

Breaking the Cloud of Inevitability in the Religion-Development Nexus?

How varieties of secularism affect development practices on child protection
in global development politics

[FINALVERSION]



An Indian family in Visthar, Bangalore, India

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'The fact that the people we study may say or do things that to us appear as wrong just indicates that we have reached the limits of our own conceptual repertoire'

- Mario Blaser

We must think critically, and not just about the ideas of others. Be hard on your beliefs. Take them out onto the verandah and beat them with a cricket bat. Be intellectually rigorous. Identify your biases, your prejudices, and your privilege.

- Tim Minchin

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1. Introduction

Problem Analysis

Until recently, religion has been systematically overlooked and neglected in both ‘mainstream’ development discourse and academia. Current international development discourse shows a ‘renewed’ interest among secular actors in religion, due to various developments: the perceived ‘resurgence’ of religion in the public domain in the post-Cold War era; the emergence and rise of non-Western humanitarian agencies, faith-based actors and other transnational religious activists as a result of ongoing processes of globalization¹; and the realization that religion remains ever-present in the social fabric, lives and identities of many people across the globe (Ter Haar 2011; Jones & Petersen 2011; Barnett & Stein 2012; Haynes 2013).

In effect, secular actors are increasingly seeking to (re)engage with faith-based development organizations, religious institutions and religious leaders in an attempt to ‘include’ religion as another instrument to achieve development goals. Albeit this different approach may initially seem to represent a point of departure, I argue in this thesis that this paradigm is another variety of secularism that ultimately does not seek to make development aid more inclusive. I argue that it merely exploits a limited understanding of religion in order to achieve secular goals, and in order to reaffirm dominant secular values, structures, epistemologies and ontologies. In fact, this approach is still part of a broader ontological structure of secularism, which serves to secure the political and cultural power position of the Global North, and contributes to the marginalization and exclusion of alternative ontologies, epistemologies, voices, ideas and experiences.

Various scholars have made the argument that the international development sector is influenced by a secular bias. Yet, how secularisms affect development policies in global development politics remains understudied (this includes forms of secularisms within and outside the Global North). I argue that such a study is a crucial step in identifying, acknowledging and understanding the limitations and vulnerabilities of secularism. In effect, studying how varieties of secularism affect development practices

¹ Barnett and Stein (2012) refer to this specifically as the ‘third wave of globalization’ (7).

across multiple levels and actors in global development politics also contributes to opening up a space in which potential alternative; more inclusive models can be developed in the future. This is the central objective of this thesis. Therefore, the central question of this thesis is *'How do varieties of secularism affect development practices on child protection across multiple levels and actors in global development politics?'*

Child protection makes a relevant case study. First and foremost, child protection and child rights are highly political debates, in which power and exclusion of ontologies are incarcerated in the struggles between different agents in processes of meaning-making around images of childhood, child protection and child rearing. I therefore argue that we need acknowledgement of different voices, ideas, structures knowledge systems and ontologies that contribute to the wellbeing of children across the globe, in order to make development regarding child wellbeing more inclusive.

Structure

I start out this thesis by building my theoretical framework. In my theoretical chapter I pose the first two sub questions *'how do varieties of secularism relate to the field of humanitarianism?'* and *'why are the secularist assumptions and categories that they comprise of problematic?'* I deconstruct these assumptions and categories by arguing that they are not neutral, nor universally applicable. Furthermore, I argue that they involve limited notions of both the secular and the religious, and of how these categories relate to notions of modernity and development. I argue in favor of recognizing multiple secularities, multiple modernities and multiple ontologies, as this will address the larger problem of ontological justice that is constituted by the dominance of secularism. Thereafter, I shall introduce my methodologies in the methodological chapter and justify why they are relevant for my further analyses.

Subsequently, I will analyze how varieties of secularism affect development practices around child protection across the international level in the third chapter of this thesis. I utilize Critical Discourse Analysis and a Complex System Approach to analyze the most crucial international document on child protection: the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The sub question of this chapter is *'Which secular power dynamics and discourses inform dominant international development discourse on child wellbeing*

and child protection?' I demonstrate how unequal power distributions lead to a biased document that favors Western images of childhood and secularist discourses (and ontology), reinforces a notion of superiority of 'developed' countries over 'developing' countries, and leads to the marginalization of other epistemologies and ontologies. In this chapter, I focus on the power play between various international actors.

In the fourth chapter I discuss the national Indian context. I first briefly discuss existing images of childhood in India, and the problems that India faces with regard to child wellbeing. Subsequently, I utilize Critical Discourse Analysis and a Complex System Approach to analyze India's international and national political discourse, with a focus on the relationship between the secular and the religious, in order to answer the sub question *'Which secular power dynamics and discourses inform India's national development discourse on child wellbeing and child protection?'* This chapter reveals a different type of secularism, one that is based on Hindu traditionalism, which has led to the marginalization of other religious minorities and their ontologies. As I will show, this has had crucial ramifications for India's national child protection policies. This chapter particularly reviews the Indian government as an actor.

In the last analytical chapter I show how varieties of secularism also influence the work of transnational faith-based actors. Taking World Vision International (WVI) as a case study, I seek to answer to the question *'How do previous mentioned varieties of secularism on an international and national level influence World Vision's identity and discourse as a faith-based organization?'* I show how WVI attempt to navigate through secularist frameworks on an international and national level in India, and how this forces them to produce various narratives in order to be accounted for and to achieve their own goals.

A number of scholars and practitioners have put explicit religious programs forward as a solution to the dominance of secularism, including World Vision. Therefore, I study World Vision's explicit religious program Channels of Hope Child Protection program (CoH CP) in the second section of this chapter. Here, I pose the sub question *'Whether and, if so, how does the Channels of Hope Child Protection program either reinforce or subvert dominant secular frameworks in global development politics?'* This question assists in studying how far-reaching the effects of varieties of secularism are on

development policies and programs in global development politics, even on those that attempt to disrupt its dominance. As such, studying explicit religious approaches is helpful to answer the central research question, as well as making steps in exploring alternative understandings of the religion-development nexus.

In the conclusion I summarize my research outcomes, and I answer the central research question of this paper. Moreover, I will reflect on remaining questions and further research that would contribute to understanding how secularisms influence development practice, and how we can potentially find alternative approaches to development without falling back on secularist assumptions and categories in our aim to make development aid more inclusive.

Limitations

There were a number of limitations that have affected the outcomes of my research. Initially, this thesis was supposed to revolve around my fieldwork in Bangalore, India, where I visited the Channels of Hope Child Protection workshop of World Vision India. Unfortunately, almost everything that could go wrong actually went wrong during this trip.

It was quite challenging to get a research visa, and once I got it I was only allowed to visit World Vision Bangalore. Once in India, participants did not show up during the first day of the workshop. Therefore, World Vision India had to deal with certain time restrictions. In effect, I could not conduct most of my interviews. Moreover, I had prepared questionnaires for all the participants. While I was assured that all participants would be able to read the English questionnaire, most of them were not. Also due to time restrictions, they only had around 30 to 45 minutes to fill in the multiple pages of the questionnaire, which understandably led to short answers that did not contain a lot of information.

After the workshops, I only had roughly a week left in India (my trip was merely two weeks, which in itself would have been another limitation). Unfortunately I fell sick shortly after returning to Bangalore from the fieldwork location, and I was forced to fly back home earlier than was planned, hence I could not visit the participants to interview

them at a later point in time. Hence, I returned to Groningen with fewer materials than I had expected prior to my trip.

While the fieldwork trip has been a relevant learning experience (I will most definitely do a lot of things different for future fieldtrips), this meant that I have had to make some necessary shifts in my thesis. As a result, I have chosen for a larger focus on theory and critical discourse analysis of primary sources throughout this thesis. Nevertheless, I have incorporated fieldwork data in my theoretical chapter, as well as in the last analytical chapter on World Vision and the Channels of Hope Child protection program.

2. Theoretical chapter

In order to answer the central research question ‘*How do varieties of secularism affect development practices across various levels and actors in global development politics?*’ two questions need to be raised first: ‘How do varieties of secularism relate to the field of humanities and, as I argue that they are problematic, ‘*Why are the secularist assumptions and categories that they comprise of problematic?*’ Around these two sub questions, I build my theoretical framework.

In the first section, I unfold dominant secularist assumptions and categories that dominate global development politics, and subsequently deconstruct them in order to account for the multiple ways in which the secular-religious nexus is understood. Subsequently, I address how these limited conceptualizations of the secular and the religious relate to notions of modernity, progress and development, which are all concepts that are embedded in the field of humanitarianism. Subsequently, I attempt to create a theoretical space to justify why we need to study how varieties of secularism affect child-related development practices, which vulnerabilities and shortcomings can be observed here and, more importantly, *why* we need to seek for ways to make child-related development aid more inclusive.

It is relevant to mention that, although I am critical of secularist assumptions, I do not reject secularist ideologies or thoughts *an sich*. Rather, I propose that we should recognise the limitations of secularist worldviews (and the categories constructed in such worldviews) when applied to different (particularly non-Western) settings, in the sense that they restrict us in understanding and perceiving the influence and the dynamic and complex roles of religion in development and other spheres. Acknowledging these limitations hopefully contributes to more inclusive forms of aid in the future.

I am aware that I speak of a ‘secularist’ bias while at the same time acknowledging the existence of ‘multiple secularities’ in this chapter. I draw from Wilson (2017), who notes that, although there are multiple ways in which secularism can be constituted, there are a number of ‘family resemblances’ between them (Wilson 2017: 4).

With regard to terminology, it is important to mention that I utilize the terms ‘Euro-American’ and ‘the West’. In line with O’Hagan (2002), I argue that these terms are not tangible or static. Yet, such terms refer to more than merely a geographical group

of nations. Indeed, they represent an imagined transnational community that seems to encompass diverse groups of people who believe that they share a common identity (45). ‘The West’ does not share a common language but yet, O’Hagan argues, *the* language that ‘constitutes it draws on concepts and principles whose lineage is traced deep into history’ contributes to the representation and legitimisation of an ‘imagined community’, particularly in international politics (O’Hagan 2002: 45). Some scholars refer to this identity as ‘the West’, others prefer to refer to it as Euro-American. Considering that I draw from many different scholars, I use both terms interchangeably.

2.1 Unfolding secularist assumptions

Calhoun, Juergensmeyer and VanAntwerpen (2011) state that “in all cases, secularism is defined in tandem with its twin concept, religion, and how we think about one of these paired concepts affects the way we think about the other” (Calhoun, Juergensmeyer & VanAntwerpen 2011: 6). Within secularist discourse the relationship between the secular and the religious is often juxtaposed, created into a binary opposition. This can be explained by the influence of dualism that permeates secularist thought, in which such binaries are often constructed in order to make sense of the world (Wilson 2012: 11).

And indeed, how secularists think about the secular automatically affects how they view the religious. As these concepts are constructed in a – rather fixed – dichotomous relationship, they are considered to be mutually exclusive. Various scholars such as Hurd (2008, 2011), Casanova (2011) and Wilson (2012) have argued that secularists tend to ascribe desired and valued qualities to the secular (such as rational, liberal, universal, or modern) while religion is often (but not always) considered to be an ‘irrational particularism’, that should be excluded from the public domain (Hurd 2008: 169).

Within development discourse such dualist structures can be observed as well. Although academics, policymakers and practitioners do increasingly attempt to reengage with religion, religious organizations and religious leaders, some scholars such as Mavelli and Wilson observe similar dualist distinctions between ‘good’ religion and ‘bad’ religion. Religion seems only to be deemed to be ‘good’ as long as it conforms to

standards that are set by secular actors. Religion that does not adhere to secular standards is ‘bad’, and is therefore attributed all qualities that are considered alien to the secular: historical, intolerant, divisive, irrational, prone to be violent, etc. (Cavanaugh 2004; Mavelli & Wilson 2016).

The dominance of such static dualist constructions in secularist thought is not a problem per se. Again, I do not seek to reject an ideology, nor the thoughts that construct one. But I do argue that the dichotomous relationship between the secular and the religious, as constructed in secularist thought, becomes problematic when such a narrative serves to secure power, particularly when it is perceived as applicable to all societies and contexts as a universal truth.

2.2 Deconstructing the ‘cloud of inevitability’: accounting for alternative realities

2.2.1 Multiple ways of perceiving the secular-religious nexus

First and foremost, in secularist thought, the separation between the secular and the religious is often presented as a neutral one, and as one that shall eventually become universal. Scholars such as Asad (2003), Gregory (2006), Hurd (2009), Casanova (2011), Fountain (2013) and Wilson (2012) have criticized such assumptions, claiming that it is part of a secularist ideology rather than a neutral or universal position. In fact, the distinction between the secular and the religious is ‘deeply political’, and serves to reaffirm and secure the hegemony of ‘the West’ (Fountain 2013: 10).

Secondly, it is not merely the relationship between both concepts that is narrow and limited, but the meaning that is attributed to both the secular and (particularly) the religious is limited as well. The secular tends to be presented as an overarching and inevitable truth.

Within Euro-American secularist discourse, religion is often defined in substantivist terms, as a monolithic and universal category, either good or bad. Wilson (2012) suggests that the conceptualization of religion in International Relations (but on a broader level also in international politics), a field dominated by secularist thought, revolves around three dichotomies, namely institutional/ideational, individual/communal and irrational/rational (Wilson 2012: 16).

According to Wilson, the focus of ‘the West’ remains on the institutional aspect of religion, as this element is more tangible and visible in society compared to its counterpart (16). Wilson argues that religion is more often seen as individual, which is also reinforced by the dualist distinction between the public and the private domain in (particularly) Western nations (16). In addition to religion being viewed as a private and individual matter, religion is often considered as an irrational or backwards phenomenon, while secularism is considered to be a force that ‘liberates societies from the yoke of religion’ (Keane 2013: 163). Hence, it becomes legitimate to exclude religion from politics in secularist discourse (Wilson 2012: 19)

Such a fixed understanding of what both the secular and the religious entail is questionable, and has thus been questioned by various scholars (such as Asad, Mahmood, Burchardt & Wohlrab Sahr, Hurd, Wilson, and Casanova). Some of the arguments these scholars have brought to the table are worth mentioning in order to critically rethink secularist assumptions that are presented as normative.

Firstly, the understanding and conceptualization of religion as institutional and a private matter has been influenced by the West’s experience with the Judeo-Christian tradition, which already experienced an ‘internal Christian secularization’ (Asad, 2003; Hurd, 2009; Casanova, 2011; Wilson, 2012)². Indeed, the first distinction between the secular and the sacred was made in Western Christianity . Yet, such a distinction has not been made within any other religion that is known to us (Casanova 2011: 56). The idea that people who follow other religious traditions will easily subject themselves to such a distinction while it is not made within their own is hence questionable.

Furthermore, Taylor (2007), who has made an impressive study of the origins of the secular in West-European societies, brings another relevant argument to the table. In *A Secular Age* (2007), he argues that the emergence of Deism has played a crucial role in the decline of faith. He distinguishes processes of an ‘anthropocentric shift’ (Taylor 2007: 242). I will not belabor the details of the different stages here, but rather focus on the notion of an anthropocentric shift. It entails how European societies transform from societies in which God was deeply embedded in all aspects of society, to a society in

² Term borrowed from Casanova (Casanova 2011: 65).

which the place and role of the transcendent is increasingly reduced. Taylor describes it as the profane world becoming 'independent from spiritual demands' (266). Piety and the expression of what a Christian life entails became expressed in 'terms of code of human action', which means that it enabled the encompassment of all valuable basic goods of life in the secular world (266-267).

Yet, while the dualist distinction between the secular and the sacred occurred in West-European societies, it is challenging to hold up the argument that such a distinction can be universally applied without taking into account the historical context that has allowed for such a distinction to be made in the first place. Moreover, it does not account for the multiple relations that exist between the secular and the religious worldwide.

Burchardt and Wohlrab-Sahr (2012, 2015) have sought to reconceptualize the distinction between the secular and the religious in cultural sociology (Burchardt & Wohlrab-Sahr 2012: 876). They have developed the notion of 'multiple secularities' that rests on the acknowledgement that terms such as 'the secular', 'secularization' and 'secularism' are conceptualized in different ways, due to a divergence of socio-political and cultural contexts (904). Moreover, they argue that these terms become deployed as categories in response to different social conflicts within societies (887). Of course, such problems arise in most societies. However, according to these scholars, the 'urgency' of a problem determines which institutionalized distinction between the secular and the religious can be adopted as a solution (888). Multiple problems can occur at the same time, but Burchardt and Wohlrab-Sahr believe that 'certain pre-conditions' will cause one problem to become dominant over the others (888).

In doing so, Burchardt and Wohlrab-Sahr distinguish four different types of social problems:

- 1) Individual freedom vis-à-vis social relationships (groups or the state)
- 2) Religious heterogeneity and the potential of conflict between religious groups
- 3) Social and/or national integration and development
- 4) The independent development of institutional domains (887)

Of course, these problems are not always resolved by moving into the direction of secularity. Furthermore, Burchardt and Wohlrab-Sahr also recognize that different concepts of secularity may coexist and/or may even be competing within a society. An institutional differentiation between the secular and the religious does also not necessarily lead to the decline of religious ideas held by society. Finally, it is possible that states seek to institutionally separate the secular from the religious while the people do not agree with such a distinction (888-889).

Based on these four societal problems, Burchardt and Wohlrab-Sahr continue to build their framework for multiple secularities by distinguishing four 'ideal-types' of secularity, which they do admit does not encompass the complexity of the world around us. Nevertheless, their attempt to show that the relationship between the secular and the religious is highly dependent on different contexts contributes to deconstructing the assumption that the dichotomous relationship between the secular and the religious is a universal or neutral one.

They distinguish the following ideal types that they assume to be possible solutions to the dominance of one of the earlier mentioned four societal problems.

1) Secularity for the sake of individual rights and liberties

The 'guiding ideas' behind this ideal-type are freedom and individuality (e.g. secularity in the US)

2) Secularity for the sake of a peaceful and/or balanced religious plurality

The 'guiding ideas' behind this ideal-type are tolerance, non-violence/non-interference, peace and respect for other religious worldviews (e.g. secularity in India)

3) Secularity for the sake of societal or national integration and development

The 'guiding ideas' behind this ideal-type are modernity, development, progress, and 'enlightenment' (e.g. secularity in France)

4) Secularity for the sake of the independent development of functional domains of society

The 'guiding ideas' behind this ideal-type are rationality, efficiency, and

autonomy (e.g. secularity in European domains such as science, education and law) (889-904).

By acknowledging that there are multiple secularities ‘out there’, it also implies that there are multiple ways in which the secular and the religious are related to one another, and hence also multiple ways in which the religious is constructed. This realisation assists in opening up a conceptual space in which such alternative relationships and constructions can be further explored.

2.2.2 What constitutes modernity/progress/development? Secularism in the field of humanitarianism

My second reservation entails how terms such as ‘modernity’ and ‘progress’ are also perceived and conceptualized as neutral and/or universally valid terms, and how they are linked to narratives of secularism. Many are unconsciously affected by the idea that secularism goes hand in hand with modernization and progress (Casanova 2011). Some would even claim that the road to modernization and progress needs secularism. However, similar to how religion is conceptualized in Euro-American discourse, the idea of progress (or development) is also a product of the West’s own experience.

Shanin states that the idea of progress is a ‘philosophical legacy’ of 17th to 19th century Europe (Shanin 1997: 65). Progress is envisioned as a linear progress, as a universal ladder that all societies follow. At the bottom of this ladder one can find poverty, barbarianism, ignorance and corruption – values deemed ‘bad’ – while at the top of the ladder one finds affluence, civilization, rationality and democracy – values deemed ‘good’ (65). Throughout history, the idea of progress has become formulated in different terms, such as ‘growth’, ‘modernization’, and ‘development’ (66). It is thus assumed that the world will eventually become a homogenous place with universal norms.

Shanin argues that there are two crucial factors that have shaped the idea of linear progress. Firstly, Europeans were confronted with the immense diversity of various societies once they started to travel all across the world (Shanin refers to the 16th century). According to Shanin, the dualist distinction between ‘barbarians’ and those who

are ‘civilized’ was no longer enough to make sense of the world. In order to comprehend the diversity they stumbled upon, the Europeans started to conceptualize these different developments as different stages of a linear development, in which they viewed themselves as most civilized (p.66)

Secondly, Shanin distinguishes another important factor, namely a shift in the European perception of time (p.66). For centuries Europeans had perceived time as a cyclical model, based on astronomical calculations and biological cycles in nature. In this perception, history was viewed as *magistra vitae*.³ The shift towards a linear perception of time did not happen until the Enlightenment, which can be seen as a discontinuation of the past in itself. Instead of looking towards the past – which became considered as bad – people started to view the future as an opportunity, as a period of time that could be radically different from the past. It was thus believed that the future could be shaped by human activity (Schulz-Forberg and Stråth 2010: 74).

The idea that societies could be reformed through science (and later on modern technology as well) soon became the status quo (Haynes 2013: 53). It assisted Europeans in making sense of the world and categorizing different societies on the linear ladder of progress on which, as mentioned before, Europeans considered themselves to be on top. Indeed, this perspective confirmed their superiority and justified their role as a ‘natural leader’ to the rest (Shanin 1997: 68). Needless to say, this has also served as one of the main motives for European imperialism and colonialism.

One can observe similar pretensions among secularists in – particularly – Europe. To give an example, Edith Schippers, the present Dutch Minister of Health, Welfare and Sports, recently stated on national television that people are equal but cultures are not as ‘ours is a whole lot better than all others’, When touching upon fighting intolerance of homosexual young Muslims among Dutch Muslims, she continued: ‘I can’t say ‘in your group [Dutch Muslims] you are only halfway through that progress [of accepting

³ Term borrowed from Cicero. History being the *magistra vitae* (life’s teacher) implies that one who lives in the present should look towards the past in order to learn what lies ahead in the future. This fits the notion of time as a never-ending cycle in which society can return to an ‘imagined ideal zero point’ in order to start the cycle again (term borrowed from Schulz-Forberg and Stråth, 2010, p.74)

homosexuality and sexual freedom], come back in thirty years’’.⁴ Another example could be general statements made about Islamic nations in the Middle East as being ‘backwards’ or as still ‘having to go through an Enlightenment’.

Such statements reinforce the idea of Western superiority, as well as classical modernization theory. Furthermore, they reinforce assumptions that the rest of the world shall or should follow the footsteps of ‘modern’ European nations, hence neglecting the specific circumstances in which such developments in Europe became possible in the first place. Such thoughts are not limited to the political domain. A recent project run at Cambridge University called ‘A Westphalia for the Middle East’ is but one example of how such assumptions are still embedded in dominant academic discourse in Europe as well.⁵

In international development discourse similar postulations can be observed, particularly in the post-World War II era, when a new paradigm was established in which Western leaders started to divide the world into ‘developed’ and ‘underdeveloped’ regions (McMichael 2004: 22). The very distinction between the ‘developed’ and ‘developing’ world implies that ‘developed’ nations apparently have reached a certain (desired) state of modernity, while ‘developing’ nations have not. The same applies to the distinction between ‘the First World’ and ‘the Third World’. It is crucial to realize that both terms are charged, and that by such a distinction the ‘Third World’ (and how it should develop) becomes framed in the expectations and goals of the ‘First World’ (Dickinson 2003: 117). Or, to quote Esteva (1992):

‘In a real sense, from that time on, they [people in the so-called underdeveloped nations] ceased being what they were, in all their diversity, and were transmogrified into an inverted mirror of others’ reality [those of people in the so-called developed nations]: a mirror that defined their identity... simply in terms of a homogenizing and narrow minority’ (Esteva, 1997: 7, found in McMichael 2004: 23).

⁴ The Dutch Minister of Health, Welfare and Sports made this statement in a program called ‘Pauw’. Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F0Yc51D728I> (consulted on 05/11/2016).

⁵ The project can be found at <http://www.coggs.polis.cam.ac.uk/laboratories-for-world-construction/westphalia-middle-east> (consulted on 12/01/2017).

And thus the Third World became represented as being economically dependent on developed nations, which reinforces the power of developed nations. But such a construction also implies something about the First World's view of itself, as it tends to 'reproduce Europe's profoundly erroneous highly ideological representation of its own history' (Halperin 2006: 43). Some scholars go even further, suggesting that current development discourse can be considered as a form of neo-colonialism. Ager and Ager (2011) argue that the 'civilizing' mission of the West has become a 'modernizing' one. (Ager & Ager 2011: 9). Both reinforce a superior-inferior relationship (civilized – uncivilized, modern – backwards/traditional), and demand a linear form of progress. In this case, the more powerful group, which is formed by those who are perceived as modern, do not merely get to determine what this progress entails, but also have the economic and political power to refuse support to development programs that do not meet their demands (Ager & Ager 2011: 9).

As mentioned before, secularism is perceived as closely tied to processes of modernization and development. Furthermore, development often involves a 'mechanical' top-down approach. Van Wensveen (2011) distinguishes four different stages 1) Acknowledging a problem and defining a mission, 2) identifying strategies to solve the problem 3) identifying tactics and ways of implementing the mission through selected methods that can 4) be evaluated later on in the process (van Wensveen 2011: 83). Such a system also relies on empirical (secular) evidence that can be measured.

Within such a bureaucratized, rationalized and secularized paradigm there is a lack of recognition for phenomena such as faith – things that are not visible and tangible. As Barnett (2011) puts it: it 'feeds off the belief that the world, in principle, can be reduced to calculations, means-end reasoning, and cost-benefit analysis' (Barnett 2011: 189). Religion may only be considered as an instrument to such a top-down approach as long as it adheres to the demands of secularists ('good religion'). In other cases, religion is perceived as counterproductive, as a barrier to development or even as an 'index of underdevelopment' (Ager & Ager 2011: 9, Mavelli & Wilson 2016: 5).

Since the beginning of the new millennia, scholars in various fields of the social sciences have begun to deconstruct such ideas, hence also critiquing the narrow normative claims made by Western nations on the universality of Western (secular)

modernity. Drawing from three of these scholars, I argue that we should ‘provincialize’ European and North American thought on modernity, development, the secular and the religious (and their perceived relationship). More specifically, I draw from Eisenstadt’s notion of ‘multiple modernities’ (2000), Blaser’s notion of ‘multiple ontologies’ (2013) and Wilson’s (2017) notion of ‘ontological injustice’. In doing so, I am able to create a space to think of the world as consisting of different ‘worldings’ (Blaser 2013: 551). Such a space allows us to think of other alternative approaches to development, such as the explicit religious program Channels of Hope (CoH) from World Vision International.

Eisenstadt’s notion of multiple modernities revolves around the argument that Europe’s ‘cultural program of modernity’ – though it can be considered as a precedent or as a point of reference for other societies – is not universally applicable to all societies (Eisenstadt 2000: 1-3). In Eisenstadt’s own words, the term ‘multiple modernities’ implies a ‘story of continual constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programs’ (2) Eisenstadt argues that there are various groups and movements in different societies that are continuously re-appropriating and redefining what exactly constitutes ‘modernity’, due to ever-changing ‘historical forces’ (24).

Eisenstadt notes that there is a great variety of institutional and ideological patterns that are embedded in different societies, which are informed by both the effects of globalization and existing socio-cultural variegations (e.g. historical experiences and cultural traditions)(2). In this sense, Eisenstadt views modernity as fragile and transmutable, as a process rather than a universal and homogenous consequence (25).

Blaser (2013) also rejects the idea of one all-encompassing idea of modernity, yet there are some crucial differences between Blaser and Eisenstadt. Blaser has developed the notion of ‘multiple ontologies’, which can be understood as the acknowledgement of multiple ‘worlds’ out there that are operated in different ways and involve different principles according to which people perceive ‘their’ world (for example how they perceive the material and immaterial, the human condition, human relationships etcetera). Although many societies have interacted with Europe, Blaser emphasizes that the encounter with Europe is not the only factor that shapes the story of these societies. On the contrary, Blaser argues to look into the stories that are enacted, performed and told ‘in

spite of Europe', the stories that shape the reality – or ontology – of these people (Blaser 2013: 548).

And hence, Blaser attempts to create a framework in which it becomes possible to think about ontological differences and ontological conflicts, without falling back on the assumption that there is only one reality 'out there' (547). He thus criticizes the idea that everything 'contemporary' eventually enters the trajectory of becoming 'modern' or 'neutral', simply because of encounters with Europe (549).

According to Blaser, a difference is made between 'Culture' with a capital C as an ontological category, and culture with a lowercase c. In the 'modern' ontology, Culture is constructed in tandem with nature. On the contrary, culture(s) with a lowercase c are perceived as relative expressions of Culture with a capital C (550-551). And hence, viewing Culture with a capital C as an ontological category implies that there is only one world, or one reality 'out there'. By perceiving cultures with a lowercase c as relative expressions of Culture with a capital C, they once again become part of a linear hierarchy. Modern culture becomes superior once again, as Blaser notes that 'the culture that uses culture to understand difference has a privileged status because *it knows*, and it does so because it has privileged access to reality, one that is not clouded by culture (with lowercase c)' (550). It is exactly because in the modern culture the difference between Culture and nature is being made (while it is not made in other cultures), that in modern culture it is thought that there is one reality 'out there' (551). It thus 'takes for granted its own ontological status' (551).

Subsequently Blaser suggests that we should commit to the pluriverse, which he refers to as 'political ontology'. Blaser claims that by employing a political ontology we acknowledge that we cannot simply grasp different stories without referring to the context of their 'worldings' (551). We should acknowledge these different worldings and the multiplicity of ontologies, which Blaser refers to as a 'foundationless foundational claim' (551). One way of avoiding the idea of an all-encompassing modernity is to tell the stories in spite of modernity, by 'shrinking' modernity into one specific ontology. In this way, Blaser argues that we open up a 'conceptual-ontological space' for the performance and enactment of other stories in spite of the European encounter and the existence of multiple ontologies (552, 556).

I propose to take elements from both theories, in order to talk about ‘multiple realities’. I draw from Eisenstadt when I acknowledge that – just as I acknowledge the existence of multiple secularities - there are multiple ways in which societies constitute modernity. Therefore, I argue the way in which modernity is constituted in secularist thought should be ‘provincialized’ and seen as but one way of constituting modernity. This opens up space for exploring alternative ways of thinking of modernity, and hence also about development.

At the same time, I acknowledge the importance of Blaser’s call for a ‘foundationless foundational claim’. Indeed, in order to create a space to explore alternative frameworks – as is the intention in this thesis – we should acknowledge the limitations of our own conceptualizations and the limitations of our own ‘reality’. This also includes acknowledging that we should ‘provincialize’ secularist ontologies and hence create space to explore alternative ontologies, alternative ways in which stories become enacted and performed. In this way, we can also justify exploring alternatives to the secular-religious dichotomy, and alternative understandings of the religion-development nexus.

The third scholar I draw from is Wilson (2017), who builds on Blaser’s theory. She stresses that the current dominance of secularism in global politics constitutes an ‘ontological injustice’ (Wilson 2017: 15). As Wilson speaks of global justice, which includes human rights and therefore also the rights and protection of children – which is my case study – I borrow this term from her to address ontological injustice in the field of development. Wilson argues that in addition to material injustice (unequal distribution of resources), and epistemological injustice (unequal validation of different knowledge frameworks and types of evidence), ontological injustice exists within international politics. Ontological injustice concerns the exclusion and/or subordination of alternative realities (Wilson 2017: 2, 15). In Wilson’s own words:

‘The power differences that exist amongst visions of different worlds in contemporary global politics, which begin in the subordination of particular realities to others and are entangled with and contribute to material and epistemological power differences’ (Wilson 2017: 8).

Indeed, in international development discourse the dominance of secularism has led to an unequal validation of alternative perspectives and knowledge systems as well as other alternative ontologies. The secular outlook is presented as a neutral and universal understanding of the world, as if there is a real or factual world ‘out there’ that is constituted by one single reality. This results in the exclusion of worlds and perspectives that do not conform to secular ontologies (Wilson 2017: 8). Since secular ontologies are so dominant in global politics, they also shape what counts as ‘evidence’ in international development. (Wilson 2017: 2). Secularism is based on rational inquiry, scientific evidence and tangible empirical observations. Therefore it neglects and excludes ontologies in which religion plays a crucial role, for example when spiritual entities are considered to be powerful actors that can influence people’s lives and societal structures (Wilson 2017: 8).

In 2000 the World Bank published *The Voices of the Poor*, a report based on interviews with more than 60,000 people living in poverty in 60 countries. The World Bank concluded that to many poor people spirituality and religious ‘observance’ were a crucial part of their lives, identity and wellbeing, often ranked as high, if not higher than other aspects such as material wellbeing (WHO 2000: 38, 222). Moreover, spiritual wellbeing is considered interlinked with other forms of wellbeing. A relevant example of this is my encounter with a female church leader in Bangalore, India:

After a discussion on healthy family relationships, the facilitators announce a short break. I get up to get myself a cup of chai. It is hot outside, so I decide to go back into the air-conditioned room. I sit down next to a local woman, a leader within a Pentecostal church that is located at the outskirts of the city. She has been invited to the workshop together with her husband (a pastor). I ask her what she thinks of the workshop. During our talk on marriage, she suddenly states: ‘You know... some men... they have a wife and children, but they will look for love outside the marriage.’ She continues: ‘these men use witchcraft on their wives and children [so that they can go and conduct their

business], which makes them insane and suicidal. Some of them commit suicide.’ I ask her how they [the church or the community] deal with such issues. She explains to me that they help these families by performing exorcisms, during which God frees the family from the witchcraft that is inside of them, saving them as a family.⁶

The woman in this example truly believes in witchcraft, and is convinced that God is a powerful agent that can heal damaged relationships between husbands and wives. Her reality does not adhere to dominant secularist standards. After all, witchcraft and God cannot be verified through empirical observation or through rational inquiry. And thus, her way of knowing and her ‘reality’ is likely to be excluded or marginalized, even when it promotes spiritual and social wellbeing within her community.

My point is that, in order to understand the aid system and its outcomes we need to be aware that we are dealing with multiple actors that have different views on reality and/or may have different realities. Yet, due to power differences, not all actors have an equal voice in what development consists of, and those who do not risk remaining disempowered and unheard.

If we truly seek to make development and aid more inclusive by stressing the importance of civil society, individual change and grass-root assessments, and if we truly wish to prioritize the wellbeing of those considered poor, we need a framework that accounts for their epistemologies and ontologies, and the place of religion and/or spirituality in both. Accounting for ontological injustice in international politics and development in order to counterbalance secular ontologies, is a first step in creating space to analyze alternative ways of knowing and alternative realities.

⁶ Field notes 19-04-2016.

2.3 Conclusion

In the beginning of this chapter I posed two questions. First, I raised the question *how varieties of secularism relate to the field of humanitarianism*. In this chapter I have argued that secularism is perceived as closely connected to processes of modernization, development and progress. The anthropocentric shift and the shift to a linear perception of time, have contributed to the European idea that progress is man-made and that the future is malleable through processes of science and technology. Processes of secularization went hand in hand with these developments in Europe. Development became increasingly perceived as a linear process, in which the rest of the world was assumed to follow the footsteps of the West. I have demonstrated that these ideas are reaffirmed in secular modern ontology.

Due to the dominance of the West in global politics, secular modern ontology remains dominant as well. I have argued that this reinforces another superior-inferior relationship between the West and the Rest, between developed and developing nations, all in order to reproduce Europe's erroneous ideological image of itself (Halperin 2006). Moreover, I have demonstrated that the way in which religion is conceptualized in secular ontology contributes to religion being viewed as either good or bad for development, depending on whether or not it can serve as an instrument to achieve secularist goals. Religion is thus given a certain form of agency, rather than the people who practice a religion.

Secondly, I posed the question '*Why are the secularist assumptions and categories that they comprise of problematic?*'. I have argued that secularism is neither a natural nor a neutral or universal position that all societies will eventually achieve. The idea that it is a natural position imposes a linear understanding of development. Instead, I have argued secularism is an ideological construction that serves to reaffirm the hegemony of the West. I have shown the limitations of the narrow conceptualizations of both the secular and the religious through acknowledging the existence of multiple secularisms (and hence, multiple relationships between the secular and the religious).

However, it has to be noted that these varieties of secularisms show certain family resemblances.

In addition, I have deconstructed the claim that the relationship between secularism and modernity is exclusive, by acknowledging multiple ways of achieving modernity, which can be observed worldwide. Moreover, I have argued that the most problematic aspect of the dominance of secularism is the epistemological and ontological injustice it constitutes. Following Blaser, I have shown that alternative understandings are set aside as cultures (with a lower case c), which allows modern secular culture to become superior over them, as modern secular culture is attributed a privileged position. Indeed, the latter is perceived as the only way to have access to ‘reality’, as it is not being clouded by culture like other cultures. The rigid (secular) binary distinction between nature and Culture (with a capital C) allows for only one reality due to which modern secular culture can take its own ontological status for granted (Blaser 2013: 551).

This theoretical chapter clearly demonstrates the limitations and vulnerabilities of secularist frameworks and categories. My argument is that dominant approaches to and perceptions of the religion-development nexus are still part of a broader ontological structure of secularism that continues to sideline other ontologies. In the next chapters, I build on this framework by exploring how varieties of secularism, and the ontological injustice it constitutes, affect development practices on child protection across various levels and actors in global development politics. Understanding how secularism affects practices provides relevant insights in how to move beyond secularist assumptions and frameworks, in order to enable a future of more inclusive development aid. However, before I dive into my analysis, I first explain and justify my methodologies in the next chapter.

3. Methodology Chapter

In this chapter I introduce and justify the methodologies I have chosen to utilize for my analytical chapters. Firstly I introduce Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Subsequently I will justify why CDA is the most viable method to explore how secularist discourses affect development practices, as CDA allows for a critical analysis of the relationship between semiotics (text, speech, images and/or body language), existing social structures and dominant systems of power.

Thereafter, I introduce a Complex System Approach (CSA) and justify why this is a crucial approach when one wishes to account for the complex power dynamics between various actors across different levels of development practice. Both CDA and CSA are utilized in all three analytical chapters in order to provide an answer to which power dynamics and discourses inform dominant international development discourse and India's national development discourse on child wellbeing and child protection.

Lastly, I introduce two methods I used while conducting my fieldwork in Bangalore, India. These include participant observation and semi-structured interviews. The latter are solely relevant for the last analytical chapter, where I focus on whether or not the Channels of Hope Child Protection contributes to subverting secularist categories and frameworks that dominate global development politics.

3.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

3.1.1 Critical Discourse Analysis: approach or approaches?

Firstly, it is important to comprehend that CDA is a broad term that is used to refer to different things. Fairclough (1995, 2012) has developed a specific approach which he refers to as CDA. At the same time, the term CDA is also used to refer to a broader trend within discourse analysis, a branch of critical social analysis, that encompasses different approaches that share a number of common features (Jorgensen & Philips 2002: 60). Fairclough's approach is one example of these different approaches.

Yet, although there are some key elements that these approaches share, there are also a plethora of differences between them. Theoretical understandings of discourse tend to differ (For example, Fairclough understands discourse as texts which are related to other

social practices, but other scholars understand all social practices as discourse). Similarly, the ideological effects of language are understood in different ways, as well as how language constitutes social interaction (Jorgensen & Philips 2002: 64).

In addition, there is no consensus with regard to which scholars belong to this movement, except for Fairclough (Jorgensen & Philips 2002: 60). In this sense, CDA refers to a rather vague entity that is challenging to define. As I require a concrete approach, I utilize Fairclough's approach, particularly since it remains most the developed approach within CDA.

It is important to note that Fairclough's notion of CDA entails a large number of concepts, of which some have changed over time as Fairclough continues to develop his method. Therefore, I also chose to include unpublished writings of Fairclough on CDA. To stay within the scope of this thesis, I intend to explain the key concepts that are crucial in understanding Fairclough's CDA, and subsequently explain why and how I utilize these concepts in this thesis.

3.1.2 Critical Discourse Analysis: Fairclough's method

Firstly, before explaining Fairclough's CDA, it is crucial to understand what the term 'discourse' entails according to Fairclough, as there are various ways in which this term is conceptualized and defined within various fields of social sciences. Fairclough gives three examples of – what he refers to as – 'senses' of discourse. Firstly, discourse can refer to language as a way of meaning making, which is used as a social practice (I will return to this shortly) (Fairclough 1995: 135; Fairclough 2012: 3).

Secondly, discourse can refer to the kind of language (or jargon) used within a specific field, for example a 'political' discourse, a 'medical' discourse, a 'scientific' discourse, etcetera (Fairclough 2012: 3). Thirdly, discourse can refer to 'a way of construing aspects of the world associated with a particular social perspective', which implies how language gives meaning to ideas and experiences from a particular perspective. Examples of this could be socialist discourse, feminist discourse, or neo-liberal discourse. Or, in the case of this thesis, secularist discourse. This 'sense' of

discourse is most commonly used, as it is considered more concrete than the others (Jorgensen & Philips 2002: 67; Fairclough 2012: 3).

Fairclough uses the term ‘discourse’ in the first sense, which he prefers to refer to as ‘semiosis’, because semiosis does not merely include verbal or written language, but also body language and visual images (Fairclough 2012: 3).⁷ Semiosis, then, is an element of social process that is dialectically related to other social elements. Here Fairclough differs from other theorists, as some consider all social practices as discourse (Jorgensen & Philips 2002: 9, 36). Fairclough distinguishes discourse from other social practices, but argues that discourse is both ‘constitutive’ and ‘constituted’.⁸

Discourse is constitutive, in the sense that it can both shape and change the world and social structures. It assists in constructing social identities and social relations (relational), and it assists in providing groups of people with different systems of meaning and knowledge (Jorgenson & Philips 2002: 67). At the same time, discourse also *reflects* those things, and constitutes and is constituted by other social elements. Fairclough refers to Harvey (2004) who distinguishes six different elements of social process: 1) discourse (language), 2) power, 3) social relations, 4) material practices, 5) institutions (rituals), and 6) beliefs (values) (Fairclough 2012: 1).

Therefore, CDA focuses not solely on discourse, but also on its relationship with other social elements and the linguistic discursive dimensions of these elements (Fairclough 2012: 1). More particularly, CDA can be utilized in order to study how power relations in relationships, groups, or societies can be expressed through language. At the same time, discourse is assumed to have its own *ideological effects*: language can contribute to the creation of unequal power relations and hence the domination of one identity, relationship, or knowledge system (for example values, belief-systems and/or worldviews) over another (Fairclough & Wodak 1997: 273; Fairclough 2012: 2).

In fact, Fairclough and Fairclough (2013) argue that the effects of discourse on social life are often intended. Yet, they argue that it is important to distinguish between

⁷ Just to clarify, semiosis refers to the relationship between signs and signifiers. Semiotics is an academic discipline that studies semiosis.

⁸ Earlier in the introduction and theoretical chapter I have referred to discourses in the ‘third sense’ as well (referring to discourse as a way of construing aspects of the world associated with a particular social perspective).

intentional and unintentional acts. Some people intentionally seek to promote a discourse in order to maintain or secure a position of power. Other people might unintentionally act in favor of a discourse that ‘appears to be common sense’ (Fairclough & Fairclough 2013: 101).

And thus, for Fairclough, studying language embedded in texts does not suffice, as this does not account for the relationships between texts and social processes. Moreover, what distinguishes CDA from other forms of social analysis, is that those who utilise CDA do not merely analyze texts. They also endeavor to explain texts by studying power behind the discourse (e.g. structures) (Fairclough 2012: 1). Furthermore, texts (and the existing realities that they represent and constitute) are also criticized on normative grounds (Fairclough 2012: 1). Thus, those who utilise CDA also seek to improve (change) social realities (Fairclough 2013: 4-5). Hence, Fairclough speaks of a trinity: *analysis-criticize-change* (Fairclough 2013: 4).

3.1.3 Fairclough’s Three-Dimensional Model

Fairclough considers language as a *communicative event*. He distinguishes three different elements that are interrelated to one another (see model 2). These elements come together in his ‘three-dimensional model’ (Fairclough 1992: 73). Firstly, there is the *text* (which can be either written or verbal, a visual image, a body movement or a combination of these). When one analyses a text, one should focus on the linguistic features (vocabulary, metaphors, grammar, the cohesion of the text, etcetera) (Jorgensen & Philips 2002: 68).

Secondly, there is the *discursive practice*, which entails all the processes that are related to both the production and the consumption of a text. Discursive practices can be analyzed by focusing on how existing discourses have influenced the creation of the text, as well as how existing discourses influence how the readers interpret the text (Jorgensen & Philips 2002: 68-69).

Thirdly, there is the *social practice*. The relationship between the text and social practice is ‘mediated’ by discursive practice, which implies that text and social practice can only shape one another through discursive practice (Jorgensen & Philips 2002: 69). The relationship between discursive practice and social practice can be studied by

considering whether the discursive practice either reinforces or subverts the ‘existing order of discourse’, and which consequences this can possibly have for social practices (Jorgensen & Philips 2002: 69).

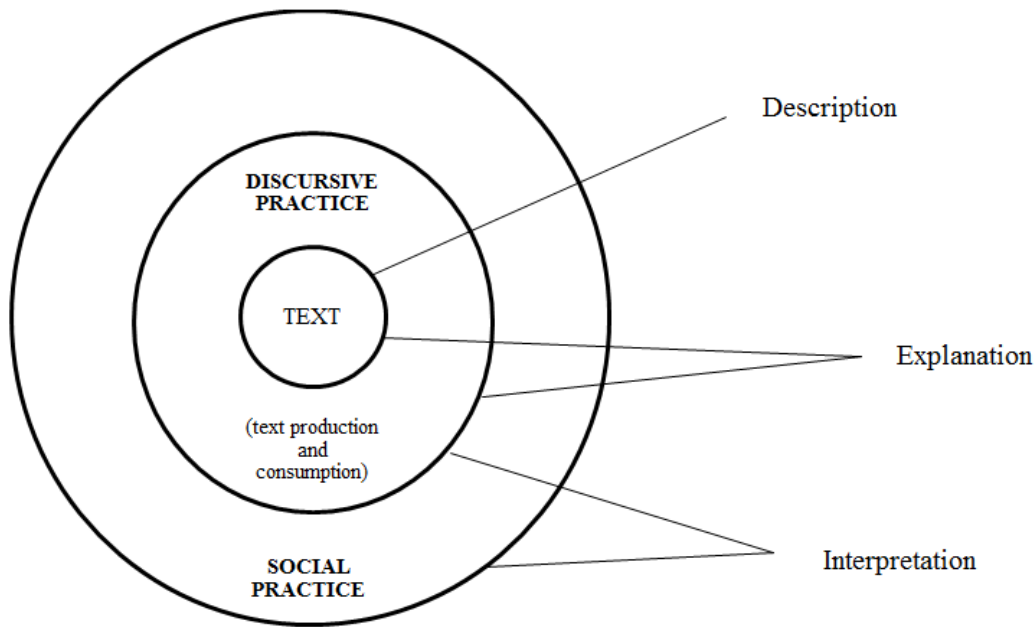


Figure 1: Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model

It is important to note that, as Fairclough confines ‘discourse’ to semiotics, Fairclough’s discourse analysis is not sufficient *an sich* for or studying discursive and social practice. Therefore, he argues that CDA requires a ‘trans-disciplinary’ approach, in which linguistic analysis is mixed with cultural, social and/or political analysis (Fairclough 2012: 1).

Keeping this three-dimensional model in mind, Fairclough (2012) distinguishes four different stages of utilizing CDA as a method:

1. *Selecting a social problem.*

In the first stage the focus should be on the semiotic aspects of this social problem. In this thesis, I argue that the social problem involves the dominance of

secularist categories and frameworks that influence development practices on child protection and child wellbeing.

2. *Identifying obstacles that obstruct addressing the social wrong.*

This stage includes studying the dialectical relationship between discourse and power relations, values, rituals, social relationships or other social practices. In this thesis, I argue that the dominance of varieties of secularism form an obstacle to addressing the social wrong, as they neglect alternative voices, ideas, structures, epistemologies and ontologies that should be valued and included in order to rethink how we construct our notions of development, as well as to produce more inclusive development models.

Therefore, I need to analyze the dialectical relationship between secularist discourse and power relations, values social relationships and other social practices, in order to analyze *how* varieties of secularism affect development practices across different levels and actors in global development politics.

3. *Consider whether or not the social order 'needs' the social wrong.*

In this thesis I argue that the social order perceives varieties of secularism as neutral and universal. In my theoretical chapter I have deconstructed these assumptions. While the social (Western) order might need these varieties of secularism to secure their hegemony, I argue that they are not helpful when one seeks to make development more inclusive. This would involve the acknowledgement, validation and integration of other voices, ideas, structures, epistemologies and ontologies in development models.

4. *Identify possible ways to move beyond these obstacles.*

In the last chapter of this thesis, I analyze whether and how explicit religious programs subvert or reinforce dominant secularist categories and frameworks. (Fairclough 2012: 6).

3.1.4 Objectives to utilize Critical Discourse Analysis

There are multiple reasons why CDA is a relevant approach for this thesis. First and foremost, in this thesis I analyze secularist discourses and link them to existing social practices, in order to explain and criticize how they affect development practice. Especially the emphasis on *critical* analysis is crucial to me. As mentioned above, those who utilize CDA seek to criticize social realities on normative grounds, in order to improve or change these realities for the better (or at least critically rethink them). In the case of this thesis, my normative ground to criticize varieties of secularism is shaped by my concern with the persisting secularist bias and ontological injustice which, as I have argued in line with scholars such as Jones and Petersen (2011) and Wilson (2017) are embedded in global development politics.

But perhaps the most important reason is that CDA is concerned with how discourse shapes and is shaped by other social practices. In this thesis, I am mostly concerned with how power relations and secularist ideological values shape and influence development discourse and vice versa. To quote van Dijk (2001): ‘Discourse Analysis is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced or resisted by text and talk in the social and political context’ (Van Dijk 2001: 352). Through CDA I can thus demonstrate how varieties of secularism affect development practice, while at the same time criticizing the epistemological and ontological injustice that they promote.

3.2 Understanding power dynamics: a Complex System Approach (CSA)

In order to provide a sufficient answer to the central research question ‘*whether and if so, how does introducing explicit religious programs contribute to challenging dominant secularist narratives in international development discourse?*’ it is crucial to understand and account for the significance of power relations, the influence of various powerful agents, and the interdependence between different actors within complex and dynamic systems. Complex System Approach, which I borrow from Groves and Hinton (2004) allows for a wider perspective to study the diversity, fluidity and interdependence of

relationships between various actors across and between systems (see model 1) (Groves and Hinton 2004: 6).

Two elements are crucial in adopting a CSA. On the one hand, it is important to account for the broader context of relationships and networks between actors in a system (and, as I argue, also between different systems), as it highlights that systems have their own ‘emergent dynamism and internal logic’ (Groves & Hinton 2004: 5). Particularly in the first analytical chapter, where I utilize CDA to understand the dialectical relationship between the text of the Convention of the Rights of the child and larger social practices, this element of CSA is crucial to me. Moreover, this shows that CSA is an excellent addition to CDA. Also in the second analytical chapter, which reviews varieties of secularism and its effects on India’s national development practices on child protection, this element allows me to study the relationships between India and the larger international community, as well as the internal relationships between various religious and communal groups in India.

On the other hand, it is equally important to understand choices that individual actors make, and how they position themselves within a larger system (Groves & Hinton 2004: 5). Moreover, CSA highlights the importance of individual agency, as Groves and Hinton (2004) argue that individual agency can eventually lead to radical transformations of the system as a whole when ‘small and well-placed’ shifts are made (16). This element is of particular relevance to the last analytical chapter on transnational actors, as I study to what extent World Vision’s explicit religious program Channels of Hope Child Protection challenges existing secular structures of the larger systems it is embedded in. Moreover, both elements are relevant in studying World Vision’s positionality within larger secular systems on an international and national level in India. Therefore, CSA is a relevant method for this thesis.

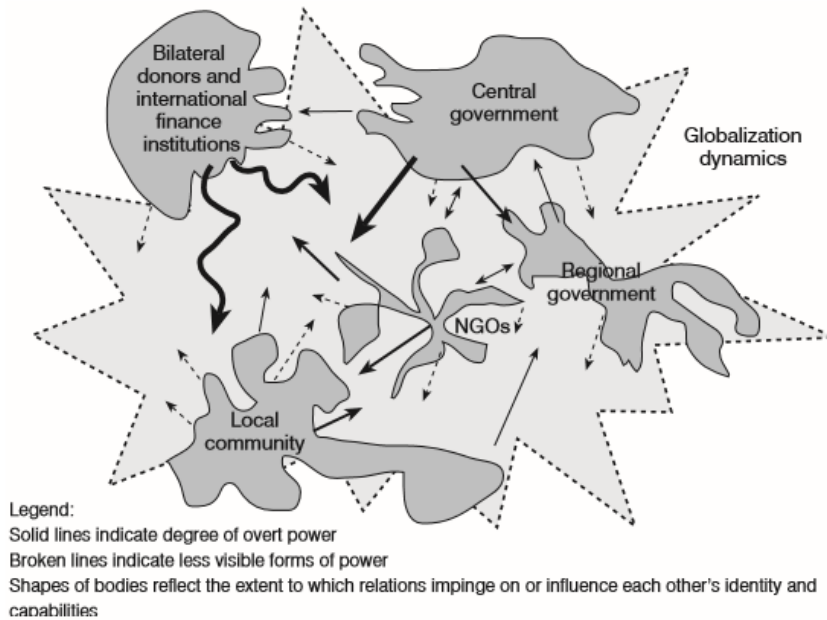


Figure 2: A model that illustrates the complexity of development aid. Source: Beth Cross, University of Edinburgh (In: Groves & Hinton 2004: 8)

3.3

3.3 Fieldwork Methods

3.3.1 Participant observation

Observing is something we do on a daily basis; we observe our environment, how other people move and speak, and how certain things smell, taste and sound. In this way, we make sense of our own environment. In anthropology (but also other social sciences), participant observation is a useful method that can be used during fieldwork in order to unravel the obvious and less obvious aspects of other people's life routines and cultures in different contexts (DeWalt & DeWalt 2011: 1). As mentioned in the theoretical chapter, I am committed to account for different ontologies and different worldviews. Utilizing participant observation, as a method is therefore a relevant method as, as a researcher, one takes part in interactions, rituals, events, and other activities in order to explore different ontologies and worldviews,

My fieldwork was quite limited (both due to the duration of the workshop as well as the barrier of language), but nevertheless I have attempted to participate in all activities. Sometimes this involved direct participation, such as sharing food and participating in conversations during breaks. At other times this also involved participating and observing ‘from a distance’ (mostly due to language barriers). For example, I attended the morning prayers, but I was (aside from clapping along) not able to participate in the prayers that were sung in local languages. Another example involves the games that were played during the workshops. During such activities I rather prioritized observing people’s behavior and body language over participating in the actual game.

3.3.2 Semi-structured interviews

I made a conscious choice to conduct semi-structured interviews during my fieldwork for similar reasons as utilizing participant observation. Structured interviews can be tenacious, as the interviewer strictly confines the interview to a set of questions. In semi-structured interviews, the interviewer has in mind a framework of themes he/she wants to touch upon based on the aims of the research. In this way, the interviewer facilitates space for the interviewees to express their own ideas and opinions, or even introduce new perspectives and concepts that, as a result of multiple epistemologies and multiple ontologies, the interviewer might have never considered due to these limitations of one’s own ‘conceptual repertoire’. Thus, whenever interviewees mention something that is relevant or interesting, the interviewer can deviate from the original questions to gain alternative (or unforeseen) information. Again, accounting for other perspectives and worldings is crucial in this research, and therefore semi-structured interviews were the most viable and relevant option.

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have introduced and justified my methodologies: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Complex System Approach (CSA), Participant Observation and Semi-Structured Interviews. I utilize CDA as the approach is concerned with how discourse

shapes and is shaped by other social practices. It allows for a study of the ways in which power imbalances, power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced or resisted via texts in socio-political context. CDA is thus a relevant approach to make a critical study of how varieties of secularism affect development practice. CSA is a relevant method as it can be used to study both relationships between actors in a larger system and the importance of acts of individual actors. This is particularly relevant in my analytical chapters, as I study how power relations and ideological struggles play a crucial role in affecting development practices. Participant observation and semi-structured interviews are useful fieldwork methods, as they can provide insights in people's epistemologies and ontologies, which might go beyond one's 'conceptual repertoire'. Considering I am a Western secular researcher, this assists in avoiding certain categories being imposed on research subjects through research questions.

Chapter 4: A veil called universalism: concealed ideologies in international discourse on child protection.

Unlike solely biological immaturity, ‘childhood’ is generally understood as a social construct in the social sciences (Prout & James 1997: 8). Indeed, rather than a natural or universal feature, childhood is usually considered a social variable that cannot be entirely separated from other cultural variables and components (Prout & James 1997: 8). Yet, in this chapter I demonstrate that childhood remains largely envisioned as a natural and universal phenomenon/development in global politics.

However, I also demonstrate that this dominant image is – similar to the notion of ‘progress’ and the secular-religious binary – a result of the hegemony of the West, and continues to be dominant through the exclusion and/or marginalization of alternative discourses, epistemologies and ontologies. As I have argued previously in this thesis, this is problematic because varieties of secularism are limiting the ways in which development is conceptualized and practiced, hence reaffirming ontological injustice.

Central to this analysis is the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC). The CRC is an international treaty, in which rights of the child are set out (civil rights, political rights, cultural rights, and socio-economic rights). The UN General Assembly adopted the CRC in 1989, after it was signed by 196 nation-states (Kaim 2011: 3). It is relevant to mention that no other human rights treaty has had as many state participants as the CRC. This widespread support indicates at least willingness among states to acknowledge and support the need for a separate document explicitly focused on the rights, needs and protection of children around the world. Until today, the CRC is the only extensive international legal principle solely dedicated to children rights. Therefore, this is a relevant text to analyze within the context of international discourse on child protection.

Yet, comparative and cross-cultural research shows that a plethora of images of childhood exist around the world, which arguably would challenge the notion of a

universal childhood.⁹ Therefore, the question arises whether or not all states involved are truly satisfied with all articles posed in the CRC. Through applying CDA and CSA to the CRC, I show that the debate on human rights is a highly political one, and one in which power and exclusion are enrooted in the struggles between different agents in processes of meaning making. In addition, such an analysis demonstrates how historical and institutional frameworks also contribute to the exclusion of other (particularly) non-Western child images, narratives, voices, epistemologies and ontologies. Acknowledging these issues (hopefully) contributes to a more inclusive future. It also assists in answering the sub question *which secular power dynamics and discourses inform dominant international development discourse on child wellbeing and child protection?*

4.1 The power of language and the language of the powerful: the larger (secular) picture

4.1.1. Background

The CRC should be seen within a larger trend of adoptions and attributions of rights to special groups of people during the 20th century, particularly to those groups suffering the most from human right infringements, and those whose voices are weak vis-à-vis the state (Holzscheiter 2010: 177). The acknowledgement and construction of the international rights and protection of children – and that of a particular image of the child – has been a gradual process which, as I will demonstrate, has been subjected to spatial and temporal contingencies, as well as to politically and culturally constructed values. And hence, the language that is utilized in the CRC has been strongly influenced by earlier stages of the development of the notion of childhood and the protection of the child's rights.

Indeed, the CRC has not been the first text dedicated to the protection and rights of children. In fact, scholars argue the text has evolved out of earlier international

⁹ For the African context, see e.g. Freeman & Veerman 1992; Boyden 1997; and Balagopalan 2002. For the Asian context, see e.g. Fitzgerald 1999; Balagopalan 2002; Burr 2002, and Neary 2002. It should be noted that non-Western images of childhood have received less attention in academics compared to their Western counterparts.

agreements on the protection and rights of children such as the Declaration of the Rights of the Child (GDRC) adopted by the League of Nations in 1924, and the Declaration of the Rights of the Child (DRC) adopted by the UN in 1959 (Ramesh 2001; Holzscheiter 2010).¹⁰ The former actually is the first human rights declaration adopted by an international governmental organization, and this one was solely devoted to ‘the child’.

Both treaties were drawn up after the deprivation and horrors of the First and Second World War. The GDRC pointed out a broad scale of issues such as provision of food, care in times of sickness, shelter, aid and relief, exploitation, and labor (League of Nations 1924). For example, article 3 states that ‘The child must be the first to receive aid in times of distress’ (League of Nations 1924) Holzscheiter (2010) argues that this declaration focused mainly on the most deprived and needy children (those lacking food, shelter, a loving family, etcetera), as a result of the concern for millions of children that had suffered from deprivation during and after the First World War (Holzscheiter 2010: 124-125). It should thus be taken into account that the context in which the GDRC was written was – even though the League of Nations embodied a cooperation between nations across the world – based on developments that solely took place in Europe.

The discourse utilized in this document focuses on the child as both innocent and in need of care from ‘men and women of all nations’ (their duty is stated in the preamble of the GDRC). Interestingly, the parents and state parties, both consequently mentioned in the CRC, are not mentioned here. It thus seems the GDRC is more an emotional call towards humanity, rather than a legal document. Moreover, it mostly involves the external and material needs of the child.

In 1950, the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and the International Union for Child Welfare (IUCW) started drafting a new declaration concerning the rights of children. In 1959, after the adoption of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Rights of the Child (DRC) While certain rights of children were already mentioned

¹⁰ The former was adopted by the League of Nations, the latter by the UN General Assembly.

in the UDHR, the UN and the IUCW felt that a special document for children was needed (Ensalaco & Majka 2005: 11).

The preamble of the DRC (1959) refers to the GDRC, and builds upon the notion of children as the most vulnerable actors of society who need ‘special protection’ (Principle 2), and should be ‘among the first to receive protection and relief’ during conflict (Principle 4). In addition, it states in the preamble that ‘mankind owes to the child the best it has to give’, which somehow implies that the wellbeing of children reflects the ethics or morals of society. In addition, similar to the GDRC, the DRC does not explicitly address the legal obligations of states (except for a loose mentioning of ‘law’ in Principle 2), but seems to mainly focus around the obligations of the parents and society at large. Again, this treaty also emphasizes the external and material needs of the child.

There are also notable differences between the GDRC and the DRC: while the GDRC mostly stresses the basic needs of the child, the DRC adds the personal development of the child and the child’s social needs (for example, a loving environment, understanding parents, etcetera) (Holzscheiter 2010: 126). However, aside from one principle that is devoted to stressing that the child is entitled to a name and nationality (Principle 3), Holzscheiter (2010) argues it is ‘devoted almost solely to economic, social and cultural rights’ (126). In this discourse, children were not attributed political agency.

Similarly to the GDRC and the DRC, the CRC can be seen as a project of (particularly) Western Europe. Even though it was Poland’s initiative to draft a first proposal for the CRC, the whole concept of internationalizing child matters has been a project of West-European nation-states since the beginning of the 20th century.¹¹ The desire to internationalize child welfare is closely linked to the creation of a universal image of childhood in Western Europe. This image of a ‘universal’ or ‘average’ child should be seen in the light of the rising dominance of scientific studies. Indeed, throughout the 20th century children and childhood became, similar to other phenomena, an object of study in the natural and human sciences (Holzscheiter 2010: 107). Childhood

¹¹ Belgium was the first nation-state to propose the internationalization of children’s welfare within the League of Nations, and quickly enjoyed support from other West-European nations such as France and Switzerland.

became imagined as a predetermined set of developmental stages – thanks to studies from psychologists such as Piaget – that became perceived as natural and universal for all human beings.

In this paradigm, the child is seen as an evolutionary agent, in the sense that a person's physical and psychological capacities gradually transform according to these universal stages of development. In Piaget's model, the child and the adult are juxtaposed: a child is irrational, simple and disorganized, while adults are perceived as rational, complex and in control of their lives (Prout & Allison 1997: 10)

Such an imagination of childhood as an immanent phase implies an average or normalized way for a child to develop itself, and hence tend to ignore the crucial influence that the social and cultural environment have on the construction of childhood. In short, childhood became imagined as a natural phenomenon, rather than being perceived as a social and cultural construct (Jenks 2001; Holzschleiter 2010). This larger discourse has visibly influenced the CRC. For example, the CRC consistently speaks of 'the child'. By utilizing this singular term, the CRC suggests a certain degree of universalism and homogeneity, while at the same time, almost paradoxically, the child as an individual agent that gradually is attributed rights as well.

The European desire to internationalize child welfare may have resulted in a universal document on the rights of the child, but the CRC is by no means a neutral document, as it is subjected to processes of discursive power. Inclusion and exclusion are a central element in discourses, particularly those that involve meaning making. Holzschleiter (2010), in line with Fairclough, distinguishes two different levels of discursive power. Firstly there is the level of semantics (power of discourse), which entails the exclusion of certain ways of speaking and thinking about reality (Holzschleiter 2010: 51). I would like to add here, that this also includes certain ways of speaking and thinking about multiple realities or ontologies.

Secondly, there is the level of social context (power in discourse), which includes the exclusion due to rules and procedures in institutional frameworks (Holzschleiter 2010: 51). I draw from Price and Reus-Smit (1998) who argue that not all exclusion might be obvious. For example, during the Working Groups of the CRC all state participants were considered legitimate actors. Yet as Price and Reus-Smit (1998) argue, at times,

particularly in IR, some legitimate actors can be confined in their input while other actors are not (286). Both levels of discursive power, and the processes of inclusion and exclusion that are irrevocably part of this, can only be studied in the light of critical historical developments out of which discourses can emerge in the first place. For clarity purposes, I shall start with the analysis of the social context.

4.1.2 Discourse in power

There were a number of institutional rules and procedures that have led to the inclusion and exclusion of certain states and their thoughts. For example, the drafting sessions of the CRC always took place in Geneva, Switzerland. While the Working Groups on the Draft Convention parallels the membership of the UNHCR, ideally 11 seats would be reserved for African states, 9 seats for Asia, and 8 seats for Latin America, many of the so-called Third World countries simply did not have the financial means to send a delegate or an observer to attend these sessions (and even those who did, were unable to attend all discussions). In effect, only three African states participated of the CRC. Johnson (1992) has published a table (see table 1.1) that shows the disproportionate representation of states (particularly during the first years of the drafting process), particularly for a document that supposedly represents a neutral or universal image of the child.¹²

¹² Another possible factor that might have played a role in the absence of African and Caribbean states could be a lack of interest from certain states to participate in drafting a universal document on child rights. If this were to be the case, this also would be an indicator that some countries may have felt uneasy with the idea to internationalize child rights, which also says something in itself about a presumed universality of child welfare matters by European states. It could also be that some states simply had other priorities at that point in time, considering the many challenges that post-colonial states were facing, which would be a part of the historical framework.

	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	SR
West ¹³	14	13	15	16	18	16	17	17	19
East ¹⁴	5	6	4	6	6	5	5	6	6
Asia	3	4	6	6	7	7	9	10	15
Africa	3	1	1	3	1	7	4	3	7
Latin America	2	4	7	5	9	6	6	7	8

Table 1: Overview of participating states in the yearly Working Groups and the Second Reading (SR) of the CRC (Source: Johnson 1992: 96).

Secondly, even those non-Western states that did participate in the drafting process, faced a lot of resistance against alternative interpretations during the sessions. One relevant example involves the preamble of the CRC, wherein it is stated that it should be taken into consideration that ‘the child should be fully prepared to live an individual life in society’ (The United Nations 1989). While the ‘individual life’ (agency) is heavily emphasized, being part of a group (or community) is not, nor are the (political, social, economic, spiritual and cultural) responsibilities one might have towards a community. This part of the preamble reveals a clear Western bias, as the individual is prioritized over communion.

However, in many non-Western societies greater emphasis is placed on the child as being a part of a larger extended family, group or community, as traditional emotive and protective perceptions of the child tend to be more dominant (Holzscheiter 2010: 206). When the Senegalese delegate, after stressing the importance of including Third World perspectives during earlier meetings, suggested to rephrase the preamble into ‘the child should be fully prepared to live an individual and community life’ during the fourth drafting session, he was cut by the Chairman who stated that it was simply ‘too late for consideration’ (Johnson 1988: 7).

¹³ Western Europe, US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand

¹⁴ Soviet Union and Socialist Eastern Europe. It becomes clear that the Cold War had a clear influence on the division of seats within the UN.

It is important to mention here that, even though most articles from the second Polish draft were changed, most articles of the CRC were based on those in the Polish draft. In fact, the Chairman claimed during the second session of the CRC that, due to a strict timeframe, they had gathered to ‘fill the gaps, rearrange and renumber’ the articles (Johnson 1988: 10). Delegates that still attempted to open up a space for substantial discussions were, similarly to the Senegalese delegate, cut off (Holzscheiter 2010: 201).

When the Senegalese delegate spoke out against this, arguing that in such a way it would be quite challenging to have any significant influence on the final document, the Chairman claimed that participants from both developing and developed states had made ‘significant and positive contributions’ to the draft convention (ECOSOC 1988: 251). Holzscheiter argues that this statement should be seriously questioned, considering the absence and limited participation of (particularly) developing countries during the drafting process, a fortiori considering that their contributions were often shunned when they risked threatening the consensus by expressing alternative and/or culturally contested visions and ideas (Holzscheiter 2010: 213).

It should be mentioned that the word ‘consensus’ was not interpreted as states fully agreeing with one another. Price-Cohen (1990), who was present at the Convention as part of the NGO Group for the Convention of the Rights of the Child (now known as Child Rights Connect), states that consensus rather meant the lack of objection than full support (Price-Cohen 1990: 42). This method of consensus had a large impact on the drafting process. Cantwell (1992) states that it slowed down the discussion, since every article was discussed until all participants were able to accept the text. In practice, Cantwell argues that this rather meant ‘let’s agree to disagree’ in order to move on (Cantwell 1992: 22).

This was particularly the case in the last couple of years of the drafting, due to the strict deadline to finish the CRC before 1989, which became known as ‘Target ‘89’. This deadline also influenced the bargaining process, in the sense that objections and dissatisfaction regarding contentious articles were largely ignored in order not to endanger this deadline (Holzscheiter 2010: 231). Furthermore, the CRC was drafted at the same time as the Torture Convention. This meant that countries had to run in between different sessions. Holzscheiter (2010) also argues that it is quite likely that power

contestations and/or grudges held between different states in one meeting have influenced how states acted towards one another in the other meeting.

4.1.3 Discourse of power

The exclusion of alternative visions also becomes visible when analyzing the discursive power of hegemonic practices and exclusion on a semantic level. A relevant example with regard to the exclusion of alternative voices is the debate with regard to the child's right to freedom of expression, conscience and religion (as manifested in Article 14). West-European countries, particularly those that are highly secular, value the choice and freedom of (and from) religion. Furthermore, these societies tend to prioritize the choice of the individual over community. The working group of the CRC met to discuss the issue of freedom of religion in 1984, and three proposed texts for the final article were discussed (as proposed by the US, Canada and the Scandinavian states). Although both participating states and observers delivered critical feedback on all three proposals, there were no fundamental disagreements concerning the child's freedom of religion in itself (ECOSOC 1983: 4).

Yet, although this might seem to represent a consensus on this topic, it should be taken into account that only representatives and observers of 34 countries were present, of which 19 were from Western Europe and North America (ECOSOC 1984: 2). No sub-Saharan African states were part of the Working Group of 1984 (ECOSOC 1984: 2). In addition, only three Islamic countries sent observers to the meeting: the Islamic Republic of Iran, Lebanon and Morocco. Asia was merely represented by the People's Republic of China, Japan and the Republic of India (ECOSOC 1984: 2) This is quite a disproportionate representation of states, particularly considering that the issue is quite complex and often highly contested.

Interestingly enough, the observers of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Lebanon and Morocco initially kept relatively quiet during the meeting in 1984. The first country that questioned the article on the freedom of religion was Bangladesh, which stated in 1986 that the article seemed to run 'counter to the traditions of the major religious systems of the world', particularly to that of Islam. In addition, Bangladesh was concerned that the

individual right of the child would run against the sanctioned practice of the child growing up with the religion of his/her parents (Holzscheiter 2010: 221).

Two years later during another workgroup meeting, Morocco questioned whether or not a child was capable of forming his/her own religious opinions, and stated that ‘the commitment by States to the convention was compulsory regardless of religious consideration’ (ECOSOC 1988: para. 42). Subsequently, Morocco’s concerns were waved aside when the other states remarked that the article was ‘already adopted’ and ‘reflected globally all points of view’ (ECOSOC 1988: para 43). Yet, other countries that weren’t part of the working group also started expressing their concerns during the second reading of the CRC in 1988. The delegate of Libya states that the abilities of the child contradicted the child’s right to change his or her religion. The Holy See and Italy expressed similar concerns. The delegate of Senegal remarked that it should not be the desire of the convention to ‘destabilize the family structure’ (Johnson 1988: 43 In: Holzscheiter 2010: 222). Even the delegate of the Soviet Union stressed that it was important to have the support of (particularly) Islamic countries (Johnson 1988: 42-43 In: Holzscheiter 2010: 222).

After a lengthy discussion, the drafters agreed on the following article:

1. *‘States Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.*
2. *States Parties shall respect the rights and duties of the parents and, when applicable, legal guardians, to provide direction to the child in the exercise of his or her right in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child.*
3. *Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health or morals, or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.’ (The United Nations 1989)*

After the addition of clause 2 and 3, the Chairman declared that consensus had been reached (Holzscheiter 2010: 223). However, this statement is questionable considering that the Holy See and twenty-two Islamic states entered reservations. Islamic states based

their reservations both on Sharia law and cultural reservations. For example, Jordan stated in 1994 that neither Islam nor Christianity would permit the child to abandon the family's religion, as 'the individual's family links and the religious and ideological upbringing that individuals receive within their families in Jordan do not permit the renunciation of religion' (The United Nations 1999: 57). Only one Western country, namely Sweden, accepted the reservations of Jordan (The United Nations 1994: 36).¹⁵

This example clearly shows a power struggle between states with different ideologies. One could argue that some of the concerns regarding the individual freedom of the child were taken into account by referring to the responsibilities of parents. Yet, parents are merely allowed to 'provide direction', a relatively loose term, that is consistent with the 'evolving capacities' of the child. However, this notion of an evolving child as an increasingly independent agent largely represents a Western image of the child. Most of the complaints from actors with alternative understandings or realities were marginalized. However, these states used the possibility to enter reservations in order to maintain control.

Holzscheiter (2010) argues that in all cases in which the authority and responsibilities of the parents were raised, Western delegates would argue to utilize the notion of the 'evolving' child in limitation clauses, stimulating a gradual increase in the autonomy and independent choices of the child and hence, confining the authority of adults. This directly opposes the child image of many non-Western cultures, in which the child is considered dependent, immature, or sometimes even direct property of the parents, legal guardians or others responsible until he/she leaves the house, finishes studying, or gets married. This is also the case for many Indian communities (Chopra 2015: 111).. Hence, article 14 suggests that the autonomy and individual choices of the

¹⁵ Syria made a similar reservation in 1996, declaring that 'the harmony and spiritual cohesion of the family makes it necessary to avoid any discord in religious belief between the head of the family and his children as long as the latter are below the age of maturity', and that the full adoption of freedom of religion would ultimately lead to the 'disintegration of the family and, consequently, of society'. None of the Western countries accepted this reservation. (The United Nations 1996: 18).

child are in this case (largely) prioritized over that of his or her parents, which again shows a clear bias.¹⁶

Furthermore, the third clause is also problematic as it risks falling back on the secularist perceptions of religion as an ambivalent phenomenon, either good or bad (which I mentioned in my theoretical chapter). As long as religion adheres to existing laws, order and morals, religion is deemed good, while when it might pose a challenge or threat, it is considered bad. And hence, if the State decides what forms of religion are deemed desirable, religion again becomes a politically motivated binary construction that does not reflect the complex dynamics that exist in societies.

It is relevant that religion is mentioned as a separate category. Yet, what exactly is meant by the term ‘religion’ does not become clear through linguistic analysis. The terms ‘spiritual’ and ‘belief’ are also utilized various times in the CRC. Nevertheless, what these terms encompass, or what the differences are between these categories does not become clear either. This can either imply that the authors of this document have consciously made a distinction between these three terms, or that they use them interchangeably, which both say something about the general understanding of religion.

Altogether, the way in which freedom of religion is conceptualized in the CRC suffers from a clear secularist bias. Religion is considered a positive quality as long as it does not challenge existing political structures and as long as it is by and large an individual choice. In addition, whilst spiritual well being is mentioned when it comes to stimulating the access of the child to information, spiritual well-being does not seem to play a crucial role in the CRC, which is quite relevant considering the findings of reports such as *The voices of the poor*. In general, the document speaks of tangible agents, such as the state, parents and occasionally of other legal guardians and the extended family. The fact that, in many ontologies, God(s), ancestors, spirits, angels and other supernatural

¹⁶ Some people may argue that these views on children should change. While I do not want to ‘throw away the child with the bathwater’ or pin everything down on cultural relativism, I do argue that these examples demonstrate that child images are not universal nor neutral, but are in fact constructed within various epistemological and ontological contexts. Prioritizing one over the others results into the marginalization of voices which I find highly problematic, particularly when this reaffirms the image of non-Western people as lacking agency and subjectivity.

beings are perceived as real agents with real powers that can influence the wellbeing of the child, is completely ignored in this document.

This fits with Blaser's understanding of modern ontology; the document is perceived to be drafted based on a universal consensus, demonstrating a neutral/universal understanding of one 'real' world in which other cultures and worldviews are simply devalued as alternative (less developed) understandings of a single reality. They are merely loosely mentioned as being important for the child's wellbeing, and cultural traditions, to a certain extent, need to be respected (unless they are considered harmful by Western standards). Yet, as I have argued earlier, understanding cultural and religious differences as *alternative understandings of reality* is not the same as considering them as *alternative realities*. Hence, we can observe that the possibility of alternative realities are neglected and that spiritual well-being and religion are only mentioned in such ways that adhere with (secularist) Western thought, due to the dominance of Western states on the drafting of the document.

The last example of how Western ontologies and epistemologies dominate over alternative worldviews, and how this assists in securing the hegemony of Western ideas and values, becomes clear from how the development of the 'evolving' child is linked to the development of the world through (particularly) a universal notion of education. The CRC emphasizes that the child's 'personality, talents and mental and physical abilities' should be developed to 'their fullest potential' (The United Nations 1989). Education is one important aspect that according to the CRC assists in reaching this full potential.

Article 29 states that:

'(e) States Parties shall promote and encourage international cooperation in matters relating to education, in particular with a view to contributing to the elimination of ignorance and illiteracy throughout the world and facilitating access to scientific and technical knowledge and modern teaching methods. In this regard, particular account shall be taken of the needs of developing countries' (The United Nations 1989).

The fifth clause aims at the elimination of ‘ignorance’ and ‘illiteracy’. The way in which this sentence is formulated makes it seem as if ignorance and illiteracy are somehow related to one another, while one can be ignorant without being illiterate. This also raises the question what exactly is meant by ignorance or, rather, ignorance towards what or whom. Furthermore, it states that States Parties should facilitate ‘access to scientific and technical knowledge’ and ‘modern teaching methods’. What exactly is understood as ‘modern’ does not become clear from the outset. In addition, since the desire to eliminate ignorance and illiteracy is mentioned in the same sentence as ‘scientific and technical knowledge’ and ‘modern teaching methods’, it seems as if the CRC suggests that the latter can be utilized as strategies to eliminate the former.

Within the context of developing the child to his/her fullest potential, this is an interesting remark, as this specifically links the child’s development to scientific and technical knowledge and ‘modern’ teaching, while other indigenous or experiential methods and forms of teaching and knowledge are left out (or at least not specifically mentioned). The exclusion of other, non-secular epistemologies shows a clear secularist bias, in which science, modernity, progress and secularism are perceived to be interdependent (which I have explained in my theoretical chapter), while religion is constructed as an identifiable category that needs to be relegated to the private domain.

Since religion is created as a category in opposition to both secularism and science in secularist thought, there is no place for religious/spiritual knowledge. And since the CRC suffers from a clear secularist bias, this explains why there is no space for such epistemologies in the CRC. Moreover, it seems that the makers of the CRC envisioned a general universal educational plan for children. Hence, the way in which the term ‘development’ of ‘the child’ is linguistically utilized in the CRC also suggests a global standardization of children’s educational development. This again implies that the CRC is a neutral and universal applicable document, whereas it is a document heavily influenced by a specific culturally embedded worldview.

It is crucial to mention here that the CRC speaks of ‘developing’ nations, as this implicitly suggests that there are ‘developed’ countries as well. The CRC states that ‘particular account shall be taken of the needs of developing countries’. This does not merely suggest that ‘developing’ countries need scientific and technical knowledge and

modern teaching methods in order to develop, but it also somehow seems to suggest that the development of children is an investment for the world's future, a paradigm in which technology, science and modernity are considered to be measurements of 'development' or 'progress'.

I am not suggesting that modernity, science or technology are Euro-American phenomena, or that these things are Western inventions. However, I do argue that the explicit reference to these matters fits a larger discourse in which normative claims are made by the so-called First World. I referred to this in my theoretical chapter, where I explained that this dominant notion of progress is a European legacy, based on the secularist idea that societies are transformable through human efforts such as scientific innovations and technology.

Again, this discourse of human self-affirmation is a result of processes of secularization and secularism in Europe. It does not represent a global way of thinking, although we have to be aware that the culturalization of progress – and that of childhood – does not account for the complex historical processes such as colonialism, neo-colonialism and coloniality of power which have assisted in securing a cultural hegemony of Western countries.

Particularly 'developing nations' are supposedly in need of such progress, as the CRC states that 'particular account shall be taken of the needs of developing countries'. Again, several questions can be raised here. Who will account for the needs of developing nations? And more importantly, who decides what developing nations need? After all, as demonstrated above, not only were developing countries underrepresented compared to Western countries, but alternative understandings, visions and ideas were largely neglected or excluded from the treaty.

In addition, many scholars have pointed out that the treaty actively promotes a rather modern middle-class bourgeois Western image of the individual child as a desired hegemonic ideal (see e.g. Balagopalan 2002, Holzscheiter 2010: 89). The 'innocent' child has the right to be free from labor, has a right to education, has the right to leisure, and has the right to live a 'happy life' surrounded by a 'loving' family (The United Nations 1989).

This issue was addressed by a number of ‘developing’ countries that were part of the Working Group of 1985. Under the lead of Senegal, these countries questioned what these attributed rights meant for children living in developing countries. First of all, as the Senegalese delegate asked, ‘What was the significance of the right to leisure for a starving and sick child?’ (ECOSOC 1985: 29). Forming a counter-hegemonic block, these countries further state that if it was the objective of the Convention to ‘establish a universal legal framework’, that [the] ‘search for universality should take account of the objective conditions of the developing countries and their contractual capacity to give effect to the Convention’, particularly by ‘taking all precautions by drawing on the traditional and cultural values of the subject’s milieu’ (ECOSOC 1985: 27).

This desired hegemonic ideal of the playing happy-go-lucky individual child implicitly promotes the developed world’s image of the Self. Since children generally do not work in Euro-American societies, go to school, can play freely and enjoy individual rights, these countries consider themselves as most developed. Ergo, a certain culturalized image of childhood becomes an indicator of civilization and development.¹⁷ This fits with what I mentioned earlier in my theoretical chapter, namely reinforcing the superior-inferior relationship between developed and developing countries, and of the metaphorical ladder of progress on which developed nations consider themselves to be on top as being moral and civilized. From such a limited perspective, there is understandably hardly any space to consider alternative voices and epistemologies, let alone alternative ontologies. Therefore, scholars have critically questioned human rights ideology, seeing it as ‘the ideology of the status quo’ instead of a document of ‘change’ (Shivji 2003: 115).

Lastly, the CRC presents a rather mechanical top-down approach, in which not only the responsibilities of State parties are addressed. The responsibility of parents and other legal guardians, part of a previously considered private or sacred sphere, increasingly has become governed by state legislation and state intervention due to treaties such as the CRC. This is largely based on existing structures of European family law, and sits uneasily with societies in which the raising of the child is still considered as

¹⁷ By the term ‘culturalized’ I refer to how some cultures make normative claims on knowledge with regard to images of childhood.

a sacred family matter, not as the business of the state (Holzscheiter 2010: 1). In addition, in many religious societies, the child first and foremost belongs to God, who is also considered as a caretaker of the child (and to whom they should obey). For example, in many Indian communities it is believed that the child belongs to God, and that God gives his trust to the child's parents to raise the children (Chopra 2015: 12).

The delicate relationship between the State, parents and the child has been the subject of a plethora of debates during the Working Groups. Yet, when it comes to the protection of the child, for example the protection against abuse, harmful practices, and sexual exploitation, the responsibilities of parents and society are not explicitly addressed, while State parties are addressed to take 'all appropriate measures, including legislative, administrative, social and educational measures' to prevent abuse, exploitation and addiction (The United Nations 1989). Yet less tangible measures, such as cultural and religious/spiritual measures (in order to not just solely protect children from a top-down approach, but also transform societies and people's minds holistically regarding certain cultural harmful practices and taboos) are not mentioned at all. This, again, shows a clear secularist bias.

4.2 Conclusion

In conclusion, studying the CRC through the application of CDA and CSA demonstrates that the international process of meaning making with regard to the child, childhood, and the rights and protection of the child are subjected to the power interplays and power dynamics between different actors with different ideologies, which become clear by studying processes of inclusion and exclusion on both a social level and on an analytical level. In addition, I have shown that exclusion particularly happens when certain thoughts challenge or even threaten modern secular hegemonic ideas.

In the case of the CRC, I have shown that the hegemonic practices of Western states have led to a shift in the image of the child as a vulnerable and dependent agent that is in need of protection to a gradually rational and individual agent with rights. I have shown that the well being of children according to the CRC suffers from a Western secularist bias, due to which other images of childhood and the child (and hence other epistemologies and ontologies) have largely been ignored or downplayed.

Moreover, this Western image of childhood is clearly linked to the notion of progress and development, which reinforces a notion of superiority of Western nations over the non-Western world. Because progress is clearly linked to secularism (after all, in Western modern ontology the future is malleable and completely human-made), this leaves little space for the consideration of other epistemologies and ontologies, be it with regard to the relationship between State Parties, parents and children, the fact that religion is conceptualized in a narrow and limiting way, or the fact that spiritual well being, spiritual transformation and the influence of spiritual agents are largely ignored in the discourse on child protection in global politics.

5. The secular-religious nexus and child protection in India

In this second analytical chapter, I study how varieties of secularism affect development practices on child protection on a national level in India. In order to answer the sub question *which secular power dynamics and discourses inform dominant national development discourse on child wellbeing and child protection in India?* I have divided this chapter into four sections. Since I have argued in the previous chapter that international discourse on child protection downplays and marginalizes alternative ideas and conceptualizations of childhood, I first elaborate on existing images of the child, childhood and childrearing in India and compare them to those that can be found in the CRC. Thereafter, I briefly describe the challenges that India faces with regard to child protection and child wellbeing.¹⁸

Subsequently, I will discuss India's position and discourse on the international level, and how India has responded to international initiatives on child protection. In the last section, I focus on India's national discourse, with a specific focus on the secular-religious nexus and the religion-development nexus, and how these affect child protection policies. I reflect both on India pre-independence and on India as a post-colonial state, as I demonstrate why it is crucial to account for historical processes, particularly when it comes to secularism in post-colonial states.

¹⁸ These 'challenges' have been defined and identified by international stakeholders, such as the Human Rights Watch, UNICEF and the World Health organization, as well as the Indian government through their National Family Health Surveys (NFHS). However, since I have questioned the universal validity of international ideas and standards of childhood in the last chapter, it important to keep in mind that the issues defined as 'challenges' depend on the larger framework of ideas and standards their very construction relies on.

5.1 Images of the child in India

'The Indian child is [...] at the intersection of anthropology, history and current politics'
(Raman 2000: 4063)

'To be born in India is to arrive into the world swimming in religion'
- Ravi Zacharias

I start out with these two quotes, since they enclose two factors that are crucial to account for when studying childhood conceptualizations in the Indian context. Firstly, I have already mentioned in the previous chapter that images of childhood differ across the globe as they are subjected to temporal and spatial contingencies. It might seem commonplace, but it needs to be mentioned that India is a considerably large country, which is home to a plethora of diverse and culturally vibrant communities and societies, which all possess their own identities and histories and political structures (Raman 2000: 4062, 4063).

The importance of the caste organization of Indian societies is crucial in understanding socio-political roles, as one's caste determines whether or not one has power, whether one is privileged or oppressed, whether one enjoys honor or suffers from denigration, whether someone feels secure or anxious, and whether one has a rewarding or deprived life (Berreman 1971: 87-88). This socio-political distinction between people also results in different treatment of and different future perspectives for different children.

In addition to this horizontal diversity, India is characterized by vertical diversity due to a plurality of hierarchal structures. These hierarchal structures are complex and differ per community, but they mostly involve caste systems, which are so dominant and encompassing that even Muslim and Christian communities have been affected by it (Raman 2000: 4062). Both these horizontal and vertical diversity make it incredibly challenging to make general statements about India as a whole, and about the diversity of child images that exist within India. All comments made below should thus be read with this disclaimer in mind.

The first logical question to ask is ‘Who exactly is considered a child in India?’ In contemporary India, similar to the CRC, the legal age of majority is 18, since the Majority Act of 1875 was introduced. From a legal perspective, other laws cause confusion, as in various laws children are defined as persons under the age of 14. For example, child labor under hazardous circumstances is only prohibited up to the age of 14 (Child Labor Act 1986). Similarly, the Right to Education Act that was passed in 2009 states that all children between the age of 6-14 have the right to free education. Children above the age of 14 are not considered at all (Right to Education Act 2009). From a societal perspective, in many Indian communities children are assumed to take up adult responsibilities at a much younger age (Raman 2000: 4056). This particularly includes child work in the familial sphere and child labor.

It needs to be mentioned that, unlike Europe and North America, South Asia still does not have an extended literature regarding socio-cultural family life in which explicit attention is given to childhood (Banerjee 2003). Due to this and India’s diversity, little is known regarding ideas on what makes a childhood ‘normal’ or ‘abnormal’ in Indian contexts (Mohanty & Prakash 1993; Pandey 2001; Raman 2000; Viruru 2001; Chopra 2015).

It is noteworthy that child images are often ambiguous, or even paradoxical. Misri (1986) statement on child images in India conveys this ambiguous essence: The child ‘is ritually impure yet innately sacred and pure [...] it is both human and divine’ (131). In many Indian societies, children are placed at the bottom of the hierarchal ladder but are, unlike other groups that form the bottom of society, protected and nurtured. This idea of nurture and protection of the child is similar to the discourse of the CRC (Raman 2000; Chopra 2015). Children are considered God’s gift, yet are considered immoral and in need of discipline (Chopra 2015). Children are expected to obey their parents, family and kin, and discipline can include corporal punishment, which is not frowned upon in many Indian families.¹⁹

¹⁹ This was also confirmed in my own research. During my fieldwork 83% of the faith leaders attending the CoH CP workshop agreed with the statement ‘Children sometimes need a good beating to discipline them’. Field notes 20-04-2016.

There is a disparity between this image of the child and the image of the child that is constructed in the CRC. Children are expected to have the right to express themselves freely. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child has defined corporal punishment as degrading punishment. Hence, corporal punishment is covered by Article 37, which states that ‘No child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment’ (The United Nations 1989).

In the dominant global discourse on childhood, children generally are considered as being different from adults. Yet, the Western rigid binary distinction between childhood (until the age of 18) and adults (those over the age of 18) is not evident in many Indian societies. The child is often not considered as a separate individual person, but as a part of a larger unit (the family, the extended family, a tribe, a community or society). Indian cultures tend to be collectivistic and are characterized by structures of interdependence and reciprocity between adults and children (Isaac & Annie & Prashanth 2014: 39).

In this sense, Indian images of the child differ from the image of the child that is illustrated in the CRC. The child is continuously constructed in relationship to the parents and other *legal* guardians, but not in relationship to the larger family, kinship, or community. Indian cultures value communion over individual agency, which is in discordance with the CRC, as the CRC emphasizes that the child should be prepared to live an individual life in society. Moreover, the CRC emphasizes the responsibilities of State Parties, parents and other legal guardians, but does not mention the possibility of the child having responsibilities within a family, kinship or community as well.

From a young age onwards, most Indian children are learnt to value and respect the ties with their family, their kinship and extended family. It is common to cousins as brothers and sisters, as families may live together in the same household (Isaac & Annie & Prashanth 2014: 39). Chaudhary (2004) notes that most Indian societies perceive children as belonging to their family. Their social identity mirrors that of their parents and kin (109). He even states that ‘a notion of [a] bounded unitary self is not familiar to basic Indian psyche’ (Chaudhary 2004: 109). Again, this is in discordance with the CRC, as the CRC emphasizes the importance of the child’s development as an individual agent. Children often live and sleep in the same rooms as adults, unlike in Western societies

where children often have their own space to sleep and leisure (Raman 2000).²⁰ Whilst child labor has been abolished in the West – which has mainly been enabled due to capitalism – economic circumstances in India often force poor families to deploy their children to earn an additional income.

Moreover, Indian children are introduced earlier in life to certain expectations that their parents have of and for them. Particularly girls are often prepared for married life from an early age onwards (Saraswathi 1999). All these factors contribute to relationships between children and adults to be more blurred compared to the West. This would partially explain why there has not been an extensive focus on children in Indian family literature.

Particularly the child-parent relationship is often considered as a symbiotic one (Chopra 2015: 27). Parents offer security to their children, providing them with love, and often with an education (Indian parents are particularly keen on education). Children in return are often expected to provide their parents with an ‘old age security’; taking care of them once they are no longer able to care for themselves (Chopra 2015: 27). Again, this is in discordance with the CRC, in which children are not attributed any responsibilities towards their parents.

Having children provides families with a social security that is often not provided for by the government in India (Isaac & Annie & Prashanth 2014: 36). In addition, children (particularly sons in patriarchal societies, and daughters in matriarchal societies) can be considered as enhancing their family’s power and status (Chopra 2015: 27).²¹

It needs to be mentioned that due to globalization (primarily Westernization) modernization and urbanization, these traditional patterns are being challenged. Urban communities become more characterized by childrearing practices that value directly related family members, but also value self reliance of the child and the ability to adapt himself/herself to live in a globalizing world (Chaudhary 2004; Isaac & Annie & Prashanth 2014).

²⁰ Needless to say, social and economic factors also play a crucial role here.

²¹ Again, it should be mentioned that Indian societies vary from being patriarchal to matriarchal, and there are many shades in between.

Secondly, the Indian context is impossible to comprehend without accounting for the religiosity and spirituality that imbues Indian society, its epistemologies and ontologies, and hence also has considerable effect on conceptualizations of the child, childhood and child rearing. Firstly, when speaking of religion in India one has to acknowledge the immense cultural and religious diversity. Indeed cultural practices, rituals and ideas mediate between diverse ethnic, religious and cultural communities. Varieties of lived religion, religious syncretism and cultural diversity 'give rise to a complex unity' that is India (Das 2006: 46). Claiming that syncretism in India is a result of mixing religion A with religion B is too simplistic. As Wendy Doniger puts it: '[Indian] religions have fuzzy edges and multiple parts. Their interaction [in India] is more like mixing the palette of a Monet with the palette of a Rembrandt' (Doniger 2002: xvi).

As mentioned above, a child is usually considered a gift from God in Indian societies. Various religious groups (Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims and Christians) place value on daily prayers to God, Gods and Goddesses, as these are considered as the most powerful agents that have the agency to influence their lives. Praying to deities to seek guidance with regard to child rearing is therefore prevalent at all levels of various Indian societies (Isaac, Annie & Prashanth: 39).

Chopra (2015) and Isaac, Annie and Prashanth (2014) argue that there is no general consensus on parenting skills and child rearing in India. Hence there is no broad literature on these issues available. In addition to the socio-economic background, Indian parents generally rely on spiritual, philosophical and religious sources for guidance when it comes to child rearing, as they are considered 'store holders of knowledge' with regard to how one ought to behave and one's social relationships (Isaac, Annie & Prashanth 2014: 39). In Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism, *dharma* and *neeti* are key concepts and form the foundation of how Hindus relate to the world, each other and the larger cosmos.²² When it comes to child rearing, many Indian parents aim to instill values and attitudes that are in line with this spiritual foundation (Chopra 2015: 27).

²² *Dharma* has multiple meanings, but generally tends to refer to behaviors (duties, rights, customs, etcetera) that are in line with the all-encompassing cosmic order. *Neeti* is a Sanskrit word that literally means policy. It is used in different context and is utilized to refer to rules and regulations. In terms of

Every child that is born is perceived to have his/her own destiny and identity based on his/her *karma* (actions and deeds in a previous life). When a child is born, his/her horoscope is calculated. In many parts of India, one's horoscope is crucial in choosing a partner (Campion, 2012: 118).²³ During childhood, various rites mark different milestones in a child's development. I mentioned above that children are often perceived as an investment. This is not merely due to the old-age security, but also because children (particularly sons) are needed to perform spiritual rites that increase the wellbeing of deceased parents in the afterlife. I have already mentioned in the previous chapter that the international discourse on childhood and child protection suffers from a secularist bias, in the sense that spiritual and religious epistemologies and ontologies are completely ignored.

Similarly, in Islamic and Christian societies in India religion and spirituality are deeply embedded in all aspects of life. Children are also perceived to be a gift of God, and will ultimately return to God. With regard to childhood, Islamic heritage emphasizes brotherhood and community life. Most literature on Christianity in India focuses around the times of colonialism and the missionaries. There is little known with regard to specific Christian Indian images of the child, although some authors emphasize Christianity brought along more 'Western' parenting styles (Isaac & Annie & Prashanth 2014).²⁴ Nevertheless, literature clearly demonstrates the importance of religious and spiritual contexts and resources influence images of childhood and practices of child rearing in all segments of Indian society.

human behavior, it can also mean ethics. I am grateful to Bharat Gehlot and Mohamed Zahir for explaining these terms to me.

²³ Horoscopes of a man and woman are matched before they are getting married. If the horoscope does not match, this could bring misfortune and even lead to divorce or death.

²⁴ One case study by Ohja & Pramanick (1992) pointed out 'significant differences' between child rearing attitudes of Hindu, Muslims and Christian mothers. Christian mothers were found to be most loving and protective of their children compared to Muslim and Hindu counterparts (65). Further research with regard to cultural and religious variations with regard to child rearing is needed.

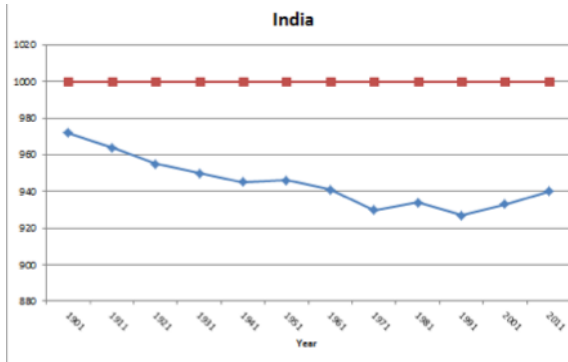


Figure 3: Trends in Infant Mortality (NFHS-4 2014-2015: 4).

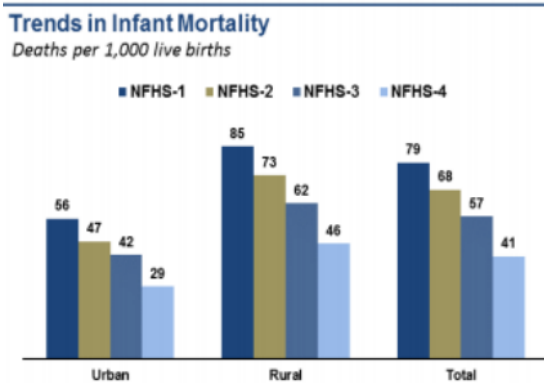


Figure 4: Overall sex-ratio developments India 1901-2011 (Compiled from Census of India data)

Census of India shows a positive trend in the overall sex-ratio rates since 1991. Yet in

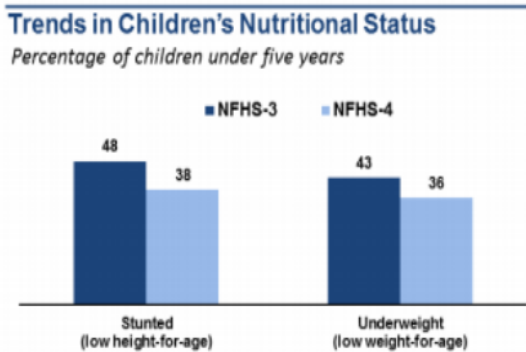


Figure 5: Trends in Children's Nutritional Status (NFHS 2014-2015: 4)

5.2. Indian discourse on child protection

5.2.1 Challenges faced in India

India is home to 19% of all children globally (Ministry of Women and Child Development 2017: 43). Within India, children make up for a third of India's population. Unfortunately, 40% of India's children are suffering from vulnerability, or are experiencing harsh circumstances (Ministry of Women and Child Development 2017: 43).

Although, decreasing, India still copes with a high level of infant mortality. Whilst the level is declining the Indian National Family Health Survey (NFHS) of 2014-2015 shows that 41 infants die per 1,000 live births (see figure 3). In addition, 59 per 1,000 children die under the age of 5 (NFHS 2014-2015: 4).

Gender is an important factor due to widespread practices of female infanticide and son preference. The former Minister of Women and Child Development Maneka Gandhi claimed in 2015 that '2,000 girls are killed in the womb every day' (Iyengar 2015: para. 2). The

2011 there are only 940 women per 1000 men in India. In some states (particularly northern Indian states), this number is even lower. The child sex ratio in India is even more concerning: in 2011 it reached a historical lowest point of 914 girls per 1000 boys (Census of India 2011).

Malnourishment is a serious factor. Figure 5 shows that 36% of Indian children under the age of 5 are underweight. UNICEF (2013) speaks of 46% of children under the age of 3 being malnourished, of which at least

16% are chronic cases.

Lack of immunization and hygiene (particularly a lack of toilets) is also concerning, as diarrhea is the second major death cause among children in India (UNICEF 2013). In addition, more than 220,000 Indian children are infected with HIV. UNICEF estimates that up to 60,000 children contract HIV via mother-to-child transmission every year (UNICEF 2013).

Moreover, 20% of Indian children between the age of 6 and 14 do not attend school, often due to poverty, social stigma and exclusion. India has the largest number of child laborers worldwide. It is estimated that 12.6 million children work in India (UNICEF 2013). Human Rights Watch published a report in 2013 on child wellbeing in India. They reported that 40% of India's children are vulnerable to homelessness, forced labor, being trafficked, drug abuse and crime (Human Rights Watch 2013: 14). In addition, more than half of married women wed before the legal age of 18 (Human Rights Watch 2013: 14). A survey by UNICEF showed that 42% of Indian girls have been victims of sexual violence. Abuse is not limited to institutions and the public environment (Chopra 2015) According to the WHO children in India often deal with severe physical punishment, or moderate physical punishment within the family (WHO 2014: 63).²⁵

5.2.2 A rising power: India's discourse on an international level

As soon as India became an independent country, India's leaders envisioned a new discourse in which India sought to be independent and self-reliant, moving away from a Western hegemony that had so long oppressed these aims (Kugiel 2017: 475). India was precarious with regard to getting involved in power politics. India is mostly known for its 'Non-Alignment' discourse (particularly during the Cold War), as India shunned the idea of making advanced commitments to any alliance in global politics.²⁶

²⁵ Based on mothers' reports, the WHO states that 36% of Indian children are hit with an object (severe physical punishment). In addition, the most common measures of moderate physical punishment were spanking the child's buttocks with the hand (58%) and slapping the child's face or head (58%)(WHO 2014: 63).

²⁶ This does however not mean that India did not actively participate in global politics. It just avoided making alliances with powerful nations.

This also had to do with the fact that India was suspicious of hegemonic powers in the postcolonial era. India accepted the right to be a powerful nation, but only to achieve goals of its own national interest. Moreover, Chacko (2012) argues that India was ambivalent towards Western modernity. After all, India had once embraced Western modernity, and it had led to its colonial subjugation. Therefore, India associated Western modernity with its exploitative and violent colonial past (4).

In this sense, India's Non-Alignment foreign policy can arguably be seen as a key factor in establishing India's postcolonial identity, as India aimed at focusing on its national interest. During this period, India has emphasized its support for the sovereignty of nations, peaceful coexistence, and friendship and cooperation between nation-states in order to achieve mutual development (Chacko 2007: 277). The emphasis on independent decision-making based on morality politics and normative approaches has been key in this postcolonial discourse (Chacko 2007: 11). Chacko (2007) argues that Indian nationalists were critical of Western modernity, as they associated it with violence and exploitation, which according to them happened at the expense of cultural and moral values. Indian nationalist, Chacko argues, attributed Indian civilization unique and superior moral qualities, due to which India would not act the same way as the West had done in the past. In this way, India's 'mimicry of subversion' assisted India in subverting Western claims of superiority (11).

India has been a strong voice and advocate of newly independent states. While India shunned away from hegemonic coalitions, it had a large role in anti-hegemonic coalitions. India played a crucial role in anti-imperial and 'Third Worldism' politics, securing South-South relationships instead of being dependent on North-South relationships (Mohan 2003: xix). These factors reflect India's foreign policy as a 'self-reflective ethic-political project of identity construction' as a response to its' colonial past (Chacko 2012: 3).

However, in the Cold War era a shift can be observed in India's discourse. Indeed, from non-alignment morality politics India made a shift to realpolitik policies in securing national interests. This meant that Nehru's moral idealism to change the dynamics of global politics was abandoned for policies based on more pragmatic and geopolitical concerns (Ganguly 2004; Kapur 2006; Chacko 2007). Certain developments,

such as the end of the Cold War, India's status as a new nuclear power in the 1990's, and India's enormous economic growth have enabled the country to pursue new ambitions to position itself as a prominent actor in global politics (Stanley & Kochanek & Hardgrave 2007: 474; Sullivan 2015: 15)

Yet one can argue that India's strategies in its search for power are quite ambivalent (Sullivan 2015: 15). On one hand, India now wishes to be recognized by the hegemonic powers. On the other hand India's leaders are still more doubtful about power compared to other leaders. Moreover, India still seeks to maintain 'solidarity' relationships with other developing country allies that India built during the Cold War era (Chacko 2012; Sullivan 2015; Kugiel 2017). India increasingly presents itself as a rising power by being a beneficiary of foreign aid to other developing nations (particularly since the 2000s) (Chaturvedi 2012; Kugiel 2017).

Sullivan (2015) argues that in this paradigm Indian elites tend to shift to a narrative in which they do not comply with the narratives of actors that enjoy global dominance (Sullivan 2015: 16). India aims at presenting itself as a powerful player, while at the same time emphasizing that its' development strategies are different from those of Western states (being mutually beneficial, without conditions and based on the needs of the receiving country) (Kugiel 2017: 112).

These different discourses also reflect in how India has responded to the international discourse on child protection. Until 1989, when India first participated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, India did not participate in any international conventions on child protection and child wellbeing. During this time, the Indian government was more focused on making efforts to ensure child protection on a national level. This again shows the independent and self-sufficient image of the self that characterizes India post-independence. In the post-Cold War era, when India experienced a shift in their foreign policy discourse, India started to invest considerable time and resources in participating in international dialogues and conferences, also with regard to the issue of child protection and child wellbeing. I have included an extensive list of India's participation in and ratification of various treaties, conventions and summits related to these issues in the appendix.

By utilizing international platforms, such as the UN and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), India seeks to build a new positive image of itself as a (relatively new) independent nation with democratic credentials that values activism with regard to the promotion and protection of (children's) rights and non-violence (Kugiel 2017: 95). In effect, this power strategy implies that India partially seeks to act in compliance with hegemonic norms set by the First World in order to be validated, valued and acknowledged as a major power.

This also becomes visible when analyzing India's stances during the drafting and ratification of the CRC. India raised no large concerns with regard to the content of the CRC during the drafting, and ratified the convention. This is noteworthy for another reason, which I reveal in the next section. Moreover, India ratified two optional protocols on armed conflict and the sale of children/prostitution/pornography that were introduced after 1989. However, India did enter reservations with regard to article 32 on the regulation of child labor (the full article is added in the appendix):

'While fully subscribing to the objectives and purposes of the Convention, realizing that certain of the rights of the child, namely those pertaining to the economic, social and cultural rights can only be progressively implemented in the developing countries [...] recognizing that the child has to be protected from exploitation of all forms including economic exploitation: noting that for several reasons children of different ages do work in India; having prescribed minimum ages for employment in hazardous occupations and in certain other areas; having made regulatory provisions regarding hours and conditions of employment; and being aware that it is not practical immediately to prescribe minimum ages for admission to each and every area of employment in India - the Government of India undertakes to take measures to progressively implement the provisions of article 32, particularly paragraph 2 (a), in accordance with its national legislation and relevant international instruments to which it is a State Party' (United Nations 1989: 6).²⁷

India emphasized its full devotion and support of the CRC, whilst at the same time noting that India would not fully comply with the article that reinforces State Parties to provide a

²⁷ All underscoring in this thesis is my own emphasis, not those of the original documents. It is more usual to just put 'emphasis added' or 'emphasis in original' in the brackets with the author name, date and page

minimum age for admission to employment.²⁸ Following Hayathri and Chaudhri (2002), I argue that this is the result of a conflict between Western and non-Western notions of childhood.

As I mentioned above, the relationship between the child and the parents (and family) is symbiotic and, particularly when the family suffers from poverty, children are expected to contribute to the family. This is contrary to the (rather) Western belief that child labor is by definition exploitative. Because child labor is more socially and culturally accepted in India, and since a number of Indian economic sectors rely on child labor, India renegotiated the terms of the international community as a means of securing its own independent national interests.²⁹

5.2.3 The personal is political: Political secularism, majoritarianism, and child protection discourse in India.

Since India's independence in 1947, India aspired to become a modern nation-state with a secular outlook (Jodhka & Bora 2009; Tomalin 2015). Interestingly, the term 'secularism' was not broadly used by Indians prior to independence (Cady & Hurd 2014: 68). The constitution speaks of a plethora of freedoms and of equality. For example, Article 15 emphasizes that state discrimination against any citizen based on religious affiliations is forbidden. Article 25 emphasizes the right to freedom of conscience and religion. Yet the term 'secularism' was not included in the Indian constitution of 1947 (Cady & Hurd 2014: 68)

India aimed at achieving peaceful religious pluralism, but envisioned a clear national identity within a democratic framework (Madan 2011: 7). Nehru stated in 1948 that 'India will be a land of many faiths, equally honored and respected, but of one national outlook' (In: Madan 1997: 233). In the 1970s the Indian Supreme Court thus

²⁸ The Census of India reveals that 4,353,147 children were working in 2011, while 12,666,377 children were working in 2001 (Census of India 2001, 2011). Although this is a huge decline, many families and local economic sectors remain dependent on child labor.

²⁹ This could also be partially explained by India's focus on its economic development in the 1990's. India liberalized and largely privatized its economy.

ruled that secularism was an ‘unalterable feature’ of India’s identity and the constitution, and therefore it was added in the preamble in 1976 (Madan 1997; Cady & Hurd 2014).

What exactly is meant by ‘secularism’ in India is highly contested. I argue in line with Cady and Hurd (2014) and Deo (2016) that, similar to the West, there are various models/interpretations of secularism in India. Cady and Hurd (2014) distinguish two dominant interpretations. The first views secularism in India as a political ideology that transcends all religious traditions. This comes closest to what is referred to as the ‘Nehruvian liberal understanding’ of secularism (Deo 2016: 27). From this perspective, the Indian state has the responsibility to reform religion in order to serve national interests of social justice and social equality, and to secure the rights of religious minorities. It views Indian secularism within a broader framework of equality, justice and democracy (Cady & Hurd 2014: 69). In this paradigm, secularism is perceived as an achievement of India’s ‘anticolonial freedom struggle’, and as a framework that guarantees equality for all (Cady & Hurd 2014: 69).

I have already mentioned in my theoretical chapter that secularism relies on the distinction made between the public and the private domain (the secular belonging to the former, and the religious belonging to the latter). This is also a key element of the Nehruvian liberal understanding of secularism. It is crucial to mention that this distinction was already shaped by colonial governmentality in India (Hasan & Menon 2005; Chatterjee 2010). Chatterjee (2010) notes that when Indian nationalists reclaimed India from the colonialists, they also acquired a secular state apparatus in which – as it was shaped by Enlightenment discourse – the European dichotomy between public/private was incarcerated (32).

Subsequently, the distinction between public and private translated into a distinction between national common laws and personal laws for various religious groups. In effect, the secular governs the public domain in India, whilst the private domain is governed by cultural and religious traditions. The latter can be perceived to be quite a conundrum, considering that it contradicts the Indian Constitution, which guarantees equal treatment and equal rights of all citizens (Hasan & Menon 2005: 80).

The second model is referred to by Deo (2016) as a Hindu traditionalist model (27). It envisions Indian secularism as a religio-political ideology, one that draws from

values such as tolerance and pluralism that are perceived as deeply rooted in the majoritarian Hindu tradition.

Similar to the Nehruvian liberal understanding of secularism, this model of secularism seeks to maintain equidistance between the state and all religions. However, because Hinduism is built on notions of pluralism and tolerance, being Hindu is equated to being secular in this model (Deo 2016: 27). In effect, in this model of secularism Hinduism needs to flourish and has to be reconfigured to become a ‘unifying philosophy’ that serves national interests and provides a national identity of India (Cady & Hurd 2014: 69)

In recent times, particularly since the rise of Hindu nationalism (I shall return to this shortly), I argue this form of secularism has come to dominate Indian politics. Critics such as Khalidi (2008) state that this model of secularism has even enabled the ‘Hinduization’ of India, as ‘secularism in fact translates into Hindu assimilationism’. In effect, secularism thus implies proximity to Hinduism rather than an equidistance of the state towards all religions. Khalidi argues that this Hinduization can be observed through 1) the state’s promotion of Hinduism through reform and favoritism, 2) the promotion of Hindu beliefs and practices 3) the erosion of educational, cultural and religious autonomy and 4) the fusion between Hindu and Indian culture, which has led to the marginalization and exclusion of minorities (1546).

Similar to Khalidi, Tomalin (2015) notes that equal treatment of religious groups in India was not achieved in practice, since religion-based politics (particularly Hindu nationalism) ensures that certain groups are prioritized by the state (190, 192).³⁰ She also argues that the distinction between the majority/minority, disparities between personal laws of different groups, as well as the colonial past have contributed to religio-political communal tensions, particularly between Hindus and Muslims. Christians, Buddhist and Sikhs have also faced persecution by Hindu nationalist groups (190-191).

³⁰ Relevant examples are provided by Khalidi (2008). Several Indian states have introduced anti-conversion laws that favor Hinduism, as conversion to Hinduism is allowed, but conversion from Hinduism to another religion is not (1550). The cultural right of minorities to teach their languages is at stake, particularly regarding those who speak Urdu (which is associated with Islamic culture) (1548). Other examples include the Hinduization of education and public culture, as well as the Hinduization of state culture (which often includes Hindu rituals and songs). The recent controversy with regard to eating beef can be considered as yet another example of Hinduization of society.

Since independence, the role of religion in the public sphere has only expanded according to Tomalin, particularly considering the increase of religion-based politics and the rise of religious identity movements. This is particularly the case with regard to Hindu nationalism. Hindu nationalism finds its roots in colonial India, when Hindu nationalist were fighting against the British occupation. Many Hindu nationalist groups, such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sang (RSS), make a rigid distinction between religion and culture, the former being perceived as a private matter while the latter is supposedly a national structure. Culture, according to these organizations, must be Hindu. It promotes unity among Hindus and propagates the marginalization of other religious groups that came to India from the outside, and are thus considered to be alien (particularly Christians and Muslims) (Nussbaum 2007: 153).

These groups firmly believe in *Hindutva*, a term that refers ‘Hinduness’, based on an ideology of ethnic purity and homogeneity (Nussbaum 2007: 345). It implies that India is solely home to Hindus (Hindus being those who follow the original Indic religion based on the scriptures of the Veda). *Hindutva* is promoted by a number of Hindu nationalist organizations, which are collectively referred to as *sangh parivar* (family of organizations) (Tomalin 2015: 345). The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), that is currently in power grew out of the RSS and is, according to Nussbaum (2007), ‘still profoundly linked’ to it (345). As a consequence, alternative religious groups are marginalized.

The modern secular governance of post-colonial India and the challenges it faces with regard to the marginalization of religious groups is reminiscent of Mahmood’s study of modern secular governance in post-colonial Egypt. Mahmood (2015) states that secularism in Egypt had played a crucial role in the exacerbation of tensions and polarization between religious communities. She argues that the demand for religious equality is one of the key components of the modern secular state, as ‘secularism entails a form of national-political structuration organized around the problem of religious difference’ (Mahmood 2015: 10). Yet, the secular state is not a neutral arbiter that can solve religious tensions and differences. On the contrary, Mahmood argues that it is an important factor in its creation. Indeed, Mahmood argues that secularism does not involve

a separation of religion from politics, but rather implies state involvement to reconfigure and control religious life.³¹

While there are varieties of secularism, Mahmood argues that the resolution to solve religious difference is eerily similar across different contexts: Secularism allows majoritarian religious traditions, values and norms to make normative claims on a national identity (non-religion in Western Europe, Islam in Egypt, Hinduism in India), while relegating other forms of religion to the private domain, (partially) allowing religious minorities to have their own rights. This allows for the production of a disparity between majorities and minorities, particularly when minorities are also allowed to have their private religious laws (66). The secular state thus ‘produces and conditions the precarity of minorities’ (6).

Since the resolution to religious difference is so similar across various contexts, Mahmood states the discussion should be not so much about whether we should pluralize or homogenize secularism. Rather, Mahmood proposes that we should conceptualize the varieties of secularism in relation to the larger ‘Western universalizing project’ (10). Particularly post-colonial secular states should be studied in this context as this project continues to subjugate these states to various forms of ‘Western domination’ (10).

This is a compelling argument in relation to Indian secularism. After all, colonial oppressors imposed secularism on India. India may be an independent nation, but it has inherited a secular state apparatus. Moreover, the colonial state had given religious identities concrete identities, and drew boundaries between them where only ‘fuzzy differences’ existed (Jodhka & Bora 2009: 10). In this sense, one could argue that the ‘Western project’ of subjugation still somehow continues. This is particularly relevant considering India’s international discourse on child protection as it (at least partially) explains why, compared to its non-Western peers), India had no crucial objections to the CRC – which is noteworthy considering that Western ideas about modernity are favored in the CRC.

³¹ After all, secularism includes a distinction between the secular and the religious, in which the secular gets to construct what religion is. In secular thought religion is constructed as something easily tangible and identifiable, that can be easily distinguished and separated from other areas of human experience (Wilson 2017: 4)

This paradigm has had its ramifications for how social development is visualized in India. Jodhka and Bora (2009) argue that post-independent India was influenced by modern Western ideas about equality, rationality and liberty (10). The ideological orientation of India's new modern elite visualized economic and social development as a process that would modernize the country (Jodhka & Bora 2009: 3). In fact, Jodhka and Bora (2009) argue that the Nehruvian understanding of development shows a plethora of similarities with Western modernization theory (12-13). For example, India's First Five Year Plan states that:

'A major element [...] is the community's will to progress and its readiness to develop and adopt new and more efficient methods [...] Certain forms of economic and social organization are unsuited to or incapable of absorbing new techniques and utilizing them to the best advantage' (Government of India 1951: para. 14).

As I have mentioned in the theoretical chapter, processes of modernization are linked to processes of secularization. Secularization, in effect, was seen as a crucial part of social and economic development. Indian citizens were supposed to identify themselves as rational individuals, rather than drawing their identity from their caste status or their religious background (Jodhka & Bora 2009: 3). In this modernist and secularist paradigm, religion and religious institutions and organizations were not expected to play a role in processes of social and economic development, and they were relegated to the private domain (Jodhka & Bora 2009: 12).

This also has had its effects on India's CP policies. It needs to be mentioned that India has adopted a plethora of policies and acts on CWB and CP since independence (a full list is included in the appendix). All CP documents are secular in nature, utilize secular language and focus particularly on physical, material and social wellbeing. None of the documents speaks of the importance of spiritual wellbeing of children, nor acknowledge the holistic spiritual nature of Indian communities and practices of child rearing. It is also noteworthy to mention that special attention is given to those that are socially disadvantaged. These people usually belong to the so-called Scheduled Caste

(SC), a term given to the former Dalits (untouchables) by the Indian government.³² In addition, extra attention is given to the Scheduled Tribes of India (ST's).

For example, the Annual Report (2016-2017) of the Ministry of Women and Child Development states that ‘ [woman and child] schemes and programs of the Ministry are directly impacting the lives of women and children belonging to the most disadvantaged sections of society. Most of the programs are located in the areas where the women and children belong to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.’ In fact, 20% of the budget of the Ministry of Women and Child Development goes to plans specifically targeting SC's and ST's.

With regard to the practice of female infanticide, the report states that in order ‘to address the societal mindset of the community and making parents realize the value of girl child [the] ‘Aapki Beti Humari Beti’ scheme has been an important initiative and under this, a sum of Rs. 21,000 is deposited in the account of firstborn girl child of families belonging to SC's living below the poverty line (66).³³³⁴

However, a clear influence of religio-political and religio-communal tensions, as well as the dominance of Hinduism in the public domain (all effects of modern secular governance) can be observed in India's development policies. For example, the Indian constitution initially only recognized Hindu Dalits as SC. In 1956 and 1990 respectively, Sikh Dalits and Buddhist Dalits were included, but until today Muslim Dalits and Christian Dalits are not included in the SC (Tomalin 2015: 193).³⁵ This has crucial ramifications for children within these groups, as they are not supported by Child Protection Schemes of the government.³⁶ Also, if Dalit Hindus convert (which sometimes happens due to stigmatizations in the Hindu caste systems), they are no longer eligible to profit from policy action (Tomalin 2015: 193).

³² These terms are recognized in the Indian constitution of 1947.

³³ According to the World Bank 2016 rates, the average Indian yearly income is Rs. 108,091. Considering Rs. 21,000 thus is a huge sum of money for those living in poverty.

³⁴ Aapki Beti Humari Beti translates as ‘Your daughter is our daughter’.

³⁵ Due to the sensitivity of the issue, there are no official studies on the percentage of Christian dalits, but it is estimated that roughly 60% of Indian Christians are Dalits (Roberts 2016: 258).

³⁶ What I find particularly interesting about the Aapki Beti Humari Beti campaign is that it implicitly implies that ‘your daughter is our daughter’ as long as she belongs to a certain background. This does not acknowledge many of India's other daughters.

This is also true for all affirmative action plans of the government that focus around public employment, education and representatives of the electoral system (Khalidi 2008: 1557). Khalidi (2008) therefore argues that such plans are not designed to combat poverty, or to empower the poor. It is designed ‘to be blind’ to certain religions (1557). The caste hierarchy, in combination with majoritarianism of Hindu nationality thus allows for the exclusion and marginalization of religious minorities, which also affects the children in these groups. Interestingly, the idea that castes are connected to a religious background was introduced by colonialists and Christian missionaries, and differ from the original four *varnas* (castes) that were based on people’s profession (Tomalin 2015: 192).

A special Ministry of Minority Affairs, including child protection, addresses all issues concerning religious minorities. Congress introduced a special 15 Point Plan for minorities in 2006. Amongst other points, it promised equitable efforts to make the Integrated Child Development Services Scheme (ICDS) available to minorities. This ICDS is called ‘one of the flagship programs’ in the last annual report of the Ministry of Women and Child Development.³⁷ It contains six services that mainly focus around the nutrition, health and immunization of the child.³⁸ The 15 Point Plan promised that ‘a certain percentage of ICDS projects and Anganwadi Centres will be located in blocks/villages with a substantial population of minority communities’ (15 Point Plan 2009).³⁹ 15 percent of government funds were to benefit minorities (Bhalla & Luo 2013: 96)

Unfortunately, ‘a certain percentage’ remains a vague promise. Moreover, the BJP accused Congress of being ‘communal’ stating that ‘The BJP takes strong exception to the apportioning of the national wealth and singling it out for a religious community in particular as being divisive and unconstitutional’ (‘PM’s 15 Point Plan has BJP, CPM at

³⁷ Again, language is quite crucial here. The Ministry of Women and Child Development is mainly occupied with the majority, whilst child protection and child development is mainly the responsibility of a special appointed Ministry of Minority Affairs. I argue that this does not only sharpen the boundaries between the majority and the minorities in India, but it also excludes them from the mainstream.

³⁸ Supplementary nutrition, nutrition and health education, health check-ups, pre-school non-formal education, immunization and referral services.

³⁹ ‘Anganwadi Centres’ are mother and childcare centres (particularly used in rural areas of India) that were founded by the Indian government in 1975 when the ICDS was first introduced.

each other's throat' 2007). The Communist Party of India (CPM) backfired, stating that BJP was merely trying to push a RSS agenda by opposing the minority deal, blaming BJP of 'converting the secular democratic republic of India into a rabidly intolerant fascistic Hindu Rashtra ('PM's 15 Point Plan has BJP, CPM at each other's throat' 2007).

Despite these types of plans and programs being adopted by various Indian governments since the 1980s (a similar 15 point program for minorities was adopted in the 1980s), minorities continue to be disadvantaged. Governments have failed to effectively enforce laws and to implement programs (Bhalla & Luo 2013: 96). For example, the 11th Five-Year Plan (India works in terms of Five-Year Plans on development since its independence) of 2007-2012 included sub-plans for SC's and ST's, but included no sub-plans for minorities, due to a fear that it would incite large-scale communal demonstrations (Bhalla & Luo 2013: 96).

It would be relevant to study the current situation of minorities, considering that the BJP is currently in power. It is arguably at least questionable whether minorities are benefitting from the promises that were made to them by Congress. Further research on this topic would be beneficial to understand how the shift of power has affected the minorities. However, in general religio-political power clashes are concerning when it comes to child wellbeing and child protection, as they tend to promote unequal treatment and support purely based on their caste and religious background, which also affects children. It does not assist in promoting child wellbeing, nor in assisting India to tackle the various challenges and threats that children face that I have described in this chapter.

Lastly, I argue in line with Kalaramadam (2016) that, similar to Western varieties of secularism, Indian secularisms have also established a gendered dichotomy of public and private that continues to be dominant in Indian public culture (102). The public domain remains largely reserved for men, who are perceived to embody rationality, independence, individuality, objectivity and thus considered fit for decision-making, politics, economics and labor (102). Women are considered as pure, emotional, irrational, caring and dependent and are therefore relegated to the private domain where they are assumed to carry the responsibility for family care and child bearing. (Iyer 2009; Kalaramadam 2016). This shapes limitations for women to participate in the public domain. Such gendered stereotypes are problematic because they stimulate existing

cultural practices such as son preference and female infanticide, and hence pose a threat to child wellbeing in India.⁴⁰

In addition, Mahmood argues that family law is a modern invention that is predicated upon the public/private divide of political secularism. Issues of religion, gender, sexuality and the family are relegated to the private domain. In effect, these issues are mainly part of family law in India, not of the civil law. Therefore, rules and regulations with regard to gender related child wellbeing vary across different legal systems, which makes national legal principles on child wellbeing particularly tricky. In addition, since religious minorities (and their ontologies) are excluded and marginalized in (mainly) the dominant Hindu traditionalist secular model, family law plays a large role in the preservation and survival of the religious identity of these minorities. In effect, (gender) issues related to child wellbeing risk becoming part of religio-political agendas.

The Indian state continues to be committed to secular development models (Tomalin 2015: 195). During the 1990s, when India started to liberalize its economy, many of the state-provided services were privatized. Moreover, the government's focus on economic development created space for other agents to enter the development sector, including FBOs (Jodhka & Bora 2009: 14).

It should be mentioned that due to the complexity of both NGO's and the Indian government there is no fixity in their relationship. The Indian government admires the development aid provided by NGO's, but is at the same time suspicious and can even be hostile towards certain organizations (Sheth & Sethi 1991: 60). More particularly, there are certain limitations and sensitivities around faith-based organizations in India, particularly around those that are Christian, as they are easily accused of conversion (Tomalin 2015).

⁴⁰ I have already mentioned that in Hinduism sons are the only ones who are able of carrying out funeral rituals for their parents. Another incentive for son preference is the fact that parents of sons often receive dowry from the in law family, and are seen as future contributors. Daughters are more often seen as a burden. In many parts of India investing in a girls education is deemed unreasonable when Indian cultures insist on marrying off a girl, after which she becomes 'property' of her in-laws. In India there is a term called 'paraya-dhan' which is often used for girls. It literally means 'someone else's money' (McDougall 2000: 1650). I am not claiming that eradication of this gendered dichotomy will solve all problems. I do argue they play a key role in gender related child issues in India.

Conversion to Hinduism is encouraged, but conversion to another religion forbidden in a number of states due to anti-conversion laws. Some scholars argue Hindu nationalists perceive conversion from Hinduism not merely as an attack on Indian culture (as Hinduism is equated to culture), but also as an attack on India itself (Khalidi 2008; Roberts 2016). The majority of converts out of Hinduism are the former Dalits, now belonging to the Scheduled Castes. Roberts (2016) argues that prior to the 20th century, these groups weren't bothered to convert, as they were not regarded as Hindus (7).

However, during the 20th century Hindu nationalists started to claim the Dalits as part of the Hindu population of India in order to claim the majority (Roberts 2016: 7-8). According to the Census of India of 2011, 16.6% of the total Indian population belongs to the Hindu SC's (Census of India 2011). Losing these communities might decrease the gap between the Hindu majority and other religious minorities (Roberts 2016: 8). This, and India's experiences with Christian missionaries in its colonial past mean that Christian development aid in India is a highly sensitive matter, particularly when much of their funding comes from abroad.

One last interesting observation is that the way in which religion is constructed in order to serve Indian political goals shows many similarities with how religion is constructed in dominant international discourse. In both cases, sharp delineations are made between what belongs to the public domain and what belongs to the private domain. When it comes to religions in India, Indian politics produce religion as a political category, in which religions are seen as clearly identifiable and distinguishable from one another. The sharp boundaries that are made between Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism and Islam do not seem to correspond the many forms of lived religion in India, which are characterized by syncretic elements and blurry boundaries.

5.3 Conclusion

I began this chapter questioning which secular power dynamics and discourses inform India's discourse on child wellbeing and child protection. India's post-colonial modern secular governance initially embraced secularism in order to keep equidistance between the state and religious groups. Yet, rather than a solution to religious difference, I have

demonstrated that secularism has been a force in the creation of polarization between religious groups in India, as it has allowed the majoritarian religion (Hinduism) to make normative claims on India's national identity while relegating other religious identities/issues to the private domain (This particularly concerns the Hindu traditionalist model of secularism). In this sense, India's secularism shows resemblances with other (Western) varieties of secularism I have discussed, particularly regarding state involvement in conceptualizing, reconfiguring and controlling religion and religious life. I have argued this is not surprising, considering that India inherited its secular state apparatus from its colonial oppressors. Therefore, Mahmood's argument that post-colonial secular states should be studied in the context of the Western universalizing project due to which these states (unconsciously) subjugate themselves to various forms of Western domination is quite compelling.

India based its post-independence social and economic development discourse on modern Western ideas about equality (abolishing religious/social inequality), rationality, liberty and notions of modernization and progress, which further strengthens Mahmood's argument. Both factors also explain why India has not been as critical of the CRC, a biased document favoring secularism and Western notions of modernity, compared to other non-Western nations. India has prioritized secular development approaches in which religion and spirituality are almost completely ignored (arguably, this could also be a strategy to avoid religio-political and religio-communal tensions). In this sense, the Indian approach differs from Western secular policymakers, who wish to reengage with religion but make distinctions between good and bad religion based on how instrumental religion can be in achieving secular goals. At the same time, the Indian government discourse favors the majority, while other religious groups become marginalized.

This variety of secularism thus also constitutes ontological injustice and affects children's wellbeing, particularly those that come from religious minority backgrounds. I find this particularly problematic concerning the importance of spirituality and religion in the conceptualizations of childhood images and practices of childrearing in India (which demonstrates that secular Western childhood images are limited, which I also argued in the previous chapter). Religious and spiritual wellbeing, as well as the immense variety in

religio-cultural contexts in India is completely ignored in India's secular policy documents that involve child protection and child wellbeing.

I have earlier discussed the limitations of secular ontology in my theoretical chapter, and I have explained that including alternative voices, epistemologies and ontologies is key in making development aid more inclusive. Particular challenges that India faces with regard to child wellbeing, such as son preference and female infanticide take place in contexts in which spirituality and religiosity are intrinsic part of people's epistemologies, ontologies, identity and daily life. Therefore, I argue that these factors should be taken into account and integrated in development policies.

6. Bridging the gap? Faith-based development in the web of secularism

In the last two chapters I have studied how various forms of secularism affect development policies on child protection on an international level, by studying the CRC, and on a national level in India, by studying India's national politico-religious and religio-communal context. The next steps are to explore how varieties of secularism affect the work of transnational faith-based organizations, and to study whether or not explicit religious programs form a potential disruption to the dominance of secularism in global development politics.

In this last chapter I therefore study World Vision International as a transnational actor in the field of development aid and relief services. In the first section I introduce World Vision as a FBO. Subsequently, I study how World Vision relates to larger international and national frameworks. Through the utilization of both CDA and CSA, I focus on how power politics and discourses in various context shape different narratives and strategies, in order to answer the sub question '*How do previous mentioned varieties of secularism on an international and national level influence World Vision's identity and discourse as a faith-based organization?*' In doing so, I specifically explore how World Vision relates to the international discourse on child protection by studying World Vision's position towards the CRC, and how World Vision relates to the politico-religious and religio-communal tensions between the Hindu majority and minority religious groups in India.

In the second section of this chapter, I focus explicitly on the Channels of Hope Child Protection Program. As I have mentioned in the introduction, some scholars and practitioners in the field of humanitarianism have put explicit religious programs forward as a solution to the dominance of secularism. Similarly, World Vision has introduced various explicit religious programs in which, they claim, religion is integrated in a holistic way. In this way, World Vision aims at bridging the secular-religious divide and subverting the dominance of secular models and frameworks. In this section, I explore to whether and how introducing explicit religious programs contributes to subverting reinforcing the dominance of secularist frameworks in global development politics, or whether they reinforce such frameworks. The second sub question of this chapter is

therefore ‘*Whether and, if so, how does the Channels of Hope Child Protection program either reinforce or subvert dominant secular frameworks in global development politics?*’

I thus study the CoH CP program by utilizing CDA. In doing so, I also reflect on how CoH CP discourse relates to that of the CRC. I am aware that, even though the CoH CP and the CRC cannot try to do the same things, and whilst they have different approaches, they are nonetheless both concerned with child wellbeing and the realization of child protection and child rights.

I am interested in understanding how we can achieve a more diverse approach to existing global political norms and values, as well as how these norms are developed in the first place. Studying whether and how explicit religious programs of FBOs either challenge or reinforce the dominance of secularism is an important step in order to further explore how far-reaching the effects of varieties of secularism are on development policies and programs in global development politics, even on those that attempt to disrupt its dominance. In this regard, studying explicit religious approaches is helpful to answer the central research question, as well as making steps in exploring alternative understandings of the religion-development nexus.

6.1 FBO’s in the web of secular power politics

6.1.1 An introduction to World Vision International

As mentioned in the introduction, World Vision International (WVI) is one of the largest non-governmental organizations worldwide, and has an explicit religious identity (Carbonnier 2011, 1; de Wet 2011: 97). WVI was established in 1977 as an international coordinating body that overarches national entities around the world. These entities are also referred to as World Vision ‘partners’ that are part of the World Vision ‘partnership’ (‘Structure and Funding’, n.d.). WVI’s original roots lie in American ‘new evangelicalism’ (Bornstein 2003: 17). Nowadays, the organization is considered an ecumenical organization that has links with various Christian denominations and churches across the world (de Wet 2011: 97).

WVI attracts both secular donors and faith-inspired donors (Bartelink, Wilson & Haze 2016; Hopgood & Vinjamuri 2012).⁴¹ World Vision is largely dependent on private donors, most of which are based in so-called developed countries. In fact, almost 80% of World Vision's funding depends on private donations, which includes individuals, foundations and corporations ('Structure and Funding', n.d.). In addition, WVI depends on and values national and local governments, as well as other stakeholders and leaders, as important players in order to provide development aid (Bartelink, Wilson & Haze 2016: 6).

WVI's motto is 'Our vision for every child, life in all its fullness; our prayer for every heart, the will to make it so'. WVI has a large focus on children, and are mostly known for their extensive child-sponsorship program, which is the source of roughly half of WVI's total funding ('Structure and Funding', n.d.; de Wet 2011: 97). WVI's website states: 'everything we do has just one goal: the sustained wellbeing of children, especially the most vulnerable. We work with families, communities, and partners to ensure that children enjoy good health, are educated for life, experience the love of God and their neighbors, and are cared for, protected, and participating'. Furthermore, WVI states that they serve 'all people, regardless of religion, race, ethnicity or gender' ('Our Approaches', n.d.).

6.1.2 How environments shape approaches and narratives

It should always be kept in mind that the space in which religious actors operate is not a vacuum. Their actions, to what extent and the ways in which they can publicly express and effectively realize their faith, religious identity and goals are shaped by the complex and ever-changing and unpredictable political settings in which they are situated (Tomalin 2015: 183). This also applies to how World Vision relates to larger discourses on an international level, and on a national level in India.

On an international level, WVI is acknowledged as an important player in the field of in development aid and relief services. However, World Vision operates within

⁴¹ Following Salek (2016), I argue that this implies that World Vision needs to conform to secular narratives as well in order to secure their funding.

an international framework that is dominated by secularism, due to which communication and cooperation with secular stakeholders is inescapable. Whilst religion was once deeply embedded in World Vision's organization and policy strategies, the religious identity of various FBOs has been downplayed as a result of the dominance of secularism and the favoring of secular agencies by Western governments during the 20th century (Barnett & Stein 2012: 4) In effect, a majority of programs of FBOs, such as World Vision, are not explicitly religious, but are quite similar to secular relief and development services (Appleby 2000: 272). World Vision's child-sponsorship program is a relevant example of this.

Furthermore, this also means that organizations such as WVI need to utilize secular international institutions, and that they have succumb to secularized international legislation (such as the CRC) in order to obtain their own goals (Barnett & Stein 2012: 4) This would partially explain why international organizational ideologies of many Northern-based NGO's that are active in the field of child protection show, what Holzscheiter (2010) refers to as, a 'puzzling' unanimity with regard to the CRC (86-87).

WVI is part of the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and have explicitly praised the legal document. A relevant example is an elaborate blog series posted on WVI's website in celebration of the 25th anniversary of the CRC in 2014. Tiffany Tao Joiner, a *Child Participation Specialist and Child Wellbeing and Rights Community of Practice* Manager at WVI wrote:

[The CRC] signaled a new era in which children were no longer viewed as passive or helpless beings; the CRC recognizes children as rights-holders with a voice and a contribution to make to the wider global community. CRC gives children a new identity as contributors, partners and collaborators [...] in making the world a more just, peaceful and safe place. To me, the CRC is more than a document filled with articles and principles. It is a dynamic worldview-shifting recognition of children as human beings worthy of dignity and a voice. And that, during this 25th anniversary year, is truly something to celebrate' (Joiner 2014).

At the same time, staff of WVI also carefully place caveats in the implementation of the CRC. Paul Stephenson, the Senior Director *Child Development and Rights Technical Cluster of WVI* highlights in his blog post that there are groups that oppose the CRC, as they consider it as another measure of the state to ‘gain access and control over children’, thus ‘undermining the role of parents and families’ (Stephenson 2014). He states that:

‘Rights language sits uncomfortably in the vocabulary of many parents [...] parents don’t tend to talk to their children about their rights, but try to help them develop a sense of identity within their family and often faith community, and teach values of service, responsibility, delayed gratification, character and caring for others. [...] Teaching children their rights still forms an important part of child focused programming. However the way they are taught should take into account the faith, context, culture and values of their community. Working with faith groups around rights and encouraging greater understanding of how child rights relate to principles of faith and theology can help to diffuse the antagonism that exists within many faith groups – especially conservative ones’ (Stephenson 2014).

I chose to include this elaborate quote because I argue that this shows the ambivalent and dependent position that WVI has within the larger international system. On one hand, WVI is a faith-based organization and has expressed its ambitions to promote holistic development approaches in which religion plays an integral role. This quote shows that WVI is aware of the need to acknowledge and value religious and socio-cultural contexts.

On the other hand, the last part of this quote resembles secularized language of how religion can ‘help’ or ‘assist’ as an instrument to tackle the ‘antagonism’ of ‘especially conservative’ religious groups. This echoes the secularist distinction between good and bad religion. It also fits the larger secularist framework that wishes to sideline religion, and only considers ‘including’ it as an instrument when it adheres to the secular agenda. I address this ambivalence because it demonstrates the pulling power of a larger

secularist framework that organizations such as WVI navigate in. They might consciously (or unconsciously) use secular language in order to convince secular audiences. As such, World Vision has to (partially) succumb to secular frameworks and categories in order to be successful, and to be recognized by other actors in these frameworks.

Similarly on a national level in India, World Vision has to navigate through a complex and tense religio-political and religio-communal framework. I already mentioned in the last chapter that faith-based organizations are met with suspicion by the Indian government. During my fieldwork in Bangalore, World Vision facilitators in India expressed to me that the Indian government, as well as (particularly) Hindu communities are suspicious of World Vision's activities, as they believe that World Vision aims at converting communities to Christianity.⁴²

One of them told me that World Vision India had to be careful with regard to their Christian vocabulary in India as 'in the Indian context, issues may arise, because they [the government and the Hindu community] will think we try to convert people.' World Vision thus needs to carefully position itself as a Christian development organization in India. For example, in their Indian Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA), World Vision does not identify itself as a Christian organization (Bauman 146).⁴³

Such allegations are not without merit. I have mentioned World Vision's roots lie in new-evangelicalism, and for long time evangelism was an overarching aim in the organization's activities (Whaites 1999: 412). For example, World Vision India receives large sums of money from foreign donors.⁴⁴ Critics of World Vision often argue that the

⁴² I experienced the sensitivity whilst applying for my research visa. From various experienced scholars studying Christianity in India had expressed their struggles with regard to obtaining a research visa for their research activities (this was particularly the case when their studies concerned conversion practices of SC's and ST's to Christianity). I was advised to be careful in the ways in which I would express my research aims towards the Indian government. Also, the invitation letter that was sent to me by World Vision India for the Indian embassy contained no information about my research revolving around spiritual transformation, nor did it mention the objectives of the Channels of Hope program. This example clearly demonstrates that both the NGO as well as researchers are forced to produce alternative narratives when they have to navigate through certain frameworks.

⁴³ Moreover, World Vision does not have a clear Christian name, compared to peer organizations such as Catholic Relief Services or Islamic Relief.

⁴⁴ A sheet of received foreign donations from January to March can be found at https://www.worldvision.in/CMSAdmin/Uploads/fc_donation_jan2017_march2017.pdf (consulted on 07/07/2017)

deployment of foreign donations is ‘at the very least a subtle form of allurements’ (Bauman 2015: 146).

World Vision emphasizes that they ‘serve all people, regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, or gender’ (‘6 Ways We Earn Your Trust’, n.d.). At the same time World Vision states it is its’ mission to ‘bear witness to the good news of the Kingdom of God’ (‘Our Mission’, n.d.). It should be acknowledged that they are an agent that provides resources to the poor. Hence, they enjoy a certain level of status, credibility and a position of power. In effect, it is likely that those depending on aid provided by World Vision are more susceptible to the message that the organization propagates.⁴⁵

In the last section of this chapter, I shall elaborate on the content of the workshops I attended in Bangalore. At this point, it suffices to say that these workshops were explicitly Christian with regard to the activities and the language that was used. Almost paradoxically, the WV facilitators in Bangalore told me that 90% of their donors come from Hindu communities.⁴⁶ I wondered how explicit Christian activities could be reported back to donors coming from a different background, particularly when one considers the recent tensions between different religious groups since the Hindu traditionalist secular model (and in effect, Hindu nationalism) gained dominance.

I addressed this during one of my interviews with the World Vision facilitators. One of them responded: ‘World Vision and the churches [referring to church leaders that were present at the workshop] have a unique role because they carry the same wishes and mission. We speak the same language. But when it comes to the donors we don’t want to speak of our Christian identity.’ However, the same facilitator assured me that, even though World Vision do not (and cannot) *speak* like Christians to their national donors, they do *act* like Christians, as they perceive providing aid and relief as an inherently Christian act.

⁴⁵ A relevant example would be how World Vision often organizes workshops and trainings at expensive beautiful locations (such as luxurious hotels). As one can imagine, this leaves an impression on participants, who tend to be new to these types of luxury since they often come from poor areas. During the workshops in Bangalore I could clearly notice that the church leaders were impressed by the location and the services that they received for free.

⁴⁶ I am assuming that this is 90% of the national funding incomes, considering the large amounts of foreign funds World Vision India depends on.

To a certain extent, *acting* like Christians echoes what Bornstein (2003) has referred to as ‘life style evangelism’. Life style evangelism includes ‘handling’ people in a Christian manner, by showing them love and building relationships with communities (50-51). These relationships enable evangelism through friendship. In this way, faith is also an attitude, in addition to an integral aspect of World Vision’s development strategies (50).

I encountered an example of this type of ‘life style evangelism’ during my fieldwork in Bangalore. I spoke with two children and their father, who got infected with HIV in the hospital when he had a blood transfusion. The daughter explained: ‘They [the doctors] didn't test it, whether the blood was [HIV] positive or negative’. After their father got infected, their mother soon became infected as well. During one of the mothers’ hospitalizations, World Vision came to the hospital for a visit and offered support. The family primarily received financial support (for medication and nutrition) and educational support for the children. They also go to summer camps offered by World Vision, where they play and learn ‘life skills’.

The children explained to me that they used to be Hindus prior to their introduction to World Vision, but that the family converted to Christianity after their father became seriously ill. World Vision prayed for their father and ‘only through prayer he came back to us’, the daughter explained. A World Vision staff member, who joined the conversation, stated: ‘They [the family] really enjoyed the benefits they received [from World Vision], and they are thankful to God. They have not converted from religion to religion, they have given their hearts to God. What we [World Vision] have contributed is less [...], but the heavenly blessings have directly come to them [from God].’⁴⁷

On the other hand, one could argue that World Vision is able to mobilize various religious groups within India *because* they choose to *not* speak like Christians towards non-Christian stakeholders. This could arguably be seen as a response to the charged relationship between the Hindu majority and (Christian) minorities in India, and/or to the dominance of secularism in international development discourse. After all, in secular

⁴⁷ Field notes 20-04-2016

frameworks, religious evidence is considered as ‘real’ evidence as it cannot be empirically verified. Moreover, religious narratives and realities tend to be marginalized or excluded. By downplaying their religious language, World Vision is arguably capable to cooperate with multiple stakeholders that they depend on.

Hence, the way in which World Vision presents itself to various actors across different levels is fluent rather than static. This results in multiple narratives in which World Vision utilizes different languages in order to adapt and/or navigates a way around certain challenges they face in different environments. In effect, the ways in which the secular and the religious are entangled in World Visions work can vary across various levels in global politics.

World Vision has claimed that they aim at overcoming the sharp boundaries that are constructed between the secular and the religious, and the way in which religion is continuously sidelined in secular environments. During an academic workshop in the Hague in June 2015, Christo Greyling, the Senior Director *Church and Faith Partnerships for Development* (WVI), emphasized that religion needs to become an integral part of mainstream development instead of being used as an instrument. During this workshop, but also during personal conversations through Skype, he stated that religious approaches should not necessarily replace secular approaches, but that both approaches should become default options within mainstream development discourse. Moreover, Greyling as well as other World Vision staff members have emphasized the importance of (equal) cooperation between secular and religious actors.

In order to establish such cooperation, organizations such as WVI claim that they should invest in ‘faith literacy’ among secular actors.⁴⁸ Moreover, WVI claims to bridge the secular-religious divide by using explicit religious programs that focus on faith leadership. But to what extent does introducing explicit religious programs challenge secular models, and the secular categories on which these models rely? In this next section I shall discuss and analyze one of this programs, namely the Channels of Hope Child Protection Program.

⁴⁸ ‘Faith literacy’ or religious literacy are terms that are used by World Vision to refer to ‘the knowledge of, and ability to understand, people’s faith or religion’. This includes those faiths and religions of people who do not adhere to an established or organized religion.

6.2 Explicit religious programs: solution or (alternative) secularism?

6.2.1 An introduction to Channels of Hope

The Channels of Hope (CoH) program was initially designed to assist churches in Southern Africa to respond to HIV and AIDS (Bartelink, Wilson & Haze 2016: 6). The Christian AIDS Bureau of Southern Africa (CABSA) developed the program in 2001. In 2004, WVI signed a license agreement with CABSA in order to implement the program on a global level (Bartelink, Wilson & Haze 2016: 6). Therefore, CoH is closely connected with WVI, and is influenced by its' approach to development. Nowadays, CoH has grown out into different programs: CoH HIV/AIDS, CoH Maternal and Newborn Child Health (MNCH), CoH Gender, and CoH Child Protection (CP).⁴⁹

A central element of the CoH programs is a so-called 'Theory of Change' model (ToC⁵⁰). The ToC exists out of four stages that are believed to be crucial in order to 'transform' local communities. The first stage concerns the *preparation* of the CoH program. WVI works in so-called Area Development Programs (ADP's), which are distinct geographical areas where WVI provides development aid together with local stakeholders (Brennan 2013). Firstly, WVI explores which problems exist within certain

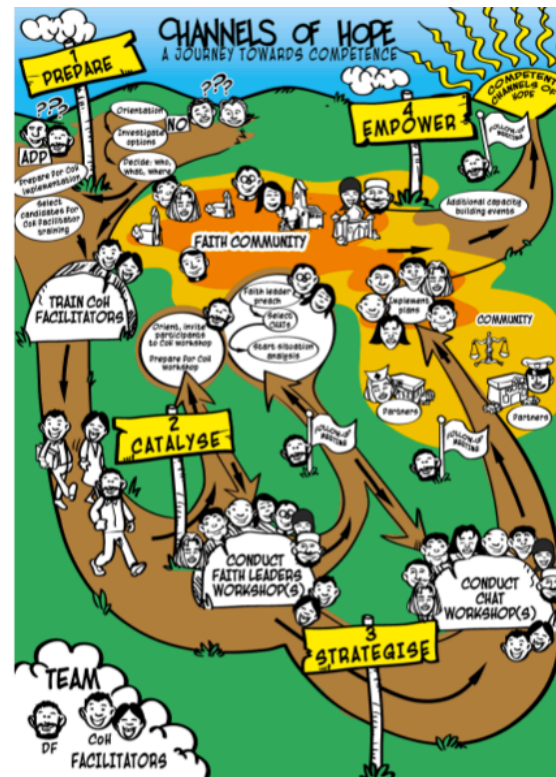


Figure 6: 'Channels of Hope: A journey towards competence' (Source: CoH Field Guide 2015: 2).

⁴⁹ In response to the Ebola outbreak in the west of Africa, WVI also developed a CoH Ebola program. This program was, contrary to the other programs, exclusively implemented in Africa.

⁵⁰ It is relevant to mention that the term 'transformation' resonates with both 'behavior change' (as a more technocratic term) and (particularly) Christian notions spiritual change (transforming faith, or for example being 'born again' as a Christian).

communities. Then, WVI investigates which options are available and which program is most suitable to implement in the community. Subsequently, WVI trains CoH facilitators, and plans workshops for the second stage of ToC, which entails *catalyzing* faith leaders.⁵¹

At the beginning of this second stage, faith leaders are invited to participate in CoH workshops. During these workshops, faith leaders are encouraged to participate in discussions on a certain issue (for example child protection). They are provided with legal and medical knowledge, and they are challenged by the WVI facilitators to critically reflect on their own behaviors and roles in the community with regard to specific issues. In addition, faith leaders learn to develop their own facilitation skills, and how to respond to issues in a faith-sensitive manner.

The second stage involves the establishment of so-called Congregational Hope Action Teams (CHAT's), as part of *strategizing* further actions. CHAT's consist of church members, and they are also invited to participate in similar workshops. During these workshops, church members are encouraged to make practical changes in their community. This leads to the fourth and last stage, which involves continuing support for congregations and ensuring that the 'linking and networking' continues through the *empowerment* of communities. This happens through the implementation of the CHAT's plans, as well as additional capacity building events.

6.2.2 CoH CP Discourse Analysis

6.2.2.1 Faith leaders as 'gatekeepers'

Partnerships with religious institutions and religious leaders are an integral part of WVI and CoH. According to CoH, engaging with 'faith communities', 'faith leaders' and 'community leaders' is key, as these agents 'play a crucial gate keeping role in the community' (Channels of Hope 2014)(see image 2). These 'gatekeepers' allow certain messages and approaches to be spread in the community, but also block them if they feel certain messages and approaches are opposing their faith and values (Channels of Hope 2014). By inviting these agents to cooperate with CoH, and inviting them to join

⁵¹ Following WVI, I prefer the term faith leaders rather than church leaders, considering that WVI nowadays implements CoH programs in Islamic countries and communities as well.

discussions on taboos and other issues that are faced in the community, CoH aims at increasing the ‘effectiveness’ of efforts made by WV and other NGO’s to ensure child wellbeing (see image 3) (CoH 2014). This echoes secular assumptions that faith leaders are either obstacles to progress or conveyors of development, either good or bad.

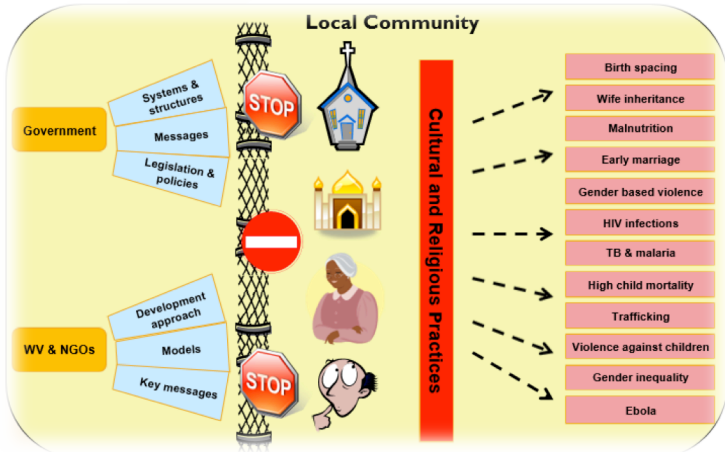


Figure 7 The scope of secular development approaches according to WVI

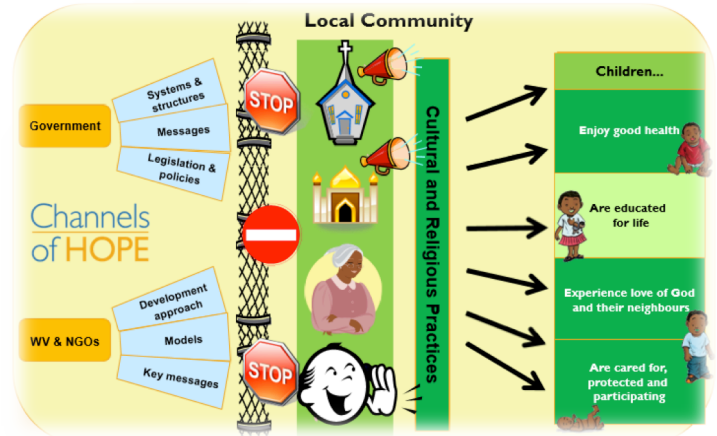


Figure 8 The scope of faith-based development approaches according to WVI

Most secularist development frameworks focus on material wellbeing and tend to ignore or marginalize alternative epistemologies and ontologies, which constitute other forms of (immaterial) wellbeing. WVI provides material aid as well, but explicit religious programs such as CoH also focus on development in terms of immaterial spiritual wellbeing and experiences. This particularly involves the linkage of the self to the social through connections to the spiritual (de Wet 2011; Bartelink, Wilson & Haze 2016). Social transformation and social engagement are key goals in this approach.

This can be clearly observed in WVI’s general mission statement as well, as WVI states it is the mission of its Christians ‘to promote human transformation’ through an ‘integrated holistic commitment’ to ‘transformational development that is community-based and sustainable’ (‘Our Mission Statement’, n.d.). Moreover, WVI states that ‘Partnerships with churches contribute to spiritual and social transformation’ (‘Our Mission Statement’, n.d.).

This spiritual and social transformation begins, according to the ToC, with the faith leaders of the community. Therefore, the ToC revolves around transforming the

mindset of faith leaders and their responses towards certain issues of the community prior to including other agents in societies. The CoH program thus reinforces an international standardized (foreign) top-down approach, similar to secular models of development. However, World Vision claims that this is not a process of coercing or imposing a certain mindset. They claim it rather provides faith leaders with a ‘safe space’ in which they are ‘challenged’ to reflect on their mindset, attitude and responses as authoritative figures in society (World Vision 2014: 4).

6.2.2.2 CoH CP and the CRC

WVI states that:

‘CoH CP is a program methodology that motivates and builds capacity in faith communities to address harmful traditional practices towards children, to support and advocate for children's rights, to become better child protectors, and to ultimately strengthen the local child protection system’
(World Vision 2013).

It becomes clear that the child is mainly imagined as a vulnerable and dependent agent. Child protection and support is key in the CoH CP program. In addition, it is implied that it builds capacity in faith communities to ‘advocate’ for children’s rights. In this way, the agency of advocating for children’s rights is given to a larger community, rather than the child as an individual. This is in contrast with the CRC, in which the child is given gradual agency to autonomous choices. Responsibilities are attributed to State Parties, parents and other legal guardians, but the CRC does not suggest that communities have a shared responsibility in protecting and advocating for their children.

The image of the child as a dependent agent can also be found in the CoH CP Workbook. When it comes to transformative justice, faith leaders are asked: ‘How active is our church in openly addressing things that are going wrong – especially when it comes to the wellbeing of children? Have we been ‘a voice of the voiceless’ – when children are abused, neglected or exploited (CoH CP Workbook: 6)? Suggesting that

children are voiceless and that faith leaders, families and communities need to advocate for children does not resemble statements made by World Vision (on the CRC) that I have mentioned earlier in the chapter.

According to CoH CP, children need ‘protection’, need to be ‘nurtured’, and need to be ‘cared for’ and ‘loved’ (CoH CP Workbook: 6). Children are considered ‘Our gift from God at birth’, and therefore need to be ‘honored’ and ‘celebrated’. The image of the child is therefore continuously constructed in relation to God, the family, the congregation and the community. This is in stark contrast with the CRC, in which little agency is attributed to larger communal groups. Moreover, the CRC completely ignores the agency that is given to God(s) and other spiritual agents in various (non-Western) contexts. This is relevant, because it seems to suggest that World Vision accounts for religious ontologies, while dominant international discourse on child protection does not.

When it comes to child protection, particularly with regard to the prevention of child abuse, only State Parties are called to take ‘all appropriate measures’ in the CRC. In the CoH CP discourse it becomes clear that WVI believes that such issues can only be prevented if communities – in which ‘harmful practices’ take place – are ‘transformed’. The CRC only mentions legislative, administrative, social and educational measures, whilst CoH CP mainly focuses on social and spiritual transformation.

In the CoH CP, faith leaders are a central element of comprehensive prevention, as they are considered to be the ‘gate keepers’ of the community. Again, the CRC mainly addresses the responsibilities of State Parties and parents, but neglects the potential influences of faith and local leaders, as well as faith institutions and communities on CP and CWB and, in doing so, the influence of local ontologies.

With regard to comprehensive prevention, CoH CP emphasizes the importance of ‘compassionate care and support’ in reaching out to those most vulnerable in the community. They envision development as a ‘journey’ of ‘transformation’, in which both spiritual and social aspects of human experiences are incorporated in order to holistically address issues with regard to CWB and CP. This includes inner reflections and transformations, as well as larger community transformation. International discourse largely ignores the importance of individual and communal forms of transformation that are needed in order for change and prevention to take place. Particularly, the importance

of spirituality and spiritual transformation is completely neglected in the CRC. In this sense, the CoH CP program challenges existing dominant assumptions in international discourse.

6.2.2.3 Caveats and pitfalls

However, in certain ways, World Vision also reaffirms secular assumptions. For example, World Vision utilizes value charged terms such as ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ attitudes of faith leaders which, again, resemble secularist distinctions between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ religion. For example, the CoH CP Workbook reads ‘We also realize that not everybody who quotes scriptures does that responsibly’ [...]. The question would be: Do we in our church use the Bible in a relevant and responsible way [...]? Do we use the Bible for our own agenda or do we obey the Word of God to follow God’s agenda? (CoH CP Workbook: 5). Again, this raises the question to what extent World Vision is (consciously) complying with the overarching secularist discourse that dominates global politics.

There is however a difference between this discourse and secular discourses. Secular discourses tend to view religion as either good or bad, hence ascribing religion some form of agency. In CoH CP discourse, agency is given to faith leaders who can either act or respond in a way that influences child wellbeing in a positive or negative way. Whilst secular agents might want to exclude those agents that are considered as promoting ‘bad religion’, WVI focuses on faith leaders in society as crucial, and sees opportunities to transform people’s mindsets rather than excluding such agents entirely. One could argue ontological injustice may seem to be less of a risk in this type of discourse. The fact that World Vision has also developed a CoH model for Islamic faith leaders would strengthen this argument further.

Yet, one should realize that WVI has an ambivalent relationship with communities. I have mentioned several times that they are both partners and donors to communities they serve. FBOs such as WVI are powerful players due to their status and (financial) resources. Because when one speaks of ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ behavior, the questions ‘To who is something positive or negative’ and ‘Who has the power to

determine what positive and negative behavior is?’ and ‘according to what standard?’ quickly rise.

By qualifying certain behavior as ‘positive’ or ‘negative’, and by explicitly referring to their mission as ‘bearing witness to the good news of the Kingdom of God’, WVI frames itself as a knowing agent that local communities *need* in order to develop. Therefore, it neglects local epistemologies. In effect, WVI partially reinforces a certain dependency relationship between those in need of aid and the organization. Moreover, Channels of Hope differentiates between the Gospel, which is perceived as all encompassing and true, from religion that is perceived as blurred by ‘(‘harmful’) ‘cultural practices and ‘own agendas’ of other actors.

The distinction that World Vision seems to make between religion and culture is another noteworthy example. Keane (2007) has argued that the West is characterized by a long tendency of identifying culture with localities, while Christianity– and I argue more recently secularism – is perceived as a universal, overarching truth, unbounded to spatial and temporal contingencies (84). He also argues that this separation between religion and culture eventually served as a justification for colonial interventions. In the aftermath of the colonial era, the particular protestant Christian construction of religion versus culture is quite relevant.

CoH refers to ‘cultural and traditional harmful practices’, which are juxtaposed against the ‘word of God’ and ‘true’ religion. The notion of ‘cultural harmful practices’ or ‘cultural harmful behavior’ has been problematized and criticized, particularly by feminist and decolonial scholars. Longman and Bradley (2015) argue that the notion of cultural harmful practices is ‘undergirded by a particular western secular-liberal notion of human agency and subjectivity’ (11). Interestingly, whenever policymakers and other stakeholders speak of cultural harmful practices, this rarely seems to concern Euro-American cultural practices. On the contrary, Narayan (1997) argues the Third World is perceived as ‘devoid of agency and subjectivity’, and is in this sense constructed as a mirror image of the Western self as being culturally superior (she particularly mentions the construction of the ‘Third World woman’ here).

This also relates to Blaser’s argument that modern culture is perceived as closest to reality, and therefore other cultures are perceived as clouded by ‘backwards’

‘traditional’ practices. Ultimately, this reinforces a linear hierarchy, which then justifies First World intervention in the Third World. With regard to colonial history, this paradigm is at least problematic, and contributes to what Ager & Ager (2011) and other decolonial scholars have referred to as neo-colonialism, or coloniality.

Furthermore, Channels of Hope promotes a particular kind of religion, a ‘true’ religion that can be delineated and articulated. The idea that religion is something that can be clearly identified is a secularist assumption. Hence, Channels of Hope reinforces secularist ontology, in which little acknowledgement is given to those who do not conform to this ontology. During the workshops I also experienced that Christianity was talked about as something that can be clearly identified, which I found compelling given the complex context of India with its blurred and multi-dynamic relationships between different religious groups. In addition, various faith leaders came from different denominational backgrounds, due to which they arguable might have various understandings of Christianity in itself. These examples demonstrate caveats and pitfalls of the CoH CP discourse, and also demonstrate how CoH CP partially falls back on secularist assumptions.

6.3 Observations and experiences in Bangalore

Between the 19th and the 21st of April 2016, I visited one of the CoH CP workshops for faith leaders in Bangalore India. During this workshop, eighteen faith leaders were present, of which four women and fourteen men. All women came together with their husbands, who were all faith leaders as well. All faith leaders identified as Christian, although the denominations they belonged to differed.⁵² First, I briefly touch upon the CoH CP program as internationally planned and strategized by World Vision. Subsequently, I will reflect on a number of personal observations and experiences during the workshop in Bangalore. In both sections I also reflect on how these issues relate to larger discursive practices.

⁵² In the post-workshop questionnaire, some church leaders identified as Baptist, some as Evangelical, and some as Pentecostal. One faith leader mentioned he led an interdenominational church.

6.3.1 The CoH CP program

Four elements are crucial during Channels of Hope programs: touching the heart, touching the mind, touching the hand, and touching the spirit (Bartelink, Wilson & Haze 2016: 12). The formulation of these goals is noteworthy, as it challenges Kantian-Habermasian body/mind dualism, which is an important philosophical tradition within Western secularism. I draw from Mavelli and Wilson (2016), who argue that it has been the dichotomization of body and mind that allows secular logic to reduce religion to a set of cognitive choices. Ultimately, this limited perception of religion serves as an instrument that leaves the political authority of secular logic ‘fundamentally unchallenged’ (Mavelli & Wilson 2016: 2). By integrating body and mind within a holistic framework, CoH programs thus challenge idea that other experiences, exercises, rituals or knowledge – which in secular thought would be classified as irrational – merely symbolize or represent beliefs.

The CoH CP program builds on a foundation of the following important inter-relational objectives:

1. Self- reflection (touching the mind)

Initially, after an icebreaker, the faith leaders are asked to reflect on their position with regard to CP. This includes discussion of hypothetical scenarios and an assignment in which faith leaders should mark whether or not they agree or disagree with certain statements regarding CP. Afterwards, faith leaders are invited to discuss these in two groups opposing each other in order to discuss their stances (see photo 1).

In Bangalore, faith leaders responses were most divergent with regard to the following topics: whether or not children sometimes need a good beating in order to discipline them, whether or not arranged marriages can be a form of abuse, whether or not sexual abuse in the church should be publically addressed,



Photo 1 The Agree/Disagree exercise during a CoH CP workshop in Bangalore, India

whether or not girls that wear indecent clothes are to blame for rape, and whether or not child rights should not be over-emphasized, because they can undermine the authority of parents

Some of the faith leaders experienced this part of the workshop as most challenging, particularly listening and understanding to views that differed from their own. One of the faith leaders mentioned that ‘it was very challenging to understand each mindset’.⁵³ World Vision facilitators were facilitating the discussion, but did not determine which answer (agree/disagree) was the right one according to them. However, the fact that certain statements are selected means that they are perceived as (at least) debatable or controversial. Moreover, most of the statements are related to matters that are included are related to the rights and protection of the child that are manifested in the CRC. Since an overview of the CRC is also included in the CoH CP workbook, certain answers are more implicitly confirmed and promoted in the CoH CP compared to others.

While World Vision may not explicitly tell faith leaders what to think, subtle language and messages do have an influence on the perceptions and thoughts of the participants. One example of this is a faith leader who agreed with the statement ‘children sometimes need a good beating in order to discipline them’, stated in his post-workshop questionnaire: ‘We can say, parents shouldn’t punish them [the children], but discipline them.’ This raises the question whether or not this merely is an exercise of self-reflection, or whether it is utilized to implicitly promote World Vision’s vision on child protection.

2. Deeper knowledge (touching the mind, heart and spirit)

Subsequently, WVI shares practical knowledge on CP with the participants (mainly in the form of statistics). Furthermore, faith leaders are invited to take part in a balloon game role-play in which various faith leaders take up several roles of people in the community and are later on asked to reflect on these roles.⁵⁴



Photo 2 Faith leaders playing the balloon game in Bangalore, India

⁵³ Field notes 20-04-2016.

⁵⁴ One group represents vulnerable children. They have balloons tied to their ankles. Another group represents perpetrators that threaten CP in the community. They are supposed to try to pop the balloons of the ‘children’. Another group represents those who take care of vulnerable children in the community. They

In another balloon game, the balloons represent vulnerable children in the community. The faith leaders should keep them in the air, but are not allowed to touch the same balloon twice in a row. In this way, faith leaders become aware that they should work together as a community to protect children (see photo 2).

The goal of this game is to make clear to the faith leaders that there always perpetrators who try to hurt children. It also makes clear that people have the choice to protect the children or be a bystander. To a certain extent, this promotes the idea that the world exists out of good and bad people, and that bystanders should chose to be either completely good or completely bad. This is problematic to a certain extent, as those who harm children may not do this consciously, or may have other external (uncontrollable) reasons that influence their behavior. Similarly, one female faith leader wrote in her post-workshop questionnaire that she wanted use the workshop to teach on ‘good’ and ‘bad’ parenting and ‘good’ and ‘bad’ children in the church. It raises the question to what extent such sharp binaries promote understanding and social cohesion within the community.

Overall, the games were experienced as fun and educational and, according to participating faith leaders, easy to use in the church and community as well. During the workshops in Bangalore, church leaders were also requested to find a stone outside and to visualize it as one of the vulnerable children in the community. They were also invited to pray for the vulnerable children in their society.

3. Facing realities (touching the mind, touching the heart)

During this stage, faith leaders are invited to create a Challenge Tree and a Celebration Tree with hand written post-it notes. The leaves of the Challenge Tree are filled with challenges that the community faces with regard to CP. The roots are filled with what faith leaders believe to be the root causes of these challenges (see photo 3 and 4). The leaves of the Celebration Tree are filled with existing positive aspects regarding CP in the

try to obstruct the perpetrators in popping the balloons. The last group represent the bystanders. They are asked to observe.

community. The roots are filled with what the faith leaders perceive to be the root causes of these positive aspects (see photo 5 and 6).

Unfortunately, not all post-it notes were written in English. The discussion following the creations of the trees was also not in English and therefore it is challenging to analyze this part of the workshop. It raises the question what it means to evaluate your own community in terms of what is either harmful or good. Moreover, by asking participants to visualize their community in terms of ‘good fruits’ and ‘bad fruits’ again reaffirms a sharp binary that automatically assumes that there is behavior is either good or harmful

Subsequently, faith leaders were encouraged to address the harmful issues through ‘good’ and ‘accountable’ leadership. Again, this raises the question what ‘good’ leadership is. To me, it seemed that the good leadership promoted and encouraged by World Vision is inextricably tied to what World Vision perceives as ‘good behavior’ of faith leaders. As argued earlier on in this chapter, this distinction of ‘good’ behavior from ‘bad’ behavior of faith leaders promotes a certain perception of religion in itself that relies on secular assumptions. Moreover, the fact that only Christian faith leaders were invited to the CoH CP workshop, and that Christian faith leaders in India are encouraged to show ‘accountable’ leadership (which again relies on certain limiting assumptions about religion) in their communities in order to account for – what is qualified as – ‘bad’ or ‘harmful’ behavior is arguably problematic, as it echoes the previously mentioned colonial separation between ‘universal’ Christian faith and ‘backward’ local cultures.

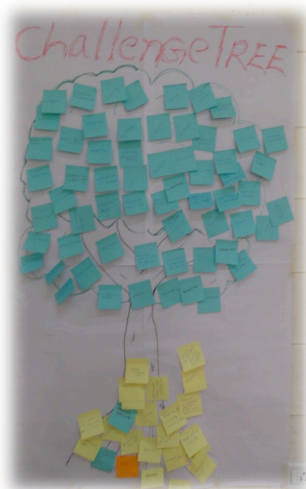


Photo 3 Example of a Challenge Tree



Photo 4 Example of a Celebration Tree

4. Discussing harmful cultural practices (touching the mind, touching the spirit, touching the hand)

In this stage, harmful cultural/traditional practices are discussed that influence child wellbeing (CWB) in the community. In the CoH CP Workbook there is a strong focus on child abuse (physical, emotional and sexual). During this stage, various Biblical verses are discussed to reflect on how faith leaders can incorporate the Bible in a ‘relevant and responsible’ way in order to ‘understand and acknowledge vulnerabilities’ through ‘accountable leadership’ (CoH CP Workbook: 5). I have already argued that the term ‘harmful cultural/traditional practices’ is problematic. Unfortunately, due to time constraints and language barriers, I have no concrete examples from the workshop in Bangalore here.

5. A Faith Response: Redeeming and Restoring (touching the heart, touching the spirit)

During this part of the workshop, faith leaders are asked to write down ‘Healing Memories’ of their own childhood. This includes both experiences of hurt and joy. Subsequently faith leaders are asked to forgive and bless the people who have hurt them or brought them joy. Faith leaders are also asked to write down ideas they have with regard to seven areas of competence that form the basis of CoH CP.⁵⁵ The discourse that World Vision utilizes in these competences is inherently Christian (considering, for example, the terms ‘redeeming’ and ‘transformative justice’).

⁵⁵ 1) Relevant and responsible use of the Bible; 2) Understanding and acknowledging vulnerabilities 3) Accountable leadership; 4) Meaningful community interaction; 5) Transformative justice; 6) Compassionate care and support; 7) Comprehensive prevention. All seven competences have their own Christian ‘Guiding Principles’ that reflect the Christian ‘calling’, ‘identity’, ‘responsibility’, ‘duties’, ‘gifts’, ‘compassion’ and ‘discipleship’. In this way, faith is an integral part of all competences.

6. Discussing ‘Tough Stuff’ (touching the mind)

During this stage, WVI facilitators invite the faith leaders to critically think about ‘tough stuff’, which includes taboos and difficult topics with regard to CP and CWB. By explicitly addressing taboos in society, World Vision implicitly suggests that society should be freed from taboos. This again reinforces the idea that World Vision’s agenda plays a crucial role in how faith leaders *should* think.

7. Comprehensive prevention (touching the mind, touching the spirit, touching the hand)

Faith leaders are invited to discuss the differences between disciplining and punishing a child. Furthermore, faith leaders are invited to become part of so-called ‘Circles of Care’, in order to further spread the knowledge into the community, and to explore the circles of influence that they can initiate.

8. Towards a competent CoH community (touching the spirit, touching the hand)

The central question in this stage is ‘What is a CP competent faith community?’ Faith leaders reflect on the dreams they have with regard to CWB and CP, the reality in their community and the journey to transform their congregation and their community. The term ‘transformation’ is used in terms of spiritual and social transformation, which are clearly linked to each other in the CoH CP workbook (CoH CP). It is emphasized that competence does not happen over night, but that competence is a journey.

9. The Way Forward (touching the hand, touching the spirit)

WVI emphasizes that the CoH ‘journey’ is a spiritual one in which faith leaders are called by God to show responsible leadership with regard to CWB. Faith leaders are invited to share their personal reflections and plans for the future. WVI facilitators share

the following stages of the CoH process and plan individual congregational responses with the faith leaders.

It should be noted that every workshop day starts with a ‘Biblical Reflection’, which can include singing and praying. Each day also starts and ends with so-called ‘love notes’ and prayers. In this way, faith is an inherent part of the CoH CP experience. In this sense, the CoH CP differs from secular development models. At the same time, as I have already noted, CoH CP promotes a certain type of religion that is based on a certain understanding of Christianity (one that is quite textual) Taking into account that India is a multi-diverse country with a plethora of forms of lived religion (that all come with messy and fuzzy boundaries), the CoH CP does not seem to be sensitive towards other understandings of religion, nor does it promote the integration of other understandings in its development discourse.

6.3.2 Personal reflections on the workshop

A CoH CP workshop usually takes three to four days, and thus a strict timeframe is set for each activity. While this might be common and perceived as productive or pragmatic in many parts of the West, this certainly was not the case in Bangalore. During the first day of the workshop only five couples and two single pastors showed up. Around 14:50 pm, the facilitators decided to start a different program that was referred to as ‘Family Celebration’.

This is not part of the CoH CP program, but the facilitators did not have a choice as they were otherwise forced to tell the same story twice. One of them told me: ‘We do not want to disappoint the families that have come, and [we] also want to ensure that they are staying for the upcoming days.’⁵⁶ In effect, the three-day workshop had to be done in two days, due to which the facilitators were unable to cover the entire program.

Language barriers were a common challenge during the workshop. Some of the pastors did not speak English, but only Kannada (a language spoken in Karnataka) or

⁵⁶ Field notes 19-04-2016.

Tamil (the official language of Tamil Nadu). Only one staff member of WV spoke Tamil. Another pastor spoke both Tamil and English and assisted in translating to his colleagues. During the first day the staff and participants mostly communicated in Tamil and Kannada, which made it challenging for me to understand what was going on.

On the other days, the facilitators shifted between Tamil, Kannada and English during different parts of the workshop. At times it seemed participants were confused, or did not completely comprehend what was being said. Moreover, the workbook that they received is solely written in English, includes development jargon (such as the terms ‘competences’, ‘accountable leadership’, ‘transformative justice’) and thus demands a high level of comprehension.

The level of English demonstrated by the participants in the interviews, and in the post-workshop questionnaires makes me question if the high level of English utilized during the CoH CP workshop and in the workbook was understandable to all participants. If faith leaders (of which almost all finished some form of higher education) find it challenging to grasp all knowledge that is shared, it also raises the question whether the community members, who might not have had any education at all, will understand this knowledge. Moreover, it occurred to me that the terms that faith leaders used were more simplified compared to the language of World Vision. For example, a few faith leaders explicitly used the term ‘child protection’ in their questionnaires. Most of them used the terms ‘children’s issues’, ‘things about the child/children’, or other simplified terms.

Both challenges with regard to timekeeping and language barriers demonstrate that an internationalized, standardized static approach might not be the most effective way to engage with a community compared to when methodologies and language are more culturally sensitive and contextually appropriate. Furthermore, since the content of the workshop is already internationally determined en large, it does not necessarily reflect the needs, perspectives and/or existing knowledge systems of the community wherein the program is implemented.

At the same time, WVI does value input from local faith leaders and the communities during the CoH CP discourse shows space for faith leaders to share their ideas, plans and personal reflections. The CHAT’s that are established in a later stage also share their knowledge about problems in the community and are encouraged to find

ways to solve problems that are faith and culturally sensitive. However, in my experience it tends to happen within a pre-determined framework with pre-set questions and debates. Hence, I argue that World Vision still has a lot to gain with regard to integrating existing knowledge systems of local communities.

I was told that World Vision tends to stay in ADPs for 10-15 years, and subsequently pulls out (completely). After that, no follow-ups take place. World Vision's mechanic top-down approach (defining a mission, setting goals, implementing a program, evaluating the program) thus takes place within a pre-determined timeframe. I wonder to what extent such a static demarcation is effective. In line with van Wensveen (2011), I argue that development is not something static, but a complex process with ups and downs. For example, certain changes can take generations to become normalized patterns.

Development takes place in an 'organic paradigm' as organizations have to deal with human beings and their social environments that form complex systems, and these cannot be fully predicted or manipulated (van Wensveen 2011: 90). Van Wensveen compares organic development aid to how a park ranger fosters an ecosystem, without being able to control its dynamic processes (90).

Another question that should be raised in this context is to what extent the CoH CP model is sustainable once World Vision pulls out. As I have mentioned earlier, the CoH CP program relies on expensive workshops that are given at the most beautiful and expensive locations outside of the communities. World Vision does not only pay for the participants stay, but also for the materials, food, and transportation. The question remains if communities are capable of running the CoH CP by themselves after World Vision has left, particularly when they are under the impression that this is the only way in which a CoH CP program can take place.

6.4 Conclusion

World Vision International is a powerful player in the field of development aid and relief services. Whilst they continue to express their religious foundation, as well as their religious motivation for providing aid, World Vision is part of a larger framework that is

dominated by secularism. Both on an international level, as well as on a national level in India, World Vision continuously needs to position itself in order to achieve its goals. In doing so, World Vision produces various narratives and uses different languages for different actors.

On the international level they succumb to secularist frameworks by downplaying their religious identity, as well as emphasizing their (tangible) material and social aid. On a national level in India, World Vision is also forced to downplay their religious identity due to ongoing tensions between various religious communities as a result of the dominance of a Hindu traditionalist model of secularism, which has resulted in the rise of Hindu nationalism and the marginalization of religious minorities.

World Vision has introduced explicit religious programs, which they argue allows for more faith-inclusive aid. Prominent World Vision staff members have even claimed that they aspire to subvert the dominance of secularist frameworks and categories, so that faith-based approaches can become a more accepted part of mainstream development. However, my analysis shows that, even though the Channels of Hope discourse does indeed show various ways of faith integration, it falls back on secularist assumptions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ religion.

Moreover, it exclusively promotes a certain kind of Western Christian faith and constructs religion as if it is a clearly identifiable demarcated phenomenon, which is a part of secularist ontology. Therefore, I argue that regarding the Channels of Hope program, while World Vision may have sincere intentions to move beyond secularist categories and frameworks they have not escaped its web. Thus, even explicit religious approaches are influenced by the varieties of secularism that continue to dominate development discourses, both on an international and national level.

7. Conclusion

I started out this thesis by addressing the ‘renewed’ interest of secular development actors in religion. I pointed out that, while their attempts to reengage with religion might seem to represent a departure towards more inclusive forms of development aid, these attempts are still permeated by a secularist bias that continues to reaffirm modern secular ontology and, in effect, Western hegemony in global development politics. I have argued that secularism is not a cloud of inevitability. Rather, I have proposed that we should acknowledge the limitations and vulnerabilities of existing varieties of secularism, so that we can create a space to acknowledge and explore alternative understandings in order to make development aid more inclusive in the future.

This requires studying how varieties of secularism affect development practices across various levels and actors in global development. I have adopted this as the central research question of my thesis, taking child protection and child wellbeing as my case study. In my theoretical chapter I have first explored how varieties of secularism relate to the field of humanitarianism, and I have argued why I find them problematic. I have shown that secularism is linked to processes of modernization, development and progress, which reaffirms a linear perception of development and allows secularists to make normative claims on the neutrality and universality of secularism.

I have deconstructed these claims by accounting for the existence of multiple ways in which the secular-religious nexus is perceived worldwide. I have argued that the way in which the categories are constructed as a dichotomy is solely based on European experience with Judeo-Christianity. Therefore these categories are limited and not universally applicable. Moreover, I have deconstructed the perceived mutually inclusive relationship between secularism and modernity, by drawing from Eisenstadt’s notion of multiple modernities.

I have also argued in line with Wilson (2017) that secularism currently continues to constitute epistemological and ontological injustice. Drawing from Blaser (2013), I have demonstrated that modern secular ontology only allows for the acknowledgement of one reality ‘out there’ and attributes a privileged position to modern secular culture, as it is perceived as being closest to Culture (with a capital C), and hence is not clouded by culture (with a lower case c) like other non-modern non-secular cultures. In effect,

modern secular culture takes its own ontological status for granted, which allows for the marginalization and exclusion of alternative voices, ideas, structures, epistemologies and the possibility of multiple ontologies.

I have argued this is problematic, particularly in the context of developing nations, in which god(s), deities, angels, spirits, ancestors and other spiritual beings are often considered as real agents with real power to influence people's lives and choices (Wilson 2017) Moreover, in these societies religion and/or spirituality tend to be integrated in all aspects of life, people's identities, knowledge systems and worldings (van Wensveen 2011). Therefore, I have argued this should be taken into consideration, if we truly wish to make development more inclusive.

Subsequently, I have focused on how varieties of secularism affect development practices on child protection across three different levels. Through Critical Discourse Analysis and a Complex Systems Approach I have first analyzed which secular power dynamics and discourses inform dominant international discourse on child wellbeing and child protection. I have demonstrated that the claimed universality of the Convention of the Rights of the Child is rather a veil that conceals how hegemonic values, epistemology and ontology are prioritized over alternative understandings in international development discourse.

I have elaborately described the various power interplays and power dynamics between various representatives during the CRC drafting, during which alternative voices, ideas, structures, knowledge systems, ontologies and images of childhood were marginalized, downplayed or simply excluded, particularly when they risk threatening or challenging hegemonic modern secular values and images of the child. In this way, I have demonstrated how secularism contributes to epistemological and ontological injustice in dominant international development discourse. This is concerning, particularly when those countries that presumably need development aid with regard to child protection and child wellbeing do not share the same conceptualizations of childhood, nor have the same rigid binary constructions between the secular and the religious in their epistemologies and ontologies, which ultimately affect how actors view the issue of child protection and child wellbeing.

In the second analytical chapter I analyzed which secular power dynamics and discourses inform India's national discourse on child wellbeing and child protection. I have firstly elaborated on which images of the child and childrearing exist in India. I have demonstrated that, whereas the CRC imagines the child as an individual agent with gradual rationality and rights, in India the child is constructed in relation to his/her larger environment. This does not merely include the nuclear family and other legal guardians like in the CRC, but also the larger extended family, kinship, community or caste.

The relationship between Indian children and their parents tend to be symbiotic, and children are often considered an investment for the parents' old age. Moreover, I have shown that religiosity and spirituality are deeply enrooted in all segments of Indian society. In effect, religious and spiritual resources are also embedded in images of childhood and childrearing practices. This shows the limitations of dominant secularist discourse, which does not account for these factors.

After describing the challenges that India faces regarding child protection, of which the low sex-ratio, son preference and female infanticide are key factors, I moved on to analyze how India positions itself on an international level. I have demonstrated that, unlike other non-Western nation-states, India seemed to not have raised large concerns with the content of the CRC (only regarding the article on child labor). I have described India's Non-Alignment approach to foreign politics, which implies that India attempts to get along with everyone and avoids becoming part of powerful coalitions. I have also shown that India increasingly aimed at becoming a powerful player in international politics, which also affected India's participation in conventions and treaties on human rights – including child protection.

Subsequently, I have shown that India's post-colonial governance has been marked by two varieties of secularism. Initially, India embraced secularism in order to keep equidistance between the state and religious groups. I have argued that India's post-colonial modern secular governance was inspired by Western ideas about equality, modernization, and rationality. An important aspect of this new form of governance was equality for all and the aim to overcome religious differences. To a certain extent, this is not surprising, considering that India inherited a secular state apparatus from the British colonialists. In this apparatus, clear distinctions between the public and private domain,

as well as the distinction between various religions were already made (which didn't exist this rigorously in pre-colonial India).

I have argued that, rather than a solution to religious difference, Indian secularism has been a force in the creation of the marginalization of religious minorities, as it has allowed for the majoritarian religion to make normative claims on India's national identity. In this Hindu traditionalist model of secularism, Hinduism became equated to secularism, while other religious groups were relegated to the private domain with their own personal laws. The frictions between these personal laws and India's civil law have only strengthened the tensions between various religious groups. Moreover, the dominance of Hinduism has, according to some scholars, resulted in the Hinduization of society. I have argued that this form of secularism has crucial ramifications on governmental development policies on child protection. The fact that the Christian and Muslim Dalits are not recognized as SC's and ST's, and thus miss out on financial aid from the government is a clear example that demonstrates the marginalization of minority groups.

To a certain extent, India's secularism resembles Western models of secularism, in the sense that the secular state is involved in how religion and religious life are conceptualized, configured and controlled. In both cases, religion is considered as something clearly identifiable, and this makes Indian secularism also adhere to secular ontology. Mahmood has argued that in this sense, post-colonial states remain subjugated to a certain form of Western domination.

Moreover, I have showed that India's social and economic development approaches have been highly secular since independence. In this paradigm, religion and religious organizations were not expected to play a role in development. Unlike Western policies, which attempt to reengage with religion, India's governments seem to completely ignore religious and spiritual resources, epistemologies and ontologies in their development agenda. I have argued this is problematic, particularly considering that spirituality and religiosity is deeply enrooted in Indian societies, also with regard to conceptualizations of childhood and child rearing. By making aid more inclusive, by developing cultural-sensitive and faith-sensitive approaches I argued that this can

potentially assist India to overcome the challenges it faces with regard to child protection and child wellbeing.

During the 1990's India's national focus on economic development and the privatization of the economy opened up a space for (foreign) NGOs and FBOs to become important actors in India's development sector. However, due to power struggles over maintaining the majority and religio-communal and religio-political tensions, as well as India's experience with colonial missionaries means that India is highly suspicious of (particularly foreign) Christian development organizations.

In the last chapter I have focused on how varieties of secularism also influence actors on a transnational level. By taking World Vision International as a case study, I first explored how previously mentioned varieties of secularism on the international and national level influence World Vision's identity and discourse as a faith-based organization. World Vision is an organization that has a deep religious foundation and has explicit religious motivations for providing aid.

However, I have demonstrated that this religious identity at times needs to be downplayed when World Vision is navigating through frameworks that are dominated by secularism. On an international level, World Vision succumbs to secularist frameworks in order to achieve its own goals. I have demonstrated that the way in which World Vision relates to the CRC is a clear example of that. On a national level in India, World Vision has to deal with the sensitivities around foreign Christian aid assistance. Therefore, they also have to downplay their religious identity, and they have developed multiple narratives in which different language is used towards various actors (the government, the Hindu donors, Christian communities, etcetera).

At the same time, World Vision has advocated for counterpoising the dominance of secularism in global development politics. Through the introduction of explicit religious programs, such as the Channels of Hope program, World Vision aspires to subvert the dominance of secularism in order for faith and religion to become more integrated in mainstream development discourse. As I also advocate for exploring alternative understandings of development and development practices in order to make development more inclusive, I have explored to what extent introducing explicit religious programs challenge secular models and categories on which these models rely.

I have discovered that the Channels of Hope Child Protection as an explicit religious approach does integrate religion as part of a more holistic approach to development. To a certain extent, it therefore challenges existing dominant discourses. However, I have also revealed that the Channels of Hope discourse continues to rely on secular distinctions between good and bad religion. Moreover, CoH CP promotes a certain type of religion, which supposedly can be clearly distinguished and demarcated from other aspects of life, and from other religions, which are perceived as ‘blurred’ by cultural practices. Therefore, CoH CP falls back on secularist assumptions and continues to reaffirm secular ontology.

I am aware of the paradoxical relationship World Vision has with secular environments. On the one hand, World Vision aims at challenging dominant structures and I am convinced they have sincere intentions to move beyond secularist categories and frameworks, in order to position and identify themselves in the way they aspire to. On the other hand, they cannot simply escape the frameworks that they are embedded in, nor the relationships with other actors that it depends on. In effect, World Vision needs to account for these environments if they wish to achieve their own set goals. Thus, I have concluded that even explicit religious approaches are influenced by the varieties of secularism that continue to dominate development discourses, both on an international and national level.

Even though I have shown the limitations and vulnerabilities of secular values, frameworks, categories, epistemologies and ontology, and the need for more inclusive development, various questions remain: How can we conceptualize development and think of development approaches without falling back on secularist assumptions? How can we develop more religious-sensitive development models within frameworks that are dominated by secularism? How and why do faith and spirituality matter to people in developing nations? How is spiritual wellbeing linked to social wellbeing and social transformation? How can we convince secular actors of the importance of more inclusive aid? How can we account for multiple ontologies in global development politics without falling back on cultural relativism? How do actors conceptualize and enact development/progress on a grassroots level? Could grassroots approaches potentially challenge hegemonic models?

In conclusion, I argue that it will remain difficult to escape the web of secularism as long as it continues to dominate global development politics. Nevertheless I strongly believe that if we wish to make development aid more inclusive, we should continue our search to critique the ontological injustice that is constituted by the dominance of secularism, and how this ontological injustice affects conceptualizations of development and its practices. Moreover, we should continue our search for alternative understandings, conceptualizations and practices of development that are more inclusive and challenge ontological injustice.

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9. Appendices

Appendix 1: List of research themes of my semi-structured interviews

1. The relationship between the participants and World Vision India (from the perspective of both World Vision staff members and the participants)
2. What distinguishes World Vision India from other organizations (from the perspective of both World Vision staff members and the participants)?
3. The relationship between the secular and the religious in India/the community (from the perspective of both World Vision India staff members and the participants)
4. The issue of child protection (which challenges do the participants face in their community, as well as observing how they frame ‘children’ and ‘protection’)
5. The participants experience during and after the workshop (what are ‘new’ insights, how are they going to share their insights with others/use insights in the community?)
6. What does ‘development’ mean to World Vision India and the participants?

Appendix 2: List of India’s participation in international treaties, conventions and declarations with regard to child wellbeing and child protection

1985 UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (Beijing)

1989 The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

1990 The World Conference on Education for All

1990 World Fit for Children Declaration

1990 World Summit for Children

1990 UN Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty

- 1990 UN Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency (Riyadh Guidelines)
- 1993 The Hague Convention on Protection of Children & Cooperation in respect of Inter-country Adoption
- 2002 Optional Protocol CRC on the involvement of children in armed conflict
- 2005 Optional Protocol CRC on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography
- 2001 SAARC Decade on the Rights of the Child (2001-2010)
- 2002 SAARC Convention on Prevention and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution
- 2002 SAARC Convention on Regional Arrangements for the Protection and Welfare of Children

Appendix 3: The full text of Article 32 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

Article 32

- ‘1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.
2. States Parties shall take legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to ensure the implementation of the present article. To this end, and having regard to the relevant provisions of other international instruments, States Parties shall in particular:
- (a) Provide for a minimum age or minimum ages for admission to employment;
 - (b) Provide for appropriate regulation of the hours and conditions of employment;
 - (c) Provide for appropriate penalties or other sanctions to ensure the effective enforcement of the present article’ (The United Nations 1989).

Appendix 4: List of national policies and acts on CWB and CP adopted by the Government of India

1961	Dowry Prohibition Act
1974	National Policy for Children
1975	Integrated Child Development Services Scheme
1983	National Health Policy
1986	National Policy on Education
1987	National policy on Child Labor
1991-2000	National Plan for SAARC Decade of the Girl Child
1993	National Nutrition Policy
1994	Pre-conception and Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act
1996	Communication Strategy for Child Development
1996	Reproductive and Child Health Policy
2000	National Population Policy
2001	National Policy for the Empowerment of Women
2005	The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005
2005	National Commission for Protection of Children Rights
2006	Integrated Child Protection Scheme
2010	Right to Education Act
2012	The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act
2013	National Policy for Children
2014	Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Bill

