

Invitation to
4th Nordic Sri Lanka Research Seminar on
"Peace and Development in Sri Lanka"
21-22 May 2009, Copenhagen.

The annual gathering of researchers in the Nordic countries who work on Sri Lanka is a unique opportunity to share findings of ongoing research and discuss ideas for new research. The seminar in 2009 will continue the tradition to explore aspects of *conflict, peace and development*, but also open up for new discussions on *the politics and ethics of research in the context of conflict* and on *the relation between conflict, peace and popular culture*. As we are aware that the two last themes may not be at the core of ongoing research, shorter interventions on these two themes are also most welcome.

Empirical and theoretical explorations of conflict, peace and development
The annual Nordic Sri Lanka Research Seminar has taken Sri Lanka's prolonged conflict and the various attempts at brokering and building peace as one of its central concerns. Multi-disciplinary research has explored the visions, ideologies, roles and impacts of international actors such as Sri Lankan diaspora groups or foreign governments, and of key national actors including the Sri Lankan government, various political parties and fractions, and not least the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. Light has also been shed on the everyday sufferings and aspirations of people directly or indirectly affected by the armed conflict and its concomitant effects on the economic market, inter-ethnic relations, physical mobility, and the prevailing human rights situation. Valuable contributions have already been made in this field in previous workshops. However, the conflict and peace are not only complex issues, but also extremely dynamic ones, and we welcome papers that enhance our understanding of these from different disciplinary and thematic perspectives.

Political and ethical issues of conducting research

The dynamics of war and peace are not only objects of study. They are also factors that deeply affect the very conditions of research. Access to places and people must be negotiated and is sometimes denied. Data collection risks becoming embedded in a general atmosphere of insecurity, fear and censorship. And our interpretations and analyses may not only be contested, but also politicized by actors with vested interests. At the same time, the media, the public and state institutions often show great interest in our so-called expert knowledge. The ethical questions that emerge are many: What issues to study? What analytical categories and terms to employ? How to position oneself? What purposes should research serve? We welcome papers that discuss the conditions of contemporary research and that reflect on what would constitute ethical research on Sri Lanka today, thus acknowledging that

researchers and their research do not exist outside the phenomenon they address, but are part of them.

Conflict and peace in popular culture

A prolonged political conflict like the one that Sri Lanka is experiencing is likely also to enter the realm of popular culture. Fiction, art, theatre plays and cinema movies may offer ways of dealing with painful personal experiences and of translating them into social ones available for wider consumption. Popular culture may also offer a rare opportunity for political critique not permissible in the public media or even in social communication. We welcome papers that explore popular culture in relation to political conflicts from both a contemporary and historical perspective.

Other issues and perspectives

Although the conflict continues to play an important role for our understanding of Sri Lanka, it is not all that is. It is important that we do not disregard other aspects of contemporary life in Sri Lanka. Environmental degradation and protection, economic development, HIV/AIDS, drug abuse and other health issues, education, children and youths, tourism, religious practices, internal and international migration, urbanization and urban poverty, regional collaboration – we welcome research proposals and findings on any theme that contributes to an in-depth understanding of Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka is not an island – within a research optic, that is. Yet, the persistence and impact of the conflict on local livelihoods and worldviews risks isolating Sri Lanka's historical, economical and political development from larger regional struggles and phenomena. For one, Sri Lanka is not the only conflict area in South Asia, and we might benefit from engaging more rigorously with similar issues in other arenas. But more importantly, tracing the connections between phenomena in Sri Lanka and beyond the national sphere might grant us a fresh look at the commonalities of social and political processes. Papers and proposals that touch upon the interconnectedness of social processes beyond the realm of the Island are therefore most welcome.

Registration: Deadline 1 April 2009 (Birgitte.soerensen@anthro.ku.dk)

First name:

Family name:

Title:

Department:

University:

E-mail address:

Title of paper:

Abstract, max 1
page:

Please send on separate sheet.

Accommodation:

Will arrange myself:

Single room: 20 May: 21 May: 22 May:

Double room: 20 May: 21 May: 22 May:

Price approximately 750 Dkr per night for a single room. Cheaper offers are available on the internet.

Meals:

Vegetarian:

Other, specify:

Lunches, tea/coffee and dinner on 21 May will be provided.