

[Call for Papers—Heritage and Religion in South Asia and its Diasporas: Frictions, Entanglements and Reconfigurations—deadline 15 January](#)

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Call for Papers for a workshop organised by the South Asia Study Circle (CEAS) and the Anthropology of Religion Network (NAR) at the Centre for Research in Anthropology (CRIA), Lisbon, 29-30 June 2023.

Heritage and religion are similar but at the same time conflicting value systems (Meyer and de Witte 2013). Heritage entails a process of selection of ‘fragments of culture’ (Bendix 2009) to which added value is then applied through the label of ‘heritage’. These objects, sites or practices are made to stand as icons of, and identity markers for, nations, diaspora groups or minority communities. In that sense, heritage-making resembles a kind of sacralisation, inasmuch as the label ‘heritage’ lifts up, sets apart and places those objects, sites and practices beyond the ordinary, perhaps even in a numinous realm. At the same time, though, the ‘vibrancy’ of religion (Byrne 2019) seems to undergo a process of desacralisation when heritage becomes involved: heritage tends to ‘freeze’ religious practices and sometimes even obscures or erases the supernatural forces that religious actors attach to their own practices, places of worship and objects. In South Asia, for instance, the notion of ‘heritage’ as we know it today, has developed hand in hand with the formation of postcolonial states, national identities and notions of citizenship—processes that sometimes entailed attempts to ‘modernise’ Asian religions through the marginalisation or even erasure of certain popular religious practices.

Nonetheless, a variety of actors in South Asia and the South Asian diasporas—including politicians of authoritarian and religious nationalist regimes and grass-roots activists who resist those regimes—increasingly and creatively appropriate the language and motifs of global and institutional heritage in vernacular contexts. Consequently, they transform and popularise heritage and, to do so, they often advance specific demands precisely about religious objects, sites and practices. This seems to indicate that heritage-making is increasingly seen as a path to recognition and visibility for a religion or at least that religion is increasingly shaped through recourse to heritage. (‘Religion’ here is understood to include both normative frameworks and lived, vernacular practices while ‘Heritage’ is understood to include institutional heritage frameworks as well as popular conceptions.) As a result, meanings of heritage and religion, and the relationship between them, are continuously transformed and reconfigured.

How do heritage and religion redefine each other, and what role do they play in postcolonial societies and for postcolonial subjects?

Through a discussion of empirically and ethnographically grounded material and case-studies from South Asia and its diasporas, this workshop aims to pinpoint the recurring contradictions and challenges prompted by frictions or productive entanglements of heritage and religion in this region, and as enacted by people from this region elsewhere. At a later stage we would like to transform insights from the workshop into a special issue or collective publication that will contribute to wider

debates about postcolonial and global heritage and the role of religion and religious heritage in postcolonial societies.

The workshop will deal with a set of specific questions:

- How do religion and heritage interact in, and contribute to reconfiguring, postcolonial societies in South Asia and its diasporas?
- How and by whom are heritage and religion mobilised together and to what ends?
- To what extent do South Asian people themselves reconfigure religion vis à vis heritage and vice versa?
- And what does this tell us about global and postcolonial heritage?

We invite papers from scholars with various disciplinary background (including critical heritage studies, anthropology and religious studies) that address one or more of the above questions through case-studies on (but not limited to):

- * The heritagisation of religious sites, objects and practices.
- * Intersections of multiple heritage regimes (international, national, regional or local, vernacular or subaltern) around religious heritage.
- * Modalities of preservation, systematisation and transmission of religious traditions before and beyond global heritage, and as *deśi* heritage-making.
- * Difficult religious heritages.
- * Decoloniality and religious heritage.
- * Migrant and translocal religious heritage in the diasporas.
- * Religious actors and heritage activism.
- * Religious populisms and heritage.
- * Heritages of religious minorities.

Timeline: Please submit an abstract (250 words maximum) addressing the workshop's themes and questions to Vera Lazzaretti at vera.lazzaretti@iscte-iul.pt by 15th January. Decisions about acceptance or rejection will be communicated by the end of February. Submission of papers' first drafts for pre-circulation among participants by 15 May.

Format: will be decided subject to fund availability and locations of selected participants at the workshop—it will most likely be fully online or hybrid.

<https://cria.org.pt/pt/cfp-CEAS-NAR>

Related date:
January 15, 2022