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**Youth in the cultural politics of contemporary Jaffna**

Based on recent ethnographic fieldwork in Jaffna, this paper explores how youth has become a crucial site for contested cultural politics in contemporary Jaffna. Popular representations of young people as incorporated into the structures and aspirational logics of diaspora and globalization reflect not only ambivalence about the impact of an expanding commodity culture, but also a sense of profound social failure (failure to win the civil war, to provide professional opportunities for young people, and, especially, failure to pass on the political activism of their seniors as well as their culture, values and identities). My argument is that by simply highlighting the triumph of consumerism and its alleged evils (alcoholism, fashion, romance, sexual promiscuity and so on) such discourses obscure more than they reveal. My ethnography shows that university students are responding to recent and political changes in an era of liberalization in Jaffna not (merely) through drinking and partying, but through “ragging” (or hazing) on their campus. My argument is that the practice of ill-treating and punishing junior students if they fail to obey their seniors is deeply entangled with local, state and even national politics in a complex web of demands, expectations and competition. This occurs even when it is perceived as mundane and concerned only with everyday student-campus life. I also suggest that while Jaffna university students (and Jaffna youth in general) appear cut off from the world of their parents, they nonetheless enact forms of socialization that are consistent with Jaffna’s historical and social politics at large.