

F-02: Ethnicity and region: the need for non-national scale analysis of ethnic politics

Shantha K Hennayake

(Dept of Geography, Univ of Peradeniya)

This paper theoretically argues the need for a regional analysis of ethnic politics. The political historiography on ethnicity has generally been biased toward national scale analysis, to the detriment of the regionality intrinsic to ethnic politics. While the state-centrism that has overwhelmed social sciences and the power of ethnonationalist ideology can be implicated for such one sided analysis, a real need exists to investigate the regional character of ethnic politics. Such an approach will not only highlight the internal differentiation of ethnicity which too often has given a monolithic existence, but also challenges the validity of continuing acceptance of state-centrism and ethnonationalist ideology in ethno-political studies.

A closer look at Tamil ethnonationalist politics reveals that it is anything but monolithic. A comparison of the political behaviour of the Tamils in Jaffna and Batticaloa before the eruption of the violent guerrilla war, clearly reveals that there are multiple interpretations of Tamil ethnopolitics based on regionality. Regionality intrinsic to Tamil ethnonationalist politics is under-researched and this comprehensive understanding of Tamil political behaviour has become difficult.