

## **Between State of Nature and Nation State: Identity, Territory and “Wilderness” in Post-War Sri Lanka**

### *Summary/Zusammenfassung*

The research project explores how constructions of indigeneity shape processes of territorialisation at violent margins of the state. Focusing on the case of the Veddhas in Eastern Sri Lanka, it explores everyday life of and ethnic politics around a so-called indigenous group after a protracted civil war (1983-2009). The project is built upon three main parts: the politics of performance, the politics of categorization, and the politics of post-war spaces.

Part I concerns the re-making of Veddhaness after the war through national celebrations, museums, and the re-enactment of a local Veddha leader. It examines imaginations of wilderness and savages through the lens of political philosophy, such as ideas on the state of nature by Jean-Jaques Rousseau and Thomas Hobbes, as well as through ethnographic fieldwork, key informant interviews and participant observation. Furthermore, this part analyses every day life and marginality in a remote area during and after a civil war.

Part II focuses on census making and population statistics both in the *longue durée* (Portuguese, Dutch and British colonialism, independence and civil war, post-war transition and regime change) as well as in today’s complex situation of political uncertainty and post-war nation building. It investigates causes and consequences of ethnic politics in terms of identity, development, space appropriation, and state building. In addition to ethnography, this part uses qualitative data analysis of policy and census documents as well as archival material.

Part III focuses more specifically on living with violence and uncertainty as well as on processes of opening up post-war spaces. Based on concepts such as resource frontiers and geographies of violence, it explores rural livelihoods, access to natural resources and landscape transformation in a post-war space, which was heavily affected by violent conflict and the Tsunami (2004). Relying on ethnographic fieldwork as well as policy and planning documents, this part investigates change and continuity in a contested area that suffered heavily for almost 30 years and was closed-off from the rest of the country for more than a decade.

The research project aims at three main contributions. Firstly, it contributes to on-going debates on geographies of violence, ethnic politics and territorialisation by adding a fine-grained ethnographic perspective from the ground combined with political philosophy and archival work. Secondly, the project aims at giving a voice to marginalized people in a remote post-war space. It fills the research gap on Coast Veddhas in Eastern Sri Lanka and adds a specific aspect to the discussions on ethnicity and state building in Sri Lanka. Thirdly, the project provides insights for policy-makers and development practitioners on the everyday life after a civil war as well as on the complexities of ethnic categorizations and the ambiguous impacts of good intentions.

### *Keywords/Suchbegriffe*

Territorialisation, Marginality, Political Violence, Veddha, Sri Lanka

### *Project Leadership and Contacts / Projektleitung und Kontakte*

Alice Kern ([alice.kern@geo.uzh.ch](mailto:alice.kern@geo.uzh.ch))

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