

Call for Abstracts

(Im)Materiality of the Secular City: Trials and Tribulations

Workshop at the Centre for Advanced Studies „Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities“, Leipzig University, 23-24 June 2022

Organisers:

- Mariam Goshadze, Department for the Study of Religion, University of Bayreuth
- Margaux Fitoussi, Department of Anthropology, Columbia University
- Thomas Schmidt-Lux, CASHSS Multiple Secularities, Leipzig University

The goal of this workshop is to discuss the materiality of the secular and of processes of secularisation in urban spaces. Much ink has been spilled on the ideological dimensions of the modern secular nation state, especially the legal and discursive techniques and realities of managing religious institutions. However, the physical re-working of urban spaces has received less attention even though it is well-acknowledged that grand projects of state-formation go hand in hand with on-the-ground alterations. Whether forced or voluntary, these transformations shape the urban terrain in conformation with visions of a “secular” and/or “modern city.” Inspired by the British Israeli architect Eyal Weizman’s contention that the materiality of the built world has a life of its own, the goal of this workshop is to probe into the distinctive force of secular architecture and the processes of destruction and construction involved in its production.

We were led to this topic when thinking about how religious heritage is “erased,” made to disappear, as part of secularisation projects across national boundaries. However, the materiality of the secular and secularity (conceptualised as the process of boundary making between religious and secular domains) is a much broader theme with multiple dimensions that transcend the question of “erasures.” Other material forms of symbolic demarcation of the secular are equally relevant. This is the case, for example, with the foundation of new republics in India or Turkey, where attempts were made to establish explicitly “secular architectures.” Building on these multiple dimensions of urban secularity, the “(Im)Materiality of the Secular City: Trials and Tribulations” workshop is planned to include three thematic clusters:

1. Erasing Religious Pasts: Projects of secularisation that involve the erasure and the negation of material religiosity (collective memory, questions of recovery and reuse).
2. Assembling Secular Futures: Projects of secularisation that involve building material forms of secular urbanity (multiple dimensions of the materiality of the secular).
3. Theoretical Paradigms: Negotiating materiality of the secular and materiality of religion, patterns of differentiation and dialogue.

Timeline

- 31 January 2022: Deadline for abstract (200–300 words) and short biography
- 01 March 2022: Notification of acceptance
- 31 May 2022: Deadline for short papers (2000 words)

If you wish you participate, please send your abstract to multiple-secularities@uni-leipzig.de.