

# Building Trust, Constituting Allegiance, Imagining Society: A Symposium on Global Religion and Secularism

8-9 April 2022, Conducted virtually on Zoom

A standard feature of many secularization narratives is the modern triumph of trust (in experts, critical thinking, and multi-cultural democracy) over pre-modern allegiances (to political, religious, racial “tribes” and dogmas). This symposium scrutinizes this supposed antagonism, challenging the assumption that contemporary forms of trust in medicine, laboratory science, technological expertise, and democratic decision-making transcend the pre-modern. We pursue these questions through a set of historically and culturally diverse case studies, including the daily laboratory routines of 21st-century creationist scientists; debates over religious tolerance in colonial America; the conceptual entanglements between Asian medicine and religion; the epistemological borders between Islamic and scientific interpretations of Southeast Asian volcanic activity; the movement of medical charms across the boundaries of medieval England and Wales; and the engagement between spiritualism and science in the 19th-century United States.

Over the last decade, many pundits, and even some humanists and social scientists themselves, have offered what might be called a “regression hypothesis,” warning that the growth of authoritarianism, political polarization, science denialism, and “alternative” belief systems has threatened to reverse the traditions of rationality, tolerance, and technocratic expertise that define modern secular societies. However, such analyses frequently resort to discredited teleological narratives of progress. These narratives both overlook the structural violence of modern efficiency-oriented technocratic rule while caricaturing or simply dismissing the sophisticated contributions of religion to pre- and early modern science, medicine, and social organization. In recent years, the *longue durée* accounts provided by such scholars as Talal Asad, Wendy Brown, David Graeber, Ara Norenzayan, Jennifer Graber, and Monika Wohlrab-Sahr have challenged these more historically superficial accounts.

Working in religion, anthropology, the history of science and culture, environmental studies, and literary studies, the scholars contributing to this symposium critically engage the regression hypothesis. In a period of fragmentation (as tribalization) of the modern dream of a national and international civil society, what resources do we have as social scientists/humanities to cope, re-vision, re-imagine possible futures. How do we re-vision the revisioning of allegiances in a manner sustainable for any possible global future?

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Supported by the **Centre for Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (CLASS)** and the **College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences**  
Co-organized by Christopher Trigg (NTU English) and Justin Clark (NTU History)



**Registration:**  
<https://tinyurl.com/rst-symposium>



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## Organisers:

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# Building Trust, Constituting Allegiance, Imagining Society: A Symposium on Global Religion and Secularism

## Schedule: Friday 8 April 2022 (Singapore)

Time	Programme
Friday, 8 April 2022, 9:00 AM - 9:20 AM (Singapore) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thursday, 7 April 2022, 9:00 PM - 9:20 PM (New York)</li> <li>Friday, 8 April 2022, 2:00 AM - 2:20 AM (London)</li> </ul>	<b>Introduction</b>
Friday, 8 April 2022, 9:30 AM - 11:00 AM (Singapore) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thursday, 7 April 2022, 9:30 PM - 11:00 PM (New York)</li> <li>Friday, 8 April 2022, 2:30 AM - 4:00 AM (London)</li> </ul>	<b>Panel 1: East Asia</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Situating Medicine and Religion in Asia</b> Michael Stanley-Baker (NTU Singapore)</li> <li><b>Creationism and Laboratory Practice in Contemporary South Korea</b> Hyung-Wook Park (NTU Singapore)</li> <li><b>Historical Transformations and Future Possibilities of Chinese Temple and Trust Networks in Southeast Asia</b> Kenneth Dean (NUS)</li> </ol>
Friday, 8 April 2022, 11:15 AM - 12:45 PM (Singapore) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thursday, 7 April 2022, 11:15 PM - 12:45 AM (New York)</li> <li>Friday, 8 April 2022, 4:15 AM - 5:45 PM (London)</li> </ul>	<b>Panel 2: The West</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Secularization of Sacred History and the Founding of Rhode Island</b> Christopher Trigg (NTU Singapore)</li> <li><b>Faith and Expertise in Medieval English Charms</b> Katherine Hindley (NTU Singapore)</li> <li><b>Rebecca West's Liberalism of Faith</b> Ng Zhao Feng (NTU Singapore)</li> <li><b>Carceral Time and Spiritual Redemption in 18th and 19th Century North America</b> Justin Clark (NTU Singapore)</li> </ol>
Friday, 8 April 2022, 1:45 PM - 3:15 PM (Singapore) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Friday, 8 April 2022, 1:45 AM - 3:15 AM (New York)</li> <li>Friday, 8 April 2022, 6:45 AM - 8:15 AM (London)</li> </ul>	<b>Panel 3: Multicultural and Transnational</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>'Again You Will Plant Vineyards': Prophecy, Jewish Settlement and Temporal Dissonance in the Occupied West Bank</b> Ian McGonigle (NTU Singapore)</li> <li><b>Increasing Religious Conservatism, Renewed Secularism: Political Trends, Trust, and Social Dynamics in the Post-Socialist Orthodox Revivals</b> Jennifer Cash (NTU Singapore)</li> <li><b>Rome, the Christian Dispensation, and Apocalypse in Anthony and Cleopatra</b> Walter Lim (NUS)</li> <li><b>The Secular Realm as Interfaith Space: Discourse and Practice in Contemporary Multicultural Nation-States</b> Paul Hedges (NTU Singapore)</li> </ol>
Friday, 8 April 2022, 3:45 PM - 5:15 PM (Singapore) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Friday, 8 April 2022, 3:45 AM - 5:15 AM (New York)</li> <li>Friday, 8 April 2022, 8:45 AM - 10:15 AM (London)</li> </ul>	<b>Keynote A</b> Monika Wohlrab-Sahr (University of Leipzig)



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# Building Trust, Constituting Allegiance, Imagining Society: A Symposium on Global Religion and Secularism

**Schedule: Saturday, 9 April 2022 (Singapore)**

Time	Programme
Saturday, 9 April 2022, 9:00 AM - 10:30 AM (Singapore) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Friday, 8 April 2022, 9:00 PM - 10:30 PM (New York)</li> <li>Saturday, 9 April 2022, 2:00 AM - 3:30 AM (London)</li> </ul>	<b>Keynote B</b> Jennifer Graber (University of Texas-Austin)
Saturday, 9 April 2022, 10:45 AM - 11:45 AM (Singapore) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Friday, 8 April 2022, 10:45 PM - 11:45 PM (New York)</li> <li>Saturday, 9 April 2022, 3:45 AM - 5:30 AM (London)</li> </ul>	<b>Grant Ideation Session</b> presenters only
Saturday, 9 April 2022, 12:00 PM - 1:30 PM (Singapore) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Saturday, 9 April 2022, 12:00 AM - 1:30 AM (New York)</li> <li>Saturday, 9 April 2022, 5:00 AM - 6:30 AM (London)</li> </ul>	<b>Panel 4: Southeast Asia</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>“What is Secular Control?”: Rethinking State Power through Animals and Mediums in Contemporary Singapore</b> Stuart Strange (Yale-NUS)</li> <li><b>The Game of (After)life: Efforts Towards Death Literacy by a Chinese Funeral Company</b> Jill Tan (Yale)</li> <li><b>Islamic Readings of Krakatau Eruptions, 1883 and 2018</b> Faizah Zakaria (NTU Singapore)</li> </ol>
Saturday, 9 April 2022, 2:30 PM - 4:00 PM (Singapore) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Saturday, 9 April 2022, 2:30 AM - 4:00 AM (New York)</li> <li>Saturday, 9 April 2022, 7:30 AM - 9:00 AM (London)</li> </ul>	<b>Panel 5: South Asia</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Against Ram Mohun Roy’s Critique of Idolatry</b> Parashar Kulkarni (Yale-NUS)</li> <li><b>Religion as Rationality: The Dalit Scholarly Sensibility Applied to South Asian Historiography</b> Nicholas Witkowski (NTU Singapore)</li> <li><b>Depictions of the Ramayana in Early Modern Sri Lanka</b> Sujatha Meegam (NTU Singapore)</li> </ol>
Saturday, 9 April 2022, 4:30 PM - 5:30 PM (Singapore) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Saturday, 9 April 2022, 4:30 AM - 5:30 AM (New York)</li> <li>Saturday, 9 April 2022, 9:30 AM - 10:30 AM (London)</li> </ul>	<b>Roundtable:</b> <b>Keywords in 21st C. Global Religion and Secularism</b>



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