In July and August 2011, two years after the end of Sri Lanka’s 30-year civil war, the island was swept by rumours, followed in some cases by vigilante attacks (including a number of killings). The rumours concerned “grease devils”, men who cover their half-naked bodies with grease in order to evade capture, and who lurk in the shadows, waiting to attack unprotected women. The rumours started in the central hills of the country, then moved to the Tamil workers on tea estates in the mountains, and then on to the Muslim and Tamil areas of the country’s north and east, where they sparked confrontations with the army and police. The rumours’ ability to galled across the ethnic and religious divisions that shaped the war, has to be interpreted within a broader context, in which the war has left in its wake a growing sense of shared moral unease.

Jonathan Spencer has carried out fieldwork in Sri Lanka since the early 1980s, concentrating at first on rural change and local politics, but writing more recently on ethnic conflict, political violence and political non-violence. His current research looks at the fraught boundary between the religious and the political in Sri Lanka and elsewhere. His book on the anthropology of 'the political' in South Asia, *Anthropology, Politics, and the State* appeared in 2007. A new book, *Checkpoint, Temple, Church and Mosque*, written with colleagues from SOAS, Zurich and Peradeniya, on the work of religious organizations in war and peace in Sri Lanka, was published in late 2014.

**DATE**  Wednesday, 11 February 2015

**TIME**  3.00pm to 4.30pm

**VENUE**  Malay Studies Seminar Room, AS7 #04-13, Kent Ridge Campus, NUS