Eight Years CASHSS "Multiple Secularities"

Outcome and Prospects through the Eyes of our Interlocutors

Final Conference of the Humanities Centre for Advanced Studies
„Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West. Beyond Modernities"

12–14 October 2023, Leipzig University

Event Locations

Bibliotheca Albertina	Beethovenstraße 6, 04107 Leipzig
GWZ	Beethovenstraße 15, 04107 Leipzig
Alte Handelsbörse	Naschmarkt 1, 04109 Leipzig

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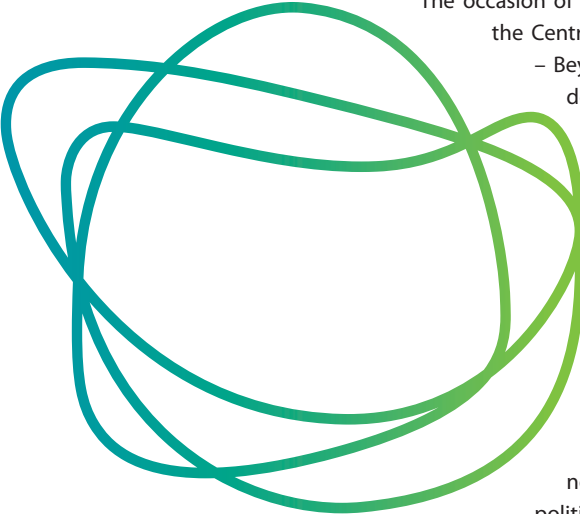
Convenors

Christoph Kleine and Monika Wohlrab-Sahr
CASHSS „Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities", Leipzig University

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Eight Years CASHSS "Multiple Secularities"

The occasion of this conference is to mark the end of the eight-year funding period (2016–2024) of the Centre for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences "Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities" next year. Over the course of these eight years, dozens of fellows from various countries and different disciplines who work on a diverse range of regions and historical focuses have helped us tremendously to discuss, reflect and sharpen our concept of Multiple Secularities, to underpin it empirically and to theorise it more thoroughly. We are extremely grateful for this highly productive exchange. We want to get together once again with our interlocutors and discuss what has been achieved, to celebrate the encounters made here, and the community that this project has enabled with colleagues worldwide.

The main objective of this conference is to take stock. We will review the outcome of our collaboration and outline prospects for future research. We would also like to take the opportunity to exchange ideas about possible future collaborations and perspectives on possibilities for follow-up projects that can build on and benefit from the Multiple Secularities project. Finally, in light of the recurring question of the normativity of research on secularities, we would like to address directly contemporary political conflicts and the ways in which they contest and challenge the secular-religious arrangements that we heuristically call secularities.

Thursday, 12 October 2023
Bibliotheca Albertina | Lecture Hall

7.00 p.m.	Keynote Lecture and Reception
Reinhard Schulze	The Normative Status of Secularity and Islamic Genealogies of Worldliness

Friday, 13 October 2023
Bibliotheca Albertina | Lecture Hall & **GWZ |** Lecture Hall

9.00 a.m. – 10.30 a.m. Bibliotheca Albertina	Opening Panel
Christoph Kleine	Discussants: Farhat Hasan, Daniel Witte
Monika Wohlrab-Sahr	

11.00 a.m. – 1.00 p.m. Bibliotheca Albertina	Panel I Secularity and Modernity Chair: Magnus Echtler
Neguin Yavari	Secularities contra Positivism: A Scoreboard
Dietrich Jung	Multiple Secularities and Pre-adaptive Advances to Modernity: A Perspective of Social Emergence
Rinku Lamba	Religion and the Constitution of the Modern — An Analysis of the Views of Tagore and Ambedkar

11.00 a.m. – 1.00 p.m. GWZ	Panel II Conceptual Explorations of the Multiple Secularities Framework Chair: Daniel Witte
Housamedden Darwish	Multiple Secularities' Conceptual Framework and the Study of Islamic Secularities: Conceptual and Critical Considerations
Hubert Seiwert	Reflexive Secularity: A Conceptual Exploration
Edgar Zavala-Pelayo	Using and Rethinking Multiple Secularities in Latin America: Analyzing and Historicizing the Secular Subject/s

Friday, 13 October 2023

Bibliotheca Albertina | Lecture Hall & **GWZ |** Lecture Hall

2.00 p.m. – 4.00 p.m. Bibliotheca Albertina	Panel III	(Post-)Ottoman Secularities Chair: Mohammad Magout
Markus Dreßler		The Religionization of Din in the Late Ottoman Period
Wolfgang Höpken		Negotiating Secularity: Post-Ottoman Muslims in Bosnia 1878-2020
Gökçen Beyinli-Dinç		Rethinking the Religious History of Turkey and Alevis through the Concept of "Multiple Secularities"

2.00 p.m. – 4.00 p.m. GWZ	Panel IV	Multiple Trajectories Chair: Hubert Seiwert
Vanya Vaidehi Bhargav		Multiple Secularisms in Colonial India
Peter Kneitz		The Multiple Secularity Approach as a Middle-Range Cultural Theory: Interpreting the Secular State Project on Madagascar, and Beyond
Dagmar Schwerk		What Does "Religio-Political" Even Mean? The Diachronic Perspective on Bhutan as an Empirical and Theoretical Case Study
Sven Bretfeld		Secularization and Doubt in Buddhist Societies

Friday, 13 October 2023

Bibliotheca Albertina | Lecture Hall & **GWZ |** Lecture Hall

4.30 p.m. – 6.30 p.m. **Bibliotheca Albertina**	**Panel V Multiple Secularities and Global Histories** Chair: Elisabeth Marx
Adrian Hermann	Multiple Secularities and „Global Religious History": Recent Innovations in the German Study of Religion
Sushmita Nath	Multiple Secularities, The Task of Comparative Political Theory and the Trend of Global History: A View from India
Todd Weir	Conceptual History and Multiple Secularities: The Global Diffusion of Arguments from Epistemes/Ontologies/Worldviews
4.30 p.m. – 6.30 p.m. **GWZ**	**Panel VI Secularities: Beyond Modernity?** Chair: Katja Triplett
Michael Stanley-Baker	Situating Medicine and Religion in Asia
Rajeev Bhargava	History of Religious Coexistence in India
Roberto Blancarte	Signs of Secularity in Latin America
7:30 p.m.	**Get-Together and Reception** Alte Handelsbörse

Saturday, 14 October 2023

Bibliotheca Albertina | Lecture Hall & **GWZ |** Lecture Hall

10.00 a.m. – 12.00 p.m. **Bibliotheca Albertina**	**Panel VII**	**Modes of Secularity: Performativity, Materiality, Affectivity** Chair: Marian Burchardt

Augustine Agwuele	From Gestural Communication of the Religious and Secular to Functional Amalgam of the Religious and Secular
Magnus Echtler	How to make a Zulu King
Birgit Meyer	Materiality and Secularity
Nur Yasemin Ural	An Affective Material Approach to Multiple Secularities

10.00 a.m. – 12.00 p.m. **GWZ**	**Panel VIII**	**Thinking Beyond Multiple Secularities** Chair: Yee Lak Elliot Lee

Juan Cruz Esquivel	Beyond the Concept. Research Agenda Based on the Heuristic Potential of Multiple Secularities
André Laliberté	From Multiple Secularities to Social Welfare - Beyond the West, and Beyond Modernities
Jason Josephson Storm	Possible Futures for Multiple Secularities Research

1.00 p.m. – 3.00 p.m. **Bibliotheca Albertina**	**Panel IX**	**Secularity and Governance** Chair: Nur Yasemin Ural

Lori Beaman	Nonreligion in a Complex Future: Rethinking the Secular, Secularism and Secularity
Marian Burchardt	Multiple Secularities, Secularism and the Specters of Race
Anindita Chakrabarti	Multiple Secularities, Post-Coloniality, and the Indian Conundrum

3:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m. **Bibliotheca Albertina**	**Panel Discussion: Contested Secularities - A Global Scenario**

Keynote Lecture

The Normative Status of Secularitiy and Islamic Genealogies of Worldliness

Reinhard Schulze
Bern University

In the course of its research activities, the KFG Multiple Secularities has successfully worked on the development of a new research paradigm that focuses on a synchronic as well as diachronic examination of global processes of differentiation of religious and secular orders. It remains a matter of debate whether „secularity" can be expanded into an analytical concept that could serve as a key term for a transcultural theory of the modern order of religion and the world. It is still undecided whether (1) there can be a global theory of secularity at all beyond the nominalistic content of the term and, if so, whether (2) such a "realist" theory can also be applied diachronically to traditions for which the term „secularity" has not been empirically documented. Furthermore, (3) the question must be clarified how the process leading to the differentiation of a normative order into religious and worldly orders can be modelled historiographically. Finally, (4) it is to be determined more precisely whether, in a world-historical perspective, there is today a normative order that has standardised the religion and secularity order, and, if so, how they have genealogically converged in a standardised order of modern „secularity".

I would like to pursue these questions in the context of the history of the Islamic tradition and propose preliminary answers.

PANEL I: Secularity and Modernity

Secularities contra Positivism: A Scoreboard
Neguin Yavari
New York

It is hardly an exaggeration to claim that even the wind blowing through Nikolaistraße in Leipzig has caught a whiff of 'secularity as a heuristic concept,' as outlined in the KFG's research agenda. Hardly unambiguous, what exactly is the purchase of 'heuristic' in defining as protean a concept as secularity? In this presentation, a student of premodern Islamic history will briefly explain how she caught the whiff, reshaping her ideas and setting her off on new tracks. I will focus on the dialectics of secularity, to argue that heuristically, and as an alternative/counterpart to both religion and secularism, secularity affords an antipode to positivism. The triangulated schema (religion/secularism/secularity) has at its foundation a dynamic historical process, in that it illuminates not the religious or the secular, but the manner(s) in which religiously inflected political discourse determines the political imaginaire in a given context. As a heuristic concept, secularity undermines both a bounded notion of religion and an identifiable domain of the secular, and perhaps most significantly, a notion of the emergence during the Enlightenment, of that inevitable decline of religion called secularization. At its core is an unshakeable focus on historical change, which 'multiplied,' upends the positivist flotsam from what is commonly referred to as Orientalism: the determined exclusion of a sizeable chunk of human history and societies from serious consideration. Even if unspoken and heuristic, secularity authors a new geography of the modern world that 'is not intrinsically prejudicial to religion,' or to the non-West. To borrow from Jonathan Sheehan, it allows us to consider the Enlightenment less as a birthplace of secularism than as the birthplace of a distinctly modern form of religion whose presence and power continues to shape the present. As such, it circumvents nominalism, a cornerstone of any positivist inquiry, with manifold ramifications for the study of premodern Islamic societies.

PANEL I: Secularity and Modernity

Multiple Secularities and Pre-adaptive Advances to Modernity: A Perspective of Social Emergence

Dietrich Jung
University of Southern Denmark

The term multiple secularities immediately reminds us to Shmuel Eisenstadt's concept of multiple modernities. However, as a research program it goes beyond Eisenstadt in two crucial points. First, it decentralizes Europe in taking no longer for granted the assumption of modernity/secularities as "product" of the West. It calls for searching – in Niklas Luhmann's theoretical vocabulary – pre-adaptive advances to modernity in pre-modern cultures beyond the so-called West. Second, the multiple secularities program – at least in my reading – opens for studies that do not only put their focus on the relationship between religion and politics. My paper will take up these two points and develops them further in putting both into the broader context of theories of social emergence. From the perspective of theories of emergence, this is my argument, modernity does not have a specific origin in time and space. Rather, like Karl Jasper's philosophical idea about the "axial age" and its distinction between transcendence and immanence, modernity appeared in different cultures at different places without these cultures necessarily being in contact with each other. From this perspective, the theoretical framework of the multiple secularities program gave me important and supportive inputs which I will illustrate with examples from Muslim history. However, I also will point to a core problem I nevertheless have with that framework which is the remaining focus on the dichotomy between religion and the "rest" of modern (secular) social realms. This, so my conclusion, is an unjustified prioritizing of religion in social research.

PANEL I: Secularity and Modernity

Religion and the Constitution of the Modern — An Analysis of the Views of Tagore and Ambedkar

Rinku Lamba
National Law School of India University

A key lesson I've learned from the Multiple Secularities project is to keep open the space for investigating how diverse conceptions of religion can help in comprehending the constitution of the *modern*. Some conceptions can generate a notion of differentiation of spheres and others can relate with a prioritisation of harmony thus giving to religion the task of harmonising and integrating different spheres of human activity. Let me call the first a differentiation conception and the second an integration conception.

At first I was able to see the two conceptions mainly in an oppositional manner. Also, I tended to associate the differentiation conception more with the historical experience of the modern west, and judged it unsuitable for understanding the historical experience of the Indian subcontinent. However, over time, working with the notion of multiple secularities allowed me to reckon with how focusing on different understandings of religion can illuminate questions of modernity.

For example, probing integrationist conceptions of religion in contexts such as India can shed light on the constitution of the *modern* in India. It is surely the case that I am gesturing toward how multiple secularities are linked with multiple modernities. But I want to say something more too. It is that more and more, the multiplicity of the modern must be elaborated and not just assumed. And such elaboration requires investigating how the *modern* came to be in ways that are linked with the notion of religion. In my paper, I want to dwell on reflections about the above, through an analysis of how the categories of dharma, Dhamma and religion became vehicles for the way the moral vision that constituted and Indian modernity took hold. I will do this through a normative analysis of the political thought of Rabindranath Tagore and B R Ambedkar.

PANEL II: Conceptual Explorations of the Multiple Secularities Framework

Multiple Secularities' Conceptual Framework and the Study of Islamic Secularities: Conceptual and Critical Considerations

Housamedden Darwish
Cologne University

The primary objective of this paper is to assess the effectiveness and limitations of the conceptual framework proposed by the "Multiple Secularities" Centre in analyzing secularity (and secularism) in Islamicate contexts. This paper is based on my fellowship at the Centre, and its purpose is to demonstrate the significant impact of its conceptual framework on my research concerning the formation of secularity and secularism, as well as the cognitive and normative debates surrounding these concepts in the Islamicate world(s). Firstly, it focuses on the distinction between secularity as an analytical concept and secularism as a normative concept. The Centre acknowledged that it "cannot completely wipe away the normative connotations of secularism from the term secularities." Therefore, it aimed to "overcome these connotations through open discussions and conceptual reflection." The paper argues that these normative connotations are inherent to the analytical concept of secularity due to the reference problems identified by the multiple secularities project. Secularity is seen as the solution to these problems, and as such, the normative connotations cannot be completely eliminated, overcome or disregarded. Therefore it is essential to explore the cognitive and normative interplay between the analytical concept of secularity which primarily encompasses the thesis of functional differentiation within secularization theory, and the remaining two theses: privatization and decline of religion. Secondly the paper examines the limitations of the binary code of religion/non-religion or religious/non-religious which serves as the fundamental basis for the concept of secularity. It explores the possibility and necessity of deconstructing this code without destroying it. Thirdly, the paper investigates the potential intersection and/or mutual exclusion between post-secularities and multiple secularities. It suggests that post-secularity could be one variant of multiple secularities while simultaneously opposing other variants of secularity. Finally the paper reflects on the potential for these considerations to inform a future project that builds upon and expands the multiple secularities framework.

PANEL II: Conceptual Explorations of the Multiple Secularities Framework

Reflexive Secularity: A Conceptual Exploration

Hubert Seiwert
KFG "Multiple Secularities"

Exploring the theme of secularity within the framework of Chinese history, spanning from antiquity to modern times, has engendered theoretical problems, some of which possess broader significance. Amidst this exploration, a vexing issue surfaces: The term 'secularity' is used in varying meanings within academic literature. Analogous to the juxtaposition of 'secular' and 'religious,' 'secularity' is intuitively apprehended as the antithesis of 'religiosity' or 'religion.' Charles Taylor discerns three different forms of secularity, but in all three cases, secularity is demarcated from religion, even though the distinction takes on various forms (Taylor 2007, 15). In our collaborative project "Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities," a different concept of 'secularity' was developed, which is often perceived as counterintuitive, as it doesn't contrast secularity with religion. Instead, 'secularity' is defined as a theoretical concept that designates a specific relationship between religious and non-religious or 'secular' forms of social action. This ideal-typical concept of 'secularity' is complex and theoretically demanding. Yet, its virtue lies in not essentializing religion but understanding the distinction between religion and non-religion as historically contingent and variable. In this paper, I will analyze the theoretical complexity of this concept of secularity, which I characterize as 'reflexive secularity.'

The analysis addresses the interdependence of social practices ('social structures') and symbolic representations ('epistemic structures') and the interlocking of object-language and meta-language perspectives. It is argued that the binary contrast between 'religious' and 'secular' at the level of epistemic structures emerges as a reflexive response provoked by the practical significance of alternatives at the level of social practice. 'Reflexive secularity' is more than secularity understood as the absence or opposite of religion. As an ideal type, it directs attention toward specific social constellations in which religious and non-religious forms of social practice are perceived and normatively interpreted as contrasting alternatives. The concept thus can stimulate empirical research, including the question under which conditions this particular understanding of religion emerges or possibly disappears.

PANEL II: Conceptual Explorations of the Multiple Secularities Framework

**Using and Rethinking Multiple Secularities in Latin America:
Analyzing and Historicizing the Secular Subject/s**

Edgar Zavala-Pelayo
El Colegio de México

As part of my intervention I will reflect on the earliest version of the Multiple Secularities project that was carried out back in the first years of the 2010s. I will address the project's conceptual and methodological elements that I could apply to a collaborative exploratory work on religious diversity and pluralism in Latin America. More specifically, I will highlight the substantial contribution of the concept of secularity and cultures of secularity in the balancing of the theoretical and empirical weight given to church-state institutional dynamics in the study of the religious and the secular in Latin America. I will point out as well the historical/historiographical vein of the project and its (trans-)regional comparative scope, observable at a greater extent in the project's more recent version, as relevant theoretical-methodological prompts to approach cultures of secularities, and religious fields, beyond the societies of the global north. After acknowledging these strengths, I will suggest the possibilities for follow-up research that remains focused on the (re)creation of either sharp or fuzzy institutional differentiations and conceptual distinctions between the religious and the secular, while directing the analytical gaze, in a non-reductive fashion, towards the *micro* level of reality as well. Drawing briefly on the case of the first "secular", "scientific", and "progressive", educational public institution in 19th-century post-colonial Mexico, and the rather ambivalent "secular subject" that the institution's founder envisioned implicitly and explicitly as one of the ultimate outcomes of his educational enterprise, I will sketch the usefulness of investigating secularities comparatively through analyses focused on the historical and contemporary formations of the secular *subject/s* or secular *subjectivity/ies.*

PANEL III: (Post-)Ottoman Secularities

The Religionization of Din in the Late Ottoman Period

Markus Dreßler
Leipzig University

Din has been, due to its rootedness in the Quran and its centrality in Islamic religious discourse, a particularly sturdy concept. Drawing on the Ottoman-Turkish example, the paper will argue that in order to understand its transformations, which nevertheless occurred in the modern period, it is necessary to situate them both within (1) the longer trajectories of traditional Islamic discourses, as well as (2) semantic and conceptual changes particular to the modern period.

The Islamic tradition constitutes until today the most important normative reference point for Muslim elaborations on the meanings of *din*. This background needs to be considered when investigating in the considerable correspondence that *din* acquired over time with the modern Western concept of religion, which became increasingly solidified since the 19th century. My contribution will chart this religionization of *din* in relation to the "secularization problematic of modern political thought" that made itself felt in Ottoman lands at least since the Tanzimat reform period and found its articulation in intensifying debates on the "the place and significance of religion under the changing conditions of modern life" (Davison 1995).

Since the religionization of *din* came along with new distinctions between *din*/religion and its thus secularized others, it serves as an example of secularity. Such secularity is especially lucid in the complex translations between political practices and concepts marked as "European" in relation to the practices and concepts that were in the same process reified as traditional "Ottoman" and/or "Islamic".

PANEL III: (Post-)Ottoman Secularities

Negotiating Secularity: Post-Ottoman Muslims in Bosnia 1878-2020

Wolfgang Höpken

Leipzig University / KFG "Multiple Secularities"

From the end of Ottoman rule in 1878 to the present, Bosnian Muslims have been challenged by the necessity to negotiate and re-negotiate the boundaries between their religious life and various secular systems. Three periods can be distinguished within this constant process: After the end of Ottoman rule, the Bosnian Muslims during the Austro-Habsburg period, *firstly*, were forced to adjust their hitherto strictly religious environment to an Empire, understanding itself as "Christian", but at the same time as a "modernizing" one, confronting the Bosnian Muslims with a semi-colonial European "mission civilisatrice".

Yugoslav socialism after World War II posed a *second* challenge to Bosnian Muslims, now in the context of a strictly secular, even atheist state. While the question of modernity, which had dominated the debates during Austrian rule, faded away as a result of an unquestioned concept of socialism, the question of *ethnicity and religion* became the most disputed issue. With the end of the socialist Yugoslav state and the independence of Bosnia in 1992/5 the *third* necessity to re-draw the boundaries between the religious and the secular arose, this time under the condition of liberal-democratic pluralism and the claim to be part of "Europe", but at the same time increasingly being influenced by transnational debates and actor-networks of a global Islamic revival.

The case of the Bosnian Muslims can be linked to the concept of Multiple Secularities in two ways: *First*, it offers a particular example for the multiplicity of the secular-religious divide, not only between "Europe" and "Non-Europe", colonial and post-colonial, but also beyond the dichotomy of "Western" vs. "Eastern European" secularity. At the same time, it enriches the ongoing debate on the relationship between Islam and secularity, largely debated with regard to the non-European Islamic world.

Second, the idea of secularity as a process of "boundary drawing" proved to be a prolific conceptional approach to structure the "long durée" of post-Ottoman Bosnian Muslim history. Starting from the core aspects of the Multiple Secularities concept, the "critical junctures" of changing institutional and power configurations in the process of boundary drawing could be identified and discourses and taxonomies of the secular and the religious could be contextualised. Having widened the concept of Multiple Secularities to include the field of symbolic and material dimensions has also offered enriching perspectives for the Bosnian case.

PANEL III: (Post-)Ottoman Secularities

Rethinking the Religious History of Turkey and Alevis through the Concept of 'Multiple Secularities'

Gökçen Beyinli-Dinç
Hamburg University

The extensive research on Alevis mostly explains the exclusion, discrimination and violence they have faced in the history of the Republic of Turkey through the secular or religious policies of the Turkish state and related actors. My initial approach to my archival material on Alevis and Bektashis in Turkey was similar. I tried to situate my findings within this "binary" framework but hesitated to publish them because such an approach did not adequately explain the complexity of the whole story, and there were still "gaps" between empirical material and theory. In this presentation, I will elaborate on, first, how my view on the religious history of Turkey and the role of Alevis within it changed after I applied the concept of "multiple secularities" to my research. Secondly, I will talk about how the discussions at the colloquiums helped to sharpen my perspective, especially on the significance of the secular Law 677 which banned religious orders (*tarikat*) in Turkey in 1925. In this regard, I will finally discuss whether it is necessary to extend the concept of "multiple secularities" to include the drawing of boundaries within the "religious" in the context of a "secular" nation-state.

PANEL IV: Multiple Trajectories

Multiple Secularisms in Colonial India

Vanya Vaidehi Bhargav
ICAS:M.P., New Delhi

My post-doctoral research agenda involves unearthing multiple conceptions and narratives of secularism in colonial India. The Multiple Secularities (MS) framework distinguishes between 'secularity', as an analytical category connoting the modality of distinction-making between religion and non-religion, and 'secularism' as a normative category, signifying the ideological project of separating the two. My project aims to capture different forms of secularisms envisioned by historical actors as evident in the different extents to which they conceived separation, and the different value-based reasons and justifications they gave for this separation. Since the project is concerned with normative ideological visions, it uses the category of secularism rather than secularity. However, the normative-ideological aim of separation was preceded on the act of making distinctions between religion and the state/politics. And so, in unearthing multiple secularisms in colonial India, the project is in effect unearthing multiple Indian secularities. The conceptual framework of multiple secularities allows me to excavate multiple secularisms in India.

In particular, my project agrees with MS' attempt to navigate a path between scholarship that assumes the universality of one form of secularism born in the West, and scholarship that rejects secularism as a Western concept alien and unsuitable to non-Western contexts. It aligns with MS' commitment to recover the agency of regions beyond the West, uncover forms of distinction-making in these regions, and its attention to particular historical experience and cultural imprint of these regions. My project seeks to uncover how the specific and astounding religious diversity of British India, and the challenges and conflicts these generated, resulted in different actors across the political spectrum – Congressmen like Gandhi and Nehru, on one hand, and the Hindu politician Lajpat Rai, on the other – articulating different conceptions and narratives of secularism. The MS framework permits me to explore and reveal the 'reference problems' colonial Indian actors sought to address and the different 'solutions' they offered. Equally, while the distinctiveness of Indian secularism has been theorised and noted, my project raises an important question for the MS framework: do multiple secularities exist not just *across* different regions but also *within* a single country?

PANEL IV: Multiple Trajectories

The Multiple Secularity Approach as a Middle-Range Cultural Theory: Interpreting the Secular State Project on Madagascar, and Beyond

Peter Kneitz
Leipzig

The Multiple Secularity Approach has added a very valuable perspective for the interpretation of my empirically oriented ethnological research project. In other words: It has worked for me as a middle-range cultural theory, allowing to arrange my understanding of the cultural phenomena studied in a heuristically meaningful way.

In my contribution, I would like, first, to consider some of the positive consequences for the understanding of my data. Studying the meaning, and the development of "Malagasy solidarity" (fihavanana gasy) as a central normative concept within the present Republic of Madagascar, it seemed a long time given that the basic idea was all about mutual understanding, about the value of consent, of conflict solution, of living in harmony, and peace. Slowly, though, a very different reading evolved, leading to an interpretation of Malagasy solidarity as deep conservative impetus, as a way, to valorize a new kind of Malagasy identity, and to develop a critical theory of modernity. Looking to my data through the prism of the Multiple Secularity Approach allowed me, among other, to unveil how the idea of "the" religion arrived on Madagascar, and to embed the process towards the elaboration of present normativity within the greater, and unknown picture of the negotiation of secularity in Madagascar, and on the African continent.

In a second step I will aim to broaden the horizon, and to reflect on the position of secularity within the greater cultural process. How to understand the complex intellectual journey leading, roughly, from religious practices, to religion, to secularity, and moving at present further on? And how to describe the characteristic, and changing aspects of secularity within a process stimulated, quite paradoxically, by an always increasing emphasis on rationality, and the logos? Such questions can serve as a starting point for developing prospects for an extension of the Multiple Secularity Approach.

PANEL IV: Multiple Trajectories

What Does "Religio-Political" Even Mean? The Diachronic Perspective on Bhutan as an Empirical and Theoretical Case Study

Dagmar Schwerk
Leipzig University

In this talk, I will first provide a brief overview of how I integrated the multiple secularities approach into the analytical framework of my research. As a background, directly after my Ph.D. in 2017, I choose a new research focus in my fellowship here at the CASHSS, eventually leading to the work on my second monograph about identity- and nation-building in Bhutan in the 18th century now. How to possibly adapt the concept of multiple secularities in my research about the spheres of religion and politics (partially: law/economics) in Bhutan from the 17th to 20th centuries was, back then, sketched out in a working paper (2019).

In brief, Bhutan's development path is unique as Bhutan, never colonized, is the only country in the Tibetan cultural area that still possesses a premodern structural continuity in the form of the "Joint Twofold System of Governance" embodied today in a constitutional monarchy and sustainable development model (Gross National Happiness). The concept of multiple secularities was immensely helpful to identify and describe systematically and diachronically – in that depth, for the first time in Tibetology – not only institutional differentiations but also corresponding underlying "epistemic structures" (in the beginning called "conceptual distinctions") and boundary negotiations. Here, I will highlight aspects that were essential for me and that repeatedly resurfaced in discussions about secularity/modernity within my disciplines of Tibetology/religious studies in Europe and North America. Second, personally, I am interested in discussing some "open" questions regarding the multiple secularities approach and possible future research collaborations. For example, how can we further develop the analytical approach of epistemes (my research interest lies in environmental humanities/climate crisis research)? What unresolved issues in the trans-disciplinary academic discourse about multiple secularities should be addressed? And, finally, did we succeed in establishing less Anglo-European perspectives/terminologies in modernity/secularity studies in the German academy?

PANEL IV: Multiple Trajectories

Secularization and Doubt in Buddhist Societies

Sven Bretfeld
Norwegian University of Science and Technology

Religious and scientific modes of knowledge production are commonly perceived as one of the major differences marking a borderline between the religious and the secular spheres. Religions deal with 'revelations' and transmitted 'beliefs', sciences with 'discoveries' and experiment-tested 'models'. From the mid-1800s Buddhist authors have disputed that these dichotomies applied also to Buddhism. Buddhism was rather promoted as the one exceptional religion in full compatibility with modern science, or, even itself a form of science. This still widespread and ongoing discourse has absorbed some of the shocks modern scientific findings may have caused for religious world-views in other cases.

The history of this rhetorical device and its echoes in Asian societies illustrate how secularities can develop in multiple ways. Indeed, in Buddhist cultures secularization seems to be driven by science-induced doubt to a lesser degree than, for example, in Christian Europe. On the contrary – be it relativity, quantum or evolution theory; the cosmological standard model, psychoanalysis or, recently, neuro-scientific brain research – Buddhist interpreters have always found ways to reiterate and popularize the idea that modern sciences confirm traditional Buddhist knowledge. More extreme formulations even claim that secular scientists have now started to discover what Buddhists have been knowing for ages. Yet, despite this quite successful strategy of immunization against scientific challenges, other forms of religious doubt have caused many Buddhists, for example in Sri Lanka, to turn their backs on religiosity.

The paper will focus on this alternative source of doubt, what it tells us about the distinctive mechanics and organization of the religious fields in Buddhist countries, how secularization processes can be conceptualized within this context, and what this all has to do with scholarly debates on how to translate Pāli into English.

PANEL V: Multiple Secularities and Global Histories

Multiple Secularities and „Global Religious History": Recent Innovations in the German Study of Religion

Adrian Hermann
Bonn University

In the context of the German study of religion, the concept of "multiple secularities" has been one of the most innovative and exciting new developments of the last 15 years. Among other things, it has been emerged as a response to the various challenges of postcolonial critique of the concept of „religion" as an analytical category. Alongside the successful implementation of the "multiple secularities" perspective, the German study of religion has also brought forth the approach of „global religious history" (Kollmar-Paulenz/Bergunder/Hermann/Strube/Maltese et al.) In my contribution, I want to relate these two recent innovations to each other and discuss how "multiple secularities" has contributed and could continue to contribute to a „global religious history"

PANEL V: Multiple Secularities and Global Histories

Multiple Secularities, The Task of Comparative Political Theory and the Trend of Global History: A View from India

Sushmita Nath
Ashoka University

In 2016 I joined the KFG "Multiple Secularities" as a junior fellow, and then again as a postdoctoral fellow in 2019, where I continued my research until 2021. As this timeline reveals, I was fortunate to have a long association with KFG "Multiple Secularities". As a result, the research group had a major influence on my research on secularity in modern India. At the KFG I explored the "Gandhi-Nehru tradition" of secularity, which, as a dominant socio-political ideal during the twentieth century, influenced the Indian national movement as well as the ideal of secularism in the post-colonial state. By distinguishing secularity from secularism and secularisation, and by construing it as an analytical category that distinguishes "religion" from its others, I was able to demonstrate the distinctiveness of the secular ideal of the Gandhi-Nehru tradition vis-à-vis the secular ideal of western Europe and North America. The result of this research was a monograph titled, '*The Secular Imaginary: Gandhi, Nehru and the Idea(s) of India*', published in 2022. Secondly, my intellectual engagements with the fellows at the KFG reminded me that the case for the distinctiveness of Indian secularity was not an argument for exceptionality. An argument for exception,

it may be argued, assumes an authoritative original. By questioning the existence of an authoritative original secular, the notion of multiple secularities challenges accounts where the history of Western Europe and North America serves as such an original. As such, the concept of secularity has been useful for me and my co-author Tobias Berger in writing a paper on the autonomous sources of "liberal" and non-liberal thinking with regards to questions of secularism and secularity in South Asia. Lastly, I see immense possibilities in exploring the conception of secularity in conjunction with recent developments in global (intellectual) history and comparative theorisation. International and inter-disciplinary research environments, such as the KFG "Multiple Secularities", are crucial for such intellectual developments.

Friday, 13 October 2023 | 4.30 p.m. – 6.30 p.m. | Bibliotheca Albertina

PANEL V: Multiple Secularities and Global Histories

Conceptual History and Multiple Secularities: The Global Diffusion of Arguments from Epistemes/Ontologies/Worldviews

Todd Weir

University of Groningen

Premise: Given what we currently know of the conceptual history of worldview, we can posit that concepts such as worldview have been crucial in the elaboration of novel ideas about human knowledge, community, and religious-secular relations in modernity. These concepts have been formed and reflected upon in the context of apologetic struggles between religious-secular viewpoints, which have sometimes been known as "culture wars." In this process, definitions of worldviews both diverge, as antagonistic claims are made by ascribing contrary prefixes, such as "Christian" versus "scientific" worldviews, as well as converge, given that the participants in the field of contestation themselves seek to define themselves in relation to one another. Furthermore, concepts travel geographically and linguisticlly and enter into new spaces of contestation, which can be observed in the migration of the German term *Weltanschauung* to Spanish *cosmovision* in the Latin American context, and now as "cosmovision" in the global Anglosphere.

Relation to Multiple Secularities: The strength of the Multiple Secularities approach is the comparative historical framework it established for analysing religious-secular events and fields.

This comparison is both geographic/cultural and chronological. One could extend the above described project on this history of worldview, which I will undertake with support of the Dutch Research Council grant, with a collaborative project that would investigate both historical and contemporary developments of arguments about ontological difference in the context of apologetics of various sorts. It would study the evolution of such arguments discursively and theoretically, one the one hand, as well as liguistically and conceptually, on the other. The premise is that arguments about ontological difference are key sites of the apologetic elaboration of religious-secular boundaries. To take one very current example, it is clear that part of the concept of "Russian world" advanced by the Russian government and Orthodox Church in the current war in Ukraine is the notion that underpinning the conflict is a worldview chasm between Russia and the West.

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PANEL VI: Secularities: Beyond Modernity?

Situating Medicine and Religion in Asia

Michael Stanley-Baker
Nanyang Technological University

During the period of the KGF research group, I produced two related works, an edited volume titled *Situating Medicine and Religion in Asia*, which should be out by the time of the conference, and a monograph in progress, titled *Situating Practice: Medicine and Religion in Early Imperial China*. The unimaginative lack of difference between the titles indicates that they hinge on, or obsess over, the same basic idea, of examining how religion and medicine come to be situated in relation to each other in specific contexts. Whereas the broadly-scoped *Multiple Secularities* project has compared many different contexts and forms in which religion becomes bordered, these two works examine one particular kind of bordering, that between medicine and religion. They focus on the contexts, genres, social forms, historical and personal moments bring to bear different kinds of issues and contours.

Concepts put forward by Killinger, Triplett and Kleine in their *Asian Medicine* introduction have been particularly useful and easy to apply. One insight that drew out patterns in the *Asia* volume was the role of meso-level social forms – primarily institutions – and how definitions of religion versus medicine could be seen as contours of social and inter-institutional power negotiation. This could be seen in the strong role the state played in various chapters, whether Japan, Tibet, India or Myanmar. The *China* monograph performs a close analysis of records of a fourth-century gentry family, to tease out how healing practices situate knowledge, and organise religion and medicine. Here, Killinger, Kleine and Triplett's typology of modes of distinction is brought to life and appears repeatedly in different guises: ends and purposes, means and methods, framing, competence or charisma, and forms of authority. It becomes clear that even within a single community we cannot capture a singular snapshot of this moving tableau, but rather need to observe clusters of methods or repertoires of practice – an approach foreshadowed by their introduction.

PANEL VI: Secularities: Beyond Modernity?

History of Religious Coexistence in India

Rajeev Bhargava
Parekh Institute of Indian Thought

Deep religious diversity in India has remained a fertile topic of discussion among scholars and public intellectuals. Some have claimed that in pre-colonial India, religious diversity was not only openly acknowledged but politically endorsed and that India offers an interesting model of peaceful religious coexistence. It has also been claimed that one of the distinctive features of modern Indian secularism as distinct from other secularisms is that it responds morally and politically to religious diversity. Others have claimed that the Indian case is no exception and has followed the trajectory of religious conflict found in other parts of the world. The present essay examines these claims. Its main conclusion is that there was an enviable degree of religious coexistence in India in the past, though this was neither due to explicitly formulated doctrines of religious pluralism, nor a result of a practical, social, and political arrangement, a bare modus vivendi. Instead, South Asia in the past had collectively imagined a particular way of living together, a common moral understanding of the significance of religious pluralism, and it is this that accounts for peaceful religious coexistence in pre-modern India. This claim is substantiated by historical evidence of conflict and accommodation until the arrival of the modern idea of religion. This moral imaginary was severely challenged by the impetus given by colonial modernity to some morally troubling features in both Hindu and Islamic thought. It also had much to do with the globalization of the modern, Western idea of Religion. Modern Indian secularism is a fragile response to modern religion and the forms of religious strife it generates. It is an attempt to resurrect in a new form the core elements of a much older pluralist imaginary and to prevent forms of inter-religious and intra-religious domination (caste and gender related hierarchies).

PANEL VI: Secularities: Beyond Modernity?

Signs of Secularity in Latin America
Roberto Blancarte
El Colegio de México

The purpose of this paper is to answer a central question regarding Latin America and particularly Mexico: Was there some seed of a secularization process in what we now call Latin America and particularly Mexico before the arrival of the Spaniards and Portuguese to the American continent? And if it's the case, when and where can we find those elements? The current research on secularity in Latin America takes for granted that efforts of secularization in the region began only with the independence of the new republics, after the fall of the colonial dominion, in 19th Century. But a closer look reveals us a more complex situation. Not only Pre-Hispanic cultures (Aztec, Incas, and so forth) could have develop some signs of distinction and separation between the "religious" and the "non-religious", but also the Colonial period (XVI-XVIII Centuries), known for the importance of the Catholic church and catholic culture in society, could show many signs of separation of affairs, distinction of spheres and other elements of eventual seeds of secularization. The paper will introduce a discussion about the influence of the concept of multiple secularities, its usefulness in the research, exploring at the same time the limits and reach of the whole approach related to the theory of secularization.

PANEL VII: Modes of Secularity: Performativity, Materiality, Affectivity

From Gestural Communication of the Religious and Secular to Functional Amalgam of the Religious and Secular

Augustine Agwuele
Texas State University

Modes of communicating religiosity are integral to the spread of religion; the ability of the religious to captivate is inextricably linked to the place of culturally relevant 'visible bodily actions' such as paralanguage, proxemics, physical appearances, and use of material items of signification and symbolization involved in secularism and the appressentation of associated values.

I set out from a linguistic perspective to observe and document how actors of two bible based Yoruba Movements have positioned nonverbal elements to bear their message, rather, I am confronted with a vast area of discourse on multiple secularities, the exploration of which unveil multiplicities of modalities that in interaction with core elements of culture generate empirically observable habitual responses that effaces the dyad of religion and the secular and iterate the very cultural imperatives that these movements initially identified as secular. While not a religious scholar, a perspective shift ensued from the interaction afforded by the fellowship at the Centre that now compels a strongly emerging collaboration between linguistics, religious- and socio-cultural studies with colleagues Magnus Echtler and Asonzeh Ukah. The dyad,

religion and secular, it seems, are utilitarian objects through which Yoruba people contend with everyday life and that can be explored theoretically and ethnographically to understand how and why. This initial interaction laid for me a strong foundation to further this new idea. The diverse case studies, cultural and disciplinary perspectives that the Centre brought together uniquely and collectively expounded consequentially the theme of secularization unfurling for me, from an emic vista, the enveloping context through which Yoruba people apprehend and respond to life persistent questions. I therefore will circumscribe (a) the manner in which my research has been influenced by the fellowship through the interactions afforded by being at the Centre in Leipzig, and (b) the possibilities for follow-up trans-disciplinary projects.

PANEL VII: Modes of Secularity: Performativity, Materiality, Affectivity

How to make a Zulu King

Magnus Echtler
KFG "Multiple Secularities"

After having analyzed power relations in the Nazareth Baptist Church, an African Indigenous Church that promotes Zulu cultural identity, working at the CASHSS "Multiple Secularities" provided me with the opportunity to study performances of African culture outside the church, and hence arguably outside the religious field. I hold that in the South African context secularity was shaped through the customization of African discourses and practices, that is, their secularization by codification in Native Law, and that these customs were subsequently mobilized in the political and religious spheres. In my paper, I illustrate the argument with the public performances that make a Zulu king.

On October 29, 2022, Misuzulu kaZwelithini received a certificate of recognition from Cyril Ramaphosa, president of South Africa, and he was anointed by Referent Dr. Thabo Makgoba, the Anglican archbishop of Cape Town. The event, commonly referred to as 'coronation', took place at Moses Mabhida Stadium in Durban. While the ceremony was criticized as neo-colonial, it effectively installed Misuzulu as the new Zulu king, although two of his half-brothers still contest his succession in court. On August 20, 2022, Misuzulu had performed the 'entering the kraal' (ukungeni esibayeni) ritual at the kwaKhangelamankengane Royal Palace in Nongoma. This ritual 'really' made him king according to Zulu proceedings, but he was not the only one to perform it, although he mobilized more supporters than his brothers. In my presentation, I look at these public events from a performative angle, analyzing how they negotiate the boundaries between religion, politics and culture.

PANEL VII: Modes of Secularity: Performativity, Materiality, Affectivity

Materiality and Secularity

Birgit Meyer
Utrecht University

In my work, materiality and secularity have long formed important research lines. My fellowship at the KFG "Multiple Secularities" prompted me to think them together. In my presentation I will offer a reflection from the interface of the strands of scholarship associated with these lines, explaining why it is productive to relate work on materiality and secularity in the study of religion to each other. Firstly, I will offer some general thoughts, tying into the last phase of the Multiple Secularities project in which materiality was foregrounded as a prime conceptual focus, and take stock of the insights gained during my fellowship in the KFG (April-June 2023). Secondly, I will try to demonstrate the conceptual and methodological gains of a combined materiality-secularity approach with regard to a particular case-study which is occupying me currently and which formed the focus of my work during my fellowship: the translocation of a missionary collection of legbawo and dzokawo – items mistranslated as "idols" or "fetishes" – from the Ewe in the "mission field" on the West African coast (the current South east of Ghana and South of Togo) to the Städtisches Museum in Bremen (now Übersee-Museum Bremen). I will

point our that research on this collection can benefit from the theorization of the materiality-secularity nexus, while at the same time it offers important reflexion points to refine our understanding of the complex relations between categories as art, heritage and religion in our entangled, post-colonial world.

PANEL VII: Modes of Secularity: Performativity, Materiality, Affectivity

An Affective Material Approach to Multiple Secularities

Nur Yasemin Ural

KFG "Multiple Secularities"

"Religious feelings" and the way they were conceptualised from the end of the 18th century to the beginning of the 20th century – exemplified in the writings of Schleiermacher and Otto, two important German Protestant theologians – play a prominent role in the representation of religion as immaterial, textual and personal. Religion was and still is predominantly seen as a personal feeling/experience, thus a private matter and should remain between the individual and God, we are told. The public display of "ostentatious" religious signs continues to disrupt the European public sphere, because it renegotiates the boundaries between the private and the public, as well as the place of religion, as in the case of the headscarf/burkini affairs, and the controversies about crosses in public institutions (Göle 2013). While religion is seen to belong to the private sphere, where the personal, emotional and intimate takes place, its definitional opposite – the secular – sustains an exclusively public, impersonal and rational character. But as recent research through the material turn has aptly shown, religion has never been exclusively immaterial, personal and textual. Along the same lines, the secular is also not a free-floating ideology, completely detached from personal interests, bodily sensations or historical dispositions. The secular is not free of emotions, it feels a certain way (Jacobsen & Pellegrini 2008). Under the premises of the affective turn, we can understand these secular feelings of empathy, joy and moral superiority or of frustration, anger and fear not as personal, individual experiences of singular human bodies, but as relational affects that go beyond and under our skin (Ahmed 2005). Following this line of inquiry, I will address the affective politics of *laïcité* (French secularism) in the last decade using the example of food, particularly pork in public spaces and public schools. I argue that the we can only understand Multiple Secularities Paradigm (Wohlrab-Sahr & Kleine 2021), which in its plurality based on the historical conditions of their emergence, through the affective bonds, joys and anxieties that do not emerge in single individuals but occur relationally, contingently and arbitrarily. It is precisely this affectivity that forms the basis for the constitution not only of individual human bodies, but also of the collective body of a group, a people or a nation.

PANEL VIII: Thinking Beyond Multiple Secularities

Beyond the Concept. Research Agenda Based on the Heuristic Potential of Multiple Secularities

Juan Cruz Esquivel
CONICET / Universidad de Buenos Aires

Multiple secularities, more than a theoretical concept, implies an epistemological, theoretical and analytical perspective to understand the relations between the religious and the secular in the contemporary world. This approach, which enables a field of research to analyze the singularities of the historical contexts of various social configurations, at the same time stimulates systematic and comparative analyses. In this sense, the research was oriented primarily to identify the particularities of the secularization process in the Western world and in Eastern countries. Much less have they focused on unraveling the dissimilar paths within the West, taking into account the different historical ways of resolving the tensions derived from the processes of institutional differentiation. Considering the heuristic potential of this theoretical-analytical tool, it would be opportune, on the one hand, to advance in the construction of a system of typologies worldwide that systematizes the multiple secularities. On the other hand, to reflect on the challenges of the concept today, in light of the renewed religious presences in the public space and their incidence in the dynamics of institutional differentiation. The management of religious diversity as a gravitating element in government agendas is processed in various formats, depending on the imprints of the predominant religious institutions, the political culture of the ruling class and the levels of secularization of society itself. To what extent are the processes of institutional differentiation being transformed is a research question that would contribute to revising the scope of the conceptual framework of multiple secularities in its interpretive capacity of the contemporary dynamics.

PANEL VIII: Thinking Beyond Multiple Secularities

From Multiple Secularities to Social Welfare - Beyond the West, and Beyond Modernities

André Laliberté
University of Ottawa

I would like to celebrate the meaningful contribution of the project Multiple Secularities - Beyond the West and Beyond Modernities to the field of political science especially with the issue of decolonization and the realities of deep diversity. A key problem that the discipline will have to wrestle with for years to come is the risk that legitimate concerns for contextualization and methodological humility can be misconstrued as the advocacy of irreconcilable differences and boundaries between fixed and incommensurable traditions. The balance that the Centre for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences has maintained throughout the years has managed to avoid that trap and given reasons for hope because it has shown empirically that these aspirations are shared by colleagues the world over. The concept of multiple secularities has provided me with a germane framework to disentangle the paradox of China: A society that remains deeply religious but nevertheless has to bear governance by political rulers who profess atheism but at the same time have never embraced one of its constitutive ideas of freedom of conscience; and therefore, disqualifying them to define their regime as a secular state. The reliance on comparative historical sociology that has guided the principal investigators and the team working with them proved to be a salutary methodology because it has reminded us that culture is not destiny and that people who claim a Chinese heritage can look to other options than the model of pseudo-secularism enforced by the Chinese Communist Party: they can look to Taiwan for a very different way in which the legacy of Chinese religions and philosophy have nurtured the resilience of a prosperous democracy with its distinctive characteristics. I shall reflect on how the methodology that inspired the whole research program of multiple secularities beyond the West and beyond modernity could possibly be extended to nourish a research program on welfare, mutuality, and social justice that would aim as well to reach a global comparative scope.

PANEL VIII: Thinking Beyond Multiple Secularities

Possible Futures for Multiple Secularities Research

Jason Josephson Storm
Williams College

The exploration of multiple secularities has been a remarkable endeavor in understanding the diverse forms of social and discursive differentiation across various cultures, contexts, and historical periods. While I harbor reservations about the applicability of the multiple secularities model to cultures that lack a distinct category of "religion," I must acknowledge the project's exceptional ability to track and analyze important themes and cultural conjunctures. Building upon this foundation, I propose the consideration of alternative forms of social and intellectual differentiation that are closely intertwined with the concept of secularity (such as the binary differentiations between science/superstition, science/magic, religion/magic and/or the secular conceptions of temporality and history). In summary, this talk will reflect on the way my thinking has evolved from conversations with the group, but it will mainly aim to inspire and suggest possible future research endeavors along different paths and uncharted territories.

PANEL IX: Secularity and Governance

Nonreligion in a Complex Future: Rethinking the Secular, Secularism and Secularity

Lori Beaman
Williams College

The Nonreligion in a Complex Future Project is a 7 year international project that studies the impact of increased nonreligion and increased religious diversity in five research areas: law, education, the environment, health, and migration. The project was designed to explicitly avoid using versions of 'the secular' as a placeholder concept to describe social change related to the increase in nonreligion. In our view, much of what we are analysing can be effectively discussed without relying on this overused concept. We share with the Multiple Secularities programme of research a critical approach to the secular, though we differ in our focus. The NCF is not concerned primarily with the social construction of the secular. However, through and because of the approach of Multiple Secularities we have cautiously embarked on a re-engagement with the concept of the secular using the Multiple Secularities approach as described by Kleine and Wohlrab-Sahr. This approach has been especially helpful in our projects in law, which have examined same-sex marriage as public controversy and the issue of reproductive rights, especially in light of the overturn of Roe v. Wade in the recent Dobbs decision by the United States Supreme Court which prompted an international reaction. Social actors in these debates deploy 'the secular' in varyious ways in public debate and in legal settings. Their strategies are embedded in power relations and ideas of the common good. They link to notions of community and nationhood as well as to citizenship and belonging. This paper will examine the NCF research in conversation with the conceptual framework of Multiple Secularities, considering its positive contribution as well as its challenges.

PANEL IX: Secularity and Governance

Multiple Secularities, Secularism and the Specters of Race

Marian Burchardt
Leipzig University

In an important part of the social scientific literature, secularism has been construed as an element of modern statecraft that is intrinsically tied to the histories of Western colonialism and pretension of racial superiority and white supremacy that underpinned it. Such approaches typically construe secularism and secularity as an exclusive element of Western colonial modernity, not as a form of conceptual distinction and institutional differentiation that is possibly universal. Many studies, which work with such an approach lack a clear empirical or historical basis for clarifying the nexus of secularity and race. And generally, while the historical relationship between secularity and other forms of social categorization such as gender, race and ethnicity are undoubtedly central to the research field of multiple secularities, there is a dearth of work. My talk seeks to address this lacuna on a conceptual and empirical level.

While for a long time, sociologists of religion imagined secularization as more or less anonymous process, recent approaches are more actor-centered and view secularization as conflict. In my paper, I contribute to this research by focusing on the civic engagement of secularist activists towards reshaping the relationships between religion and the state. Drawing on empirical research in Quebec and Catalonia, I show that, while understanding their activism as aiming to democratize the governance of religion, secularists often find themselves in caught up between conservatives who seek to preserve the status quo which privileges Christian majority institutions on the one hand, and actors from the 'multicultural left' who blame secularists of undermining the struggle of religious minorities, especially Muslims, and racism. My paper explores this increasingly explosive conjuncture and examines in a comparative fashion the ways in which different institutional arrangements incentivize, curb, or potentially absorb such conflicts.

PANEL IX: Secularity and Governance

Multiple Secularities, Post-Coloniality, and the Indian Conundrum

Anindita Chakrabarti
IIT Kanpur

Much of the recent theorization on the concept of secular has questioned its monolithic and Eurocentric understanding and worked towards an analytical frame that better explained the practices and institutional dynamics associated with it. Much of this scholarship has been situated within the post-colonial contexts untouched by the temporality of the post-secular. How does the idea of secularity/secularism work in these socio-political contexts? The concept of multiple secularities has initiated a discussion beyond the political ideologies of separation between religion and state/politics as it detects a variety of combinations of religion, national politics and the claims of religious groups and secular agents in the public sphere. It frames the debate not around the question whether secularism/secularity are culturally inauthentic and a western import, but how the boundaries between religion and secular spheres are negotiated, challenged, and redrawn. In this presentation I map the secularity debate in India on three key registers: First, the separation of religion and politics/state and its impossibility in the Indian context; second, secularity as rights and justice; third, an increasing judicialization of the question of religion and its aftermath. I argue that the frame of multiple secularities offers not an idea of multicultural relativism but a conceptual tool to identify secularity as a multi-value idea.

My work on Muslim family law in contemporary India has shown how the idea of secularity has shapeshifted in the recent decades as judicialization of the religious domain emerged as the key trope. In this context, the judiciary emerged as the sole arbitrator that determined what was 'religion' and what was not. This development has on one hand led to infringement of religious freedom, especially of religious minorities and homogenization of the religious majority. For me, the frame of multiple secularities offers a conceptual toolkit for investigating how the institutional practices and concomitant meaning evolve and change in these post-colonial contexts. In this presentation I will argue that in the contemporary public discourse in India we have seen a clear shift from the guiding principle of 'balancing religious diversity'/'principled distance' to the concept of secularity as 'subjection of religion to the rule of law'. This idea of secularity couched in the language of justice, constitutional rights, and a uniform civil code has not worked well for the religious minorities as the questions of religious difference and plurality go unasked.

Panel Discussion

Contested Secularities – a Global Scenario

The interest in distinctions and differentiations between religion and the secular – which we call secularity – is not merely academic. It touches deeply on societal struggles and sometimes even goes along with culture wars. This often concerns the relationship between the state and religion. However, everyday life, the family, education, science, and a variety of cultural spheres can also become battlegrounds.

The contestations can originate from different sides: From a secularist state, like China, questioning the autonomy of religious life and its public presence. Recent developments in France, particularly regarding the wearing of certain Muslim garments in public, also point in this direction. It was this constellation of a – more or less – authoritarian secularist state that postcolonial and other critical approaches have focused on. However, during the last decades and sometimes longer, we have been confronted with a different constellation in many places around the world: an intermingling between the state and the dominant religion which goes against the maintenance of the boundaries of private life and the family, the possibility of free speech and political critique, the autonomy of culture, but also the freedom of minority religions. We can observe this in Turkey, in India, and – with utmost violence against the civil society – in Iran. But we can also see it in Russia and other Eastern European countries in their intermingling of orthodoxy and nationalism, as well as in parts of the United States, for example in cases of severe religious intervention into school curricula or women's reproductive rights. And most recently, accompanied by huge civil society protests, we see it in Israel, where radical Jewish groups are trying to impose a Jewish religious agenda on society. The panel will bring these different cases together to discuss them in comparison and relate them to the academic debate.
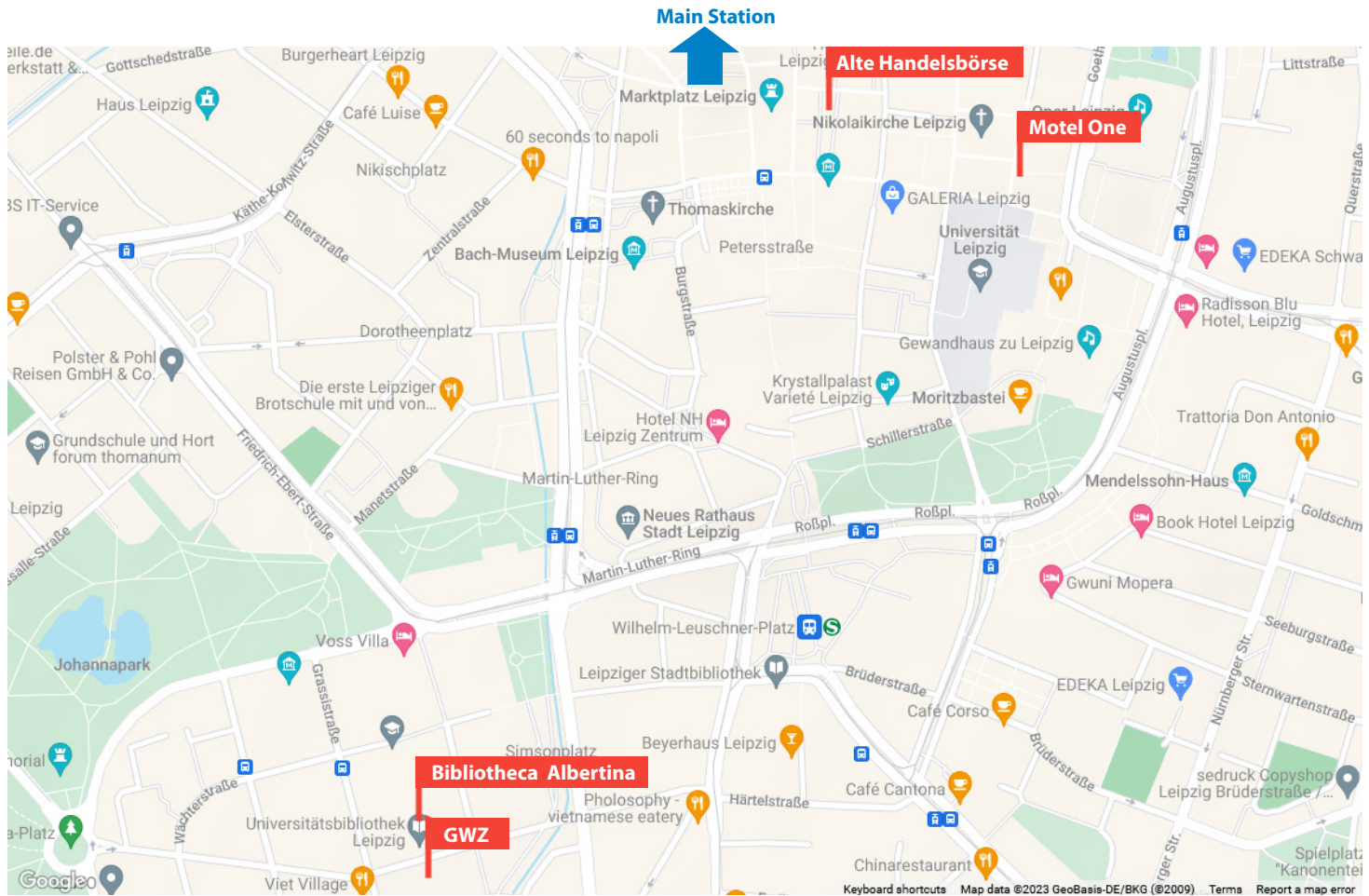
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multiple secularities