

Abuddhassa Kale: A Time of Godlessness
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Abstract

This paper examines the moral tropes through which state employees interact with their clients. Based on ethnographic field work conducted over a period of one year during 2007/2008 in a Probation and Child Care Services Unit in Sri Lanka the paper argues that the moral positions of state employees is rooted within a Sinhala Buddhist nationalist identity. These moral positions are explored particularly in terms of their disposition towards girls and women. The paper examines the ways in which these moralities are expressed have particular outcomes for the girls and women who are clients of the Probation and Child Care Services. It shows how Probation Officers assessed their clients' experiences and decided on interventions based on ideas regarding the respectability and virtue of girls and women. The paper goes on to argue that the public enactment and discussion of what it means to be culturally and morally grounded is a means of expressing the particular subjectivities and positions of these particular state employees. These identities are also linked to the ambiguities faced by the mostly middle class state employees in having to differentiate themselves from their class inferiors as well as their class superiors. The paper also shows that state employees resort to moral frameworks to respond to their clients' difficulties in the face of inadequate resources to effectively deal with the complex issues faced by their clients.

Keywords: *Morality, Nationalism, Culture, Respectability, Surveillance, Middle-class*