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Masterclass "Unesco and the politics of religious heritage"

Thursday, May 25, and Friday, May 26, 2023

University of Groningen

This masterclass will focus on the politicization of religious heritage, taking as case studies religious practices and traditions that have been inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. For two days, the participants will analyze the power of religious heritage as a political tool that structures the relationship between the states and religion in new ways. The following questions will be addressed:

- Does heritage offer a field of action in which the state acquires power over the religious practices, and religious institutions gain a new place of authority inside secular traditions and within the state?
- What interests and strategies are pursued by the various actors that contribute to Unesco heritage applications (nation-states, religious institutions, regional and subaltern actors)?
- How does Unesco heritage appellation alter religious practices?
- How are religious heritage politics altering the separation of state and religion? Are they supplanting or by contrast strengthening regimes of secularity?
- What role does heritage play in the global politics of indigeneity and decolonization?

The masterclass is meant for doctoral and master students interested in religious heritage from different disciplines and perspectives. Although focusing on the elements inscribed on the international Unesco lists, the themes of the workshop are applicable more broadly to religious practices that are considered as cultural heritage. For instance, religious traditions inscribed in the Dutch inventory of intangible heritage (Inventaris Immaterieel Erfgoed Nederland) or featured in tourist routes or museum exhibitions can be also studied during the workshop.

The masterclass is part of the workshop series of the Dutch Network for Religious Heritage and it builds on the 2021 NGG Conference on "Religion and Heritage: Future for Religious Pasts". With funds from the Cultural Heritage Agency, it is co-sponsored by the Centre for Religion and Heritage of the University of Groningen, the Meertens Institute, the University of Utrecht, the Dutch Association for the Study of Religion (Nederlands Genootschap voor Godsdienstwetenschap -NGG), the Netherlands School for Advanced Studies in Theology and Religion (NOSTER) and the research centre Multiple Secularities of the University of Leipzig.



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Speakers: dr. Todd H. Weir (RUG; convenor), Martín Andrade-Pérez MA (RUG, Meertens Institute; organiser), dr. Birgit Meyer (Utrecht University), dr. Irene Stengs (Meertens Institute), dr. Marian Burchardt (Universität Leipzig), dr. Ernst van den Hemel (Meertens Institute).

Course objectives: Familiarizing young researchers with the cultural heritage concepts and methodologies for the analysis of religious and secular practices.

Learning goals: The participant will be able to:

- Apply cultural heritage terms and methodologies in their analysis of religious practices.
- Analyse the role of religious heritage in post-secular times.
- Recognize the political power of religious heritage.

Programme: Day 1, morning: Lectures; afternoon: presentations of case studies by (selected) ReMA students and PhD candidates. Day 2, morning: discussion/analysis of case studies; afternoon: closing presentations and conclusions.

Credits and workload: 1 EC (28 hours)

Students are invited to register by sending an e-mail to m.andrade-perez@rug.nl.

ReMA students and PhD candidates who are members of NOSTER or at any other research school in the Humanities can register through NOSTER. The latter need to apply for a NOSTER Junior Guest Account if they don't have one yet. After you have written a reflection assignment, NOSTER can provide an official document that you can use to receive ECs for participating in this workshop.