

Even fish have an ethnicity...

A study on how ethnic identities mediate livelihoods
in a fishing community in post-war Sri Lanka

2nd February 2017, 4.30 pm—6.00 pm

at the Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA) 29, R.G. Senanayake Mawatha, Colombo 07



While discussions on ethnicity and tensions based on ethnic interactions are still very important in post-war Sri Lanka, these discourses are insufficient to explain the nation's post-war social tensions as well as the inequalities that lead to these tensions. A study conducted in coastal Trincomalee over a period of thirteen months by PhD candidate Gayathri Lokuge explores how these ethnic dynamics are manifested in the mundane day to day lives of men and women as an ideological concept that men and women subscribe to, and as a rallying force for political means. From 'ethnicised' types of fish to 'ethnicised' fishing methods, from morality and legitimacy to 'illegal' fishing, ethnicity pervades life in post-war coastal Trincomalee. However, ethnic identity is socially constructed. In times of civil unrest, ethnicity becomes a political and social construct. Further, similar to the way men and women do gender, men and women of different ethnicities, caste and class groups do ethnicity. This doing, is usually mediated by ethnicity's interaction with other social identity categories such as gender, caste and location. Gayathri's study attempted to understand how these identity constructions mediated differentiated access to livelihood spaces for men and women and in turn, how livelihood activities of men and women shape ethnic and other identity categories and their meaning.

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Presenter: **Gayathri Lokuge, CEPA**
Chair: **Asha Abeyasekera, CEPA**
Discussants: **Malathi De Alwis, University of Colombo**
Vjiay Nagaraj, LST

<http://www.cepa.lk>

If you would like to attend, please **RSVP** hasanthi@cepa.lk or 011 4690215