real-existing socialist paradigm may have contributed to the misinterpretation of Indian secularism as hostile towards religion. Rajeev Bhargava has shown that it is not hostile but practices a principled distance towards all religions in India.

Different standards have informed the two Germanys after the war. While the GDR adopted the real-existing socialist framework of secularism, which is hostile to religion, West-Germany has continued on its trajectory from its foundation in 1871 via the post-revolutionary state of 1919 and via the post-war state of 1949. Being faced with two unequally strong organized religions, Protestant and Catholic, and an emancipating Jewish community, already in the Bismarck era, Germany had developed a model of partnership between state and organized religion that gives religion less privileged a position than multiple establishment but more privilege than complete separation of state and religion. I have shown that the typology of theocracy, singular and multiply established state and secular state as developed by Rajeev Bhargava cannot quite account for this particular instance of a western state. The

³ Der freiheitliche, säkularisierte Staat lebt von Voraussetzungen, die er selbst nicht garantieren kann. Das ist das große Wagnis, das er, um der Freiheit willen, eingegangen ist. Als freiheitlicher Staat kann er einerseits nur bestehen, wenn sich die Freiheit, die er seinen Bürgern gewährt, von innen her, aus der moralischen Substanz des einzelnen und der Homogenität der Gesellschaft, reguliert. Andererseits kann er diese inneren Regulierungskräfte nicht von sich aus, das heißt, mit den Mitteln des Rechtszwanges und autoritativen Gebots zu garantieren versuchen, ohne seine Freiheitlichkeit aufzugeben und – auf säkularisierter Ebene – in jenen Totalitätsanspruch zurückzufallen, aus dem er in den konfessionellen Bürgerkriegen herausgeführt hat (Böckenförde 1976: 60).

notion of a principled distance, however, developed to account for the Indian context, proved useful to account for Germany's dealing with the growing Muslim community.

We can thus conclude by saying that Rajeev Bhargava's writings on secularism have improved our understanding of the German setup and that we have followed his exhortation that "western secularism must look back to its own past and look sideways, at Indian secularism" (Bhargava 2009) to find out about secularism's future both in India and in Germany.

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