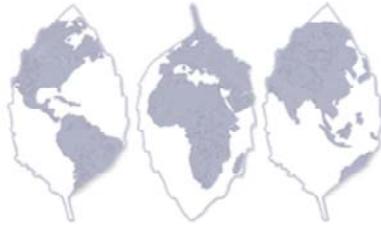


Remaking the Fort: Familiarization, Heritage, and Gentrification in Sri Lanka's Galle Fort



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This paper examines the postcolonial life of Galle Fort, a former colonial city in southern Sri Lanka, which has seen dramatic spatial, social and economic transformations over the past two decades. The small walled town, home to a multi-ethnic community of less than 300 families, has drawn both national and international attention for its colonial built environment, and become the focus of substantial state-led projects of heritage management. Further, the growing interest of expatriate investors in purchasing and reselling properties in the Fort has produced increasing tourism-related gentrification. Building on ethnographic research conducted over two years, this paper poses the following questions: How do bureaucrats, restorers, and architects reconstruct the Fort's colonial urban forms as postcolonial heritage? How do residents respond to the growing number of building regulations and laws aimed at managing not only their homes but also their social, spatial and economic activities? What transnational socio-economic processes have drawn expatriate investors to this former colonial city and how are they transforming colonial buildings into elite spaces marketable to an exclusive tourist clientele? Using spatial analyses and interviews with residents, bureaucrats, and expatriates, this paper examines Galle Fort's urban life, heritage politics, and entanglements in global real estate markets, looking at how a number of its contemporary power dynamics and resistances relate to and sometimes even recall struggles over space that characterized urban life in cities under colonial rule.

Nethra Samarawickrema is a second year PhD student in the Department of Anthropology. She has an M.A. in Anthropology from Dalhousie University where her thesis examined postcolonial spatial formations, heritage practices, and gentrification in Galle Fort, a former colonial port-city in Sri Lanka. Her doctoral project will investigate the nexus between trade and cosmopolitanism in the Indian Ocean, seeking to conceptualize social and economic relations in the region outside the poles of conviviality and conflict, focusing on diverse forms intimacy and sociality across ethnic, religious, and class lines. She plans to conduct fieldwork in the port-cities of Galle and Colombo in Sri Lanka.

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