

VORTRAG IM OBERSEMINAR
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A Slit in the Rock: Silence and the Politics of Interreligious Dialogue at a Contested Site in Sri Lanka

Adam's Peak (Sinhala: Śrī Pāda) is a sacred site in Sri Lanka, where Muslims believe that Adam fell to Earth after his fall from Paradise. For the majority Buddhists on the island, however, the "sacred footprint," is attributed to the Buddha, while Tamil Hindus believe that it belongs to Skanda. Muslims have long claimed that after centuries of penance standing on one foot at that spot, he departed to reunite with Eve in Arabia. His reunification journey was through a slit in a rock in the vicinity of Dafthar Jailani, the "office" (daftar) of the saint Abdul Qadir Gilani, who is thought to have resided at that spot during his eastern sojourns. The slit in the rock is a barely accessible rock outcrop near the saint's shrine that is said to provide direct transport to Mecca. Following the legend, Muslim pilgrims squeeze through the crevice leading into the space where the slit is located as a form of ritual re-enactment to receive the barakat (grace) of Allah. However, with the rise of Buddhist nationalism on the island after the end of the civil war there, monks have violently reclaimed the shrine complex as their own. Buddhist counter-narratives then began circulating to challenge Sufi interpretations of the site in an attempt to "purify" the island by purging all other religious claims to legitimacy. Interreligious dialogue has thus become politically loaded, resulting in silences speaking louder than words. My presentation will explore the valences of competing narratives to show how ethno-religious communities in Sri Lanka vie for legitimacy and power by using the language of cultural heritage as a way of bolstering their own agendas.

Oberseminar

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