Multiple Secularities: Toward a Cultural Sociology of Secular Modernities

Monika Wohlrab-Sahr and Marian Burchardt
University of Leipzig, Institut für Kulturwissenschaften, Beethovenstr. 15, 04107 Leipzig, Germany
a) wohlrab@uni-leipzig.de
b) marian.burchardt@uni-leipzig.de

Abstracts
For more than two decades sociological debates over religion and secularization have been characterized by a confrontation between (often American) critics and (mostly European) defenders of secularization theories. At the same time, there was a remarkable rise in public debates about the role of secularism in political regimes and in national as well as civilizational frameworks. Against this backdrop this paper presents the conceptual framework of “multiple secularities” with a view to refocusing sociological research on religion and secularity. We will demonstrate that it can stimulate new ways of theorizing the relationship of religion and secularity in a variety of modern environments. Arguing for a reformulation of this relationship within the framework of cultural sociology, we conceptualize “secularity” in terms of the cultural meanings underlying the differentiation between religion and non-religious spheres. Building on Max Weber we distinguish four basic ideal-types of secularity that are related to specific reference problems and associated with specific guiding ideas. Finally, we illustrate the use of the concept with regard to selected case-studies.

Keywords
secularity, secularism, secularization, multiple modernities, cultural sociology, sociology of religion

For more than two decades sociological debates over religion and secularization have been characterized by a confrontation between (often American) critics and (mostly European) defenders of secularization theories. At
the same time, there was a remarkable rise in public debates about the role of secularism in political regimes and in national as well as civilizational frameworks. The changing place of the West in world politics, the war on terror, struggles for recognition of religious minorities and immigrant communities, and the emergence of postnational citizenship all play into these dynamics. Reflections from political theory, social anthropology and religious studies that emerged from this context have enriched the debate, but also contributed to fragmenting existing theories on the relation between religion and modernity. Whereas former attempts still aimed at developing ‘general theories’ of secularization including the deviations from the general model, newer approaches tend to highlight the specificity of Western Europe developments as opposed to those in the rest of the world, sometimes even their incomparability.

Against this backdrop this paper presents the conceptual framework of “multiple secularities” with a view to refocusing sociological research on religion and secularity. We will demonstrate that it can stimulate new ways of theorizing the relationship of religion and secularity in a variety of modern environments. Arguing for a reformulation of this relationship within the framework of cultural sociology, we conceptualize “secularity” in terms of the cultural meanings underlying the differentiation between religion and non-religious spheres. Building on Max Weber we distinguish four basic ideal-types of secularity that are related to specific reference problems and associated with specific guiding ideas. Finally, we illustrate the use of the concept with regard to selected case-studies.

1. Religion, Secularization and Modernity

Over the past decades sociological debates have problematized long-cherished assumptions of process theories in the social sciences, have necessitated revisions, and have given rise to new approaches. This concerns the classical version of modernization theory, with its assumptions regarding convergence and diffusion, as well as the theory of secularization, which assumed that the worldwide spread of the concepts of the nation state, parliamentary democracy, the rule of law, the liberal market economy, and rational science would give rise to a similar model of social organization in which religion would be largely confined to the private domain.
In addition, it seemed obvious that an increase in the economic standard of living and in existential security would go hand-in-hand with a reduction in religious participation and belief (Inglehart 1997). Although these ‘classical’ variants of modernization theory have not disappeared from the scene and can still claim a certain degree of plausibility, they have nevertheless lost the dominant status they once enjoyed.

A wide-ranging controversy over classical modernization theory was conducted both among social scientists as well as historians (see Wagner 2001; Knöbl 2007). Within this controversy, the long-dominant position of the convergence theorists is increasingly being superseded by approaches that assume different developmental paths as a permanent feature, among them also authors who had initially proceeded on the basis of strong convergence assumptions (Inglehart and Baker 2000). The new orientation has found prominent expression in the debate over “multiple modernities,” in which, on the one hand, a minimal, unifying concept of modernity is maintained, but, on the other, an enduring diversity of developmental paths is assumed (Eisenstadt 2000). The latter is explained with reference to the divergent developments of different Axial Age cultures, though also in terms of their respective histories of interaction with the Western concept of modernity (Arnason, Eisenstadt and Wittrock 2005). It was the rapid economic and political rise of the ‘Asian tiger’ economies (Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea), as well as China, India, and Brazil, in particular, that contributed to the belated recognition of the modernity of these societies by (Western) sociology and has unsettled the hitherto prevalent identification of modernity with Western civilization. However, these developments have led only a few authors to reject the concept of modernity altogether.

A parallel development can be observed in the discussion over secularization. Although here attempts were made from early on to identify different paths of secularization, these were initially motivated by the intention of developing a “general theory of secularization” (Martin 1978) and discovering the conditions of exceptions to the general model. In the meantime however, an awareness of enduring differences (Martin 2005; Gorski and Altnordu 2008) developed here as well, and was articulated as the need to historicize the secularization debate (Gorski 2000).

In a different strand of the debate, the paradigm of secularization was increasingly interpreted as a modern myth (principally inspired by the
West) that, like the classical modernization theory, is based on cultural biases and is unsuited to analyses beyond the Western world.\(^1\) It was argued that there are forms of modernity that can dispense not only with democracy and a liberal market economy but also with secularization.

Concerns with the variety of secularization were heightened by Casanova (1994) into a fundamental critique of the theoretical idea that three, rather distinct subtheses – functional differentiation, the decline of subjective religiosity, and the privatization of religion – are necessarily linked. However, although Casanova at first still regarded the aspect of functional differentiation as an indispensable component of secularization, in his more recent work he has increasingly characterized this, too, as a genuinely Western development in the light of European history and its confrontation between temporal and sacred authority and has questioned its relevance for other regions and religions (Casanova 2008).

In his book “A Secular Age”, Charles Taylor (2007:22) takes the critique further by arguing that secularization theories have mainly been “subtraction stories”, based on the idea that secularization unfolds as the liberation from earlier forms of knowledge whereby human nature is ultimately revealed. Similar to Casanova he distinguishes between secularity as the retreat of religion from public space and as the decline of beliefs, but ultimately focuses on secularity as a change in the “conditions of belief” (p. 12) in terms of the emergence of exclusive humanism. Taylor is aware of and supports the idea of multiple modernities, stressing that “secularity, like other features of ‘modernity’ (...) find rather different expression, and develop under the pressure of different demands and aspirations in different civilizations” (p. 21). But he self-consciously limits his analysis to the internal transformations of Christendom whereby belief in God is perceived as one option among others. While Taylor employs a unified idea of “the West”, others have limited the geographical validity of secularization theory even further through the concept of “European exceptionalism” (Berger 1999; Berger, Davie and Fokas 2008).

In recent years, empirical analyses have been increasingly shifting toward comparisons between “secularisms” (Cady and Hurd 2010), i.e. the institutionalized relationships between politics and religion. In the case of Europe, for example, a distinction is made between formal establishment

\(^1\) One of the first to speak of secularization as a “myth” of modern societies within the context of European sociology of religion was Thomas Luckmann (1980).
combined with pluralism (as in Great Britain), a cooperation model (as in Germany), and strict separation (as in the case of French laïcité) (Koenig 2005). Other studies distinguish between assertive and passive secularisms (Kuru 2009), represented, for instance, by France and Turkey, on the one side, and by the United States on the other. Overall, however, the literature on secularism does not distinguish institutional separation systematically from the accompanying ideologies. Accordingly, secularism is often viewed primarily from the perspective of the critique of ideology (Modood 2010; Mahmood 2006; Bader 2007).

The critique of classical secularization theory can be heightened into three fundamental objections. These concern (a) its alleged universalism, (b) its underlying process theory, and (c) its modernist normative bias.

Overall, however, these critiques themselves are highly normative. While the secularization paradigm is often considered as Eurocentric and anti-religious, recent research generally fashions itself as sympathetic toward religion. At times the studies evoke the impression of a ‘natural’ religiosity among the population and of an ideological secularism founded on an alliance between political and academic elites. As compared to the older debate, recent contributions often engender an inversion of the subject and object of the critique: Whereas secularism used to be regarded as a means of liberation from the constraints of traditional and religious authority, religion now appears as a space of freedom, and secularism as an instrument of regimentation and of exclusion.

The heightened awareness of secularism’s articulation with power relations and knowledge regimes, also as regards the production of religious forms of subjectivity and expression that are compatible with liberal modernity, leads to one-sidedness when it downplays the autonomy associated with modernity and secularity against moments of domination and then dismisses them in the name of religious freedom.

The critique of secularization theory has certainly increased the sensitivity to cultural differences and unjustified generalizations. However, there is now a danger of an essentialism of historically and culturally ‘unique’ constellations and undue generalizations about the ideological power of Western secularism. Given this situation, we think that the discussion of

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2) An exception is the book by Jacoby (2004) in which the history of American secularism is told as the history of a liberation movement and of its coalition with religious dissenters – for example, in the controversies over the American Constitution.
secularization in sociology could be profitably linked to recent debates in the theory of modernity, in particular to the “multiple modernities” approach and to the perspectives of cultural sociology.

The “multiple modernities” approach insists on the indispensability of the concept of modernity, but without persisting in its one-sided orientation to a seemingly universalistic Western model. Focusing on the intertwinements of universality and difference, it contends that all modern societies have been confronted with the European model. These confrontations and their interpretations, however, reflect specific – in Eisenstadt’s terminology ‘civilizational’ – histories. As a consequence, the results display differences that cannot sufficiently be explained by processes of diffusion and convergence.

This also implies that variations across time and space in how the religious-secular divide is understood and justified cannot be reduced to structural and institutional dimensions. Against the tendency to construe this divide mainly in terms of relationships between church and state we suggest that cultural sociology with its insistence on the ineluctable embeddedness of action in horizons of affect and meaning (Alexander and Smith 2002:136) can offer new insights in the endurance of variations and the persistency with which they are defended. This is not meant to substitute institutional approaches. Rather, we consider institutional regulations to be one expression of a ‘culture of secularity’.

We suggest to conceptualizing both dimensions by asking to which societal reference problems the development of different forms of secularity responds and what solution they offer for these problems.

2. Multiple Secularities: The Concept

2.1. Conceptual Clarifications: Secularity, Secularism, Secularization

The dominant concepts in the current international debate are secularization and secularism. Until now, the concept of secularity has only seldom featured centrally (Asad 2003; Taylor 2007, Berger et al. 2008). Whereas the concept of secularization is used primarily in sociological process models addressing processes of functional differentiation, religious decline, and privatization of religious practice, secularism refers to the arrangements of
the institutional separation of politics/the state and religion as well as to their ideological legitimizations.

For reasons of analytical clarity, in what follows we propose to reserve the concept of secularism for the ideological-philosophical program—hence, for the explicit ideology of separation—and related political practices, and the concept of secularity, by contrast, for the culturally and symbolically as well as institutionally anchored forms and arrangements of differentiation between religion and other social spheres. Following Asad (2003) we assume that both domains are first identified as religious and secular domains in the course of their differentiation. Secularization signifies both the process of differentiation, including diminishing mutual influences between religion and other social domains, as well as the decline in religious participation and belief (Casanova 1994).

Therefore, the concept of secularity is more inclusive than that of secularism and also encompasses the at times latent, taken-for-granted forms of the distinction between the religious and the non-religious. In addition, we expressly do not confine the analysis to the relation between the state and religion but include other functional domains of society (for instance, those of law, education, science, business etc.), as well as the public sphere. The connection between such religious-secular distinctions and their legitimating guiding ideas differs empirically. One can assume that the corresponding divisions develop a special cultural dynamic where they are not only implicitly practiced but are made explicit and become condensed into guiding ideas, as was also the case with the guiding ideas of modernity and progress or with the ‘social projections’ (Giesecke 2006:156) that went along with the introduction of new technologies, such as letterpress printing.

Exploring secularity in terms of symbolic distinctions implies of course that religion and the non-religious are far from being completely separate without any points of contact, or mutual entanglements. Recent anthropological literature (Mahmood 2006) sometimes mistakenly claims that secularization theory propagated the complete separation of religion from other social spheres. This misunderstanding obviously rests on the conflation between secularization theory and the secularist self-image prevalent among various social groups in which concepts of separation circulate as political ideologies. In contrast to such self-images, sociological ideal types always assume a variety of combinations of religion, national politics, and
the claims of religious groups and secular agents carried into the public sphere. Secularity is then considered as a result of social conflicts (Wohlrab-Sahr, Schmidt-Lux and Karstein 2008; Smith 2003) or negotiation processes. Far from refuting the concept of the religious-secular divide, the entanglements of religion and politics must be viewed as sites in which the boundaries between religion and secular spheres are negotiated, challenged, and redrawn. For this reason we agree with Casanova (2006:19) that the concepts of secularization and secularity make sense “as an analytical framework for a comparative research agenda that aims to examine the historical transformations of all world religions under conditions of modern structural differentiation.”

It also seems evident from this perspective that the rejection of concepts such as secularization and secularism in large parts of the Islamic world is not necessarily bound up with the absence of differentiations between the religious and the secular, hence with the omnipresence of religion (see Schulze 2010). Our assumption is rather that there are no readily accessible guiding ideas of secularity with which such distinctions could be legitimized. In addition, Islam is also widely employed in terms of a cultural identity especially in the Arab world with its history of belated nation-state formations. This blurring of the boundaries of religion and culture renders a positive articulation of secularity extremely difficult. Correspondingly, the most intransigent resistance to (Western) secularism is also articulated by Muslim groups active in the transnational arena. By contrast, secularity was part, though only at times, of the self-image of the more ‘robust’ nation-states, such as Syria or Iraq under the Baath regime.

The history of the resonance between the Western and the non-Western world is in this sense reflected primarily in the negative relation to a form of secularity perceived as ideological secularism which is associated with hostility to religion and atheism. This does not preclude de facto differentiations in the areas of education, science, business, law, as well as politics while these are often subordinated to references to Islam or the sharia. Therefore, we argue against a reading of Islamic societies which sees their path to secularization (in particular to functional differentiation) as being obstructed primarily by intrinsic features of Islam (Diner 2009). More relevant, it seems to us, is the interplay between religious-cultural particularity and histories of resonance whereby the possibilities of explicitly adopting secular ideas are undermined.
The analytical distinction between ideologies of separation and practices of differentiation also opens our eyes for pre-modern practices that provide intellectual resources, and thereby pave the way for modern forms of secularity (Bhargava 2010), without themselves already being associated with secular guiding ideas. Pre-modern regimes of toleration are an example of this.

2.2. Paths of Secularization and Varieties of Secularism: Existing Typologies

Although research on secularization and secularism entails comparative methods and typologies, they represent only a minor part of the literature. Comparisons between the United States and Europe or between different European societies have been the primary focus of attention to date in both the sociology of religion and in history (McLeod 2007), with institutional arrangements of the relation between religion and the state being scrutinized both as independent and as dependent variables (Berger et al. 2008; Stark and Finke 2000). Koenig (2005) as well as Fetzer and Soper (2005) examine the importance of institutional arrangements for regimes of incorporation of religious minorities and challenges for principles of citizenship. The origins of such regimes are often explained, in turn, on the basis of specific historical dynamics, in particular the relations between temporal and religious rule in earlier historical phases, traditions of political thought, and the characteristics of the dominant religious traditions. Thus, in an attempt at sociological mapping, Martin (1978, 2005) differentiates models of religious monopoly, duopoly, and pluralism and specifies Protestant, Catholic, and orthodox scenarios, respectively, which in turn undergo a variety of reconfigurations at the subnational level as regards the relation between political-theological centers and peripheries. Similarly, Casanova (2009) explores the differences between a Protestant, primarily Anglo-Saxon-Calvinist path, and a French-Latin-Catholic path.

Demerath (2007:71pp) presents the only sociological typology known to us that is explicitly global in scope and also addresses dynamics of imperialism, colonialism, and decolonization in an incipient way. He differentiates between directed and undirected scenarios and between internal and external sources of secularization.

3) The regimes are: formal establishment with simultaneous pluralism implemented at low thresholds; corporatist cooperation between the state and religious actors; and laïcité.
Whereas the above-mentioned approaches make efforts to connect social dynamics of secularization with regimes of secularism, typologies from the field of comparative politics often have a more descriptive orientation and are restricted to institutional arrangements. Many approaches connect descriptive typologies with normative questions. Kuru (2009) compares “assertive” and “passive” secularisms, whereas Modood (2010) – similarly – juxtaposes “moderate” and “radical” secularisms. Stepan (2000) examines forms of “twin tolerations,” by which he understands mutual concessions of autonomy on the part of religious and state actors. Taken as a whole, the achievement of this research tradition consists in bringing together a multitude of different state norms, discourses, and practices under the framework of models. However its almost complete lack of attention to the everyday perspectives and the culturally saturated imaginaries of social groups imply that the _cultures of secularity_ that develop under certain conditions beyond the reach of state guidelines are hardly addressed or are taken as mere effects of state policy. For the purposes of a cultural sociology of secularity this cannot be sufficient. When we talk of “cultures of secularity” we refer to the _meaning_ that is attached to the institutions, practices or discourses of differentiation and distinction with regard to religion.

Moreover, recent research has failed to construct ideal-types of secularity in Weber’s sense (Weber 1985 [1922]). Although Eisenstadt’s work on multiple modernities has identified numerous fault lines and antinomies, he did not condense them into ideal types.

2.3. From “Multiple Modernities” to “Multiple Secularities”

While being inspired by the idea of “multiple modernities”, our conceptualization remains aloof from its strong “civilizational” underpinning and its projections upon the ancient pasts of these civilizations (cf. Wagner 2005:95). Research on multiple modernities has mostly tried to collect evidence on axial age cultures (Eisenstadt 2002, 2005; Raaflaub 2005 etc.) or their non-axial counterparts (Eisenstadt 1996) and to elaborate on their consequences for the formation of collective identities (Eisenstadt 1998). In general, Eisenstadt’s civilizational approach tends to identify the cultural foundations of collective identities rather than constructing ideal types for the purpose of empirical comparison. It would be too strong an
assumption, however, to identify the “cultures of secularity” with collective identities based on “civilizations”. Moreover, the idea of “multiple secularities” captures not simply a consequence of an ancient past, but the interplay of cultural histories and modern encounters. While being a core assumption of Eisenstadt’s work, studies building on him focus on past origins rather than on present interplays. With a view towards secularity such interplays are key in that at least the explicit public usage of secular-religious distinctions is hardly perceivable without some sort of encounter with European forms of modernity.

Most of the studies on multiple modernities remain highly abstract and their empirics and connections to present conflicts are rather vague. Against this backdrop, our goal is to enable the interpretation of recent conflicts by taking cultural histories and historic entanglements into account.

However, there are important similarities between our ideal-types of secularity and Eisenstadt’s notion of Axial Age Civilizations (Eisenstadt 1986). One of the central features of Eisenstadt’s axial age civilizations is the emergence of strong notions of transcendence and the separation of mundane and transcendental spheres (Wittrock 2005:66). It should be emphasized that the meanings of modern secular-religious distinctions fully depend on older differentiations between mundane and transcendent spheres, even if the former are generally more closely associated with the history of medieval Christian Europe. More research is needed on the conditions under which axial age notions of transcendence feed into concepts of secularity in the way suggested in this paper. Overall, we agree with the multiple modernities approach in its insistence on the plurality of cultural paths into modernity and on the effects of a history of mutual entanglements, in which the European modernity plays the role of a (positive or negative) point of reference. Both aspects are of specific importance for the issue of secularity.

To sum up, what distinguishes the approach presented here from the ones mentioned above is that (a) it attempts to develop ideal-types of secularity in a way that supports work on concrete historical cases, while taking into account the distinction between these two tasks; (b) it seeks to overcome the separation between processes of secularization (religious decline and functional differentiation) and figures of secularity (configurations of cultural meaning); (c) it relates the figures of secularity back to historical processes of and conflicts over secularization; (d) through its focus on the
cultural meaning of secularity, it avoids a restriction to state policy; and (e) it aims at a comparative interpretation of current religious controversies against the background of the conflicts transmitted by cultural memory.

2.4. Some Remarks on the Use of Ideal-Types

Importantly, one must not conflate the differences between ideal-types in the Weberian sense and specific national or regional variations. Ideal-types are analytical abstractions that are developed from empirical and historical data and mirrored back on them to guide the construction of hypotheses and theorization. ‘Real’ configurations will always differ from ideal-types, but the latter help to better examine the former. Therefore, our goal is to develop an analytical framework that allows to comparatively analyzing social change in regions, or nation-states or any other social formation. Thus, the construction of ideal-types is not a purpose in itself or an exercise in “pure theory”. Rather it is a guide to empirical work. Some empirical configurations that are analyzed and “compared” with the ideal-type, may come closer to it than others; in some cases competing or contradictory tendencies rather than a unifying strand may be revealed; and in others finally, comparisons with the ideal-typical distinctions may help to develop hypotheses on the non-existence of certain features and their consequences rather than to subsume it to one of the types.

There are some limitations regarding the reach of our typology. First, it is not meant to comprehensively capture developments everywhere in the world. It is related to empirical cases where a “guiding idea” of secularity on which social groups can draw, was actually formulated. This implies that all the cases in which de-facto differentiations between the religious and the secular exist, but remain implicit and are not expressed through guiding ideas, are not directly included in the model. Simultaneously however, we suggest that diverging configurations too can be fruitfully discussed on the basis of the model and its analytical distinctions.

2.5. Multiple Secularities: Problems and Solutions

By “multiple secularities”, in what follows, we mean the forms of distinction between the religious and other social domains (which are thereby marked as non-religious), that are institutionalized and in part legitimized
through guiding ideas. We assume that these secularities exhibit different structures of meaning that document a specific social history of conflict no less than the competing influence of other forms of secularity.

We assume further that the “multiple secularities” that are taking shape in different countries and regions ‘respond’ to specific societal problems (as their reference problems) and offer solutions to them. Obviously, these problems arise at some point and in some form in many societies, but they come up with different degrees of urgency at different points in time.

At a first approximation, we identify four such reference problems: (1) the problem of individual freedom vis-à-vis dominant social units, be they groups or the state; (2) the problem of religious heterogeneity and the resulting potential or actual conflictuality; (3) the problem of social or national integration and development; and (4) the problem of the independent development of institutional domains. It is clear that most of these problems are closely associated to the formation of modern societies and states and the ideas on which they are founded, whereas at least the second also arises in pre-modern societies. It is no accident that reflections on pre-modern sources of modern secularity generally begin here.

It is clear that understandings and interpretations of such problems and solutions are often contested and, as a consequence, are collectively shared to varying degrees. What is considered a problem, for instance with regard to nation-building and religious diversity, and a viable solution in terms of secularity is therefore subject to processes whereby interpretations of problems and solutions are negotiated and authorized. These processes of authorization in which the dominant social meanings of religion and secularity impinge on one another, are thus invariably embedded in power relations defining the deep strata of historical experience in a given society and its religious and political tradition.

Processes of definition and framing involve a variety of social and political actors and social movements, often with antagonistic agendas. Typically, however, the reference problems and the guiding ideas epitomizing them can be used as reference points for a variety of groups, even if these groups pursue competing goals in other respects. Therefore, the reference problems and solutions mentioned above, together with their associated guiding ideas, may develop a binding social thrust, at least for certain historical periods, and thereby become points of crystallization for collective
identities. As a consequence, we can see the emergence of more or less entrenched ‘cultures of secularity’, which are shared across otherwise existing lines of difference.

The four central problems outlined above provide motives for institutionalizing distinctions between the religious and other social spheres. As latent motives and social practices, they can certainly coexist, as overt motifs they may compete with each other. Our assumption is, however, that, given certain preconditions, one of them will become dominant at least for a certain period by being aligned with guiding ideas that set the basic terms for distinguishing religious and secular spaces in a given society, and thereby push the other motives, at least at times, to the background. There is no doubt, however, that these motives are often highly contested.

Accordingly, our claim is not that such a basic tenor of secularity can be identified in every society or that just one of the motives matters. The following constellations may restrict such development:

(a) Practices of differentiation may remain below the threshold at which guiding ideas are formulated. An example of this would be (parts of) the Islamic world (Schulze 2000).

(b) Different concepts of secularity may coexist and find support by equally strong groups. This is likely to be the case in situations where the urge to find solutions for specific societal problems is not very strong. It may also be the case in situations where the need to form coalitions is stronger than anything else. Times of constitution building could be an example of that.

(c) Different concepts of secularity and guiding ideas may compete with each other. This situation seems to exist in a whole range of countries. It is especially visible in postcolonial countries, for example in South Africa, or in Western societies during phases of transition.4

(d) The guiding idea can be the ideology of elites that diverges from the dominant social practices of differentiation, as with the secularist reforms of Kemal Atatürk, which today are patently in conflict

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4) We have discussed this in Schuh, Burchardt and Wohlrab-Sahr (2012) with regard to the Netherlands, where we see a shift from secularity centered on the accommodation of groups to a model that centers on national development and societal integration.
with the Islamic self-understanding of large parts of the Turkish population.

(e) Finally, it is also possible that the problems in question are not ‘resolved’ in the direction of secularity but through the imposition of religious authority, so that secularity remains in the background as a latent option.

Even if the distinction between four basic types of secularity is an ideal-typical construction that is not ‘identical’ with reality, we assume that a basic cultural understanding of secularity can be identified in a whole range of societies, at least in certain periods. During “settled periods” (Swidler 1986:278pp.) this will remain latent but it will become manifest in periods of conflict. Such conflicts may be the expression of “critical junctures” in Kuru’s (2009) sense and trigger shifts in historical orientations.5 We have used the formula “secularity for the sake of . . .” to designate these basic patterns.

At a first approximation, we distinguish between the following forms: (1) secularity for the sake of individual rights and liberties; (2) secularity for the sake of balancing/pacifying religious diversity; (3) secularity for the sake of societal or national integration and development; and (4) secularity for the sake of the independent development of functional domains of society.

The identification of ideal-types is a process that shifts between the analysis of empirical cases, the attempt to condense them into theoretical relations, the theoretically informed return to empirical cases and so forth.6 Thus, it follows the pattern of maximal and minimal comparison. Starting with the reference problem of individual rights and liberties, which can be considered a centralized focus,7 raises questions about its opposite, a decentralized focus, in our case the reference problem of balancing group

5) Kuru (2009) defined critical junctures as periods or moments in which both agency and structural conditions are available for systematic change.
6) In general, this comes close to the research strategy of the Grounded Theory Methodology. Cf. Strauss (1987).
7) While not being “centered” in the same way as the concepts of societal integration or national development, “individual liberties” has indeed the potential of a unifying principle, especially in contrast to “group rights”, which are much more difficult to institutionalize and have thrust that is de-centering rather than unifying.
diversity, but also the problem of the independent development of functional domains. A second comparative perspective concerns questions regarding the definition of the social that is inherent in the formulation of the reference problem. Here, we can differentiate between definitions of the social that are derived from the life-world domain of people and the community, and others that are derived from societal and institutional perspectives. Here, definitions of the social based on life-world perspectives, such as that of individual liberties, may clash with “systemic” definitions that are dominant in concepts of societal integration and national progress or the development of institutional domains.

These four basic forms of secularity are associated with different guiding ideas: in the first type (1) it is the idea of freedom and individuality, in the second (2) that of toleration, respect and non-interference, whereas the third type involves (3) the ideas of progress, enlightenment, and modernity. The fourth type, finally, involves (4) the guiding ideas of rationality, efficiency, and autonomy.

This leads us to the following four-field-matrix:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Implicit Focus</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Centralized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Type 1: Secularity for the sake of individual liberties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>life-world-related</td>
<td>Guiding ideas: Freedom, individuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>definitions of the social</td>
<td>Type 3: Secularity for the sake of social integration/national development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System-related</td>
<td>Guiding ideas: progress, enlightenment, modernity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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8) Of course, the notion of freedom can also become the guiding idea of national development and the symbol of social progress and the preservation of social sovereignty. Examples of this can be found in the French Revolution, though also in the right-wing populist “freedom parties,” as, for example, in the Netherlands.
We assume that the dominance of one reference problem tends to create tensions vis-à-vis the others not only in theoretical terms but in the real world. For example, prioritizing the balance between religious groups is likely to create tensions with regard to individual liberties, to the pursuit of national interests, as well as to guaranteeing the autonomy of functional domains. We will elaborate on this in more detail in our discussion below.

In a more abstract way, the emerging field of relations and tensions\(^9\) can be depicted as follows:

\[ 
\begin{array}{ccc}
\text{Individual} & \leftrightarrow \text{Groups} \\
\text{Society/nation} & \leftrightarrow \text{Functional domains} \\
\end{array} 
\]

3. Multiple Secularities: Illustrating the Conceptual Framework

In what follows, we would like to lend this conceptual framework plausibility by drawing upon examples from selected country studies. In doing so, we will refer to existing studies, prominent legal cases, and public debates, as well as to expert interviews with researchers, politicians, legal experts, social activists, and representatives of religious groups that we have conducted in the context of a research project on “multiple secularities.”\(^{10}\)

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\(^9\) Types 1 and 3 show some similarities to the comparison Talcott Parsons made in his famous article “Christianity and Modern Industrial Society” (Parsons 1963) between the early Christian church and Judaism as well as Greek religion and philosophy. There are similarities especially between his description of the early Christian church with its focus on religious individualism and our type 1, as well as between the Hebrew fusion of different tribes into a “people” bound to Jahweh and our type 3.

\(^{10}\) The project “multiple secularities” was based at the University of Leipzig in Germany and funded by the Saxonian Ministry of Science and Art between 2010 and 2012. Next to the authors, the following people worked in this project: Roman Vido, Ute Wegert, Cora
In this context the reference to empirical material has a primarily illustrative character and cannot serve as a substitute for in-depth studies. The primary emphasis is on describing and justifying the conceptual framework. On top, in what follows we will highlight the predominance of one type of secularity and thereby present the cases in a pointed manner. It will become evident that this does not mean that the other types of secularity are not present or might not gain importance in the future. We even suggest that all forms of secularity are in fact available in the stock of knowledge of modern societies due to their global interconnectedness. If they become dominant or remain a background option, if they find support or are highly contested, however, depends on the specific constellation and on the cultural history to which it can be related.

3.1. Secularity for the Sake of Individual Liberty

The motif of liberty, the “freedom of a Christian” (1520) (Luther 1974), meant as freedom of conscience, was a central concern in the Protestant reformation and is closely linked to Luther’s two-kingdoms theory.11 Both became important points of reference for later justifications of the separation of church and state. The Lutheran concept of the freedom of conscience remained a central guiding idea not only for separation issues, but also gained influence upon Western concepts of individuality and the autonomy of man.

The motif of liberty of conscience was also important for early Enlightenment thinkers, as is visible in John Locke’s Letter concerning Toleration from 1689 (Locke 1824). It became influential for the developments towards a separation of church and state and their intellectual grounding

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11) Talcott Parsons (1963:39) rightly points out that “religious individualism” was already a central feature of early Christianity, which stood in contrast to the Hebrew concept “of a solidary, religiously sanctioned social unit” (ibid.), which managed to fuse tribes into a “people”.

Schuh, Susanne Lemke and Susanne Schenk. Based on four “pilot studies” on the Netherlands, India, South Africa and the United States, the project explored the cultural underpinnings of secularity in these societies. The results fed into the theoretical work on the “multiple secularities” framework. In the process, we conducted expert interviews with political, religious, and secularist activists, lawyers, social scientists, and historians. The interviews focused on historical developments, societal and legal conflicts regarding religion-secular-distinctions, the role of religion in society, and ways and extent to which particular societies are perceived as secular societies etc.
in Europe as well as in the United States. In spite of the co-existence of several concerns motivating the separation of church and state in the US (Witte 2006), the motif of liberty – mostly in close connection with religion – obviously served as a guiding idea under which different interests were able to coalesce. In Democracy in America (1835) Alexis de Tocqueville pointed this out in clear distinction from the French development:

In France I had seen the spirits of religion and freedom almost always marching in opposite directions. In America I found them intimately linked together in joint reign over the same land. (Tocqueville 1969:295).

Similarly, in her intellectual history of the British, French, and American Enlightenment, Himmelfarb (2004) demarcates the latter from the European variants. Although rooted in British intellectual history, she sees the American Enlightenment as being founded centrally on the motif of “political liberty,” whereas a sociology of virtue forms the core of the British and an ideology of reason the core of the French Enlightenment. The emphasis on “liberty” as a “strong value” (Taylor 1992) of American Enlightenment presents a major cue for the cultural sociology of secularity we have in mind.

This is not to say that other guiding ideas did not exist. “Equality” – in terms of guaranteeing the rights of religious (and other) minorities12 – is certainly one of them; and the often heard slogan of “celebrating diversity” expresses this idea until the present. The ideological struggles that started in 1800 with the election debates between the Republican Party of Thomas Jefferson and John Adams’ Federalist Party also conveyed the notion of secularity for the sake of societal progress:

Adams’ Party accused Jefferson of being ‘the anti-Christ’ and the new ‘whore of Babylon’, a ‘Jacobin infidel’ and secularist bent on destruction of the necessary religious foundations of law and necessary alliances of church and state. Jefferson’s party accused Adams of being a ‘Puritan pope’ and ‘religious tyrant’ bent on subjecting the whole nation to his suffocating beliefs and to his smug, self-serving ministers who stood ‘foursquare against liberty and progress’ (Witte 2006:34, with references to Hamburger 2004:111–43).

In spite of diverging interests, the motif of liberty, however, could unfold the strongest unifying force.

Notwithstanding its centering on the value of individual liberty, American history is replete with struggles over its very meaning (Jacoby 2004; Hunter 1991). The relations between church and state and the role of religion in the public sphere have always been crucial in this regard. The “Act for Establishing Religious Freedom” passed in Virginia in 1786 was an important milestone along the route to a secular constitution in the United States whose significance was also immediately grasped in Europe (Jacoby 2004:13pp.). Furthermore, a secular foundation of the state and comprehensive religious freedom were a novelty in the United States at this time: Just as the political liberties were restricted to white, adult males, religious freedom was initially restricted to Christians in the majority of the federal states, and in certain cases even only to Protestants.

That the United States finally anchored the separation between the state and religious communities in the First Amendment was the result of a remarkable coalition between two very different groups. On the one hand, there were strict secularists whose concern was to limit the influence of religion on the state and the public in order to protect and develop the ‘American liberties’ (freedom of opinion and the press), on the other, there were religious dissenters who saw the ‘established churches’ as a threat to their religious liberty (p. 22). Tisa Wenger illustrates this interplay between the different camps in terms of the controversy over the referencing of God in the constitution. “Secularism” was not the central shared value in this context but “the all-American principle of liberty, interpreted by each side to support its own case” (Wenger 2010:102).

The social value accorded liberty as freedom of religion over against the state is also reflected in denominationalism as the specifically American way of organizing religious diversity, which according to Casanova (2008) represents a religious subspecies of “American associationism” as the voluntary coalition of individuals at the horizontal level. That liberty in this context is in fact connected with individuality is shown by the – in comparison with Europe – much higher rates of switching from one denomination to another over the individual life course. The fact that ‘newcomer’ religions, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam, have also bowed to this principle means that secularity in the sense of an accommodation between religious groups is scarcely addressed since, at least formally, no privileges
exist that could prompt such a motive, or they were abolished over the course of history. This is not to say that the community dimension is unimportant. As Warner (1993) has argued, religious communities are principle mechanisms of integrating individuals into American society. But religious diversity is typically emphasized because it allows freedom of choice and it is celebrated in the name of the promotion of individual human flourishing.

That “disestablishment” can be interpreted in different ways, and that “the wall of separation” is by no means uncontested, is shown by a multitude of controversies over the place of religion in public schools, over Darwinism, abortion, and the presence of religion in public space, among many others. The concomitant split into an “accommodationist” and a “separationist” camp is in certain respects also a political one (Kuru 2009). Nevertheless, the motif of liberty is continually employed by social actors across the lines of difference between the camps. In this respect, the controversies over religious clothing in the case of female teachers or pupils or, more generally, over the wearing of religious symbols in public, such as are currently observable in various European countries, are scarcely imaginable in the United States. Conversely, given the dominance of individual liberty, actions such as the public burning of a Qur’an by a Protestant minister are not, and are not expected to be, curtailed for the sake of balancing group interests – with major consequences worldwide. A secular lobbyist at congress, whom we interviewed for our research, remarked that “our belief is that anybody has the perfect right to burn a Qur’an or a bible or a US flag or whatever else so long as it’s their property.” This view was shared by interview partners across the board.

A clear contrast to the American model, both historically and in the present, is the French concept of secularity. Although the motif of liberty was also central to the French Revolution, the two countries – as Toqueville has noticed – differ fundamentally. The difference is not only that “the pursuit of liberty in France stood in opposition to religious freedom, not in collusion with it” (Cady and Hurd 2010:13). It also consists in the fact that, in France, the rhetoric of liberty ties into a national, republican program, whereas in the US it is more individualistically inflected. While in the US liberty is all about limiting state power over individuals, in France it is a property of the collectivity. Historically, this difference is reflected in the American understanding of the French Revolution. In the present, it
finds expression in the American way of organizing religious diversity. However, recent history shows that “liberty” or “freedom” can also become an ideological emblem of nationalism in the United States, as for example in the rhetorical legitimation of the Iraq war carried out as it was under the motto “Enduring Freedom.”

It has often been pointed out that the modern concept of freedom in general has its concrete roots in the right to religious freedom and is therefore intimately tied to the American interpretation of secularity. On the other hand, the idea of freedom writ large is also at the epicenter of the American self-image. This can be seen both from the ideology of “small government” and from different phases of American foreign policy, above all its neoconservative strand. Just how important the concept of individual freedom actually is in America was made clear by the conflicts over the healthcare policy of the Obama administration whose project of introducing a minimal basic health insurance was castigated by opponents as both communist and fascist and as incompatible with the American ideal of freedom (Casanova 2009). It becomes understandable against this background why the concept is also the paramount value in controversies over religion.

3.2. Secularity for the sake of Balancing/Pacifying Religious Diversity

The motive of secularity for the sake of pacifying religious diversity played an important role in a variety of countries that had to grapple with unrest and violence between different religious and confessional groups. The European “religious wars” were an influential historical experience for this motive. One of the places in Europe where it became most influential and was expressed in elaborate concepts of tolerance, is the Netherlands, where it later became institutionalized in the pillar structure as the characteristic model for the Dutch way of dealing with religious diversity (see Schuh, Burchardt and Wohlrab-Sahr 2012).

The country, in which the impact of the type of secularity that serves to balance and pacify religious diversity is especially strong, is India. Even though secularism was only explicitly incorporated into the Indian Constitution in 1976, it played a central role already in the Constituent Assembly Debates from 1946–1949. As Bajpai (2002) shows in her analysis of the Constituent Assembly Debates as well as of the Lok Sabha Debates on

13 Lok Sabha is the “House of the People” next to the “Council of States” (Rajya Sabha) in the bicameral Indian Parliament.
the Shah Bano case in the 1980ies, the connotations of secularism in India have changed significantly:

secularism in the Shah Bano debate was defined primarily in terms of state deference to religion and protection of the rights of minorities rather than in the dominant terms of the Constituent Assembly debates: those of equal citizenship, rights for individuals, and the exclusion of religion from the political domain. (Bajpai 2002:194).

According to her analysis, “rights” increasingly tended to be interpreted as group rights, and “religious freedom” was more and more understood as the freedom of religious communities from state interference rather than the individual freedom to choose or reject a religion (ibid.:183).

This becomes especially apparent in the arguments over the implementation of a “uniform civil code” which is foreseen in the Indian Constitution but has not been realized to date. The existence of an Islamic civil status law is regarded above all by Islamic groups as a symbol of recognition as a minority. As a consequence, attacks on this element of legal pluralism are eyed with great suspicion. This was manifest in responses to the judgment in the Shah Bano case, in which the judge in an “Observation” – literally placed in brackets at the end of the judgment – called for the implementation of a uniform civil code\(^\text{14}\) with reference to issues of “national integration” as well as to individual justice. This provoked a storm of outrage that in turn had major political consequences (Das 1995:95pp.). In arguing for a uniform civil code, the RSS makes itself into the de facto champion of a secular legal system, in which it finds potential allies among the so-called “rationalist” groups, even though the latter have little sympathy with the Hindu nationalist tenor of the RSS. Therefore, skeptics like T.N. Madan

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\(^{14}\) 849 OBSERVATION (Article 44 of our Constitution has remained a dead letter. There is no evidence of any official activity for framing a common civil code for the country. A common Civil Code will help the cause of national integration by removing disparate loyalties to laws which have conflicting ideologies. […] A beginning has to be made if the Constitution is to have any meaning. Inevitably, the role of the reformer has to be assumed by the courts because it is beyond the endurance of sensitive minds to allow injustice to be suffered when it is so palpable. […] ) (MOHD. AHMED KHAN versus SHAH BANO BEGUM & ORS. Supreme Court Cases. 1985 AIR 945 1985 SCR (3) 844 1985 SCC (2) 556 1985 SCALE (1)767).
(1998) see major weaknesses in the political form of Indian secularity that could be exploited by the Hindu nationalists for their own purposes.

From the multiple secularities perspective, we would interpret Bajpai’s findings as a shift towards a concept of secularity for the sake of accommodating religious diversity, whereas at the time of the constitutional assembly different notions of secularity (addressing individual freedom, national unity, and the independence of the political domain) were still on the agenda. The government’s decision in favor of a secular penal code, on the one hand, and of religiously grounded civil status rights, on the other, from the very beginning engendered tensions between universalistic and group-specific law in which secularity and religion maintain a precarious balance. From this perspective, the Shah Bano case and its repercussions may be interpreted as a “critical juncture” in Indian secularism in Kuru’s sense.

If one reads the numerous publications on secularism in India or speaks with Indian scholars, politicians, and intellectuals from different backgrounds, the almost unanimous view is that Indian secularity, or secularism, is not mainly about the separation between state and religion, and certainly not about antireligious attitudes of any kind. In debates over secularism, the Indian case is contrasted to both the American “wall of separation” and French laïcité, which are often identified as essential variants of the “Western model” and are rejected by many.

Instead it is claimed that Indian secularism stands for the “equal distance” of the state from the groups, but above all for respect toward religious minorities. Moreover, the state is supposed to ensure the balance between groups in order to avoid social unrest and maintain public order. These claims are closely tied to cultural memories of partition and the secession of a large portion of Indian Muslims with the foundation of Pakistan. The continual rekindling of bloody conflicts between religious minorities and majorities – for example, accompanying the destruction of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya – demonstrates that this caution is entirely warranted.

The idea of accommodating religious diversity as key to Indian secularity holds for both critics and advocates. Advocates support this reading by referring to indigenous developments and cultural concepts in premodern

\[15\) Taking the impact of Gandhi’s philosophy and its relation between tolerance and self-sacrifice into account, however, one might assume that the cultural support for a strong guiding idea of individual freedom in India is in fact limited.
India – like the concept of the *Sarva Dharma Sambhava* – that they claim provided the “conceptual tools” of Indian secularity (Bhargava 2010); others regard it as a fundamental political malaise that poses a major obstacle to the pursuit of national interests. The latter view is represented above all by the Hindu nationalist RSS and its political arm, the BJP, whose positions combine anti-Islamic and universalistic arguments (cf. Chatterjee 1998:346).

Focusing on the problems of balancing religious diversity means that other aspects command less attention – for example, individual freedom of religion or the freedom to criticize religion. Thus, already shortly after the appearance of Salman Rushdie’s book *The Satanic Verses*, the Indian government decided to ban it, even though there had been no significant protest by Muslim groups. The protest *against* the banning of the book also remained within limits. But individual liberties are also subordinated to the sensitivities of the religious majority, as occurred in the case of the Muslim artist Husain, who became a target of criticism because of his use of images of Hindu deities in his art. Ultimately, he could not pursue his artistic career in India and left the country.

Issues of the autonomy of institutional spheres of society also take a back seat when it comes to ensuring the balance between the religious communities. Again, this is especially apparent in the legal domain. Emblematic of this is a court decision in 2010 handed down in the case concerning the land claims of two Hindu groups and one Muslim group to the compound in Ayodhya. In this compound stood the Babri Mosque (later destroyed by Hindu nationalists), which in turn – according to the argument of Hindu groups – was supposedly erected on a site of a former temple to Ram. Many Hindu groups regard this as the birthplace of the god Ram and assume that the temple was destroyed when the mosque was erected (Tambiah 1996:244pp.).

Two things stand out in the recent court judgment as regards secularity in India: On the one hand, one of the judges, Sudhir Agarwal, argued that the place of the mosque was in fact the birthplace of Ram. Adopting such

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16) “(i) It is declared that the area covered by the central dome of the three domed structure being the deity of Bhagwan Ram Janamsthan and place of birth of Lord Rama as per faith and belief of the Hindus, belong to plaintiffs (Suit-5) and shall not be obstructed or interfered in any manner by the defenders.” (Justice Sudhir Agarwal – Summary). http://www.rjbm.in/allahabad-highcourt-lucknowbench/justice-sudhir-agarwal---summary (accessed: 13.06.11).
an avowedly religious perspective he clearly transgressed the limits of his secular judicial authority. Numerous commentators criticized his view, held the judgment to be judicially inadmissible, and conjectured that it would not stand up in appeal proceedings. Simultaneously, however, the decision to accord each of the three parties one third of the compound was regarded as a ‘wise’ judgment on the model of familial or village conflict mediation. One of our interview partners, a historian, concluded: “If you were to judge on the basis of its consequences, it was a very good judgment, because it did not aggravate the Hindu Muslim divide. It may be wrong in law, but it was right in practice.”

One could conclude from this that the “pacifying” argument has the upper hand over the autonomy of functional domains, in this case, the domain of law. Clearly, the fact that the administration of justice strayed into the religious domain is not really disconcerting in the Indian context; much more disconcerting would be a decision that ignores the imperative of preserving the balance between religions.

3.3. Secularity for the Sake of Societal/National Integration and Development

We find this type of secularity where the guiding idea of secularity is closely allied with national interests and takes precedence over the balance between groups or over individual freedom. This is the case in France, for example, where the republican motive is intimately bound up with the principle of laïcité and is simultaneously associated with the expectation that ‘imported’ cultural and religious differences among the population should be treated as ‘private matters’. In France, this “republican covenant” was for a long time an undoubted success and was better able to integrate immigrant groups by comparison to other European countries. The prerequisite for citizenship was not ethnic identity, but the universalistic identification with the nation in abstraction from ethnic diversity. Associated with this is the claim to purify the sphere of the state, though possibly also the public domain as a whole, from overtly visible cultural, above all linguistic and religious, diversity. This became apparent in the area of public schools around 1900 and again in the “affaire des foulards” in the late 1980s. The mass demonstrations in which French laïcité was both passionately

17) Cf. interviews with scholars in history and Islamic law, New Delhi, November 2010.
18) Cf. interview with scholar in history, New Delhi, November 2010.
defended and challenged, document the extent to which French secularity remained linked with the idea of the republic, though at the same time it showed how brittle the republican covenant had in fact become. The controversy culminated in the total prohibition on wearing the burka in public (Parvez 2011), which makes clear that at stake here is not only the separation between state and religion but also the defense of the broad program in the wider public domain.

Ahmet Kuru has likened French secularism to the Turkish model and has characterized both as variants of an “assertive secularism” (Kuru 2009). Taking its orientations from France, Atatürk’s secularist reform in Turkey went far beyond the domain of the state. It included dress codes (prohibition of the fez), ideal body images, and the public regulation of gender relations (Göle 1997). Secularity borne by the guiding idea of social progress therefore tends to reconfigure the most diverse domains of the state and society and as a result exhibits totalizing features. Nevertheless, France and Turkey clearly differ in the degree to which the secularist idea is socially accepted: whereas in Turkey there is a patent difference between secularist elites and large parts of the population, in France the principle and practice of laïcité, though not uncontroversial, are deeply rooted.19 The mass demonstrations in support of, and against, the prohibition of conspicuous religious symbols in public schools offered proof of this contentiousness. The fact however that a majority of the Muslims also supported the headscarf prohibition also demonstrated the strong support for laïcité.

Some of the socialist dictatorships, though not all, can be subsumed in this logic too. For example, the official GDR doctrine of “scientific atheism” involved the curtailing of churches’ influence and religious freedom. By repressively imposing secularist rituals such as a youth initiation ceremony the state achieved a significant reduction in religious participation. Protagonists of the ruling party explicitly legitimized anti-church activities, such as blasting the Leipzig university church in 1968, in terms of social progress (Winter 1998:129, 206). East German secularism, however, did not remain an elite project. Surveys have shown remarkable support for the idea that religious and ‘rational’ perspectives are incompatible,

19) The mass mobilizations of the secularist camp against the admission of female students wearing headscarves in 2007 did indeed demonstrate that a portion of the Turkish population also defends assertive secularism as part of their self-understanding and as a specific interpretation of Turkish modernity.
and twenty years after the end of the GDR, the eastern part of Germany is still the most secularized region in the world (Wohlrab-Sahr, Karstein and Schmidt-Lux 2009).

Other (post-)socialist countries show different developments. It would be too easy, however, to simply tell a story of Socialist repression of religion and post-Socialist religious revival. As Inglehart’s “cultural map” (Inglehart and Baker 2000) indicates, some of the Communist regimes were able to leave a lasting imprint on their populations’ perspectives on religion and to shape long-lasting secular habits. Further research is still needed to identify to what degree the secularism in Communist societies remained only on the level of political ideology and repressive practices, and to what degree it was able to create a long-lasting culture of secularity, even if some religious rituals and practices may have been revived after the fall of Communism. Vietnam would be an interesting case study in this respect.

3.4. Secularity for the Sake of the Independent Development of Functional Domains

This fourth type is intimately bound up with the notion of social differentiation and hence with one of the key concepts of sociology. Here we are concerned with processes of social differentiation of religion and other social domains (politics, education, art, science, etc.), for example in the form of the emancipation of institutional domains from ecclesiastical control (cf. Chavez 1994).

It is obvious that this motif plays a role in all the attempts to separate religion and the state, at least when the functioning or malfunctioning of the state as such is concerned. But this is not the only domain where this motif of secularity can be found. Differentiation opens secular spaces to develop rationalities of their own. The converse also holds for the domain of religion.

Historically, it seems that ‘pioneering champions’ of the autonomy of education, medicine, and law from religious guidelines frequently conducted their struggles in the name of progress and modernity. While this

20 This is exemplified in the antagonism between science and religion that was enforced by the Logical Positivism of the Vienna Circle, which developed the notion of a scientific world concept (“Wissenschaftliche Weltanschauung”) that was explicitly put in contrast to religion. This group was in line with Comte’s evolutionism viewing Christianity as an outdated
suggested overlaps with model 3, the situation in fact is more complicated. In European history, science, education, and fine arts were especially promoted through the churches. De facto differentiations between the dogmatic and scientific perspectives arose through the concrete work on the object – as, for example, in the case of Galileo Galilei – free from any secularist impetus. In the domain of ecclesiastic art we see the gradual distancing from the sacrality of the altarpiece through new ways of artistic framing – “exchanging the old aura of the sacred for the new aura of the artistic” (Belting 1996 [1990]:484) – starting in Western Europe as early as the end of the Middle Ages.

In the domain of law, independent legal logics emerge during the eighteenth century – for example, through the development of ‘autonomous’ legal procedures involving the cross-examination of witnesses, defense, etc. – that gradually abandoned references to God in the proceedings (Krischer 2011).

The struggle for secular schools was at the core of conflicts over the separation between church and state in many European countries: In France, the ‘Loi Ferry’ of 1882 which established the ‘free, secular and compulsory’ principle of schooling, predated the law of 1905 on the separation of Church and State by more than 20 years. In Germany, in the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, it was schoolteachers who advocated the establishment of secular schools.

In general, we suggest that this type of secularity is less concerned with incorporating forms of differentiation into a societal or national ‘program’ and it does not necessarily include the devaluations of religion that accompany secularist ideologies of progress. Its central focus is more on effecting a ‘dislocation’ of religion especially in societies hitherto characterized by religious monopolies of power and interpretation, that prove in certain historical moments to be limiting, inefficient, or irrational for certain professions. The supporting actors of this type of secularity therefore should be found among representatives of professions (like teachers), science, and arts. The fact that secularist groups appropriate this concern and link it

medieval worldview to be overcome by scientific progress. In the footsteps of this movement, the German association of Monism in the early 20th century claimed a fundamental hiatus between their scientific “Weltanschauung” and Christianity.

21) See also Parsons (1963:46).
with a fundamental societal program can accelerate but also hamper processes of differentiation.

This demonstrates that the emergence of this type of secularity is more a matter of transforming social spheres and religion than one of antireligious attitudes. In the history of science and philosophy, debates over autonomous truth claims are typically associated with new deist or subjectivist theologies that formulate conceptions of faith beyond traditional dogmas hostile to autonomy. Where this was not the case, as in Comte’s evolutionist sociology or the Marxian critique of religion, conceptions of science themselves became new dogmas and flowed into secularist programs. More typical of secularity for the sake of the independent development of functional domains, by contrast, is the differentiation of claims to validity (Luhmann 2000:220).

Yet processes of the autonomization of functional domains were often associated with social conflicts with different intensities. Thus, Pasquale (2008:69pp) claims that the conflict between religion and science in Europe was extreme because of ecclesiastical dogmas and monolithic conceptions of science. It was weaker in East Asia because of the diversity of scientific traditions and the greater epistemological openness of religious doctrines. A similar difference is sometimes alleged concerning the relation between science and religion in Europe and the United States, though in view of the controversies over Darwinism and creationism this is scarcely justifiable.

Secularity for the sake of the independent development of functional domains is rarely the dominant pattern of an entire society and subordinates other motifs of secularity. It is rather documented in a multiplicity of arenas and developments that, taken as a whole exhibit the same thrust. In these arenas, however, the other motifs discussed recede into the background.

4. Conclusion

The concept of “multiple secularities” rests on the recognition that the notions of the secular, of secularism and secularity are charged with highly divergent meanings that are linked to different political and cultural contexts and histories of social conflict. Even though these histories inevitably
give rise to different social dynamics they always focus on specific ways of drawing boundaries and distinctions between religion and other spheres of social practice. We have construed these ways in terms of four ideal-types specifying historical reference problems, guiding ideas and historical solutions. Taken together, these aspects form what we have called “cultures of secularity”, e.g. the ways in which the relationships between religion and other social spheres are organized in a meaningful way according to models that have become dominant at the expense of others or which conflict with other models. We have illustrated these cultures of secularity through different regional scenarios and indicated how these might change.

On the one hand, this conceptualization thus acknowledges the divergent structures of meaning that crystallize in the notion of the secular in different societies. On the other hand, we argue that these differences do not imply that the transformations of the social location of religion unfold as incomparable processes. In today’s world of multiple and entangled modernities it seems, on the contrary, much more likely that similar structural conditions, e.g. regarding the relationships between temporal and religious authority or colonial-postcolonial dynamics, are associated with similar discourses and cultural meanings of secularity. On top, the case studies that we have referred to, indicate that the same motifs of secularity are available in the stock of knowledge of various societies. What becomes dominant however depends on the (communicated) urgency of societal problems as well as on cultural frameworks and structural conditions. The reference to “freedom”, for example, can be employed for the sake of individual liberties, as well as for the immunity from state interference granted to groups (secularity for the balancing of religious diversity), for an agenda of national progress as well as for the independence of functional domains.

Research based on the proposed conceptualization would need to identify the social mechanisms and power relations through which particular understandings of secularity become dominant while others become marginalized or remain insignificant. This however, would require a much more detailed analysis of single cases than the one offered here. In addition, it would also need to examine the ways in which particular practices, symbols and beliefs are publicly recognized as religion and are thereby drawn into the dynamics and logics of secularity.
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