

## Borderlands, Brokers and Peacebuilding: War to Peace Transitions viewed from the margins

Why are so many borderland regions, areas of insecurity, chronic poverty and environmental degradation – even after an apparently successful war to peace transition? Why do such areas seem to be largely unaffected by progress at a global level in tackling poverty and armed conflict? Why do international donors suffer from ‘borderland blindness’ when subnational and transnational problems cannot be addressed through national policy frameworks and strategies?

These questions are the starting point for a two-year ESRC-funded<sup>1</sup> research project led by SOAS University of London in collaboration with the Universities of Bath and Melbourne, CEPA, International Alert, and Martin Chautari.

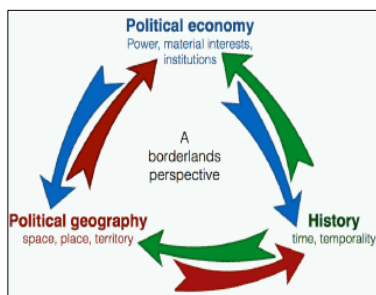
The project aims to generate a *better understanding of contested war to peace*

*transitions* in Nepal and Sri Lanka with a view to *improving statebuilding and peacebuilding interventions in post-war contexts*.

The originality of this project lies in the way it takes the margins of the state as the starting point for understanding and explaining the political and economic dynamics of ‘post war’ transition.

By doing so, we depart from the top down, centrist orientation commonly applied to studies of (and policy responses to) post-war statebuilding and reconstruction. Our theoretical approach draws upon insights derived from the disciplines of political economy, history and political geography. This leads to a concern with

questions of *space, power* and *time* in the context of war to peace transitions



## Key Questions

Our core research question is: *How have processes of post-war transition been shaped by, and influenced, processes of political and economic change at the margins of the state?*

We are specifically interested in (a) how *peripheral zones* influence post-war peacebuilding and reconstruction processes at the national level (b) The impacts of *borderland brokers* on these processes (c) The effects of *international peacebuilding and reconstruction* interventions on war to peace transitions and the lives of borderland communities and marginalized groups.

We believe that different kinds of marginalised areas within a state, and variations in institutional arrangements and brokering relations that connect the centre to the periphery, have a major influence on the dynamics of post-war stabilization and reconstruction, and hence the sustainability of post war transitions.

## Sri Lanka and Nepal

Why Nepal and Sri Lanka? Firstly, we think they are interesting because of some commonalities of experience; they have been through long-running sub-national conflicts, followed by contested war to peace transitions.

Borderlands were incubators of grievances and central to the dynamics of civil war. And both countries experienced intrusive international

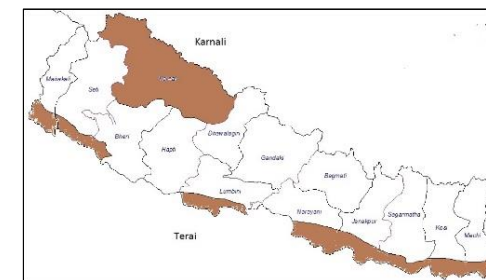
engagement involving western countries as well as key regional powers – China and India.



Secondly, there are important differences between the two cases (e.g. in the causes and dynamics of conflict and civil war termination; differing

demands of borderland regions on the state; contrasting state responses to these demands) and trying to explain these differences will generate broader lessons about how and why the role of borderland regions and brokers vary across contexts.

The project looks at different kinds of state margins; the first axis of comparison is between Nepal’s borderlands in which there is a land border, and Sri Lanka’s frontier zones where there is a maritime border. Second, we have chosen contrasting



borderland sites -- one ‘marginalised’ and one ‘advanced’ case in each country

<sup>1</sup> Economic and Social Research Council

- the Karnali and Terai regions in Nepal, and the Batticaloa and Hambantota districts in Sri Lanka. We think the features and dynamics of brokerage will differ in these contrasting cases.

### Engagement with Policy and Practice

We aim to have a significant impact on policy discussions and outcomes and we feel that a borderland perspective unsettles policy discourses related to

#### Borderland brokers

We see the dynamics of brokerage as central to war to peace transitions. Military, political and economic brokers mediate valued resources and ideas between centre and periphery and across the borderline. They act as intermediaries and gatekeepers, they are both a point of friction and a lubricant. In war to peace transitions their roles may change; for example military actors become political party leaders or morph into businessmen, or development brokers. The extent to which borderland regions are integrated into the post war settlement and the economic development of these regions may be shaped by the role of such brokers.

'state fragility', peacebuilding, statebuilding, good/good enough governance, and conflict-sensitive reconstruction and development.

The project will be guided by an international advisory board, including senior policy makers and separate advisory groups in Nepal and Sri



Lanka. This will ensure that the project is both relevant to and helps shape debates on post war transitions and reconstruction. The project aims to challenge 'borderland blindness' and to show in concrete terms how a sensitivity to borderland issues can lead to fundamental changes in how to provide external support to post conflict societies.

#### Research Plan

The project runs for 2 years and starts in December 2015.

**Phase 1** (Dec 15-Mar 16) focuses on developing up-to-date overviews of country dynamics and thematic literature reviews.

**Phase 2** (Apr 16 – Apr 17) covers the main fieldwork and will include (1) national mapping studies focused on national-level political and economic dynamics, (2) district-based studies of the 4 field sites which will identify key development/political activities and brokers, and (3) broker/programme studies that will provide more in-depth studies of key individuals and

organisations. A regional workshop will be held in Delhi in Feb 17.

**Phase 3** (Apr – Nov 17) will involve analysis and writing up. The project will conclude with a conference in London.



#### Project team

The project draws together expertise from a range of institutions and organisations in South Asia, the UK and Australia.

It is led by Prof. Jonathan Goodhand (SOAS, UK/ Melbourne, Australia).

The Co-Investigators are:

- Dr. Vagisha Gunasekera (CEPA, Sri Lanka),
- Dr. Pratyoush Onta and Gautam Bhaskar (Martin Chautari, Nepal), and
- Dr. Oliver Walton (Bath, UK).

Markus Mayer (Programme Manager – South and South East Asia, International Alert) will lead the project's engagement with policymakers and practitioners.



Gautam Bhaskar



Jonathan Goodhand



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