

At a moment when the 'resurgence of religion' is calling into question the secular orientation of global futures, we ask: isn't it time for cross-cultural, cross-disciplinary debate about the role that the sacred plays in our ideas and our histories of personal and collective agency, power and change?

This conference will bring together scholars, professionals and arts-practitioners to investigate the ways in which sacred traditions - in diverse historical and cultural contexts - have shaped discourses and practices of empowerment, emancipation, change, resistance and survival.

We invite proposals for 20-minute presentations, which address the relationship between empowerment and the sacred to be given at the conference. For more information on conference themes and submitting a proposal please see our Call for Papers (attached and below) or visit our website at: <http://www.empowermentandthesacred.com>

Call for Papers

Keynote Speakers: Professors Kim Knott (University of Leeds); Bart Moore-Gilbert (Goldsmith's University); Neil L. Whitehead (University of Wisconsin)

Discussing international responses to the 'resurgence of religion' in our time, Talal Asad has argued: 'If anything is agreed upon, it is that a straightforward narrative of progress from the religious to the secular is no longer acceptable' (Asad, 2006). In the 'straightforward narratives' of which Asad talks - and in Enlightenment discourses of 'reason', 'progress' and 'modernity' more generally - religion, spirituality and the sacred have customarily been pitted against empowerment and emancipation, in political, cultural and intellectual terms. At this present historical juncture, then - when the secularist orientation of global futures is increasingly being called into question - a vital need presents itself for cross-cultural, cross-disciplinary debate about the role that the sacred has, does and can play in our understanding of the possibilities of personal and collective agency, power and change.

This conference will bring together scholars, professionals and arts-practitioners to investigate the ways in which sacred traditions - in diverse cultural and historical contexts - have shaped discourses, practices and narratives of empowerment, emancipation, social change, resistance and survival. We ask: How do difference sacred discourses and practices frame and/or extend the possibilities of agency - socially, spiritually, imaginatively and corporeally? What variant conceptions of the spheres of activity have they produced - whether temporal, spatial, cultural, cosmic, public and/or private? And what role have religious and spiritual traditions played in political discourses and counter-discourses of class, gender, race, sexuality, cultural identity, humanism and human right? Where sacred traditions have challenged the limits of secular reason, what alternatives have they suggested for cognition, representation, and even rationality? And how have they 'empowered' different artistic practices? Does the 'commitment to social justice' necessitate the 'translation' of sacred realities into 'disenchanted histories', in order to maintain dialogue with modern institutions (Dipesh Chakrabarty)? Or does a 'conception of creativity in dialogue with the sacred' enable an interrogation of 'forbidden territories within ourselves' as well as 'the sacrosanct territories of our institutiois' (Wilson Harris)? Do sacred traditions themselves provide the premises for imaginations of cross-cultural

and inter-faith community that differ from secular multiculturalism?

We welcome papers, especially from postgraduates and early career researchers, that address issues of the sacred and empowerment in relation to topics that may include, but are by no means limited to:

- * Concepts of agency: God, gods, spirits and the divine; the human/extra-human; identity and 'imagined communities'; actors, heroes/anti-heroes, role-models and leaders; somatic/spiritual powers.
- * Performances of power: artistic, cultural, political, ritual; protest and activism; violence/non-violence.
- * Histories and historiography: colonialism and the postcolonial; globalization; materialism; memory.
- * Sacred texts and authority: interpretation, translation, intertextuality; secular/religious criticism; freedom of speech, blasphemy and taboo.
- * Place, space and environment: sacred sites and land rights; nature, geography, topography, archaeology.
- * Difference and Dialogue: orthodoxy/the unorthodox; syncretism; inter-faith and cross-culturalism.
- * Justice and judgment: ethics, morality, legality; sacred-secular/inter-faith arbitration.
- * Secular/sacred powers and the state: private/public spheres; policy-making and pedagogy.
- * Re-conceptualizations: 'sacred', 'secular', 'post-secular', 'religion', 'magic', spirituality, 'myth' etc.
- * Action, motivation and practice choice, desire, sacrifice and faith; freedom/constraint.
- * Epistemologies and aesthetics: faith, rationalism and science; representation and the unrepresentable.

Please submit 300 word abstracts, accompanied by a 100 word biography, for 20 minute papers to the conference organisers, Shivani Rajkomar and Lori Shelbourn, at organisers@empowermentandthesacred.com

. The deadline for submissions is February 20th 2011. Further details can be found on our website

<http://www.empowermentandthesacred.com>