



Beyond Secularity: Neutral Zones and How to Find them in Premodern Sources

International Workshop at the Centre for Advanced Studies
"Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities", Leipzig University

11–12 May 2023

Convenors: Brian A. Catlos (University of Colorado Boulder), Christoph Kleine (KFG "Multiple Secularities"), and Monika Wohlrab-Sahr (KFG "Multiple Secularities")

Approach

The concept of Multiple Secularities is based on the assumption that the distinction between the religious and the non-religious is a highly relevant epistemic structure in global modernity, which nevertheless manifests itself in a diverse range of local variants. We call this binary mode of distinction "secularity". On closer inspection, however, it also becomes apparent that secularity as a mode of distinction does not play the same role in all contexts of interaction and communication.

In any case, the study of pre-modern sources of diverse provenance suggests that even before the entry into global modernity, binary distinctions between two spheres of social action, analogous to the distinction "religion/non-religion", can be observed in many contexts of interaction. However, some historical sources suggest that there were also contexts in which no distinction was made between 'religious' and 'mundane', nor did affiliation to a religiously defined group play a role. This comes into clearest relief when members of formally distinct religious communities interacted with each other, whether directly and in person, or at a geographic or temporal distance, through texts.

In other cases, certain practices were – after often intense discussions – deliberately left outside of religious regulation and defined as matters that don't concern the interests of the dominant religious group (adiaphora = middle things). Here, we can observe what may be described as "neutral zones" – that is contexts, arenas or venues in which people, ideas, practices, or objects were approached without regard to their communal provenance or identity or were at least left untouched by the control of the dominant religious group. At times such environments of discourse and interaction were established deliberately, whereas at others, they emerged organically. In either case, they depended on the parties involved engaging in a "willing suspension of belief".

This workshop will address the following questions:

- What are the contexts in which such neutral zones can be observed?
- How do concrete sources enable us to distinguish between explicit (deliberate) and implicit (organic or intuitive) neutrality on the basis of concrete sources?
- For what purposes, in what contexts do such neutral zones of discourse and interaction emerge?
- What are the limits of such neutral modes of interaction? That is, are there certain contexts in which such engagement is impossible? And if, so why?

The workshop will take place as a hybrid event. The corresponding connection data will be made available to all registered participants shortly beforehand.

Schedule

Thursday, 11 May 2023

10:00–10:30 Registration

10:30–12:00 **Introduction**

Brian A. Catlos, Christoph Kleine, Monika Wohlrab-Sahr
"Welcome and Introduction"

Monika Wohlrab-Sahr & Daniel Witte
"Neutral Zones as Precursors and Starting Points of Secularity"

12:00–13:00 Lunch

13:00–18:00 **Panel: Politics & Law**

13:00–14:30 Sita Steckel
"Friends Beyond the Faith: Negotiations of Neutral Zones in Heresy Trials around 1300"

14:30–14:45 Coffee Break

14:45–16:15 Brian A. Catlos
"A Plea by Francsico Núñez Muley: Marginalized Moriscos and Emerging Secularity on the Cusp of Modernity"

16:15–16:30 Coffee Break

16:30–18:00 Farhat Hasan
"Beyond the sacred-secular binaries: The search for the third space in Abul Fazl's Akbarnam"

19:00 **Joint Dinner**

Friday, 12 May 2023

09:15–12:30 Panel: Science and Literature

09:15–10:45 [Miquel Forcada](#)

"Secularity and rational sciences in al-Andalus according to Andalusí scientists (9th–11th centuries)"

10:45–11:00 [Coffee Break](#)

11:00–12:30 [David Wacks](#)

"Neutral Zones in Medieval Iberian Literature"

12:30–13:15 [Lunch](#)

13:15–16:30 Panel: Public and Private Spheres

13:15–14:45 [Neguin Yavari](#)

"On the Neutral Zone of Inebriation"

14:45–15:00 [Coffee Break](#)

15:00–16:30 [Christoph Kleine](#)

"The Public Sphere as a Neutral one and the Adiaphorisation of Buddhism"