



## Material Secularities

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

**21–23 June 2023**

Conveners: Magnus Echtler (Leipzig University), Birgit Meyer (Utrecht University), and  
Nur Yasemin Ural (Leipzig University)

### Approach

In the last decades, questions of the material, affective and corporeal aspects of religion have gained a central place within cultural theory. While the "material turn" generated numerous studies and established sub-fields within anthropology, sociology, and the study of religion, there are still few scholars who explore secularity from a materialist and affective perspective. With an interdisciplinary approach, this workshop, tentatively titled "material secularities", attempts to examine a range of value-laden (and often contested) material-corporeal expressions of secularity, such as the questions of hand-shaking in everyday interactions; halal/kosher food or crosses in public institutions; the one-love-bandage in sports events; national ceremonies; architectural forms of war memorials, etc. With the "multiple secularities" approach developed at Leipzig University, we take secularities to refer to the various forms in which the social differentiation and conceptual distinction between religious and other realms are politically and culturally arranged. This approach multiplies the regime of "the secular" as usually understood by Asad, while distinguishing it from secularism, the normative and political endeavour to limit the influence of religion. Taking a fresh look at the secular from a material angle, we would like to engage with recent debates on ontology, relationality, and non-human actors that consider things, discourses, and symbols as relevant elements of affective, sensual and aesthetic experiences/expressions.

Hence, our workshop proposes to examine secularity/the secular/secularism as scholarly as well as political categories always in relation to their co-constituent, namely the religious. The relation itself varies, from strict opposition or the ideal of complete separation, over interdependencies as the dialectics of *din* and *dunia*, or *ōbō* and *buppō* (this-worldly and other-worldly spheres within the Islamicate and Japanese traditions), to incorporation in the form of the culturalization of religion as custom or heritage. Consequently, our foci vary. One of our areas of interest is the investigation of how the boundary work between religious and other social spheres materializes in different parts of the world. Yet, we also wish to draw attention to the possibilities of studying materialized forms of secularity in their own right.

In an extended conversation with the theoretical assumptions of the "Multiple Secularities" project (Wohlrab-Sahr and Kleine 2021), we would like to highlight the methodological and conceptual implications of a material approach to secularity. Secularity is not an abstraction that hovers above everyday life as a mere ideology, but "matters" as it inscribes itself in spaces, bodies and material culture. While taking the perspective of multiple secularities, we would like to bring in a material, affective and spatial dimension to the extensively studied conceptual and discursive distinctions in textual sources.

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



## Schedule

### Wednesday, 21 June 2023

- 15:30–16:00** Registration
- 16:00–16:10** **Welcoming Remarks**  
Christoph Kleine (KFG "Multiple Secularities")
- 16:10–17:40** **Panel 1: Materiality, Affectivity and Performativity of Multiple Secularities**  
Chair: Christoph Kleine (KFG "Multiple Secularities")  
Birgit Meyer (Utrecht University)  
"Materiality"  
  
Nur Yasemin Ural (Leipzig University)  
"Affectivity" "Materiality"  
  
Magnus Echtler (Leipzig University)  
"Performativity"
- 17:40–17:45** Coffee Break
- 17:45–18:45** **Display of Secular Objects and Photographs**
- 18:45–19:15** **Reception**
- 19:30** **Joint Dinner at "Barcelona"**



**Thursday, 22 June 2023**

**09:30–12:00 Panel 2: Secular Practices of Heritagisation**

Chair: Mariam Goshadze (Leipzig University)

Irene Stengs (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Meertens Institute Amsterdam)

"The Materialization of 'The Wild Boars Cave Rescue': Secular Sacreds in Processes of Heritage Formation in Present-Day Thailand"

Gökçen Beyinli (KFG "Multiple Secularities")

"The Secularisation of Superstitions as Intangible Cultural Heritage in the AKP Era: Hidrellez and its 'Convivial' Materiality"

Ernst van den Hemel (Meertens Institute Amsterdam)

"Magnifying Heritage and Religion in Miniature Parks: The Mosques and Churches of Madurodam & Miniaturk"

**12:00–13:00 Lunch**

**13:00–15:30 Panel 3: Affect, Emotion, Space/Cultivating the Secular Body**

Chair: Nur Yasemin Ural (KFG "Multiple Secularities")

Donovan Schaefer (University of Pennsylvania)

"Hard Feelings: Power, Secularity, and Public Material Culture"

Augustine Agwuele (Texas State University)

"Spatial and Materiality of Secularity among Aladura Movement in Yorubaland"

Peter Bräunlein (University of Göttingen)

"The Piano as Affective Artefact and the Question of Secular Aesthetics"

**15:30–16:00 Coffee Break**

**16:00–17:45 Panel 4: Negotiating the Material Secular**

Chair: Birgit Meyer (Utrecht University)

Stefan Binder (University of Zurich)

"Materiality and Moral Judgment among Atheist Activists in South India"

Erik Meinema (Utrecht University)

"Material Secularism in Interfaith Dialogues in Coastal Kenya"

**19:00 Joint Dinner at "Café Cantona"**



Friday, 23 June 2023

**09:15–11:45 Panel 5: Secular Things/Objects/Elements**

Chair: Magnus Echter (KFG "Multiple Secularities")

Sana Chavoshian (Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient)

"Secular Atmosphere: Dust-winds in Iran's Landscapes of War"

Mascha Schulz (Max Planck Institute Halle)

"Is there a Secular Thing? What We can learn from Bengali Culturalism in the Conceptualization of Secularity as a Material-aesthetic Practice"

Pooyan Tamimi Arab (Utrecht University)

"Reformist, Principlist, the Game is Over!": Secularist Visual Culture and the 2022 Nationwide Protests in Iran"

**11:45–12:00** Coffee Break

**12:00–13:00** Final Discussion

**13:00–14:00** Lunch

**14:00** Visit *Völkerschlachtdenkmal*

<https://www.stadtgeschichtliches-museum-leipzig.de/besuch/unsere-haeuser/voelkerschlachtdenkmal-forum-1813/>