Peace Journeys

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A New Direction in Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage Research

Edited by

Ian S. McIntosh, Nour Farra Haddad
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INTRODUCTION

Peace, the ultimate human aspiration, was one of the driving ideals for global tourism scholars and practitioners in the 1980s. The Declaration on World Tourism (1980), the Tourism Bill of Rights and Tourist Code (1983), and the later Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, speak of the ways in which tourism can contribute to international understanding and cooperation, and be a vital force for promoting friendship and peace among the peoples of the world. According to Moufakkir and Kelly (2010, xxiii), tourism is an activity capable of not only generating significant economic and social benefits, but also of breaking down barriers created by politics and by differences in culture, ethnicity, nationality, lifestyle and economic development. However, Higgins-Desboilles (2006) argues that, despite a promising beginning, especially with the emergence of sub-fields like reconciliation tourism, pro-poor tourism, and justice tourism, global tourism has proven ineffective in promoting peace, justice or equality. In the 1980s, for example, Louis D'Amore (1988) established the International Institute for Peace through Tourism as a means for global tourism leaders to advocate for trust, diversity and social justice. But according to Higgins-Desboilles (2006) the results have been minimal. In the current neo-liberal era, the discourse of tourism as an "industry" has overshadowed tourism's potential as a powerful social force for the greater common good.

To examine the potential impacts of tourism beyond the idea of markets—of businesses that create tourism products and services that are sold to tourists—we must begin again to focus on the role of tourism as an avenue for the spreading of positive information about the personalities, beliefs, aspirations, cultures and politics from one region to another (Higgins-Desboilles 2006; Haessly 2010). As Jafari (1989, 154) says, properly designed, tourism has the potential to help bridge the psychological and cultural distances that separate people of diverse races, colors, and religions. Through tourism:

> …we can come to appreciate the rich human, cultural and ecological diversity that our world mosaic offers, and to evolve a mutual trust and respect for one another and the dignity of all life on earth (Jafari 1989, 154).

One unexplored dimension of bridging divides and promoting peace is pilgrimage. Definitions matter. The way that we define a phenomenon impacts the way it is understood and practiced. When definitions channel our vision along paths that are culturally prescribed, what appears normal, true and trusted by one person, can appear prejudiced or even incomprehensible to another. Peter Jan Margry (2008, 17), for example, defines pilgrimage, much as others do, as a journey to a place that is regarded as more sacred or salutary than the environment of everyday life. He says that pilgrims seek a transcendental encounter with a specific cult object at this place for the purpose of acquiring spiritual, emotional or physical healing or benefit. Many definitions of pilgrimage tend to emphasize this personal act of devotion as the journey's defining feature. However, emphasizing the role and experiences of the individual, while paying scant attention to the social and cultural context of the pilgrimage, is the product of a specific cultural lens. Emphasizing the transformative journey of the solitary traveler severely limits our ability to consider motivations or impacts from other vantage points. It is impossible to contemplate the impact for peace, for example, beyond the perspective of the transformed individual.

In this book, we are calling for a paradigm shift in pilgrimage and religious tourism research through the development of new definitions that recognize that pilgrims and pilgrimages are embedded not just within religions and economies, but in ever-changing cultures, societies, and political systems. Individuals may be seeking growth, healing, or blessings through their sacred journeys, but the societies in which these pilgrimages are embedded have their own specific interests, needs and agendas. Victor Turner (1969), for example, discussed how "anti-structural" pilgrimage practices, as evidenced by *communitas* (equality and unity in diversity), are developed by cultures in order to generate and maintain cohesion. Yet this relationship between the individual and society is not referenced in standard definitions of pilgrimage. We cannot consider the motives or desired outcomes of one without the other: the pilgrim and the pilgrimage, the seeker and the system, are two sides of the one coin.

Our goal, through fifteen case studies, is to demonstrate one dimension of this broader vista: how pilgrimage and religious tourism, under the right circumstances, can have a transformative role beyond the level of the individual, especially in the realm of peace-building.

The Virgin Mary apparition site at Medjugorje in Bosnia and Herzegovina provides a powerful case study pointing us in the direction that we will travel in this book. As Vukonic (1996, 145) says, pilgrims come to this remote and desolate place where the "Queen of Peace" poured out her

love upon the world in order to allow peace and joy to enter them. They then carry this peace to their communities and become "a source of peace for people of all nations." When we examine the Medjugorje site in its larger context, this "divine intervention" can be construed as a counter play to the perceived "godlessness" of communist Yugoslavia (Vukonic 1996, 147). There are two coinciding agendas here, one where the individual is the recipient and agent of peace, and the other where the way of life of the people is being systematically transformed in response to community needs and desires.

As a social being, the pilgrim functions within the equivalent of an operating system that has its own unique history and trajectory. The individual can have a limited impact on this system through the choices that he or she makes in either endorsing or challenging the values espoused by the elites who oversee the sacred places. However, when we cease to look simply at individual motives and outcomes and more at the way that pilgrimage is fundamentally a group phenomenon (Vukonic 1996) we are in a better position to appreciate the potential impacts at the macro level to either endorse or challenge the status quo.

As we said earlier, the distortion in classic definitions towards individual experiences is the product of a specific way of looking at the world. Nowhere do we see that pilgrimage might be the product of a community's aspirations for itself through the design and actions of its members who are upholding or defending certain values and principles deemed important to them. To not adequately situate the pilgrim as a member, more or less, of a living and breathing community that has its own agenda and interests, is misleading. From the narrow lens of individuality, we perceive only a glimpse of the many, often profound, impacts of pilgrimage and religious tourism. If we are to see the sacred journey in its proper dimension, we need definitions that focus more not just on the individual or the industry, but also on this larger socio-political context.

Consider, for example, those pilgrimages in which the vast majority of the population are engaged and where and the motives are not primarily linked to seeking personal blessings or giving thanks. The annual Dhammayietra "pilgrimage of truth" initiated by Buddhist Monk Maha Ghosananda in Cambodia in the last stages of the Khmer Rouge oppression, was framed in terms of rebuilding the country after the devastation wrought by the dictator Pol Pot. Each step by the pilgrim was considered both a prayer and a stage in bridge-building (Poethig 2002). Likewise, in the great Vari pilgrimage in Maharashtra in India, the major beneficiary of the sacred journey is society itself. The hundreds of thousands of devotees completing this overland trek are reinforcing the values that lie at the heart of this

pilgrimage, such as social justice, equality and dignity. They return from the "liminal zone" with a new or renewed vision of the world in which they wish to belong and will build.

Consider also traditional Mayan pilgrimages in Central America, which Palka (2014, 4) describes as an element of social life that is so integral to the cultural core that it transcends political and temporal parameters. All that we need in life, like water and rain, good harvests, and wellbeing, are concentrated in ritual landscapes, and these sites must be visited and propitiated for their life-giving properties to be released. According to Palka (2014, 11), these pilgrimages are performed according to the ritual calendar. Mesoamerican pilgrims might be seeking individually focused social, economic and religious goals, but they also recognize that humans perpetuate the gods' actions, just as gods perpetuate and protect human lives, and this balance in the world must be maintained for peace to prevail. The meaning of pilgrimage in this context is linked to the maintenance of both cosmic and world order, well beyond the interests of any one individual. Mayan pilgrimage, as in the cases described earlier, is a journey within a journey.

Any definition of pilgrimage that does not address the interrelationship between the many dimensions of sacred travel, or acknowledge that the experience is being orchestrated at some higher level, whether or not the individual pilgrim is aware of it, is deficient. In this book, therefore, we are laying the groundwork for a renewed look at the meaning and significance of the ancient practice of pilgrimage. Specifically, our investigation is centered on the interplay of both individual and group aspirations with a focus on peace-building. The case studies are grouped in three textual blocks, namely 1. Interfaith Solidarity, Peace-Building, Interreligious Tourism and Dialogue, 2. Civil Society, Secularism, Religious Tourism and Pilgrimages, and 3. Personal Narratives, Inner Peace, and Post-Pilgrimage.

Interfaith Solidarity, Peace-Building, Interreligious Tourism and Dialogue

Ian McIntosh and Rev. Paramananda see a role for pilgrimage and religious tourism in the reconciliation process now underway in the wake of Sri Lanka's civil war. They argue that the sacred journey to Sri Pada—also known as Adam's Peak—can help to model a vision of the future in which Sri Lankans of all religions and ethnicities are equal and united. From ancient times until well into the twentieth century, Sri Pada was perhaps the greatest interfaith pilgrimage site on earth, attracting Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, Christians and others in great numbers. Now that peace has

returned to Sri Lanka, Sri Pada can once again be an inspiration for policies and practices designed to heal the wounds of war and unite all strands of Sri Lankan society.

From Russia's North Caucasus region, Mikhail Alexseev and Sufian Zhemukhov present a case study into what they call the Muslim Pilgrims' Paradox, which challenges conventional wisdom embedded in political, academic, and media discourses. Their evidence shows that performing the Hajj—the annual pilgrimage of Muslims to Mecca—conditions pilgrims to become more socially and politically tolerant, *i.e.* to find acceptable diverse streams within Islam, as well as religions and ethnic groups other than their own.

In her chapter, Nour Farra Haddad describes popular pilgrimages in Lebanon that have spread well beyond their orthodox Christian and Muslim forms. In contrast to the codified religiosity of the mosque and church, Muslim, Christian, Druze and Buddhist believers have developed a less constraining religiosity through the *ziyârât*, *i.e.* the visits to the religious sites of saints. Even if it is not the initial objective of pilgrims, these pilgrimages inevitably include an encounter with "the other"—the Christian with the Muslim, and the Muslim with the Christian. Saint worship and shared pilgrimages have contributed to maintaining a dialogue amongst the faithful around the shared figures of sainthood, even during very difficult situations.

On a related topic, Gebhard Fartacek and Lorenz Nigst explore the topic of *baraka* or divine blessings, in the context of local pilgrimages in Syria and Lebanon. Based on a case study from the holy cave of Mār Elyās al-ḥayy, the authors examine the ritual efficacy of baraka and its "side-effects" and how it relates to the much-emphasised interreligious importance of such pilgrimage sites.

Finally, Senbeto Dagnachew describes how religious tourism is a growing phenomenon in Ethiopia, even though its economic potential has yet to be fully realized. Ethiopia is endowed with considerable religious, cultural and linguistic diversity. The noteworthy co-existence of Muslims and Christians—they stand together both during holidays and in periods of conflict—could play a crucial role in the enhancement of the tourism industry and the promotion of even more harmonious relations.

Civil Society, Secularism, Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage

In Part Two, Matthew Anderson proposes that walking pilgrimage on historically-important but largely-forgotten trails across the northern Great

Plains of Canada can help prepare Settler-descendants for the important work of reconciliation and making amends for historical injustices. Such journeys accomplish the personal and social objective of making Settlers better treaty partners by reconnecting them with the First Nations forced from the land, and also the land itself and its history.

Douglas Challenger describes the reanimation of the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage in Spain as a "postsecular sanctuary"—a place where religious and axiological pluralism is practiced in everyday life. As such, the Camino is playing an important role in reshaping European civil society and the West's changing identity as postsecular.

From the Indian sub-continent, Varada Sambhus argues that walking the Vari pilgrimage serves as a platform for people to interact and share their views on the sacred values of respect, service, simple living, and compassion. Through various forms of performance including singing, dancing, play, and music, the Vari pilgrims can rise above caste, class, race, and gender identities to achieve *Satsang*, defined as living in the company of pure or "true" beings.

In a case study from Indonesia, Pierre Fournie explores the rich diversity of pilgrimage in the Indonesian archipelago, including journeys that are inspired by the power of nature, tradition, religion and also of the mind, including those hybrid forms of pilgrimage that promote tolerance and coexistence between Muslims, Hindus and Christians.

Then, in an exploratory essay, Veena Sharma asks whether religious or faith tourism can lead to a crucial, empathetic shift in personal awareness, enabling humans to accept one another without prejudice. Can it help to build deeper and permanent trans-class, trans-racial, trans-ethnic and trans-religious connections? Can it transform the tourist from a consumer-voyeur to a responsible participant in the quest for social equality and cultural and environmental preservation?

Personal Narratives, Inner Peace, and Post-Pilgrimage

In Part Three, Roy Tamashiro explores a genre of pilgrimage known as *pilgrimage into witness consciousness* which is conceptually constructed and defined through autoethnographic analyses of experiences and memories associated with pilgrimages to Hiroshima, the Buddha circuit (India and Nepal), and massacre sites of Jeju 4·3 (1947-1954) in South Korea, and the 1968 Mỹ Lai Massacre in Vietnam. Pilgrimage into witness consciousness is concerned with healing from grave wounds and traumas, and is facilitated by being witnessed, being heard and being known. Witness consciousness renews centered and mindful connections to the self,

communities, nature, and finally, to the eternal.

Alison Smith examines the potential of labyrinth walking for promoting peaceful student engagement. As a professor at a military college, she is keenly aware of the urgent need to share peaceful alternatives with young people who are actively being prepared for war. Smith describes how high impact pilgrimage practices of short duration might allow students to contemplate and experience peaceful encounters first hand.

Christian Kurrat's research into the motivations of pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago in Spain reveals that people often decide to go on pilgrimage to process life crises and radical life changes. With a methodology that focuses on the entire life story of the pilgrim, Kurrat shares his analysis of 30 narrative interviews to show that this processing takes place not only by walking, but also by talking with other pilgrims. To help understand what he deems to be a search for inner peace, he has created a typology of biographical motivations, including the categories of balance, crisis, time-out, new start, and transition.

In an examination of faith travel and pilgrimage to major sites associated with St Paul on the island nation of Malta, Dane Munro finds an avenue of reconciliation between Protestants and Catholics. The Protestant outlook on pilgrimage has changed dramatically in recent years. From a total suspension of the practice of Roman Catholic pilgrimage due to irreconcilable differences in both religious practice and Biblical interpretation, we now see a cautious acceptance by Protestants of faith travel as a means of fully immersing themselves in the spiritual dimension of travel to holy places.

In the final chapter, Janice Farley introduces six women who blazed their own trails, inadvertently becoming pilgrims and role models. These women confronted dangers to later reap the awards awaiting those who dare slip the shackles of societal expectations and forge their own paths in answering adventure's call. Empowered by their successes, each traveler continued to tackle new challenges in righting the injustices of this world, defending the most vulnerable, enlightening the present through preservation of the past, and/or bringing humanity full circle back to nature with its transcendent benefits and exigencies.

Peace Journeys Within Sacred Journeys

In summary, the chapters of this book highlight a new direction in religious tourism and pilgrimage research, namely, the role of sacred journeys as avenues for peace-building and reconciliation—the journey within a journey. With this addendum to the commonly held definition of pilgrimage, we are better placed to see the rapid growth in religious tourism

over the past several decades as an unprecedented opportunity for building a culture of peace not just at the level of individuals, but within and between communities, regions, and states.

In many instances, pilgrims and tourists meet on the trail and share their stories in a cordial and peaceful atmosphere, without artifice. Borders and boundaries disappear, the pilgrimage facilitating a vision of unity in diversity. Even if it is not the initial objective of the sacred journey, encounters with the other can contribute to the maintenance of this "natural dialogue," providing opportunities for learning about the beliefs, practices, sacred figures, and sacred sites of the other, while contributing to conflict resolution by preventing the spread of fanatical or radical ideologies.

By encouraging intercultural and interfaith dialogue through sacred journeys, and by promoting the pilgrimage values of hospitality, openness and welcoming the stranger, we can help lay the foundation for inclusive and sustainable futures. Organizations like the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) are engaged in promoting this vision on multiple fronts. A recent statement by this organization's former General Secretary, for instance, confirmed that:

> Religious tourism is a key agent of peace. It is a transformative force that breaks down cultural barriers and builds bridges between people, communities and nations. Leveraging the growing interest in religious tourism is crucial in building cultural dialogue, mutual understanding and peace (CPNN 2015).

We dedicate our book to this important journey.

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PART 1

INTERFAITH SOLIDARITY, PEACE-BUILDING, INTERRELIGIOUS TOURISM AND DIALOGUE

CHAPTER 1

TO THE TOP TOGETHER: PILGRIMAGE AND PEACE-BUILDING ON SRI LANKA'S HOLY MOUNTAIN

IAN S. MCINTOSH
AND REV. POLGASWATTE PARAMANANDA

Abstract

Is there a place for pilgrimage in war-torn Sri Lanka's reconciliation process? Specifically, can the sacred journey to Sri Pada—also known as Adam's Peak—help to model a vision of the future in which Sri Lankans of all religions and ethnicities are equal and united? In this chapter, we argue that, with appropriate national and international recognition, like the designation *corpus separatum*—a place of peace governed by a collective representing the various interest groups—the holy mountain's meta-narrative of unity and diversity can be an inspiration for policies and practices designed to heal the wounds of war. From ancient times until well into the twentieth century, Sri Pada was perhaps the greatest interfaith pilgrimage site on earth, attracting Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, Christians and others in great numbers. As a symbol of hope for humankind, it had no equal, except perhaps for Jerusalem, which is sacred to Jews, Christians and Muslims. Members of various faiths climbed the holy mountain together and worshipped at an imprint in the rock that they recognized as either the mark of Buddha, Shiva, Adam (after he was expelled from paradise), or the apostle to the world, St Thomas, among others. Over the centuries, the holy mountain has been the scene of various reconciliation initiatives, and now that peace has returned to Sri Lanka, pilgrim numbers are increasing and reaching record levels. We believe that there are grounds for optimism that the interfaith cooperation so evident at Sri Pada, both in the past and today, will continue to be a beacon of hope for Sri Lanka, and a bridge to the future.

Pilgrimage and Reconciliation in Sri Lanka: An Introduction

For many centuries, Sri Lanka has been divided along religious, ethnic, linguistic and geographical lines, and tensions between the majority Sinhalese (Buddhist) and minority Tamil (Hindu) populations were exacerbated by the British colonial experience (Naik 2008). In the 1970s, when Tamils demanded a state of their own in the north and east of Sri Lanka in a region coinciding with their traditional and historical homeland, relations with the ruling Sinhalese deteriorated. A full-scale civil war broke out in 1983 that led to the loss of upwards of seventy thousand lives. Hostilities ended in 2009 and there have been nationwide calls to look into the root causes of the civil war and to find strategies for meaningful reconciliation, defined here as the restoration—or formation—of amicable relations between parties previously in conflict.

While peace has returned to the island, normality remains elusive. It is a 'negative peace' which is defined as the absence of conflict, not a 'positive peace', which is characterized by justice and bridge-building between former adversaries. Moderate Sinhalese leadership has revived hopes for rebuilding the nation according to the "five R's", namely 1. Reconstruction, 2. Resettlement 3. Rehabilitation 4. Reintegration and 5. Reconciliation. Additionally, a new and inclusive national constitution has been drafted to stabilize the country and address the bitter grievances of the past. Despite these initiatives, there are major obstacles to progress. While overt Buddhist-Hindu conflict has largely ended, deep mistrust still continues. Additionally, attacks on Muslims by Buddhist fanatics are on the rise, posing a real threat to the peace process. Fake news stories on social media platforms like Facebook have sparked a rash of mosque burnings and murders (Razak 2015; Stewart 2014). Additionally, horrendous attacks on Christian Churches in 2019 by terrorists affiliated with ISIS has compounded the sense of unease in the country.

The 2011 Commission of Inquiry into Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation prepared by the government of Sri Lanka stressed the need for people-to-people contact, especially by the young, as a precondition for building consensus and promoting harmony:

> Students of different ethnic and religious backgrounds should be encouraged to interact with each other and create networks… Thousands of Sri Lankans born to the so-called 'war generation' may have not met a person of a different ethnicity. Encouragement of sports, aesthetic and other extracurricular activities are a means of bringing students of different ethnic backgrounds together (Republic of Sri Lanka 2011, 313).

Interfaith alliance is proposed in the commission report as an essential element in the reconciliation process. Sri Lanka has been enriched over time by the traditions of four world religions, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity, and the report says that religious leaders should unite and provide leadership for the people by emphasizing religious commonalities. Specifically, not only should war-damaged Buddhist shrines, Hindu kovils, Muslim mosques, and Christian churches be rebuilt but:

> …the spirituality and common human values founded and strengthened by the different religious teachings should be used as a force to promote inter-ethnic understanding and social cohesion (Republic of Sri Lanka 2011, 316-317).

Traditionally, the annual overnight climb to the top of Adam's Peak from the full moon in December to the full moon in April attracted hundreds of thousands of pilgrims of different faiths. They would travel together at their own pace, worshipping in their own style, on the way to the sacred mountain top to "the sacred footprint" or Sri Pada. Once there, a natural rock formation in the shape of a foot was venerated by all.

The interfaith dimension of the Sri Pada pilgrimage is a source of national pride for Sri Lankans, for it is only here and at a handful of other major pilgrimage sites like Kataragama, that the rigid boundaries between ethnicities and religious groups becomes porous. Building on Haddad's (2013; 2016) work in Lebanon where she demonstrates the potential impact for nation-building of informal dialogue during interfaith pilgrimages, our contention is that the above-mentioned porousness experienced by pilgrims at Sri Pada can be avenue for achieving not only reintegration, but also peace and reconciliation in Sri Lanka.

Pilgrimage, like sport, has the capacity to bring together disparate groups for a common purpose. But to what extent can the camaraderie displayed on the trail or the sports field transfer to everyday life? Can such fleeting moments of togetherness help to address structural and historical injustices in society at large? The contact hypothesis suggests that stereotypes of the other can be challenged and long-term friendships nurtured by these group experiences. In the case if Sri Pada, will this be first order (or superficial) change, or second order change, where the circumstances that drove the conflict are addressed at a structural level?

In this chapter, we ask whether the Sri Pada pilgrimage can be promoted by the state, and the international community, in such a way that it leads to an ongoing reduction of tensions and creates opportunities for more harmonious relationships between all Sri Lankans. As we will explain, the holy mountain guides pilgrims of all faiths towards a mindset of peace and

inclusiveness through the common rituals practiced by pilgrims and through its meta-narrative of unity in diversity. If recognized nationally and internationally not just as a World Heritage site but as a beacon of hope for all humanity—as a *corpus separatum* or place of peace governed by religious leaders of all faiths—then Sri Pada can model a vision of the future not just of a reconciled Sri Lankan state, but of a world at peace with itself.

Image 1. *Sri Pada (Adam's Peak) at dusk. © Ian McIntosh.*

The Reconciliation Challenge

Sri Lanka is a country in transition. Ten years after the bitter civil war, are the peoples of Sri Lanka reconciled to the past and is there a clear vision of where they want to be in the future? Are they all on board with the lofty goal of building state institutions that govern through an ethnic-free lens? The answer is no (Arulthas 2018).

As stated earlier, there is an agenda for reconciliation in Sri Lanka, but it is unclear what assumptions underlie the belief that it will succeed. It is also unclear how the authorities are evaluating the desire for reconciliation within the different strands of the population, or measuring the impact of initiatives designed to achieve common goals.

In Sri Lanka today, there is still a desperate need to identify, understand and address the sources of fear and prejudice that inspire communal divisions. Building trust, confidence and respect, will only happen when there is open and free dialogue between Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims. This remains a significant challenge because, as I mentioned earlier, so many Sri Lankans are living very separate lives. Some do not even define themselves as Sri Lankan. Rather, they identify themselves according to their own ethnic and religious background (Dunung 1995).

Trials and truth commissions spring to mind when we talk of reconciliation on the international stage. Perpetrators are put behind bars, reparations and compensation are paid to victims, and hidden truths about a troubled past are opened to the public gaze. While the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission was a step in the right direction, the lack of accountability for the gross human rights violations committed by the Sinhalese military in the latter stages of the war, for example, remain a major sticking point in the reconciliation process.

Success in any program of reconciliation is determined by three factors. First there must be a strong desire and interest in reconciling by the various parties to a conflict. Second, the people must have the capacity to do the work of reconciliation. Healing takes time, and the people must be physically capable of undertaking the role and feel empowered to tackle the problem head-on. Finally, there must be an opportunity to act. The door must be opened for meaningful interactions to occur, injustices to be addressed, and lives to be restarted. All three factors must be in sync for there to be real progress (McIntosh 2013; 2014).

In an ideal setting, parties to a conflict will have negotiated a pathway towards a well-defined destination, with progress marked by social indicators. But in Sri Lanka, this is not the case. There is no agreed upon roadmap beyond the aforementioned 5 R's and even then, it is not being followed.

Reconciliation initiatives are generally of two types, often described as the "hardware" and "software" of peace. Hardware includes necessary infrastructure developments, such as housing, schools, health centers, and transport, that can level a playing field and bring resources to the people who need them most. Software initiatives, on the other hand, are designed to change the value systems, beliefs and orientations of people towards each other, the state, and to the past. The lack of trust-generative mechanisms or processes of peace-building at the national level in Sri Lanka is indicative of the problem that lies ahead. The government's insistence on prioritizing Buddhism in this multi-faith country continues to engender intolerance in both politics and society at large.

Case Studies in Reconciliation

While there have been a number of local initiatives designed to foster an integrated Sri Lankan identity, including peace camps and sporting events facilitated by local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the outcomes—when considered against the backdrop of a nation divided and as models for nationwide implementation—have been inconclusive.

As human beings, we all belong to certain in-groups where we share a feeling of belonging, identity and wellbeing. From within that in-group, we perceive out-groups, *i.e.* people who we neither interact with nor identify with in any significant way. Boundaries, both physical and symbolic, are constructed and maintained by these in-groups. These boundaries are in various degrees permeable or impermeable for individuals wishing to move between the groups, or the categories of insider and outsider (McCallion 2007; Putnam 2007). The challenge for NGOs pursuing reconciliation in Sri Lanka has been to negotiate these boundaries and build friendships across lines of division. The ultimate desire in many instances has been to foster inclusive social identities along national, rather than ethnic or religious lines.

In two cases that we will briefly share here, positive social change was the aim of an interfaith peace leadership event and a sports program. Both drew inspiration from the contact hypothesis, which suggests that bringing people together from different in-groups under certain circumstances—like in the ascent of a mountain—can induce a change in their behaviors for the better and reduce in-group bias. However, the literature also shows that we should not deceive ourselves into thinking that just because people are walking, talking or playing together there will automatically be long term positive outcomes. The experience may even exacerbate tensions. Old rivalries may also be rekindled (Rigby 2001).

However, Haddad (2013; 2016) argues that there is scope for optimism. Pilgrimages to sites of shared sacred geography in Lebanon, such as those associated with the Virgin Mary and Saint George, have the potential to increase the permeability of frontiers between the Catholic, Muslim and Druze faith communities. Even in times of conflict, the cordial atmosphere at these sacred places allows pilgrims, who often share common concerns, to engage in a form of natural and spontaneous dialogue far removed from the tensions and anxiety of daily life. Likewise, Fartacek (2012) argues that in folk religions, as opposed to world traditions—and to some degree this also applies to Sri Lanka—there is much more scope for interfaith cooperation.

The work of the NGOs like the Asian-German Sport Exchange Program (AGSEP) in Sri Lanka has focused on creating sites where informal positive interactions can occur. Since 2002 they have been conducting sports events to try and build bridges of friendship and cooperation (Schulenkorf 2010). Their 2007 Intercultural Sports Meeting contributed to inclusive social change among the participating Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim communities in the Peace Village they established in the Nattandiya community in remote rural Sri Lanka. The first ever inter-community sports weekend for 8-16-year-olds and their families was designed to provide a foundation for dialogue between the different constituencies and to achieve inclusive social change. The theoretical underpinning for this intervention was Tajfel and Turner's (1979; 1986) Social Identity Theory or S.I.T. and the idea that social identity can be influenced, deconstructed and reconstructed, leading inevitably to changes in behavior towards others. Extensive interviews with participants by Nico Schulenkorf (2010) indicated a shift in self-identification toward a new common identity as a result of this event. The participants saw themselves more as sportspeople and peace villagers than as Tamil or Sinhalese, and took pride in their common Sri Lankan heritage or Sri Lankan-ness.

Such results are always open to scrutiny because the data are reliant upon so many factors, including timing, method of instruction, nature of coursework and activities, and the experimenter-demand component, where interviewees merely give the answers that are desired. Similar experiments conducted elsewhere in Sri Lanka, however, also point to the potential for long-term positive outcomes.

An analysis of the long-term impact of 'peace camps' on youth attitudes and behaviors in Sri Lanka by social scientists Malhotra and Liyanage (2003) was promising. They found that 40 Sinhalese and Tamil high school students who lived with each other over a period of four days showed increased empathy toward each other. The program included discussions on conflict resolution and diversity, as well as role-playing and group projects, and there was adequate time for socializing. The methodology for the study involved reaching out to the students one year after this experience, when they were back in their home communities, and asking them questions about trust, empathy, and social distance, which were then compared to non-participants from these same communities. The questions centered on 1. Whether you expect the other person to behave benevolently when the trustor is vulnerable, 2. The degree to which the perspectives of the other are acknowledged and they have concern for their well-being, and 3. The extent to which a person is comfortable with being associated with a member of the other group.

The findings were noteworthy. While there was no effect in terms of social distance or comfort levels, there was an increased level of trust, especially by Sinhalese students towards their Tamil peers, and of empathy, specifically an inclination to assist those in need, even across the borderlines of faith.

How instructive are these case studies? We know that contact alone is usually insufficient in bringing about any lasting change for the better. As suggested earlier, once re-immersed in their home environments, in-group prejudices and negative images of the other may reawaken. As Johan Galtung (1967), one of the founders of peace studies, has argued, to try to address attitude change without addressing the root causes of a conflict, is wrong-headed. This is better described as pacification than as a just peace. A bridge to the future can be built only if the reconciliatory gestures, like those described above, are integrated into a larger agenda of social and political reform (Schulenkorf 2010). As Halpern and Weinstein (2004) argue, while reconciliation must occur among individuals, the process can happen only within the context of a society that not only gives permission for people of opposing groups to interact but indeed promotes their collaboration in pursuit of a common agenda. Andrew Rigby (2003) concurs and says that when initiatives are orchestrated in this fashion, reconciliation will become embodied in the emerging routines of life within the family, the school, the neighborhood, and the wider community. Under such circumstances, a contribution well beyond the immediate impacted local peoples and communities might be anticipated.

One lesson emerging from these small-scale case studies is that direction and inspiration for the larger goal of reconciliation needs to come both from the grass roots and from on high. National events and rituals inspired by the above examples that cut across all ethnic and religious divisions are required in the Sri Lankan reconciliation process. This is why we believe that the holy mountain of Sri Pada should be integrated into the national reconciliation process. As a form of topographical ‘national constitution’ with its meta-narrative reinforcing the notion of unity in diversity, Sri Pada can help direct the hearts and minds of all the people to the greater cause of inclusive state-building.

The Vision of Peace

The idea of linking Sri Pada with peace and reconciliation is not new. Over the centuries, the holy mountain has both inspired and also reflected harmonious coexistence between religious faiths. If we go back 600 years to China’s Ming Dynasty, Admiral Zheng He with 20,000 men and 200

ships was pursuing a vision of peace through international trade when he landed on Sri Lanka's southern shore. He offered a wealth of tribute to the gods of Sri Pada (Buddha, Allah, and an avatar of Vishnu) including 1000 pieces of gold, 5000 pieces of silver, rolls of silk in many colors, scented oil and fragrant incense. He also erected a large stone tablet near Galle at the starting place of the Muslim pilgrimage route to the holy mountain. The tablet's inscription sought the blessings from these same gods written in three languages, Persian, Tamil, and Chinese, for the peaceful cooperation among the religions.

Zheng He himself was a Muslim in the employ of a Chinese emperor who was deeply influenced by Tibetan Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism. Many of Zheng He's crew, however, worshipped Mazu, the goddess of the sea. Zheng He would sometimes pray at the tomb of the Muslim sages who brought Islam to China in the 600s, but he also credited Mazu for calming the seas and thus ensuring the success of his long-distance voyages.

In the 1400s, as today, for a foreigner to erect a stone tablet on someone else's land would be a bold if not audacious move. Perhaps he wanted to promote the sort of cooperation that he had witnessed in Chinese trading ports like Quanzhou and Guangzhou, which were great emporiums welcoming peoples from across the Indian Ocean, just like the coastal ports of Sri Lanka. It is not known how Zheng He's gesture was received, only that the stone tablet was found 500 years later in a ditch in Galle by a British engineer. By all accounts, this was an extraordinary visit. Zheng He was not a conqueror like the Portuguese who would come in his wake, but he did want to impress upon all the might of the Chinese emperor. His was a vision of a world where peace and prosperity could be achieved through trade, but only if the followers of all the various ethnic and religious groups would recognize and appreciate each other's beliefs and traditions. Zheng He may have believed that there was no greater place on earth demonstrating this cherished ideal than Sri Pada, for no similar artefact has yet been found anywhere along the Maritime Silk Road.

Moving ahead in time to independence from Great Britain in 1948, Sri Lanka considered the use of a stylized rendition of Sri Pada for the design of its new national flag. In what some say was a lost opportunity for peace-building, that idea was set aside, and today we see the Buddhist lion predominating in the design, with a green Islamic stripe and an orange Tamil stripe alongside it to represent the country's ethnic and religious diversity.

Now fast forward 40 years to the 1980s when Sri Lanka was in the midst of a civil war. An initiative by Save the Children Norway sought to promote

ethnic and religious harmony through what they called ‘walkshops’ and ‘talkshops’ on the holy mountain. Led by the international expert on applied communication in developing countries, Andreas Fuglesang, the project saw youth from Sri Lanka’s various ethnic groups come together and climb the holy mountain. As with the aforementioned peace camp and interfaith sports event, the ‘walkshop’ involved simply being together on an arduous overnight trek up the mountain. As I mentioned, the contact hypothesis suggests that there is potential for the breaking down of stereotypes and the re-humanization of the other during such ventures. The ‘talkshop’ was centered on learning to appreciate the diversity of beliefs associated with the mountain from the perspectives of the various faith groups represented by the walkers, and how these beliefs are all intertwined. To facilitate the learning component of the exercise, a detailed account of the history and wide-ranging significance of a mountain was created (Aksland 2001). The project leaders wanted to inspire Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim youth to find solutions to the gnawing problems of mistrust and violence in their country. Pilgrimage, in this instance, was envisaged as an avenue for participants to consider a vision of the future in which they were not divided. On the mountain, everyone is equal, and it could be like this in the broader society as well.

A Fabled Mountain

The cult of venerating the footprint on the holy mountain became a global phenomenon more than a thousand years ago. Up until the 1950s, Sri Pada was arguably the greatest interfaith pilgrimage site on earth, attracting Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, Christian and others in considerable numbers. A symbol of hope for humankind, it had no equal, except perhaps for Jerusalem, which is sacred to Jews, Christians and Muslims. At Sri Pada members of various faiths climbed the mountain together and worshipped at an imprint in the rock that they recognized as the mark of Buddha, Shiva, Adam (after he was expelled from paradise), or the apostle to the world, St Thomas, among others. Pilgrims also worshipped the indigenous fertility god of this mountain, Saman, and performed rites in his honor, rites common to all faiths, as we will describe later. In ancient times, Sri Pada was the site of sun worship by the indigenous peoples and even today, pilgrims perform an age-old ‘homage to the sun’ at sunrise.

The cross-cutting cosmological linkages at Sri Pada were center stage in the aforementioned ‘talkshops’ conducted by Save the Children Norway. They reveal how the ‘cosmic geography’ of Sri Pada grew with each wave of Sri Lankan history, providing powerful evidence of the capacity of Sri

Lankans over countless generations to accommodate the new (Holt 2006). Drawing on the work of Ernst (1997), the Kataragama Devotees Trust, McKinley (2018), and Skeen (1870), some of the major cosmological dimensions of the holy mountain are as follows:

1. At the invitation of Saman, the indigenous mountain god of fertility, crops, and healing, Lord Buddha placed his footprint on the peak during his third visit to Sri Lanka. (Another of the Buddha's footprints is in Mecca, Saudi Arabia). Footprint worship has its origins with the Hindu god Vishnu, with whom Buddha is seen, by some, as an avatar.
2. Saman created the mountain from where the sun is worshipped. At Sri Pada's base there is a sacred tree linked to Saman whose leaves bring about new life and youthfulness. It is said that in years to come Saman will be the 7th incarnation of the Buddha. In some accounts, Saman is linked to Yama, the old Hindu god of death and the underworld, and reportedly the very first human, which links this god to Adam.
3. As early as the 8th century, Arab and Persian traders along the Maritime Silk Road described Sri Lanka as an earthly paradise. As the holy mountain had the distinction of being "closest to heaven" it was presumed that Adam had landed there after being expelled from Paradise, leaving his mark on the summit. (Eve landed in Jedda, Saudi Arabia). Adam and Eve reconnected on Mt Arafat, in Mecca, where the Prophet Mohammed gave his final sermon.
4. In Sri Lanka, Arabs and Persians would trade for precious jewels such as rubies and sapphires found in the foothills of Sri Pada, and they would climb the holy mountain to honor the Prophet Adam. Many enthralling stories arose from those times, such as those of the Sufi sheik who meditated for twelve years after his climb, or the account of the Sufi philosopher Ghulam Ali who describes Adam's Peak as the 2nd holiest place in Islam, the site of the first revelation, the first mosque on earth, and the place from where the first pilgrimage to Mecca was performed. According to Ghulam, the black stone of Mecca (in the corner of the Ka'bah) descended with Adam, as did the walking stick that Moses would later carry. In this narrative tradition, all the fruits and fragrances of South Asia derive from Adam via his descent from paradise.
5. From certain vantage points, Sri Pada looks like a Shiva lingam, and it is said that the Hindu god Shiva came to Sri Lanka from the Himalayas and created all the rivers that arise from the holy mountain.

Shiva then danced his cosmic dance on the mountain top and left his footprint as a symbol of his divine totality, creating a place of pilgrimage for Hindus. This narrative was prevalent at the time when Tamil kings ruled Sri Lanka.

6. St Thomas, the apostle to the world, left his mark upon the mountain after having converted the three kings of the east, one of whom was said to be from Sri Lanka. This narrative, popular among Catholics, emerged in the times of the Portuguese conquest of Sri Lanka.
7. In Chinese mythology dating back to the third century CE, the first created man bears the name of Pawn-koo and he left his footprint on the peak at Sri Pada. The gems that are found in such rich abundance around Sri Pada are believed to be his crystalized tears, accounting for their singular luster and tints.
8. In the pilgrimage off-season, from the end of April to early December, the gods themselves are said to be worshipping at Sri Pada. Elephants and butterflies undertake their own pilgrimage to the mountaintop, and flowers turn their colorful petals toward the peak. As William Skeen (1870, 11) writes, before the rise of world religions this place "was sacred to the primal religion of humanity—the worship of nature—as the enduring, all originating, all absorbing universal whole."
9. Miscellaneous: The Eunuch of the formidable Abyssinian Queen Candace is said to have left his mark on the mountain, as did Alexander the Great, who is believed to have had chains placed near the summit during his ascent. Also, the indigenous Wanniyal-aetto or Veddas of Sri Lanka link the great Yaksha or spirit of Kataragama, who is an alien divinity, to the holy mountain. He descended from the sky upon Sri Pada, stood there for a long time, and then followed the path of elephants to Kataragama, the home of the elephants. He planted his spear in the earth, sat down, and has remained there ever since. This is claimed to be the first indigenous settlement in Sri Lanka.

Many linkages between the faiths are evident in these vignettes. The Christian narrative of St Thomas, for example, is linked to the Portuguese colonial period but also to the Old Testament and Muslim stories of the prophet Adam. Adam is linked to Yuma in Hindu narratives, and to Pawn-koo in the Chinese narratives, as he is deemed to be the very first human being. Adam is also linked to Vishnu, the first entity whose footprint was worshipped. As Buddha is seen as an avatar of Vishnu, Buddhists and Hindus are therefore connected. In the two-hundred-year period when the

mountain was under Hindu rule, Shiva narratives predominated, and yet because Vishnu is understood to be an aspect of Shiva, Buddha was always present there, and Shiva is understood to have been acting through him.

What is the significance of all the permutations and combinations of sacred narratives? In this transition period in Sri Lanka, with Buddhists in the ascendency, Buddha interpretations and ritual practices may predominate, but all pilgrims have a sacred claim to be there and no one has a stronger claim than any other. This is the meta-narrative embedded in the very heart of Sri Pada. All humanity comes together on the mountain. It is as if we are seeing the entire world in miniature. Just as with the Hajj in Mecca where pilgrims wear the simple white cloth, there are no marks to distinguish pilgrims—apart from Buddhist monks—and perhaps that is a secret of success. People are worshiping their own god or gods, but they carry them the stories of other gods, all the way to the top.

Common Rituals on Sri Pada

Emphasized during the 1980s 'talkshops' was the fact that members of the various faith groups, in particular Buddhists and Hindus, perform common rites as they prepare for the pilgrimage, during the ascent, upon reaching the summit, and returning home. As with pilgrimages to the tombs of saints in Lebanon, this is what makes this pilgrimage ripe for natural or spontaneous dialogue.

In preparation for climbing Sri Pada, pilgrims will abstain from eating meat for upwards of 21 days or longer. Vows are then made at a site of worship closest to the pilgrim's place of residence and they ask for a safe journey, placing themselves at the mercy of Saman. To a branch of a sacred Bo (Bodhi) Tree—like the one under which the Buddha attained Enlightenment—they will tie *Panduru* or consecrated coins. Upon their return from the pilgrimage, pilgrims remove these coins from the tree and bestow merit upon the gods for the protection given to them.

Many rituals are observed at the foot of Sri Pada. Since the pilgrimage is normally carried out by groups, an elderly person with wide experience is elected leader. First, he or she will remind his group about the various taboos, including particular words to be used or not used, and those activities to be strictly avoided during the ascent. Complaining, declaring one's inability to meet the challenge, or even boasting, is not tolerated. A suitable vocabulary in the Sinhala language to be used includes words such as *Karunakaranawa*, which means looking forwards, not backwards.

It is the custom of pilgrims to bathe in the river at the foot of the mountain before the ascent, and members of all religions adhere to this