

## [CFP | Religion and the Covid-19 Pandemic: Mediating Presence and Distance](#)

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Type:

Call for Papers

Date:

January 10, 2021

Location:

Singapore

Subject Fields:

Religious Studies and Theology, Southeast Asian History / Studies

**This workshop is organised by the Asia Research Institute, NUS, and jointly sponsored with a grant from Yap Kim Hao Memorial Fund for Comparative Religious Studies at Yale-NUS College, Singapore.**

This workshop explores religious responses to COVID-19 and ritual innovations under the lenses of media, senses, and spaces. How are ritual actions, events and performances (re)mediated, navigating the complex balance between transformative “presence” (Engelke 2007) and cautious “distance”? How are “sensational forms” (Meyer 2011) reproduced, (dis)embodied or re-invented? In these pandemic times, social distancing requirements place all realms of sociality under new constraints. We seek to address how new demands for distance are negotiated with communities’ aspirations to establish connection, proximity, and togetherness in order to realize their religious and spiritual goals. Large congregations of practitioners have been blamed as ‘clusters’ of viral contagion. In the early phases of the COVID-19 pandemic, mainstream media perpetuated the imagination of religious communities tending to be intrinsically conservative, non-compliant, irreconcilable with medical science, and fundamentally opposed to technology. This workshop challenges such representations by exploring diverse and innovative responses as they unfold in accordance with underlying onto-cosmologies and pre-existing power relationships. Through disciplinary perspectives in religious studies, anthropology, sociology, history, and geography, this workshop will bring together an array of scholars to examine how the matter of achieving ‘presence’ on the one hand, and anxieties to maintain social and physical ‘distance’ on the other, are negotiated.

The questions we aim to explore include the following:

1. How are religions engaging new technologies of mediation between human, divine, and between community members?
2. How is the body sensorium engaged in pandemic forms of religiosity? How do pandemic transformations and the use of new media affect sensory and bodily engagements in ritual contexts
3. How are spatial configurations of the sacred shifted to private, domestic, and online spaces? What are the perceptions of presence and absence emerging from such reconfigurations? How are online and domestic modes of worship again cautiously shifted back to communal worship in physical settings?

## SUBMISSION OF PROPOSALS

This workshop is oriented towards the publication of a Special Issue in a peer-reviewed academic journal of international reputation in the fields of religion and society. To participate, please use the [paper proposal form](#) and send your proposal in word file (paper title, 300-word abstract, 100-word bio-note) to Sharon at [arios@nus.edu.sg](mailto:arios@nus.edu.sg) by **10 January 2021, 12.00 am** (Singapore Standard Time). Selected participants will be notified by **30 January 2021** and be offered an honorarium.

## FORMAT

Synchronous + Asynchronous

This format aims to optimize the time and the technology at our disposal to improve the papers and stimulate more interactive discussion. Shorter panels, spread out with long breaks in between, allow the best participation in terms of concentration and constructive engagements.

Papers and presentations will be uploaded online 2 weeks before the workshop takes place. Selected participants will submit: 1) a 5,000 words paper, and 2) a 15 minute presentation by 10 March 2021. Each participant is assigned the role of discussant for another participant's paper. During the 2-day workshop, authors/discussants will meet on Zoom for interactive discussion and feedback. The Zoom discussion panels consist of 3 authors/discussants and one moderator. Each discussant will offer a summary of the paper, followed by her comments, questions and suggestions. Each author will then respond to the comments. Finally, the discussion is open to all participants e-attending the panel. The discussion panels are open to all workshop participants and invited participants (including NUS scholars).

## CONVENORS

**Dr Carola Lorea** | Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore

**Dr Neena Mahadev** | Yale-NUS College, Singapore

**Dr Natalie Lang** | Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore

**Dr Ningning Chen** | Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore

For more on ARI Religion and Globalisation Cluster research blog on religions and Covid-19 in Asia, please visit [CoronAsur](#).

Contact Info:

Miss Sharon Ong  
Workshop Secretariat

Contact Email:  
[arios@nus.edu.sg](mailto:arios@nus.edu.sg)

URL:  
<https://ari.nus.edu.sg/events/rgc19/>