

# SPRING 2015 COLLOQUIA SERIES

*Date: Wednesday, May 27*

*Time: 3:15 – 5PM*

*Location: Social Sciences 1, room 261*

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## Dr. Sharika Thiranagama

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### *"Grease Devils": Violence and Militarization in Postwar Sri Lanka*

What kinds of violence and longings for (often violent order) do postwar societies experience? In 2010, a year after the end of Sri Lanka's brutal civil war, low-key incidents of theft and assault began to take new proportions. Spreading from southern Sri Lanka and gaining enormous intensity and frequency in Tamil and Muslim areas, communities began to report "Grease Putham" (Tamil) and "Grease Bottiya (Sinhalese): men covered in grease entering houses through back doors and assaulting women with knives. Throughout Tamil and Muslim areas, locals were convinced that these men were off duty army officers. As panic spread, locals began patrolling areas at night, leading to increasing clashes between the Sri Lankan police and army and local residents. It reached full-scale panic subsiding in late 2010 as quickly as it had begun. The paper will position the grease devils phenomenon within larger local concerns around post war criminality and the feeling of being surrounded by state security forces and having no security. I will discuss the manifestation of these concerns (including the opacity of violence) around women's bodies and intimate relations. As such the paper also examines how one might think about the profound militarization of northern and eastern Sri Lanka and the way in which the violence of the war has become translated into pervasive everyday forms of violence.

Sharika Thiranagama is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Stanford University. Her research interests include civil war, political violence, gender, militancy and the relationship of the political to the familial focusing primarily on Sri Lanka. She received her PhD in Anthropology from the University of Edinburgh in 2006 and has held postdoctoral positions at the Pembroke Center, Brown University, and the University of Edinburgh, and an Assistant Professorship at the New School for Social Research, New School University. Her book *In My Mother's House: Civil War in Sri Lanka* was published by the University of Penn Press in 2011 (and by Zubaan Books in India in 2014).