

Security and heritage in the making of urban futures: A new research avenue

Ethnography
2024, Vol. 0(0) 1–21
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DOI: 10.1177/14661381241266918

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Abstract

Heritage and security are distinct research topics in anthropology, but some of their connections have been unpacked, particularly in scholarship about heritage during conflicts and peace building. This article, however, brings them analytically together to understand how they entangle to shape cities and their futures. In scrutinising overlooked similarities between heritage and security, my longitudinal ethnography in Banaras (Varanasi) suggests that both intersect productively in anticipating and making urban futures. I argue that a Hindu majoritarian urban future—as materialised in the walls, signboards and checkpoints of the Prime Minister’s flagship Kashi Vishvanath Dham and Corridor—unfolded precisely through security and heritage. This future seems to be, at least partially, shared by those who are excluded from it. Bridging the largely disconnected anthropological scholarship on heritage and security, this article offers a first ethnographically-grounded theorisation of security and heritage as cross-fertilising urban processes that make futures.

Keywords

Security, heritage, urban future, South Asia, Hindu nationalism, urban everyday life, urban heritage, policing, inter-religious space

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From future unimaginable to future materialised

After a break of almost 3 years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I return to Banaras (Varanasi) in October 2022 to find that what some of my interlocutors had called an ‘unimaginable’ future has materialised in the monochromatic pinkish sandstone of the Kashi Vishvanath Dham and Corridor.

Banaras is a city of about 1.5 million people in India’s most populous state (Uttar Pradesh, or UP). It lies on the banks of the Ganges river and features prominently in translocal imaginaries as a unique, ancient and renowned Hindu pilgrimage centre. A stronghold of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for decades, the city was chosen in 2014 as the parliamentary constituency of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The so-called ‘timeless city’ subsequently began what the PM’s website describes as a ‘glorious development journey (*vikas yatra*)’ in order to ‘appear more prominently on the world tourist map’.¹ Modi’s pet project for his own constituency is the Kashi Vishvanath Dham and Corridor (henceforth KVDC),² a new monumental space finalised during the pandemic.

As I walk the redevelopment area around the city’s most renowned Hindu temple, Kashi Vishvanath, I observe the new facilities for pilgrims. Sign boards for ‘iconic sites’ or ‘rediscovered’ temples have popped up, confirming official depictions about the KVDC as a showcase of Indian (Hindu) heritage. At the same time, security—a long-standing presence in this neighbourhood—is visibly increased: there are new walls and checkpoints to access the temple compound and, together with the usual UP state police force, guards of a private security company now patrol the new monumental space.

‘*Kalpna nahi kar sakta*’ (I cannot imagine), a sentence that several residents and shopkeepers had often repeated when asked about the future of their neighbourhoods, continues to resonate in my head. At the time of those conversations in 2016 and 2017, *suraksha* (security) transitioned from being just a nuisance in my daily ethnographic fieldwork around Kashi Vishvanath to becoming a research focus. As often happens in anthropological research, that transition occurred as a result of puzzles that emerged in the field rather than from a priori theoretical interests: indeed, my interlocutors had identified policing and security measures around the temple as a major cause of disruptions to the geographies of pilgrimage that I was unpacking at that time. This prompted me to take a closer look at what *suraksha* meant for the neighbourhood.

The presence of police and security measures had, by then, strayed far from its original purpose of ensuring peace and order in an area potentially fraught with inter-religious tension. Notably, the 18th century Kashi Vishvanath temple is just meters from the royal Mughal Gyanvapi mosque. The latter was erected most likely in the 17th century, on the site and with some of the material of a previous Hindu temple,³ and is in use for prayers by Sunni Muslims. Because of its origins, Gyanvapi has been a longstanding target of Hindu nationalist campaigns for the ‘liberation’ (*mukti*) of allegedly originally Hindu places of worship and, since the 1990s, the mosque has been under the protection of national and state security forces to prevent an outcome like the one prompted by the Ramjanmabhoomi movement in Ayodhya.⁴

‘How do you imagine the future of this neighbourhood?’, I used to ask residents and shopkeepers of the lively *bazaar* around the temple-mosque compound in early conversations about security. Even interlocutors who had just disclosed a local anthropology of (in)security by sharing insights about the neighbourhood’s transitions over three decades, would reply (no matter how much I tried to stimulate their imagination) with the rather puzzling statement: ‘*kalpana nahi kar sakta*’, or ‘I cannot imagine (how the future will be)’.

A few months after those conversations, that unimaginable future began materialising at a fast pace. Following the landslide victory of the BJP in UP in March 2017, preparations began for the KVDC. Within 3 years more than 300 buildings were demolished under the watch of UP police and the new monumental space, inaugurated by the PM in December 2021, now connects the temple to the Ganges riverbank. Despite the rubble, the KVDC is widely spoken about and promoted as a new heritage site and the PM has repeatedly stressed that it is a model for development that respects (and does not destroy) history and traditions.⁵

How did such a future materialise so quickly, and what is it made of? In the next pages, I address these questions by pulling together and expanding reflections that emerged within the anthropology of security and space on the one hand, and critical heritage studies on the other. In so doing, I attend to the under-explored ways in which security *and* heritage (beyond times of war and its immediate aftermath) may be entangled in urban everyday life and become co-productive of urban spaces, imaginaries and futures. This article draws on ethnographic material collected during periods of three to 5 months almost every year between 2013 and 2022 through observations of everyday life, embodied spatial experience and engagement with residents, Hindu pilgrimage experts, Muslim and Hindu religious authorities, frequenters of both temple and mosque, shopkeepers and low ranking police, as well as analysis of legal, visual and digital sources in and about the centre of Banaras.

The type of Hindu majoritarian future that materialised in the KVDC, my ethnography suggests, was already well in the making in previous decades and is made up of ticket counters, checkpoints, barriers, signboards and people in uniform. Indeed, this future was anticipated in previous decades, and then progressively inscribed onto the historic centre of Banaras, by and through the registers and materials of security. However, it was eventually sanctioned and gift wrapped for the city and the nation with the construction of the KVDC, precisely through the resignification of the city and the neighbourhood using the registers and materials of heritage. Put simply, the future at the centre of Banaras is made of, and materialised through, security and heritage.

Through my ethnography, I argue that security and heritage are simultaneous and cross-fertilising urban processes that make futures, and thus should be studied conjointly in other cities.

Security and heritage: Approaches to under-explored similarities

Heritage and security are distinct areas of research in the social sciences and humanities but some scholars have begun dealing with their connections. An important article by historian and heritage scholar Mattias Legnér (2017) reviews these connections and identifies two main research directions in which security and heritage have been approached conjointly: a first, more prominent direction—which the author calls ‘heritage *in* security’—includes studies dealing with the protection and ‘securitisation’ of heritage, mainly during conflicts. Because heritage-making is an attempt by one group to craft a universalising narrative of the past for transmission into the future (Di Giovine, 2015; Harrison, 2005), heritage is clearly also a target for those who oppose that narrative, and reasons for attacks on it have been widely addressed (Bevan, 2006; Brosché et al., 2017; Layton et al., 2001; Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1996). So too have questions of how to protect heritage during conflicts (e.g., Rothfield, 2008; Kila and Zeidler, 2013) and what impact protection and security measures may have on the ground (Russo and Giusti, 2018) and, more recently, on access to urban heritage (Overmann and Gantner, 2019). A second research direction—in Legnér’s terminology ‘heritage *as* security’—investigates the role of heritage in peace-building, thus framing it as a possible security-making device. It does so by investigating the aftermath of civil wars and armed conflicts, particularly in Eastern Europe and the Middle East (Gould, 2018; Legnér, 2017; Walters et al., 2017).

This article moves beyond the two above research directions to open up a new avenue that investigates the ways in which security and heritage entangle and shape cities. The urgency of doing so emerged inductively during my ethnographic research in Banaras which I will discuss in the next sections. From a reading of the anthropological literature on heritage and security that I offer in this section, however, we can already deduce that the two processes of heritagisation and securitisation are worth being explored conjointly.

In anthropology, concepts of security and heritage and the objects they try to define are seen as contested and negotiable. Ethnographic accounts highlight that both heritage and security are inherently spatial: each is productive of new socio-spatial formations inasmuch as, in their names, places are transformed irretrievably; and so are the ways in which people relate to them. Importantly, ‘heritagisation’ and ‘securitisation’ are selective processes: they both exclude what is not selected as ‘heritage’, or what is not protected. Anthropological literature about their respective fallouts abounds: it documents ‘spatial cleansing’ (Herzfeld, 2006) and the displacement of previous inhabitants from newly labelled heritage sites (Bloch, 2016; Chu, 2018; Collins, 2015; De Cesari and Dimova, 2019; Dines, 2012; Herzfeld, 2010, 2017; Meskell, 2019) and the ‘insecuritisation’ of people and places through policing and security discourses (Caldeira, 2000; De Goede et al., 2019; Fassin, 2014; Feldman, 2012; Goldstein, 2010; Lazzaretti, 2021a; Maguire et al., 2014).

It is precisely in their roles separately as future-makers that I detect another important but under-explored similarity between heritage and security. It is accepted that heritage not only concerns the past, but is also a means through which ‘futures are imagined and

made possible' in the present (Harrison, 2013: 7). Ongoing resignification of heritage as having increasingly more to do with future aspirations than modern anxieties (as established by classic works on heritage such as Lowenthal, 1998; Harrison, 2013) has begun to be documented. In postcolonial nations, for instance, heritage is a means for economic gain and global recognition that nurtures a selectively distributed 'capacity to aspire' (Appadurai, 2004) and the imagining of future (Meskell, 2019; Zetterstrom-Sharp, 2014). As well, 'aspirational futures' are increasingly in evidence in (Asian) urban contexts (Bunnell and Goh, 2018), and the 'futuring' of postcolonial cities (Datta, 2019; Urry, 2016) relies heavily on recourse to a selected mythological past (Kuldova and Varghese, 2017; Udayakumar, 2005). In this context, the construction of new monuments and new heritages (Lazzaretti, 2021b; Lefèvre, 2020) becomes crucial for imagining the future.

Security is inherently linked to space and places (Low and Maguire, 2019). Importantly, imaginaries and materials of security generate global 'scapes' (Appadurai, 1990) that articulate discursively and spatially, at multiple scales. But despite the fact that seeking protection from unknown futures is a driving force behind the security-marketing of futuristic technologies, security has only recently begun to be addressed as future-oriented. To do so, scholars pay close attention to the affective and aesthetics of security, and highlight its sensory roots (Caldeira, 2000; Ghertner et al., 2020). They also often build on Rancière's (2004: 12) elaboration of aesthetic politics as the 'distribution of the sensible', that is 'a shared aesthetic disposition, a normative arrangement of intelligibility' (Ghertner et al., 2020: 4) and, in so doing, pay close attention to security's potential in creating consensus and shared future visions.

While similarities between security and heritage can be detected in the above literature, their potential cross-fertilisation has been explicitly addressed in the work of anthropologist John Collins, which was inspirational for my own work in Banaras. Looking at everyday policing in Pelourinho, the UNESCO-branded centre of Salvador de Bahia, Collins (2014 and 2015) illustrates how policing shapes supposedly homogeneous urban spaces. In particular, the author suggests that policing is part of the state's toolkit for producing heritage, inasmuch as it participates actively in the cultural showcasing of the everyday life of selected residents for a tourist audience. Collins' work does not explicitly frame policing and heritage-making as future-oriented processes, but implicitly suggests that aspirations for, and anticipation of, future in Pelourinho are enabled through them. My own ethnography in Banaras provides a solid base to advance this argument explicitly.

By connecting the dots in the above literature, this article frames security and heritage in Banaras as processes that assemble and are composed of, imaginaries, registers and materials, and play crucial roles in aspiration, anticipation and future-making. Far from being restricted to institutional domains and manifesting as solely top-down processes, heritagisation and securitisation are seen to create aesthetic consensus and define belonging to the future. They involve a variety of actors who often mobilise contrasting imaginaries and visions of security and heritage. It remains to be seen, however, whether and how these similar urban processes become interwoven and work conjointly to make futures. I now turn to my field site to ground the hypothesis of heritage and security as cross-fertilising urban processes that make futures.

Banaras and Hindu nationalist aspirations for it

Banaras is often portrayed in popular narratives as ‘sitting outside of mortal time, and as a seemingly unique urban site with a particular (“Hindu”) religious character’ (Dodson, 2012: 1). This powerful imaginary has been produced over time, but crystallised through the actions of a variety of regional patrons and the colonial administration during the 18th and 19th centuries (Dalmia, 1997; Desai, 2017; Dodson, 2012; Freitag, 1989; Gaenszle and Gengnagel, 2006). Urban imaginaries continue to evolve, however, and be productive in the contemporary moment: the above idea of Banaras—particularly its symbolic capital as a ‘Hindu city’—appears to be central to its choice as the constituency from which the BJP⁶ and its prime ministerial candidate Narendra Modi, campaigned during the 2014 national election.⁷ At that time, Modi’s controversial public image as a Chief Minister of Gujarat and ‘Emperor of Hindu Hearts’, was morphing into a more appealing image as a self-made *vikas purush*, or development man, able to guide the world’s largest democracy out of the ‘bad days’ of previous governance and make India a global power and a world-class destination (Jaffrelot, 2021; Kaur, 2015). Banaras, then, afforded Modi ‘a symbolic religious and urban backdrop that would appeal to his Hindu-right supporters—committed to realising India as a Hindu *rashtra* (nation)’ while at the same time he campaigned more on economic issues (Williams, 2021: 160). BJP electoral slogans included ‘*acche din anevale hain*’ (good days are about to come), and ‘*sabka sath, sabka vikas*’, (with everybody’s effort, development for all).

After Modi’s electoral victory in 2014, the emphasis on development and promises of a prosperous future began to affect Banaras and its imaginary. The city became the recipient of numerous government initiatives, including the widening of roads and improvement of railway junctions, renewal of the electricity supply system and ‘beautification’ of religious infrastructures, as well as projects for the ‘rejuvenation’ of water bodies and sanitation of the *ghats* (the area along the riverfront) and the river. The city’s ‘face-lift’ accelerated with its inclusion in the second phase of the Smart City Mission in 2016.⁸ This scheme rethinks the city’s future in accordance with six principles, in which heritage and security feature prominently.⁹ The smart city concept is often mobilised to project India’s urban future as one that materialises in tandem with foreign investors and corporates and expresses itself through new digital technologies (Datta, 2015), but imaginaries of the smart city acquired a very specific flavour in Banaras. The future of the ‘timeless city’ is in fact reimagined as a mixture of allegedly ancient traditions and futuristic infrastructures and technologies, as exemplified by advertising slogans for projects of Banaras’ *vikas yatra* that play with the tradition/modernity binary—a binary that apparently is dissolved through Banaras’ projection as a ‘smart heritage city’ (Williams, 2021).¹⁰

Registers and materials of heritage evidently play a crucial role in projecting Banaras in a Hindu majoritarian future: as in the case of the KVDC, and in line with a long history of patronage and resignification, the city’s historic fabric continues to be the canvas on which the urban visions of politicians, as well as administrative and cultural elites, are inscribed (Desai, 2017; Freitag, 1989, 2006).

Alongside references to heritage, commentators and scholars have observed that the BJP government built its national appeal crucially through references to security,

particularly during the national electoral campaign in 2019.¹¹ In Banaras, though, registers of security were mobilised well before it became Modi's constituency. These are often interwoven with the reality of a heterogeneous population: despite being often described as a 'Hindu city', about 30% of population is Muslim and since colonial times these kinds of cities and particularly their religious festivals and multi-religious places of worship have been governed as potential threats to public order and security (Pai and Kumar, 2018; Varshney, 2002). Apart from a few instances of communal riots in the 19th and 20th century (Raman, 2010), though, Banaras has not experienced the extent of inter-religious violence seen elsewhere in India. Due to a long and well documented history of productive inter-religious collaborations in the once thriving but now declining textile sector (Kumar, 1987; Raman, 2010), the city is often described in scholarly accounts, media and by Banarasis themselves, as an example of Hindu–Muslim brotherhood and a virtuous exception in a region prone to inter-religious violence. This very narrative has been shown to assist the reproduction of a 'everyday peace' (Williams, 2015) that, however, rests on the inherent inequality between Hindu majority and Muslim minority (Ibid and Cf. Lazzaretti, 2021a). Frictions at inter-religious sites, threats posed by international terrorism¹² and the movement of pilgrims and tourists particularly in the reputedly 'labyrinthine' neighbourhoods of the old city, though, remain topics often treated as likely security issues both in the local press (Lazzaretti, 2020) and in everyday talk, as shown below. The Smart City principle of a *surakshit* city seems itself to nurture the idea of Banaras as potentially dangerous and endangered. The recent increased surveillance of public and religious places and the creation of a Smart City control room (Trinetra Bhavan¹³), seem to add to this and promote security as both a future horizon and a means to it.

Let us now zoom again into the neighbourhood around the Kashi Vishvanath temple and the Gyanvapi mosque to investigate how the above imaginaries of security and heritage play out in, and intersect with, the fabric of the city.

Ethnographic explorations of security and heritage at the heart of Banaras

In this section, I explore registers and materials of security and heritage as they unfold around the temple-mosque compound and are co-opted by various actors over several decades.

Security as, and in the making of, urban future

The neighbourhood under investigation has long been seen as in need of security: police were deployed there at specific festivals in colonial times and in the first decades after independence.¹⁴ The massive deployment of security forces that we see recently, however, began with the intensification of 'liberation' campaigns in the early 1990s and aimed to protect the mosque from attacks by Hindu nationalist militants and, more generally, discourage inter-religious frictions. It should be remembered that in 1990, the Ramjanmabhumi movement that eventually led to the destruction of the Babri mosque by

mobs of Hindutva activists in December 1992, is at its acme. As well, the protection of places of worship was increasingly a national concern, and discussions in parliament eventually led to the 1991 Places of Worship (Special Provision) Act.¹⁵ In subsequent decades, though, a progressive expansion of security to the whole compound and neighbourhood occurred, both materially and discursively. Along with the mushrooming of barricades, watch towers, checkpoints, barriers and bodies in the uniforms of state and national security forces, so too the terminology used in the local press shifted when referring to the securitised area. An analysis of local Hindi newspapers (Lazzaretti, 2020), shows that in 1990, the Gyanvapi mosque is the main object of protection, while later reports mention more often the compound or even the whole neighbourhood.

My ethnography below, then, helps pin down a perhaps unexpected turn in the progressive expansion of security; this occurs over the course of three decades, when what the Copenhagen School of Security Studies would have called the ‘object of securitisation’ (Buzan, de Wilde and Wæaver, 1998) began shifting from the Gyanvapi mosque to the Kashi Vishvanath temple. This shift, I show below, is now fully accomplished with the KVDC.

Let us look more closely at the role of security measures and policing in this shift. While both state and national security forces are involved in the supervision of the temple-mosque compound, I draw principally on observations of, and casual interactions with, low ranking UP police. As a white woman researching in a sensitive, volatile and potentially dangerous area, and in an increasingly authoritarian setting, I have carefully to navigate the field, adjust methodological strategies and re-interpret research ethics. Open and repeated discussions with the elite, more highly trained security forces,¹⁶ or full disclosure of the scope of my research are not viable options, as is the case with much ethnographic work in similar settings (De Goede et al., 2019; Sökefeld and Strasser, 2016). Random and short interactions with low ranking UP police, who are often available for a chat with visitors, and happen to be particularly curious and eager to meet foreigners (especially if they speak Hindi), however, provide crucial insights about on-the-ground work of security measures and policing. This is because UP police are the public face of security: they control almost all the publicly accessible areas at the temple-mosque compound, interact often with local people and pilgrims alike, and have become part of everyday life in the neighbourhood. When my other interlocutors, such as residents and shopkeepers, refer to police in the area, it is the UP police they have in mind, unless they explicitly mention the elite forces. But how exactly does one encounter police there, what does this public face of security look like and what do their attitudes tell us?

Every day a heterogeneous, gesticulating and rather lost-looking crowd of Hindu pilgrims proceeds slowly around the temple-mosque compound while they are constantly offered flowers, milk and sweets to donate to the deity Vishvanath. Shopkeepers, pilgrim guides and residents direct them, shouting in their faces and they are pressed to leave their belongings and shoes at any shop they encounter. If they are already without belongings and hold offerings in their hands, they will be pointed towards one of the gates to the temple. Groups of UP police sit on benches outside the checkpoints, or at other specific posts; a few busy themselves searching pilgrims, while others stare at the crowd. Others chat over cups of *chay* at small local shops, or have their *chay* placed in their hands by street vendors. They

carry batons, and rifles. Almost all police officers are visibly Hindu: they might have red and yellow threads tied on their wrists or the fresh ash and vermilion on their foreheads that indicates that they have worshiped at the temple. Like temple-goers, many police have bare feet, completing their ambiguity: these UP police are ‘the edge where state and society meet’ (Jauregui, 2016: 22) but they are also ordinary devotees of Shiva.

Police too participate in the above-described pilgrim (dis)orienting exercise—they issue instructions to the crowd about how to proceed, where to buy temple-offerings, where to leave shoes and belongings and how to behave. They often push and shove. They serve and enhance the temple and do so not only through their words but also through their bodies and the security infrastructure. Consider, for instance, a police booth positioned until a few of years ago on the main road, next to one of the checkpoints for the compound. Before redevelopment for the KVDC, that police booth carried a sign that welcomed people to ‘Kashi, the holy city of Kashi Vishvanath temple’ and a UP Tourism Department information board about the temple. Although just a few meters from the only checkpoint through which Muslims could access the Gyanvapi mosque, the signs bore no trace of its existence. Like the signs, conversations with constables and sub-inspectors omitted the mosque: when asked about the reason for their presence, my interlocutors almost exclusively referred to the security of *the temple*. The temple alone was presented as the main attraction and a possible target of attacks, particularly by, as one put it, ‘Islamic terrorism’. When asked directly about the security of *the mosque*, some of the police I talked to over the years acknowledged the proximity of temple and mosque as a security issue but only very few explicitly mentioned the agitation for, and demolition of, the Babri mosque in Ayodhya.

The changing fabric of the *bazaar* that used to exist around the temple-mosque compound corroborates police understandings of the area as focussed on Kashi Vishvanath. Over the last decade, shops that used to sell daily needs or local artefacts—particularly cosmetics, trinkets and wooden toys—were transformed into shops that just provide temple offerings and lockers for pilgrims’ valuables. By 2016, a couple of years before the KVDC forced them out, many shopkeepers that I met regularly were complaining that business in the *bazaar* had decreased. They saw checkpoints and the constantly changing restrictions of access as the main cause of this drop off, and as some began to give up family commercial traditions to turn their shops into temple-focused businesses, the area lost more of its local clientele. Locals, my interlocutors used to say, would not come any more for shopping because they do not find what they want; plus the crowd, traffic and difficulties in moving freely make them impatient.

Even Karim, a Muslim interlocutor whose family has for generations run a shop on the main road selling household merchandise, has now turned to lockers and offerings. He began reluctantly by placing a small set of lockers at the entrance to his shop, while continuing his main business. Mosque frequenters who wanted to access Gyanvapi for the Friday congregational prayer, made use of that first set of lockers but in a couple of years and after the inner *bazaar* was demolished to make way for the KVDC, I find Karim’s shop catering almost exclusively to the Hindu crowd in October 2022. When talking about the transition, Karim mentions the increasing need to obscure his Muslim identity by not displaying the visible signs that he used to exhibit with pride when we first met in 2014. ‘We have no choice’, he explains.

Like Karim, as I discussed elsewhere (Lazzaretti, 2021a), other local Muslims have carefully to navigate and adjust to the increasingly muscular majoritarian atmosphere and the sense of insecurity partially aggravated by the almost exclusively Hindu police; they experiment with strategies of self-containment. But Hindu residents and shopkeepers too blamed security for important changes to the urban fabric and their relationship with it, saying that not only had shops to be transformed, but that their religious practices were affected as well. Pappu, for instance, explained that he gave up visiting the temple because of the harshness of going through checkpoints and he said that security was there for, and because of, outsiders, not locals. ‘They put so many police (*pulis*) that the place has turned into a destination for people from outside (*bahari log*)!’, he said while talking to me and another shopkeeper. As shown below, the police/outside motif further solidifies in the KVDC.

In early projections, security appears as a key feature of the KVDC and envisioned Banaras’ Hindu majoritarian future. In March 2019 Modi inaugurated the KVDC and tweeted a video showing how the area would look after it was completed.¹⁷ The video takes a sweeping, bird’s eye view of the whole area and informative labels pop up, naming the various facilities projected. Stylised pilgrims are shown, and a few UP policemen with their khaki uniforms also appear, together with a ‘security office’ positioned almost next to the Gyanvapi mosque. While policemen and a dedicated security office are seen as integral to the KVDC, the mosque—visibly the largest structure in the area—appears without its security barricade and, unlike other buildings, is given no label. The video projection seems, in this way, to finalise the shift of the object of securitisation from the mosque to the temple.

But how did security work on the ground and what roles did people attribute to security while the KVDC was materialising? During the first demolition waves in 2017 and 2018, I often joined displaced residents and other inhabitants who still lived amidst the rubble as they gathered to look at the broken landscape. Police were deployed to redirect pilgrims around the half-demolished lanes and at times would mockingly try to convince remaining residents to give up resistance and sell their properties because, as one constable put it, the government had anyhow decided, so they had no choice—this was not a place for local people to live any more, this was the deity’s abode. Many police rehearsed the same kind of argument with me: the clearing of the congested area was necessary for the future city; *suraksha* and their own work would be improved because ‘a wide space can be managed more easily than narrow lanes’, as one put it.

Some Hindu residents took a contrary view, and saw at first the space envisioned by the government as potentially detrimental to the security of the temple—the lanes, they claimed, had long been a protective shield for Vishvanath, whereas a wider space would expose *the deity* to potential attacks. Later, however, uses of security registers in favour of the KVDC started to emerge among displaced Hindus. In early spring 2019, when most of the houses had been demolished and residents displaced, I visited Mr Sharma, who had earlier been one of the leaders of a residents’ protest movement. We sit in his newly rented house in a gated community in an upwardly-mobile neighbourhood, some kilometres from the old city. Although highly emotional when talking about the now demolished family house and his life in the old neighbourhood, Mr Sharma was now confident that the

KVDC would be a great opportunity for the city. As an enthusiastic BJP supporter who suddenly withdrew from the protest as soon as it became critical of Modi's rule, Mr Sharma's change of opinion was perhaps not surprising. More unexpected, though, was that although in various speeches and meetings with urban authorities he had previously argued that the new spatial arrangement would be potentially detrimental in terms of security, Mr Sharma now believed that the whole redevelopment would have precisely the opposite affect: 'the KVDC makes the temple *more secure*', he repeated several times.

When I return to Banaras in 2022, the KVDC is a reality, a projection no more, and I see what 'more secure' means on the ground. Security has visibly increased and is a key feature of the new monumental space.¹⁸ UP police patrol the new gates that give access to the KVDC, as well as the checkpoints to the temple premises. In addition, private security guards patrol the area together with the UP police, while security audits have been undertaken.¹⁹ A private guard explains the rise of security in these terms: 'more people are coming so more security is needed, but we all work collaboratively; we (the new private security company) are in charge of public management, safety and cleanliness, while UP police are here to protect the temple in case of inter-religious tensions'. But, as I find out while walking the KVDC regularly, UP police do much more. Consider another ethnographic vignette: I am standing inside the corridor, though near one of its outer boundaries, holding my camera. I look at cramped old buildings and temples just outside that are likely to be demolished if the rumoured expansion of the corridor occurs. I take some pictures, and suddenly a policeman approaches me, waving his hand towards the inside of the KVDC, and shouts, stridently: 'take pictures of the inside over there, not of the outside!'. Clearly, police play a role in educating the visitor's gaze telling us how we should (and shouldn't) look at this materialised future.

Heritage as, and in the making of, urban future

We have seen that the making of a temple-focused urban future, eventually materialised in the KVDC, has been a long-term process, to which security contributed both discursively and materially. Below, I show that the same outcome is concomitantly being achieved, sanctioned and reinforced through registers and materials for consistency of heritage.

The home page of the website 'Cultural Heritage of Varanasi'²⁰ provides a prominent link to a section about 'Temples of Kashi Vishvanath Corridor'. There, it is explained that:

'The removal of encroachment brought to light several ancient, forgotten temples and religious statuary, many of which were hidden within residential and commercial structures that crowded the narrow by-lanes around the temple. The Kashi Vishwanath corridor project also plans to conserve and restore the temples to their former splendour'.²¹

This narrative of the KVDC as a Hindu heritage zone which includes not only Kashi Vishvanath but also a series of 'rediscovered' and supposedly previously neglected temples, crystallised in March 2019 at the time of the laying of the foundation: the PM referred to the project as the *mukti*, or liberation, of Kashi Vishvanath, simultaneously

nodding to Hindu nationalist ‘liberation’ campaigns and presenting himself as the liberator of heritage from encroachment.²²

While I cannot fully detail here the winding and contorted formation path of the KVDC as a heritage project, my analysis of local newspapers and ethnographic material clearly points to the fact that this was not always the case: it was in fact initially promoted by urban authorities and understood by residents as a *development* project. Indeed, development (*vikas*), expansion (*vistar*) and acquisition (*adhigrahan*) were buzz words associated with it in the initial phases, both in the local press and in everyday talk in the neighbourhood.²³ On the contrary, heritage at that time was associated with the area, but solely in protests *against* government projects: Rajendra Prasad Tiwari, a member of the family that claims hereditary rights over Kashi Vishvanath,²⁴ recalls that following controversial renovation works by the temple trust in the 2000s, intellectuals, politicians and locals had mobilised heritage *against* what they framed as random and detrimental development.²⁵ By the time rumours about a temple expansion began circulating after the BJP came to power in UP, the idea of development (*vikas*) as a synonym for destruction (*vinas*), was entrenched in everyday talk.

When residents then began to protest against the KVDC they chose heritage (*dharohar*), as a key word around which to articulate their demands. One of the residents, Sonu, said he suggested the name Dharohar Bachao Sangharsh Samiti (Save Heritage Struggle Committee) for their movement. Though ‘heritage’, he explained, was not about monuments but referred to a way of living, the worship of local deities and relating to the unique joyfulness of the city through the neighbourhood.

It was months later, and *subsequent to* the residents’ articulation of heritage in their protests, that urban authorities and government officials began appropriating heritage in their own register. This was done initially in a rather clumsy way: discursively, officials made seemingly random references to UNESCO and local textual traditions²⁶ and materially, for instance, signs appeared marking the landscape as a ‘heritage zone’ supervised by the temple trust (Lazzaretti, 2021b). These were the first steps towards the successful co-option of the local heritage discourse for what has now become the official promotion of the KVDC, as exemplified by the ‘Cultural Heritage of Varanasi’ website.

Discussion and concluding thoughts

In a foundational contribution for the anthropology of the future, Bryant and Knight (2019) deal with several ‘futural orientations’ as lenses through which to investigate the role of the future in orienting quotidian actions in the present. One of them is ‘anticipation’, identified as pervasive in individual life, and manifest at the collective level at particular moments. When the future appears threatening and uncertain, the authors contend, anticipation is ‘a way of addressing the anxiety of uncertainty’ (Ibid. 48). ‘There are, however, moments’, they write, ‘when the future cannot be anticipated, when there are no resources to think about the future that might be. In such moments the present becomes uncanny to us in its presentness, *acquiring a weight of the future*’ (Ibid.). In my initial vignette, my interlocutors talked about an ‘unimaginable future’ and according to Bryant and Knight’s formulation, that future is the kind that can not be tamed through

anticipation. As my analysis above suggests, the apparent inability to anticipate the future, however, did not come in that case from a lack of resources to think about it, but precisely from the fact that their present already had the weight of, and was moulded into, a future. We have seen that the Hindu majoritarian, apparently top-down, aspirational future that later materialised in the KVDC was already in the making through registers and materials of security, and later through recourse to heritage as well.

Long before the redevelopment of the area began in 2017, decades of security measures had produced ‘a sense of being thrown into a new temporality in which the future was entirely unknown’ (Bryant and Knight, 2019: 44). We have seen that my interlocutors had progressively become estranged from the bazaar in which they worked or resided, inasmuch as already they saw it as a space for outsiders, rather than their own. In Pelourinho, Collins (2014) describes policing contributing to a certain intriguing aura of secrecy that is attractive for tourists while at the same time, enhances insecurity for the racialised and vulnerable black dwellers. In Banaras, police around the temple-mosque compound participate in a pilgrim (dis)orienting exercise that enhances the temple as the sole appropriate attraction in the area, while making it difficult to access. At the same time, security measures and policing enhance a sense of insecurity among residents and shopkeepers (both Hindus and Muslims) and contribute to making them feel out of place. During the materialisation of the KVDC, then, police often acted not just as guards of a development project but as enthusiastic enablers of an aspirational future as well. More recently, police, security measures, material signs and verbal indications contribute to the narration of the KVDC as an attraction for visitors, a now materialised future worth photographing from the right angle and being part of.

Similarly to the ‘world-class aesthetic’ as defined by Ghertner for Delhi (2015), and in line with Rancière’s ‘distribution of the sensible’—that is a way of creating a shared sense and disposition that presents itself as universal—here in Banaras, security helps producing a shared sense of belonging to the future city. A willingness (and need) to partake in the future made of and projected through security emerges when evicted residents, such as Mr Sharma, spin security-based arguments originally developed against development to praise the accomplishments of urban ‘beautification’. At the same time, an aesthetic consensus appealed to by security is found when shopkeepers and others echo official narratives of the KVDC as a secure space for *bahari log*. But, like Ghertner’s findings in Delhi and Harms’ (2016) in New Saigon, residents are not passive even when they face future-led dispossession: in Banaras they co-produce and creatively reappropriate the register of security as the urban fabric transforms, as shown by the case of Mr Sharma and, to some extent, by the fact that even excluded residents, such as Muslims, creatively find ways to live with this new urban future (Lazzaretti, 2021a). This confirms not only that actors ‘on both sides of the heuristic divide may even have common—or at least overlapping—visions of aspirational futures’ (Bunnell and Goh, 2018: 11), but that security is not only an important vehicle for anticipating and making these shared futures come true, but also one through which even the excluded can claim their little piece of future. However, this does not mean that such a shared future is devoid of tension and insecurity; insecurity, indeed seem to be the texture of the future in Banaras. As I write, controversies around the Gyanvapi mosque are escalating and decades of ‘recollection

and anticipation of violence' (Jeganathan, 2004) seemingly gain momentum in the year of another national election (2024): my ethnography shows that an already profound sense of insecurity observed among minority Muslims, which had been nurtured by decades of policing and security measures, is likely to be further enhanced as an important feature of such a Hindu majoritarian future.

The same kind of co-produced, aspirational futures are nurtured and further sanctioned through heritage. Perhaps more than security, heritage is an important vehicle for global aspirations, increasingly appropriated and mobilised in postcolonial contexts: recognition by the international heritage enterprise (represented principally by UNESCO) is likely to reinforce and allow the global circulation of appealing images of a nation, while at the same time distracting from the erasure of layered histories or even ethnic cleansing (Meskell, 2018). The promotion of the KVDC as heritage, then, though emerging from a winding and contorted path that testifies to the recurring transformation of heritage from an instrument of protest to one of repression, marks an important achievement for Hindu nationalist 'liberation' campaigns: the further sidelining of the Gyanvapi mosque is currently made acceptable through recourse to heritage. In legal cases backed by Hindutva organisations and vitriolic social media debates, the mosque is increasingly framed as the only remaining 'illegal encroachment' to be removed from the area in order to restore the ancient glory of Kashi Vishvanath.²⁷

My ethnography at the centre of Banaras illustrates that security and heritage—beyond times of wars or their aftermath—manifest as urban processes. Their registers and materials make futures. But it is their interactions and cross-fertilisations that emerge clearly in the case of the KVDC. As a heritage site, calls for more security are seen as natural in both police narratives and by some who previously protested, as well as by the many who, every day, comply patiently with security procedures as part of the experience. However, security had already transformed the neighbourhood, somehow preparing it to be the future majoritarian heritage site that it has become.

The specific context I deal with is a multi-religious urban centre that is undergoing resignification as a 'heritage city' under a Hindu majoritarian government but intersections of security and heritage could well be investigated elsewhere. How do they play out in other cities? And to what extent is their cross-fertilisation found at popular tourist destinations, when previously neglected historic neighbourhoods are 'regenerated'? If we take seriously what my ethnography in urban north India shows—to put it plainly that heritage inevitably calls for more security, and that security produces spaces that are more easily turned into exclusive heritage sites—there is an urgent need to pursue further this research avenue and urban ethnographers are well placed to do so.

Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to the people in Banaras who welcomed me repeatedly to their shops and homes and shared their thoughts at difficult times. Several ideas in this article took shape during repeated rounds of writing applications and academic events at the University of Oslo, the South Asia Institute in Heidelberg, the Alice Boner Institute in Banaras and with conversations with colleagues and friends here at CRIA, Lisbon. Many thanks to Christiane Brosius, Ute Hüsken, Kathinka

Frøystad, Arild Engelsen Ruud, Cristiana Zara, Simone Tulumello, Ruy Lleras Blanes, José Mapril, Giacomo Mantovan and the anonymous reviewers for their insights; and to Geoff Ainsworth, for editorial support and much more throughout this research. Any errors or omissions are my own.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This was supported by the Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (2020.02275.CEECIND/CP1634/CT0001).

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Notes

1. See <https://www.narendramodi.in/kashi-vikas-yatra#VikasYatra>, [last accessed 20 January 2023].
2. The Sanskrit term *dhama* or *dharm* in Hindi means ‘dwelling’, ‘residence’ or ‘abode’. It is widely used to indicate a divine abode and pilgrimage destination, particularly one of pan-Indian significance.
3. This previous temple was apparently also dedicated to Vishvanath and sponsored by the Mughal emperor, Akbar, (Asher, 1992: 254; Desai, 2017: 31–7). It was demolished on the orders of emperor Aurangzeb in 1669 (Saqi, 1986: 45): its dismantling is one of the few (though still very poorly) documented demolitions perpetrated by the controversial emperor, among the many attributed to him (Truschke, 2017). Although documentary evidence is lacking (Asher, 1992: 254), popular accounts and scholarly works seem unanimous in assigning the construction of the Gyanvapi mosque to Aurangzeb.
4. This was a mass mobilisation by Hindu nationalist forces to ‘liberate’ the supposed birth place of the Hindu god Ram, and led to the destruction of the 16th century Babri mosque in Ayodhya in 1992 and severe inter-religious conflicts across South Asia.
5. For instance, see *The Times of India*, 18 December 2021, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/pm-tod-phod-no-way-to-meet-modern-needs/articleshow/88349183.cms>, [accessed 20 January 2022].
6. The BJP is currently the ruling party at both national and state levels. It is the parliamentary arm of a family of organisations informed by the majoritarian ideology of Hindutva, a term literally meaning Hinduness that was first used by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar in *Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?* (1923) to define India and Indian in exclusively ‘Hindu’ terms.
7. Modi explained his choice by mentioning a special bond with Banaras and its people, and saying that he was called to contest the election from there directly by Vishvanath and mother Ganga. See for instance <https://www.narendramodi.in/kashi-vikas-yatra#VaranasiVisits> [last

- accessed 24 February 2023], and speeches of the PM during functions at the KVDC add and in other visits (Williams, 2021).
8. <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/modis-constituency-varanasi-gets-smart-city-tag/article9128737.ece>, [last accessed 10 March 2023].
 9. The six principles are illustrated in the ‘Varanasi Municipal Corporation Corporation’s proposal for the Indian Smart Cities Challenge Phase-II’ and are: Suramya Kashi (picturesque); Samunnat Kashi (progressive); Surakshit Kashi (secure); Sanyojit Kashi (organized); Nirmal Kashi (pure) and Ekikrit Kashi (unified), [<https://smartnet.niua.org/sites/default/files/webform/FinalSCPVaransi.pdf>].
 10. Some of the slogans on the central banner of the PM’s website are, for instance, ‘Modern infrastructure for the timeless city’; ‘Kashi witnesses an incessant flow of *vikas* Ganga’; ‘From Kashi, Ganga turns northwards. Now, so will Kashi’s development’; and ‘Global spotlights shines above Varanasi’, <https://www.narendramodi.in/kashi-vikas-yatra>, [last accessed 10 March 2023].
 11. Arguably, Modi and the BJP have ‘owned’ the issue of national security, through strongman rhetoric and controversial policies on Pakistan, Kashmir, terrorism and so-called anti-nationals. For an overview of some of these policies see <https://thewire.in/politics/modi-bjp-national-security>, [last accessed 10 March 2023] and Jaffrelet (2021).
 12. Relatively minor bomb blasts occurred in 2006 and 2010 at key religious sites; see: ‘India on alert as bomb hits Hindu holy city’, *The New York Times*, 7 December 2010, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/08/world/asia/08bomb.html>, [last accessed 11 December 2019].
 13. Interestingly, *trinetra* in Sanskrit means ‘three-eyed’ and is a feature of Hindu deities.
 14. The suit *Din Mohammad and Others vs. the Secretary of State for India Council through the District Magistrate and Collector Benares*, CWP no. 62 of 1936 in the Court of Additional Civil Judge of Benares, and appeal no. 466 of 1937 in the High Court of Judicature at Allahabad, reconstructs several layers of frictions in the area and depicts police as one of the actors of the everyday life of the compound (see Lazzaretti, 2023).
 15. This prohibits the conversion of any place of worship of any religion into a place of worship of a different religion and seeks to maintain the status quo at the time of Independence (15 August 1947).
 16. These are the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) and are on regular duty only at the mosque and in its immediate proximity. They are more widely deployed only at specific festive times or during visits by politicians and VIPs.
 17. The video is available at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/watch-pm-modis-dream-project-kashi-vishwanath-corridor-plan/videoshow/68381158.cms>, [last accessed 9 March 2023].
 18. See <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/varanasi/varanasi-kashi-vishwanath-dham-begins-security-upgrade-ahead-of-pm-modis-visit/articleshow/87892736.cms>, [last accessed 10 March 2023].
 19. Apparently by the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), a government consultancy organisation. See <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/govt-deputes-cisf-to-provide-security-consultancy-for-kashi-vishwanath-temple-complex/articleshow/94132154.cms>, [last accessed 10 March 2021].

20. The website is at culturalheritageofvaranasi.com. It is ‘An initiative of Government of India towards safeguarding the cultural heritage’ and carries the logos of the National Museum Institute and the Ministry of Culture, Government of India.
21. <https://culturalheritageofvaranasi.com/temples-of-kashi-vishwanath-corridor/>, [last accessed etc].
22. A translation of the speech is available at: <https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-pm-s-speech-at-kashi-vishwanath-temple-in-varanasi-uttar-pradesh-544171>, [last accessed 21 March 2023].
23. A detailed analysis of discussions in the local press at that time is given in Lazzaretti (2021b).
24. The family has been fighting in the courts to reclaim their role since in 1983 the UP government, through the Uttar Pradesh Shri Kashi Vishwanath Temple Act, created a government trust to manage the temple: <https://updharmarthkarya.in/booking/pdf/1983UP29.pdf>, [last accessed 9 March 2023].
25. I detail these previous uses of heritage in Lazzaretti (2021b).
26. See for instance <https://www.livehindustan.com/uttar-pradesh/varanasi/story-vishwanath-temple-corridor-houses-will-be-drone-survey-1793050.html>, [last accessed 5 March 2023]; and ‘Drone survey to protect the existence of the temple’, *Sanmarg* [paper edition], 18 February 2018, p. 3.
27. For an overview of the legal history of Gyanvapi see Lazzaretti (2023).

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