



SRI LANKA LECTURE SERIES

Territorial anxieties: The impossibility of boundary demarcation in Sri Lanka

Professor Benedikt Korf

Head of Political Geography Unit, University of Zurich
(with Shahul Hasbullah)

In this talk, I will provide an ethnographic case study of the politics of boundary demarcations of local administrative units in eastern Sri Lanka to argue that at the heart of Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict that has ravaged the country for several decades is a "territorial anxiety" - an anxiety that continues to haunt Sri Lanka's politics even after the civil war has ended. Taking the controversy around Koralai Pattu Central D.S. division (known as "KPC") in Batticaloa District as a case, our presentation will trace the history of the evolution of KPC and neighbouring D.S. divisional secretariats and the Pradeshiya Sabha system from the late 1980s to illustrate how administrative boundary demarcation and ethnic segregation became increasingly entangled. The contradictions and controversies around the boundary demarcation in Batticaloa district illustrate the impossibility of boundary demarcation as a politics of (ethnic) purification - the attempt to purifying administrative (and political) entities into ethnically homogenous territorial containers. The case of "KPC" has lessons, not only for Batticaloa's politics, but for boundary demarcation politics for administrative or electoral purposes in Sri Lanka and South Asia more broadly.

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