

**Edited by Bruce J. Berman,  
Rajeev Bhargava,  
and André Laliberté**

# **Secular States and Religious Diversity**



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## **Ethnicity and Democratic Governance Series**

How can societies respond to the opportunities and challenges raised by ethnic, linguistic, religious, and cultural differences and do so in ways that promote democracy, social justice, peace, and stability? The volumes in this series seek answers to this fundamental question through innovative academic analysis that illuminates the policy choices facing citizens and governments as they address ethnocultural diversity. The volumes are the result of a collaborative research project on ethnicity and democratic governance under the general editorship of Bruce J. Berman.

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# Preface

## **The EDG Series: Governing Diversity**

The volumes in the Ethnicity and Democratic Governance series are the product of an international Canadian-based Major Collaborative Research Initiative (MCRI) begun in 2006 under Bruce J. Berman of Queen's University as principal investigator. Over the course of six years thirty-nine international researchers and other associated organizations pooled their research and knowledge of one of the most complex and challenging issues in the world today – governing ethnic diversity. The EDG project began with one foundational question: How can societies respond to the opportunities and challenges raised by ethnic, linguistic, religious, and cultural differences and do so in ways that promote democracy, social justice, peace, and stability?

To approach the complex issue of governing ethnic diversity our academic investigations were broken into four interrelated research streams represented by four main research questions:

- What are the causes of ethnic community formation, political mobilization, and conflict?
- What are the institutional strategies and policies available to states for developing democracy in multiethnic societies?
- To what extent can the international community facilitate the peaceful resolution of ethnic conflicts?

- What normative principles of justice and democracy should be used in formulating or evaluating the governance of diversity?

The themes around which our work has coalesced include nationalism, multiculturalism, federalism, ethnicity and moral economy, recognition and identity, accommodation and integration, conflict resolution, democratic governance, secularism and religious pluralism, citizenship, international intervention, immigration, social integration, self-determination, and territory.

Core funding for the Ethnicity and Democratic Governance MCRI comes from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The project is headquartered at Queen's University and conducted in partnership with the Université du Québec à Montréal, the University of Toronto, and the University of Victoria. It is our hope that readers will discover within all of our volumes – and in other project outputs – new understandings of previously neglected or understudied aspects of the nature of ethnic identity formation, the causes of ethnic conflict, and the relationship between ethnic conflict and democratic governance in the contemporary globalized world. For more information on the EDG project and for a list of other EDG publications, see <http://www.queensu.ca/edg/>.

# Introduction

## Globalization, Secular States, and Religious Diversity

Bruce J. Berman, Rajeev Bhargava, and André Laliberté

This book developed from the realization that religion was too often left out of discussions of the issue of democratic governance of ethnic diversity and that this exclusion was untenable in the context of recent controversies in Canada and other Western democracies over the secular state and the challenges allegedly attending the unprecedented ethnic and religious diversity caused by recent immigration. It comes from a conference on “the secular state and religious diversity” organized by the Ethnicity and Democratic Governance program, which was convened at the University of Ottawa to think about this issue. It quickly emerged from the papers presented that for many contributors the changes produced by globalization constituted too important a contextual framework to ignore. This followed logically from the original impetus for the conference, which was the realization that debates on the secular state were Eurocentric and failed to capture the political realities faced by a majority of the world population. China, the largest country in the world, has been ignored for too long in this debate, and India, the largest democracy in the world and perhaps the most important experiment as a secular state in a diverse society, has too often been marginalized as peripheral to it. The book seeks to address these lacunae and to enlarge the framework of critical and comparative analysis by paying attention to these two countries and other non-Western societies, as well as to the different modalities of Western secularism, in order to enlarge discussion of religious diversity and the secular state.

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Although the three editors of this volume are political scientists, they come from different horizons: Bruce J. Berman is an Africanist who has worked on the state and development and has recently focused on nationalism, ethnicity, and multiculturalism; Rajeev Bhargava is a prominent public intellectual in India who has written extensively on secularism and secular democracy; and André Laliberté is a sinologist who has written on the state and religious affairs in China and Taiwan. The contributions to this book reflect scholarship in political science by a new generation of scholars working on religion and the secular state: Yasmeen Abu-Laban, Elinor Bray-Collins, Claude Couture, Ahmet T. Kuru, Rinku Lamba, and Manuel Litalien. Abu-Laban and Couture compare the United States and Canada, and Bray-Collins writes on Lebanon, Kuru on France and Turkey, and Litalien on Thailand. This book also includes prominent scholars of religious studies who focus on the effects of globalization and the legacy of postcolonialism for religion and secularism in Canada: Lori G. Beaman, Peter Beyer, Paul Bramadat, and David Seljak.

In this introduction we present the challenges faced by the secular state in the context of globalization, with particular attention to the issue of religious diversity. Then we address the normative issues raised by these challenges by presenting an approach inspired by the experience of India that represents a break from traditional academic analyses using the United States or France as models of secular states. We believe that India also deserves consideration as a source of inspiration as a model of a secular state, as it is the largest democracy in the world and one of the most religiously diverse societies. Then we sketch the diversity of the social, cultural, political, and historical contexts of different regions in the non-Western world to remind us that the contextual secularism inspired by India may not be easily replicated elsewhere. India can serve as a model of interreligious coexistence as long as one accepts the premise of religion's relevance in the public sphere, but for those who reject this view and for those who think that religion's involvement in politics is problematic, the Chinese model of state control over religion, which *is not* what we mean by a secular state, is an alternate model for many authoritarian regimes that we cannot afford to ignore.

### **The Secular State and the Political Resurgence of Religions**

It is no secret that social scientists, Western and non-Western governments alike, and international institutions were surprised by the powerful political resurgence of religion and radical religious movements during the past thirty years. In the mid decades of the twentieth century religion was widely



thought to be a declining force in human societies in the face of the relentless advance of secular modernity expressed in the global development of nation-states and economies, both capitalist and socialist, based on scientific knowledge and instrumental reason. Anticolonial and national liberation movements were overwhelmingly grounded in the ideologies and goals of this secular modernity (Fox 2004). The resurrection of aggressive political religion came to the fore with worldwide events: the 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution, which displaced the modernizing regime of the shah; the rise of Islamist parties from the Maghreb to South Asia; the rise of Hindu nationalist parties and their affiliates within mainstream Indian politics; and the deepening of the political influence of the “religious right” in the United States during the administration of President Ronald Reagan. These events indicated that secularization had not in fact unseated religion as a dominating political and cultural influence, although they were perceived by many at the time to be the last gasps of an old order whose anomalous, backward-looking reactions to modernity went against the grain of the global trend towards secularization. By 1999, however, it had become increasingly difficult to hold this perception when China, a country viewed as thoroughly secularized, saw the emergence of the spiritual movement Falun Gong. The resurgence of such multifaceted, subterranean, and at times militant religiosity did not make sense to outsiders, occurring as it did in a country subjected to a very aggressive form of state atheism propagated for decades at all levels of society. In Canada, another state viewed from afar as secularized and a leading example of modern multiculturalism, controversy erupted in 2007 over demands for “reasonable accommodation” of religious minorities (particularly Muslim minorities) that revealed both ugly expressions of intolerance and deep-seated insecurities about the place of religion in the public sphere. Although the Chinese and Western situations differ widely from each other, and from those in other parts of the world, they underscore the fact that secularism – which in principle defines the proper place of religion in modern societies – has not achieved the universal acceptance and hegemony once expected.

Although the challenges to the secular state can be seen as global in scope, three different types of configuration emerge from the preceding observations: Western states that have established certain forms of secular state; postcolonial states that have inherited these institutions from previous colonial rulers and have come to terms with them in ways ranging from adaptation to rejection; and states that did not experience direct colonialism from the West and therefore find themselves least affected by the direct

impact of Western secular states. The book's chapters reflect these three different situations by addressing different forms of secular state in Western countries such as Canada, the United States, and France, in countries such as India and Lebanon that have been relatively westernized due to colonialism and have adapted or rejected the forms of secular state imposed on them by Western states, and in countries such as China, Turkey, Thailand, and Taiwan that are adopting some aspects, in whole or in part, of the Western secular states into dramatically different religiocultural backgrounds.

This volume is also based on three premises. The first is that religion in all societies – North, South, East, and West – continues to provide inspiration for many people with a wide variety of political agendas. This religious inspiration has led to a variety of political programs, some of which aim to influence an entire society with a particular religious agenda, whereas others reject institutionalized religious domination, defending only the right of their own communities to greater inclusion in mainstream society or the right to live apart. Others tackle issues such as the defence of the civic rights of those outside of their own faith. The fight for religious domination and/or inclusion takes many political forms, ranging from democratic participation in mainstream political parties<sup>1</sup> to the development of militant antiseccular organizations.<sup>2</sup> Chapters in *Secular States and Religious Diversity* strive to illustrate a variety of civilizational and political contexts beyond Canada and the two countries to which it is most frequently compared: the United States and France. Case studies in this volume also extend beyond the type of European country where established religions coexist with freedom of conscience and where religion's influence has been significantly reduced, as well as beyond states deeply influenced by Christianity and Judaism. Chapters examine secularism and the secular state as they are experienced in the Middle East and in South, Southeast, and East Asia and as they are influenced respectively by Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, among others. Chapters explore how non-Western states interpret "separation" of religious and political institutions, to the extent they do so at all.

The second premise underlying the work of this volume is that religious diversity is a major characteristic of modernity at the global level. Religious diversity can be analyzed along two dimensions: diversity of religions and diversity *within* religions, both of which are examined in more depth in Bhargava's chapter and, to a lesser degree, in Laliberté's and Bray-Collins's chapters. The former dimension considers the differences between religions with backgrounds in different civilizations, whereas the latter looks at differences within religious communities, whether between leaders and

followers (i.e., clerics and lay persons), men and women, caste and racial hierarchies in India, or different interpretations and practices of a given religious tradition. These differences have led to the diverse worldviews of people with varying levels of religiosity, ultimately also including those at the far end of the spectrum, such as secular Hindus or Jews, who may feel only loosely attached to communities of people associated with the strict practice of a religious tradition, as well as practitioners of body-cultivation techniques like Qigong who may consider themselves nonbelievers or even atheists.

A third crucial underlying premise developed in the chapters by Berman, Beyer, and Beaman is that secularism originated in a distinctive Western historical experience. Along with the liberal revolution in the United States, which generated a regime of separation between church and state, and the more radical French variant, there has also been a gradual evolution away from religious establishment in states such as the United Kingdom and the states of continental Europe. These forms of relationship between religion and state were also imposed through colonialism on societies with other historical, religious, and political traditions in which there were no churches to separate from state institutions. Colonialism also brought the secular knowledge of the state and market and, through the activities of Christian missionaries, a degree of religious pluralism, both of which have seriously undermined indigenous forms of political and religious authority.

The rising religious-secular tensions have taken place within a rapidly changing and increasingly unstable global context, which experienced a tectonic shift with the emergence of China and India as economic powers. Berman notes that globalization has generated widespread socioeconomic and political crises in non-Western societies that have threatened established religious communities and have led to the widespread belief among many Muslims that they are under deliberate attack by Western secular modernity in a “war on Islam.” Bray-Collins discusses youth movements in Lebanon and the country’s inability to break the shackles of communal leaders’ domination, aptly illustrating the consequences of the threat felt by traditionalist religious leaders. Berman also points to the rise of ethno-religious political movements and fundamentalism (as two distinct phenomena) within world religions that may lack a history of functioning within secular states or may have found increasing secularity a challenge to their beliefs. Such movements have threatened nation-states and have led some to believe in the essential incompatibility between the secular liberal-democratic modernity of the West and the rest in what has been termed the

“clash of civilizations” (Huntington 1996; see also Berman’s and Beyer’s chapters). There is no doubt, as Beaman notes, that unprecedented international migration and rapidly increasing ethnic and religious diversity in Europe and North America have made migration, integration, and accommodation of new ethnoreligious minorities central issues of national politics. As Beyer documents, these tendencies were reinforced by the collapse of the Soviet Union and its satellites from 1989 to 1991, bringing an end to the most militant secularist atheist states and the death of the socialist option in the global economy. These trends are also relevant to China, even if the People’s Republic remains nominally socialist and committed to its own authoritarian version of secularism (Goossaert and Palmer 2011). Conflicts between secular and religious authorities there need to be seen in terms of a competition for international legitimacy between, on the one hand, the Chinese state and, on the other hand, the global Chinese diaspora and the democracies influenced by Chinese culture such as Taiwan, as well as Japan and South Korea.

In the context of the now interlocked global and local confrontations, Berman notes that neoliberalism may itself have taken on the ideological form of a millennial cult, tending towards homogenization in the name of a global-market universalism, and that religious fundamentalists exhibit increasingly militant lines of differentiation between the infidels and the true believers – even among their own followers. The most visible, overtly menacing, and violent aspect of religious extremist movements – global terrorism – can undermine the stability of weaker nation-states but ultimately involves only a very small proportion of the adherents of the major world religions and tends to obscure the broader and deeper issue of the development of relations between secular states and religious communities and institutions, as well as how this development will shape not only the direction of public policy but also the very course of liberal democracies in the future. In these confrontations we find the contemporary challenges to secularism, empirical and normative, and its ability to encompass the increasingly complex and divisive intersection of religious institutions and public life.

Existing secular states now face several challenges. First, some religious institutions do not accept the authority of the secular state, whereas many others, having accepted it reluctantly, now question its legitimacy through militant religious contestation. Second, some supporters of the secular state argue that states are not in fact “secular” enough and should not concede to even the milder demands of religious actors. The tension between these two

perspectives has been exacerbated by the consequences of decolonization, the end of the Cold War, and increased global mobility. Finally, and most relevant to this volume, increasing religious diversity compels the secular state to rethink its purpose and its position relative to religion. The presence of growing religious diversity was briefly obscured by the rise of the nation-state and the accompanying conceptual ideal of culturally homogeneous political communities. Today, however, diverse religious communities with differing conceptions about the place of religion in public affairs have helped to reignite debates about the secular state. Moreover, modern ethnonationalist movements and ethnic conflicts have increasingly become religiously grounded and have reinforced religious militancy (Juergensmeyer 2008; Fox 2004). Beyond the diversity of views on the secular states, there is one issue on which opponents and proponents alike agree: the historical development of the different models originated in the West and relied on the subsequent “Europeanization” of the world.

### **The Secular State as Western Hegemony**

Beyer notes that, over a period of more than a thousand years, Western societies have moved from an experience of fragmented political pluralism and the religious universalism of the Catholic Church to the modernity of a small number of unified and sovereign nation-states containing a diversity of religious communities that are nonetheless primarily Catholic, a wide variety of Protestant churches, and small communities of Jews. Societies of western Europe and societies in the settler colonies of the New World, which had in common the dominant influence of Christianity, either adopted variations of the American and French models or gradually modified regimes of established state churches to give religious freedom and full civic rights to other religious communities. Although secularism situates the state as the dominant agent in the regulation of religious institutions, in practice this has resulted in state responses ranging from the minimal regulatory approach of the United States to the stronger state interference implemented in France. American secularism is characterized by what Alfred Stepan (2000) has termed “twin toleration” – noninterference of the state in religious affairs but also nonintervention of religious institutions in government (although enforcement of the latter implies that the principle of noninterference by the state may be impossible to implement in its entirety). Implementation of these two principles of noninterference has not necessarily meant the rejection or deliberate negation of religion but rather constitutional measures that prevent religious institutions from directly

exercising political power and also limit state control over any religious community.

Beyond these differences, there is little question that secularism – as a discourse and an institutional practice positing that religion should not be the final determinant of political outcomes and that religious institutions should not directly exercise secular power – still stands out globally as a hegemonic approach supported at least overtly by the overwhelming majority of states, whether authoritarian or liberal. For supporters and critics alike, secularism embodies the essential nature of the modern state and is institutionalized at varying levels almost universally. Western states have adopted a variety of approaches to established churches, denominations, and non-Christian religious institutions, all premised on the idea that states should be the final arbiter in matters of interreligious relations and the ultimate authority in managing secular worldly affairs. Most postcolonial states have adopted some permutation of religiously neutral and distanced state institutions that constrain the role of religious institutions, and most view these institutions as being foundational attributes of their own independence. States such as the People's Republic of China – and until 1989 the Soviet Union – are only quasi-secular because if they have adopted the principle of keeping religion strictly out of the state and have relegated it to the private sphere, they have not implemented freedom from state interference in religious affairs, the other part of the ideal relationship between state and religion implied in the notion of secularism.

Of course, not all contemporary states are secular. The obvious exceptions are the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; both states also greatly impact the global economy and the international balance of power. In addition, the precarious situation of Pakistan, which appears to be veering ever closer to the status of an Islamic republic due to its internal Taliban insurgency, presents the world with a nuclear-armed country of over 170 million people now decisively rejecting a half-century-old secular – although undoubtedly precariously “secular” – state. Recent elections of political parties advocating a greater presence of Islam in public life following the Arab Spring in Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia represent important tests of the secular state's resilience – or lack thereof – in these countries. As suggested above, the more intriguing but equally, if not more, consequential case relevant to the future of the secular state is the baffling model of China with its own mode of state control over religious affairs. Over the past six decades China has proceeded in a haphazard way to establish five religions under the tight control of the atheist Communist Party;

that is, the state explicitly recognizes five (and only five) religions at the expense of the many others that existed prior to 1949 – and still do outside of the People’s Republic of China. In other words, even if China’s public intellectuals claim to be secular, due to the absence of freedom of conscience, the Chinese state is not. Whereas the model of an Islamic republic may appeal to some Muslims who are critical of the secular state, it has no attraction at all in societies where the religious background of the majority is Christian, Hindu, or Buddhist. The Chinese quasi-secular model, however, may represent a more formidable challenge to the variants of the liberal secular state because it could inspire authoritarian leaders in societies with a different religious configuration, which are also facing a religious resurgence with the potential to oppose their political regime.

The religious revival and the militant challenge to secular states and culture – as well as the obvious error in “secularization” theory’s expectations of an inevitable global process of secularization – have attracted the attention of social scientists, including the contributors to an important collection of papers edited by Ira Katznelson and Gareth Stedman Jones (2010). They and their collaborators recognize secularism as a complex and open-ended process encompassing a wide range of beliefs and increasingly heterogeneous forms of religion. Rather than following a universal trajectory, it is part of larger and more contradictory historical processes. Secularism in state and society is not one thing but takes multiple forms in different societies as the contingent outcome of powerful social forces. In this volume we attempt to explore these processes in broader comparative and historical context, looking in particular at the development of secular states and at their relations with religious institutions not only in Western societies but also in the wider range of major non-Western societies that have been affected by the global impact of Western political and cultural secularism.

Katznelson and Stedman Jones (2010, 12-13) distinguish as well between “political” and “existential” secularism. Here we further develop a distinction between “institutional” secularism – particularly in the dominant institutions of modernity, namely the nation-state and the capitalist market – and “cultural-ideological” secularism. They are closely related but remain distinct in their relationship to religious doctrines and communities. Secular states separate religious institutions from the direct exercise of secular authority and the mutual official sanction of church and state. This is anti-clerical rather than antireligious and has actually opened the way for religious freedom as a personal choice and for the legitimation of religious pluralism. Secular culture, however, developed out of the separation of the

sacred and the profane – the “disenchantment of the world” described by Max Weber (Habermas 1990, 2) – which rejected religion as “superstition” and grounded human agency in the secular world based on instrumental rationality and science. States and markets have been increasingly dominated by diverse forms of expert knowledge that dismiss the authority of religious knowledge of the sacred. For more than two centuries the growth of the secular culture of modernity (Giddens 1991) has posed a deep threat to religious institutions and doctrines. This confrontation between faith and reason has led to what Berman describes as “the politics of knowledge,” and it continues to divide the secular and the religious in conflicts over control of the institutions and practices of the state.<sup>3</sup>

Although secularism remains a dominant global influence despite long historical resistance in the West from religious institutions in battles that have lasted decades, if not centuries, the variety of arrangements found around the world to govern relations between states and religions testifies to the wide array of circumstances under which these struggles have unfolded and continue to do so. This conflict has yet to abate, and although in some parts of the world, notably Europe, it may be on the wane, elsewhere it has experienced a powerful resurgence. Contributors to this volume are interested particularly in one dimension of this resistance that is especially relevant to most societies experiencing the effects of late-capitalist globalization: the phenomenon of greater religious diversity and its effects on social cohesion. This phenomenon affects Canada in many ways, as Lori Beaman demonstrates in her discussion of the power differential embedded in the language of accommodation and toleration. Paul Bramadat and David Seljak clearly underline how deeply secular societies such as Canada are entering uncharted territory as far as the current institutions of secularism are concerned: If not a return to a *status quo ante*, what would be the contour of a postsecular society? In other societies like India, the critique against secularism should not blind us to its considerable benefits; Rinku Lamba underscores this in her examination of the vital impact of secular institutions in battling caste-based discrimination. Likewise, as André Laliberté notes in his observations about Taiwan and East Asia, secularism still benefits from quasi-universal support in this region, although it sometimes takes forms that would not be recognized as such in the West.

This volume addresses the emerging field of multiple secularisms, and because this field remains in its infancy, the volume tentatively introduces different typologies to make sense of a very heterogeneous conceptual field.



In addressing this multiplicity of secularisms, this introduction presents various typologies that apply mostly to Western states – including assertive, passive, and moderate types of secular state – as well as Bhargava’s central concept of “principled distance,” originally developed in India, a multi-religious state from its beginning in 1947. Although India has adapted much of Western secularism through the influence of colonization and thus may be more easily identified with other Western forms, India’s approach cannot be adequately captured by the assertive, passive, and moderate types and propels us into thinking about the relevance of dramatic differences due to non-Western religiohistorical (i.e., Islamic, Indic, and Sinitic) backgrounds. To this end, we introduce a framework that addresses non-Western states that have willingly or unwillingly adapted some forms of the originally Western philosophy and structure of secularism, and we present a typology of Western, Islamic, Indic, and Sinitic “secularisms,” with the recognition that much more research needs to be done on the latter three. This is a task whose urgency can hardly be overestimated: a majority of the world population lives in non-Western societies, and among the latter, China, the most populous country in the world, is travelling a path to modernity that differs from that taken by both Western and postcolonial societies. The particular approach to the management of religious diversity by societies influenced by Chinese culture will increasingly matter since China’s growing economic clout is likely to have a “spillover effect” on other institutions of global governance, such as international covenants on human rights and religious freedom.

### **Modalities of Western Secularism and Its Challenges**

Ahmet Kuru’s chapter develops an analytical distinction between the different forms of secular state experienced in France (assertive secularism) and the United States (passive secularism). Kuru argues that twin toleration represents the basis of passive secularism, and he notes that the United States is the closest approximation to this particular ideal type. France implements an assertive form of secularism that arose out of a distinctive form of anti-clericalism that focused on the management by the *ancien régime* of an established church that had once actively provided legitimacy to the established order. In both passive and assertive secular states, however, the privatization of religious belief was as much about protecting religious minorities from religious intolerance and persecution as it was about excluding religious institutions from secular power. In Europe this meant protection for

Protestants where the Catholic Church remained dominant, for Catholics and dissenting Protestant sects where Protestants were dominant, and for Jews everywhere. Relations between states and religious institutions in the West could also follow a third institutional path, which Tariq Modood (2011) calls “moderate secularism” and which we prefer to call “incremental secularism.” In countries with established state religions, the fragmented, piecemeal development of liberal democracy was linked to the gradual removal of restrictions on religious minorities’ participation in the public arena and on their holding public office but only insofar as these minorities did not act as Jews or Protestants or Catholics in the public sphere. The distinction between passive, assertive, and incremental secularism, as we discuss below, may have an effect on postcolonial societies’ receptivity to secularism.

The varying forms of Western secular state are discussed in the chapters that follow. The strongly republican ideological secularism of France and Turkey is discussed by Kuru, and the very different institutional and ideological contours of American secularism are discussed by Berman and by Claude Couture and Yasmeen Abu-Laban. The Canadian experience of a gradual movement – first in the British imperial tradition and later in a more independent fashion – towards tolerance and accommodation of ethnic and religious pluralism is analyzed by Beaman and also by Bramadat and Seljak. These two chapters focus critically on the contemporary development and limits of liberal multiculturalism underpinning the Canadian approach to religious diversity. Beaman notes in particular the hegemonic power differences that remain embedded in notions of tolerance and accommodation and the recent public fixation in Canada on the “limits of accommodation” of ethnoreligious minorities, especially Muslims and Sikhs. Both Beaman and Bhargava note the need to recognize the diversity within and between religious communities embedded in the power relations of these communities and in the wider society. Bramadat and Seljak argue that despite the melding of liberal multiculturalism with the discourse of human rights, liberal multiculturalism alone cannot deal effectively with the new religious diversity, particularly since it fails to understand the internal diversity of ethnic and religious groups and the ambiguity and historicity of their claims.

There are multiple challenges to the management of religious diversity in secular states. Many religious actors think the secular state lacks moral authority and therefore holds no legitimacy to regulate religious affairs; in other cases, religious minorities view the secular state as the protector of

minority rights against dominant religious majorities and may therefore pressure the state to act in ways that compromise its neutrality. Finally, secularism faces challenges in its implementation because (as we discuss below) varied philosophical approaches to secularism have led to differing institutional models. This diversity, resulting from different experiences with modernity, exposes societies to widely divergent expectations about the nature of secularism. There is also a historical and cultural specificity to dominant models of secularism – both as institutions and as concepts in the Western world – and therefore questions about the extent to which they can be employed as templates for non-Western societies. The chapters in this volume reveal the complexity of secularism not only in the nations of the West where it “originated” but also in the non-Western societies to which it was often aggressively spread by Western imperialism and colonialism, as demonstrated in Lamba’s chapter on India and in Bray-Collins’s chapter on Lebanon, as well as in other non-Western societies where elites with very different understandings of modernity adopted it, as illustrated in Kuru’s chapter on Turkey, Litalien’s chapter on Thailand, and Laliberté’s chapter on East Asia. In each national instance the character of secularism and the state was shaped by the earlier historical experience of the relationship between political institutions and religious beliefs and institutions.

This reopening of the confrontation between secular modernity and religion owes much to developments within the Islamic world and – due to increased international migration – to the growth of Muslim communities that are now an intrinsic part of the fabric of societies in post-Christian and postsocialist Europe and, even more so, of societies established by European settlers in the New World. The attachment of a growing segment of the populations of secular states that were once overwhelmingly Judeo-Christian to a variety of religious traditions from non-Western ancestral lands tests the ability of many of these states to respect ostensibly deeply held values such as freedom of conscience, an intrinsic part of which is religious diversity and the capacity of religious adherents to practise their own deeply held religious ideals. Western societies must come to terms with the fact that a majority of the global population – and an increasing proportion of their own citizenries – refer to traditions other than Judeo-Christianity, and this creates the need to look beyond dominant models of the secular state and to consider lessons from non-Western states regarding the management of religious diversity. Meanwhile the confrontation between secular modernity and religion plays out differently in societies like China where the state’s project of modernity was not about establishing a secular state

through a regime of separation between religious and political authority but rather about asserting state authority to control religious activities. In this case, the state is best defined as quasi-secular, and religious resurgence is often seen, rightly or wrongly, as an assertion of civil society against an authoritarian state rather than as a questioning of the secular state. Understanding the Chinese situation matters to the broader context of world politics and the transmission of norms across cultures because its model of state control of religious affairs appeals to other societies' rulers who consider religious resurgence to be a threat.

And there is no question that this religious resurgence can be especially worrisome when it is accompanied by intolerance against other religions, especially minorities. One of the supposedly great merits of the ideal liberal secular state in Western political philosophy is that it legitimates tolerance of minority religions through its dissociation from the majority religion. However, with the increasing ethnic and cultural diversity of Western societies, this dimension of existing secular states, regardless of their varying forms, is coming under stress. Whether it is the hostile reaction to building a mosque at "ground zero" in New York or to minarets in Switzerland or the ban on the *niqab* in France and Quebec, the ability of secular states to respect religious diversity is coming under increasing challenge. Here the difference of quasi-secular authoritarian states like China matters again. Religious resurgence in China often accompanies more general calls for political liberalization (Yang 2005), and the persecution of religious minorities does not result from the rearguard reaction of populist groups and demagogue politicians but from the state itself and its particular variant of modernity (Tong 2009). In short, the political contexts where religious believers and organizations make demands bring forth the necessity to contextualize the secular state's modalities when discussing the future.

### **The Future of Secular States, Secularism, and Religious Pluralism**

Secular nation-states are confronted with unprecedented ethnic and religious pluralism in the context of a global crisis marked by what Bramadat and Seljak term an "ideological interregnum" when previous hegemonic ideologies, secular or religious, have been dramatically undermined. Neoliberalism – whose hegemony largely embraces the elites of international institutions, major Western nations, and international corporate capital and whose utopian claims to creating global prosperity have produced in many situations quite the reverse – may have tarnished, if not annulled, the credibility of its

moral claim to advance justice or equality, whether secular or sacred. On what basis, then, can a global paradigm be constructed that will link both religious communities and secular political forces in commitment to a shared agenda of social justice and equality in mundane secular reality at the local and global levels? Do we need, as Bramadat and Seljak suggest, a “postsecular” paradigm, or do we need, as Bhargava suggests, a “contextual secularism” based on a principled distance between the state and religious institutions and a shared search for a contextually grounded common ethic? This search would take place both within and between religious communities and secular states. How do we deal with communities or movements within the world religions that reject the legitimacy of the secular nation-state, which remains the dominant global political form – particularly the dominant liberal-democratic form – and that may seek either to live in isolation from secular nation-states or to replace them with theocratic states that are agencies of extreme oppression, exclusion, and violence? And finally, how do we avoid tarring with the same brush other communities or movements from within the same world religions that are politically active rejecting only the authoritarian variants of the secular state?

One suggestion, put forth by Bhargava, is that rather than imposing a highly context-specific liberal-democratic secularism or seeking a radical religion-centred alternative, we might construct a new conception of political secularism from the best practices of Western and non-Western states. Bhargava details five features of this contextual secularism based on his understanding of the characteristics of the Indian secular state. First, such a secularism’s more explicitly multivalent character would look beyond individualistically construed values of religious and nonreligious liberty and equality to encompass community-specific rights such as peace, toleration, and nonindividualistically construed values of liberty and equality. Second, it would have the capacity to address both inter- and intrareligious domination and would benefit minorities through community-specific political or sociocultural rights, where required.

The concept of principled distance is a third, and perhaps the key, feature of Bhargava’s contextual secularism. In contrast to mainstream Western secularism, in which separation appears to have taken the routes of either one-sided or mutual exclusion of religion from state functions, principled distance accepts that although states must not be tied to religious goals and must be kept apart from religious institutions, they do not need to keep religion entirely out of policy and law. Secularism based on principled distance

would apply a flexible approach to the question of state inclusion versus exclusion of religion and to the question of state engagement versus disengagement with religion. Religion, then, would be allowed to intervene in the affairs of the state if such an intervention promoted freedom, equality, or other values integral to secularism. For instance, practices banned or regulated by the state for one culture might indeed be permitted in a minority culture because of the distinctive status and meaning these practices have for its members. The important consideration here is whether this intervention occurs as a means to treat all people as equals. However, principled distance is more than differential treatment; it may require state intervention in some religions more than in others, and it takes into account the historical and social conditions of all relevant religions. Thus the state may not relate to every religion in society in exactly the same way or intervene in each religion to the same degree or in the same manner; the state must ensure only that its relationship with each religion is guided by nonsectarian motives consistent with democratic values and principles.

This emphasis on the role of values and principles brings up a fourth aspect of secularism: the commitment to pursue actions that may be perceived as hostile to particular aspects of religion (e.g., caste and gender restrictions) but necessary to other deeply held values such as equality. The final aspect of contextual secularism, referred to in its name, is its highly *contextual* mode of moral reasoning, where the precise form and content of secularism vary from one context to another and where this idea of multiple secularisms opens up the possibility of different societies working out their own form.

One implication of contextual secularism is that, as a multivalue doctrine, its constitutive values do not always sit easily with one another but are frequently in conflict. As a result, internal discord and instability are integral parts of contextual secularism. New interpretations, contextual judgments, and attempts at reconciliation and compromise are therefore central to this form of secular state. From an institutional standpoint, according to Bhargava, this practice of secularism requires a different model of moral reasoning than ones that rely upon what Charles Taylor (1994, 16-43) terms "straightjackets": well-delineated, explicitly stated rules. Bhargava holds that one of the key characteristics of contextual secularism is its capacity to recognize that the conflicts between individual rights and group rights, between claims of equality and liberty, and between claims of liberty and the satisfaction of basic needs cannot always be adjudicated by recourse to

general and abstract principles. Rather, they can be settled only case by case and may require a fine balancing of competing claims. Multivalent doctrines such as secularism encourage accommodation and the reconciliation and possible harmonization of different values – in an effort to make each value work without changing its basic content.

Bhargava's chapter defends his concept against possible accusations that it could lead to moral relativity and could elicit watered-down compromises, among other possible criticisms. Whatever contextual secularism's weaknesses might prove to be, it draws on a secularism based on some of India's lived practices in accommodating deep diversity. It is one attempt to further the practical applications of political secularism that asks what the relationship between the state and religion ought to be if the concern is to prevent religious domination and to promote freedom and equality. Although political secularism must be conceived in opposition to institutionalized religious domination, questions remain as to what this entails; for example, Modood (2011, 2) argues that despite their formal recognition of one religion, states with established religions (e.g., Britain) can still "treat the claims of all religions in accordance with multicultural equality." This stands in contrast to states whose political secularism opposes all forms of religion-centred governance – that is, theocracies and states that establish religions – and is equally opposed to amoral and antireligious secular states. Clearly, there is room for future debate as to whether political secularism does in fact require a complete separation of state and religion to fulfill its purpose. Whatever the result of such a dialogue, this volume highlights and critiques the tendency in the literature to equate political secularism with a unique version of governance developed largely in the West. This mainstream conception exhibits the very problems and weaknesses touched upon in this chapter and further explored throughout this volume. The crisis of secularism the world over is also due to certain problems internal to this mainstream version of governance. Although Bhargava's contextual secularism remains to be tested both in this volume and beyond, it exemplifies the idea of multiple secularisms. And because it lies in contrast to forms of secularism that have been studied in much more depth, it strikes deeply at the heart of the question of whether equality requires the accommodation of religious minorities as groups – rather than only as individuals – and it arises from the very lessons learned in India's confrontation with deep religious diversity. As a result, there may be much to learn from contextual secularism.

### **Non-Western Religious Diversity and Encounters with Secularism**

Modern secularism as a culture and ideology and as an institution has come to the non-Western world largely through the experience over the past three centuries of Western imperialism and successive epochs of globalization. The adoption of the secular state in societies with a non-Christian heritage, not surprisingly, proceeded in differing ways. Sometimes, secularism was imposed by colonial rulers in an authoritarian manner often hostile to religion and by states such as France that had implemented in their own countries a radical form of secularism. In countries such as India that were ruled by Great Britain, a colonial power with its own established religion, secularism took a form more accepting of religion and religious pluralism. Finally, as in the cases of China, Turkey, and Iran, secularism was implemented under modernizing revolutions against old elites. This variety of historical trajectories reminds us again why there is no single dominant form of secularism or relationship with religion but rather a variety of distinctive national forms that differ politically, socially, and culturally. This book attempts to widen the comparative scope of analysis beyond what has been attempted before (Katznelson and Stedman Jones 2010, 11-20).

Secularism was sometimes imposed on societies where the very concept of “separation between church and state” was largely irrelevant because the leaders of these societies were also supreme religious leaders, as Laliberté shows in the case of ancient China and as Manuel Litalien shows in the case of present-day Thailand. In these and other cases theocracy was a foreign concept superimposed on societies where the dominant worldviews were not founded on a belief in one God. In non-Western states issues of domination and subordination between religious communities and the tolerance of difference both within and between communities took very different forms. The authoritarian institutions of the colonial state generally did not sanction indigenous religions, which in Africa and the Americas were largely dismissed as primitive and savage and in Asia condemned as backward and decadent. The tools and expertise of industrial modernity, both civil and military, also dismissed indigenous knowledge and practice (Adas 1990).

Contemporary responses to secularism and religious pluralism in the non-Western world are often based on earlier interactions between native traditions and colonial officials, missionaries, and settlers, and these responses have been sharpened by the social and economic crises of globalization and by its hegemonic neoliberal ideology, which challenges the world religions



of the Middle East and Asia. We can identify a variety of forms of non-Western secular state. In addition to the distinction between passive, assertive, and incremental secularism in Western states, we can also distinguish between three groups of non-Western secular states according to their civilizational origins. This is not a reiteration of the categories used by Samuel Huntington (1996) but rather an approach closer to that of Schmucl Eisenstadt (2000), who looks at civilizations as metanarratives defined by core sacred texts and traditions with which large groups of people and nations identify and to which they relate their collective histories – even when they are critical of these texts and traditions and even in situations where these texts and traditions incorporate elements of other ones. These three groups of non-Western secular states adhere to metanarratives that can be categorized as *Islamic*, where the central reference is the Quran; as *Indic*, where the foundations can be traced back to the Vedic and Upanishadic tradition; and as *Sinitic*, where the foundations can be traced back to the formative Spring and Autumn periods in China more than twenty-five centuries ago. These forms correlate to the dominant religious and spiritual traditions that prevail in particular areas. It is important to keep in mind that each form contains variants depending on particular historical circumstances, including but not limited to the impacts of inter- or intrareligious warfare; conflict with the state over the establishment or disestablishment of a major religious institution such as a mosque, *mandir*, *fo tang*, *gurdwara*, or the like; disputes between the state and religious authorities over the legal interpretation of holy scriptures or traditions; conflict with the state over the extent to which secular institutions ought to be established; the legacy of colonial rule in states where Christian missions played a role in conversions; and the complexity of religious diversity. Non-Western societies and governments have employed a variety of approaches in their attempts to implement secular states.

We can identify three different forms of secular state in societies where Islam represents the religious tradition of the majority. This is in addition to those Islamic states where Islam forms the ideological foundation for state institutions.<sup>4</sup> All of these are part of the torturous and deeply conflicted efforts in Islamic societies to come to terms with a secularism that came as an intrinsic component of Western capitalist modernity and imperialism (Tripp 2007). There are *assertive secular states* where Islam represents the religion of the majority but where the state is opposed to a conspicuous presence of religion in the public sphere.<sup>5</sup> There are *passive secular states*

where Islam is the state religion but where – similar to western European states with established churches – religious customary law is not the source of legislation.<sup>6</sup> In some significant passive secular states, the Constitution does not make a specific commitment to religion, often due to the intrinsically religiously pluralist makeup of the population.<sup>7</sup> Finally, there are also *majoritarian secular states* where Islam is a crucial aspect of the national identity but only for larger or smaller majorities, a situation that threatens the integrity of the state if extremists aspire to impose their version of Islam on the entire country.<sup>8</sup> In these three types of secular state, political Islam represents an important source of inspiration for political parties, many of which aspire to take power and transform their societies according to their particular interpretation of the tenets of Islam. In those states where Islam coexists with other important religious minorities, the concept of the secular state may feel threatening to the majority religion, especially when it is fragmented along sectarian lines. Such is the situation in Lebanon, whose complex equation Bray-Collins examines in her chapter on the Lebanese youth movements' inability to establish a nonconfessional political system. She points to the difficulty of establishing a passive secular state in the context of deep religious diversity entrenched by a religiously based consociational system and in the context of the resistance of religious leaders to secularism in the absence of a strong state.

Religious diversity has long been a central characteristic of Indic Asia,<sup>9</sup> even though the influence of Christian missions was far more limited there than in other parts of Asia. Countries of this region established their own political institutions influenced by world religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. In South Asia, Hinduism primarily influenced India and Nepal, whereas in continental Southeast Asia, Buddhism constituted the major foundation for state builders in their conceptions of the appropriate relations to encourage between state and religion.<sup>10</sup> Whereas the religious diversity of India and the complexity of its colonial history facilitated the development of a unique and hybrid form of secular state, the religious diversity of Sri Lanka and Nepal led to the creation of established state religions: Buddhism and Hinduism, respectively. In her chapter Lamba argues that the Indian secular state's efforts to maintain neutrality towards different religious beliefs do not (and should not) prevent state intervention in religious affairs to serve goals such as social justice or equality. That is, India is neither assertive nor passive: it does not prevent the intervention of religion in public affairs, and it intervenes in religious affairs. Yet India cannot

be defined as an incremental secular state because the republic's founders staunchly resisted proclaiming an established religion.

In continental Southeast Asia, a region influenced primarily by the Indian tradition for more than a millennia, the hegemonic presence of Buddhism has not prevented different reactions to the secular state. Thailand has established Buddhism as the state religion, but Burma, Laos, and Cambodia have not. Burma and Laos appear to have developed assertive secular states, whereas Cambodia developed a passive secular state following the brief dictatorship of the Khmer Rouge, which had implemented an extreme form of assertive secular state. Viewed from afar, Thailand may appear as the Buddhist equivalent of the western European state with an established religion that in effect sustains a passive secular state. However, Litalien's exposé on the close connection between the monarchy and the Buddhist religious establishment demonstrates that Thailand is not a genuinely passive secular state. Although Buddhism may seem more amenable to secularism and more tolerant of diverse beliefs, Litalien points out Thailand's continuing reluctance to recognize religious minorities.

Evidently, not one religious tradition facilitates the management of religious diversity in South Asia and Southeast Asia. In contrast to those societies influenced by Islam, however, societies with an Indic heritage appear to have reacted differently to colonial rule; in India the secular state is not seen as an imposition from the West, and in Thailand resistance to the secular state cannot be attributed to colonialism since this country was never subjected to Western domination.

East Asia demonstrates a form of secular state distinct from those of the West and of Islamic and Indic Asia. We can call it *Sinitic*, as it is deeply influenced by Chinese culture. States in this region have historically supported and sometimes established specific religions, often simultaneously. Governments have lent legitimacy to religious practices that incorporate the liturgy and belief systems of Buddhism, Confucianism, and local national traditions such as Taoism in China and Shinto in Japan, often at the same time and without appearing to favour one over the other. However, following the major divisions created by the Cold War, two different types of secular state developed, mirroring divisions between political regimes in the region: authoritarian, nominally Leninist states became extreme forms of the assertive or quasi-secular state, and liberal, pluralist states moved closer to the model of the passive secular state. The three quasi-secular states – the People's Republic of China,<sup>11</sup> Vietnam,<sup>12</sup> and the Democratic People's

Republic of Korea (or North Korea)<sup>13</sup> – have created societies in which the state gives recognition and protection to a limited number of established religions to the exclusion of others. In these cases, tight state control accompanies recognition. In contrast, Japan, the Republic of Korea (or South Korea), and Taiwan have developed passive secular states that recognize a variety of religions over which little state control is asserted. In all of these cases, the importation of foreign modes of religious regulation – mostly from the United States – has combined with the institutional memory of state control over religious affairs to give each region its distinctive characteristics. States with a Sinitic cultural heritage have an altogether different experience of the secular state than do Western and postcolonial states. As Laliberté argues in his chapter on Taiwan’s regulation of religious affairs, the secular state in East Asia, far from being imposed by Western powers, is considered a transposition of a long tradition of state control or state regulation of religious affairs. Decisions in the region to adopt or reject the secular state do not rely on a metanarrative of foreign invasions. The adoption of secularism is partly inspired by an indigenous history in which for centuries states promoted religions whose institutionalized boundaries were often indistinguishable from those of state authority. Because the relation between the state and religions in East Asia was originally one where religion was subordinate to the state, as remains the case in China, Vietnam, and North Korea, these three polities can best be described as quasi-secular states.

To better understand the varieties of secular state in each of the four clusters discussed, it is appropriate to look into the religiously pluralistic situation in which these states were established. It is important to underline that there are few, if any, regions in the contemporary world without some form of religious diversity. We identify four broad forms of religious diversity. The first is the Western form, which has gone through different stages and is familiar due to the vast amount of scholarship on the subject. The second is the Indic form, whose deep diversity is not only unlike that of the contemporary Western world but also arguably more complex because in Indic states the traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity have comingled for centuries. The third form is the not often acknowledged Islamic pattern of religious diversity, which is evident primarily *within* the dominant religion but is nevertheless important enough to explain the variety of constraints that have influenced the development of different secular yet predominantly Muslim states. The fourth is the Sinitic form of religious diversity, which shares with contemporary Western and

Indic areas a condition of deep diversity that, like in South Asia but unlike in the West, has prevailed for millennia.

### **Conclusion**

The discussion above about different clusters of religious diversity serves to remind us that although the Indian approach of principled distance may appear compelling as a way to assuage conflicts or to reconcile groups with contrasting worldviews in many non-Western or postcolonial societies, it cannot serve as a universal template. Given the stark differences between the religious policies of India and China, it is difficult to see how the latter could seek to emulate the former. In other words, there is likely to be more than one model of secular state capable of reconciling the sometimes conflicting exigencies of freedom of conscience, social justice, and political control. Nonetheless, since the global context produces powerful homogenizing effects that reinforce trends towards a “one size fits all” model of governance for the management of diversity, the idea of contextual secularism appears more relevant than ever. This book contributes to the early exploration of contextual secularism, even when the authors do not use this terminology explicitly. Chapters discuss the fundamental terms of reference, such as the original and historical meaning of secularism, the secular state under contemporary globalization, the changing nature of religious pluralism, and the effects of modernity on the above in the context of sociology, history, and political science. Chapters also question in the Canadian context the limitations of loaded concepts such as tolerance and accommodation, as well as testing the idea of the chasm between secularism and postsecularism. Finally, the comparative case studies provide empirical evidence of the relevance of contextual secularism. Even societies with relatively few cultural differences between them, such as Canada and the United States, can harbour significantly divergent approaches to the secular state. The comparison between the United States, France, and Turkey underlines how much ideological views can mould supposedly universal and value-neutral institutions differently, and the case studies on India, Taiwan, Thailand, and Lebanon confirm that cultural differences are likely to yield even more institutional forms. It is hoped that this book will encourage further explorations of a now global issue.

### Notes

- 1 For every major religion there are affiliated parties. Christian Democrats have their counterparts among Muslims with the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party) in Turkey and the Nahdlatul Ulama in Indonesia and among Buddhists with parties such as the Komeito in Japan, among others.
- 2 The Islamic Hamas and Hezbollah have their counterparts in the Hindu Shiv Sena in India, the militant Buddhists in Sri Lanka, and the far-right Christian militias in the United States.
- 3 The sharpest contemporary confrontations between secular ideology and religion, particularly in the United States, are over evolution, global warming, and human sexuality.
- 4 Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen, all did not experience direct colonial rule.
- 5 Such states are Turkey and the nations of Central Asia. Although predominantly Muslim the population of Turkey has been profoundly shaped by its contact with the West on a relatively equal basis, in contrast to the former central colonies of the Soviet Union in Central Asia.
- 6 Such states are Bangladesh, Iraq, Egypt, and those of the Maghreb.
- 7 Examples are Indonesia and Syria. However, Indonesia sits uneasily in the Islamic context, being shaped deeply by other cultural influences and non-Islamic histories.
- 8 Examples are Nigeria and, before 2010, Sudan.
- 9 Indic Asia emphasizes here the influence of religions emerging in India: Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Jainism, among others. Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Malaysia could arguably all be included in the Islamic context because the influence of Islam has been pervasive in these countries for centuries.
- 10 This group includes Thailand, Burma, Cambodia, and Laos. Sri Lanka and Bhutan, although not in Southeast Asia, could be added to the list. Vietnam should be excluded because its traditions and political experiences are more relevant to the Sinitic world.
- 11 China recognizes Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Protestant Christianity, and Catholicism.
- 12 Vietnam recognizes the same religions as China minus Taoism (see note 11). It also recognizes Caodaism and Hoa Hao Buddhism, both of which are indigenous developments.
- 13 North Korea recognizes Buddhism, Protestant Christianity, and Catholicism, as well as Chondogyo, a religion that emerged on the peninsula.

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