Conflict and Environment in Sri Lanka, a Complex Nexus

Anthony Goreau-Ponceaud[1]

1. Introduction: a New Type of War

Since the conclusion of the Cold War, a new type of war has engulfed the global South, threatening the security of the rest of the world. The *new wars*, which are mostly internal and regional forms of conflicts, have threatened progressively the lives of civilians more than those of combatants. Moreover, these *new wars* are frequently described as a complex humanitarian emergency. Regularly depicted as a post-Cold War phenomenon, complex humanitarian emergencies are characterized by a multiplicity of man-made causes, often infused with political dissent and prolonged violence.[2] The Sri Lankan case study is an example among many others of these new wars. For the best part of three decades (from 1983 to 2009), Sri Lankan society was torn apart by a war between successive governments and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the Tamil insurgent group fighting for a separate homeland for the Tamil minority.[3] The conflict generated large-scale refugee flight over several decades, contributing to the formation of a substantial Tamil diaspora[4] of around a

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1 Geographer, senior lecturer at the University of Bordeaux, UMR LAM 5115 "Sciences Po" Bordeaux.

2 Duffield, M. (1994): Complex Emergencies and the Crisis of Developmentalism. In: IDS Bulletin 25, 4. 37–45. Duffield, M. (2001): Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Development and Security. London. Duffield, M. (2007): Development, Security and Unending War. Cambridge.

3 McDowell, C. (1996): A Tamil Asylum Diaspora. Sri Lankan Migration Settlement and Politics in Switzerland. New York. Fuglerud, Ø. (1999): Life on the Outside. The Tamil Diaspora and Long Distance Nationalism. London.

4 In this paper the term diaspora is used as an analytical category to describe the migration processes and transnational connections of the approximately one million Sri Lankan Tamils displaced all over the world. The usage of the term diaspora implies that Tamil migrants refer back to a *homeland*. Diasporas are not static entities but heterogeneous and dynamic formations. As Brubaker writes: "In sum, rather than speak of 'a diaspora' or 'the diaspora' as an entity, a bounded group, an ethno demographic or ethno cultural fact, it may be more fruitful, and certainly more pre-

million people.[5] Like other diasporas from conflict-ridden societies, this transnational population has kept close contact with relatives and communities left behind and with political developments in the erstwhile homeland. This sizeable Tamil diaspora usually funded the insurgency driven by guilt about those they had left behind. This millions strong diaspora is a reservoir for separatists aspirations and has been willing to fund violence in the past. A new generation has been politicized by the final months of the conflict. This new war is also a good example to study the relationships between war and environment. Academic researchers, environmental organisations and advocacy movements in Sri Lanka, while working and campaigning on problems and issues pertaining to the South, appear to have been either ignorant or silent on the ecological consequences of the war. The paucity of data also means that we will not be able to present quantitative information; we will, however, attempt to paint a qualitative picture of the consequences of the war on the environment.

During the Eelam Wars[6], there was considerable concern about the use of unconventional weapons and specifically chemical weapons (such as the utilization of acid, thermobaric bomb, cluster bomb munitions or white phosphorous), bombs and mines. At the same time deforestation took place during the 1980s and early 1990s when Government soldiers cleared

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cise, to speak of diasporic stances, projects, claims, idioms, practices, and so on." Brubaker, R. (2005): The *Diaspora* Diaspora. In: Ethnic and Racial Studies 28. 1–19. 13.

5 Fuglerud (1999). Goreau-Ponceaud, A. (2014): Ganesha Chaturthi and the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora in Paris: Inventing Strategies of Visibility and Legitimacy in a Plural Mono-Cultural Society. In: Gallo, E. (ed.): Migration and Religion in Europe. Comparative Perspectives on South Asian Experiences. Farnham. 211–231.

6 Eelam Wars are the 4 stages of the Sri Lankan civil War that took place from July 1983 to May 2009. Nobody knows how many thousands died in the final week of the war. As mention by Frances Harrison, "the world turn a blind eye to the tens of thousands civilian deaths that took place in the north-east Sri Lanka in the space of just five months in 2009" (2012:6). The winning strategy used by the government of Sri Lanka involved scorched-earth tactics, blurring the distinction between civilians and combatants, and enforcing a media blackout. The human cost of the "Sri Lankan option" as this winning strategy is referred in the academic circle is terrible. Since the defeat of the Tigers there's been no attempt to address the underlying causes of the conflict. Sri Lanka is a small country but according to some accounts there are more than 200,000 internally displaced Tamils, 40,000 war widows in the northern town of Jaffna alone, according to the UN population figures there would appear to be well over 100,000 people missing as a result of the final five months stage of the war (Harrison, 2012).

the rainforests because they served as refuges for rebel forces. This also displaced small-scale farmers. Between 1990 and 2005 Sri Lanka had one of the highest deforestation rates of primary forest in the world with more than 18 percent of the remaining forest cover lost in that period.[7] Reconstruction efforts in the wake of the 2004 tsunami also increased the pressure on the country's forests. All these warfare practices are not only attacked but also weaponized environment. In a Kantian framework, the natural world is deserving of respect and the natural world and its contents have inherent worth, thus meriting an attitude of respect from human beings.[8] From this affirmation of biocentrism,[9] human beings ought not directly and deliberately destroy the natural world in pursuit of political, social or military objectives. In a biocentric pattern, how to immunize environment from warfare activity? War inevitably distorts the ways in which humans are dependent on the natural world. With the Sri Lankan case study I will show that war undermines the context of conditions for liveable life, delivering destruction to the natural world.[10] This destruction occurs as the result of a failure to recognize not only the way humans are dependent on the environment but the way humans are inserted into a web of interdependences with all other life forms.

Recently, environmental historians have shown an interest in war and its effects on the natural environment, but their work essentially focuses on World War II and the nuclear era.[11] These studies often highlight the links between the conduct of war and industrial and agricultural practices in a society. The vast majority of work on the relationship between war and environment focuses on military, political and economic aspects, but largely neglects ecological upheavals – that is, changes in the interactions between organisms and their environment – and the long-term environmental changes caused by the evolution of social and natural relations between humans and ecosystems, which accompanied the conflict. Studying

7 Lindström (2011).

8 Taylor, P.-W. (1986): Respects of Nature: a Theory of Environmental Ethics. Princeton.

9 Biocentrism is the belief that the Earth not only has a value beyond its use value to humans (intrinsic value) but also that humans ought not to act in such a way as to interfere in natural processes.

10 Butler, J. (2009): Frames of War: When is Life Givable? New York.

11 Tucker, R.-P./Russell, E. (eds.): (2004): Natural Enemy, Natural Ally: Toward an Environmental History of War. Corvallis. Closmann, C.-E. (ed.) (2009): War and the Environment: Military Destruction in the Modern Age. College Station.

the relationships between war and environment in Sri Lanka is also interesting regarding the role of religion in the production of ethical principles (Buddhism and Hinduism). One theme within contemporary environmentalist discourse concerns the idea that the way in which people treat their natural environment can be related to their religious beliefs and practices. We have to compare the moral status of the environment and how it is produced by these two major religions of the island and interpreted in a context of war.[12] My paper will be divided into three parts.

After describing why Sri Lanka is particularly suitable for dealing with the subject, I will analyse in my second part the impacts of war on human and natural environment. In this part, I will show that in a process of inflicting damage on an enemy whose survival depended on rural natural resource based economy (the Jaffna peninsula), the natural world became a direct object of attack. The destruction directed at the paddy fields, forests and jungles of Vanni (Northern Province) treated the environment as a mere means to an even more destructive end. Furthermore, the use of landmines transformed the nature itself into a weapon. Step by step, during the Sri Lankan civil war, nature is transformed from a relational partner into a weapon. Large-scale population displacement linked to the war also leads to environmental change, disrupting local ecosystems and livelihoods. The conflict had detrimental impacts on the environment. The biodiversity, natural resource base and wealth of the State have been significantly harmed by bombings, planting of landmines and aerial attacks. Elephants and their terrain, one of the most fiercely guarded wildlife reserves of Sri Lanka (such in Wilpattu national park) of Sri Lanka, have been adversely affected. Human habitation has also been through dreadful ruins and degradation and has been a cause of serious concern to the government and people.

The civil war in Sri Lanka (1983–2009) saw massive migrations amongst the civilian population and widespread damage to villages and towns. The events of the war changed the cultural landscape and, in the

12 The Hindu tradition has received much attention within religious environmentalist literature with commentators arguing for its innate sensitivity towards the natural world. For many scholars, Hinduism and Buddhism have great promise as a basis for an environmental ethic, because it teaches a concern for the other animals and nature as well as our fellow humans. Both Buddhist and Hinduist world view is holistic and seeks harmony at all levels: within each person, among persons in society, and within the universe, of which humans are but a part.

same time, the cultural landscape influenced the course of the war. By cultural landscape, I am referring to everything from settlement patterns, house types, transportation networks, land use patterns, and urban morphology to less tangible elements of iconography and perceived meaning. The variable character of this landscape played an important role in structuring the course of the war. Fieldworks for this study were conducted during the summer of 2015 in the Eastern Province of the Island and between 2010 and 2015 both in France and in India among the refugees from Sri Lanka (Sri Lankan Tamil links to the sixty million fellow-Tamils who live just across the water in the southern tip in the Indian mainland made the Sinhalese insecure. A majority with a minority complex is how many have described them). These fieldworks included numerous semi-structured interviews regarding the landscape histories of villages, towns and patterns of flights and displacement[13]. These findings revealed that a clear relationship existed between the civil war and the cultural landscape created what we could name a *warscape*. As defined by Korf/Engeller/Tobias (2010), *warscapes* are "landscapes characterized by brutal violence, political volatility, physical insecurity and the disruptions and instabilities that exist in many civil war zones that different social actors navigate through."[14] The Sri Lankan warscape was not confined to the territories of Sri Lanka, but extended into a transnational space linked to a refugee diaspora. On the one hand, the war caused dramatic changes in the morphology of the cultural landscape, creating three distinct landscapes (pre-war, wartime, and post-war), while on the other hand the cultural landscape went far to structure the character of the war.[15] In such context, the certainty of uncertainty has become a fundamental reality in the lives of social actors (for those who made a political choice and were involved in the LTTE as combatants and are now living abroad as refugees all they want is to find somewhere quiet to live in obscurity – as far away from their fellow-Tamils because of the fear of betrayal).

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13 During these fieldworks, I conducted semi-structured interviews with refugees both in India and France and former combatants in order to reconstruct the landscape history and gain more detailed local knowledge about the history of the war and its effects. I did this research with the assistance of a local guide and translator.

14 Korf, B./Engeler, M./Tobias, H. (2010): The Geography of Warscape. In: Third World Quaterly 31, 3. 385-399.

15 Korf/Engeller/Tobias (2010).

In my third part, I will analyse the impacts of human and natural environments on war. The military victory achieved in the north over the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam has created an appearance of peace in the country, but minority ethnic communities have a strong feeling of dissatisfaction since their control over their lands has been reduced. It is feared that the continued military control of the area is set to provide opportunities for businesses, including foreign investment that will take control of the land and other natural resources. Sri Lanka's military is dominating the reconstruction of the Northern Province, weakening international humanitarian efforts and worsening tensions with the ethnic Tamil majority. Since the war ended in 2009, hundreds of millions of dollars have poured into the province, but the local populations, mostly left destitute by the conflict, have seen only slight improvements in their lives. Instead of giving way to a process of inclusive, accountable development, the military is increasing its economic role, controlling land and seemingly establishing itself as a permanent, occupying presence. In the North there is one Sri Lankan soldier for every eleven citizens. According to Harrison, the Sri Lankan military has actually expanded since the end of the war, adding 100,000 men to its ranks. Combined with what many Tamils see as an effort to impose Sinhala and Buddhist culture across the whole of Sri Lanka and a failure to address many social aspects of rebuilding a society after conflict, these policies risk reviving the violence of past decades. Furthermore, the tsunami that hit the island in December 2004 led to a death toll of 35,322 and displaced 516,150 people. In 2005 plans for rebuilding the country suggested the expulsion of all coastal fisher people. Their land was to be used for the development of tourism zones and modernized cities, designed for rich elite. It was also intended to switch into large-scale industrial fishing that would replace the small-scale, beach-based fishing on which people's livelihoods depended. Labour protection laws were to be revised to enable the free hiring and firing of workers, since it was assumed that investors were unlikely to come to countries where labour was protected by law. In Sri Lanka, the ethnic bias and identity politics embedded in land policies have a long history.

The last part will conclude that environment is a quasi-person in Sri Lanka which has an agency. These human and natural disasters are a real collapse of everyday life that can create the conditions for an unprecedented explosion of different dynamics (social, political, environmental and economic) dynamics. As Bruno Latour writes, it is even possible that in such contexts, to experience the disturbing and electrifying feeling that

things could turn differently: in this case, "we are no longer sure about what *we* means."[16]

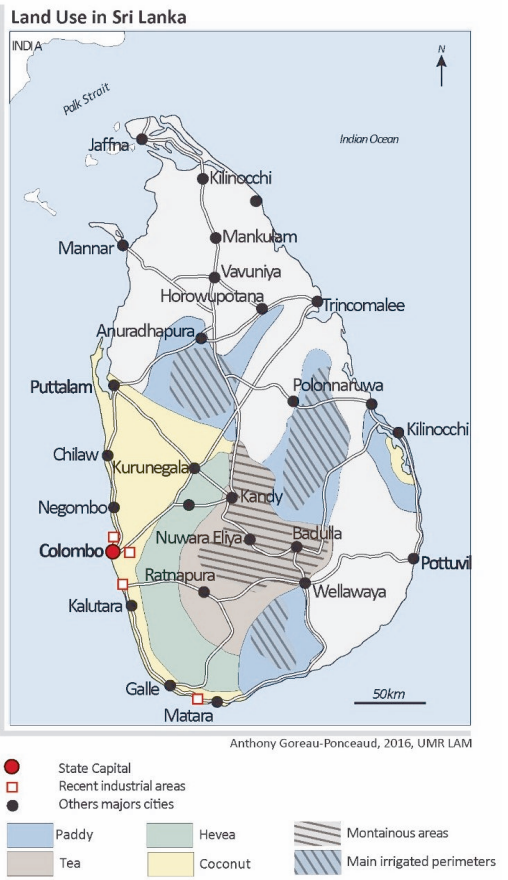
2. The Sri Lanka Conflict

The conflict in Sri Lanka is neither a simple ethnic contest nor a mere two-sided affair. Studies from the fields of political economy, geography, anthropology, and sociology emphasize that the titanic military struggle between the Government of Sri-Lanka (GoSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was the product of a continuing series of alienating and isolating moves by GoSL and escalating responses from the LTTE. Sri Lanka has remained in the global map of conflict for more than two decades. Since 1983, displacement in Sri Lanka has been embedded in intractable conflict which has produced an ongoing condition of insecurity.[17] What began as a conflict between the Sinhala and the Tamil communities gradually grew into a demand for the creation of separate homeland for the Tamils. After almost three decades of brutal armed conflict, on 19 May 2009, the GoSL declared victory over the LTTE. The final stages of the conflict saw numerous allegations of violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. In May 2009, Sri Lankan military forces finally declared victory over the Tamil Tigers. The deadly conflict cost the lives of an estimated 80,000–100,000 people including Army soldiers, Tamil fighters and civilians. By 2007, the civil war had displaced more than 460,000 people in the North-East region of Sri Lanka. The final stages of the war alone created an estimated 300,000 internally displaced persons.

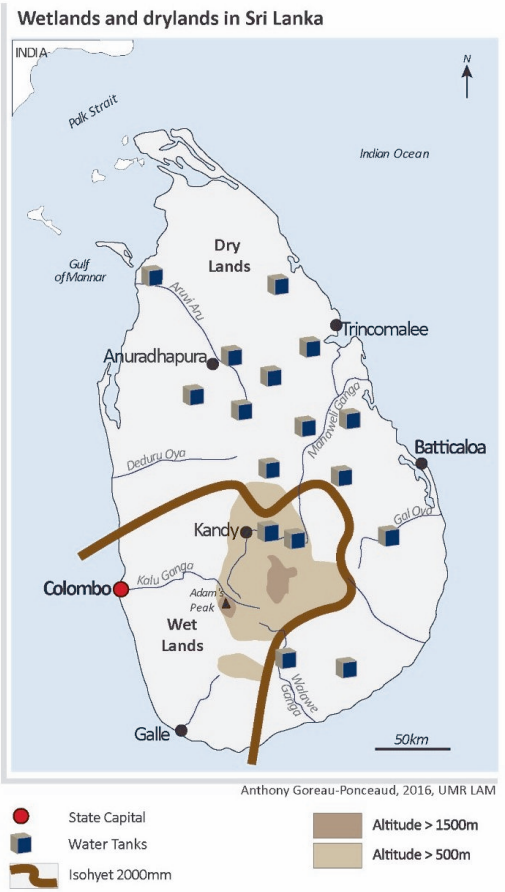
16 Latour, B. (2005): Reassembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor Network Theory. Oxford. 6.

17 The 1983 pogrom – generally taken to mark the beginning of the war in the country – was a major turning point in the conflict and it is considered by the Tamil Diaspora as the beginning of the war and as the beginning of the life in exile. Tamils call it "Black July". In the capital, Sinhalese mobs used the killing of the thirteen soldiers as the trigger for a pre-planned pogrom. They attacked Tamil shops and homes, burning them and hacking people to death in the streets. The rioters came, armed with electoral lists as well as machetes, so they could distinguish who was Tamil.

Figure 1: Ecosystems and population in Sri Lanka[18]

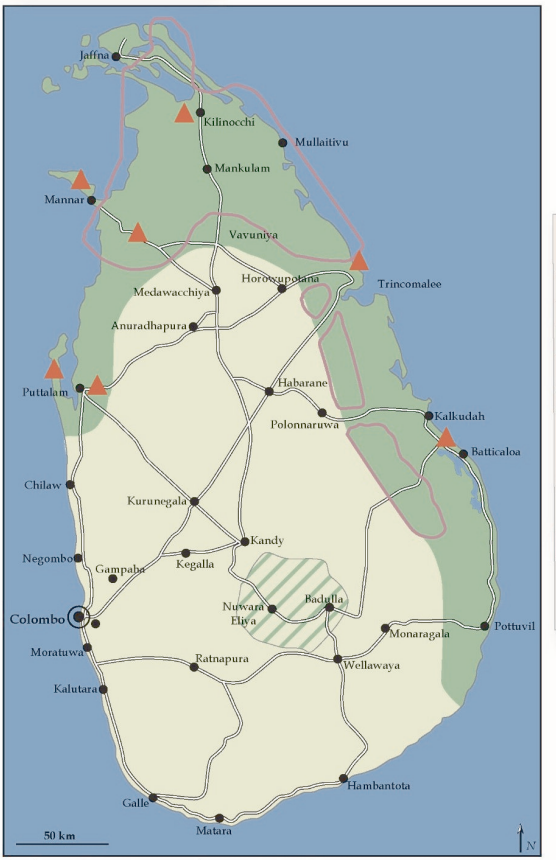


18 Legend: The question of "who was here first" assumes prime importance in the island, and historical writings of the colonial masters and the local historians have played a crucial role in defining the identity. As pointed out by Spencer, "both 'official history' and 'opposition history' agree on the basic terms of the argument: present conflicts can only be explained by reference to the past. The war which has been fought between the armed Tamil separatists and the Sinhala-dominated government has been accompanied by rhetorical wars fought over archaeological sites, place-name etymologies, and the interpretation of ancient inscription." (Spencer, J. (1990): Sri Lanka: History and Roots of Conflict. London. 3.)
The Northern and Eastern Provinces are characterized by key distinctions in terms of LTTE control, social organization, population composition, and conflict im-



pacts. The community of northern Tamils, particularly those from Jaffna, held preeminence in terms of caste (vellalar), culture, and preference under British rule (Bush 1993). The LTTE has always made its base in the Northern Province, first in the largest population center, Jaffna, and then in the Wanni region, with their headquarters in the Kilionchchi District just to the south. While Jaffna and the Wanni once had substantial Muslim majorities, these populations were displaced by LTTE fighters during the 1990s. The conflict in the north has always been characterized by clearly delineated lines of control. By contrast, Eastern Province has been characterized by considerably greater population heterogeneity, a more complex system of overlapping political and military control, and a much less conventional and diffuse mode of conflict.

The "new war" in Sri Lanka in 2008



Anthony Goreau-Ponceaud, 2016, UMR LAM.

According to the 2001 census, Sri Lanka's population composition by ethnicity/nationality was 74 percent Sinhalese (primarily Buddhist), 18 percent Tamil (primarily Hindu)[19], and 7 percent Muslim.[20] Total population was about 20 million. A substantial proportion of the country's population

19 There are two distinct groups of Tamils in Sri Lanka: the Sri Lankan Tamils and the *Up-country Tamils* who are the descendants of bonded labourers brought from southern India in the 19th century by the British colonial authorities to work on plantations.

20 *Muslim* is considered an ethnic group in Sri Lanka. The Muslim population consists of two separate groups, descendants of pre-colonial Arab traders who speak

lives within two compressed coastal ecosystems, a moist plain in the south and a dry zone in the northeast (figure 1). In Sri Lanka, ethnicity sometimes overlaps with and sometimes diverges from religion: Tamils can be Christian or Hindu, and Christians can be Sinhala or Tamil. Moreover, as mentioned by Goodhand/Klem/Korf ethno-nationalism holds an uneven relationship with religion.[21]

The origins of the civil war have their roots in the power relations during the colonial era of the multi-ethnic state.[22] The country has a long history of communal politics operated along these ethnic divides, resulting in several rounds of ethnic violence since 1915.[23] The transformation processes after independence from the British Commonwealth cultivated the tendency toward ethnic polarization between the Singhalese majority and the Tamil minority in the east and northern parts of the former Ceylon. The broad development leading to war in Sri Lanka can be traced to the profound alteration of the demographic landscape after independence from British colonial rule in 1948. As mentioned by Brun/Lund,[24] in the Eastern region in particular, the post-independence government's settlement policies and colonization schemes had involved moving large number of peasant families from the largely Sinhalese Southern Province to areas bordering the Tamil and Muslim dominated Northern and Eastern provinces respectively. More precisely GoSL policies with respect to population and development in Eastern Province have been characterized first by a regime of ethnic transmigration of Sinhalese populations, and second by an effort to segregate all three ethnic groups into segregated zones of

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Tamil and live in the north and east of the island (particularly in Ampara and Trincomalee, formerly in Jaffna) and descendants of colonial-era Malay migrants who live on the south coast. Members of both groups also maintain a significant presence in Colombo.

21 Goodhand, J./Klem, B./Korf, B. (2009): Religion, Conflict and Boundary Politics in Sri Lanka. In: The European Journal of Development Research 21, 5. 679–698.

22 Spencer (1990).

23 While the ethnic divide traces back to the presence of two separate Sinhalese and Tamil kingdoms at the time of colonization, the first grievances emerged with British policies favouring Tamils in colonial schools and civil service jobs.

24 Brun, C./Lund, R. (2008): Making Home During Crisis: Post-Tsunami Recovery in a Context of War, Sri Lanka. In: Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography 29, 3. 274–287.

ethnic concentration.[25] Upland areas of Eastern Province have always had a Sinhalese majority population.

In the immediate post-colonial period GoSL engaged in a number of major irrigation and flood control projects on the Maya Oya, Gal Oya, and the Mahaveli Rivers.[26] These projects provided preferential water access to upland Sinhalese populations and served as a platform for programs encouraging the systematic migration of Sinhalese populations into cleared jungle and populated Tamil – or Muslim-majority areas.[27] When the economic liberalization measures were introduced after 1977[28], especially Mahaweli river development and settlement project[29], the conflict assumed a new phase. The Mahaweli project, which covers about one-third

25 Routray, B.-P./Singh, A.-K. (2007): The Pawns of War. In: South Asia Intelligence Review 5, 12.

26 Peebles, P. (1990): Colonization and Ethnic Conflict in the Dry Zone of Sri Lanka. In: Journal of Asian Studies 49, 1. 30–55.

27 Peebles (1990). Korf, B./Engel, S. (2006): On the Incentives of Violence: Greed and Pride in Sri Lanka's Civil War. In: South Asia Economic Journal 7, 1. 99–116. Korf, B. (2005): Rethinking the Greed–Grievance Nexus: Property Rights and the Political Economy of War in Sri Lanka. In: Journal of Peace Research 42, 3. 201–217.

28 Economic liberalization – as a politico-economic phenomenon – has been a contributory factor in the escalation of the ethnic conflict since 1977. 1977 stands out as a landmark year in Sri Lanka's post-independence political and economic history. The newly elected government led by Jayewardene's UNP created history by changing the political system of the country toward a centralized power system and introduced economic liberalization policies that were a contrast to import-substitution policies of the Bandaranaike coalition that governed the country from 1970 to 1977. Actually, there are many links between economic liberalization, changes in the governing structure and ethnic conflict. Another thesis to understand the escalation of the conflict is that the combined effect of economic and political changes created grounds for a sense of alienation and counter-nationalism among the Tamils in the north and east. A different position found in the literature is that the conflict itself led to economic disparities between the northeast and the rest of the country rather than economic liberalization per se creating the ethnic conflict.

29 In 1963, the Government, with the assistance of the Food and Agriculture Organization and United Nations Development Program, launched the first mapping of the area in preparation for a huge development project in the Mahaweli river basin. It was found that the area had enough water, land and space to cater successfully for a resettlement program of vast magnitude. The economic liberalization policies and programs of the post-1977 governments required an authoritarian regime, which controlled civic and political liberties that Sri Lankan enjoyed for several decades after independence.

of the country's surface area, has played an important part in the country's development policies, as a strategy of solving some of Sri Lanka's demographic and economic problems. In fact, the aims of the Mahaweli Development Project were to achieve national sufficiency in rice, to stimulate production of non-traditional crops, to create income generating activities in agriculture, and to construct a power capacity large enough to enable intensive cultivation through trans-basin irrigation.[30] The settlement package was characterized by central planning, implementation, management, and monitoring under the Mahaweli Board. Land in the Mahaweli project was given to three different types of settlers. For several decades the project has been marketed as a way to bring Singhalese civilization back to the north-central of Sri Lanka. There is no doubt that the ulterior motive behind the colonizing of Tamil areas with Sinhalese peasants was to eventually transform a Tamil majority province into a Sinhala one. The transfer of the Sinhalese population from the south to the predominantly Tamil dry zones under this scheme increased Tamil fears. Of the 75,000 households settled under the Accelerated Mahaweli Development Project (AMDP), only 1.9 percent were Hindu and 2.9 percent were Muslim. Some would argue that the project was a direct cause of the intensified ethnic tensions between the Singhalese and Tamils in 1983. A consequence of the settlement schemes and movement of people was major shifts in demographic and ethnic composition, creating Singhalese majority in many constituencies which earlier had been dominated by Muslims or Tamils.[31] Such population shifts and the accompanying revision of administrative boundaries, and consequently electoral representation, made the Tamils in the Northern and Eastern provinces feel that the Sri Lankan state was treating them as secondary citizens and diminishing their life chances.

The set of conflicts included socio-economic aspects (such as deprivations of land, income, employment and education) and, among other fields related to cultural policies. Through policies related to language[32] – most

30 Mahewely Authority Annual Report http://www.parliament.lk/uploads/documents/paperspresented/annual-report-mahaweli-authority-2014.pdf.

31 For a discussion on the dry zone colonization, see Brun, C./Lund, R. (2009): Unpacking the Narrative of a National Housing Policy in Sri Lanka. Norwegian Journal of Geography 63, 1. 10-22. And Peebles (1990).

32 Bandarage, A. (2007): The Separatist Conflict in Sri Lanka: Terrorism, Ethnicity, Political Economy. New York.

importantly the Sinhala Only Act of 1956[33] –, citizenship, university admission and development, aimed at discarding the colonial heritage and British/Christian domination, the minorities were gradually marginalized. For many Tamil immigrants the destruction of the public library in Jaffna in 1981 was a key moment.[34] It was seen as a symbolic expression not only of discrimination against the Tamil culture, but also as a will to erode Tamil civilization. One of the implications of this perception is the importance of Tamil language as a portable cultural asset and the maintenance of Tamil art (such as Bharatanatyam[35]). This is shown in the establishment of numerous Tamil schools and Tamil culture clubs in the diaspora such as in France.[36]

The marginalization of the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka led to a radicalization of parts of the Tamil youth. Protests against the *Sinhalesation of the state* were staged mainly by Tamils from the north and developed into a LTTE-led militant struggle for Tamil self-determination. The LTTE claimed a monopoly position in the field of the Tamil resistance movements to fight against the Sri Lankan Armed Forces. The LTTE declares itself a religiously neutral organization, fighting for a secular state. The LTTE has gained a global reputation for its tactical success in overcoming a significant resource and legitimacy gap, for narrowing this gap through a highly globalized network, and for its ruthlessness in leveraging the resources of the Tamil populations and maintaining control. In addition to governing, until recently, large stretches of northeast Sri Lanka, the LTTE has maintained a standing army, intelligence agencies, an elite women's battalion (the *black tigers*), the world's largest non-state navy (the *sea tigers*), and more recently a rudimentary air force that staged a number of audacious attacks on the Sri Lankan armed forces. The so-called Eelam

33 The newly elected government led by Bandaranaike initiated two major processes in 1956: the de-secularization of the State and the statisation of the economy.

34 Knuth, R. (2006): Burning Books and Levelling Libraries: Extremist Violence and Cultural Destruction. Westport.

35 Bharatanatyam is not only a means to express devotion but it is also an artistic form enabling the Tamil people in diaspora to narrate the events of civil war. Bharatanatyam is a means of affirming Hindu or Tamil identity and for many Tamil girls, this dance (both in the diaspora as in the homeland) is regarded as an important vehicle for becoming familiar with Hindu myths and traditional Hindu social values. See Goreau-Ponceaud, A. (2011): Tamils in France. In: Rajan, I./ Percot, M. (eds.): Dynamics of Indian Migration. New Delhi. 64-90.

36 Goreau-Ponceaud (2014).

Wars were not only a local South Asian affair but particularly a transnational phenomenon with a strong international dimension. An attribute of the Tamil Diaspora is the *long-distance* nationalism of the majority of Tamil immigrants.[37] The LTTE received a support from a majority of Tamils in the Diaspora. One of the most significant consequences of Sri Lanka's civil war has been the moving of its Tamil population both internally and internationally leading to the making of a *refugee diaspora*.[38] Separated from northern Sri Lanka by the narrow Palk Straits, the southern Indian State of Tamil Nadu has been an important destination for refugees fleeing the long civil conflict between the GoSL and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Most arrived from Sri Lanka's war-torn Northern and Eastern Provinces where Tamils form a local majority. Ebbs and flows in numbers have reflected escalations and lulls in hostilities. The majority of Tamil Nadu's 60 million-strong population share a nominal ethnolinguistic identity with the Tamils of Sri Lanka.[39] According to Oberoi, "there is a strong bond of kinship between Indian Tamils and their co-ethnics in Sri Lanka, which has been an important motivating factor in India's policy toward this group of refugees."[40] The common ethnicity between Tamils in India and Sri Lanka, and as such between the

37 Fuglerud (1999).

38 Van Hear, N. (2014): Refugees, Diasporas and Transnationalism. In: Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E./Loescher, G./Long, K./Sigona, N. (eds.): The Oxford Handbook of Refugees and Forced Migration Studies. Oxford. 176-187.

39 As pointed by Demelza Jones, "Trans border ethnic kinship between the Tamils of southern India and Sri Lanka has been evoked in both primordial terms of a common linguistic and religious heritage, and historical mythology, and in the more instrumental sense of a shared political imperative of safeguarding Tamil identity from domineering external forces - in the case of Sri Lanka, from aggressive Sinhalese nationalism, and in Tamil Nadu through opposition to a perceived Hindi-speaking national hegemony." Jones, Demelza (2012): Our Kith and Kin? Sri Lankan Tamil Refugees and the Ethno-Nationalist Parties of Tamil Nadu. In: Nationalism and Ethnic Politics 18, 4. 431-451.

40 Oberoi, P. (2006): Exile and Belonging. Refugees and State Policy in South Asia. New Delhi. 201. If examples presented in the refugee studies literature lead to an expectation that ethnic kinship between refugee and host results in favourable reception and assistance, we should specify in that case that the aftermath of the assassination of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi by an LTTE suicide bomber during a visit to Tamil Nadu in May 1991 is treated in this article as a critical moment, resulting in a shift by Tamil Nadu's political elite from sympathetic consideration of the Sri Lankan Tamil refugees as co-ethnics, towards a hostile, security-focused response.

refugees and the Tamil Nadu host, is emblematic of a wider tendency within the Indian context for refugees to share ethnic kinship with sections of the host population. These refugees have experienced repeated displacement, returning to Sri Lanka during ceasefire periods only to be uprooted again when violence re-escalated.

3. Impacts of War on Human and Natural Environment

In 1917, a German psychologist and artillery officer, Kurt Lewin, reflected on the phenomenology of the battlefield. Originally posted on the Western Front, he noticed that the soldiers had a peculiar perception of the landscapes. Those who were engaged in combat saw space differently from civilians who lived safe from danger. The *landscapes of peace* appeared undulating and unlimited, extending as far as the eye could see. The *war landscapes* were ordered and circumscribed, delineated by the signs of violence and destruction.[41] Landscapes take on special significance in times of war, reflecting the mental constructions through which the soldiers apprehend the physical world and conceive the boundaries of belligerency. In the case of the Sri Lankan, the warfare activities have directly or indirectly impacted and modified surrounding landscapes. A plethora of geographers have conducted research on the war in Sri Lanka, the displacement it generated during the conflict,[42] the geopolitics of aid that shapes the political landscape,[43] and the geographies of conflict at the intersection of the conflict and the 2004 tsunami,[44] particularly in the North and East of the country. Very little has been written about the effects of this war on the environment of the northern and eastern part of the island. Intensification

41 Lewin, K. (1917): Kriegslandschaft. In: Zeitschrift für angewandte Psychologie 12. 440-447.

42 Brun, C. (2008): Finding a Place. Local Integration and Protracted Displacement in Sri Lanka. Colombo. Brun, C./Jazeel, T. (eds.) (2009): Spatialising Politics: Culture and Geography in Postcolonial Sri Lanka. Thousand Oaks. Hasbullah, S.-H./Korf, B. (2013): Muslim Geographies, Violence and the Politics of Community in Eastern Sri Lanka. In: Geographical Journal 179, 1. 32–43.

43 Hyndman, J. (2007): The Securitization of Fear in Post-Tsunami Sri Lanka. In: Annals of the Association of American Geographers 97, 2. 361–372.

44 Blaikie, P.-M./Lund, R. (eds.) (2011): The Tsunami of 2004 in Sri Lanka: Impacts and Policy in the Shadow of Civil War. London. Hyndman, J. (2011): Dual Disasters: Humanitarian Aid after the 2004 Tsunami. Sterling.

of the war and large scale military operations of recent years initiated by the Sri Lankan forces have taken place under a media blockade and press censorship, so that the extent of destruction is not known to the wider community nor reported in the media. Furthermore, as yet no analytic framework or paradigm shapes the study of the environmental consequences of war and military operations. We could also add that the environmental effects are significantly different between the winner and the loser. Indeed, despite the end of military conflict, war continues by other means, and its representation encapsulates a nationalist politics of victory that at once vilifies the defeated LTTE *terrorists* and excludes Northern Tamils from the Sri Lankan polis. The LTTE's former hideouts, training facilities, weapons, and vehicles are now tourist sites on display for public viewing.

The environment and its state of health is an essential component of post-war recovery, going hand in hand with the recovery of human population. The 2004 tsunami unfortunately added to environmental destruction, causing high levels of salinity in soils and making the well water in many areas undrinkable. The coastline also changed, with some protective coral barriers vanishing and landmines dangerously dislodged. As the war in the Tamil areas of the island escalated through the mid 1980's, the state of balance that existed in the environmental systems throughout the *Tamil homeland* began to be disrupted. The deterioration continued through the 1990's as the causal factors aggravated and the adverse impacts led to what we could consider as an environmental crisis in the Tamil homeland today. In the Northern part of the island, much of the environment has become compromised due to the protracted fighting which has destroyed both trees and soil. Landmines have prevented farmers from being able to sow and manage their crops; the High Security Zones[45] have also prevent-

45 The high security zones were basically set-up to protect military camps, strategic installations, and the lifelines of security forces in Jaffna - Kankesanthurai harbour and Palaly airport - from LTTE attack. These zones comprise large chunks of territory surrounding or encompassing strategic military installations. In the Jaffna peninsula there were 18 high security zones (HSZs) covering about 190 km^2. While the HSZs have by and large served their purpose of securing military installation, they have led to the displacement and economic deprivation of civilians. The displaced persons have to live either with their relatives or at refugee camps. This apart, there are large tracts of agricultural lands that fall under these zones that have deprived many farmers of their livelihood. The HSZ have been progressively released in several stages since 2010.

ed people from either inhabiting or farming their land – something that is a huge stumbling block in the negotiations between the Tamils and the government and causes aggravations for all those who have homes and land in these areas. Soil erosion has also undermined centuries-old farming practices and systems of land maintenance.

4. The Loss of Palmyra Trees and Forests

Ecological changes wrought on the landscape of the Jaffna peninsula are widespread. The characteristic and dominating feature of the Jaffna landscape is the Palmyra palm. Standing-up of twenty-five meters high, it is dedicated to the god *Pillaiyar* (or Ganesh) and consequently considered sacred. There used to be extensive Palmyra groves throughout the peninsula and its islands – at the beginning of the war there were an estimated five millions palms: these have been decimated.[46] The tops of many of these trees have been lopped off, either accidentally by multi-barrel rocket launchers or deliberately to provide sights of the militants in the jungle. The SLA, the militants and the local populace have also extensively cut down the Palmyra, for a variety of reasons: to sell, to make shelters and bunkers, or use as fuel. The making of bunkers, fencing and fortifications and the clearance of landing strips have all led to the loss of a huge numbers of these palms. Between 1956 and 1985, natural high forests decreased from 44 percent to 27 percent of the total land area. Most of the deforested area has been now converted into low productivity grasslands. During the subsequent period of the conflict, both sides fortified themselves by building bunkers, defence lines and camps for soldiers. Trees were cut to build thousands of bunkers and for firewood.

More precisely in the early years of the militancy, a number of camps were established by the militants in the forested area of Vanni (or Wanni).[47] The Vanni was the centre of the LTTE's de facto state from the mid-1990s until 2009. The cadres of the early militant groups were mostly from the urban area, especially from the Jaffna peninsula. They came to the forests without the familiarity, understanding and knowledge of the natural environment. A consequence of their presence in the forests was

46 Derges, J. (2013): Ritual and Recovery in Post-Conflict Sri Lanka. Abingdon.
47 The Vanni is a large area of scrub jungle and forest.

the incursion of domesticated species of plants, particularly food plants. In many cases, they held an urban utilitarian view of the forest. In many areas militant groups were also engaged in illegal logging and marketing of timber as a source of revenue. The dense forests in remote areas, such as Vanni, served as hideouts for insurgent groups, like the LTTE, but they also provide safe haven for refugees fleeing from conflict. Both cases result in over-exploitation of forest resources. The presence of the armed militants in the forests created significant environmental consequences. On the one hand the forest became the home of the militants; it provided them with food, shelter and training ground.[48] On the other the forest became a hunting ground for the Sri Lankan armed forces; they increasingly mounted military-style operations within the forests in search of the militants. The Sri Lankan army carried out a number of raids and later bombing campaigns in this region. Both caused severe disruptions to the delicate balance that existed in the dry-zone forests and other areas of natural vegetation of the Vanni and the East.[49] There has also been large scale clearing of mangroves in many areas of the north and the east to deny shelter and protection for the Tamil resistance forces. The clearing of mangroves vegetation, for both firewood and for security reasons, also have an indirect effect on the population sizes of many fish species, prawns and migratory birds; these use the mangroves as breeding grounds.

The use of heavy explosives in aerial bombing, carpet-bombing, naval cannon and shelling destroyed buildings, vegetation, trees, animals, birds.

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48 We can also add that according to Saverimuttu: "Apart from the use of forests by the militants, there was also an increase in the illegal logging in the peripheries of the forests of the North and East. The virtual non-existence of forest wardens, the collaboration of some elements of the Sri Lankan armed forces with illegal loggers and the general lack of imposition of the law contributed to this increase. The number of colonies of Sinhala settlers that were established in the forests in the Tamil homeland also increased, especially in the Manal Aaru (Welioya) area, causing further deterioration of forests." Saverimuttu, T./Sriskanarajah, N./Jayapalan, V.I.S. (1999): Ecological Consequences of the War in the Tamil Homeland in Sri Lanka. In: Research Report. National Peace Council and Marga Institute. Colombo. 72-78.

49 The only positive impact of war on the environment is largely due to the fact that it tends to keep people, including poachers, out of conflict areas. This is attested by the spectacular bird diversity and numbers recorded from the Giant's Tank in the Vanni region of the northwest Sri Lanka, from where a large number of people fled during the war. But this is an exception rather than the rule, for in most instances war tends to do more damage to wildlife and its habitat.

The use of white phosphorus bombs, as described by the ex-serviceman of the LTTE in my interview conducted both in France and in India,[50] caused severe injuries. The chemical weapons are characterized by their capacity to affect humans, animals and plants through their toxic properties. Killing, or producing casualties, is of course not the only utility of chemical weapons. Their operational significance includes primary physiological effects of the agents, for example harassment, incapacitation, debilitation, and lethal effects. However, secondary effects of chemical weapons use may include economic damage through for example contamination of land, machinery, or crops, as well as psychological and social effects of terrorizing. The psychological effects are of particular importance in the context of new wars as these can avail a disproportionately greater strategic impact than the primary effects of the actual use. In that way the role of chemical weapons as a propaganda tool is conspicuous in the thick fog of war that engulfed Sri Lanka with claims and counter claims of the use of chemical weapons. We can remarked that both sides (GoSL and LTTE) were using the allegations to try and win political points, less certain is whether either side is actually using agents. Following the utilization of white phosphorus bombs, both sides pointed at each other, condemning the use.

In the last three months of the fighting 5,000 people – including 2,000 children – had been killed. With the fall of Kilinochchi in January 2009, which was the administrative capital of the LTTE's de facto state in the Vanni area, the LTTE retreated east; where most of the heaviest fighting took place. The protracted civil war will finally come to its bloody conclusion on the shores of the Nandikadal Lagoon in mid-May 2009.

Damage to soil and wells and the residue of large craters have affected agricultural productivity. The poisoning of the earth with anti-personnel mines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in combat territory, the most extreme example of ecological violence, constrained supply routes. Rice production had decreased by one-third, during the war, with 700 hectares left uncultivated for over a decade. For instance, according some reports from GoSL, 11,200 hectares of low land were released from military occupation for rice cultivation in 2009. Diseases associated with stagnant water such as malaria and dengue fever have increased, as has

50 Independent confirmation of the use of these chemical weapons is not possible because journalists were barred from entering the area during the fighting.

cholera and typhoid due to inadequate sanitation in the IDPs camps. Road clearance by the army has been extensive: all the vegetation within a one and a half-kilometer radius of all major roads was cut to prevent surprise attacks. Another exacerbating feature has been the major military offensives that often took place at critical times in the farming cycle: before harvesting or after sowing.

5. The Wildlife Issue

Landmines set with the intent to maim rather than kill in order to use up more resource in the care of the injured, are an issue for both human and non-human population that draw severely on the already depleted resources. Both the government forces and the LTTE used mines during the conflict and it is estimated that approximatively 482 sq km is contaminated by mines and UXO[51] in the North[52]. Vast areas were mined by the LTTE without any documentation. Finally, the severe flooding in 2011 uncovered landmines from the country's decades long civil war. These unexploded mines are just another problem in a long list of difficulties for some of the poorest people in a country that is still recovering from the civil war.

The free availability of guns during the war and the use of wire snares appear to have had a serious impact on wildlife. Government troops and guerrillas have hunted wildlife for food. Their impact would have been most severe on large mammals with slow reproductive rates, as these are the ones that are likely to disappear first. The spotted deer used to be the most common and numerically abundant large herbivore in the Wilpattu National Park.[53] But today, its numbers have declined significantly. Other protected areas (like the Yala East National Park) were also affected by illegal timber extraction and poaching and are still in danger of becoming *empty forests*. Uncontrolled hunting of wildlife not only reduces the popu-

51 Unexploded ordnance (UXO) are explosive weapons (bombs, bullets, shells, grenades, land mines, naval mines, etc.) that did not explode when they were employed and still pose a risk of detonation.

52 For more details see Abhayagunawardena, V. (2011): Vicious killer. In: Frontline 28, 18. 27 August – 9 September.

53 After an interval of almost 18 years, the Wilpattu National Park, one of Sri Lanka's oldest and scenic conservation areas was re-opened by the Minister for the Environment and Natural Resources, Rukman Senanayake on 16 March 2003

lation of the target species, but it caused serious landscapes level changes in habitats and faunal assemblages. While the viewing of wildlife in national parks has been a well-established and accepted form of non-consumptive exploitation, the consumptive use of *non-endangered* wildlife even outside protected areas is a thorny issue that is bound to arouse controversy in such a predominantly Buddhist country as Sri Lanka. Unfortunately, the problem with wildlife is that the people who wish to preserve it are rarely those who have to pay the cost. Wilpattu, on the west coast of the island, was a rebel stronghold during the long 26-year civil war against the Tamil Tigers. Today it is better known as Sri Lanka's largest park and home to leopards, Asian elephants and sloth bears. Development is prohibited in national parks but after peace was declared in May 2009, the government began work on a road right through Wilpattu, known as the *New Mannar Road*. In addition, landmines have also either killed or maimed an unknown number of large mammals including elephants. For instance, according to wildlife veterinarians, as many as 10 elephants are killed or injured each year by landmines. Frequently, the resettlement of human populations results in further developments of land for housing and agriculture, resulting in the displacement of many elephant populations. This increases both the chance of human-elephant clashes and the chance that elephants will be forced to scavenge for food in areas that have not been cleared of landmines because they do not have the same value to human populations as other areas. Resettlement efforts made by human populations must be cognisantly managed to leave enough safe land for elephants to forage, decreasing the tendency for them to wander into dangerous territory or lash out against humans. Plans to circumvent human-elephant conflict in Sri Lanka include the protection and rehabilitation of seven areas for elephants to safely live with an abundance of food and water, and the installation of electric fences by the Department of Wildlife Conservation all of which will keep elephants from wandering into villages and farmland. Further education of the general public as to how to deal with elephants is another important step in human-elephant conflict resolution.

6. The Peace and its Short-Term Environmental Effects

The *peace* has different short-term environmental effects. Wars and their aftermaths frequently transform land use and ownership, reshaping *post-*

conflict landscapes through new boundaries, population movements, and conditions of access. Wars and their consequences alter land tenure and uses, often in dramatic ways. People are displaced because of hostilities. Dislocation can totally disrupt land tenure. Lands are also made inaccessible by hostilities, sometimes over long periods due to land mines and unexploded ordnance. As people resettle elsewhere, conflicts sometimes emerge between *uprooted* and *indigenous* populations (like in Puttalam for instance). Identities are frequently key to post-conflict entitlements. Whether linked to nationality, ethnicity, political convictions, kinship, or interpersonal relations, identities are based in part on historical memories. In turn, the memories (and memorial elements) of cultural landscapes have an important place in the politics of identity. I would like to highlight in this fragment the importance of memories in *post-conflict* land issues. Memories are actualized through an embodiment of places of belonging that situate local identities within historicized national territory. Place-based identities are, for example, mobilized through the political currency of historicized *national* heroism. This transcalar claim, between local and national historical narratives, involves spaces defining *local* identities which are re-inscribed within the *national* territory and history for the purpose of resisting *global* land-based economic projects. In that way, in Sri Lanka, since the war is ended, we can assist at new forms of mobility, new forms of travel, distinct from the military manoeuvres and refugee displacements of the past. These new forms of mobility are encapsulated in the expression *warzone tourism*. The opening up of transportation networks after the war (like the A9 Highway) saw tourism extending geographically and intensifying these attributes on ethnically differentiated sites. There is a persistence of wartime hostilities within emergent post-war *dark tourism* practices, which have provoked conflicts over heritage. The tourists to warzones visit sites of religious pilgrimage as well as battle-scared sites. Sites of pilgrimage in Sinhala culture are not only religious sites, but are also infused with an attachment to location, permeated with a religious and ethno-nationalist imagination. War sites attain a similar significance in the imagination of the people, as sites around which myths and legends about war and its aftermath are created, recreated and imagined. The people who experience this warzone tourism carry a past with them, emanate a certain emotions and have connections that are internalized and reproduced in order to make sense of their worlds in the present moment. This process of recreating or re-conceptualizing the past, deleting or glossing over violence associated with war, as *landscaping*,

implying a sense of transformation or displacement. Post-war efforts at reconciliation are marred both by military triumphalism and top-down policies criticized by Tamil lobbies and humanitarian groups. The continued military presence in the island's north and east, and economic penetration by southern, Sinhalese investors, businesses and contractors, dilute the region's Tamil ethnic insularity. Wartime destruction, depopulation and indigence magnify social inequities giving majoritarian market reform an ideological and political advantage. Tamil residents – displaced and impoverished by war, and smarting from the triumphalism of the Sinhalese – have been distanced from democratic discourses, internally due to militancy and externally due to Sinhala hegemony. They included IDPs and refugees from camps in India returning home. Social fragmentation diminished their capacity for collective civic responsibility. Wartime attrition of democracy, militant and military administration has eroded frameworks of civility. The Tamil community is consequently vulnerable to state hegemony, marketization and tourism.

The decades-long protracted civil war has killed tens of thousands of people and displaced an estimated one million Sri Lankan Tamils abroad. The LTTE may have been officially defeated in Sri Lanka, but artefacts of the LTTE's legacy as a *terrorist* organization have become tourist sites actively cultivated by the Sri Lankan government throughout the Vanni in northern Sri Lanka. The Vanni was the centre of the LTTE's de facto state from the mid-1990s until 2009. This tourism in a recent war zone is a way to militarize civilian space during peacetime. The ancestral home of LTTE leader Prabhakaran at Valvettithurai, his bunker at Mullaitivu, and the LTTE arsenal captured in that district attracted large numbers of Sinhala visitors. The ancestral home and bunker were later demolished while the arsenal has been gathered in an open-air museum for public viewing. This war museum in Puthukkudiyiruppu,[54] memories of the Tamil Tigers are still publicly present in Sri Lanka, but they are produced by the victor in

54 With the fall of Kilinochchi in January 2009, the LTTE retreated east; along with hundreds of thousands of civilians, to the towns of Puthukkudiyiruppu (PTK), Puttumatalan, and Mullaitivu where most of the heaviest fighting took place. The protracted civil war would finally come to its bloody conclusion on the shores of the Nandikadal Lagoon in mid-May 2009. While Kilinochchi was the administrative capital of the LTTE's de facto state in the Vanni area at the end of the war, Prabhakaran lived in a series of houses closer to Visuvamadu and PTK. These bunkers have been converted into army camps as well as tourist sites.

particular ways: dehumanized and militarized, with the LTTE as a potential and lurking threat that sustains the Sinhala nationalist project of ongoing militarization. Through its selective remembering of the Tigers and dead Tamil civilians, the GoSL stokes a triumphalist Sinhala nationalism that reproduces the Tamil Tigers as a future potential threat, and in so doing, provides grounds for ongoing militarization of civilian spaces by the state and marginalization of Tamils and other minority groups in the country who are represented as latent threats.

In the same time, several scholars have highlighted increasing state hegemony via militarization and Sinhalisation during the final stages of the war, and the resultant exacerbation of ethnic tensions.[55] Six years after the end of Sri Lanka's civil war, Tamil lands, particularly in the north of the island, remain under military occupation. This military occupation process is not about ensuring security. Sinhala army personnel and private investors and contractors engaged in the reconstruction effort form a restless backdrop to resettlement activities, their motivations often subservient to the government. Rebuilding the roads, infrastructure and resettlement falls under the Ministry of Defence and Urban Development which uses army labour.

The army has expanded non-military activities and is engaged in large-scale property development, construction projects, and business ventures such as travel agencies, farming, holiday resorts, restaurants, and innumerable cafes. The army officially runs luxury resorts and golf courses that have been erected on land seized from now-internally displaced peoples. Over the past six years, the process of Sinhalisation has intensified with an aggressive government-led effort that systematically replaces Tamil culture and history with victory monuments dedicated to Sinhalese hegemony and Buddhist religion on the ruins of the Tamil homeland. A similar ethnicisation process is occurring in the eastern region, with the building of hostels and other construction work controlled by the dominant ethnic group taking place in the buffer zone, while people who used to live there are being displaced to new settlements in the far interior. This has created increasing political and ethnic tension among the coastal population in a

55 For more information about this topic see Ismail, Q. (2005): Abiding by Sri Lanka: On Peace, Place and Postcoloniality. Minneapolis. Ismail, Q./Jeganathan, P. (2009): Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka. New York. De Mel, N. (2007): Militarising Sri Lanka: Popular Culture, Memory and Narrative in the Armed Conflict. New Delhi.

struggle for access to land in the densely populated Muslim and Tamil dominated areas. Since the end of the civil war, Sri Lanka has seen a big increase in tourists and marketed itself as an eco-tourism destination leading to new ethnic tensions.

7. Impact of Natural Events on War: the Tsunami's Case Study

When the Indian Ocean tsunami hit the coasts of Sri Lanka on 26 December 2004, killing more than 36,000 people, and injured 21,000 in a matter of minutes and, in the longer term displaced between 450,000 and 516,000, and destroyed or damaged nearly 100,000 houses and 200 educational facilities (according to the GoSL), the country had already experienced more than two decades of violent conflict. The disasters of the tsunami and civil war, although very different in their genesis and outcomes, also have similarities. They are both slow in unfolding. Even the tsunami, a natural event of a few minutes, became a disaster only as a result of the emergence and reproduction of vulnerability over a long period before its initial devastating impact. Vulnerability is a much debated term but a widely accepted definition is: "vulnerability is a set of characteristics of a person or a group of persons in terms of their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from the impact of natural hazards."[56] The term can be reworked to relate war where the impact is usually more spatially widespread, more long lasting and multivalent than a single environmental event such as a tsunami. Therefore, in long war, as in Sri Lanka, people of different ethnicities, wealth, age, and gender are constantly trying to anticipate, cope with, resist, and recover from the impact of an ebbing and flowing war. Recovery is defined as the broader process of people deploying their capabilities in a post-crisis situation. Post-tsunami reconstruction like the post-war reconstruction does not only concern buildings, roads and infrastructure, but also rebuilding communities, community networks and livelihoods, and re-enabling a huge number of displaced people suddenly made destitute.[57]

Vulnerability emerges through a number of socio-economic and political forces and often pushes economically and socially marginal people in-

56 Blaikie, P.-M./Cannon, T/Davis, I./Wisner, B (1994): At Risk: People's Vulnerability and Disasters. London.

57 De Mel (2007).

to marginal places, which may be hazardous in terms of environmental conditions and discrete events. Thus the war and the tsunami as the threat to come have intertwined social and political antecedents. On the one hand the war has created vulnerabilities through death and disappearance of breadwinners, displacement of agricultural activities, destruction of industrial plant, and thereby employment opportunities. All this in turn has rendered those in the coastal zone especially vulnerable to the effects of the tsunami. Also, there has been a tendency for those with less access to livelihood opportunities and political support during hostilities (typically some Muslims and Tamils) to be displaced towards the poorer agricultural land near the coast. On the other hand this Tsunami compounded the already complicated sequence of political struggles and violent incidents in the eastern Sri Lanka where Muslims and Tamils live in a jigsaw of coastal settlements.

The tsunami disaster of 26 December 2004 is historically one of the most extensive disasters to have affected Sri Lanka. But it was not the first. There was a cyclone which affected Sri Lanka in 1978, and hit 20 percent of the country and affected 800,000 to 1 million people, causing deaths, injuries and severe floods.[58] However the impacts of the tsunami were therefore enmeshed in a situation where land was already a bitter contested and ethnically-charged issue. Due to the severe tsunami devastation in coastal zone in Sri Lanka; considering future tsunami and disaster risk, the GoSL declared a 100/200 meters strip of land as a *no build zone* along the coastal belt. The Cabinet approved in January 2005 and issued a notification of a *Coastal conservation (buffer) zone* established in order to better safeguard the lives of the coastal population and to protect the coastal environment from any future natural disaster. The dramatic dispossession caused by the tsunami brought to light the endemic displacement of so many members of the Tamil and Muslim communities who had been forced to move to coastal locations to escape the war. Indeed, the buffer zone declared by the GoSL disallowed rebuilding houses within a 200m zone along the east coast and discriminated heavily against Tamils and Muslims who had fled the war and settled in the less fertile and less sought-after land close to the coast, which then bore the brunt of the tsunami.

58 Lewis, J. (1981): The Sri Lanka Cyclone 1978: Socio-Economic Analysis of Housing Destruction. In: Marga 6, 2. 1-33.

There are some endemic problems in the recovery process after the December 2004 tsunami. In particular the recovery work has been embedded in the conflict and was unable to *build back better*. A massive reconstruction and resettlement effort was begun and the slogan *building back better* and *rebuilt communities* became prominent in the discourse on post-tsunami.[59] In this process, the inflow of foreign aid had important effects on political relations and governance structures in the East. Furthermore we could say that in the case of Sri Lanka, aid delivery cannot be made apolitical. As Uyangoda sums up: "the post-tsunami recovery has been intensively politicized in a context of the unresolved ethnic conflict and an incomplete, installed peace process."[60] Displacement has played a major role in the discourse on the civil war in Sri Lanka. It is estimated that more than one-tenth of Sri Lanka's population has been displaced by the war. The people of the north and the east have paid a particularly heavy price, and many have experienced multiple and protracted displacements during their lifetime. By linking the war and a natural disaster as the tsunami, we foreground both disasters as political and make visible the work of militarization as the key paradigm of governance in present-day in Sri Lanka. The pre-existing uneven power relations between ethnic groups and geographical areas were clearly manifest in the politicized and very unevenly distributed quantity and quality of assistance between the war-affected communities in the predominantly Tamil and Muslim Northern and Eastern provinces of the country and the mostly Sinhalese South. The fact that vulnerable and marginalized people formed the majority of those most severely affected by the tsunami indicated that the disaster itself was not a natural event.[61]

Consequently, reconstruction and longer-term development challenges overlap with the dynamics of conflict in the Northern and Eastern provinces. As mentioned by Brun/Lund "while we need to understand and/or redress how disaster and war alter communities and people's capacities to make changes themselves, we also need to recognize how recovery from disasters and war reinforce power relations between communities

59 Benadusi, M. (2013): Cultiver des communautés après une catastrophe. Déferlement de générosité sur les côtes du Sri Lanka. In: Revet, S./Langumier, J. (eds.): Le gouvernement des catastrophes. Paris. 103-146.

60 Uyangoda, J. (2005): Ethnic Conflict, the State and the Tsunami Disaster in Sri Lanka. Inter-Asia Cultural Studies 6, 3. 341-352. 341.

61 De Mel, 2007).

and differentially affect positionalities within the communities."[62] Although natural disasters are in a sense *non-discriminatory*, war-affected countries have higher preexisting levels of vulnerability, whilst the distribution of vulnerability tends to be geographically concentrated in the areas most affected by violence.

8. Conclusion: Environment as a Quasi-Personage?

The concept of *new wars* was useful in the context of this paper, as it captures the changed nature of the conflict in its many facets. New wars are conceptualized as conflicts of the globalized age in which organized violence is perpetrated between networks of regular armed forces and organized criminal or terrorist groups. In many aspects there have been profound changes in the nature of conflict and the conceptualization of security over the last decades. Whilst irregular warfare is not new and doctrines of counterinsurgency and counter terrorism have deep historical roots, there is a shift in nature and character of warfare from state centric conflicts of the nineteenth and twentieth century, fought by regular armed forces to the messier conflicts, asymmetrical wars, terrorism and intrastate violence fought in the twenty-first century. This shift is articulated in the concept of *new wars* developed by Kaldor.[63] If in the *old wars* the territorial gain was achieved through military means, by contrast in *new wars* violence is directed against civilians to establish control over territories for purposes of access to state or political power for certain groups that are defined by ethnic and religious identities rather than nationality per se. In this new context of warfare the nature of organized violence has changed and blurred previously clearer distinctions between war, terrorism, organized crime and large-scale violation of human rights. The Sri Lankan case study reveals that causes of conflict are multiple and interlinked, and develops in a non-linear fashion over the course of conflict. Conflict dynamics in Sri Lanka were increasingly found to be contingent upon contextual factors, rather than on root causes. Furthermore during almost three decades the war becomes the normal context for the unfolding of social life. The Sri Lankan civil war was a protracted violent conflict which

62 Brun/Lund (2008), 277.

63 Kaldor, M. (2012): New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era. Cambridge.

creates multiple trajectories of threat and opportunity over authorities (GoSL, LTTE, caste system, religious affinities and so on) and makes these highly malleable in space and time leading to the creation of warscapes. Individuals in warscapes are often not just *combatants*, *civilians*, or *victims*, but each pursue different multi-dimensional agendas and life projects which cannot be easily labeled as war or not war-related, as participation or non-participation.

Aims and targets between old and new wars have changed. This change has a significant impact on environment. In this paper we tried to conceive the environment as a sum of relations and interactions. It refers to the complex relationships of interdependence between man, societies and the physical, chemical, and biotic components of an anthropomorphised or artificialized nature. The environment is generally considered as an encompassing entity on which the encompassed has a grip. It is therefore radically distinguished from the other two fundamental components of the social world: the actor and the object. Yet, the environment can be interpreted as almost a character with potential for action. That's what I've tried to demonstrate in my paper. Environment is part of these warscapes and as a quasi-personage. In this paper we saw progressively how land becomes part of larger patterns of violent contestation. Some of these violent contestations were revealed and accentuated through *natural* events such as the 2004 tsunami.

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