

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

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

23–24 June 2022

Hybrid event format, on-site event at Leipzig University and online via Zoom.

Convenors: Margaux Fitoussi (Columbia University), Mariam Goshadze (University of Bayreuth),
Thomas Schmidt-Lux (Leipzig University)

Approach

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 reworking 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.”

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, 23 June 2022

13:30–14:00 Registration

14:00–14:30 Welcoming

Christoph Kleine (Leipzig University) and Monika Wohlrab-Sahr (Leipzig University)

Opening Remarks

Margaux Fitoussi (Columbia University), Mariam Goshadze (University of Bayreuth),
Thomas Schmidt-Lux (Leipzig University)

14:30–16:00 Panel 1: Erasing Religious Pasts

[Marian Burchardt \(Leipzig University\)](#)

“Iconoclastic Fever, Fire, and Exuberant Festivity: The Making of Secular Cityscapes as Collective Spectacle”

[Margaux Fitoussi \(Columbia University\)](#)

“The Free Thinkers Cemetery in Tunis”

[Thahir Jamal Kiliyamannil \(Georg-August University of Göttingen/ University of Hyderabad\)](#)

“Mosque as a Secular Property: A View from Babri Masjid”

16:00–16:30 Coffee Break

17:30–18:00 Panel 2: Heritagizing the Secular

[Esra Çifci \(Marmara University\)](#)

“Deculturation of Religion and Its Impact on Contemporary Mosque Architecture in China”

[Sana Chavoshian \(Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient\)](#)

“Waterwheel of Secularization: Archaic, Secular and Spiritual Divide in the Delta Cities of South-West Iran”

[Fawaz Abdul Salam \(McGill University\)](#)

“Between the Secular Erasures and Religious Revival: The Transformation of the Ottoman Built Environment and the Everyday Life in Fatih district, Istanbul ”

18:30 Joint Dinner

Friday, 24 June 2022

09:00–10:30 Panel 3: Theoretical Paradigms: Negotiating Materiality of the Secular

[Anna Maćkowiak](#), [Łukasz Stypuła](#), [Natalia Zawiejska](#) (all Jagiellonian University)

“The Ghetto Heroes Square in Kraków: Between Construction and Erasure of Religious Heritage”

[Pooja Kalita](#)

“‘Modern’ Architecture of Selective Secularism: The Jeopardy of Beef Consumption in an ‘Assamese’ Urban Space”

[Thomas Schmidt-Lux](#) (Leipzig University)

“Architecture as a Medium of Secularity: Four Modes of Intervention”

10:30–10:45 Coffee Break

10:45–12:00 Panel 4: Assembling Secular Futures

[Zohar Elmakias](#) (Columbia University)

“Urban Messianism and Holy Tourism: Two Cases in Jerusalem”

[Mariam Goshadze](#) (University of Bayreuth)

“Of Secular Rituals and Atheist Temples: Tbilisi Palace of Rituals in the Soviet Urbanscape”

12:00–12:15 Coffee Break

12:15–13:45 Summary and Future Directions

14:00 Lunch