

Parallel session 3B-1.3

**Identities and heritage**

Tuesday 12 November, 16.00 – 17.30

IAS Forum

Co-chairs/discussants:

**Dr Clare Melhuish**, Director, UCL Urban Laboratory; Co-convenor, Curating the City cluster, UCL Centre for Critical Heritage Studies

**Dean Sully**, Lecturer, UCL Institute of Archaeology; Co-convenor, Curating the City cluster, UCL Centre for Critical Heritage Studies

---

**The city as grounded theology: religion and the neoliberal project in urban space**

Kamalika Banerjee, PhD candidate, National University of Singapore

Despite predictions of the waning of religious influences, recent socio-geographical studies have revealed how religion has impacted place-making practices and spatial reconfiguration in the modern society, even in ‘secular’ spaces. In this paper, I compare two upper-middle class residential neighbourhoods in Mumbai to reveal how diverse socio-theological practices have shaped the neoliberal logic and, in turn, the destinies of the two neighbourhoods, one embracing redevelopment, while the other has been preserved as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Built in the 1930s as apartment-styled Art Deco districts, both the neighbourhoods are centred around two parks and came to be protected by the Rent Control Act in 1948. The residents of one, a Marathi Hindu community which played a historical role in orchestrating a right-wing ‘son of the soil’ movement in the city, petitioned against heritage regulations to engineer redevelopment; while the residents in the other, a cosmopolitan mix of communities influenced by the Christian colonial culture and close to the former colonial core, fought against the government and private builders to nominate the precinct as a heritage site.

I argue that these decisions were based on differentiated Hindu/Christian conceptions of sacred and profane, since each of the communities have preserved what they deem sacred - the open park in the first (Hindu) case and the Art Deco buildings in the second (Christian) case. I explain the differential spatial outcomes as manifestations of ‘grounded theologies, the performative practices of placemaking informed by the understanding of the transcendent’ (Tse, 2014). Through a comparative analysis of the grounded theologies of the two neighbourhoods, internally fragmented by caste, regional community and changing composition, this paper contributes to the scholarship on geographies of “actually existing neoliberalism” (Brenner & Theodore, 2002, p. 349). It delineates the ‘path-dependent’ nature of neoliberalism by studying the interaction between the religious constitution of space and the neoliberal project.

---

## **Playing or Being Played? Tokyo 2020 Games Volunteers and the new urban dramaturgy**

Conor Moloney, PhD candidate, Queen Mary, University of London

This research, tested with participants and organisers in the Tokyo 2020 Olympic & Paralympic Games Volunteer programme (equivalent to London 2012's 'Games Makers') during the orientation phases prior to training, presents new perspectives on participation, identity and associational life in cities, and suggests the wider utility dramaturgical analysis may have in contemporary urban studies.

Cities are increasingly animated by different forms of play. Product placements, street games, pop-up events and interactive installations all invite participation by constructing playful atmospheres and performative experiences. Why have such approaches become so ubiquitous, and what do they tell us about contemporary cities and citizens? How do people understand their own performativity in these practices? What kind of subjectivities is it producing? In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) Erving Goffman proposed that social interactions are in themselves performative and used the metaphor of theatre in a 'dramaturgical' analysis: 'roles' taken up, 'onstage' settings and props, 'backstage' preparations, and presentation to 'audience'. This paper presents research undertaken in Summer 2019, adopting Goffman's method in a spatial perspective to examine cultural practices in contemporary cities. Findings suggest key aspects of the formation of the Games Volunteer experience are decidedly dramaturgical, indeed the Japanese organisers explicitly conceptualise Games Volunteers as cast members in a theatrical production. Furthermore, while Games Volunteers themselves disclose a wide range of motivations for participation, they repeatedly refer unprompted to affective and performative aspects of the staging, scripting and sharing of their expected experience at the Games. And beyond the event itself the Games Volunteer programme has become a focus for anti-Olympic activism which interprets it rather simply as an exploitative work practice, though such models of participation are characteristic of the more complex 'relational' practices increasingly common in the arts and creative sector more generally.

---

## **Hummus(ising) the homeland: Crafting space through identity fetishism**

Ahmed Alaqra, PhD candidate, Université Paris Diderot

Yasmin Huleileh, Co-founder, FANA

This paper will shed a light on the different fetishised spatial productions that the Palestinians represented by their political leaders produce to construct/affirm/highlight their National identity (Future state Identity). The city of Ramallah will be a site of investigation for those forms of fetishism. Both Marx and Freud portray Fetishism as a specific way in which a material/sexual object is displaced from its meanings and glorified instead. The reality of a commodity for Marx is its congealed labour value; it is the fetishised form that a commodity would have value for its material character. For Freud, shoes and underwear are "normal clothes" and their fetishised form is when they became objects of sexual arousal (Dant, 1996). This conception of Fetishism can be further expanded toward the way Palestinians fetishise part of their material culture for the sake of constructing a

national identity and national state, the same way hummous is fetishised from a food to being a pillar of a national identity.

It does not take much for an observer to notice the overly fetishised representation of Palestinian culture in the city of Ramallah. This representation unveils the dynamics in which culture became an important material object whose meaning could be displaced and taken out of its true context to affirm to national discourse that calls for a state (see the work of Kuryel, 2011 in Turkish election). Palestinian landscape as an important cultural material (both the natural and the manmade) can be seen as an important medium that is fetishised or allows the different objects of fetishism to be displayed for the sake of the national state (See Mitchel 1994).

“Landscape takes on the quality of fetish commodity, as fetish it is designated with qualities not inherent to it, yet values are represented as emanating from land rather than being the creation of society which transforms land into landscape... what makes it [earth from "A Piece of Holy Land" by Sliman Mansour] so poignant is the fact that it is earth from Palestine from the beloved homeland” Sherwell, 2004. P:2

The transformation that happened to the perception of landscape and its production has been the subject of discourse for several authors (See El Sakka, Weizman, Hillal, Khalidi and Muhsen) who discussed such production/transformation under their eco-political narratives. Yet, I argue that many of those transformations/productions, whether they were to promote political democratisation or economic neo-liberalisation, were painted with fetishised narratives in order to sell them better to the public. An example can be seen in the recent Palestinian pavilion, or in the advertising billboards of Rawabi city, or in the olive trees in front of the Palestinian political headquarters (Al-Mukata).

---

### **New Mosque Architecture in Dhaka: Ethics, Aesthetics and the Religious Imaginary**

Priyanka Hutschenreiter, PhD candidate, SOAS University of London

Dhaka is home to approximately 20 million people. The city itself is not large, yet its borders are unclear, and it is continually expanding in order to accommodate its growing population. Next to new mosques being built in new neighbourhoods by the city corporations, a particular kind of modern mosque structure is evolving, which can be seen around Dhaka, as well as other parts of Bangladesh. These new mosques are constructed privately, funded by upper-class people, and designed by elite architectural companies. The localities and audiences of these mosques, however, vary and are not restricted to the upper classes. These mosques thus become sites of class-intersection, in terms of (a) the imagination of the funders and the architects, and (b) the everyday reality and experience of the habitual users of the mosques. My paper focuses on the former. The facades, interiors and facilities of these mosques are very different, but equally unique in that they eschew or reimagine traditional South Asian mosque architecture. At the same time, these mosque structures represent a need to be grounded in the history, contemporality and environment of their specific localities. These mosques offer spaces for their users as part of a modern approach to securing a sacred environment and religious experience that is commensurate with the traditional as well as the modern. My paper argues that these new structures reflect upper-

class insecurities about what constitutes 'traditional' and 'modern' modes of religiosity, what a 'good' religious experience should be, and how a community should share this experience in Dhaka today. I thus explore how upper-class aesthetics, imagination and ethics are part and parcel of this project to create a contemporary urban religious landscape and experience across Dhaka.