‘They Were Kings’: Memory, Violence, and Identity in Life Histories of Sri Lankan Tamils in France

My project consists in preparing my anthropological doctoral thesis for publication. It focuses on Sri Lankan Tamils who came to France in order to escape the long-running civil war in Sri Lanka. That war ended in 2009 with the military destruction of the main Tamil rebel group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). This work aims to understand how the memory of war is constructed in different contexts and is shaped by diverse institutions and social norms.

The project will be divided in two parts. The first focuses on life histories, in particular those of the former LTTE fighters. I will analyse why they chose to engage in a nationalist organisation, how they construct their identities and how the farewell to arms and exile change their public life and their intimacy.

The second part opens the analyse to the public sphere of memory: that of the Tamil nationalist associations and the French authorities. As regards the first, I will examine how they remember the deaths, how they reconstruct Tamil history, and what their political project is for the future. Concerning the second, I will focus on the production and the examination of the asylum requests.