



SASNET

SWEDISH SOUTH ASIAN
STUDIES NETWORK

*Nationalisms in South Asia Workshop**

Lund University

Saturday, April 14

Venue: Biskopsgatan 5, House Norlind

Morning Session

8:45-9:00

Opening remarks by Andreas Johansson, Director of SASNET

9:00-10:00

Peter Van Der Veer, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Göttingen
(vanderVeer@mmg.mpg.de)

Title: What Transcends the Nation? A Comparative Approach

The nation-state is undoubtedly the most important political formation in the world today. Some theorists of globalization predicted the imminent demise of the nation-state, but contemporary reality has made these predictions less and less plausible. For example, in both India and China, with two economies that increasingly depend on globalization, we see a strengthening of nationalism, understood here as *the cultural politics that has the nation as its subject and its object*. The nation is a project and never a finished one. The nation is a daily plebiscite according to Ernest Renan. Nationalism derives its energy and motivating force from perceived threats from within or outside. The fact that the two most important 19th century secular ideologies that still dominate our contemporary world, namely communism and liberalism, pose as trans-or inter-national modes of political practice shows that nationalism is always to be understood in relation to “the other” and “to the world.” It is a crucial and productive contradiction of nationalism that it itself is a global phenomenon. In that sense one should also understand that transnationalism does not transcend nationalism, but is intimately connected with it, as the

history of Irish, Jewish, or Sikh transnationalism has amply shown. The critique of methodological nationalism in the study of transnational migration and ethnicity usefully points out that transnational linkages can be more important for ethnic groups than their location in a particular nation-state, but this should not lead us to forget the central importance of national borders and definitions of citizenship that shape the conditions that ethnic groups try to negotiate through their transnational networks.

10:00-11:00

Boris Wille, Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg (boris.wille@ethnologie.uni-halle.de)

Title: *Defending Islam in an Islamic State: Religious-Nationalist Rhetoric, Democratic Reforms, and a Controversial Change of Power in the Maldives*

On 23 December 2011 a coalition of opposition parties and religious NGOs staged a demonstration to “defend Islam” against the Maldivian State, alleging that the government had crafted a “devious plot to destroy the Islamic faith of Maldivians”, a religion that Maldivians “have followed for over 800 years” in the “hundred per-cent Muslim” nation. This rhetoric seemed somewhat surprising, as the state sees itself as the principal custodian of Islam in the archipelago, and as the government neither had any intention nor any legal ground to change that. Even the new constitution of 2008, which was the outcome of a four-year-long democratic reform process, clearly states that the state religion is Islam and only Muslims can acquire Maldivian citizenship. No legislation can be enacted and no opinion can be expressed if it conflicts with any tenets of Islam. In this light it appears contradictory how the conjuncture of Islam and the Maldivian nation could be threatened by the state, as religious nationalism directly informs state structures, procedures and ideologies.

This paper examines this tension by discusses the largely taken for granted notion of Maldivian Muslim nationalism, while focussing on the religious-nationalist rhetoric surrounding the controversial transfer of government in 2012. I argue that in the context of novel party politics in the Maldives it is less the conjuncture of religion and nation that is disputed, but rather the degree to which normative or moderate interpretations of Islam are evoked in the name of the nation. From the start, the Maldivian democratic project tried to combine democratic liberty with Islamic normativity within its political discourse. With regard to its South Asian neighbours, the significance of the Maldivian case is that the conjuncture of religion and nationalism is hardly challenged, but rather evoked, played out and reinforced in the political realm.

11:00-11:30 **Coffee Break**

11:30-12:30

Andreas Johansson, Lund University (andreas.johansson@sasnet.lu.se)

Title: *A Cry for Help: A Sri Lankan Muslim Organization's Discourse on Social Media*

The overall aim of this paper is to describe and analyze the creation of identity in social media for Muslim organizations in post-war Sri Lanka. What role does social media play among Muslim organizations in Sri Lanka? The use of social media among different Muslim organizations reflects what happens in society. In contemporary Sri Lanka Sinhala nationalistic organizations like *Bodu Bala Sena* have made a great impact on the debate on what role religion should have in the country. The *Bodu Bala Sena* claims that Islam is a non-Sri Lankan element in the Buddhist majority society. This shows that the role of a political organization in a minority situation is complex, with various kinds of discourse to relate to.

Social media has been good at countering Islamophobia in Sri Lanka. The use of social media is only one of many self-defense strategies the Muslim community uses. For example, these self-defense strategies can also be seen in political forums, like the parliament, and in ecumenical discussions among theologians. The focus in this study is explore how Muslim organizations use social media in relation to ethnicity (Muslim), nation (Sri Lankans), and state (the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka) in their reaction toward organizations like the *Bodu Bala Sena*. The materials that will be analyzed are pictures posted on the Facebook pages of three Muslim political organizations.

12:30-2:00

Lunch at Skissernas,
<https://www.skissernasmuseum.se>

Afternoon Session

2:00-3:00

Susan A. Reed, Bucknell University (sreed@bucknell.edu)

Title: *Bodies for the Nation: Performances of Masculinity, Militarism and Sinhala Buddhist Nationalism in Sri Lanka*

For decades, through a variety of embodied practices of dance and dance-related rituals, the Sri Lankan state has reinforced Sinhala Buddhist nationalism, martial masculinity and the naturalization of a militarized society. In the years since the violent end of Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict in May 2009, performances of dance and ritual that reinforce Sinhala Buddhist nationalism have proliferated, reflecting the triumphalism of the militarized state. Ideas of conquest, ethnic and religious hegemony, and the military strength of the nation are created and reinforced through the bodies of boys and men performing in sites ranging from everyday school competitions to large-scale parades and ritual spectacles. These performances reproduce the idea of Sri Lanka as a Sinhala Buddhist nation, excluding Tamils and other minoritized communities from recognition as legitimate citizens. However, outside of state control, some performers are challenging this triumphalist view, revealing the dark side of ethnic nationalism and conflict through the bodies of women and war-disabled Sinhala soldiers. In this paper, I will explore performances that reinforce and contest ideas of Sinhala Buddhist triumphalism, arguing that unless and until the state embraces a pluralistic view of Sri Lanka and proactively changes its cultural policies in accord with such a vision, Sinhala Buddhist nationalism will continue to be powerfully reinforced through a range of embodied practices, mundane and spectacular.

3:00-4:00

Frank J. Korom, Boston University (korom@bu.edu)

Title: *Bangladeshi New Year's Performances as Markers of Nationalism*

Nationalism is often bolstered in new nations by performances orchestrated to rally citizens around the flag. Like other Bengalis in India, Bangladesh has been celebrating *nababarsha* (Bengali new year) or *pahela baishak* (first of Vaishak) since the country's independence in 1971, yet its public observance has increased noticeably in recent years as a way to emphasize the secular, multiethnic, and multilingualistic

nature of Bangladesh in the face of growing Islamicization throughout the country. The secular nature of the event is celebrated most visually in the *mangalshobhjatra* (“procession for well-being”), which originated in Jessore in 1985, then followed by Dhaka in 1989. It has evolved into a spectacular and colorful street parade including huge floats made by students of Charukala, the Faculty of Fine Arts at Dhaka University. The parade is also accompanied by patriotic performances on the street and at national shrines in the capital, as well as *melas* (“fairs”) for the display and consumption of folk arts and crafts. Similar events are performed throughout the country and broadcasted via various media outlets all day long. People paint their faces in the colors of the national flag, wear animal masks and colorful clothing, serve special sweets, perform local dances, and sing patriotic songs to celebrate the nation’s diversity. UNESCO declared the festival a “cultural heritage of humanity” practice in 2016, a fact in which Bangladeshis take great pride. In my presentation, I provide a quick overview of the festival’s history, then incorporate ethnographic data gathered through participant observation during several occasions between 2014-2017. I focus specifically on the role that institutions like the Bangla Academy play in promoting the secularist ideology upon which the festival was founded.

4:00-4:30

Coffee Break

4:30-5:30

Mari Miyamoto, Keio University (miyamoto@fbc.keio.ac.jp)

Title: *Buddhist Revivalism and Democratization in Bhutan*

In 2008, the dragon kingdom of Bhutan reformed its polity from being an absolute monarchy to being a democratic constitutional monarchy. The reforms contained a written constitution, a multi-party system, and the implementation of universal (lay) suffrage. The most significant change from the former political system was the removal of “religious personalities” from the public political sphere. Although in the former system representatives of the monastic body were given seats in the national assemblies, now all official means by which this body could participate in elections and the national assembly were taken away.

According to the new constitution, the disenfranchisement of “religious personalities” is explained as a means to protect Buddhism from the dirt of politics and to maintain its purity as the “spiritual heritage of Bhutan.” While the Indian constitution declares that secularism prevents religious interests from interfering in politics, the Bhutanese constitution aims to protect religion from politics. This reverse situation compared to Indian secularism, however, does not necessarily indicate that the influences of religion on society and politics are any weaker in Bhutan. On the contrary, since the time when a Buddhist monk who fled Tibet founded the country in the 17th century, Buddhist monks have played an important part in the nation’s polity and politics until 1907. Even after the establishment of the Wangchuck monarchy, the monastic system has been highly respected by the people and the government. Suggestions and orders from Buddhist monks are still almost unquestionable for the Bhutanese laity that aims to achieve religious merit. This would have made it possible for monks and monasteries to influence the preferences of people regarding candidates and policies during the state elections, if they were allowed to participate in those elections.

When all religious personalities were requested to retire from the public political arena during the first national election, the head abbot of the central monastic body undertook meditation to demonstrate that he had no interest in politics or the election. However, it seems the activities of Buddhist monks and

institutions for the people and their society have not decreased. Instead, the extent of religious activities has increased and has become more inclusive, catering to all classes and generations.

In this presentation, I would like to discuss how the status of Buddhist institutions and monks has changed in Bhutanese society, and how citizens interpret monastic orders and the preaching of lamas in everyday life, since the political democratization of 2008. In particular, the transformation of people's treatment of animals will be examined. While slaughtering (and eating) cows as well as pigs have been taboo in the context of Hindu and Muslim societies respectively, Buddhism has no restrictions relating to particular animals. For pastoral communities especially, slaughtering and eating cows and yaks has been a common practice. However, these customs have recently become a target of radical criticism. One of the reasons for this is the Buddhist precept forbidding the taking of life and the Buddhist ritual of releasing living things, called *tsetar*.

The *tsetar* ritual in Bhutan has been conducted for fish and small animals, like goats or wild animals. Recent practice, though, has also included bigger, daily, and indispensable animals for pastoral communities, such as cows and yaks. This tendency started in the early 2000s, but the frequency and its extent has increased in recent years. In this presentation, I will examine the meanings of this tendency in relation to religious influences under the secularization of the polity, the transformation of pastoral lives in the Himalayas, increasing restrictions in relation to cow slaughter in India, and a certain revivalism of Buddhism in Himalayan societies under the new political regime.

5:30-6:30

Mara Malagodi, City Law School, University of London (Mara.Malagodi@city.ac.uk)

Title: *Holy Cows, Hinduism, and Constitutional Nationalism in Nepal*

The paper presents a linguistically informed analysis of Nepal's historical tensions between the process of nation building and the management of socio-cultural diversity through the prism of cow protection by legal means. Even Nepal's new Constitution (the country's seventh), which was promulgated on 20 September 2015, nine years after the end of the ten-year-long Maoist insurgency, continues to grant Hinduism a privileged place and to define the cow as Nepal's national animal. To understand the symbolic significance of these constitutional provisions in the construction of the Nepali nation and their material impact on Nepal's marginalized groups, it is crucial to analyze their historical development and their relationship to other parts of the constitution and to ordinary laws. In particular, special emphasis ought to be placed on the link between Nepal's constitutional arrangements and the long-standing criminalization of cow slaughter in the "old" (1854) and "new" (1961) *Muluki Ain* (Country Code). These provisions – unlike in India – apply uniformly across Nepal's territory and make no exceptions on the basis of community affiliation.

The relationship and influence between Nepal's various constitutions and the *Muluki Ain*, especially the "new" Code of 1961, are critical to understand Nepali constitutional identity. Significantly, Nepal is the only country in South Asia that was never colonized, and, therefore, the Nepali state has acquired a central role in the construction of the Nepali nation. Thus, in Nepal's context of 'state-framed nationalism' law fulfills a pivotal function in forging a Nepali collective identity, but also in constructing a "hierarchy of belonging" within the many communities inhabiting the territory of Nepal, who present an astounding level of diversity in terms of religion, ethnicity, language, caste, and region. As a result, Nepal's constitutional protection of the cow and the uniform criminalization of cow slaughter have played over the centuries both an integrative function – the promotion of unifying national values (*dharma*) over different ethnic groups – and a disintegrative one – the repression of the local customs of cow slaughter and beef consumption (*deshadharmā*).



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The present study focuses on Nepal's various processes of constitution making and on constitutional adjudication after 1990. The essay seeks to answer two questions: first, what was the rationale for inscribing the protection of the cow at the constitutional level in Nepal? Second, how has the Supreme Court interpreted the constitutional provisions relevant to cow protection and their relationship to the wider legal system?

7:30-10:00
Dinner at Skissernas,
<https://www.skissernasmuseum.se>

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Sunday, April 15

Morning Session

9:00-10:00

Jan Magnusson, Lund University (jan.magnusson@soch.lu.se)

Title: *Broadband Baltistan: Virtual Nationalism in Greater Tibet*

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Baltistan is a mountainous region in the Western Himalayas. After Partition, the Line of Control (LoC) divided the region into two parts, leaving a Balti community on each side of the Indo-Pak border. Unlike many border areas that are usually quite permeable, the rugged geography and the ongoing conflict between India and Pakistan shut the LoC. Cross-border interaction was reduced to a trickle. For the Balti community, independence more or less came to mean a transition from one mode of colonial domination and subalternity to another. With the new masters came new national narratives founded on the contention between India and Pakistan, and between religious faiths, especially in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan with its dual power structure of state and Islamic elites. During the following decades the region was marginalized. Being parts of two rather different new states the trajectories of the two Balti communities also became different, with the Baltis in India generally being better off.

With the access to broadband in the region in the 2000's followed a rapid increase in the cross-border interaction leading to a virtual Balti reunification and a surge in the reconstruction of pre-Partition Balti identity and re-invention of Balti history and culture. Perhaps the most salient aspects of this turn have been the distancing from South Asia in favor of an orientation towards an alternative Himalayan context characterized by Tibetan history, culture and language, and the quest for an independent so-called *Greater Ladakh*.

In my paper, I interrogate the post-Partition development in Baltistan by taking my cue from the *Zomia* literature (van Schendel, 2002, Scott, 2009, Michaud, 2010, 2017, Schneiderman, 2010, Samuel, 2015).

Perhaps most importantly, it allows me to adapt a perspective that breaks out of area studies and open up for alternative geographies. The discussion is primarily concerned with Baltistan's relationship to the master narratives and how broadband access to the Internet and social media is allowing the community to wriggle itself free from their grip.

The primary issues I'm dealing with are the ability of the Balti community to form several identities such as Balti/Tibetan vs Pakistani/Muslim, a so called "post literate" perspective on Balti script and the ambiguity encountered in its revival, and the seemingly contradictory act of leaving the nation states to form Greater Ladakh while simultaneously seeking recognition by those states in order to access their resources. I'm also looking at the reinvention of Balti history.

10:00-11:00

Jürgen Schaflechner, University of Heidelberg (juergen.schaflechner@uni-heidelberg.de)

Title: *Nationalism and the Dissemination of "The Hindu Other" in Pakistan*

Over the last decade, political analysts have shown increased interest in the distribution and impact of so-called "hate material" (*nafrat angez mavādd*) in both Pakistan and India's governmental education systems (cf. Nayyar and Salim 2005; Saigol 2005; Lall 2008; Flaten 2012; Kumar 2002). Understanding this as a seed of mistrust planted into the minds of future generations, scholars and activists have unanimously criticized such mutual vilification as a major hindrance to curbing tensions between the two nations. In this paper, I will focus at two hitherto overlooked fields in this regard—Urdu pulp fiction and hagiographic literature—to examine the dissemination of the "Pakistan ideology" (*naẓariyah-i pākistān*). As I will show, such literature carries an ideological baggage, which, similar to ideological strains identified by scholars studying the content of schoolbooks, consolidates a Pakistani identity through anti-Hindu and anti-India sentiments. I consider such cultural articulations crucial for investigating what Mohammad Waseem once called a strong consensus between political decision makers and public opinion in Pakistan when it comes to an anti-India mentality (2002). To analyze the vast field of embedded stereotypes, political scientists and scholars of Pakistan studies must also pay heed to the contribution of vernacular popular culture and its role in solidifying ethnic, religious, sectarian, and other differences.

11:00-11:30

Coffee Break

11:30-12:15

Ted Svensson, Lund University (ted.svensson@svet.lu.se)

Discussion, closing comments, and roundtable conversation

12:15-12:30

Jan Magnusson & Frank Korom

Closing remarks by co-conveners

12:30-2:00



**Lunch at Skissernas,
<https://www.skissernasmuseum.se>**

**2:00
Departure**



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