

## **NEW SPACES CREATED BY THE ETHNONATIONALIST CRISIS IN SRI LANKA**

SHANTHA K. HENNAYAKE

*Department of Geography, Faculty of Arts, University of Peradeniya*

All societies are engaged in a perpetual exercise of making and unmaking places. The objective of this research, following the broad human geographic tradition, is to identify the places created by the ethnonationalist crisis in Sri Lanka and to assess the level of currency these places have gained in the larger society.

A content analysis of recently published books on the ethnonationalist crisis, feature articles and news items of Sri Lankan newspapers, internet and informal discussions with key people formed the basis for identification and analysis in this research.

The ethnonationalist crisis itself can be broadly defined as a political contest over ownership, definition and interpretation of place – Sri Lanka. At the next level, the ethnonationalist crisis has introduced new places (e.g. *border villages or Mayim Gammana*) and imbued new meanings and interpretations to existing places (e.g. *South and Eelam*).

The new places created by the ethnonationalist crisis could be classified into the following;

1. Politico-ideological space (e.g. *homeland, eelam, south, east, Sinhala state*)
2. Military space (eg. high-security zone, uncleared areas or *muda nogath pradasha*)
3. War spaces (*border villages, Mayim Gammana*, officially defined as *threatened villages or Tarjitha Gammana recently, bunker or bankara*).

In addition to the intrinsic academic value of studying the creation and evolution of places, this research highlights the fact that issues specific to these newly created spaces must also be addressed in finding a lasting solution to the present ethnonationalist crisis.