

**LIFETIMES, NOT PROJECT CYCLES:
EXPLORING THE LONG-TERM IMPACTS OF GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT
PROGRAMMING IN NORTHERN SRI LANKA**

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Abstract

The concepts of ‘empowerment’, ‘agency’ and ‘gender’ have been variously interpreted and applied by donors and development actors, and in largely instrumental terms. Theoretically, these concepts – as well as gender mainstreaming, the primary tool proposed to achieve gender equality – have drawn criticism for being disassociated with the original political intent to transform power relations. Practically, the current state of knowledge around the outcomes of gender and development programming is rife with institutional perspectives of donors and NGOs reflecting in the short-term, with voices of the constituents of development conspicuously absent. Understanding how gender and development interventions are perceived and experienced by recipients in the context of their life course is an urgent task required not only to improve the current state of knowledge, but also to understand what kinds of measures lead to positive societal changes.

Drawing from ten life histories of recipients of gender mainstreamed development programming in Northern Sri Lanka, this dissertation probes how recipients situate and make sense of gender mainstreamed development programs as they navigate a post-war reality. Findings show that encounters with development programming and the development apparatus in general contributed to some positive social changes, with certain groups of women expressing agency and even moments of empowerment. However, the longitudinal scope of this study reveals that these experiences take place within the prevailing structural confines of insecurity that take place at the macro (state), meso (development apparatus) and micro (community) levels. These findings uncover how gender hierarchies and factors of identity influence these limits on choice, and therefore challenge current understandings of agency, empowerment, and the role of development programming within society.

This research points to the limitations of donor-driven development programs that are ill-equipped to address structural issues of gendered insecurity, patriarchal societal norms, and deep-seated trauma. Further, this research offers new dimensions to existing frameworks around the interaction of masculinities, femininities, identity and conflict, suggesting that factors of identity must be complemented with significant experiences across a life course in order to understand how constituents receive and perceive development interventions, and to what extent these interventions are ultimately equipped to facilitate change. Methodologically, this dissertation offers innovative feminist approaches to foregrounding recipients' knowledge and experience of the development process, including pursuing more partnership approaches that include development actors, constituents, and researchers.

Abstract (Tamil) ஆய்வுச் சுருக்கம்

"அதிகாரமளித்தல்", "முகவாண்மை" மற்றும் "பாலினம்" ஆகிய எண்ணக்கருக்களானவை நன்கொடையாளர்கள் மற்றும் அபிவிருத்தியாளர்களால் பல்வேறு விளக்கங்கள் கொடுக்கப்பட்டு பயன்படுத்தப்பட்டு வருகின்றன என்பதுடன் இச்சொற்கள் பெரும்பாலும் துணைச் சொற்களாகவேயுள்ளன. கோட்பாட்டளவில், இவ் எண்ணக்கருக்களானவை பாலின சமத்துவத்தை அடைய முன்மொழியப்பட்ட முதன்மைக் கருவியான பாலின முதன்மை நீரோட்டமானது அதிகார உறவுகளை மாற்றுவதற்கான உண்மையான அரசியல் நோக்கத்துடன் இணங்காமல் இருக்கின்றமைக்காக விமர்சனத்தைப் பெற்றுள்ளது. நடைமுறையில், பாலின மற்றும் அபிவிருத்தித் திட்டங்களின் விளைவுகளைச் சுற்றிய அறிவின் தற்போதைய நிலையானது, வளர்ச்சிக் கூறுகளின் குரல்கள் வெளிப்படாத குறுகிய காலத்தைப் பட்டெறியும் நன்கொடையாளர்களினதும் தன்னார்வத் தொண்டு நிறுவனங்களினதும் நிறுவனநோக்குகளால் நிறைந்துள்ளது. பாலினம் மற்றும் அபிவிருத்தித் தலையீடுகள் எவ்வாறு பெறுநர்களால் அவர்களின் வாழ்க்கைப் போக்கில் உணரப்படுகின்றன மற்றும் அனுபவிக்கப்படுகின்றன என்பதனைப் புரிந்துகொள்ளும் உடனடிப் பணியானது இ தற்போதைய அறிவின் நிலையை மேம்படுத்துவதற்காக மட்டுமல்லாது நேர்மறையான சமூக மாற்றங்களிற்கு எந்த வகையான நடவடிக்கைகள் இட்டுச் செல்கின்றன என்பதனை விளங்கிக்கொள்வதற்கும் வேண்டியதாகிறது.

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Acronyms and Glossary

CBO	Community Based Organization
CID	Criminal Investigation Department
CSD	Civil Security Department
CSN	Civil Society Network
DS	District Secretary
GAD	Gender and Development
GBA+	Gender Based Analysis Plus
GS	<i>Grama Sevaka (Tamil)/Grama niladhari (Sinhalese)</i>
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICES	International Centre for Ethnic Studies
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
<i>Kasippu</i>	illegally brewed alcohol
KI	Key Informant
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NVIVO	Qualitative Data Analysis Software
PI	Principal Investigator
RDS	Rural Development Society
<i>Seettu</i>	Traditional rotational savings circle
SLA	Sri Lankan Army

STF	Special Task Force
TO	Technical Officer
TOT	Training of Trainers
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
WAD	Women and Development
WDN	Women’s Development Network
WERC	Women’s Education Resource Centre
WID	Women in Development
WPS	Women, Peace and Security
WRDS	Women’s Rural Development Society

Administrative Map of Sri Lanka



Adapted from: Administrative Map of Sri Lanka. Nations Online Project.
<https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/Sri-Lanka-political-map.htm>

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

Following the landmark Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, the resulting Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action called on governments and actors to mainstream a gender or gender-equality perspective across a host of sectors and issues, including access to access to health care; violence against women; economic independence of women; equitable decision making and power distribution at all levels between men and women; and in situations of armed conflict (United Nations Specialized Conferences, 1995). This call marked a watershed moment that inspired donors and development practitioners to adopt gender mainstreaming as the guiding strategy to achieve gender equality. In the more than two decades that followed, development agencies and bilateral aid donors alike have rapidly adopted gender mainstreaming as the guiding strategy to promote gender equality. This practice of applying gender perspectives throughout policies and programs has since been used in sectors as diverse as water and sanitation, food security, and post-conflict reconstruction (Kabeer, 2003).

Despite the widespread application of gender mainstreaming, there has been scant evaluation of its long-term impacts. The limited research suggests that the potential of gender mainstreaming to positively transform lives has thus far not been fully realised (Parpart, 2014a; Subrahmanian, 2004). Reasons for this shortcoming include: 1. 'gender' is often misinterpreted to be synonymous with 'women' (Cornwall, 2007; Grown et al., 2016); 2. gender work is often relegated to junior female staff (OECD, 2013); and 3. gender is deprioritized in the face of complex needs of disaster- and conflict-affected communities, known as the 'tyranny of the urgent' (Mukhopadhyay, 2007; Rees, 2005). Further, concepts such as 'empowerment', 'agency' and 'gender equality' that were originally constructed to challenge unequal power structures and gender relations have also been criticized by feminist scholars as having lost the political bite

and have been effectively neutralized and sanitized in their translation into development policy and practice (Cornwall, 2007; Goldman & Little, 2015; Parpart, 2014a; Rathgeber, 1990).

Although positive shifts towards achieving gender equality entail long-term, complex social processes that require years if not generations to take root, most programs – and their evaluations – are often bound to short-term funding cycles (Richey, 2000). While much of the development literature assumes an institutional perspective that focuses on donors and implementing agencies such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the voices of ‘beneficiaries’ of gender mainstreamed interventions are conspicuously absent. This tendency points to a significant gap in our understanding of the influence of gender mainstreaming to date.

The impacts of gender and development programming are measured in quantitative, short-term evaluations – an insufficient approach for understanding how lives have changed, how relations have shifted, how new norms or practices have emerged. Through applying a feminist, qualitative, longitudinal methodological lens, important and nuanced information about gender-specific experiences of donor programming can be revealed. This dissertation contributes to the current state of knowledge around gender and development programming by documenting the experiences of individuals in Northern Sri Lanka, focussing on gender mainstreamed donor interventions in a post-war context.

Exploring first-hand understandings of how constituents make sense of these encounters suggest new ways of thinking about not only how the concepts of ‘women’s empowerment’, ‘gender’, and strategies of gender mainstreaming are interpreted by development institutions themselves, but also how implementing programs that were designed with these concepts in mind are assigned meaning by the recipients of these programs. Applying a longitudinal approach that embodies feminist methodological and epistemological principles, this research

returns to the site of significant post-war gender mainstreamed development programming to conduct life histories with ten recipients of such programs. This research moves beyond the limitations of other exercises by development actors, including NGOs and donors, that fall into ‘monitoring and evaluation’ and Results-Based Management frameworks that are limited by the short-term timeframes that project cycles demand. Since changes in gender and power relations are complex and take much time to foment, applying this longitudinal perspective is imperative to understand these changes and relate them back to development programming and the larger post-war context.

Current Knowledge Gaps, Rationale and Contributions

Armed conflict and war levy tremendous and multifold impacts on gender and power relations on communities and societies, as masculinities and femininities are reworked, re-imagined, and reproduced in during the war and post-war contexts (Cockburn, 2001; Enloe, 1990; Manchanda, 2005; Parpart, 2015). Given the significant presence of humanitarian and development actors in many of these contexts, the role that development programming and the larger development apparatus¹ can and has played in the lives of those who survive war should be of great interest and relevance, not only with a view of improving programs, but also in contributing to our collective understanding of how these investments are perceived by the very people for whom they are designed and delivered. However,, the role of gender and development programming in recognizing and promoting positive shifts towards gender equality in the long term is largely unknown. While the development literature offers some insight and analysis into

¹ Throughout this dissertation I often revert to the term ‘development apparatus’, a shorthand to refer to the institutions, actors, donors, partners, processes, and all the interstitial relationships, cultures and dynamics that are produced between these, and thus constituting the development ecosystem. In some places, I refer only to development programming when speaking of specific donor-funded development interventions, or a collection of interventions, but do not refer to other aspects contained within my definition of the ‘development apparatus’, such as actors or NGOs themselves.

how development institutions, such as NGOs and donors, have contended with the theoretical underpinnings of ‘empowerment’, ‘gender’, and ‘gender mainstreaming’ (D. Baines, 2010; Campbell & Teghtsoonian, 2010; Cornwall & Brock, 2005; Tiessen, 2007), far less attention has been paid to how the constituents of these programs have experienced and make sense of these interventions, and how they are understood as fitting into individuals’ larger life course, which in most cases far predates these encounters with the development apparatus.

Applying tools such as gender mainstreaming, which was proposed at the Beijing Conference as the preeminent tool that holds great potential to foster gender equality, has been inconsistent, with interpretations often translating not into transformative approaches that address the political, cultural, and historical dynamics of gender inequality, but rather stopping short at the mere inclusion and participation of women. This reductive interpretation of gender mainstreaming neglects the crucial relational element of gender relations that would necessitate attention be paid also to men and masculinities, and how these have been shaped by war and perhaps by gender and development programming.

At the operational level, program evaluations are largely conducted shortly after programs conclude and therefore only capture a short-term picture of social change. The institutional realities do not permit approaches that would take a longitudinal view of how changes may have taken root or developed into sustainable change over time. Even the most qualitative, participatory, and feminist-inspired methods deployed by NGOs and development actors² rarely if ever take place beyond the two- to five-year time frames of most development programs. It is in this context that my research was inspired.

² Some examples include the Most Significant Change approach (Davies & Dart, 2004) or Oxfam’s Feminist Monitoring, Evaluation Accountability and Learning approach (Oxfam Canada, 2020).

This dissertation breaks new ground on several levels. First, this research assumes a longitudinal scope, whereby the site of heavy investments in gender mainstreamed post-war³ development programs are returned to in order to get a sense of the legacy of impact that may or may not be left behind nearly ten years after the war has ended. Second, the contextual subtleties of the selected case study of Northern Sri Lanka offers the opportunity for this research to look specifically at the dynamics and challenges of armed conflict and how these interact with the delivery of gender mainstreamed programs in communities of individuals who have survived armed conflict. Third, this research makes a theoretical contribution through combining spheres of literature not previously related to investigate such questions related to the value, impact and suitability of development interventions, as perceived by its recipients. A fourth contribution is made through the methodological approach to this research. Selecting a relatively small sample size, and opting for depth over breadth, creates the space for both researcher and respondent to explore facets of life that are not able to be explored through more traditional research methods that have often been applied to understanding gender equality programming. While many donors and NGOs pursue qualitative evaluations and broader research, these often take place within tight time frames, budgets, and reporting periods.

³ Throughout this thesis, I deliberately use the term ‘post-war’ over ‘post-conflict’, the latter of which would imply that the context is free of or has moved beyond conflict. As many researchers and analysts have shown and continue to demonstrate, and as my own research confirms, Sri Lanka is fraught with conflict – inter-ethnic, inter-sectarian, inter-religious, all with a gendered character – and the term ‘post-conflict’ simply does not resonate here. Rather, the term ‘post-war’ is more accurate and applicable to this context. While the war in Sri Lanka has ended, largely considered to be the day that the leader of the LTTE, Vellupillai Prabhakaran, was killed on the battlefields in Mullaitivu on May 19th, 2009. However, as this dissertation demonstrates, the ‘aftermath’ (Meintjes et al., 2001) of war, particularly on civilians including women, continues to shape experiences of insecurity, development and gender equality in the North. For many, the war may be over, but conflict and violence persist vividly into the present day. Many participants in this study have chosen to use the word “war” [*por* in Tamil], and so I, too, have chosen to use this language.

Applying the methods that I have in this project have revealed the richness not only of data collected, but also of how the research process is experienced by both the researcher and the participants. The expansive scope of discussion and the authority of participants to choose what they divulge in each listening session makes this methodology particularly powerful. In this way, this project's methodology is not only valuable in its outcomes – what data it reveals – but also in its very process – the experience of both the researcher and the participants. Applying such a methodology to understanding how programs influence gender relations and post-conflict life has the potential to be highly instructive to future programs and interventions, while also adhering to feminist principals of do no harm, promoting transformation of gender relations, and challenging power imbalances between the researcher and the researched.

Lastly, building upon the contributions of others on the larger policy and institutional domains of 'where gender mainstreaming happens' (see Brown & Swiss, 2017; Tiessen, 2007), this research offers a view into the often overlooked or silenced voices of individuals who are on the receiving end of development efforts. This approach is significant in that applying methodologies such as the one in this project can shine a light on areas of programming impact – that is, the intentional and unplanned long-term changes that are directly or inspired by programs – and thus help donors, policy makers and program partners to rethink and perhaps rework how gender equality efforts are pursued and delivered. From a neoliberal perspective of development, these findings could certainly improve the efficiency of gender equality programming. However, moving beyond an instrumentalist approach to development, investing in alternative methods that foreground recipients' experiences and perspectives can help flatten the vertical power

relationship between donor, development organization, and ‘beneficiary’⁴ and can help build good programming that moves towards the original purpose of gender mainstreaming – that is, to encourage and create conditions for transformational changes that work towards gender equality. Through these contributions, this research reveals important insights into the gender and development apparatus from the very individuals for whom the development apparatus was ostensibly created.

Research Questions

The following research questions have guided this research:

1. How have the experiences, attitudes and practices related to gender and power relations changed over time in post-war communities?
2. What are the outcomes of gender and development programming, from the perspectives of development ‘constituents’? How do individuals make sense of their encounters with gender and development programming in the post-war period?
3. How can this improved, longitudinal understanding of gender equality programming from the perspectives of communities help us make sense of gender mainstreaming strategies, the challenges of translating policy into practice, and the implications of these

⁴ The term ‘beneficiary’ in the context of development programming and policy is a contested one that is rife with connotations of power, agency, access and capacity, most notably imbued with passivity and unidirectional benefit that echoes a colonial vision of the Other (see [Green, 2018](#); [Hendrix-Jenkins, 2020](#)). While I have not been able to identify a more appropriate term, I will borrow from [Keystone](#) to employ the term ‘constituents’, which reflect both a sense of intended benefit from an intervention “as well as a more active sense of the rights and responsibilities that inhere in a polity” (2006, p. 3). In some places in this thesis, I have chosen to use ‘beneficiaries’ in quotation marks when referring to the end users of programs from a donor perspective but will otherwise use ‘constituents’.

findings for advancing critical feminist theories related to security, gender and development?

4. What are the limitations of current approaches to measuring outcomes to gender and development programming, and how can measuring those outcomes through feminist, qualitative and longitudinal methodologies reveal new insights into the experiences of ‘beneficiaries’? How can experiences of gender and development programming and gender mainstreaming be understood in new ways through alternative, feminist data collection tools and qualitative methodologies?

These research questions were originally crafted to reflect what I originally set out to accomplish with this research project. Specifically, the first question propelled me to explore the larger post-war context in Northern Sri Lanka and if and how the war’s disruption and reordering of gender and power relations has unfolded in one very specific case and context. The second question guided my exploration of the connections between context, history, and constituents’ experiences of how gender and development programming has been conceived, delivered, received, and understood. This second research question was also the driver of my methodology’s primary method of life histories. The third and fourth questions were valuable in helping me to think through what methodological contributions my research would and has been able to make through enacting a feminist-driven, biographical, longitudinal methodology that focussed on bottom-up perspectives.

While these original research questions were heuristically useful, upon further ex-post reflection I have re-evaluated their applicability to what in fact this research has yielded in terms

of findings and my analysis. As such, I have identified the following two retrospective research questions that have evolved out of the research process and my reflections:

1. How do constituents in Kilinochchi understand and situate their post-war (2009-present) encounters with gender and development programming within the larger events and complexities of their life course?
2. What can the perspectives of constituents of development programming reveal about the challenges of policy and praxis of promoting gender equality in post-conflict settings?

The original four research questions, as well as the retrospective two core research questions, are all born out of a particular theoretical and conceptual orientation of post-development and post-structuralist thought, coupled with insights from critical feminist security studies and related concepts. These research questions have also been informed by, and in turn, have informed, an explicitly feminist methodology. These cornerstones of the dissertation are explored in the following sections.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This dissertation is theoretically oriented and influenced by post-development and post-structuralist thought, which challenges historical accounts and structures that have historically oppressed certain groups, including women. In particular, feminist post-development scholars have effectively shone a light on the colonial, Western-centric prism through which ‘third world women’ have been viewed and understood (Mohanty, 1984; Wood, 2001). Post-structuralist thought rejects universal, simplified definitions of social phenomena that essentialize reality and

obscure the intricacies and complexities of lived experiences (Marchand & Parpart, 2003).

Through spotlighting the lived experiences of men and women, the very knowledge base that informs debates around gender and development policy and practice is expanded, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of how constituents make sense of these programs.

To complement post-development and post-structural approaches to development, I also draw from a body of literature that I term Critical Feminist Security Studies (CFST). CFST authors have contributed several important insights to our understanding of how war and conflict shape gender relations, masculinities and femininities, and how conflict itself is gendered (Hoogensen & Stuvøy, 2006; Pankhurst, 2008; Silber, 2004; White, 2007). Amongst the most relevant for this study, and which serves as the organizing framework of Chapter Five, are: the problematization of the assumption that the state provides protection for women during war (Blanchard, 2003); the reconceptualizing of war and peace, with an emphasis on the ‘productive destructiveness’ of masculinities and femininities (Elshtain, 1987); and new empirical and theoretical contributions to understandings of war-related sexual violence (Aijazi & Baines, 2017; Alison, 2007; Baaz & Stern, 2009; Gorris, 2015; Mackenzie, 2010). Other interrelated concepts that are central to this research include gender, structure, agency; empowerment; militarization; masculinities, femininities, and intersectionality. These concepts are critically discussed in Chapter Two and are all highly relevant to the post-war setting of Northern Sri Lanka, and, indeed, many other post-war contexts.

Research Framework, Design and Methods

The methodology for this dissertation is informed by feminist methodologies and feminist epistemologies, of which feminist standpoint theory has been most prominent in shaping my methodological orientation. Feminist epistemology, or a feminist theory of knowledge

(Harding, 1987), has worked to address the historical deprivileging of women's participation, representation and authority in knowledge creation (Harding, 1987; Henwood & Pidgeon, 1995). Feminist standpoint has inspired my methodology in its position that women's lived experiences form the basis of feminist knowledge (Marchand & Parpart, 2003). This emphasis on lived experiences led me to focus on life histories as the central method for this research, which also is equipped to capture and contend with individuals' lived life courses, not only pre-defined periods of time that may be of interest. While some of the founding scholars of feminist standpoint theory argued primarily for the focus to be on women's lived experiences and perspectives, scholars have since highlighted the value of including men's experiences, especially historically oppressed or silenced groups of men (Marchand & Parpart, 2003). For this research I have chosen to include men in the research sample precisely to maintain the relational aspect of gender and power relations, not at the expense of learning about women's lived experiences, but rather in pursuit of uncovering the gendered social and cultural dynamics that have produced these experiences, of which men and other groups are a part.

The study's methodology is also inspired by the Listening Methodology developed by Anderson et al. (2012) of conducting loosely structured, narrator-focussed 'listening sessions'. During these sessions, participants are provided space to select which events, reflections, issues and experiences they would like to share and which a pre-determined set of questions would not be able to anticipate. Crucially, this approach works to reduce the power imbalance between the 'researcher' and the 'researched' through allowing participants to self-select what they discuss. This approach avoids ethical issues of potential coercion and works to mitigate researcher bias.

To explore the research questions laid out above, I conducted field research in Kilinochchi, Northern Province, Sri Lanka. Kilinochchi is an overwhelmingly Tamil⁵ majority District in Northern Province, and a site integral to the 26-year war that changed hands between the Sri Lankan Army (SLA) and the Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam (LTTE) several times, resulting in the LTTE maintaining Kilinochchi as its administrative hub for the latter years of the war until their ultimate defeat. Due to the intense destruction of life and property in Kilinochchi, development programming flooded into the District in the post-war years, beginning with the resettlement phase a few years after the war ended in 2009. Conducting this research in Kilinochchi ten years later in 2019 meant that enough time had passed to allow participants to reflect on any social changes that had occurred since their encounters with the development apparatus, while not having these experiences be too far out of memory's reach.

I conducted ten life histories (LHs) with six women and four men living in Kilinochchi District. These LHs were complemented by nine key informant interviews (KIIs). Two focus group discussions (FGDs) were held separately with men and women in Kilinochchi with the purpose of socializing the research project and introducing myself and the Research Assistant (RA) team to key community leaders and members, as well as beginning the snowball recruitment for participants in the LH method. These FGDs were conducted in the Tamil language with consecutive interpretation provided by whichever RA was present to support each

⁵ Two groups of Tamils are often cited when speaking of the demography of Sri Lanka. The first group, the 'Sri Lankan', 'Ceylon' or 'Jaffna' Tamils, are descendants of Tamil-speaking groups from India, migrating several centuries ago (Minority Rights Group International, 2015). The majority of this group live in Northern and Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka. The second group are known as 'Up Country', 'Hill Country' or 'Estate' Tamils, largely seen as recent immigrants to Sri Lanka from India who came to the island as indentured labourers to work on British tea plantations (Minority Rights Group International, 2015). Up country Tamils were effectively rendered stateless upon independence from the British in 1948, and discrimination against this minority within a minority persists (Wuthmann & Nafeel, 2018). In referring to Tamils throughout this dissertation, I refer exclusively to the first group, the 'Ceylon' or 'Sri Lankan' Tamils.

of the two sessions. To encourage dialogue and comfort through reflecting local gender norms, the FGD with women was supported by the female lead RA, while the male FGD was supported by a male RA. Field work took place from 8 January to 27 March 2019. This period followed a previous scoping trip to Sri Lanka from 16 August to 14 September 2018, which led to key decisions on field site, participation criteria, and scope of the research. Prior to conducting field work, I obtained a Certificate of Ethics Approval from the University of Ottawa Office of Research and Integrity, approved on 19 July 2018.

Layout of the Dissertation

The following chapters have been arranged to construct adequate theoretical, conceptual, and methodological scaffolding before introducing the narrators of the research, hearing what they shared, analyzing what possible meanings could be interpreted, and finally summarizing with a survey of the contributions that this dissertation makes to the larger knowledge base at the intersection of gender, development and security.

Chapter Two provides an in-depth literature review as well as a presentation of the theoretical and conceptual framework for this dissertation. I begin with a survey of the relevant literature, first laying out the feminist critiques of the interpretation and application by development institutions and others of the once-political concepts of ‘gender equality’, ‘women’s empowerment’ and ‘gender mainstreaming’ strategies. Once established, I move on to identify significant gaps in the current state of knowledge relating to the timeframe and perspectives of gender and development program, arguing that longitudinal and ‘bottom-up’ perspectives from constituents are urgently required. Next, I explore the challenges of measuring the elusive, complex, and contested natures of empowerment, agency, and gender equality. I then critically evaluate how the terms ‘vulnerability’ and ‘resilience’ are used within the development literature

and discourse. Next, I move on to construct my theoretical and conceptual framework, consisting of a foundation of feminist post-development and post-structural thought that queries power relations and the politicization of development projects and policies, combined with the contributions from the domain of critical feminist security theories (CFST), which connects with the post-war context of my research questions. In this chapter I also provide an overview of debates on relevant concepts and processes as well as some preliminary discussion on gender, structure and agency; empowerment; militarization and gender; masculinities, femininities and intersectionality; and finally, an introduction to the Feminism and Development/Disasters (FAD²) framework to which I later return when discussing approaches to gender and development programming.

In Chapter Three I lay out my research methodology that is explicitly rooted in feminist methodologies and feminist epistemologies. Here, I introduce the theoretical underpinnings of my methodology that focus on standpoint feminism and ultimately led me to privilege oral histories of men and women as the primary method for this study. I turn next to a presentation of the methods applied during this research, namely life histories, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions, as well as participant observation and informal interviews. I then briefly introduce the historical, political, and demographic character of Kilinochchi in Northern Sri Lanka and discuss my process for selecting this as the research context. Next, I turn my attention to the essential role that the Research Assistants played in this research and share details of efforts made to ensure their wellbeing during the research process, given the sensitivity and intensity of many of the listening sessions. I then offer a discussion and rationale for the processual aspects of my methodology, including selection of participants, transcription and translation, and data analysis. I then present the limitations of the research, followed by an

important yet seldom included section on how sexual harassment and violence can and has impacted the research process and product. I close the chapter with a self-reflection on my own positionality and how it has influenced the research process, while attempting to strike a balance between pulling focus away from the research narrators and acknowledging my own power, privilege, and limitations.

Chapter Four formally introduces the ten narrators of this research, namely the six women and four men who participated in life history sessions. I begin this chapter with a rationale for creating the space for these individual biographical sketches, namely my intention to honour and respect the narrators' trust and confidence in me as a researcher, and my inability to include all biographical details within the larger discussion of findings and analysis that the subsequent chapters hold. This chapter is also a reminder that 'data' emerge not from inanimate objects through research instruments, but rather from real people living real lives whose experiences have had real impacts on their life course. To provide sufficient background within which to situate the narrators' biographies, I then present a brief overview of the 26-year war between the LTTE and the SLA, moving into the immediate post-war period of 'welfare camps' that housed hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons from the Vanni, or Northern, Tamil-majority segment of the island. Next, I move on to discuss a central theme that transcends nearly all life histories in this study: war-related trauma. Here, I relate trauma to aspects of gender and identity, with a focus on widows and former LTTE combatants. Having established the context in which the ten narrators' lives have unfolded, I then present each narrator in turn. To maintain anonymity, I use pseudonyms that have been carefully selected by the lead RA, Thavachchelvi Rasan, that reflect their gender, age, religion, and other aspects of their identity.

Chapter Five comprises the first of two empirical chapters upon which this dissertation rests and focuses on an analysis of the gendered in/security described and made sense of by the narrators. I use these findings to draw links between these larger structural forces and the ability of gender and development programming to contend with these, thus contributing to the structure/agency debates explored in Chapter Two. First, I recall some of the major contributions from CFST that are directly related to the findings revealed through this research. I also present a reflection on the politically specific time and place in which this research was conducted, offering commentary on the factors that led to what I term an ‘opening for inquiry.’ Thereafter, this chapter is organized around four major themes raised by narrators: widowhood and in/security; lack of state protection and justice; threat and actual sexual and other forms of violence; and the impact of gendered in/security on behaviour, movements, and access to resources, including gender and development programming. I relate each section to the relevant CFST contribution presented at the outset of the chapter and return to a more nuanced discussion of this in the final section.

As the second empirical chapter, Chapter Six explores empowerment, agency, and the meaning of development programming from the perspectives of the narrators, focussing on how they make sense of their encounters with gender and development programming. First, I present a brief history of gender and development programming in Sri Lanka and offer insight into the political and historical context of NGOs and development programming in the country, with a focus on gender and development programs in the post-war period. Next, I discuss findings that reveal new articulations of empowerment and insights into how agency is expressed and exercised within the sociocultural context. I reveal new articulations of empowerment – as courage, as independence, and as moving into new spaces – and point to several factors that have

led to what narrators describe as something akin to empowerment. I then move on to explore the role and meaning of development programming from the perspectives of development constituents, focusing on network creation and opportunities, and the social value placed on monitoring and evaluation exercises of NGOs. Before moving into a considered discussion on the findings presented in this chapter, I explore how the prevailing trauma related to the war has influenced the extent to which narrators are able to access gender and development programming and opportunities presented by the development apparatus.

In Chapter Seven, I conclude with a presentation of the empirical, theoretical, and methodological contributions that this dissertation makes to the wider literature and body of knowledge around gender, development and in/security. I present four contributions that this research makes to CFST, as well as further empirical and theoretical contributions, including new articulations of empowerment, the problematizing the static dichotomies of passive recipient/active giver, and further development of the concept of restricted agency.

Methodologically, this section also presents contributions towards new ways of conducting evaluation and data collection exercises, suggesting opportunities for innovative approaches such as partnerships between development actors, scholars, and constituents. I close this chapter with some directions for further research, and a final note of dedication.

CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review, Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

After Beijing: Gender and Development in the Mainstream

In 1995, the Beijing Platform for Action for Women ushered in a new era of approaches, tools, and frameworks to guide how gender relations might be re-imagined, re-drawn, and how societies might make solid advances towards gender equality. Amongst the most widely taken up and applied tools across the development sector include gender mainstreaming, a move towards a Gender and Development (GAD)⁶ approach, and the introduction of new concepts such as ‘women’s empowerment’.

On the one hand, it can be argued that significant progress has been made since Beijing, evident in the fact that these concepts appear on several agendas and prominent policies, such as the proliferation of national Feminist Foreign Policies, including Canada’s recent Feminist International Assistance Policy, as well as several other domestic and international gender policies of major bilateral and multilateral donors. On the other hand, a common critique levied against the evolution and application of these terms is that while they were conceived within a political agenda – that is, to challenge and transform unequal power relations and patriarchal institutions – the interpretation of these concepts has often led to their sanitization and depoliticization. These rhetorical and theoretical critiques highlight the disconnect between the original intention and potential of gender mainstreaming, women’s empowerment and even gender itself, and their application which has, according to these critics, robbed these concepts of their full potential to be transformative (see [Cornwall, 2007](#); [Mukhopadhyay, 2007](#); [Parpart,](#)

⁶ For an overview of the evolution from Women in Development, Women and Development and Gender and Development approaches, please see Rathgeber (1990).

2014). Through these institutional applications, these tools have been defanged and made to fit within the existing (patriarchal, neo-liberal) structure, rather than working to challenge it from the outside. This repackaging has been in service of an efficiency model approach, whereby the successful achievement of development goals is prioritized over addressing the root causes of why development problems exist in the first place.

In this chapter, I first critically evaluate the key debates that surround the use and misuse of concepts that are central to gender and development programs and policies, namely gender mainstreaming, gender equality and women's empowerment. I conclude that despite valid charges from feminist scholars that these terms have been sanitized and depoliticized, empirical research is still required to investigate the value and potential to encourage transformative social change that would advance gender equality. Next, I illustrate two major gaps within the literature that undermine the current state of knowledge around the effectiveness and impacts of gender and development programming, specifically a dearth of both longitudinal and 'bottom up' perspectives from the recipients of development programming. I then discuss the challenges of measuring the complex, thorny and unquantifiable processes that characterize gender equality and highlight some offerings within the literature that work to overcome these challenges. I then move on to construct my theoretical and conceptual framework, drawing together the contributions of feminist post-development and post-structural approaches, Critical Feminist Security Theories (CFST), and Feminism and Development/Disasters (FAD²). Through the innovative combination of these three complementary theoretical approaches, I introduce and illustrate how key related concepts are interpreted, mobilized, and thereby inform the three theoretical pillars of this dissertation and speak to the context of the case study of Northern Sri Lanka. I then present a critical review of how various bodies of literature treat concepts of

gender, structure and agency; vulnerability and resilience; empowerment; militarization; and masculinities and femininities. This chapter ultimately demonstrates the rationale behind the theoretical and conceptual choices that I have taken to address my guiding research questions, and which reflect my ontological and epistemological orientation as a researcher.

Beyond the Buzz: Unpacking Women's Empowerment and Gender Mainstreaming

Although the introduction of women's empowerment may have been useful as a practical goal to mobilize development resources and efforts, women's empowerment has been 'hollowed out' and applied to development without due attention to the use of power or processes (Goldman & Little, 2015, p. 762). While 'women's empowerment' has become a term that has gained attention in recent decades, it has shifted the spotlight away from structural issues of social and economic justice and onto the self-improving individual. This has given rise to some pervasive and harmful 'gender myths' (Batliwala & Dhanraj, 2004), whereby women's empowerment has been co-opted by politicians, development agencies, and donors as an instrumentalist approach that privileges efficiency of programs and policies over the original thrust of women's empowerment, that of transforming social power relations to improve women's lives. Amongst these myths include the belief that improving poor women's access to economic resources will inherently empower women to drive development, and that including women in formal political structures will result in better "politics and policies that promote social and gender equality, peace and sustainable development", among other things (Batliwala & Dhanraj, 2004, p. 14). The emphasis on participation and technical solutions underpins this myth, which is particularly salient to the case of post-war gender mainstreamed programming in which this research is rooted.

The applications of gender mainstreaming within development have suffered the same charge as women's empowerment, as once-powerful concepts become watered down through the translation of policy into practice. Although proposed at the Beijing Platform for Action as the preeminent tool to foster positive change towards gender equality, an inadequate or misdirected understanding of what is entailed by gender mainstreaming has led to a "medley of interpretations that allow organizations and initiatives to (mis)represent their commitment to the goal of gender mainstreaming: that of gender equality" (Rathgeber & Vainio-Mattila, 2005). The concern that gender equality falls out of focus through the application of gender mainstreaming centers around a fundamental issue underlying the practice of gender mainstreaming, namely the failure to challenge the power structures that have led to gender inequality. Instead, gender mainstreaming is often expressed as merely including women as participants in development projects, rather than pursuing the higher goal of transformation (Parpart, 2014a). This approach of 'add women and stir' harkens back to the Women in Development (WID) approach of the 1970s, which did little to address underlying structural causes of gender inequality (Rathgeber, 1990). Even at the conceptual level, it is argued, gender mainstreaming "commits the user neither to a clear agenda on gender transformative action, nor to a clear institutional transformative agenda" (Subrahmanian, 2004, p. 117). Clearly, skepticism around the take up of gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment abounds.

In neo-liberal, instrumentalist and efficiency-oriented applications of women's empowerment and gender mainstreaming, the original political project that gave rise to these concepts to tackle the root causes of inequality and women's oppression in the first place become difficult to uncover. For example, Cornwall (2016) points to the World Bank's emphasis on 'assets' and 'opportunity structures', rather than facilitating access to assets or improving

institutions to work better for women. This dislocation of transformation and politics from the concept of empowerment is also apparent through examining the practical applications of women's empowerment policies and programs. In another example, the 2000 Human Development Report on Human Rights and Human Development (UNDP, 2000) mentions 'empowerment' everywhere, but with various meaning and no discussion on what these applications have in common (Drydyk, 2013). The concern registered by many critical feminists is that where applications of terms such as empowerment, gender and gender mainstreaming are dislocated from social relations, they cease to be transformative and thus are restricted in their potential to deliver transformative, lasting change. However, an overly deconstructive lens that is not embedded or reflected in the lived realities and everyday lives of people does little to advance political change. The critiques raised in relation to the limitations and failures of gender mainstreaming can lead to assumptions of the failure of development. However, more nuanced analyses are needed to fully examine the impact of gender mainstreamed programs through the lens of feminism, with attention to what political and structural changes are required.

Further complicating matters is the issue of multiple 'genders' and multiple 'feminisms', where these concepts are interpreted and applied in various ways that vary according to institutions, actors, regions, and myriad other variables. While the multiplicity of feminisms and interpretations of gender may be messy and difficult to contend with, it is nonetheless critically important to recognize locally constructed notions of feminism and gender relations and the need for context specificity (Rao & Tiessen, 2020). Nuancing our understanding of how these terms and approaches have been defined and applied in various contexts reveals the diverse interpretations of how to apply feminist values and concepts and can help avoid miscommunications. Beyond miscommunication, the pressures of norms articulated at the donor

or international NGO partner level can be counterproductive to the original political goals driving gender equality related goals, as articulated in the Beijing Platform for Action. In Sri Lanka, competing interpretations of gender mainstreaming – or ‘doing gender’ – led international NGOs to be disconnected from local realities while their local Sri Lankan community based organization counterparts manoeuvred around imposed gender policies to preserve their best interests (Attanapola et al., 2013).

Despite the above critiques around their interpretations and applications, little attention is paid to how the concepts attendant to gender and development are made sense of by the people on the ground who encounter them. This gap raises several pertinent yet unanswered questions: How are these larger norms at the international level interpreted and made sense of by individuals on the receiving end of the programs and policies that they shape? How do these interventions, and encounters with the development apparatus, shape alternative life courses, and how do people make sense of these changes in relation to the goals and aspirations of the ‘original intent’ of gender equality programming? What can we learn about political change, structural change, underlying issues, and the role of agency, in a more nuanced way through a more longitudinal methodological approach centered around life histories? What new knowledge can be contributed around empowerment that tells a bigger story, beyond simply adhering to donor requirements and ‘ticking boxes’? Do the credible normative argument by feminists who are dissatisfied with the faulty applications of gender equality, gender mainstreaming, women’s empowerment and other feminist projects negate the potential for these tools to encourage positive social and political change? These are the underlying questions propel this research project, which seeks to understand how men and women make sense of their encounters with gender and development programming.

Gender In/Equality and Development Programming: Longitudinal, ‘Bottom-Up’ Perspectives Required

Development actors such as local and international NGOs face numerous challenges in delivering, monitoring and evaluation gender and development programs. Pressure to spend program money within a given period dictated by donors place organizations in a particular quandary as they must implement programs that address social processes that require time to take root in an artificially short timeframe (Kalungu-Banda, 2004). The ability for programs to address long-term social change but which are funded by short-term funding cycles is thus highly questionable. What is commonly missing from analyses of aid and donor-funded programmes, however, is a long-term approach that is equipped to understand how interventions have impacted the lives of beneficiaries well beyond the project cycle. My research, thus, takes a longitudinal approach that seeks to uncover these impacts.

The critical literature addressing aid effectiveness and the location of gender equality within this discourse is currently incomplete. In addition to the lack of empirical research into the long-term impacts of gender mainstreaming, the limited theoretical research suggests that its potential to positively transform lives has not been fully realised (Parpart, 2014a; Subrahmanian, 2004). Reasons for this hinderance include the common misinterpretation of ‘gender’ as being synonymous with ‘women’ (Cornwall, 2007; Grown et al., 2016); that gender work is often relegated to junior female staff (OECD, 2013); and that gender perspectives are often deprioritized during and after emergencies, a phenomenon known as the ‘tyranny of the urgent’ (Attanapola et al., 2013; Mukhopadhyay, 2007; Rees, 2005).

Further, positive shifts towards achieving gender equality entail long-term, complex social processes that take years – if not generations – to take root, however most programs are bound to short-term funding cycles (Richey, 2000). Many guiding policies on gender equality

and gender mainstreaming that are articulated by multilateral development organizations, including bilateral and donors and United Nations agencies, make mention of the long-term goal of gender equality (see for example [European Commission, 2010](#); [Hinrichsen, et al., 2014](#); [UN Women, 2014](#)). The focus is almost exclusively on the process of integrating gender into the programming cycle, which may include monitoring and evaluation in the short-term, but rarely in the long term. This short-sighted tendency of the aid industry has led to a dearth of knowledge on how gender mainstreaming and programs intended to promote gender equality impact individuals and communities in the long run, beyond limited program cycles of a handful of years.

The required investments of time, funding, and human resources to assess the long-term and complex changes related to gender equality are rarely allocated to such pursuits. Rather, the bias within the normative frameworks has often rested on the articulation of changes in gender equality that are translated into “specific and measurable targets and indicators that reflect the specific direction and scope of the programme interventions” (UN Women, 2014, p. 24) . Where research has begun to probe into aid effectiveness relative to gender equality, the unit of measure has often been quantitative, focussing on ‘counting the women’ (Beetham & Demetriades, 2007; Grown et al., 2016). This approach to measuring effectiveness is reflexive of a limited yet mainstreamed Women in Development (WID) approach, which fails to address the larger structural factors that contribute to inequality (C. O. N. Moser, 1993; Rathgeber, 1990).

There have been significant research and insights generated by feminist researchers and civil society on the mechanics of gender mainstreaming, and how donors and NGOs have variously taken up the agenda to promote gender equality through gender mainstreaming as a principle. Ethnographic and other anthropologically-informed research on NGOs and other

development institutions have shown how gendered dynamics characteristic of wider society are often reflected in the organizational functioning and implementation of gender mainstreaming (Tiessen, 2007), as well as the creative solutions staff members employ to navigate around these dynamics and the institutional pull towards a substantialist agenda to actually pursue a more relational agenda that is more generally associated with ideas of process and complexity (Eyben, 2010; Tiessen, 2007). Other research into how the normative frameworks on gender equality and women's rights is conceived and transmitted across all levels of the development apparatus, from government and donor-level rhetoric through to implementing agencies, has also shown that gender equality-informed foreign aid contributes to the diffusion of these norms in the global south (Swiss & Fallon, 2017). While these institution-focussed insights help us understand how the goals and paths to gender equality are conceptually understood, negotiated, and eventually translated into development programming, the voices of those on the receiving end of such programming remain out of focus.

The literature on the impact of gender equality rhetoric on aid effectiveness and much of the discussion on how gender mainstreaming is taken up has centered on the institutional level. That is, the focus has been on the rhetorical framing of these concepts at the policy level and the practical application at the implementation level. Much less has been written on the impact of gender mainstreaming and gender targeted programs from the perspectives of the recipients. Further research and empirical contributions from individuals and communities are thus required to understand the extent to which gender mainstreamed programming has enabled certain gendered processes to unfold, including the reshaping of gendered power relations and power structures. This crucial piece lies beyond the institutional focus of aid effectiveness, and calls for new research, such as this study.

There have been some notable studies that have deployed more anthropological methods to delve into questions revolving around recipients' experiences with aid programming as well as changes in women's empowerment (M. B. Anderson et al., 2012; Petesch, 2011). Anderson et al.'s (2012) path-breaking multi-country listening study solicited the opinions and experiences of over 6,000 people residing in twenty countries where international aid programming had been provided. Anderson et al.'s research has inspired my own through the authors' approach to spotlighting the stakeholders of international aid, specifically 'beneficiaries' or constituents. Anderson et al.'s work unearths fresh perspectives into how international aid writ large is received and made sense of by various stakeholders, including government and local leaders, wealthy and less wealthy business owners, and "average villagers" (pg. 1), and helps fill an important knowledge gap emanating from 'bottom up' perspectives. However, the scope and breadth of this listening project is far too large to meaningfully address the specific research questions that my research poses, namely how recipients of gender mainstreamed development programs make sense of their experiences within complex lives in a post-war context.

Another study closely aligned with my research is Petesch's (2011) four-country⁷ study on women's empowerment that applied the 'life stories' method, similar to the life histories method applied in my own research. Although methodologically similar in that the voices of 'beneficiaries' provided the bulk of the data, this study differed from my own in that it employed a more rigid analytical framework that numerically scored women's responses against a pre-determined rubric with five thematic areas. This process may have inadvertently obscured some of the subtler findings that may have emerged from using a more flexible analytical approach. Nonetheless, the findings generated from Petesch's research are compelling and helpful to

⁷ This study was conducted in four 'conflict-affected' countries: Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Colombia and the Philippines.

understand the relationship between women's empowerment and the prevailing (in)security context that continue to shape women's lives in the post-war context in Sri Lanka. This acknowledgement of how agency and structural elements interact to produce the conditions of women's empowerment outcomes is in parallel with some of the major arguments that are supported by the data collected for the research that informs this dissertation.

Measuring a Moving Target: The Challenges of Producing 'Evidence' of Change in Gender In/Equality and Empowerment

The prevailing norms around gender and development within international policy commitments have favoured quantifiable measures of development progress (Fehling et al., 2013; Fukuda-Parr et al., 2014; A. Moser, 2007). Although much of the programs, policies and paradigm shifts related to gender equality and women's empowerment have been influenced by research produced under the GAD framework, there remains an absence of a clear methodology to identify and measure progress (Beetham & Demetriades, 2007). Several efforts in recent years have been attempted, including the United Nations Gender-Related Development Index (GDI), the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM), and various methods articulated in the Beijing Platform for Action +10, the Millennium Development Goals and its later iteration, the Sustainable Development Goals. The latest tools developed by development institutions have made some progress in uncovering otherwise ignored aspects of gender and development programming and progress, however these metrics often miss the mark. For example, in 2015, UN Women introduced the Gender Equality Programming (GEP) Index, a new tool to capture causal linkages between gender quality programming and "effectiveness and inclusiveness of humanitarian interventions" (UN Women, 2015, p. 5). However, this new metric captures only women's participation, which is a limited interpretation of equality that sidelines more complex social and political dynamics. The exclusion of men and other groups is a missed opportunity

reflective of a wider tendency to ‘talk gender’ but ‘do women’ (see Kalungu-Banda, 2004).

These composite and stand-alone indices are often accompanied by sophisticated frameworks of indicators and targets. Accordingly, there is a substantial body of critical literature that offers feminist critiques of these attempts at crafting standard indices and frameworks to measure gender equality (see for example Fehling et al., 2013; Kabeer, 2005; Subrahmanian, 2005).

While offering a starting point, these approaches to identifying change are often focussed on visible economic and political gains. The focus on what is measurable effectively sidesteps the deep-seated structural factors at play, especially when examining complex social processes such as gender relations at individual, institutional and societal levels. What is needed, therefore, are improved gender-sensitive methods of measurement, which feminists advocated for at the Beijing Platform for Action.

From the donor perspective, Canada was the first OECD member to produce a performance assessment framework for gender equality, which influenced a shift within the agency from objectives to results. The Canadian International Development Agency’s (CIDA) *Guide to Gender-Sensitive Indicators* demonstrates the agency’s sophisticated understanding of the debate around using indicators to measure gender equality processes⁸. This document discusses both sides of the debate introduced in the previous section. On the one hand, indicators can be powerful (albeit mainly quantitative) tools to uncover information that highlight important advances that women have made in economic, political, and social domains, as captured in Human Development Reports. On the other hand, and what CIDA recognized, is that these indicators are insufficient to fully capture women’s experiences and, by extension, the

⁸ In 2013, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) merged to form Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade, and Development (DFATD), currently known as Global Affairs Canada (GAC).

structural processes that underwrite gender inequality. As the *Guide* states, “[a]ll indicators have their political heritage and bias. This is important because certain types of indicators, particularly so-called quantitative indicators, receive legitimacy as they are considered ‘objective’” (CIDA, 1997, p. 5). Here, CIDA clearly recognizes the political nature of indicators and the temptation to place too much stock in quantitative indicators. This recognition on the part of CIDA is an attempt to avoid unleashing the “power of numbers”, or the primacy of quantifiable units over messier, more qualitative ways to communicate data (Fukuda-Parr et al., 2014).

It is critical to distinguish between attribution and contribution when examining gender equality results. Innovative participatory approaches and tools have been developed (see (Chambers, 1994; Earl et al., 2001) based on the recognition that when addressing complex social change processes, it is often inadequate or even impossible to seek attribution – or whether or not a given change occurred as a result of an intervention. Rather, measuring the extent to which an action contributed to an observed change is not only more feasible, but it also provides valuable insight into successes along the theory of change that searching only for causality would miss altogether. In line with this approach, CIDA presents its understanding of gender equality results as referring to “results that *contribute* to reducing inequality between women and men in accordance with the [Gender Equality] Policy” (CIDA, 2005, p. 2, emphasis mine). All of this points to the necessity to develop alternative ways to explore the subtle and complex changes in gender relations that go beyond measurable indicators. The qualitative methods that I applied to this study provides one example of the benefits of depth over breadth, but also demonstrates the intense resources – both on the part of the researcher as well as the research participants – required to unearth such rich understandings and findings. These challenges and possible ways to mitigate them are discussed in the subsequent chapters and the conclusion of this dissertation.

Central to this research is the issue of how to specifically measure complex social processes and concepts such as empowerment and gender equality has been debated in the literature, with a common starting point that recognizes the complexity of crafting such a metric. Some have argued, for example, that the strength of women's empowerment lies precisely in its ambiguity (Batliwala, 1993; Kabeer, 1999a), thus creating space for the term to be defined and applied (and measured) according to the context and user. However, this poses challenges for a technocratically-minded development industry that is preoccupied by measurement and evidence. Many agency-level measures of empowerment resort to technical, quantifiable and corollary indicators, such as women's participation in government or girls' education indicators (see for example Grown et al., 2016). As Parpart et al. (2002) sagely warn, the obsession with measuring empowerment, rather than understanding its processes and how they link to local, regional, national and global dynamics, can come at the expense of transformative outcomes.

While tempting to focus on achievements to measure empowerment, the restricted nature of some women's choices may be a better reflection of power rather than choice, particularly when women's choices reflect what some literature refers to as an "internalized social status of the lesser" (Kabeer, 1999a, pp. 440–441). The equation of 'power' to 'choice' here is problematic and must be recognized within any useful system of measuring empowerment. Others have pointed to the importance of including a security perspective in any measurement of empowerment, particularly in post-war settings, since violence (structural and interpersonal) and abuse cross-cut women's empowerment (Hossain, 2011). Further, the role of values in examining choices and interpretations indicators are imperative, as is "ensuring that etic judgements are informed by, and sensitive to, emic values if the voice and agency of

subordinated groups is not to be suppressed by powerful outsiders who may have only a tenuous grasp on their realities” (Kabeer, 1999b, p. vi).

Ultimately, any indicator that seeks to measure empowerment or gender equality, no matter how fulsomely it may account for values and meaning, is inherently a “snapshot” in time, and is therefore ill-equipped to predict the process of change since “human agency is indeterminate and hence unpredictable” (Kabeer, 1999a, p. 47). These critiques point to the need for more ethnographic, anthropological methods that create space for meaning making on the part of ‘insiders’, or in the case of this research, the constituents of development programming. Further, more expansive, longitudinal approaches to understanding the ebbs and flows of the process of empowerment – and thus, of agency – requires a longitudinal approach. Life histories pursued with loosely semi-structured tools, such as listening sessions, have been applied in this research precisely to address these critiques.

Currently, the prevailing norm to measure and report on impact remains situated in a rigid framework often not fit for purpose when discussing the dynamics of gender equality, women’s empowerment or agency. Recognizing the limitations of conventional ways of tracking outcome-level results, more nuanced, flexible, and ultimately feminist approaches to measuring changes in gender equality have emerged. Analysts have called for and created new monitoring and evaluation frameworks and tools that emphasize diversity, flexibility, inclusivity and experience of in/equality (Beetham & Demetriades, 2007; Tiessen & Grantham, 2021). This emphasis on *experiencing* gender in/equality is at the heart of this research, which creates the space for those on the receiving end of programming to articulate for themselves what it is like to move through their gendered world. However, even these cutting-edge qualitative feminist methodologies are limited by their short-term scope of examining impacts that take place over

two- to five- year program cycles. Again, this falls short of examining the longitudinal trajectory of lives, and how gender relations unfold, constitute, and reproduce over time and through interactions with other structural forces, such as war and in/security.

Practitioners are currently still bound by institutional realities, which may or may not change in the future to open new, longer-term horizons of monitoring, evaluation, and knowledge production. In the meantime, complementary partnerships between scholars and practitioners can provide opportunities as scholars have different freedoms and flexibilities, timeframes, funding sources, not to mention methodological skills and often contextual expertise (Buick et al., 2016; Chernikova, 2011; Tiessen & Smillie, 2017). Rather than solving a governmental issue, I echo what others have pointed to as available alternatives to complement and contribute knowledge that can be mobilized given the limitations of government evaluation techniques such as the prevailing Results-Based Management framework (Tiessen & Smillie, 2017). Scholar/practitioner partnerships can, *inter alia*, unlock other data collection strategies and can ultimately enhance knowledge production and use.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The primary focus of this research is to understand how individuals express and make sense of their encounters with gender and development programming in a post-war setting. In order to situate these experiences, it is imperative to understand the underpinning concepts and theories that have led to the design and implementation of such gender mainstreamed projects in conflict-affected settings, and indeed the history and propelling forces behind development writ large that underwrites these projects. As such, my study is informed by feminist post-development and post-structuralism; critical feminist security theories; and the feminism and development/feminism and disasters (FAD²) framework. In this section, I will analyze the

suitability of each theory, approach, and concept, and present how each has contributed to my theoretical framework. I will also introduce how the concepts of militarization, agency, masculinities and femininities and the construction of gender are understood and inform this research.

Feminist Post-Development and Post-Structural Approaches

Until the 1970s, women were largely absent from development discourse and practice, invisible in the eyes of donors, NGOs and national development planners (Kothari, 2002). Kothari offers two major assumptions that drove the boxing out of women within development planning. First, since national statistics and economic data were not disaggregated by sex, the interests and status of men were taken as a stand-in to represent the entire population, including women. Second, it was assumed that traditional gender roles held true in most if not all cases, dictating that women were confined to family and childcare roles, or “reproductive work”, while men engaged in economic breadwinning activities outside of the home, or “productive work” (C. O. N. Moser, 1993). These assumptions led to an inherent male bias within development discourse, which translated into development practice. One example of how this bias is articulated is the use of seemingly gender-neutral terms such as ‘the economy’ and ‘the household’ that collapse and obscure gender differences in the roles, experiences and inequalities experienced by men and women within these terms, pointing to a bias “that both obscures and legitimates ill-founded gender asymmetry, in which to be male is normal but to be female is deviant” (Elson, 1995, p. 9). Other feminist scholars have illuminated how the very production of knowledge and privileging of male knowledge rooted in male experiences has been problematic within development processes (Bailey et al., 2000; Edström, 2014). Feminist challenges to development epistemology have provided crucial contributions to development discourse and

shape my own research methods and design. Put simply, when the origins and value of knowledge are challenged from a feminist perspective, new insights and understandings emerge into how development processes impact various groups differently.

The querying of power relations, and the politicization of development policies and projects comprise the central contributions of post-development thought. Of particular interest to this study, feminist post-development scholars have argued that women in the third world have been subjected to the representation by and imagining of the West, and that women's lives have been understood through this Western-centric prism (Mohanty, 1984; Wood, 2001). In reaction to the post-development theorists that reject the modern and seek to return to primordial ways of living and being, Spivak (1988) usefully points out the relationship between how marginalized groups are represented and the (often privileged) positioning of those who write about them and speak on their behalf. Here she sends out an important call to theorists and researchers to be aware of and mitigate how one's own experiences can 'imprint' particular values and perspectives on those who are represented in their studies. This elegant point has been a guiding principle for this study, which seeks to understand individuals who can be considered marginalized or subaltern not only through their experience as war survivors, but also by virtue of their distinction by development actors as 'beneficiaries'.

As Kothari succinctly summarizes, "[p]ostcolonial feminists have stressed that the primary concern of postcolonialism is to decentre Western knowledge and the primary concern of feminism is to decentre masculinist knowledge" (Kothari, 2002, p. 46). However, the primary pitfall of treating the issues of gender bias and colonial oppression as separate and discrete projects is that this oversimplifies the dynamics of power within society (Kothari, 2002). Postcolonial feminists have successfully challenged this artificial divide by exploring coloniality

through a gender lens, and through establishing a connection between race, class, gender and imperialism. To further respond to this unhelpful separation, my research is also informed by an intersectional approach, whereby the interlocking factors of identity of individuals and groups can and must be analyzed together as mutually reinforcing to produce unique interactions with power and privilege (Crenshaw, 1989).

As with post-development, post-modernism arose as a reaction to mainstream discourse, becoming popular due to the rejection of metanarratives in the context of the cultural hegemony of neoliberal thought and practice. Postmodernism rejects universal, simplified definitions of social phenomena that essentialize reality and obscure the intricacies and complexities of lived experiences (Marchand & Parpart, 2003). Rather, postmodernists call for localized, specific and historical analysis of these phenomena. Examining how women (and men, and others) are essentialized by the term ‘feminization of poverty’, for example, highlights the limitations of this framing (see Medeiros & Costa, 2010). Derrida’s concept of binary opposites illustrates that Western philosophy largely rests on dichotomies, such as male/female whereby the primacy of the first term depends on the subordination of the second. Incorporating intersectionality of other diversity factors such as race and class explodes binary distinctions of male/female and challenges these categories’ essentialization as static and homogenous. Marchand and Parpart (2003) effectively relate this tendency towards essentialization to Said’s concept of ‘orientalization’ to illustrate how women in the Third World historically do not control their own narratives, and are therefore often grouped together into a monolith and essentialized. Spivak takes this further, charging that the clearest example of her notion of epistemic violence, or violence exerted against or through knowledge with the intent to dominate, is the “remotely

orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other” (Spivak, 1988, p. 76).

Men are not immune from being essentialized, which can have an impact on project objectives related to gender equality. As seen through the framing of men’s roles in advancing gender equality within policy and program documents such as Canada’s Feminist Foreign Assistance Policy (Global Affairs Canada, 2017), men are often essentialized as ‘allies’ of women, where women are cast as the only actors working towards their own empowerment. This presupposes that men are stakeholders only in their role as cheerleaders from the sidelines, rather than recognizing men’s role in actively reinforcing or even resisting entrenched patriarchal structures that reproduce gender inequality. Even in the literature, there is a tendency to cast men as allies and supporters, rather than co-creators or co-drivers of change that would propel (or hinder) advancement towards gender equality. For example, Kabeer treads a fine line of essentializing men precisely in this way when she states that “men’s willingness to ally themselves with women in their struggles for gender justice will provide a powerful reinforcement of the momentum for change” (Kabeer, 2010, p. 108). While it is important that dominant groups support a shift in the power balance, it is arguably equally important that men and boys actively challenge the harmful aspects of their own gender identities.

Post-colonial, post-structural and post-development approaches and theories have shone important and much-needed critical light onto mainstream theories of development, raising questions that merit answers and further inquiry. However, on their own they do not adequately embrace a consistently feminist framework and are therefore insufficient to fully answer my research questions. In order to do so, therefore, this study is further informed by feminist debates

around concepts of gender, structure and agency, and insights revealed through the literature emerging from Critical Feminist Security theories.

Gender, Structure and Agency

Debates within the social sciences surrounding structure vs. agency have waged for decades, with some of the most prominent contributions emerging from sociology and anthropology (Giddens, 1979; Ortner, 1984; Sewell, 1992; Thornton et al., 2012). While wading into this well-rehearsed debate risks becoming tedious, it is important to explore how the main critiques, and propositions, of these approaches can be applied to understanding the dynamics inherent in how gender mainstreamed development programs are conceived – and received.

Following post-modern and post-structuralist critiques within various disciplines, as well as social movements in the late 1980s and 1990s, the ‘agentive turn’ emerged as a response to “impersonal master narratives” that did not account for acts of opposition or resistance on the part of individuals and groups (Ahearn, 2001, p. 110). Multiple definitions of agency have been put forth for consideration. *Agency as free will* or *agency as choice* is perhaps the most common of these definitions, seeking to explain decisions individuals make (Ahearn, 2001). However, the influence of cultural and social contexts that form one’s capacity to act is not captured in this conception, nor are the context-specific structural boundaries that limit available choices to an individual or group. Further, the over-association of agency with choice has been critiqued as reflective of Western ideals of autonomy, such as understanding how wearing the veil can be seen both as an act of resistance if done as part of a resistance, but less agentic if done for religious reasons (Hemmings & Treacher Kabesh, 2013). Another interpretation of agency that has emerged in anthropological and feminist circles is *agency as resistance*. However, as Ortner

(1995) points out, there is no such thing as pure resistance. Rather, motivations that lead women (and men) to resist, comply, ignore or rally are highly complex (MacLeod, 1992).

In writings on empowerment, agency has also been defined as *agency as power within*, or the “ability to define one’s goals and act upon them” which is often invisible and yet imbues actions with meaning, purpose and motivation (Kabeer, 1999b, p. 438). This interpretation of agency resonates with my own research, which uncovers ways in which inner motivations and resources that reside within narrators served as driving forces that propelled their own recovery from war and fueled their desire to bring about positive change for them and their families.

Recognizing the internal processes associated with journeys of empowerment, the concept of conscientization has been a driving element of empowerment theory and discourse (Cronin-Furman et al., 2017). Rooted in the pivotal work of Freire (1970) around critical consciousness, conscientization refers to the psychological process whereby an individual gains power through a dynamic process of consciousness that reveals the systems and impacts of oppression and exclusion that influence people’s experiences (Carr, 2003; Montero, 2014). The process of conscientization is inherently political, and is sometimes framed within the empowerment literature as *power within* (Kabeer, 1999a), since the goal of conscientization is to transform how one views their position within society and contends with experiences of oppression and powerlessness (Carr, 2003). Much like the related components of empowerment, the application of conscientization within development discourse and practice has been criticized for being subverted and reduced from a personal political process of uncovering structures of oppression to a simplistic focus on skills and training (Cronin-Furman et al., 2017). The process of conscientization and the extent to which development programming influences this process – even when the two are clumsily confounded in practice – is a useful point of inquiry to better

understand how the potential for empowerment, agency, power shifts and conscientization may unfold, despite programmatic shortcomings.

Amongst the various efforts to define and conceptualize the term ‘agency’, Ahearn stands out as amongst the most useful for this study due to the flexibility of its articulation. Ahearn proposes a starting point for understanding agency as “the socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (Ahearn, 2001, p. 112). Acutely relevant is the emphasis on the possibility to interpret “socioculturally mediated capacity” that underscores the relational tensions between structure and agency that produce limited choices in which individuals and communities may act, and into which this study delves. This application of agency also recognizes that “gender should be linked as a structural property of social organization and as a property of actors” (Wharton, 1991, p. 373), highlighting the interconnectedness of structure/agency and making room for a feminist analysis of the gender hierarchies of social organization. That is, assuming a feminist approach to structure and agency requires uncovering and accounting for the ways in which gender hierarchies shape the macrostructure, such as economic processes, conflict, and institutions, as well as patriarchal social relations amongst and between individuals and groups. Ahearn’s definitional starting point above also makes room for Kabeer’s exploration into the inner motivations, meaning and purpose captured in her articulation of ‘power within’. This definition also allows for an exploration of the interplay between agency and structure and how this dynamic creates the conditions for different groups of women and men to express agency in different contexts.

First developed by Molyneux (1985) and later advanced by Moser (1993), the distinction between practical gender needs and strategic gender interests is useful for analyzing how women (and men) make choices under constrained conditions, perpetuated by patriarchal norms and

other structural factors. While practical needs serve an immediate purpose to smoothly perform gendered tasks within defined roles such as mothers, caregivers, wives and community workers, fulfilling practical needs does little to challenge the overall status of women and other oppressed groups within a society. Strategic gender needs, however, work towards the higher goals of transforming patriarchal norms and oppressive structures and challenge women's (and others') subordinate position within society. In subsequent chapters, I explore expressions of agency through the decisions that individuals and communities can make within socioculturally-mediated contexts and reflect both practical needs and strategic gender interests.

Pertinent to the Sri Lankan context, many scholars have disrupted the trope of women as passive victims of war, particularly through analyzing women's agency as active members of the LTTE (Gowrinathan, 2012; Rajasingham-Senanayake, 2004). In her work analyzing the everyday of life in disaster- and conflict-affected Batticaloa, Sri Lanka, Walker highlights that dichotomous tropes of victim/perpetrator or hero/martyr are unhelpful as they obscure the "endurance" of everyday of life, and thereby miss all of the nuance of experience that takes place between suffering and agency (2010, p. 14).

Approaches that privilege agency over structure, or reject the role of structure altogether, obscure the myriad ways that social structures influence the extent to which one can make choices, and act in their or their communities' best interests. Further, the neoliberal idea of an individual overcoming obstacles to achieve betterment and advancement is inherently rooted in a modernist idea. The notion that one is able to pull oneself up from their bootstraps and achieve greatness is the great myth of neoliberal capitalism and is rooted in patriarchal norms.

In this dissertation, I apply the term 'restricted agency' to refer to the relationship between structure and agency where individuals make choices from a limited selection of options

that is socioculturally mediated and reflective of multiple hierarchies and contextual factors. As the debate around structure/agency has moved forward, it has become clear that that it is neither agency nor structure that wholly explains nor can solely untangle the complex web of factors that shape our daily lives. Moving beyond the artificial dichotomy or mutual exclusivity of structure and agency creates space to examine how individual and collective agency can sometimes lead to systemic change but can also rub up against the limiting structural factors of patriarchal norms, which can prove too powerful to overcome (Madhok et al., 2013).

The ways in which these dynamics limit or constrain agency, however, remains undertheorized. While other iterations of restricted agency appear in various bodies of literature, these are often framed in slightly different manners and are not as expansive or flexible as the concept of restricted agency. Madhok et al. (2013) for example invoke the concept of ‘coercion’ to highlight the mitigating forces of subordination and oppression that stand in opposition of agency framed in more positive terms of freedom, autonomy and independence. Another articulation of restricted agency is ‘situated agency’, which draws upon the work of Amartya Sen and refers to the motivations and constraints under which people act (Peter, 2003). However, situated agency does not sufficiently account for the subversive ways in which people act as a form of resistance, but which may be perceived as an act of submission (Hoan et al., 2016). The choice to apply and further develop the term restricted agency furthers my argument that the various forms of agency exercised by the narrators can only be understood within the contextually specific historical, social and political confines of the structural limitations that are imposed and remain unchallenged, not least by development programming. These dynamics are central to this study, which illustrates, amongst other things, how the interrelationship of

structure/agency interacts with journeys of empowerment and changes in social relations, and how individuals in turn make sense of these processes.

Rethinking Vulnerability and Resilience

Mainstream interpretations of ‘vulnerability’ often assign a seemingly static, inherent quality to particular groups, thereby rendering them “stigmatized subjects” (Fineman, 2010) that often strips them of their agency. Further, some framings of ‘vulnerability’ inevitably lead to the construction of the ‘vulnerable other’, which are heavily steeped in gender essentialisms that see particularly women as incapable of escaping their fixed state of being ‘vulnerable’. In conflict-affected contexts, the construction of “civilians” is often tied up with distorted gender associations of women and children as “innocent” and “vulnerable,” despite significant differences within these groups (Carpenter, 2005). As an alternative, Fineman (2010) proposes a conception of vulnerability that describes “a universal, inevitable, enduring aspect of the human condition” (pg. 8). This understanding of vulnerability acknowledges that all humans can be vulnerable to misfortune, catastrophic events, harm, and injury. Vulnerability is also inherently gendered. Crises do not take place in a vacuum. Rather, communities and individuals experience are impacted by deeply gendered social, political, and institutional contexts. These contexts must be understood through an analysis of pre-existing social and power relations not only to avoid essentializing women as the ‘natural’ and automatic victims of war, crisis, and emergencies, but also to imagine what kinds of changes would be needed at the individual, community, and societal levels to address situations of vulnerability.

Adopting the seemingly more agentic language of ‘resilience’ and ‘resiliency’, thus, may seem tempting. In recent years, this term has made its way into white papers, donor documents, United Nations and World Bank reports, policies, and a growing number of scholarly articles. As

Neocleous (2013) observes, invoking the language of ‘resilience’ is increasingly replacing the stand-alone mention of security within development and political discourse. This trend is troublesome in that it pursues a neoliberal agenda through emphasizing “the relationship between the economic development of neoliberal subjectivity and the political development of resilient citizenship” (Neocleous, 2013, p. 5). This construction of resilience works to download responsibility to constituents of development, in line with the neoliberal, efficiency models of empowerment that center the individual and draw attention away from the larger structural limitations that fall under the purview of duty bearers, such as the state. Emphasizing resilience also obscures gender relations (Fainstein, 2015), and with it the pursuit of justice and dissuades the holding to account of those who have created or been complicit in acts of injustice in the first place. As Sarah Mourad succinctly argues, “[r]esilience celebrates survival at the expense of justice. It is the rhetorical and symbolic symptom of the normalization of injustice” (Mourad, 2020, p. 1).

The term ‘vulnerability’ – like so many other terms that this study reckons with – is ambiguous, contested, and complex. While women experience vulnerability differently from men, vulnerability is not confined by gender relations, but is rather shaped by them.

Moving away from the problematic nature of both vulnerability and resilience, ‘chronic adversities’ offers a more useful framing that emphasizes the larger contextual, structural, and societal factors that influence how groups and individuals experience shocks and stress. Chronic adversities can include occupation, war, and economic devastation (Thompson, 2014), but also allows for an examination of more community- and societal-level phenomenon, including the construction of patriarchal gender norms and inequalities. Situations of vulnerability, therefore, are inextricably linked to context or, put another way, consistent to the framing of this

dissertation, to the prevailing structural context of gendered insecurity. Therefore, I resist the urge to resort to seemingly more optimistic yet problematic language of resilience when discussing situations of vulnerability, while taking care not to undermine the agentic nature of the individual and community. Instead, I invoke the term chronic adversities to highlight the contextual factors that mitigate the processes of empowerment, and disempowerment, that are described by the narrators of this study.

Power and Patriarchy

In order to deepen our understanding of empowerment, we must first delve into its central underlying concept: power. The theorization of power has been a fascination of social science in general and is deeply relevant to the discourse on empowerment and agency. Writing at the time when the thinking of empowerment was first emerging, Rowlands (1997) observed that most frameworks proposed within the social sciences that aimed to understand power were blind to gender, class, race and other forms of oppression, and made no mention of how power is distributed within societies. This critique spurred several feminist scholars to query power through a feminist lens, which brought in these intersectional dimensions that illuminated how power operates between and amongst individuals and social relations. Foucault's (1980, 1983) earlier foundational work usefully conceives of power as relational, non-finite and therefore incompatible with previous interpretations of power as a zero-sum game. This point is central to discussions on empowerment and challenge the notion that if a woman is empowered, it is at the expense of another, often men.

Power is enmeshed with patriarchy with both working together to produce situations of oppression that are highly gendered. Patriarchy can be understood as “a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (Walby, 1989, p.

215). Although patriarchy as an analytical tool has been criticized for its inability to account for other asymmetries and aspects of oppression and inequality (Giddens, 2006), there have emerged more accommodating frameworks for patriarchy that account for history, class, ethnicity and other factors, and which also contribute to but can at times diverge from the objectives of capitalism. Walby, for example, proposes a six-pronged framework of patriarchy that encompasses the interrelated structures of “the patriarchal mode of production, patriarchal relations in paid work, patriarchal relations in the state, male violence, patriarchal relations in sexuality, and patriarchal relations in cultural institutions” (Walby, 1989, p. 215). This framework is helpful to untangle how patriarchal norms, policies and practices manifest in various structures of daily life and emphasize how they operate simultaneously independent yet co-constituting of one another. This dynamic can be seen through the lens of power and empowerment when examining various notions of power, such as power as resistance.

When it comes to conflicts between people, the expressions of power can effectively eliminate the possibility of productive conflict through “shaping [people’s] perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they can see or imagine no alternative to it, or because they see it as natural and unchangeable or because they value it is divinely ordained and beneficial” (Lukes, 1974, pp. 23–24). We can use this understanding of power to view patriarchy as a system that seeks to impose an artificial zero-sum game of power whereby sociocultural norms and expectations levied upon women and men diminish or even eradicate the opportunity for women and men (and other groups) to challenge, dissent or transgress these norms, and thereby upholding and reproducing situations of oppression of certain gender groups. However, as this dissertation illustrates, despite the patriarchal demands that would see productive social conflict

eliminated, individuals and communities are able to overcome these impositions and pursue a path of conscientization that inspires action and choices that would conflict with traditional patriarchal norms.

Foucault emphasizes that power is not something that is possessed but rather exercised – power as a “mode of action upon actions” (1983, p. 220) – and that power is intimately tied to knowledge production. While Foucault advances our understanding of power as exercised not possessed, his work has been criticized for its inability to conceptualize “co-operative efforts aimed both at political transformation and personal empowerment or consciousness-raising” (Rowlands, 1997, p. 12). More nuanced understandings of power and power relations and how they relate to empowerment are therefore required. Further, the societal reproduction and enforcement of patriarchal power relations within households, communities and whole societies mean that unequal gender power relations is not the project of changing individuals or families, but rather of targeting cultural beliefs and societal norms (Chaudhuri et al., 2014).

Feminist conceptions of power have since emerged that allow for a more nuanced vision of power that addresses these shortcomings. The FAD² framework, discussed later in this chapter, is one approach that is more appropriate for examining the themes presented in this dissertation, namely an incorporation of a feminist analysis of gendered (and other forms of) power relations. Feminist analyses can probe into how internalized expressions of power reconstitute and reproduce the conditions that oppress and prevent women and other groups from expressing power, either overtly or covertly. Understanding these dynamics is inherent to a meaningful exploration of empowerment.

Empowerment

One of the dominant articulations of women's empowerment, first proposed by Naila Kabeer (1999a), places the focus of empowerment on women's individual process of accessing, harnessing and mobilizing various resources – both external and intrinsic within an individual – . While there is a debate in the literature on the definition of empowerment (see Cornwall & Brock, 2005; Cornwall & Rivas, 2015; Eyben & Napier-Moore, 2009), Kabeer's framework of 'resources, agency and achievements' prevails as the dominant framework of empowerment, although other variations have been proposed (Drydyk, 2013; Mosedale, 2005; Thomas, 2011). In this framework, 'resources' are the pre-conditions to empowerment, and include material, human and social resources to enhance choice; 'agency' is the process of empowerment, referring to meaning, motivation and purpose of one's activity; and achievements are the outcomes of the empowerment process (Kabeer, 1999a). While the 'resources, agency, achievements' framework has made significant advances in our understanding and conceptualization of empowerment as a process, rather than a fixed end point, the emphasis on the individual requires expansion to include more emphasis on structural factors and the significance of social and power relations. Subsequent framings of empowerment that include challenging patriarchal structures within institutions and society have emerged that veer away from Kabeer's emphasis on expanded choice (Batliwala, 1995).

My own discomfort with the term 'women's empowerment' lies precisely within the common overemphasis on individual agency and the improvement of one's capacity, over the larger structures – cultural, institutional – that woman (or other genders) may not reasonably be able to change themselves. The framing of women as the 'agents', 'drivers' or 'engines' of change obscures the role and even responsibilities of others to work towards affecting these

changes, including groups of men and those who occupy positions of power in various forms. I agree with scholars such as Mosedale (2005), who focuses on redefining and extending the limits of what is possible in a given context, which stands in contrast to Kabeer's model that focusses on the individual's ability to choose. Recognizing that empowerment processes are not only a function of agency (and resources and achievements), but also take place within interactions with institutions, which influence knowledge and discourse, is also important in the quest to understand and uncover how empowerment is experienced and made sense of by individuals and communities. I also question the practicality of interpretations of empowerment that assume a linear model that outlines a complex process, but does not readily account for advances and retreats in progress along the way, which has been observed (A. Moser, 2007). Further, the language of 'empowered' implies a paradox so far unresolved in the literature. That is, one must begin from a state of being 'disempowered' and be the subject or recipient of a process of 'empowerment'. This contributes to the gender essentialism that boxes people into artificially fixed and stable categories of 'empowered' and 'disempowered', which denies the reality of daily lives in which people experience both empowering and disempowering moments. And yet simultaneously, one is understood as an individual responsible for one's own empowerment through the calling upon of resources through processes of agencies to move into achievements. This research argues that it is more helpful to understand that individuals move through gendered realities, living complex gendered lives that require multiple and nuanced ways to understand and uncover the non-linear, messy patterns of how empowerment unfolds across a lifetime (A. Moser, 2007), and most relevant for this study, in relation to encounters with the development apparatus.

For this research, the most useful framework to understand the complexities and multidimensionality of empowerment is put forth by Parpart et al. (2002). Building on the work of the foundational thinkers on women's empowerment (see Afshar, 1998; Batliwala et al., 1993; Kabeer, 1994; Rowlands, 1995), the authors call attention to four critical issues facing women's empowerment thinking and application, namely: 1. The interrelatedness between and amongst local, regional and global forces; 2. A nuanced analysis of power; 3. Links between individual empowerment processes and structural constraints of institutions and discursive practices; and 4. Understanding empowerment as both a process and an outcome (Parpart et al., 2002, pp. 3–4). Of note, the authors' inclusion of the parenthetical "(and poor men)" when discussing women's empowerment is a refreshing acknowledgement. The recognition that poor men can also pursue a journey of empowerment opens the door for a more nuanced, intersectional analysis of disempowerment/empowerment and gendered tensions of structure and agency, while avoiding the trap of essentialization that Tiessen (2015) carefully cautions against in policy contexts.

Building on Parpart et al.'s contribution towards a framework of empowerment, I find value in the Bourdieusian concept of social capital, which refers to the "social networks that an agent can use to influence others or acquire resources" (Chenhall et al., 2010, p. 738). Viewing how one arrives at and enacts decisions based on the set of resources at their disposal is one useful lens through which to understand the multitude of factors, consequences, and potential benefits that an individual must sift through in order to weigh their options, even when these are scant and often undesirable. The exploration of how individuals contend with dynamic sets of social capital – relationships, networks, and the attendant influence – points towards a new extension of social capital, one that focusses on the internal resources that one brings to the development and recovery process that shapes decisions and actions. In the discussion sections

of this dissertation's empirical chapters, I propose and develop the term 'intrinsic capital' to refer to the individual and internal qualities that one possesses or develops that can be leveraged to acquire resources and exercise various forms of power and agency.

These two related forms of capital – social capital and intrinsic capital – are also aligned with Rowlands' (1997) three-dimensional framework to understand power as operating within personal, relational and collective realms. This model allows for an exploration into how power is expressed through the development of various capacities and abilities that are situated within these three realms, recognizing the development of individual and internal capacities (personal, which I interpret as including intrinsic capital and conscientization processes), the development of interpersonal capacities that influence relationships (relational, interpreted to include the resources derived from social capital), and the development of working in community with others to pool resources and capacities (collective, speaking directly to the network element of social capital). This framework is useful to this study's exploration into how individuals make sense of their empowerment journeys, which intersect all three of these dimensions, shedding light on how individuals navigate through the power relations that shape their daily lives. Critical feminist theories, such as critical feminist security theories, are well constructed to showcase this messiness of lived realities including those unfolding in a post-war setting such as Northern Sri Lanka.

Critical Feminist Security Theories: Gender, Conflict, and Identity

While there is no singular feminism (Hudson, 2005), the various strands of feminist scholarship⁸ in the field of gender, security and development studies have together made significant empirical, methodological, and theoretical contributions to how conflict and

⁸ See Sjoberg (2009) for a classification of realist, liberal, critical, constructivist, post-structuralist, post-colonial, and ecological strands of feminism.

development processes are understood. These contributions inform and have shaped this research. Reacting to mainstream security theories that were based on assumptions and failed to incorporate gender in any meaningful – or even nominal – way, critical feminist theories have over the past four decades worked to challenge these omissions and make empirical and theoretical contributions to the field.

Amongst the most significant contributions to the scholarship has been the successful process of querying the relationship between conflict and gender relations, highlighting that these are not only relevant to understanding conflict, but are also not stable or static throughout periods of violence (Blanchard, 2003; Cockburn, 2001; Hoogensen & Stuvøy, 2006; Parpart, 2014b). Moreover, feminist scholars have raised coherent arguments as to why gender must be taken as a main category of analysis in peace making and security, with conceptual arguments including that if war and peace involve both men and women in specific ways, theoretical understandings of the concepts related to peace, conflict and development need to be reformulated to account for this (Blanchard, 2003; Cockburn, 2001; Harders, 2011; Hoogensen & Stuvøy, 2006).

Additionally, international relations (IR) feminists have made what Blanchard (2003) identifies as four significant moves within the field, namely 1. Questioning the supposed non-existence and irrelevance of women; 2. Questioning the extent to which women are secured by state “protection” in times of war and peace; 2. Contesting discourses wherein women are equated unreflectively with peace; and, more recently, 4. Troubling the assumption that gendered security practices address only women, which sparked the development of a variegated concept of masculinity/ies. Similarly, Sjoberg (2009) identifies three key contributions that move beyond the theoretical to include empirical feminist offerings to security studies. Feminist scholars have

firstly demonstrated the gender bias that exists in security's core concepts, which is consistent with Blanchard's first theoretical move. Secondly, feminists have contributed empirical and theoretical insights into the roles of women and gender, including gender-based language. Here Sjoberg implicitly refers to feminist post-structuralist contributions that seek to uncover power relations and place importance on the use and meaning of language (Marchand & Parpart, 2003). Sjoberg identifies a third major empirical contribution in the uncovering of new knowledge about sexual violence in war and gendered participation in armed conflict.

Critical feminist security scholarship has also made bold moves in asserting not only that gender and women matter to understanding conflict, but also that conflict and gender relations are inextricably linked. Cynthia Cockburn (2010) goes so far as to suggest that particularly unequal gender relations may even be a cause of war. Hoogensen and Stuvøy (2006) also take a broad swing at the failure of the mainstream security discourse to account for gender, asserting that the security debate itself is gendered. Other feminists have argued that the 'productive destructiveness' of men's and women's identities which are shaped by war through producing individual and collective power, which thus helps to understand the myriad ways in which men and women – and masculinities and femininities – affect and are affected by conflict and violence (Elshtain, 1987). Other scholars have further made links between gender, conflict and other aspects of identity, arguing that the category of 'woman' is inherently unstable, and that its meaning varies according to ethno-national and geographic locations (Mohanty, 2003). This relates to the concepts at the fore of intersectionality studies, which have also greatly informed gendered security debates through adding additional factors of identity through which to understand individuals' experiences throughout the conflict cycle (see Berger & Guidroz, 2010; Cockburn, 2005; McCall, 2005; Peterson, 2007).

Reconceptualization of Peace and Security

Notions of fixed states of being are reinforced by artificial divisions between war and peace. Feminist scholarship has made critical theoretical and empirical advances that disrupt this assumption. Runyan and Peterson (1991), for example, pinpoint the trend of mainstream security theories to conflate ‘peace’ with ‘security’, which the authors warn is a “dubious move, since it construes difference as a threat” (p. 1299). Nowhere has the conflation of ‘peace’ and ‘security’ manifested stronger than in mainstream discussions around the post-conflict period. Feminist research has posed the serious question of whether a ‘post-conflict’ period even exists and has troubled the very notion of security in the aftermath of war. Feminists begin with questioning who is being secured by state security policies, and contend that that women often experience a ‘backlash’ of violence in the aftermath of war (Meintjes et al., 2001; Pankhurst, 2008). This backlash and its resulting continuity of insecurity for women further challenge assumptions that violence against women is a war-related, another related assumption of mainstream security studies (Pankhurst, 2008). Cockburn (2001) posits that violence can be seen as a continuum, rather than taking place in defined periods. Cockburn asserts that outbreaks of war, aggressive policy-making, prolonged stalemate, rearmament and so on are not isolated events, but rather “if we look closely at the social relations in which individuals and groups enact these various steps, that is where it is possible to see gender relations at work, pushing the wheel around” (Cockburn, 2010, pp. 149–150).

Questioning the degree to which women have been able to consolidate the gains that they made during conflict has uncovered ways in which the post-conflict moment (if, indeed, one exists) can provide both opportunities for transformation, but most often fails to deliver on its promises. The tendency to push for a return to the pre-war status quo seems to override any new

spaces that were opened up for women during conflict (Harders, 2011; Parpart, 2015). This is often reinforced by the disconnect between assumptions of planners and policy makers who base post-conflict programs on unexamined gender assumptions that essentialize both women and men, for example, in Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programs. Thus, post-conflict programming often reflects and reproduces traditional, essentialized gender norms that do not reflect important shifts in gender roles that may have taken place during conflict (Moran, 2010).

Reconceptualization of Violence

Feminist scholars have presented new empirical data and have further theorized the gender dimensions of violence and conflict, both at the collective and the interpersonal levels. New ways of looking at sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in war have contributed to a more nuanced understanding beyond the essentialized notions of women and girls as victims. Some feminists understand rape in conflict as inevitable, representing the ‘spoils of war’, sends a message of dominance to conquered men and all women (Seifert, 1996), and that rape in conflict is a function of the state (Enloe, 2000). Others challenge these notions that rape is inevitable, and that it can be understood solely in terms of national security or systematic mass rape (Baaz & Stern, 2009). Baaz & Stern’s work expands previous conceptualizations of sexual violence to include social and psychological factors of the individual beyond their function as part of the state or armed forces. Further theoretical feminist insights into rape and sexual violence during conflict relate this to the blur between the private and public spheres and asserting that marriage and family law actually set the stage for the strategic use of wartime rape since the state has regulated male access to women’s bodies (Mackenzie, 2010).

Other feminist work has considered the absence of male victims in the literature and policy arena on addressing sexual violence in conflict and have raised serious legal and programmatic implications for conflict-affected populations, both civilians and armed forces (Aijazi & Baines, 2017; Alison, 2007; Gorris, 2015). Better informed theories of SGBV and other violence during and after conflict is important not only as a theoretical exercise, but also because of the implications to programs and policies that impact the lives of those affected. For example, current framing of SGBV as associated with women and girls as victims and men as perpetrators does not “account for the presence of male victims and female agents”, nor is it capable of analyzing “masculinities and the intersections with constructions of ethnicity” (Alison, 2007, p. 75). This is of particular importance for my study, since I argue that harmful structural realities must be addressed in tandem with a focus on individual agency. As discussed in the empirical chapters, experiences, or threats of sexual and gender-based violence both during the war and post-war periods arose as an ever-present threat to women’s – and by extension, family’s – honour and shame, and was always looming over discussions on gender (in)equality with both program participants and NGO workers. This research challenges some of the assumptions of the rationales for SGBV and expands our understanding of the long-term impacts and interpretations of these experiences.

Militarization and Gender

Expressly relevant for the Sri Lankan context, my research is informed by post-colonial contributions to the field of security, development and gender that problematize assumptions inherent to the ‘security/development’ paradigm. These assumptions include the purported “quid pro quo arrangement” whereby citizens support militarism in exchange for the fruits of development in post-colonial states (Parashar, 2018, p. 124). Parashar (2018) relates this to

‘postcolonial anxiety’ (Krishna, 1999), which she argues is a key factor in the relationship between security, militarism and the state. In a post-conflict context such as Sri Lanka, recognizing how the experiences of conflict-affected communities relate to this implicit agreement of security through periods of militarism for development, as well as other conditions of the post-colonial state is imperative to understanding the interplay between structural factors and individual agency.

Contributions on the interplay between militarism and gender effectively highlight how gender relations and gender hierarchies can be constructed and mediated by the overarching processes of militarization. Cynthia Enloe (2000), for example, highlights the ways in which women’s various identities and positions influence how militarization unfolds and how it is experienced by different groups of women. Writing on Sri Lanka, Tambiah (2005) analyzes the LTTE’s dress code for civilian women to demonstrate how it thinly veils the message that women are the bearers of traditional culture, and that their sexuality and behaviour as women are mediated by the interests of the militarized, nationalist project. These examples of the interplay between gender relations and militarization are bound up in socially constructed notions of masculinities and femininities, which themselves are inextricably linked to myriad other factors of identity and experience.

Masculinities, Femininities, and Intersectionality

The field of masculinities has exploded in recent decades, producing some highly valuable concepts and empirical findings that have been picked up by feminist security researchers. In line with important advances in this field, I deliberately pluralize the terms ‘masculinities’ and ‘femininities’ to signify that diversity of gendered ways of being, and to escape the gender binary (Butler, 1999; Edström, 2014).

Feminist scholars have advanced our understanding of gender and culture through focussing on masculinities. Foundational scholars in the field such as Connell and Messerschmidt have emphasized the relational dimension of masculinities, which emphasizes the agency of women, but also seeks to connect the local, regional and global levels (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Just as there is no one feminism or femininity, the field of masculinities has advanced our thinking around the plurality and diversity of masculinities, as well as the hierarchy of masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Wedgwood, 2009). This is of particular importance when applied to the construction of masculinities in a post-war context, which various expressions of masculinities are influenced by a host of new social, cultural and economic conditions left in the wake of war (Haque, 2013).

While masculinities and ‘maleness’ are often conflated with violence and conflict – just as women and femininities are equated with peace – various practices of masculinities can produce what Jeganathan terms ‘a space for violence’. That is, certain qualities that are valued within a subset of society or ‘community’, such as fearlessness amongst Sinhala ‘thugs’ in Colombo, are practiced and create the space for and conditions for “the possibility of violence” (Jeganathan, 2000, p. 52). The men who participated in this study point to various expressions – or ‘practices’, as Jeganathan might refer to them – of masculinities that relate new risks of violence within communities to men’s coping mechanisms related largely to avoidance, linked to the ‘shame/fear’ construction that is often privileged by anthropologists studying Sri Lanka (Jeganathan, 2000).

Amongst the most widely cited scholars of masculinities, Connell has emphasized that masculinities and femininities are relational concepts, and that “it is gender relations that constitute a coherent object of knowledge for science” (2005b, p. 44). Despite this assertion from

a major voice within masculinities research, much of the literature on both masculinities and femininities demonstrate a disconnect between the two in their treatment of each respective concept. Although the masculinities literature has wide applications into the gendered nature of security, conflict and development, there remains until now a chasm between literatures on masculinities and that of femininities, a chasm that must be bridged if the potential analytical, theoretical, and methodological strength of each is to be fully realized. The analysis of masculinities and femininities in this study contribute to bridging this gap and contribute to closing the gap between how masculinities and femininities are understood within the discourse.

Contrary to the tendency by mainstream security theories to essentialize women as a monolithic group, an intersectional approach considers men, women and gender non-binary people as having multiple factors of identity including race, class, and caste, each working in tandem to create lived experiences of oppression and privilege, vulnerability and resilience. In the Sri Lankan case, Hyndman and de Alwis (2004) have demonstrated that applying a gender analysis alone cannot reveal how understandings of nation, class and caste worked together during the Sri Lankan conflict to influence safety and mobility of various groups of women.

A gender analysis alone is insufficient to fully understand and address deep-seated social norms that produce inequalities, and therefore requires an intersectional approach that considers multiple dimensions of identity and axes of privilege and oppression (Hankivsky, 2014; Marchand & Parpart, 2003). However, the concept of intersectionality has been the subject of some debate. Much like debates surrounding the core concepts for this study, including gender, empowerment, and gender mainstreaming, some feminists have levied the critique that all the heightened attention to intersectionality in scholarship and practice has “depoliticized” the very concept through applications that fail to take on, *inter alia*, an anti-colonial perspective that seeks

to overcome historical oppression, and thus the approach has been effectively neutralized (see for example Bilge, 2013).

It is with these anti-colonial sensitivities in mind that development constituents' own narratives have been placed at the centre of this research. This approach moves beyond essentialized assumptions of supposedly monolithic identity groups and seeks to uncover substantially greater nuance in understanding the vulnerabilities and agency of not only women as a category, but of individuals who identify as having multiple and sometimes overlapping identities, histories, and affiliations, including widows and male and female former LTTE combatants.

As an aspect of intersectionality, it is important to consider gender and sexual identities and the attendant politics of these factors that shape the lives in specific sociopolitical contexts. Recent contributions from the literature addressing lesbian, gay, transgender and other gender non-conforming individuals has demonstrated how relevant policy frameworks such as the Women, Peace and Security agenda are shaped by heteronormative and cis-normative assumptions (Hagen, 2016). Shepherd and Sjoberg argue that the silence of and invisibility of queer bodies in security studies and discourse constitutes “discursive violence”, and that these violence(s) “have specific performative functions that can and should be interrogated” (Shepherd & Sjoberg, 2012, p. 101). Relating this to Butler's performativity thesis, the authors invoke those studying security and conflict to recognize and challenge what they term “cisprivilege” over trans and queer bodies.

While contributions from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer and transgender security literature connects with the other literature I have mobilized for this research. Particularly, literature on gender, security and masculinities demonstrates how male gender roles are shaped

during and after conflict, and how the association of power with the masculine (and vulnerability and weakness with the feminine) translates into deep-seated gender inequality, particularly when an individual identifies with neither category. Queer literature emerges from the same theoretical foundation of critical feminist security studies, whereby gendered power relations are crucial to understanding experiences of inequality. As Hagen notes, “[g]endered power relations drive homophobic and transphobic violence in similar ways to the now well-documented systemic use of rape as a weapon of war in some conflict-related environments” (Hagen, 2016, p. 314).

Foundational work has been done to interrogate the complexities of LGBTQ+ identities in non-traditional, masculinist spaces related to gender and security, such as Enloe’s work on ‘patriarchal confusion’ emerging from her research on gay and lesbian military identities (Enloe, 2007). Bulmer (2013) expands on this idea to include a performativity reading of this confusion, drawing from Butler. A major contribution of Bulmer, Enloe and others has been to disrupt the false dichotomies of ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ and ‘male’ and ‘female’ that are often defaulted to, not least within development and humanitarian interventions. The experiences of LGBTQ+ persons accessing development and humanitarian programs and resources can be distinct from those of other groups who may enjoy more visibility and may be readily identifiable as ‘priority’ for receiving assistance. Often, queer persons are invisibilized by the very design of development interventions, and the needs and interests of LGBTQ+ persons may not be reflected by rigid or well-meaning criteria that are purportedly gender informed yet miss the mark. For example, prioritizing female-headed households for assistance may reflect a lens of understanding who is most in need to receiving or participating in each program, but unmarried queer men may face similarly serious, perhaps even more complex and dangerous risks than another more visible groups. Practically, the issue of sexual violence, straying from prescribed and rigid gender

identities can be detrimental and even deadly, which is particularly prescient for LGBTQ+ persons. As Hagen notes, “gendered power relations drive homophobic and transphobic violence in similar ways to the now well-documented systemic use of rape as a weapon of war in some conflict-related environments” (Hagen, 2016 pg. 314).

The fact that (to the best of my knowledge) all narrators within my research identify as cis-gender and heterosexual has theoretical implications. Despite my best attempts at inclusion, the exclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals in this research creates a gendered bias within the findings and perpetuates the invisibility of queer individuals and experiences and in turn retrenches heteronormative understandings of how gender and development programming is received and made sense of by constituents. Including queer people in the research would have contributed a much-needed lens through which to understand key concepts and debates central to this research, such as (human) (in)security, restricted agency, intrinsic capital, and even how ‘gender’ is interpreted. Valuable insights and perspectives from different groups, including LGBTQ+ individuals, may offer new avenues to improve development practice and even reorient priority agendas. One simply cannot know the struggles, realities, sources of strength and coping, and other aspects of queer life if queer people are not included in such research.

As mentioned, the sample of individuals who participated in this study did not identify⁹ as queer or LGBTQ+, nor were issues of queerness explicitly discussed and thereby constituting one of many silences in this research. However, incorporating insights from the queer literature has helped facilitate a deeper intersectional approach that informs this study through thinking through how multiple identities of gender, ethnicity, marital status, association with armed

⁹ Please see Chapter Three for a discussion on efforts made to include members of this community in the research.

groups and social meanings attached to all these factors complicate our understanding of the typical laundry list of identity factors often associated with intersectionality.

FAD²: Feminism and Development/Feminism and Disasters

As a researcher and practitioner, I embrace a Feminism and Development /Feminism and Disasters (FAD²) approach. FAD² was proposed by Hyndman and de Alwis (Hyndman, 2008; Hyndman & De Alwis, 2003) in response to the limited analytic strength of Gender and Development approaches as they have been so far applied in the field by development practitioners. *Feminist* defined by the authors as “reflecting analyses and political interventions that address the unequal and often violent relationships among people based on real or perceived social, economic, political, cultural, and sexual differences” (Hyndman & De Alwis, 2003, p. 213). I adopt a FAD² approach to overcome the problematic application of the term ‘gender’, which has all too often come to be known as synonymous with ‘women’ and now lacks the “political bite” it once had (Cornwall, 2007, p. 69). While the FAD² approach assumes a deliberately more nuanced interpretation of gender, it does not throw out the concept entirely, neither theoretically nor as a practical unit of analysis. As Cornwall notes, “the concept of ‘gender’ can offer a tool for analysis that focuses attention on the power effects of the social constitution of difference and that is sensitive to context” (Cornwall, 2007, p. 76). She proposes, however, that what might be needed is for the term to be sent for “cleaning” before it can be put back into common use (Cornwall, 2007).

Through its emphasis on relationships between people that are based on perceived and actual differences, instances where men and women (and other groups) fail to adhere to strictly defined gender roles can be identified. FAD² is also equipped to recognize multiple bases of identity beyond gender, including nationalism (relevant to the Sri Lankan context and others),

ethnicity and class, as well as place a historical focus on the time and place in which a particular intervention is being implemented. This is of utmost importance when examining gender roles and relationships following a period of conflict since these gender roles will have inevitably shifted, and new 'rules' may be in play, and interrogating the role of gender mainstreamed or gender targeted development projects that are introduced over top of these processes. Whether and to what extent men, women and non-binary individuals succeed in assuming these roles will also impact the lived experiences of individuals in all aspects of their life, including accessing resources and power. This is closely related to Butler's concept of performativity, where gender identity "is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo" (1988, p. 520). Here, gender transformation is possible when the repeated performance of a set of arbitrary acts is interrupted or subverted (Butler, 1988). How gender roles have been articulated in the post-conflict period, and the extent to which men, women and other groups 'perform' according to these new scripts, will be investigated through this research project.

The FAD² approach is particularly appropriate given that it was born out of research conducted on the Sri Lankan context of conflict and gender relations (Hyndman & De Alwis, 2003). Hyndman purposefully uses 'D²' to denote that it is not only development efforts that need to be examined through a feminist lens, but also how disasters are understood, and response interventions designed. Here, Hyndman is equally deliberate in her use of disasters, plural, as she underscores "the intersection of conflict and natural disaster in the context of Sri Lanka" (Hyndman, 2008, p. 105). My own interpretation of the contested term 'disaster' includes man-made disasters, such as armed conflict. Moving beyond WID and GAD approaches to apply a FAD² lens will enable a more intersectional approach through which to explore my research questions, and will incorporate not only male/female genders, but also non-binary gender

identities, religious and ethnic minorities, and other silenced, oppressed or invisible groups. Thus, FAD² constitutes a conceptual cornerstone of my research.

The FAD² approach can reveal a more nuanced analysis of power structures and relationships with a focus on how masculinities and femininities shift and change and are influenced by deeply entrenched societal expectations that influence gender relations. Tools such as Canada's noteworthy Gender Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) have been instrumental in shifting institutional attention and capacity towards uncovering how interlocking individual identities influence how programs and policies are experienced. However, while GBA+ remains a valuable tool in understanding how gender and other inequalities intersect with Canadian programs and policies, it is limited in its emphasis on individual identity factors, and less on wider historical and political processes that interact with individual identities to shape gender relations in a specific place. In a context such as Sri Lanka, where the political and historical context is central to understanding the construction and evolution of gender relations, FAD² stands out as being well-suited as an approach to highlighting these dynamics that exist outside of individual identity. As Hyndman and de Alwis (2008) argue, a feminist analysis is better equipped to challenge and transform relations, given that gender is *produced* by the intersection of class, caste, religion, sexuality, and membership in social groups.

In this research, I build upon the FAD², expanding it to include a heavier emphasis on a unit of analysis: the individual as constituted within diverse social relationships. In their pivotal work, Hyndman and de Alwis call for a feminist approach to humanitarian and development contexts, "one that analyses and integrates considerations history, location, and politics" (Hyndman & de Alwis, 2003, p. 219). Hyndman and de Alwis take a contextual approach, looking at the social, political, and historical environments to inform and influence programs and

assessments. What I contribute to this call is the importance of elucidating the ways that context shapes individuals and, their diverse social relationships. Through bringing in the social relationships dimension, I expand upon the FAD² approach to draw stronger linkages between individuals, context, and social and power relations. By creating space to analyze the through-lines between processes of agency with larger structures, as well as the individual perspectives of those experiencing programs and interventions within a larger context of post-war and disaster, this research contributes to the development and value of the FAD² framework.

As laid out in this chapter, the theoretical and conceptual approach to this research has been crafted to best reflect my own ethos as a researcher as well as the best ontological and epistemological framings to answer my research questions. My approach is rooted in Feminist Post-Development and Post-Structural theoretical traditions blended with contemporary Critical Feminist Security and the FAD² framework. Together, these theoretical and conceptual building blocks help to reveal that gender processes are relational, and that changes in gender identity and social balances of power will inherently impact other family and community members. The next chapter will draw from these to explore further the epistemological underpinnings of the tools and instruments that have been developed to answer my research questions.

CHAPTER THREE: Methodology

This chapter discusses the methodological approach to this study. In keeping with the feminist orientation and spirit of this research and my identity as a researcher, this chapter attempts to adhere to the view that researchers' activities, commitments and challenges should be fully reported and discussed, and their values "acknowledged, revealed and labelled" (Reinharz, 1983, p. 172). First, I discuss how feminist epistemology and feminist methodologies inform my own methodology. I then present the methods themselves, namely focus group discussions, life histories, and key informant interviews, and supporting methods of participant observation and informal interviews. Next, I present a discussion of the essential role of the Sri Lankan and Canadian research assistants who significantly contributed to the research process for this study. Next, I delve into the mechanics of applying my methodology, beginning with a discussion of the intricacies of working across languages. I then present and discuss the approach and process of pre-analysis and data analysis. A presentation of the limitations of this study follows. Finally, this chapter concludes with some reflections not typically included in a methodology section – or, indeed, in many theses or manuscripts: how sexual harassment and violence have shaped the research process. I include in this section a statement and discussion of my own positionality as a researcher. These sections are inspired by the critical contributions of feminist researchers who have highlighted the importance of explicitly acknowledging and including these aspects of the research process to produce transparent, honest, fulsome research in line with feminist principles.

Feminist Epistemology and Feminist Methodologies

Feminist Epistemologies

Feminist epistemology, or a feminist theory of knowledge (Harding, 1987), emerged as a critique of positivist science, which has historically underprivileged women's participation, representation and authority (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1995) and ignored the possibility that women could be "agents of knowledge" (Harding, 1987, p. 3). Some of the early feminist critiques honed in on this "invisibility or distortion of women as objects of knowledge" (Harding, 1987, p. 3), which feminists understood as a direct result of the institutionalized gender biases that exist within society and have permeated the social sciences. Cook and Fonow articulate the central principles of feminist knowledge as attending to the significance of gender relations as a feature of daily life, including within the research process; consciousness-raising as a methodological tool; challenging the norm of "objectivity" between object/subject of research; thinking critically about the ethical implications of research; emphasizing the transformation of patriarchy and empowerment of women (Cook & Fonow, 1985, p. 2). In the following sections, I illustrate how my own research design interprets and reflects these principles.

The methodology that I have constructed here is inspired by feminist standpoint scholars who posit that women's lived experiences form the basis of feminist knowledge (Marchand & Parpart, 2003). Building on feminist standpoint scholars such as Sandra Harding, Somer Brodribb and Dorothy Smith, I recognize that while it is paramount to foreground women's voices to construct feminist knowledge, the perspectives of other individuals who identify as oppressed or 'othered' are also essential to hear in order to construct a genuinely feminist knowledge base. Thus, I have chosen methods that seek to discover accounts of struggle and change derived from life activities and experiences and which are "subversive of the hegemonic

account" (Cockburn, 2010, p. 140). Here, I understand this hegemonic account as being that which has been produced by development and other institutions, primarily through their monitoring and evaluation processes of development aid programs and subsequent narratives of 'impact.' For example, through external-facing annual reports, Northern NGOs tend to construct Global South constituents of development programming as "reliant, dependent, passive, backward, voiceless, unintelligent and needing care" (Dhanani, 2019, p. 1). This identity construction of the Other echoes the problematic charity model of development that casts recipients of development and humanitarian assistance as voiceless and helpless and reproduces the 'passive recipient/active giver' binary. These tropes stand opposed to the ethos of my research, which creates space for the constituents of development programming to speak for themselves.

Program evaluation exercises hold value in capturing perspectives of change from the vantage point of donors and NGOs while often fulfilling specific funding requirements. However, they do little to advance our understanding of how individuals perceive these interventions, let alone how they define change and progress. Therefore, my research stands in contrast to evaluation work typically conducted by institutions and moves the locus of voice and the construction of success, progress and change squarely into the hands of, and expressed through, the voices of those for whom these development programs were designed and implemented.

The choice to employ oral histories reflects the feminist epistemological orientation of this research. It privileges the perspectives and understandings of mainly women, but also men, in their construction of self and their relationship to society. Sangster connects feminist epistemology, feminist oral history and standpoint feminism. She points out that standpoint

feminist theory assumes that "the distinct material and social position of women produces, in a complex way, a unique epistemological vision which might be slowly unveiled by the narrator and the historian" (Sangster, 1994, p. 11). Here, Sangster usefully illustrates the value of applying feminist oral history methods to reveal essential sources of knowledge that reside particularly within women, which resonates with standpoint feminist theory. However, while feminist standpoint scholars and researchers seek to bring women's experiences into focus through innovative methods, early temptations to 'just add women' proved insufficient to fully explore and articulate the nuanced ways in which women's knowledge and experiences were constructed. This critique parallels the theoretical debates that coincided within development thought that moved through WID to WAD and GAD and eventually, although to a lesser degree – yet highly relevant for this study – FAD2 approaches (Hyndman & de Alwis, 2003; Rathgeber, 1990).

Although feminist epistemologies and methodologies draw heavily on women's experiences, I agree with the argument that "women's and men's characteristic social experiences provide different but not equal grounds for reliable knowledge claims" (Harding, 1987, p. 10). I have made the methodological choice to include both men and women participants in this study¹⁰. This choice was made not to pursue a path of strict comparison or even to contest or challenge women's articulated experiences. Instead, I have included both men and women to acknowledge that men and women have similar, different, and related experiences as recipients of development assistance. Including male and female voices is the soundest approach to exploring these relational aspects of gendered experience. On a more theoretical

¹⁰ Unfortunately, efforts to include non-binary and transgender individuals in this study were unsuccessful. Please see the Limitations section in this chapter for more detail.

point, this choice reflects the acknowledgement that both men and women (and other groups) can make valuable contributions to feminist research.

Feminist Methodologies

Feminist research methodologies cannot be distilled into one set of methods. Instead, it is the approach and theoretical and epistemological underpinnings that are crucial. As Jayaratne and Stewart concisely summarize, "the emphasis [of feminist methodology]...is on using methods which can best answer particular research questions but always using them in ways which are consistent with broad feminist goals and ideology" (1991, p. 91). Feminist methodologies have helped illustrate how traditional or mainstream androcentric theories and methods have obscured ways in which women's lives are lived and have prevented an understanding of men's activities and relationships as gendered (Harding, 1987).

Feminist challenges to androcentric and positivist science have led to the exploration and potential of qualitative methods, which have opened up new ways of conducting social science research (Mies, 1983; Reinharz, 1979). The methods that I have chosen to comprise my methodology, discussed here, have allowed for a broader approach to exploring women's and men's lived experiences. This methodology follows in the feminist methodological traditions to close the gap between researcher and participant and encourage "a greater sensitivity to the rights of participants as persons rather than as objects of research" (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1995, p. 9). Further, some of the earliest feminist scholars have emphasized the exploration of both women's and men's lives as essential in restoring "the multitude of both female and male realities and interests" in social science theory and research (Millman & Kanter, 1975, p. vii). Considering only women's (or men's, or other groups') lived experiences independent of one another would not allow for a sufficient scope to understand the complex social processes of the relational

nature of gender and gender equality. As a researcher, I am compelled to take a relational approach, whereby both men's and women's lives are explored in tandem and consideration of one another. The feminist approach that this study reflects thus allows for the relational aspects of gendered power relations to be explored and revealed.

Building on the Listening Approach

I have built my methodological approach upon a firm foundation of feminist epistemology and feminist methodologies. My interpretations of the methods that I have selected draw inspiration from some practical applications that have demonstrated their capacity to create space for individual voices of those who have experience with both development programming and war.

As discussed in Chapter Two, studies by Anderson et al. (2012) and Petesch (2011) have inspired aspects of the methodology of this research. Each of these research projects has thrown up questions around the scope and limitations of using highly unstructured interviews and life history methods and has helped me think through how to manage the scope and approach to the data collection for this research. In particular, Anderson et al.'s work has had a catalytic impact on my research since it was first my encounters using the listening methodology as a practitioner with the Red Cross that inspired my interest in pursuing a doctoral project in the first place. My own methodology was inspired by Anderson et al.'s 'listening methodology.' This inductive approach assumes that creating an unstructured, ample space through which to listen to individuals and groups of beneficiaries of aid – in this case, gender equality programming – allows for a variety of issues and experiences to emerge. Other more prescriptive methods such as structured interviews may not allow for these issues to surface. Crucially, this approach empowers participants to self-select the issues they wish to share, thus avoiding potential ethical

questions of coercion and working to mitigate researcher bias. The empirical findings from Petesch's study are compelling and help us understand the interplay between structure (through the discussion on the role of the context of in/security) and agency (through her analysis of women's empowerment interventions). However, I have made distinct choices that differ from this work to best answer my research questions and facilitate meaningful data collection and analysis. In sum, the unstructured approach inspired by the listening study, and adapted to provide space for reflection and follow up across sessions, mitigated some of the traditional power imbalance between the 'researcher' and the 'researched' and ensured that narrators were provided space to discuss what they deemed to be important and wished to share.

Methods: Narrator and Narrative

Three complementary central and complementary methods were deployed to collect sufficient and relevant data that would help answer my research questions: Focus Group Discussions (FGDs); Life Histories (LHs); and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). Most of the data were collected using LHs, which were complemented by data revealed through KIIs. FGDs functioned as both a tool to identify participants and a way to field test language and gather more background information about the field site. The sessions were audio-recorded for all methods (FGDs, KIIs, LHs). Informed consent was given by each participant, who was provided with an information sheet describing the study and a consent form (both in their preferred language, Tamil or English). To ensure comprehension and open the opportunity for questions, at the outset of a session for all three methods, the consent form was read and explained in the participant's preferred language (s) in its less formal, colloquial version. Two supporting yet important methods were used while conducting field research: ethnographic participant observation and informal interviews.

I conducted fieldwork in Northern Sri Lanka from 8 January to 27 March 2019. I based myself in Jaffna, a strategic location to expand my network and conduct multiple background interviews and KIIs with NGO staff, academics, journalists, and other knowledge holders during the week. Since LH sessions could only be scheduled on the weekend (see below), the lead RA and I would travel the one hour to Kilinochchi by public bus down the relatively newly built A9 highway connected the Jaffna peninsula to the Vanni¹¹ and the rest of the island. This arrangement allowed me to observe and experience what travelling along this route meant for those LH participants with family and business on the Jaffna peninsula and explore the sights, sounds, smells, and feelings of travelling this way.

Focus Group Discussions

Two FGDs were held at the outset of the data collection phase, one with five women and one with five men. The objective was to introduce the research to a small group of people who met the original participation criteria and get a collective background of some of the assistance that different groups had received in the communities, which would, in turn, inform the selection of research participants for the life histories method. The FGDs were used partly as a source of collecting data and partly as a snowball-style recruitment tool to help identify further research participants. The FGDs also gave me as the PI and the RAs who respectively facilitated the sessions a chance to become familiar with and refine some of the concepts and terminology central to the research, such as 'gender,' 'development aid,' and 'NGO .'The FGDs were a first step in deepening my understanding of how these concepts were understood by some members of the community and provided some initial insight into how gendered daily lives were lived and expressed.

¹¹ The Vanni refers to the area of Northern Province that covers Mannar, Mullaitivu, Vavuniya and most of Kilinochchi Districts (please see map on pg. 10)

Some key learnings emerged from the experience of conducting the FGDs. Logistically, the issue of scheduling was quickly identified as holding central importance. In order to ensure that the broadest diversity of groups of men and women were able to participate in FGDs (and eventually LHs), sessions were scheduled on the weekends when particularly younger men, but also working women, would be free from productive work responsibilities and had more personal time. Also, the limited use of sex segregated FGDs proved to be appropriate for this particular context as multiple individuals were able to participate at once, and the process of identifying participants through snowballing could begin. However, the nature of a group setting – even when segregated by sex – was not suitable to explore the highly unique and often sensitive experiences of using life histories to deeply explore a person's gendered experiences moving through society during periods of war. For this, life histories were selected as the primary method from which most of the research data emerged.

Life Histories

Individual life histories (LH) methodology comprised the bulk of my data and represents the most suited method to explore the complex issues of lived experiences of development assistance and gender equality. LH draws from rich anthropological and sociological traditions that began in the sociology department at the University of Chicago in the 1920s and 1930s (K. Anderson et al., 1987), and later saw a growing number of researchers return to this literature, leading to a 'biographical turn' in the 1980s and 1990s (Chamberlayne et al., 2000; Renders et al., 2016; Rustin, 2002). LH has been applied to effectively and sensitively explore the lived experiences of trauma, agency and the social negotiation of post-war recovery (see Baines & Rosenoff Gauvin, 2014; Baines & Stewart, 2011), all of which are relevant themes for this dissertation.

As part of my application of the LH methodology, this study employs the technique of narrative inquiry, which views lives holistically and understands that through narrating their stories, people construct their narratives (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). In life histories and narrative inquiry, 'the truth' is personal and subjective, and personal narratives are privileged over fact-checking and corroboration. In the Sri Lankan context, pioneering work by Hettiarachchi et al. in the memorialization project *Herstories* revealed the value of conducting life histories with women because they create a "safe space, relatively free of male influence in which to voice their lives" (Hettiarachchi, 2018, p. 2)¹². However, although these interviews or listening sessions may have physically taken place removed from men, the findings from this research reinforce that patriarchal societal norms and patriarchal power structures pervasively permeate women's (and men's) consciousness, behaviour, and how one makes sense of their own life (Westkott, 1979).

Twelve participants were selected through snowball sampling as part of the life histories sample. However, I decided to exclude two of the original participants, one because she did not meet the criterion of having received assistance in the past ten years, and another due to what the research team perceived as 'consensual non-cooperation', whereby he agreed to participate in an initial life history session but showed indications that he was only doing so because an authority figure asked him. In addition, participant observation during our visit to this individual revealed that he also had a heavy care load to contend with, including four small children and a wife who had suspected mental health issues. Therefore, after the first brief life history session, the research team concluded that it was neither appropriate nor ethical to include this person in the life history sample.

¹² Other notable examples of storytelling projects in the post-war Sri Lankan context include Adayaalam's "Stories of Vaharai" and "Stories of Mullivaikkaal" series (2018) as part of the "Stories of Resilience" project.

Since life history sessions could only be scheduled on weekends, this left ample time during the week to review the relevant methodological literature. This review covered feminist approaches, life history approaches and debates, anthropological literature on oral history and biographical methods, and literature and material emerging from the Sri Lankan context. This iterative approach allowed new ideas and techniques to emerge and helped refine our process of conducting the sessions with participants. Reviewing the literature also inspired several discussions and debates with the research team around issues such as subjectivity; the importance of confidentiality; and how information should be treated in any eventual publications and presentations; and the 'insider/outsider' dynamics of both myself as a foreigner and the RAs as members of parts of the same communities as the research participants.

Key Informant Interviews

As described earlier in this chapter, my chosen methodology aims to create individual storylines that privilege the creation of "meaning" making and not "truth" making (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). The purpose of conducting key informant interviews (KIIs) for this study was not to challenge, corroborate or otherwise 'fact-check' the experiences and observations shared by the LH participants. Instead, KIIs were conducted to provide an institutional yet personal point of view of the process of implementing gender mainstreamed or gender-targeted programs in a particular time and place. Further, I conducted KIIs, with interpretation support from one of the RAs as needed, to provide a longitudinal perspective of the operational side of delivering gender mainstreamed programs and observations on changes observed in the culture and communities where this study is concerned. NGO actors occupy the 'middle space' between NGOs who implement (and often design and otherwise shape) gender mainstreamed programs and the

'beneficiaries' who receive these programs. Therefore, conducting KII with these actors offered a unique perspective on the tensions between the two.

Participant Observation

Throughout my two field visits to Northern Sri Lanka, participant observation exposed me to, allowed me to become familiar with, and challenged me to make sense of the various sights, sounds, smells, and other viscerally experienced aspects of the research context. Applying ethnographic observation constantly while in the field helped provide insight and fodder for further exploration around gender relations and hierarchies, ways of being, social norms and customs, and myriad other aspects of daily life in Kilinochchi. Participant observation was beneficial during FGDs and while visiting the homes and other spaces in which LH narrators moved through and observed interactions between the narrators and their children, spouses, neighbours, and others. To document my participatory observation, I took ethnographic field notes in a Methods Journal to record my observations, which helped document what I encountered and serve as an *aide-mémoire* during the data analysis phase of this research. Some of these field notes have been quoted directly in this dissertation. During the analysis phase, the Methods Journal served as a valuable document to record analytic memos or space to "dump [my] brain" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 32) to document my evolution of thinking around the participants, relationships, social processes, and potential themes.

Informal Interviews

As a white Canadian doing research in Sri Lanka, and therefore an outsider, I felt compelled to speak to as many individuals as possible who could provide background information and guidance on issues that may be important to engage with while pursuing my research. As a result, I spoke to 46 individuals connected to civil society; government; service

providers such as health care and education; research and academia; and the media. These participants were identified through snowball sampling, with informal interviewees often suggesting and even connecting me with other individuals of interest to speak with. These interviews were not recorded, and I often followed up with emails and texts to pick up on subjects discussed during these meetings. I invariably obtained informed consent prior to these meetings to adhere to basic principles of ethics and provide background to my study and an opportunity to discuss its direction.

Participant Selection

KIIs

In order to understand the larger development ecosystem in Sri Lanka, particularly in the North, I sought out key individuals who had or have experience working in various development organizations. These included current and former project managers and gender technical advisors of both national and international NGOs. I, along with one of the RAs where interpretation was necessary, conducted KIIs with a total of nine (four men, five women) current and former 'local' (Sri Lankan) staff of local and international NGOs who have implemented gender mainstreamed projects that were delivered between 2009 and 2019. I assigned priority to staff directly involved in gender mainstreaming aspects of these projects, such as project proposal and design, implementation, and policy development. However, given that gender mainstreaming approaches are meant to be integrated across program sectors, some KII participants held program positions that may not have been explicitly or solely related to the technical work of gender mainstreaming, such as Head of Programs.

Four of the KII participants were in Kilinochchi, while the other five were from and based either in Jaffna or Colombo. This geographical distinction is critical to note since the

interviews revealed that those KIs who lived in the communities where they worked were able to speak in more detail, and with perhaps more 'authority', about the societal changes they have witnessed. These changes were described as a function of NGO programming and war/post-war periods and other socioeconomic processes, including the liberalization of the economy and increased access to technology, such as mobile phones. Further, although all participants were 'Sri Lankan' and most were Tamil, the distinct class and culture divide between those in Kilinochchi in the Vanni and those in the more affluent, educated Jaffna on the Jaffna peninsula – let alone the difference between capital Colombo and Kilinochchi – were pronounced and must be acknowledged. These distinctions influenced how the individual KIs articulated various aspects of 'doing gender' work in Kilinochchi, a place and process that undoubtedly holds different meanings to each KI. All participants had at least ten years of experience working with NGOs during and after the war, some or all of which were focused on gender or gender mainstreamed programming. Interviews were recorded and conducted in either English or Tamil. Given that I am not a Tamil speaker, one of the Research Assistants provided consecutive interpretation support for interviews where the participant chose to speak in Tamil. Informed consent was provided, and although some participants were comfortable using their names or organizational affiliations, many participants requested not to be identified, nor have their organizations named. To extend a consistent level of anonymity to all participants, no real names or organizations have been used in this study when referring to KII participants.

FGDs and LHs

Participants for FGDs and LH sessions were recruited in Kilinochchi, Sri Lanka. The criteria for participation were the following: 1. Have resided consistently in the research site (Kilinochchi) since 2009; 2. Have either participated directly in - or have directly received - aid

from a local or international NGO between 2009 – 2019; and 3. Willingness to meet with the research team (PI and RA) at least twice for around 90 minutes per session.

These selection criteria for the LHs were discussed and later refined through invaluable discussions and advice from several actors on the ground, including researchers at the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES), local activists and NGO workers, and discussions with the RAs. The eventual criteria included: 1. They received NGO assistance from 2009-2013; 2. The assistance was specifically livelihood-related; and 3. The individual was willing to speak with us. The second criterion was revised to focus on livelihood programming for several reasons. As part of ongoing discussions with my host supervisor at ICES, Dr. Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake, it became clear that having a common program sector or type would help to identify participants who encountered more similar types of gender mainstreamed programming. Narrowing the scope of assistance to programs that often included the provision of 'in kind' materials was seen as concrete enough to help potential participants remember their experiences several years ago and better self-select into the research. Further, having all LH participants experience the same 'theme' of programming allowed for a loose thread of commonality to run through all the narrators' experiences, even though each had received or participated in different programs offered by different NGOs. Lastly, the choice to focus on livelihoods assistance was thematically appropriate due to the (over)association of livelihoods and income with women's empowerment, where 'empowerment' is often framed in terms of 'economic empowerment' (see for example Godamunne, 2019; Kandanearachchi & Ratnayake, 2017; UN Peace Building Fund, 2017; Vithanagama, 2016).

While the third criterion may seem unnecessary to add explicitly, it was imperative for the research team to continually communicate the ethos and spirit of ensuring that participants

felt in total control and reducing (as much as possible) the power imbalances inherent to researcher/participant dynamics. We made every effort to communicate these criteria to various actors who were indispensable in helping to identify participants, and to whom I am grateful, including the local NGO Consortium; FGD participants themselves and those with whom they connected; and local leaders including the *Grama Sevakas* (GS)¹³ of each district. Despite our best efforts, however, there were some miscommunications, including one GS interpreting our criteria as a request to speak strictly with former LTTE combatants who did not fully meet our criteria. Once we realized this, and before the listening sessions began, the team excluded two participants from the LH pool and searched for two others who could round out our participant sample for this method.

Interestingly, a methodological fork in the road presented itself after conducting life history sessions with five out of ten participants. Intrigued by Rigg's (2012) notion of the geometries of development, and in efforts to untangle the web of gender and family relations in the communities where our first five participants resided, I considered two options for the selection of the following five participants: either they would be identified using the same snowball approach described above, and may or may not have any relation with the current sample of LH participants, or, interview one member of the household for each of the five participants who already comprised our sample, which might provide more insight into the gender relational aspect of my research questions. The latter direction would allow for an exploration into the networks of participants using the first five as the central node. However, after much deliberation and advice from my supervisor and thesis advisory committee, I decided

¹³ A *Grama Sevaka* (in Tamil) or *Grama Niladhari* (in Sinhala) is a government-appointed village officer, responsible for carrying out administrative duties and applying government regulations. In Kilinochchi, 'GS' is the term most often used to refer to this government agent.

that the best methodological decision would be to continue adding participants who were themselves the recipients of development assistance, which is the central theme of my research. Exploring the gendered relations and perspectives of five families' experiences with development assistance in this way would have been instructive. However, I felt that this would be done at the expense of data that would speak directly to my research questions and core analytical framework, which focuses on how individuals themselves make sense of the assistance they receive and related gendered experiences. Thus, I decided to stay on course and recruit the following five participants using the above-refined selection criteria.

By drawing upon feminist epistemological and methodological traditions and insights, I constructed a methodology comprised of focus group discussions, life histories, and key informant interviews, supported by participant observation and informal interviews. Together, these methods combined to help uncover the depth of experiences necessary to explore my research questions, firstly through mitigating some of the power imbalances inherent to a research/participant relationship that LH methodology allowed for, thus honouring feminist methodological principles. Secondly, the open-ended, unstructured design of the listening methodology-inspired approach opened spaces for narrators to bring forward issues, experiences, ideas and reflections for which no prefabricated question guide could have prepared or allowed. Thirdly, KIIs, participant observation, informal interviews, and FGDs bolstered the rich LH stories by providing the necessary contextual and historical background that helped inform follow-up LH sessions with narrators and the more extensive analysis presented in the following chapters.

The Research Context and Selection of the Field Site

This research took place in Kilinochchi District, which lies in the North of the Vanni region. The population during the time of field research was overwhelmingly majority Tamil (98%), with only 1.9% Muslim and .01% Sinhalese (Office of the Deputy Chief Secretary - Planning, 2019). The recently paved A9 highway runs through the district as a major thoroughfare, with public buses frequently plying this major artery. During the war, Kilinochchi was the site of several important incursions and battles, leading up to its position as the de facto administrative hub of the LTTE in 1998 until retreating during the Battle of Kilinochchi in January 2009 as part of the SLA's increased offensive against the LTTE (Buerk, 2009). Large swaths of Kilinochchi were emptied of its residents as they fled waves of bombs and shelling. The patterns of violence became so frequent and entrenched in people's lives that many of the participants in this study could track their lives against specific air raids or battles. Narrators often cited the names of artillery, like kefir and Claymore mines, which grandmothers and fathers rattled off with as much ease as their own children's names.

Although the Sri Lankan conflict is often framed as an ethno-nationalist struggle between the Sinhala majority and Tamil minority, there exist other groups in Sri Lanka who remain under-represented in the literature and yet require attention. Despite comprising Sri Lanka's third ethnic group, Muslims or 'Moors' have been treated as "peripheral stakeholders" (McGilvray & Raheem, 2007, p. vii) in the future of Sri Lanka, often assumed to be adequately represented by other dominant groups, i.e. Sinhalese and Tamils. This assumption marginalized Muslims during peace negotiations and development efforts (Haniffa, 2008; McGilvray & Raheem, 2007). To address the gap in understanding Muslim women's and men's experiences during and after conflict and disaster in Sri Lanka, efforts were made to include participants from diverse ethnic

groups as research participants. However, despite these efforts, the ethnic makeup of the eventual sample was ethnically homogenous; that is, all ten life history participants were Tamil. This homogeneity is a function of how the demography of Kilinochchi itself has been (re)shaped by post-war resettlement programs.

The process of selecting the eventual field site of Kilinochchi was a valuable one since it allowed for questions around the methodology and overall research design to be illuminated. As Lewis appropriately states, "selecting research settings and populations involves identifying those which, by virtue of their relationship with the research questions, can provide the most relevant, comprehensive and rich information" (Lewis, 2003, p. 49). Based on my prior knowledge and speaking with colleagues who had worked in Sri Lanka during and after the war, I had initially considered two sites for my field research that would satisfy Lewis' criteria above: Jaffna in the North and Batticaloa in the northeast. The underlying motivation for selecting two sites would have been to include a comparative element in the research. However, an invaluable field visit to Sri Lanka in August 2018 revealed several flaws in my original site selection, which I will discuss here.

I initially undertook a scoping trip to Sri Lanka from 16 August to 14 September 2018 with the objectives of identifying a potential Research Assistant and applicable local research protocols, contacting my host organizations, and reassessing the feasibility and appropriateness of my field site selection. I travelled to Batticaloa, Jaffna, and Colombo (please see map on pg. 10). I met several people along the way who provided invaluable advice, insight and direction that ultimately shaped some of the very core methodological decisions that shape my research as it stands. I arrived in Sri Lanka knowing very few people. However, several people were

generous enough to share their contacts and networks, which allowed me to assess my original research design and eventually reevaluate my field site selection.

Although the primarily Tamil North had suffered intensely throughout the war, the Vanni and not the Jaffna peninsula bore the brunt of these final incursions and, therefore, was the site of significant donor-funded programs, especially in the post-war recovery period. There exist notable disparities in education, income, and, as I would learn, culture between Jaffna and the Vanni. Further, the contours of war that saw outflows of Muslims, Tamils, and other civilians out of the Jaffna peninsula at various points of the war meant that the exposure of those in Jaffna to the development and humanitarian apparatus was at times minimal compared to the rest of the North. The NGO footprint left in Jaffna was slight compared to the heavy foreign and local NGO activity that flourished in the Vanni, particularly in the relief and recovery phases. On the other hand, Batticaloa has a distinct history of suffering through not only the almost three-decade war but also the devastation left in the wake of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. It became apparent during my scoping visit that the rich ethnic, religious and language complexities of Batticaloa that are connected to its historical and current population demographics would make any comparison superficial. As one local activist advised, it would be better to focus solely on Batticaloa to begin understanding and doing any research justice. As I did not have this stock of time at my disposal, I decided to leave Batticaloa and refocus on a location in the Vanni. The many conversations during my scoping trip and subsequent discussions with my research team and thesis committee members confirmed to me that a site in the Vanni, likely Kilinochchi, would be the most reasonable and fertile ground on which to pose my research questions.

My research process benefitted greatly from two local host institutions, the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES) and the Women's Education & Resource Centre (WERC). Both

organizations are based in Colombo, and ICES has a second office in Kandy in central Sri Lanka. My thesis committee member, Dr. Thushara Hewage, kindly facilitated my connection to ICES in Colombo, who agreed to take me on as an Affiliated Researcher. This title meant that I could enjoy access to their library's physical collection, as well as the Centre's expansive network of organizations and individuals. Further, I was able to forge a relationship with one of ICES' researchers, Dr. Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake, who served as a local host supervisor. My early conversations with Dr. Rajasingham-Senanayake helped shape the scope of my participant criteria, leading me to focus on LH participants who engaged with livelihood assistance instead of development programs from all sectors. My relationship with WERC was similar yet less formalized than that with ICES. With WERC, I had access to their collection of feminist-oriented research publications and research through their library, and benefitted tremendously from their network of feminists, activists, and NGO workers in the North. WERC's Director, Mrs. Shiranee Mills, also facilitated several first introductions to key informants and interlocutors in Jaffna once I based myself there. Through these initial contacts in the North, I was able to begin growing my network of contacts.

[The Essential Role of Research Assistants](#)

The Research Assistants' (RAs) contribution to this study was invaluable and cannot be overstated, particularly the principal RA involved in the LH method. I engaged three RAs: two working locally and based in Jaffna, and one based in Ottawa who helped later in the process with some translation support of the KII interviews. This section will focus primarily on the RAs involved in the field research.

I endeavoured to ensure that the RAs were as much a part of the planning and research process as possible and that they felt equipped to engage with and conduct the research as best as

possible. These efforts reflected both a utilitarian desire to ensure the quality of my field research and my commitment to mentoring emerging local researchers who would go on to engage in other projects and make valuable research contributions. I was fortunate enough to be introduced to Thavachchelvi Rasan¹⁴ through a contact in Jaffna furnished by one of my committee members. After an initial meeting to discuss the research project, the anticipated translation, interpretation, and participant liaison duties of the role, as well as the underlying feminist spirit of the project, Ms. Rasan was hired as the lead RA. Given the expected volume of work, as well as Ms. Rasan's limited weekday availability, I sought another preferably male RA. Given that many recommended RA candidates who had strong English, interpersonal and research skills along with an understanding of feminist principles were often already fully employed or otherwise unavailable, I took advantage of snowballing and networking to identify one other RA who would support the FGDs. This male RA came to the project upon Ms. Rasan's recommendation. However, after several KIIs and the male FGD, this RA secured full time employment elsewhere and was no longer able to accommodate the timeline of the study. As such, all LH sessions and remaining Tamil-language KIIs were supported by Ms. Rasan. Once I returned to Canada, some additional translation work was required to produce clear transcripts of the LH, FGD and KII sessions in English. A student at the University of Ottawa who is of Sri Lankan Tamil background was identified through a professor I was in contact with, and who facilitated a meeting to discuss the scope of work, remuneration and other details, and was hired to do this ex-post work in Canada.

In terms of positionality, Ms. Rasan is a young lecturer at the University of Jaffna who is based in Jaffna. Despite my early concerns, her position as an educated woman of a certain

¹⁴ Ms. Rasan has provided consent to use her name in this dissertation.

higher class did not prevent access to or conversations with participants of the LH or FGD methods. On the contrary, Ms. Rasan's position at the university most often contributed a general sense of local endorsement of myself as a foreign researcher that fostered acceptance and a willingness to participate on the part of the participants. The male RA embodied a different positionality, being male and educated, but without the formal title and position within a university. Although both RAs were based in Jaffna, having some research experience in the Vanni furnished each with a level of familiarity with the research context, and notably allowed them to speak to and reflect on the cultural, class and caste differences between the Jaffna peninsula and the Vanni.

Once the RAs were identified, our first meeting consisted of a two-hour training held on 18 January 2019. Topics covered include a rationale for the use of the selected methods; self-care and debriefing; discussion on how to mitigate unequal power dynamics (gender, caste, class, nationality) between and amongst researchers (RA, PI) and narrators/participants; active listening role plays; and how to handle potential disclosures of SGBV or other protection issues. In particular, the discussion around power dynamics revealed several subtleties of the culture and context and led to rich discussions of how this may impact the relationships and communication between our research team and participants. For example, one RA shared that they usually would not feel comfortable entering the homes of people of a lower caste, but it would be acceptable to them since the research takes place outside of Jaffna. A discussion on the dynamics of age and gender also led the RAs to conclude that it would be acceptable for older men to be interviewed by a female RA since this would invoke a dynamic of "grandfather to granddaughter," which would likely put narrators at further ease.

Interestingly, this familial characterization of relationships emerged throughout the life histories sessions when narrators would use family positions, such as mother or sister, to illustrate relationships built on respect. At this first training, the RAs and I reviewed the Tamil language consent and information forms to ensure that the language was appropriate and understood similarly by all our research team members. This discussion on language was particularly insightful as it raised the issue of the use of formal Tamil versus slang and local words. Together we agreed that the forms would be read out as written but that during the process and in conversations, the RAs would use the familiar slang or informal words to ensure comprehension on the part of participants.

Later, we held regular meetings with the RAs to check in and discussed various topics or issues that had come up. At these meetings and throughout my time in the field, I encouraged the RAs to make suggestions, for example working with the NGO Consortium to select participants who had received INGO assistance.

I also endeavoured to create space for RAs to reflect on their experiences and observations throughout the process, such as building in time for debriefs after FGD and LH sessions, as well as providing journals for them to use privately and at their discretion to document and process their own experiences throughout the research. The RAs' reflections contributed tremendously to the ongoing analysis and process of the research, thanks to their candour and trust. For example, one RA observed that the women narrators seemed more "in tune" and aware of the NGO apparatus and structure and can more readily recall details surrounding their experience receiving assistance, such as the names of the NGO. This ability contrasted with the men, who vaguely recalled receiving a cow or chicken or start-up funds. Together, the RAs and I theorized that this phenomenon resulted from women being

preferentially targeted as beneficiaries of this type of assistance. Therefore, their relationship with NGOs actors, structures and processes might be more robust and hold a more prominent place in their memories and association between assistance and development actors.

Amongst the most rewarding experiences of working with the research assistants was the peer mentorship that began to unfold throughout the research. For instance, when one RA expressed discomfort discussing some of the research concepts, another RA offered encouragement, citing that a deeper comfort level with the terminology comes with experience and practice, which they will gain working on this and other projects. Since a corollary of my research set out to mentor and equip future researchers in Northern Sri Lanka with concrete and transferable research skills, moments such as these confirmed that this project was indeed working towards promoting sustainability and leaving something behind after my research concluded.

Our research team meetings also helped reveal issues that had emerged and could be addressed by improving the research process. For example, the RAs observed that participants did not always recall the exact pronunciation of the names of NGOs – understandable since many development actors assume foreign names and acronyms that mean little in a local context and language. The variance in pronunciation led to some confusion as to which NGOs narrators were referring. We decided as a research team that it would be necessary to produce a written Tamil transcription of each session so that both RAs can go over these together and discuss meanings, background, and context. Although this proved to be more time-consuming, these Tamil transcripts allowed quick reference to the source data, which was invaluable when cleaning up the English-translated transcripts and making sense of these data.

It should be mentioned that the same RA was responsible and involved in the same method or participant group across the data collection process. One RA facilitated the LH sessions, while another supported the KIIs with consecutive interpretation. The RA supporting LHs was responsible for producing the written transcriptions in Tamil and then written translations in English. Due to the prioritization of conducting interviews, a third RA was later engaged in Canada to provide Tamil transcription and English translation of the KIIs. This allocation of tasks allowed the RAs to hone their skills applying their assigned method. It also encouraged a closer relationship between the RA and the data as they followed the original session to the written transcription and translation, in the case of the RA working on the LHs.

Interpretation

Consecutive interpretation was used during FGDs, LHs and KIIs. For the LHs, this approach was adapted to include only conversation markers periodically throughout the participant's narration. While KIIs and FGDs were one-time interviews or discussions, LH sessions were conducted twice with each LH participant, thus allowing for a period of reflection and opportunities to revisit, clarify and expand on what a participant said in the first session. Further, the listening session methodology I applied to LHs requires that participants occupy as close to the entire time and space created as possible to explore, often in the moment, their experiences and how they make sense of these. Thus, applying this limited consecutive interpretation prevented any potentially derailing interruptions in the flow of the narrator's story. The challenge with this technique was that increased pressure was placed on the quality of transcriptions to reflect the accuracy of what each narrator discussed and capture the feeling and more subtle nuances of speech and communication. For this, the RA and I had ongoing discussions about how to capture this in the transcripts, detailing what might seem unimportant

but is quite relevant to the analysis. The RA for LH interviews was particularly well-suited as she understood pace, silence, new characters coming on the 'stage' of our interview, and other dramatic/theatrical techniques.

To practice developing a rhythm and degree of comfort with conducting listening sessions in a second language with an interpreter providing only sporadic and intermittent interpretation, I undertook a pilot test of my approach with my (very generous and patient) grandmother-in-law. Babcia, as she is affectionately known in our family, speaks only Polish. My husband (also endlessly generous, supportive and patient) acted as our interpreter. The three of us sat in my sister-in-law's basement one chilly December afternoon. I asked Babcia the same open-ended question that I would pose several weeks later on sunbaked porches and tree-shaded lawns in Kilinochchi. This dry run of asking someone to select and expound on their lived experiences helped me tremendously to become acquainted with the ebb and flow of human narration. Like those in Sri Lanka, this conversation was marked by both silences and long periods when my husband (acting as interpreter) nor I uttered a word. On a more technical note, this also allowed me to 'field test' my equipment, namely my audio recorder.

Pre-Analysis

Transcription and Translation

Since most of the interviews were conducted in Tamil, transcripts needed to be produced and then translated. I chose to include the transcription step to provide a written reference document, which came in use later when I had questions about the English translation of certain words, or if something else required checking. This process was delicate and was shaped by the nuances of working across languages, cultures and, eventually, long distances. Translation work is never a value-neutral or merely technical process but rather is inherently imbued with

judgement and interpretation. As Wengraf articulates, "when data have been translated and/or transcribed, they are not raw data anymore – they are "processed data" (Wengraf, 2001, p. 7). Since I am not a Tamil speaker, I required support to produce the translation. I was thus at the behest of the standpoints and "processing" of the RAs who provided the invaluable service of transcription and translation, and these inevitable biases and filters must be acknowledged. As a result, the data (transcripts) that I eventually coded must be seen precisely as "processed data."

The original recordings of the FGDs, LHs and the KIIs conducted in Tamil were all first transcribed in the original Tamil by the locally hired RA who conducted the interview. Then, the written Tamil transcription was translated into English by the same RA. As mentioned earlier, the RA responsible for KIIs was fully engaged in supporting this process. However, they were unable to complete the transcription and translation due to time constraints and a heavy workload. Fortunately, I found a highly capable and motivated RA once back in Canada who could provide complete and precise translation of the remaining Tamil transcripts. Once the draft English translations were completed, I reviewed and returned them with clarification questions, which the respective RA addressed by going back to the written Tamil transcriptions and, when necessary, the original audio recording of the interview. Not always included in these transcripts were notes on physical silences or when narrators took breaks in their speech. This point had been discussed as a research team. However, given the myriad considerations that the RAs had to balance, plus all the mental and emotional labour required when listening to traumatic stories repeatedly, reflecting silences in the transcripts was not prioritized in the process. For interviews conducted in English, I transcribed these myself as soon after the interview took place as possible. I endeavoured to include notes on when speakers paused or took breaks, which signals physical silences in the interviews. However, other forms of silence – silences of content,

silences of detail – could only be captured in the resulting text itself. As such, the final transcripts produced both by myself and by the RAs were as comprehensive and close to the original narrators' narration as possible but must be read with the considerations of individual's processing and standpoint as well as limitations in capturing silences.

Analysis

I used thematic, narrative and feminist critical discourse analysis (CDA) to analyze qualitative data collected during Individual and FGDs, LHs and KIIs. Thematic analysis allowed for the identification of related themes and patterns amongst respondents, while narrative analysis helped reveal how participants have grappled with and made sense of their own experiences. For this narrative analysis, I deployed a feminist CDA to uncover complex gender and power relations. Applying a feminist CDA allowed me to "examine how power and dominance are discursively produced and/or (counter-)resisted" through analyzing participants' social practices and "interactional strategies of talk" (Lazar, 2007, p. 149). As part of my critical discourse analysis, I also incorporated elements from Gilligan's *Listening Guide Method of Psychological Inquiry* (2015), which focuses on voice and relationship, and poses questions related to who is speaking to whom, in what physical space and what stories about which relationships are being told.

It is a heavy responsibility to balance an accurate portrayal of the meaning and feeling of what narrators shared during listening sessions with the analysis and meaning that these meanings represent and suggest. In grappling with this feminist researcher's dilemma, I am comforted by Sangster's sage words, that "we can honour feminist ethical obligations to make our material accessible to the women interviewed, never to reveal confidences spoken out of the interview, never to purposely distort or ridicule their lives, but in the last resort, it is our privilege

that allows us to interpret, and it is our responsibility as historians to convey their insights using our own” (1994, p. 12). I recognize this privilege as a researcher and consciously carried it with me throughout my analysis.

Unexpectedly, returning to my data after an 18-month hiatus due to parental leave provided me with a fresh perspective through which to read through my data, coding, and coding frames. Furthermore, after returning to the data, I made connections between and amongst the higher-level themes that I had previously identified. From there, I organized them into the broad categories that comprise the empirical chapters, discussion, and analysis that follows.

Coding

Before embarking on the coding process, I decided not to use NVivo or another such Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS). First- and second-level coding was done by hand, allowing me a more tactile intimacy with the data that was neither sterile nor overly technical. In some ways, having this physical contact with the transcripts helped reconnect me to the study's participants, especially since the analysis was conducted while I was back in Canada and so far away from my participants and the field site context. Based on this study's research questions and content of the interviews, the code types used for the analysis included attribute; in vivo; emotion; values; evaluation; and initial coding. During coding, I kept a running coding memo document as part of my Methods Journal and used this to record my process, reflections, and potential patterns within the data. As Saldaña (2009) recommends, documenting the process through these coding memos was an important analytic heuristic that helped me track the process and evolution of my analysis and understand the data better. These memos were used in an iterative way to inform and be informed again and again as I read and re-read through the transcripts.

I used inductive, grounded theory to guide my coding process. I did not have any predetermined codes that I was testing or applying but instead built them 'from the ground up' as the data were revealed to me. In my first level coding, I coded for a wide variety of items, which included, among other things, events during the war; evaluations of the aid process; instances or fear of violence; coping mechanisms during and after the war; as well as impactful quotations that were captured by in vivo coding. In my second pass, I added codes that included alcohol and drug use; psychosocial, mental health and suicide; feelings of power; and meta-methodological commentary on narrators' participation in this study. Second cycle coding is described by Morse as "fitting categories one with another" with the intention of developing a coherent synthesis of the data (Morse, 1994, p. 25). Saldaña identifies the primary goal of second cycle coding "to develop a sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual, and/or theoretical organization from your array of First Cycle codes" (2009, p. 145). However, some of this work may be done during the First Cycle coding process, which was the case in my coding and analysis process. I did a first pass of coding all LH transcripts, which slowly evolved into higher-level categorization and the simple identification of events, values, quotes, and opinions with which I had been subsequently preoccupied. I noticed in my second cycle coding that new themes emerged, including the importance of reputation, the recurring emphasis on one's own contribution to their community in what was often described as "social" or "community work," as well as the overarching theme of gendered insecurity and how this plays out differently (or similarly) in the lives of the narrators.

Reviewing the themes that came up in the first round of coding and knowing that my focus had been refined and pulled in different directions as I became more familiar with the process, I began by reviewing my coding memos from the first round of coding. Then, I

compiled a long list of codes or possible themes that I noted throughout and used these to help organize or direct my reading of these transcripts. Inevitably, my thinking and analysis evolved throughout the first round of coding. Nevertheless, I wanted to make sure that I had not ignored or was blind to specific trends that may also be present in the first few sets of transcripts. Continually referring to my original research questions was useful in helping me to organize some of my reflections on what themes and findings might eventually be discussed together. However, as the iterative writing and analysis process evolved, so, too, did my research questions. Finally, I reflected on my codes' theoretical connections to the larger literature discussed in the previous chapter and what new areas of theory and literature I had not considered that I should have. I then revisited my theory and literature review and ensured that these themes were discussed in these sections.

Once I had gone through this coding process, I was left with a long list of approximately 1600 rough codes. I numbered each one and slotted them under their respective life history narrator in a sort of 'code phonebook' document to use as a reference to locate in which interview the codes were captured. I then reviewed these rough codes to try to recall and form some of the categories that I had identified during the coding process and coding collection. Next, I pulled out these categories and began to slot the rough codes underneath them, taking care to keep the numbers associated with the codes attached so that I could go back and use them as a reference in the original transcripts when needed. Next, I reviewed and reorganized the categories to avoid duplication, allow for a splitting of some larger categories, and to help refine the resulting list of categories. Lastly, I examined the categories and attendant codes that made up my Codebook. I returned to the Codebook to revisit the categories/themes, test their applicability, see if new or revised themes needed to be created, and begin defining each category. I also thought about how

these could connect to a potentially overriding theory that would help answer my research questions and noted these as my thinking evolved.

Limits to Methodology

My methodology called for narrators to be provided ample space and scope for their responses, with little to no interruption from researchers. The choice not to have simultaneous or close consecutive interpretation in the moment meant that only in the transcripts did some things show up that would have been interesting to probe further. In the case of LH sessions that took place towards the end of the research period, and therefore were transcribed once I left the field site, it was no longer possible to follow up on points that narrators raised. If done differently, I would have made space in the methodological interpretation of the LH methodology and listening tools for closer interpretation in the moment to track ideas and follow up on important points that could have been interesting to explore in the moment. On the one hand, having more frequent pauses for interpretation may have disrupted the flow of the conversation. On the other hand, however, closer interpretation might have been balanced out by the benefit of following up with clarifying questions or probes in the moment and not relying on the delayed process of transcription and translation to reveal these gaps and opportunities.

Also, as mentioned above in the discussion on translation and transcription, the data relies so heavily on the skill of the RA in translating ideas – not only literally, but also emotionally, metaphorically, intuitively, conceptually – from one language to the next. Inevitably, the sense and flavour of what is said by a narrator will literally be lost in translation (see [Temple, 2015](#); [Temple & Young, 2004](#)). It is important to acknowledge this pitfall before delving into what was said by the narrators in this study.

Despite the full intention to include as diverse of a participant sample as possible, some constraints lay beyond my control, which meant that certain groups could not participate. Particularly disappointing is the lack of participants in this study who identify as transgender, gay, lesbian, queer and other members of the LGBTQ+ communities. Colonially-rooted (Wong, 2021) attitudes and taboos surrounding gender and sexual identity issues prevail in Sri Lanka, particularly in the North and East of the country (Nandakumar, 2020). This context made identifying, connecting with, or even speaking about these groups and identities highly challenging, given the associated taboos. Unfortunately, my attempts to work with Colombo-based LGBTQ+ grassroots organizations to contact any organization or individual in the North who might connect me with individuals willing to participate in this study proved unsuccessful. Therefore, the findings from this study cannot and should not be generalizable to include the experiences of those who identify as LGBTQ+. The experiences of these individuals are no doubt differently complex from heterosexual, cis-gender community members. Approaching these individuals would require a degree of sensitivity, trust, understanding – and likely insider status – that I could not cultivate during the tenure of my fieldwork.

Sexual Harassment, Violence, and the Research Process/Product

Risks of sexual harassment and violence have a dual-directional impact on any qualitative research with human subjects, particularly where the researchers or participants identify as something other than the dominant gender, ethnicity, class, age, and other identity markers of the culture or community in question. My research is no exception. In this dual-directional model, the risks posed to the researcher arise out of several characteristics of the research, including the time, place, subjects, and content of interactions with direct and indirect research participants. Looking at particularly ethnographic research conducted by female-identifying researchers such

as myself, Hanson and Richards (2017, 2019) have illuminated three 'fixations' of contemporary ethnography that underpin researchers' experiences of and reactions to sexual harassment across their research. These three fixations or intersecting standards of ethnography – solitude, danger, and intimacy – work to both influence the risks of experiencing sexual harassment and how these risks and actual experiences in turn influence the very construction of knowledge that these research projects contribute. Hanson and Richards encourage researchers to reflect upon experiences of sexual harassment and not brush them aside as merely an "awkward surplus" (2017, p. 602). Answering their call, I have attempted to include in this dissertation my own reflections of how threats of and actual sexual harassment have impacted my own research, including my experiences of conducting research in the field and how these experiences have potentially informed the analysis of my results. Although my work's prevailing ethos and theoretical orientation compel me to privilege the voices of participants and not my own, the opportunity to contribute to improving the discipline justifies the interjection of my personal accounts. I will attempt to do this delicately and not at the expense of creating space for the research participants.

This research design draws upon guidelines and best practices for working on SGBV and trauma issues in emergencies, such as the *Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Researching, Documenting and Monitoring Sexual Violence in Emergencies* (World Health Organization, 2007). While sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is not a central point of inquiry of this research, there is always a risk of disclosure by participants who are directly and indirectly involved in incidents of SGBV. Many of the participants in this study described fear or experiences of trauma and torture, which often left me as the PI at a loss for how to treat these claims, particularly when they implicated state-level actors.

Prior to conducting any of the participatory methods, I, as the PI, along with the RAs, made attempts to identify locally available supportive resources (for example, psychosocial, health, legal) in order to be prepared to offer information and make safe referrals to trained experts in case disclosures of SGBV, torture or other protection issues. Identifying these available resources served two purposes. Firstly, locating these organizations and services served a preparative purpose vis-à-vis potential disclosure. Secondly, identifying local NGOs and civil society organizations that were active and engaged in anti-violence against women work and advocacy led to potential sources of information and participants in key informant interviews. Where these resources did not exist, foundational principles of working with SGBV – safety, confidentiality, respect – were observed by the Principal Investigator and Research Assistant(s). These principles were also covered during the RA initial training, and mini role plays were conducted to ensure that RAs had built enough confidence in safely handling disclosures. Including this section on SGBV principles comprised part of the mentoring process, whereby RAs learned new skills that they could apply outside of their engagement in this research.

Recognizing that working on topics of gender may be sensitive and pose unintended professional, personal, and even safety risks, concerted efforts were made to ensure the safety and well-being of myself and all those who will be working on the project. This included regular debriefs with the RAs to raise concerns and share observations. These debriefings were also used to identify strategies to reduce future risks and promote well-being, such as taking adequate rest breaks between interviews.

I value the importance of including reflections on how sexual harassment and violence impact the research process, particularly for female researchers. The real and perceived threats of sexualized harm manifest themselves in ways that impact the research process and can colour the

resulting analysis of data. The following excerpt from my Field Notes/Methods Journal describes how a seemingly mild yet unpleasant interaction impacted my and the RA's decisions while in the field conducting interviews. This incident also influenced my personal decisions around physical movement and reflections on feelings of insecurity that lingered after. The conversation with a friend that I refer to below involved her disclosing that while she had been waiting for the train at the Kilinochchi station, a group of seemingly intoxicated young men approached her, making jokes about how they would rape her.

[...] on my way home, I was yelled at by several men on motorbikes whizzing by. Was I imagining this? Has my recent conversation with [friend] and the experience in Kili [Kilinochchi] lifted a veil on this harassment that I had otherwise kept intact, or was there indeed a sense of increased rowdiness and energy on the streets? In front of Northmart [grocery store], one young boy in a white shirt and black dress pants confidently walked up to me and said 'Hello, miss!'. My immediate reaction was to sternly say "Please don't talk to me", and fortunately he backed right off. I had been thinking the entire walk to the restaurant and back how much I hated feeling like an animal there to be tormented, gawked at, harassed, and was surprised at the fantasies of violence that I entertained in my mind, telling myself that if I was confronted by a group of men that I would physically fight my way out of it. This is such a dramatic shift in the way [usually] I feel on the streets, perhaps because I am usually with Chelvi [RA] who seems to behave in ways that other women are not able, or perhaps because I previously chalked up any unwanted attention to my foreignness, and not my gender. Things seem so much rawer now, and I am acutely aware of any attention directed my way. As a consequence, I stayed in my room all day, only emerging to get dinner at one of the hotels near the university. Even then, I felt uncomfortable waiting for my kotthu [local dish], and when paying, couldn't help but wonder what the two men behind the counter were snickering at. (11 March 2019, Jaffna, Sri Lanka)

This journal entry describes one incident of sexual harassment that effectively stifled my confidence and diminished my sense of security. These feelings of insecurity and the constant dull threat of harassment hampered my ability fully to explore the research environment in those moments or to feel confident enough to make new social connections with individuals from whom I could learn. Through these subtle choices, I had to make as a researcher that privileged

security and safety over pursuing new ways to advance my research that may have impacted my research in ways unknown.

It should be noted, however, that sexual violence can occur in any research context despite variances – conflict- or not conflict-affected, ‘developed’ and ‘developing’ countries, and even across methods such as surveys, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews. It would be unhelpful and antithetical to my commitments to feminist and post-colonial principles to imply that these risks only emerge while conducting research in ‘the field’, often constructed as a place of the ‘Other’. However, given that this research is rooted in a specific case study, these points are discussed with reference to the context of Northern Sri Lanka.

Considering sexual violence within the research process also points to how sexual violence and harassment are situated within – and not existing outside of – the larger context of safety, ethics, and security of research. To this point, I am concerned as much about (if not more) the participants of my research and the RAs with whom I work as I am about myself. To privilege my own experience of sexual violence and harassment over others directly contributing to this research would be against my own feminist principles, which is why I am motivated to understand sexual violence, harassment and research as encompassing not only the researcher’s experience, but also those of others’ contributors to the research, including RAs and participants.

It is essential to reflect on the political moment in which this study took place, given that crimes including alleged war crimes, such as sexual violence and torture, were themes that arose during this research. Fear and mistrust abound to the present day. The fieldwork for this study took place in 2019, a moment in Sri Lanka's political history that was amenable to such qualitative inquiry that necessitated such direct contact with survivors of war. During formal and informal interviews, several individuals expressed their doubts that this research could have

taken place during the previous political regime of Mahinda Rajapaksa. Rajapaksa served as President during the final stages of war until 2015 and is widely viewed as highly sensitive and protective against any public scrutiny regarding the conclusion of the country's civil war (Samath, 2009, 2010). In the mid-2000s, Rajapaksa led a campaign to "crack down" on NGOs in Sri Lanka (Kilby, 2019), prohibiting NGOs from issuing press releases or engaging in press conferences and requiring NGOs to submit for approval their plan for the year ahead (Dibbert, 2014). These measures were all taken in the name of national security and terrorism prevention, highlighting that "regulation, transparency and accountability of funding to NGOs and NPOs [non-profit organizations] is a pre-requisite in the interest of national security and counter-terrorism as recognized by states" (Ministry of Defense and Urban Development, 2013). President Maithripala Sirisena's Presidency had signaled a more open and conciliatory political agenda in the post-war context and even pledged to re-open the war crimes inquiry (BBC, 2015). In 2019 when my research took place, Sirisena was still in office. In this political climate, ICES kindly extended to me an affiliated researcher title, allowing me to be granted official permission to conduct my research without any interference or obstruction from state actors.

In 2005 Mahinda Rajapaksa appointed his brother, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, as Secretary of Defence, placing him at the head of the country's military, intelligence, and police forces. Gotabaya Rajapaksa thus oversaw the final brutal days of the war. Both have been named in several reports on human rights abuses, especially during the final phase of the war (International Crisis Group, 2010; United Nations, 2011; United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2015; U.S. Department of State, 2009). Since the conclusion of my fieldwork, Gotabaya Rajapaksa has been elected President of Sri Lanka, with Mahinda Rajapaksa serving as Prime Minister, drawing concerns amongst Tamil communities that the fear and intimidation that

marked his brother's administration would return (Amnesty International, 2021; Tamil Guardian, 2020). Given the administration in Sri Lanka, in which Gotabaya Rajapaksa was elected at the end of 2019, it is uncertain if my project would take place unimpeded if conducted two years later.

Positionality

In line with the feminist research methodologies and epistemologies that this research – and myself as a researcher – is committed to, it is crucial to situate myself within the research, in the context of my own history, gender, race, class, and culture, and to make attempts to reflect how the many factors of my own identity have shaped the research process for this study. One of the main contributions of feminist research is its unearthing of the ethical and theoretical dilemmas related to positionality and hierarchies that are inherently created during an interview process. Judith Stacey argues that feminist research methods, in particular ethnographic-inspired methods such as oral and life histories, are more susceptible to "exploitation, betrayal, and abandonment by the researcher" compared with more positivist and "masculinist" methods (Stacey, 1988, p. 21). Stacey points to the relative freedom of the "researcher" to exit the complicated system of relationships as opposed to the "researched," which represents an inherent power imbalance between the two. To address these unequal dynamics within the research dynamic, Oakley (1981) proposes that the interview be equalized and that the process is one not of interviewer and interviewee, but rather embodies a cooperative venture. During and after LH sessions, some narrators commented on how the process of participating in the LH sessions brought them a sense of relief and catharsis through creating a space to express complicated feelings and experiences for which they had no other outlet. Other narrators also commented on their appreciation for mutual learning and exchange that they gained from their participation and

through interacting with two people – myself as an international researcher and the RA, a Jaffna-based academic – with whom they may not have otherwise encountered. In this way, an element of reciprocity emerged from the research process.

As a researcher, I hope to reveal myself to the reader "not as an invisible, anonymous, disembodied voice of authority, but as a real, historical individual with concrete, specific desires – and interests – and ones that are sometimes in tension with each other" (Harding, 1989, p. 29). The practice of self-reflexivity has been critiqued as counterproductive to the post-colonial project to de-center the West since it refocuses attention the white, Western researchers (Hale, 1991). However, I believe it necessary to reflect not on myself for the sake of doing so but to explore how my positionality has inevitably impacted the research process and outcomes. Sangster (1994) further offers feminist researchers some ethical guidelines to help address these unequal relationships between researchers and interviewees, such as making available and accessible the research material and outcomes; never revealing confidences of research participants; and never purposely distorting or ridiculing their lives. I intend to adhere to these guidelines and ensure that my research findings are accessible to those who have participated in this research and scholars, practitioners, and policymakers who could benefit from these findings.

It is also an essential exercise for any feminist researcher to reflect upon questions of ownership of knowledge and experiences, or as Harding eponymously queries, "[w]hose science? Whose knowledge?" (Harding, 1991). In response to these critical questions and considerations, I have endeavoured to adhere to Sangster's guidelines above. Furthermore, acknowledging my own power differential vis-à-vis this study's participants raises questions about my own authority or right to interpret and write about their stories. However, through

forging allyships and partnerships across research contexts and leveraging unique positionalities in a responsible, equitable manner, our knowledge about vital issues related to social justice, gender equality, and myriad other aspects of the human condition can be advanced. Here I find guidance and support in Pierson's argument that if researchers cannot study those of different backgrounds and who have less power, we would be restricted to only writing autobiographies (Pierson, 1991). As part of these attempts to responsibly mobilize my positionality, I must first acknowledge and unpack it.

One aspect of my positionality relevant to this study revolves around my professional background as an international aid worker who has worked with local and international NGOs, the UN, and the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement for over ten years. My professional background afforded me a certain level of insight and literacy into the intricacies of development and humanitarian work, such as project cycles, donor pressures, prevailing global norms, and policy trends, and the delicate and often overlooked interpersonal dynamics between development staff and volunteers. These dynamics are often racialized, gendered, classed, and localized, for example, the dichotomy (and very real differences in labour conditions and benefits) between international/national staff. Equipped with this knowledge and experience allowed me to empathize particularly with KII participants and quickly relate the content and feelings of what they shared to a larger development apparatus of which I, too, had been a part. I wrongly assumed that I could leverage this 'insider status,' which would be the currency that would gain instantaneous trust and unmitigated access to various NGO workers¹⁵. However, my concurrent 'outsider status' more often overrode this, particularly when approaching potential participants in the first place. After all, I was not a practitioner but rather a researcher in these

¹⁵ For more fulsome discussions on insider/outsider status in qualitative research, please see Dwyer & Buckle (2009) and Louis & Bartunek (1992).

moments. Once interviews got underway, I found that I became more adept at navigating this dialectic and tried to emphasize my 'likeness' to the participants in the hopes that this would create a comfortable and trusting environment in which they would feel confident enough to speak candidly with me. The following excerpt from my Field Notes/Methods Journal illustrates how I attempted to navigate my own insider/outsider identity in relation to development NGO workers:

In KIIs with NGO workers, I make it a point in my introduction to share that I have been working for over 10 years with NGOs, UN, Red Cross. I do this to build rapport, to signal to the participant that I 'speak the language' of NGOs, and that they can use technical terms with me and go into that level of detail. I state this to move closer to 'insider' status, so that they can be frank and honest with me, but making sure to be clear that I don't currently work for anyone that they work for (14 February 2019, Jaffna, Sri Lanka).

I entered the research process with post-development and feminist post-structuralist critiques front of mind. While my research does not focus on foreign aid workers, my position as a white, middle-class Canadian female aid worker resonates with research conducted by Heron (2007) on subjects who closely resemble my profile. Heron reveals subtle patterns of how white Canadian women aid workers construct the self through their 'desire for development' manifested in highly raced, classed, and gendered terms. These 'colonial continuities' inevitably influence interactions with individuals in the global south and reveal underlying assumptions and patterns of historical power dynamics that continue into the present day. Relatedly, Lazar (2007) criticizes Western (white) researchers who conduct research in settings that are not their own, who do not collaborate with locals or scholars from this community, and situations when the researcher's positionality remains ambiguous. I address Lazar's first point in the discussion above on methods, where I elaborate on my choice as a researcher to use local Research Assistants for all methods, as well as the rationale to expand the role of 'researcher' to include participants

themselves as the owners and creators of research. To address Lazar's latter point, in the interests of transparency and self-reflection, I have drafted a positionality statement of myself as a researcher, which I share here.

Positionality Statement

As a Canadian woman who grew up in my country's populous and arguably most multicultural city, I bring a particular view/lens of the world that must be addressed. I was born to first- and second-generation parents of Jewish immigrants arriving from a smattering of Eastern European countries. I grew up in a middle-class, predominately white, Judeo-Christian community. I was safe, happy, and encouraged to explore the world around me without fear. However, I recognize that my position has afforded me a set of opportunities to learn, work and travel outside of my community and country that are not available to everyone equally.

I began working in development and humanitarian aid after having the good fortune and resources to complete my undergraduate and graduate degrees in International Development, the latter of which was completed in the United Kingdom. I took up my first role in a country I had not even heard of a year prior. Somehow, my position, education, and Curriculum Vitae convinced the world's largest international organization that I was qualified to weigh in on a country's strategy to protect children's rights. I was less convinced but accepted the assignment and learned a tremendous amount. My subsequent professional roles were driven by and reinforced my core beliefs that women and girls are too often marginalized, oppressed, and vulnerable, quickly learning later that, of course, we are much more than that and that other groups are certainly not immune to these conditions in various circumstances.

I have been professionally and academically trained to 'spot the gender,' analyze what is presented to go deeper and unearth the implications for men, women, girls, boys, and, recently,

transgender persons. I am always wearing gender glasses, and although I may not always ask the gender question out loud, you can be sure that I am thinking of at least a few. So, too, with gender-based violence and any sort of interpersonal violence. When I read research and narratives about children, youth, or anyone who may have less power than someone else, my mind immediately jumps to questions of threats and risks, chronic adversities, open doors for abuse, and questions if violence exists here. These bi-focal gender and violence prevention lenses colour how I move through the world, particularly how I interpret situations where I know these risks are heightened, particularly in conflicts and emergencies.

I have been extremely fortunate to work, live, and travel to dozens of countries and have had very meaningful and cherished encounters with many different people with as many different stories to tell. I feel a great responsibility towards the participants in my research, to honour their time and experiences, and I often feel deep empathy towards them. When I read transcripts from my previous research, I often feel what I felt when I heard these words spoken in real-time, in real life. Heeding advice from my previous research mentors, I am also looking for what is not being said and asking myself why that might be. During my Ph.D. studies, I have committed to continually reflecting on my positionality and how this may impact the research process, from design, data collection, analysis and communication of results.

It is important to be forthcoming and transparent about my positionality, not only as an exercise to guide me as a researcher to do the most ethical research that honours feminist principles laid out in this chapter, but also to reflect on how my positionality has impacted the research process. In many ways, my racial, geographic, socioeconomic, linguistic and educational statuses place me on the highest rungs of the privilege ladder, both in Canada and the Sri Lankan context. As a white Canadian whose first language is English and who has the means

to remove myself from the workforce for several years to pursue a doctorate, I already embody several markers of privilege and power, many of which are visible. These privileges have afforded me access to institutions and individuals imperative to my research, including bilateral and multilateral donors, senior-ranking UN and NGO officials, diplomats, and academic institutions while in Sri Lanka. Upon arrival at these offices, I was able to furnish credentials and communicate in a colonial language that further confirmed my outsider status, but a status that was unquestionable in my right to be present.

During KIIs, LH listening sessions, and the meetings with local leaders prior to those to secure permission and support to conduct these in Kilinochchi, my foreignness may have inspired fear or suspicion to some, as expressed by Alfred. He had his former intelligence officer antenna poised and on alert from the moment he laid eyes on me. However, for others, my physical presence as a white Westerner represented something different in this context. Given the violent histories of the war and the unresolved accusations of war crimes against military and political leadership still in the air, some took my presence as a physical representation of the path to justice. Several times I was asked to convey to the International Criminal Court (ICC) the case of the Tamil people and the suffering they endured during and after the war. Despite my numerous attempts to correct them and distance myself from such a political body, it was clear that my citizenship, ethnicity, and other identity factors represented a line to "Geneva," which was often invoked as a byword for the international community's justice mechanism.

While I represent a high degree of privilege overall, my gender did pose risks and vulnerabilities to harm that were sexual and gendered in nature. I believe these gender-related risks worked to restrict some periods of my field research as I grappled with my own fear and a new lens through which to view the people I encountered in my daily life in the North. The

impacts of these experiences are discussed in the section on sexual harassment and the research process above. However, my gender also worked to my advantage in the socio-cultural context of the Vanni, where it was acceptable for myself and the female RA to speak candidly and openly about highly personal matters with women, frequently in their homes.

I entered the research process having acknowledged any potential interpreted, symbolic or perceived symbols of power, vulnerability, neutrality, or interest of myself as a researcher. This process of self-reflection has helped me to recognize and account for any reproduction of colonial continuities (Heron, 2007) or "re-enacting historical imperialism in academic neo-imperialistic terms" (Lazar, 2007, p. 155). I hope that these efforts have, in turn, promoted academic honesty and better informed the research process.

In addition to reflecting on how my positionality may limit or otherwise influence my research, I have made several methodological choices intended to mitigate whatever limitations my identity may impose. My research recognizes that knowledge is constructed and is also situated, and thus it is impossible to generalize from a universalizing standpoint (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1991). Thus, my research methodology has been designed to encourage individuals to speak for themselves and create the space for these individuals to evaluate development aid interventions on their own terms. My commitment to ensuring that the subaltern speak is reflected in the methodology described below, which included working with locally hired Northern Sri Lankan Research Assistants to ensure that critical messages from participants are heard and understood in their proper context. I also field-tested my questions for focus groups and individuals with local women, men and other groups who are representative of my research participants. Field-testing helped calibrate my questions' construction so that they were best reflective of what communities themselves wish to know or have known about their experiences

with development aid and gender equality efforts. These measures helped ensure that my research is poised to make a valuable epistemological contribution towards creating knowledge, thus seeking to avoid exerting 'epistemic violence' (Spivak, 1988) where the Other is constructed. Teo has applied this Foucauldian concept to the empirical social sciences and illustrates how "the subject of violence is the researcher, the object is the *Other*, and the action is the interpretation of data that is presented as knowledge" (Teo, 2010, p. 295) (*italics in original*). My attempts to mitigate the risk of falling into anything resembling epistemic violence have been built into my methodological approach whereby the 'Other,' or the study's participants, are not problematized, devalued, or cast as inferior. On the contrary, it is precisely the knowledge that the research participants have constructed and communicated that is sought, encouraged, and valorized. This is not to say that whatever is uttered by a participant in this research is taken as something of the word of God, but rather is subject to a research process that has been designed to promote interpretations of the research findings based on the data and not on preconceived notions.

CHAPTER FOUR: Meeting the Narrators

Before delving into the findings and discussion resulting from the fieldwork that informs this study, it is incumbent on me as a researcher to properly introduce the participants in this study – referred to as ‘narrators’ to signify that they are the tellers of their own stories, and their own lived experiences – to help contextualize their contributions. It is precisely because of the indelible nature of the memories of living through war and post-war periods that these events need to be acknowledged. It is important to honour the stories and experiences that were shared during the life history process, including the visceral and often traumatic experiences of war. Although some of what is written below may not directly relate to the research questions that guide this study, it is my intention to honour the men and women who lived through these experiences by presenting what they survived through here, as close to the ways narrators themselves used to describe them. Creating the space for each narrator to be introduced and have some part of their stories retold is not only an act of respect, but also a reminder that the ‘data’ that inform this study originate from real people, who are living real lives, and have often lived through trauma that is all too real.

Many of the narrators present a similar set or sequence of information through sharing their stories: childhood, the war, and the resettlement and recent period of their lives. These may not have been revealed in order in their narration, however I have organized these biographies in chronological order for the sake of consistency and ease of flow for the reader. Perhaps not surprisingly, not all narrators shared details from the same periods in their lives with the same level of detail or contemplation, which is reflected in the elements presented in the biographical framework of these lives.

A reminder that as part of this study's feminist methodology, a do no harm approach means that participants have the right to forget, or the right to choose not to share details of periods of their life which are too troubling or difficult to recall. Punithavathi, for example, never mentions the war directly during life history sessions, referring only once to "*resettlement*" as a marker of time when she started raising cattle. Her experiences pertaining to the war were never probed into, firstly to respect the choice to remain silent on this topic, and also to mitigate any risk of retraumatization. Thus, Punithavathi's biographical sketch includes no historical or lingering experiences related to war, unlike all the other narrators.

It should be mentioned that the following biographical sketches are written as closely to the information provided as possible without jeopardizing anonymity. All names and many places have been changed to protect the identity of the narrator.

Since the epistemological and ontological approach of this study is explicitly interpretivist and non-positivist, no 'facts' or statements told through these stories have been cross-checked to determine their validity or 'truthfulness'. This adheres to the guiding principle of feminist oral history that "all autobiographical memory is true: it is up to the interpreter to discover in which sense, where, and for what purpose" (Passerini et al., 1989, p. 5). Further, the acknowledgement of 'multiple truths' challenges the Western tendency to focus on a single narrative, and contributes spotlighting marginalized voices and other narratives that may otherwise be overlooked or silenced (Hettiarachchi, 2018). Each narrator has shared these experiences with myself and the RA and are true for each narrator, and that is considered 'valid' enough for this study.

In this chapter, I first provide vital background and history into the traumatic nature of the war and its aftermath that all narrators of this study have either witnessed or experienced and

have survived. I focus on the intersection of trauma, gender, and identity to present how narrators' expressions of trauma and its ripple effects into the present day are experienced and articulated differently by different groups, often dependent on their identities related to gender, their association with the LTTE, and other factors. Once this contextual ground has been laid, the chapter presents each narrator in turn, whose stories so closely follow the unfolding battles and moments of peace throughout the war. In sum, this chapter provides rich background and historical context to each of the life histories remembered, articulated, and shared during this research. These biographical sketches help to contextualize and anchor the findings discussed in subsequent chapters to a real person, a living person, a person who has lived a gendered life before, during, and after their encounters with the development process. Further, these sketches expand our understanding of the narrators as individuals living within socially complex communities. The narrators have lived and continue to live lives that are coloured not only by pain and suffering, but also strength and even joy, thus compelling development actors and researchers to look more closely at the complexity of life after war.

Civil War and After

The island state of Sri Lanka has undergone periods of colonization from the Portuguese, Dutch and eventually British colonial empires, each of which left its indelible marks on the politics, culture, and economy of the state and its people (Holt, 2011; Spencer, 1990; Wickramasinghe, 2006). Many of these colonial legacies created the conditions for social and ethnic division between the majority Sinhala ethnic group others¹⁶, particularly Sri Lankan Tamils. Amongst these colonial vestiges is the Official Language Act No. 33 of 1956, commonly

¹⁶ According to the 2012 Census report, other minority groups in Sri Lanka include the so-called 'Indian' or 'Up-Country' Tamils (4.2% of the population), Sri Lankan Moors or Muslims (9.3%); Malays (0.2%); Burghers of mixed Dutch heritage (0.2%); Sri Lankan Chetty (5,600 people); Bharatha (1,700 people) (Department of Census and Statistics, 2012) and the Wanniyala-Aetto, or Vedddhas (around 2,000, not included in the census).

known as the Sinhala Only Act, which declared the Sinhala language – spoken by the ethnic Sinhala majority – would replace English as the sole official language of the island. This effectively excluded the Tamil language, spoken by the island’s largest majority, Tamils, and stoked considerable resentment and mistrust of the Sinhalese-majority government (Gunasinghe, 1987). Tensions continued to flare, and multiple waves of anti-Tamil violence and pogroms took place in 1956, 1958, 1977, 1979 and 1981, when the Jaffna Public Library – one of the largest libraries in Asia at the time, and an important intellectual and cultural symbol for Tamils – was burned down by a group of Sinhalese. Two years later, on 23 July 1983, another anti-Tamil pogrom known as Black July began with riots in Colombo and quickly spread to other parts of the country, lasting for seven days. The death toll is disputed, and ranges from 400 to 3,000, with thousands of shops and homes destroyed (Harrison, 2003). During Black July, the LTTE killed thirteen high-ranking Sinhalese soldiers in Jaffna, a significant turning point seen as a provocation by the Tamil separatist group. These events are largely seen as the start to the Sri Lankan civil war between the Sri Lankan Army (SLA) and the LTTE.

The Sri Lankan civil war is marked by four ‘Eelam Wars’, which took place during distinct time periods: Eelam War I (1983 – 1987); Eelam War II (1987 – 1990); Eelam War III (1995 –2002); and Eelam War IV (2006 – 2009). Several peace attempts were made throughout the war leading to periods of intensification and abatement of fighting, particularly throughout the Vanni. Amidst an estimated 800,000 displaced persons in Sri Lanka (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2000), and propelled by a growing peace movement, a promising a peace process began in the early 2000s. In 2000, Norway was tasked to mediate the peace process to end the conflict. In February 2002, the Sri Lankan government and LTTE signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) as well as a permanent cease-fire agreement (CFA). Political

developments, including the assassination of the Foreign Minister, a Tamil critical of the LTTE, as well as the election of then-Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa led to a breakdown of the CPA and war resumed in 2006. On May 20th, 2009, after twenty-six years of war, the charismatic leader of the LTTE, Velupillai Prabhakaran, was killed by the SLA and the Government of Sri Lanka declared victory over the LTTE.

The war years, and in particular the final months of the war when the SLA scaled up their offensive in LTTE stronghold areas, had deleterious impacts on civilians, particularly the largely majority Tamils in the Vanni who were experienced multiple waves of displacement, injuries, deprivations, and deaths. During the lead up to the end of the war, the SLA ramped up its military campaign in the Vanni, which effectively trapped 330,000 civilians who were fleeing from shelling, but “kept hostage by the LTTE” (United Nations, 2011, p. 41). While the numbers of individuals who were killed during the war are a matter of intense sensitivity within the country, the UN has estimated that up to 100,000 were killed, while in the final phase of the war between September 2008 and May 2009, “there could have been as many as 40,000 civilians deaths” (United Nations, 2011, p. 41). Since the conclusion of the war in Sri Lanka, human rights violations claims have been levied against all sides of the war, citing extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detentions, disappearances, and sexual violence including rape (Human Rights Watch, 2008; International Crisis Group, 2010)¹⁷.

Following the war, the Government of Sri Lanka set up a system of ‘welfare camps’ for the estimated 300,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs), including the infamous Manik Farm

¹⁷ For a detailed journalistic account of the final days of war and its tremendous human toll, please see Harrison (2012). A broader, more historically-contextualized analysis of the factors leading up to the Sri Lankan war including the final days, as well as a detailed analysis of various estimates of those killed, missing and displaced at war’s end can be found in University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna) (UTHRJ) member Rajan Hoole’s landmark work, *Palmyra Fallen: from Rajani to War’s End* (Hoole, 2015).

in Mullaitivu District in the North, which housed 225,000 people, including former combatants, women, and children (Bhalla, 2012; The Hindu, 2012). The term ‘welfare camp’ is the official term to describe *de facto* internment camps “operated by state authorities to house individuals who have relocated from areas under the control of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)” (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2006, p. 1). Despite its name, welfare camps have been widely criticized as open prisons marked by overcrowding, lack of sanitation and hygiene, and protection issues including allegations of sexual and physical violence (Birtley, 2009; Colman, 2009; Human Rights Watch, 2009). In the post-war period, the Government of Sri Lanka embarked on an accelerated plan to resettle IDPs, mostly in the North. The program has been criticized for being top-down and exacerbating tensions amongst Tamil communities in the North due to the emphasis on infrastructure development and the military’s engagement with civil administration and economic aspects (Saparamadu & Lall, 2014). This seepage of military involvement into civil affairs would be a harbinger for a further deepening of militarization in the Vanni for several years to come.

Trauma, Gender, and Identity

The 26-year long civil war in Sri Lanka has left indelible emotional and cultural scars on the survivors residing in the North, the impacts of which continue to reverberate ten years after war’s end. The act of witnessing violence, let alone experiencing it firsthand, can have detrimental impacts not only on the individuals, but on the community at large, particularly in community-oriented societies such as Sri Lankan Tamils. This witnessing of violence also seeps into social interactions and processes, particularly where there has been a loss of culture. As Das argues, “if one’s way of being-with-others was brutally injured, then the past enters the present not necessarily as traumatic memory but as poisonous knowledge” (Das, 2000, p. 221).

Recent studies on the psychosocial condition of Tamil survivors of war in the Vanni, including Kilinochchi, have shown the multiple ways in which life after war has been hampered by a lack of services or support for mental health and psychosocial needs (Usoof-Thowfeek, 2018). In the Vanni, studies have shown that the war has led to the destruction and collapse of social networks, cultural values and ethical mores, and has led to a lack of motivation amongst many survivors (Somasundaram, 2010). Research has found that in the post-war period, trauma is prevalent across “all sections of the population” in the Northern Province, with many individuals exhibiting signs of post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, and somatoform disorders linked to experiences of violence, torture and imprisonment (Usoof-Thowfeek, 2018, p. 1).

As the narrators of this study illustrate, their lives as they unfolded during the war years were marked and shaped by multiple displacements, each having a knock-on effect on their material, cultural, and social survival. Kilinochchi and especially during the final months of the war saw hundreds of thousands of civilians, largely Tamils, corralled into ever-shrinking swaths of the Vanni, in efforts to escape the fighting.

For those emerging from the war and resettling in the Vanni, many have lost loved ones who were killed or disappeared during the war. Widows experience a particular psychosocial impact levied by the patriarchal dominance that persists in the post-war period. In addition to navigating new social and cultural terrain as they provide for themselves and their families, they must contend with attacks on their reputation, threats of sexual harassment and violence (Subramanian, 2017). This ill treatment from community members further reveals itself in the findings and discussion in Chapter Six. For women who are married, some evidence that an increase in domestic violence has taken place in the post-war period (Subramanian, 2017),

possibly as a function of unaddressed trauma stemming from the war. This is consistent with the literature on interpersonal violence, conflict and disasters, which draws a link between harmful behaviour and coping mechanisms, such as consuming alcohol and drugs, and domestic violence including violence against children (Catani et al., 2008).

While war-related trauma is prevalent amongst most if not all survivors, the psychosocial impact of the war and post-war period is especially pronounced for certain segments of the population, such as male and female ex-combatants. In 2009, ex-combatants were enrolled in a rehabilitation program run by the Bureau of the Commissioner General of Rehabilitation (BCGR), an institution set up by the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Justice, currently falling under the auspices of the Ministry of Rehabilitation and Prison Reforms. According to the BCGR, 10,790 LTTE combatants had initially surrendered in 2009, including 2,628 males and 614 (total 3,241) in Kilinochchi, and were taken into custody for ‘rehabilitation’, although the degree to which any or all of these former combatants have been ‘rehabilitated’ remains highly questionable (Gunasekera & Pathiraja, 2019). Once released from the program, and until the present day, ex-combatants are subject to the fear of constant surveillance by the state in an increasingly militarized North (Gunasekera & Pathiraja, 2019; Jegatheeswaran, 2017).

This militarization in the name of national security has overshadowed more constructive efforts to encourage ex-combatants to participate in communal activities, and therefore negatively impacting their psychosocial wellbeing (Usoof-Thowfeek, 2018). Gunasekera and Pathiraja (2019) found that this constant climate of fear has led many ex-combatants to prefer staying at home and with trusted family members and being selective of their movements and associations outside of the home, which would have implications for their ability to access services and programs offered by NGOs, state, and other organizations. The authors further

conclude that ex-combatants are rendered “withdrawn, passive and desolate” (Gunasekera & Pathiraja, 2019, p. 45). The narrators who participated in my own study here who have identified themselves as ex-combatants share their struggles with trauma and psychosocial wellbeing. However, they simultaneously demonstrate quite the opposite of what Gunasekera & Pathiraja find, showing resolve, active engagement and even defiance.

For female ex-combatants in particular, the transition to civilian life has been marred by widespread and persistent myths that continue to hinder their ability to successfully integrate and move on with their lives in the post-war setting. Perhaps the most damaging of these myths is the belief that all female combatants in the LTTE were subject to sexual abuse and violence, especially those who underwent the ‘rehabilitation’ program run by the BCGR (Gunasekera & Pathiraja, 2019). Further, many female ex-combatants continue to engage in livelihood activities on CSD-run farms in Kilinochchi and the larger Vanni. It is widely believed in Tamil communities that these women engage in sexual relationships with (Sinhalese) soldiers and employees (Jegatheeswaran, 2017). These rumours and beliefs about female ex-combatants can further exacerbate already traumatic experiences of actual sexual violence experience during and after the war, and other traumatic events, and ultimately mar these women’s efforts to rebuild and move on.

Trauma has impacted the lives of the narrators in different and compounding ways. For some, identity factors such as gender, marital status, and association with the LTTE during the war have shaped how traumatic experience and witnessing have influenced individual lives and efforts to rebuild after the war. For each of the narrators, the contours of war and its impact on the larger sociocultural context and relationships amount to a “poisonous knowledge” (Das, 2000, p. 221) that each narrator must contend with on their own terms, and which persists ten

years after the war. In the biographical sketches that follow, each narrator will be introduced in turn, serving as a first introduction to these ten individuals and the most significant and impactful events of their lives. With each life story being woven around the larger sociopolitical context of war and its aftermath, we begin to see how real lives of those who survived war are complex, messy, and fraught with moments of trauma, struggle, strength, joy and so much more.

“Kamalanayaki”

Kamalanayaki is a 57-year-old married Hindu woman living in Kilinochchi. She is warm and inviting and has a wide smile. The youngest of 5 sisters, she grew up with her mother, grandfather, and later with her three male cousins, the sons of her mother’s eldest sister. When her own eldest sister passed away leaving behind six children, her third eldest sister married her sister’s widower. At that time, Kamalanayaki’s mother pulled her out of school to take care of her sister’s youngest child. This is an event that to this day she recalls with regret, as she sees this is a major factor in her not being able to get a good job later in life. When she was growing up, she used to play with male children in her village and was always full of energy and curiosity. She would climb mango and jackfruit trees, a source of pride for her since climbing trees was something that other girls were not able to do. She remembers fondly that she was fearless when she was younger, and even rode a motorcycle at one point, which went directly against many cultural norms about women and girls at the time. She was well-liked by everyone in her family and at school, and still has a self-professed agreeable nature about her.

During her childhood, her three male cousins took Kamalanayaki in to live with them, claiming that it was “*unsafe*” to stay in her current circumstances and that she was too “*innocent*”. She was well taken care of, and often accompanied her cousins to the field when they did agriculture work. Her cousins would tell her they took her for her own safety. During

this time, Kamalanayaki engaged in many of the agricultural tasks, working alongside her cousins, and gained a lot of knowledge and experience about how to cultivate many crops. However, although they looked after her, her cousins effectively kept her away from her mother as much as possible. One cousin even threatened that he '*would die*' if she went back to live with her mother. This was her favourite cousin, and she did not want to give the impression that she was ungrateful for all that they had done for her, so she obeyed and didn't see her mother. When she talks about her mother, her face tenses and tears form in her eyes. This separation was devastating for her. After she got married, she was able to go to the temple and see her mother there sometimes, but once her cousins found out they stopped supporting her. The absence of her mother in her life continues to trouble her even now. She told us how she regrets that she was unable to care for her mother later in life.

Kamalanayaki married her husband at age 20 with a simple wedding ceremony. Her husband, the first boy after five sisters, worked from the time he was 17 years old to support his family and later his own family with Kamalanayaki. Together, they engaged in agriculture, growing crops to feed themselves and sell what small surplus they sometimes enjoyed. They supported his younger two brothers and "*worked hard to bear the family burden*", however these younger brothers no longer associate with them, a sign of ingratitude according to Kamalanayaki. They went on to have four children, two boys and two girls. She raised her children "*with love*", never punishing them or being too strict. She often took them to the field with her when doing agriculture work, creating a barrier out of sticks to contain them once her children began to walk.

Once the war broke out in 1983, her life, like so many others, became a series of displacements and rebuilding as battles were fought and new territories taken over by one party to the conflict or another. Like many people living in the Vanni, she assisted members of the

LTTE in the early days of the conflict. Prior to 1983, when the LTTE were still an underground movement, she would provide food to its members. When the Sri Lankan army moved into her village, she and her husband had to move to Iyakkachchi. Her first four children were born here. She continued to provide food to the LTTE, as the cadres would come to her house having not eaten for four days. Once the Indian Army came in 1988 and the SL Army left, she was terrified that someone would tell the army about how she had helped the LTTE. She and her family had to flee to another town, where they leased some land to do agriculture. After Operation *Suryakathir* [Sun Ray], they moved to Kilinochchi, where her last daughter was born in 1993. She then underwent a sterilization operation. More displacement followed, after Operation *Sathjaya*, Operation *Jayasikuru*, and then Operation *Ranagosa*. Like so many others, Kamalanayaki's life was directed and overlaid by the larger military advancements and retreats, incursions and battles that unfolded around her.

Kamalanayaki's eldest son joined the LTTE when he was 12, and later her daughter joined as well. After this, Kamalanayaki became bedridden and was ill for a long time. In 2003, the war had seemed to calm down and Kamalanayaki and her family felt safe enough to settle in a different town. A few years later, one day an LTTE cadre knocked on the door, showed Kamalanayaki a photograph of her son, and thanked her for the sacrifice he had made. He had died in 2005. The LTTE gave her land as a 'martyr's residence'. Eventually they would build the house that sat on that land, but she would experience very hard times. She recounts how she often would share one banana amongst the four members of her family, as food was extremely scarce. Later, in 2008, she was given 20 perches¹⁸ of land by the Divisional Secretariat Office. With assistance from her elder sister, who was financially better off, she and her husband set up

¹⁸ A unit to measure land; 1 perch = roughly 25m²

a shop here with her husband and was able to establish a new livelihood. But the war still waged, and she was displaced again. Whenever she had to flee, she remembers that she would always take a sewing machine, dresses, and four wooden sticks. She would use sarees to fill with sand and set up a bunker to safeguard her and her family against shelling. During the last battle in 2009, she witnessed a lot of death. She is pained to recall seeing over 100 dead bodies in one night after heavy shelling. They tried to leave to find safety but were not able to escape. She sat outside of her bunker that night, not even fearing death. Finally, she and her family were taken to Omantahi checkpoint and given food before being taken to a Welfare Camp. They weren't given anything to eat on that first day. Her daughter came down with a fever a few days later, and eventually died in hospital. She blames the negligence of the hospital and camp staff for her death. Her family was allowed to come to the hospital but had to sneak out of the camp. They were able to perform that last rituals at a nearby friend's house, and then they returned to the camp. After the death of her daughter, Kamalanayaki says that she began experiencing severe headaches that no pills have been able to quell.

In 2010, they were taken back to where they had been given land and made a home. However, the army continued to monitor their movements and didn't allow them to cross certain roads. This meant she couldn't go to their temple or go back to their home since it was deemed a 'martyr's residence' and had distinct ties to the LTTE. Eventually the Village Officer helped them reclaim their land through connections with a parliamentarian. They released the land in 2011. But the TID¹⁹ came to inquire as to who was behind the demand for land. Kamalanayaki

¹⁹ Terrorist Investigation Division of the Sri Lankan Police. The TID has a specific focus on preventing and investigating actors of terrorism as defined in the Prevention of Terrorism Act. The TID has been accused of committing multiple acts of torture of both Tamil and Sinhalese detainees, accusations that persist (International Truth and Justice Project, 2019). The TID facilities in Colombo are often referred to as "the sixth floor". Relatedly, the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) is responsible for investigating serious and organized crime, but has some

and her family were fearful of those inquiries. Still, the Special Task Force (STF) camp is situated very close to her house, which instills a constant fear in her and the feeling of being watched.

Kamalanayaki has received several forms of assistance from various governmental and non-governmental development actors. In 2010, the Dutch NGO ZOA gave her wood, sticks and fencing sheets. Another NGO gave her a water pump and sprinkler to spray pesticides, which she used for agriculture. These are currently still in use, and she has even helped irrigate their neighbours' land. The government also gave them some tin roofing sheets as well as 20,000 Rs²⁰ at one point, which she put towards building their home. She also pawned her gold chain and used the money to help build their house. In 2014-2015, She was selected to take part in a UNHCR-supported housing scheme which meant the provision of 5 ½ lakhs²¹ Rs to buy permanent house. As part of the program, she had to borrow money to buy the materials, then UNCHR reimbursed her. She is still unsure if this is the way the program was intended to run, or if she should have received the money up front. In 2011, she was given 20 chickens, some material to build cages, and a 3-day training course from an NGO. She prides herself on how well she took care of these hens, 3 of which are still alive today. She used them to earn money through selling eggs. The chickens also helped bridge food needs when times were lean. Over the years, she has attended many classes and trainings on various subjects, such as taking care of livestock, savings and accounting, land titles, and gender, but she does not recall every training or who delivered them.

jurisdictional overlap with the TID and at times are difficult to distinguish (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2015). The CID's headquarters in Colombo is a notorious site for taking detainees for interrogation, and has led to the term "the fourth floor" becoming a euphemism for torture itself for Sri Lankans (Pararajasingham, 2019).

²⁰ Roughly equivalent of \$185 CAD in 2009 (exchange rate 1 CAD = .0092 using 2009 estimates)

²¹ 1 lakh = 100,000; 5 lakhs = 500,000 Rs

During the war, Kamalanayaki worked for the GS before she was displaced. When she came back and the GS came back, she resumed her work, getting paid in food rations not salary. Now she is unwell and can't work but is still looked up on by the community as someone who has strong ties to the GS, who herself calls upon Kamalanayaki from time to time to help. She was also engaged with and by various NGOs, such as identifying the houses and beneficiaries for their programs. Her elder sister sometimes helps us out with money, like for her daughter's wedding. She also provides clothes. She is in debt but is managing to pay it off slowly. She still suffers from chronic headaches, and sometimes she is unable to work. She can't concentrate on what is being said to her. Kamalanayaki worked with the Village Officer after that for work. Her husband fell ill, and she herself is still unwell, but they maintain their shop. Her daughter is now 30 years old and married. Her son-in-law is employed at a private organization, but he is looking for a government job that would pay a better salary. Kamalanayaki is pleased that her son-in-law *"does not give any problems, he is well mannered"* and does not drink. Her husband, too, *"is a teetotaler"*.

“Thamilini”

Thamilini is a 36-year-old widow. She is the youngest of 12 siblings from a Christian family. She grew up in a family that was involved with the LTTE. Her father was shot by the Indian Army when she was a child because of his association with the LTTE. After that, she was looked after by her mother, who supported the family through her ayurvedic medicine practice. The military was always checking up on her family, following information about them that they were an LTTE family. They would search their house, rifling through their belonging, even sifting through their flour. One day during the war, the Indian Army came to their house, tied her mother to a tree and beat her. Thamilini was very young when this happened, but still remembers

this when she looks at the very same tree in her yard today. She grew up poor and often did not have anything to eat. She and her family ate plants in the day and found shelter in the forest. She now tells the story of hardship to her children, encouraging them to study well and overcome any challenges in life.

Thamilini studied up to her Ordinary Levels and joined the LTTE as soon as she finished them. She left the LTTE when her mother requested that she return home since she was the youngest of her children and her mother sought to keep her safe. Once she returned home, she got married. Her first son was born when she was 18. Her husband was also an LTTE cadre, who was killed in battle. At the time, she was pregnant with her third child. Later, she went alone to the Welfare Camp. She came back to her village after being “*subjected to tortures*” at the camp. Today, she lives in her family home with her son, daughter, younger brother, children of her elder sister. She has not told her children about her involvement with LTTE because she is afraid for them and what others in school might think of them. She credits her courage for continuing after her husband died.

Her first interaction with aid and development was as a first aid volunteer with the Sri Lankan Red Cross Society (SLRC) in 2003. When the tsunami hit in 2003, she was deployed to Jaffna to provide first aid. Later, she joined Oxfam, using the SLRC certificate as credentials. She worked as a tailor while working with SLRC and continues to do tailoring as self-employment. She studied tailoring with another organization where she also trained others. Oxfam provided her training classes, which she attended faithfully. She then worked for more than six national and international NGOs. She currently serves as the Secretary of Women and Children Development Association, the Secretary of the Police Group, and is a member of many societies and associations including the Development Committee of Children and Women; the

Village Development Committee (VDC); Language Association; District Women's Network (DWN). She cites the networks she has created through these experiences as helping to manage the issues as she has contacts and involvements in many places. She worked with GS (village officer), went door to door, helping the GS to select beneficiaries.

Growing up, her mother was protective, and did not allow her to go outside of the home. Thamilini was very keen to go outside and speak to people, but her mother did not allow it. She traces her interest and later involvement in “*social services*” – NGO work, civil society associations – to this experience. She is also motivated by her own experience growing up poor and watching assistance programs pass by the people she saw to be the most deserving, including her own family. Her mother was never given a housing scheme, even though they were very poor. She sees that discrimination is at play with how beneficiaries are selected and wanted to get involved to help influence the process.

Thamilini was given a sewing machine from the Dutch NGO ZOA, housing scheme, but has not received any other material assistance.

Thamilini does not miss any opportunities to attend meetings or workshops. She is an avid learner and always looking to improve her skills. She uses the money gained from volunteer jobs and attending workshops to educate her children, but she currently faces financial difficulties. She hopes that educating her children she can secure a good life for her family. She is usually paid to attend workshops and uses the money to buy groceries and vegetables and pay for her children's education. Additionally, her son drives a 3-wheeler, and contributes his earnings to the family income. She does not get any financial help from her family, even though her sister lives nearby. Her younger sister takes care of her children when she is away for work, which sometimes takes her to different parts of the North and East.

Her status as a widow has caused many hardships for her. If she is feeling sad or isolated, she listens to songs or goes to talk to the GS. Otherwise, she prefers to keep quiet and not share her sorrows or struggles with others. She has met some good friends through her work with NGOs, and the GS consoles her when she shares her feelings, and this is how she copes with the negative thoughts and feelings. She only associates with women, since as a widow, she is wary of being “*deceived*” by men.

“Chandran”

Chandran is a 43-year-old separated man who was born in Colombo. When he was eight years old, he and his family fled to the North after his family home was set on fire during the riots of 1983. His family was provided shelter and food by a Sinhalese man before they came up to the North. He has not returned to Colombo since. During his childhood, Chandran and his family were financially comfortable. He lived with his father, mother, and siblings. However, once the Indian Army left in December 1989 and the LTTE retook his village, his father was requested to provide financial support to the LTTE. Fearing that the family savings would be at risk, Chandran his mother, younger sister and one of his younger brothers left and came to Kilinochchi. His younger brother and younger sister went to Colombo, but Chandran stayed in the North to maintain the family land. He describes how happy he and his family were during this time. He and his siblings attended school and tuition (extracurricular lessons) after school. He recalls that this life was “*free from the threat of bombs*”, although the war was not yet over. He and his family had experienced several periods of displacement, both before and after this happy period. He speaks of “*several tragedies*” that he and his family experienced during times of displacement. He and his family lived in LTTE controlled areas for four years, from 1996-2000, where he witnessed a lot of “*troubles*” and saw many youths being recruited into the ranks.

Again, he had to displace in 2008 to Mullivaikal, during which his family lost all of their possessions. They survived cluster bomb attacks and eventually reached the Welfare Center. He came back to Kilinochchi to resettle in 2010.

Chandran married a woman he knew out a sense of obligation since “*friends told [him] she loved [him]*”. He says he had “*no experience in the family life*” and did not have feelings for her. He does not provide much more detail about the unravelling of his marriage, only to share that he spent a lot of time outside of the house, coming home about once every three months. He eventually separated with his wife in 2003, who has since remarried and had a child. It is unclear whether Chandran and his wife are officially divorced. His mother passed away, and his father is still alive. Chandran feels responsible to take care of his father in his old age.

Once his family was resettled, they received some financial assistance from organizations, but he does not recall which ones. He is frustrated with how assistance was given and cites an example of one family being given two houses based on faulty criteria. He was told at one point that he could qualify for a house, if he provides some help to an influential person who has close ties with the local government structure. He has spoken up about his understanding of favouritism, but he feels this has only cast him in a negative light from the perspective of the GS and Technical Officer (TO).

He was provided a toilet from World Vision, but he associates this assistance with his position on the Reconciliation Committee and his own contribution to their work. He does not believe that he would have received any help had it not been for his involvement in this committee. He tried very hard to be considered for the housing scheme that was delivered in his village and neighbourhood, however he was passed over and never received a house or support

to build a house. He also used to attend various meetings held by NGOs and other civil society organizations.

In 2010, Chandran ran a textile shop in the market in Kilinochchi, however he was pushed out by the administrators of the market, citing that he did not have the proper registration. He tried again to open the shop but fell ill for one year and was unable to work and rented the shop out. Once he returned to the shop, he was shuttered by the local authorities. He fought back, and after a complicated administrative battle was able to reopen “*peacefully*”. This incident has only sowed a deeper resentment towards the government and those in authority who Chandran sees as behaving unprofessionally or abusing their power.

Chandran also has acquired goats and cattle. However, he feels disadvantaged since he acquired his cattle with his own money and therefore does not qualify for free veterinary services, unlike cattle provided through a livelihood program. He had 15-20 cattle at one point, however five were stolen.

“Yalini”

Yalini is a 43-year-old woman who lives in Kilinochchi but is originally from Jaffna. With a blend of confidence and humility, she speaks in long flowing narratives full of vivid detail. She grew up in a relatively rich family with seven siblings. Although her father was a kind and generous man who consistently helped others out in their community, his alcohol consumption resulted in the loss of their family savings. Because of this, Yalini experienced poverty during her school years. She studied up to her Advanced Levels at a ladies’ college. Her mother always encouraged her and her sisters to study hard. Since they could not afford a motorbike or bicycle, Yalini and her sisters would walk the 10km from their home to school and back, help their mother out with her agriculture work, and attend tuition classes in the evening.

Their relatives who had a car never offered them a lift, which Yalini sees as a form of deep disrespect. In 1995, Yalini and her family displaced from Kilinochchi to Jaffna. Here, she joined the LTTE, followed by her younger sister and elder brother. Her sister and brother studied medicine and worked as doctors in the LTTE. Yalini was eventually sent home from the ranks since her two siblings had joined. Looking for something meaningful to do with her life, Yalini was encouraged by her siblings in the LTTE to ensure that their other siblings continued their studies. And so, Yalini found a job that paid little in cash but much in kind in the form of groceries. This was enormously helpful to her family amidst skyrocketing inflation at the time. Yalini enjoyed her time at work. She supported her younger brother through medical school. He also joined the LTTE. Her younger sister was killed while a member of the LTTE. Of her three of her siblings who joined the LTTE, two were killed during the war and one remains missing.

She was married in 2003 to a high-ranking member of the LTTE. This was a love marriage. Yalini's family were not pleased with the marriage since they were from different caste. Only after an LTTE superior spoke to Yalini's mother did she agree to the marriage, which she now supports. They rented a house in Kilinochchi for one year before moving to a plot of land that was owned by someone living abroad with little prospect of returning. After some administrative complications, the DS (District Secretary) gave Yalini and her husband land permits for the land. They built a small home. Her daughter was born in 2005. In 2008, they were forced to flee again.

Yalini worked with the GS and was involved in providing relief assistances to those who had been displaced. Yalini herself also received relief assistance, which was enough to sustain her and her daughter as her husband would work at the LTTE camp during the week. When the LTTE began a campaign of forced conscription, the children of Yalini's elder sister and other

relatives stayed with Yalini to escape recruitment. Yalini covered all of their expenses. Displaced again, she and her husband were wounded in Mullivaikal. Her husband lost his hearing. Yalini and her family lived through several periods marked by shelling, bombs and fleeing. During one of the last battles of the war, Yalini was wounded and thought her husband had been killed, but he was taken to the hospital and was found to have suffered a heart attack. Released from the hospital, Yalini and her husband were rounded up by the Sri Lankan Army during one of the last days of the war. Yalini describes the treatment she and her husband endured here, which she speaks of as an indication that they had lost their “*rights, identities and culture*”. She and her family eventually ended up in a Welfare Camp. Her husband was later taken to a well-known detention centre where Yalini says he survived torture. He was released four years later.

Her younger sister moved abroad once married, as did another sister and two brothers. Her married sister built a two-storey home on their family land for their parents. Yalini’s two younger brothers were with her mother during the final stages of war, but her mother managed to push them through the border at Omanthai and send them abroad to study, where they remain today. One of her younger brothers sends money home from some part-time work he does abroad. When Yalini’s husband was in jail, her sister’s husband supported her and her daughter financially from what he earned working abroad in a Middle Eastern country. Now that her brother-in-law is unemployed, Yalini and her husband agree that it is their duty to support him and her sister.

In 2010, she received a water pump as livelihood assistance, but two days later it was stolen when she was visiting her husband in the detention centre. She was also selected to participate in a Housing Scheme in 2014 which provided funds to build a house. Another NGO

provided a livelihood assistance package worth 80,000 Rs²², which she used to buy a sewing machine and a display cabinet. The NGO also provided a 3-month training, which helped Yalini to develop a business plan, amongst other skills. She and her husband now use textile scraps from the nearby garment factory to sew cushion covers and door mats to sell. Yalini and her husband also raise pigs and sell them for meat.

Yalini has worked as a volunteer with a local mental health organization for the past four years, although she hopes to be promoted soon to full time staff. Previously, she worked as a volunteer with ZOA in 2010-2011. She is currently a member of the Women's Development Network in Kilinochchi and has previously held positions with various civil society organizations.

“Nagenthiram”

Nagenthiram is a 62-year-old married man living in Kilinochchi. He has five siblings, and his mother passed away when he was six years old. Nagenthiram still grieves his mother and mourns the fact that he will never be able to take care of her. He was raised by his grandfather but faced many hardships in his childhood. He studied up until Grade 8 but was not able to go further in his studies as he needed to work in daily waged jobs to help support his family. His family worked in cultivation, cow and goat farming, which he continued when he left his childhood home to move to Mullaitivu when he was 20 years old.

Nagenthiram married his wife when he was 28 years old, and has two daughters, both born during the war. He recalls that his wife went into labour with their first child as a helicopter circled above, firing on the village below. This was in 1991. Six days after his daughter was born, Nagenthiram and eight members of his family – his wife, newborn daughter, his wife's

²² Around \$736 CAD in 2009

sister, and her children – were forced to flee amidst fighting, seeking refuge in a hut made of palmyra leaves. His daughter often experienced seizures as a baby. One night during one such seizure, Nagenthiram and his wife took his daughter to a clinic, which was in an area restricted by the Sri Lankan Army. They survived helicopter attacks during that journey, but eventually reached the clinic late that night. His second daughter was born in 1994, a period that was relatively more secure, absent of helicopter attacks but still marked by occasional gun battles. Nagenthiram also recalls that his family was relatively well off then as well, with no scarcity of food or money. He wanted to move to Kilinochchi so that his daughters would have access to better education. In 2002, he opened a grocery shop there, which he still runs with his wife. He worked very hard and managed to become “*quite rich*” during the period of 1990-2008. He was able to help others when he could, for example providing rice and corn with other people during floods. At one point, he had over 200 goats and 243 cows, but had to let them loose as he was forced to relocate and couldn’t take them with. He recalls this period as a “*happy life*”, until 2008 when the war intensified again. In the final days of war, Nagenthiram and his family fled to the army-controlled area seeking safety. The journey was arduous. Once they arrived, he describes entering this area with the large crowds as if they were “*cattle*”. His niece was shot in the foot here, which later had to be amputated. He and his wife spent some time at a Welfare Camp, where food was scarce. When they were resettled in Kilinochchi, their land was overgrown with mangroves, and required a lot of effort to clear. They had no belongings, only the clothes on their backs. Following multiple periods of displacement and fleeing violence, Nagenthiram is unable to remember many things from this period in his life. Even today, his short-term memory is unreliable, and he is not able to recall things from day to day.

Nagenthiram's daughters were only able to study up to their Ordinary Levels due to the war. His eldest daughter, now 23 years old, entered a love marriage when she was 17 years old. Eight years ago, her husband abandoned her with their daughter, who was only six months old at the time. He was physically abusive towards her during their marriage. She has applied for a divorce since they have been separated for many years, however her husband has not yet responded to the request. He has provided no financial or other support for their daughter. Nagenthiram supports his daughter and granddaughter and aims to ensure that she grows up with a good education. Nagenthiram's second daughter's husband is a driver who takes care of his family. Nagenthiram's first daughter was selected to receive financial assistance to build a house, and Nagenthiram provided her with five lakhs to build a home for her. Nagenthiram hopes to help his daughter remarry once her divorce goes through. All Nagenthiram's siblings are married, although they live in different places around the North. Three of his siblings have passed away, including an elder brother and this brother's wife.

In 2011, Nagenthiram was provided funding to build a toilet. In 2013, he was provided roofing material by the Government of India. In 2018, his daughter was given a cow as livelihood assistance. He took a bank loan of 15 lakhs, which he used to buy a tractor and invest in his shop. However, since his son-in-law has abandoned his daughter, he had to sell the tractor in order to support his daughter. He received a bank loan once they were resettled after the war. He used this money to build his house along with the roofing materials from the Government of India. He spent around eight lakhs to complete their house, doing the work himself. Today, he continues to run the grocery shop with his wife and supplements his family's expenses through a series of rotational loans.

Nagenthiram is the President of the administration of a temple. When he was 21, he was the Secretary of the Village Development Association. In 1992, World Vision came to assess the needs of the districts. Committees were set up to represent the community, and Nagenthiram was selected to be the Treasurer of one such committee. In 2010, he worked with community members to provide the appropriate paperwork and help select beneficiaries for international NGOs via the GS to receive assistance, such as coconut trees and chickens as livelihood assistance. Currently, he acts as a representative of the Farmers' Association and Village Development Association. He has attended some meetings on social issues but does not recall participating in any trainings that addressed gender or gender equality. His daughter and wife attended a one-month training when his daughter received the cow.

“Vathana”

Vathana is a 46-year-old married Christian woman. She was born in Jaffna and lived there until she got married at 19. This is where both her parents were born and raised, as well. Her mother married her father in an arranged marriage, which Vathana's mother agreed to as she was the eldest of nine siblings and felt a duty to support her family. Vathana has three brothers. Her sister joined the LTTE and was killed during the war. Two older sisters died before Vathana was born. Growing up, her father was chronically ill, and so her eldest brother took care of his siblings. Vathana and all of her siblings were only able to study up until their Ordinary Levels due to interruptions during the war as well as her father's illness and duties at home. Her father ran a shop, but the family was “*not rich*”. Her father died during the war. In 1991, Vathana and her family were forced to displace to another neighbourhood in Jaffna, and then in 1995 to a place in the Vanni. She eventually settled in a forested area within Kilinochchi.

Vathana had a love marriage and her first child, a son, was born in 1992. Three more children followed, two daughters and a son. Vathana and her family were forced to flee and displace several times during the war, so many that Vathana cannot recall all of the places. At age 14, Vathana's daughter was trained in first aid through her school. On November 27th, 2007, Martyr's Day, her daughter was providing first aid at an LTTE-run hospital when the area was hit with a barrage of bombs. Eleven people were killed that day. Her daughter was one of them. Vathana was only allowed to go to her daughter's burial site as of last year, due to restrictions on the area. In the final days of the war, amidst heavy shelling and more displacement, Vathana and her husband left her son in Pokkanai in 2009 and they entered the army-controlled area. Vathana witnessed much death and destruction during this last journey. Food and water were scarce. She and her younger daughter were seriously wounded during a shell attack. They left their son there while Vathana's husband took her and their wounded daughter to the LTTE-run medical centre. They hoped to be reunited with their son later. After receiving treatment, they proceeded to the army-controlled area, but the journey was slow and dangerous. Vathana and her wounded daughter were eventually taken by helicopter to Anuradhapura along with other seriously wounded persons. Her family was now separated into three: herself, her son, and her husband and daughter. Vathana's son managed to find her, and they were reunited. Vathana and her children were then bussed back to Vavuniya, a treatment Vathana describes as "*like cattle*". Wounded in her back and knees, she was taken to Mannar Hospital, which encouraged her since she had an aunt living here. But she and her daughter were taken to a welfare camp, while her husband and son were taken to two different camps. They were separated once again. Eventually, one of her relatives in Vavuniya was able to sign Vathana and her family out of the camp. They

stayed with this relative until they were allowed to leave and resettle in 2009, when she came to the land on which her current home sits.

In the resettlement period, Vathana was provided with 40,000 Rs from the Dutch NGO ZOA. She was able to use this money to start a shop, which she and her husband run. Vathana has also participated in many trainings offered by NGOs, including on topics such as leadership, gender equality, disaster management, work planning and accounting.

In addition to the income earned at the family shop, Vathana weaves thread for religious and decorative uses. They sell these products in their shop and fulfill orders. One of Vathana's brothers lives abroad but does not send her any financial support. This suits Vathana fine as she does not want to be indebted to anyone. Vathana has also taken out some bank loans and used the money to educate her children. Her son has studied up to his Advanced Levels and worked in a factory at one point. Her eldest living daughter has been accepted to university, and her younger daughter has recently sat for her Ordinary Level exams.

Vathana is engaged in "*social services*" through a women's civil society organization. Some recent activity included collecting signatures for a petition to prevent predatory microfinance companies from operating and advocating for women facing land disputes. She is the treasurer for her rotational savings group.

"Thampaiyah"

Thampaiyah is a 65-year-old married man. He is one of four siblings, two boys and two girls. His parents took care of him and his siblings well, and he has happy memories from his childhood. After school, he and his siblings used to help their father feed the cows, which was their main livelihood growing up. Thampaiyah has always felt a certain affinity with animals. Today, he talks to his cows and his dog and says they are like his "*children*". He believes that on

a certain level they understand each other. His mother and father both passed away after Thampaiyah had left the family home to get married. In his youth, he was active in sports with the 18km race being his specialty. He studied up to his Ordinary Levels. After that, he worked in the post office, but resigned as he was unsatisfied with his salary. He then started a business and was eager to become a successful businessman. He later opened a mill. He purchased rice bags and was able to attain a level of success with his business that led him to feel that he was ready to marry. He married his wife through a love marriage. They met while Thampaiyah was working in rice cultivation, and his future wife was a hired worker. Thampaiyah noticed how well she worked and behaved, and how enthusiastic and committed she was to her work. She impressed him. He approached both of their parents for permission, and then married his wife. He loves his wife like his mother, even calling her “*Amma*” [mother]. He laments that couples today are not like this now, that they face many problems, use “*rough words*” with each other, and even separate.

In 1991, during the war, Thampaiyah and his wife moved to Kilinochchi. It was here that his son was born, seventeen years after their first child, a daughter, was born. Thampaiyah and his wife were thrilled as they were hoping to have a boy one day to carry on Thampaiyah’s family name. During calmer periods during the war, Thampaiyah was able to live an “*average life*”, being neither rich nor poor, able to meet his and his family’s basic needs. However, once they were displaced in the later stages of the war, they left “*empty handed*”. Eventually, he and his wife ended up in a Welfare Camp. He recalls this period briefly, remarking that it was tolerable. In the camp, he had the chance to take on new jobs and learn new skills, such as masonry. While in the camp and even before he was displaced, Thampaiyah was able to earn some money while working on masonry projects on contract from UNHCR and UNICEF. After

leaving the camp, Thampaiyah, his wife and son were resettled in his current home, while his daughter had already settled in Batticaloa with her family. He recalls that the land they came back to was overrun with mangroves, which required a lot of work to clear. He got a job at the hospital in Kilinochchi and would travel work and back by bicycle. At that time, he had to pass through twenty-three army checkpoints.

Thampaiyah currently lives with his son and his daughter-in-law. His brother has also since passed away. Some of his nephews and nieces live abroad various countries, allowing his sisters to live a “*comfortable life*”, while Thampaiyah is “*the one who is living in this situation now*”. Thampaiyah currently lives with his wife, his 23-year-old son, a driver who frequently works out of town, and his daughter-in-law, who works at the local garment factory. His 40-year-old daughter is married and still lives in the East of the country with her husband and family.

After the war, Thampaiyah was provided a temporary house by UNHCR. Later, he was provided money to build a house through the Housing Scheme funded by the Government of India, however Thampaiyah says that this money was not sufficient. He had to use his own money to complete the house. In 2011, they were given a cow by a parliamentarian. In 2014, Thampaiyah was provided another cow and some veterinary medicine through a livelihood program from a Canadian NGO. Thampaiyah and his wife have used the cows to generate income to support their family. They can earn around 40,000 Rs a month from their cows, although their inputs for food run about 20,000 Rs. Thampaiyah is proud that he does not have to take on any loans, that the 20,000 Rs profit from their cows is enough to sustain his household.

Thampaiyah and his wife sell the milk they produce from their cows to the nearby Cargills²³ factory.

Thampaiyah is no longer able to cultivate his rice paddy himself, having suffered a heart attack a few years ago. He still owns the land, which he leases out.

“Vasuki”

Vasuki is 40 years old and a widow. She grew up the only girl amongst four elder brothers with her parents. Her father passed away when she was three years old. Her mother took care of her and her brothers through daily waged labour. As the only girl and the youngest, she was doted upon by her older brothers, who were much older than her. They did not let her go anywhere on her own, and even picked her up from school. Her eldest brother died when Vasuki was six years old. Her family was forced to displace in 1996, and then again, several times throughout the war. Vasuki’s studies were also interrupted as she was in school during the period when the LTTE were escalating their recruitment of students and her brothers feared that she would be recruited. Before, Vasuki remembers the family was happy. Every year for her birthday, her family would pretend they had forgotten, only to produce new dresses and a cake once dawn broke.

Having to displace multiple times “*changed everything*” in Vasuki’s life. Her second eldest brother was shot by the Sri Lankan Army in 1998. Her remaining two brothers got married right after that. Her third eldest brother’s wife has since passed away from illness, leaving three children. Vasuki then was conflicted as to whether she should take on the responsibility of caring for her two nieces and nephew or continue her studies. Since the youngest girl was only ten

²³ Founded in 1844, Cargills (Ceylon) PLC is a Sri Lankan-owned conglomerate with food manufacturing, agribusiness, banking and financial and grocery store divisions, amongst others. Cargills acquired Sri Lankan dairy company Kotmale in 2010 and set up a dairy processing factory in several districts, including Kilinochchi, which locally sources milk from smallholder farmers (Kotmale Cargills (Ceylon) PLC, 2020)

months old, she felt compelled to care for these children. She was no longer able to continue her tuition classes after school time, since her mother was suffering from vision problems and couldn't take care of the children at night. Since she was no longer studying, Vasuki took up tailoring.

In 1999, Vasuki had an arranged marriage. Vasuki's husband came from a rich family in a nearby village. He ran a shop at that time, and even had a car at his family home. Although electricity was largely unavailable, her husband's home had a television and a refrigerator. Her husband bought a motorbike for Vasuki. Their family used to go out by car. They were "*very rich*". Her husband took care of everything outside the home, even going to the shops to buy goods for the household. Vasuki's mother-in-law died in 2009 during the last days of war when the family displaced. Her husband died in 2009 in a shelling attack.

Vasuki has three children, two boys and a girl. Her eldest son was ten years old and her youngest only three years old when her husband died. After that, Vasuki was forced to displace with her brother and mother. During the final days of the war, she then lost both her mother and brother. Her brother's children were still with her then. Towards the end of the war, the eldest got married in Jaffna, and the other two went with them to Jaffna leaving Vasuki with her own children. When Vasuki and her three children finally reached the Welfare Camp. Having never had to "*bear the burdens*" of taking care of life inside and outside the home, Vasuki lacked any experience in how to make purchases, drop children at school, and even how to "*get together with people*" outside the home. In 2010, Vasuki was resettled back on the land bought by her husband. It was overgrown and full of garbage, Vasuki recalls. Initially, she and her children were brought to a school to stay, and then stayed with a friend for 15 days. As a 30-year-old widow at that time, "*it was very difficult*" for Vasuki to be alone. Vasuki even contemplated

suicide. The GS asked her to work at his office, which she agreed to because he had been a friend of her husband for many years. Here she engaged in activities such as collecting statistics and filling in forms.

In 2010, Vasuki received 40,000 Rs from UNHCR. That year, she also received chickens worth 50,000 Rs, however they died due to illness. Then in 2011, Vasuki received 20,000 Rs from another NGO, plus 50,000 Rs as relief from the Government of Sri Lanka after floods damaged her home. Vasuki was able to make ends meet using the money given to her by NGOs, plus what she earned working at the GS' office. The GS also helped her a lot with “*relief assistances*” such as food rations. She was provided a tarpaulin sheet. But her home did not have doors. She was later included in the Housing Scheme, which was run by a local NGO and funded by the Government of India, which gave her 1.5 lakhs Rs. She was able to complete her home using that and some money she got from pawning her jewelry. Her nephew is a mason, and so she was able to get the labour done for free. The same NGO later gave her some hens, but some were eaten by snakes. She sold the remaining hens. In 2013, she was provided with a cow and her calf. The cow has since given birth to two more calves. Vasuki can earn around 2000-2500 Rs per week from the milk yielded by her cow. She used the money earned from the cow to participate in a traditional savings circle, or *seettu*.

Her husband's brother and sister have also contributed financially for the puberty celebration of Vasuki's daughter. Vasuki engages in some tailoring work and has pawned and recovered her jewelry several times. Her eldest son is now 20 years old. He has written his Ordinary Level exam; however, he was not recommended to move on to his Advanced Level. Her children are provided 500-1000 Rs to help with education from their school, which Vasuki uses to cover tuition fees and other educational expenses. Once, Vasuki was recruited after

attending a meeting at the GS' office by a company, for whom she worked for about six months, however she left the job after experiencing harassment. Recently, she began working in a rice paddy field that she has recently been granted access to.

Along with three other women, Vasuki co-founded a community women's society that currently has 110 members. Members include female-headed households, those who have lost family members during the war or who have family members who are still missing, and those who need other types of "*special care*". As the leader of this Society, she attends larger community meetings on the group's behalf. This women's Society successfully advocated for a mill to be installed in her village and engages in rice paddy cultivation. This Society also oversees some assistance for others, such as providing seeds and mango trees to members of the Vellalar²⁴ community. Vasuki feels that she must not be prioritized for relief and assistance because she is in a leadership role, and it would not look right.

Vasuki's husband has four siblings that are still alive, having lost three others during the war. Having lost so many members of her own family, Vasuki encourages her children to see their aunts and uncles since "*relatives are important*". She had the chance to stay with her relatives after the war, but Vasuki put her faith in her own abilities to care for her children on her own and not be under the care or control of her in-laws.

"Alfred"

Alfred is a 44-year-old married Catholic man with three children living in Kilinochchi. He was the fourth child of five, four sons and one daughter. His father and mother are both still alive. His father often consumed alcohol when Alfred was growing up. His mother was

²⁴ Caste traditionally engaged in agriculture, seen as an elite or 'dominant' caste amongst Tamils in Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu, India (Hussein, 2013).

constantly trying to help his father earn a living for the family, buying him a bicycle and even arranging for him to own a shop at one point. But his father would always sell these assets to purchase more alcohol. Eventually, his parents separated. Alfred and his brother joined the LTTE, when Alfred was only 14 years old, leaving his mother to take care of his sister. His mother, however, was distraught that her sons had left her. He was motivated by the “*unpleasant situation*” that prevailed at that time. He remained an active and senior member of the LTTE for 22 years, working in a technical field related to security and engineering. He was involved in battle as well and sustained serious injuries that have left him with nerve damage, amongst other things. The LTTE helped his mother out “*a lot*” at that time. As a devout Catholic, Alfred found solace in the Bible and began attending church regularly. After that, Alfred’s three brothers left the LTTE and came home to their mother. She was consoled. Alfred’s brothers worked and took care of their mother. They encouraged Alfred to join them and leave the LTTE, but Alfred remained in the movement. He sat for his Ordinary Level exam, while he was an active member of the LTTE. Educated both formally and informally throughout the war, Alfred speaks three languages, which have been useful to him during and after the war. Now, one brother is married with four children. Another brother is a Pastor with three children, and another is also married. His sister has been working abroad for many years.

Before marrying his wife, Alfred had been in a relationship with a distant cousin, but she married someone else while Alfred was in an LTTE-controlled area, and she was living in an army-controlled area. Alfred was honest and transparent with his wife about this prior relationship, and there have never been any issues in this regard. Although the LTTE usually arranged marriage for their cadres at a certain age, when the time came for Alfred to be married, he declared that he was in love with the woman who would be his future wife. There are

differences in caste between his and his wife's family, but despite some initial objections on both sides, they were married in 1999 when Alfred was 25. Once their first son was born, their families dropped their objections and came to them "*out of love*". His wife was a pre-school teacher, but once she became pregnant Alfred asked her to stay home and raise their children. Their second son was born five years after their first, and a daughter was born five years after that. His first son was born the following year. In 2009, both his son and his wife were wounded during the war and were taken by helicopter along with his five-month-old daughter to a hospital in Colombo, where they remained for three months. Once Alfred reached the Welfare Camp with his son, he was identified as a member of the LTTE and was taken away and "*tortured*". He was eventually released but was arrested and tortured again. This second incident resulted in Alfred being hospitalized for almost a month. Last year, Alfred was summoned again for questioning in Colombo. By the grace of God, he says, he managed to return home after being released from questioning.

In 2009, Alfred stayed at the Welfare Camp, but does not discuss much about his time there. Once he and his family were released, Alfred began making and selling concrete blocks, which were in high demand as houses needed rebuilding. In 2011, Alfred and his family were resettled on the land where they currently live, where his wife grew up. It was also provided to him as part of the dowry, and so they have not demolished the remnants of the previous structure on the land, despite it being damaged and rendered unlivable.

Hoping to support his family with earnings abroad, Alfred travelled to a Southeast Asian country. He was initially duped by an agent who kept him detained in a building. But Alfred used his skills and wiles earned during his time with the LTTE to escape and managed to find work for a few months before returning home. Once back home, he began working part-time for

a company as a Technical Officer, for which he continues to work today. He admits that he sometimes struggles to make ends meet. His wife has pawned her jewelry, and Alfred has inquired about some bank loans. He has a land deed for his rice paddy, given to him as part of his wife's dowry, and which he can use as collateral for the loans. He is proud that he has not accepted any loans from anyone and therefore has no debt to anyone. He is able to cultivate his rice paddy field and "*earned well*". His wife also teaches tuition classes after school to primary students and earns a bit of money. She also teaches their youngest daughter. Alfred has been interviewed dozens of times for entry-level permanent jobs within the government, but he has yet to be selected despite his level of education. He attributes this to "*political influences [that] decide everything*". Alfred currently works for a company as a Technical Officer of road construction, but the money he earns from this is not sufficient to support all his family's needs. He supplements this with his motorcycle repair business after hours.

Alfred's eldest son is preparing to sit for his Advanced Level exams. His tuition fees are provided through private benefactors connected to their church. Alfred is confident that he will achieve a high enough grade to enter university, although Alfred would prefer him to attend college so he can learn a trade and earn money. His second son has ambitions to study law, which Alfred supports.

Once Alfred and his family resettled in 2011, he was provided Rs 25,000. World Vision gave Alfred's wife a sewing machine since she has a diploma in tailoring. However, Alfred is unsure who gave her the sewing machine. In 2014, the NGO ZOA contacted him. Alfred counts amongst his skills motorcycle repair, and as such was given motorcycle repair tools. No trainings or meetings were provided neither to Alfred nor his wife once they received their equipment. Although he was initially excluded from the program because the remnants of his previous home

still stood on the land, Alfred was eventually able to convince the authorities to add him to the program list. He was able to build their current house with assistance from UN HABITAT, being promised 550,000 Rs to build the home. Unfortunately, they only received 500,000 Rs as somebody “exploited” the remaining 50,000 Rs. Alfred has also participated in a few meetings run by local NGOs that addressed social issues, including gender equality. Recently, Alfred’s wife attended a meeting run by World Vision, who are planning on supporting a program that would provide cows and goats to women in the District. Alfred and his wife are still discussing if raising goats or cows would be the right fit for them. When we left Alfred, he and his wife had decided that they would prefer goats.

Alfred is involved in “*social work*” in the community. He previously held a leadership position with the Samurdhi Bank²⁵ Committee, but he prefers to work independently of community organizations or self-help groups. He gives “*assistance to ex-cadres*” (former LTTE combatants) when he can. He also works with a friend to identify illegally appropriated land in favour of families who are vulnerable and need land in order to qualify for the Housing Schemes.

“Punithavathi”

Punithavathi is a married woman with three daughters. Her father passed away when she was five years old and was raised by her mother with support from her mother’s sisters and Punithavathi’s grandmother. She was born in Jaffna but raised in Kilinochchi from the age of seven. She is the fourth of five siblings, four sisters and one brother. She recalls that her mother raised her and her siblings to cooperate and respect one another, and that Punithavathi and her siblings today have carried these values into their relationships with their own families.

²⁵ Launched in 1995, the Samurdhi (“prosperity”) program is a national poverty-reduction project financed by the Government of Sri Lanka. The program offers high interest deposits and low interest borrowing programs targeting low-income individuals (Department of Samurdhi Development, 2011).

Punithavathi's studies were supported by her mother's sister, and although her mother encouraged her to study well, Punithavathi admits that she wasn't a good student and that she is "*still so worried about it*". Punithavathi's family struggled, and her eldest sister had to leave school to get a job as a peon²⁶ to support the family. She now lives abroad. Punithavathi also learned tailoring from her mother. Punithavathi managed to complete up to her Ordinary Level exams, after which she got married and stayed home. She had a love marriage to a neighbour as she preferred not to have to travel far to find a good husband. Punithavathi's mother now lives in Jaffna, and Punithavathi tries to visit her once a month if not more.

In 2010, Punithavathi resettled in their current home. As part of a USAID-funded program, Punithavathi was given sweetgrass seeds in 2012. In 2015, after she had proved that she and her husband were capable and committed to maintaining the crops, she attended technical training on how to sow the seeds and harvest the sweetgrass. After that, the organization included them in the next phase of the project, and she received storage and processing equipment for the grass. All members of her family take on various duties related to their agricultural production. Her two older daughters can operate the machinery. She and her husband use the grass as feed for their cows and sell the remaining grass. Field Officers from USAID frequently visit Punithavathi to monitor their progress. Through this program, Punithavathi has also been connected to customers for their sweetgrass. She is now a "*little famous*" for their products, and they have a solid customer base for their grass. As a long-standing participant in USAID's program, Punithavathi is often brought in as an example of success and for the past 2-3 years has been helping to train new participants. If any of her

²⁶ A low-ranking worker, such as an orderly, 'office boy', attendant or porter.

neighbours requests to use the machinery to harvest their grass fields, Punithavathi will willingly share as she doesn't "*think that it belongs to [her] only*".

Punithavathi works with her husband and daughters growing the sweetgrass and raising cows. They have been selling milk since they purchased their own cows in 2010. Punithavathi currently has 16 cows. They earn money for their daughters' education through these activities. Punithavathi and her husband purchased the cows with their own money. Previously, they had purchased hens using their own money, but it became difficult to manage all these ventures at once, so they sold the poultry. Although Punithavathi used to do some tailoring work, she stopped seven or eight years ago as she focused on supporting her daughters to school and working on the family's agricultural work. She has encouraged her children to learn a handicraft as to have an income-earning skill, although they are all good students.

CHAPTER FIVE: Gendered In/Security: The Structural Context of Interactions with Gender Mainstreamed Development

As presented in the literature review in Chapter Two, Critical Feminist Security Theories (CFST) have made significant contributions to our understanding of the myriad ways that conflict is gendered. Amongst these, three major contributions speak most closely to the findings from this study that are presented in this chapter. First, CFST has problematized the assumption that women are protected by the state during times of war and peace (Blanchard, 2003). Secondly, feminist security scholars have analyzed how the ‘productive destructiveness’ of men’s and women’s identities are shaped by war through producing individual and collective power, which thus helps to understand the multitude of ways in which men and women – and masculinities and femininities – affect and are affected by conflict and violence (Elshtain, 1987; Enloe, 1990). These contributions are linked to revelations offered from intersectionality debates, which have highlighted within security discourse how interlocking factors of identity shape experiences of conflict (see Berger & Guidroz, 2010; Cockburn, 2005; McCall, 2005; Peterson, 2007). Lastly, empirical offerings have contributed new knowledge and theories around sexual violence in war (Alison, 2007; Baaz & Stern, 2009; Cunniff Gilson, 2016; Sjoberg, 2009), including how men and are implicated in and impacted by sexual violence (Aijazi & Baines, 2017; Gorris, 2015; Solangon & Patel, 2012).

What is not consistently included in these theoretical and empirical contributions, however, is the expansion beyond simply times of war and/or violence, to include the ambiguous and imprecise period of post-conflict, or more specifically, post-war contexts. The lasting impact of war and conflict on gender relations and, in turn, within societies must be considered when analyzing gendered experiences in a post-war context. Further, longitudinal approaches that

center the voices of recipients, situated in life histories, bring new perspectives that add new insights and richness to debates on gender, security, and development. The longitudinal, recipient-focused approach applied in this study works to uncover how lives are shaped not only during and after, but also before war, and how important life moments and contexts influence how one navigates periods of war, post-war, and the development efforts that enter people's lives across these periods.

In Northern Sri Lanka, the development apparatus – the institutions, actors, donors, partners, processes, and all the interstitial relationships, culture and dynamics that are produced between these, thus constituting the development ecosystem as a whole – is implicated in this production of conditions of insecurity, particularly for widows and other women and men who feel less powerful within society. Community members, neighbours, family members, and others living in the general society in Kilinochchi also reinforce and contribute to certain aspects of gendered insecurity, particularly those that speak to societal expectations, attitudes, treatment of and general perception of others. In other words, the messy and complex inner workings of human interaction that produce gender hierarchies and ideas about femininities and masculinities is deeply gendered and constantly evolving (Beckwith, 2005; Haque, 2013; Hudson, 2005). Through exploring these macro, meso and micro layers of post-war life in Kilinochchi, we can uncover the larger structural issues that persist that necessarily limit and dictate the potential for gender mainstreamed development programming to encourage transformational change.

This chapter presents findings from life history sessions with men and women narrators to uncover the myriad ways in which they experience and conceptualize how in/security continues to shape their everyday lives, despite – and in some instances, in connection with – their interaction with implementing agencies and other development actors. This chapter begins

with a contextualized reflection on the moment in which this research took place, which helps to situate the ensuing discussion within a particular political moment in Kilinochchi and Sri Lanka. Next, I return to the abovementioned three major contributions from the CFST body of literature to explore findings related to the structural backdrop of gendered in/security in which gender mainstreamed development programming has been and continues to be implemented in Kilinochchi. This section of the chapter is organized according to four major themes that were raised in various ways by the narrators, namely: widowhood and in/security; lack of state protection and justice; the threat of sexual and other forms of violence; and the impact of gendered in/security on behaviour, movements, and access to resources. I use these findings to build upon the temporal scope of these contributions to demonstrate how these insights can be carried into and applied in post-war contexts, thus contributing to the empirical knowledge base and discourse around gendered in/security. I conclude this chapter with a discussion on how these findings expand some of the most important contributions to emerge from the CFST literature, and therefore improve our knowledge and understanding of how constituents of development programming navigate and experience the dynamics of a post-war context, and what this means for their interactions with gender and development programming.

The Political Context Ten Years after War's End: An Opening for Inquiry

It is important to reflect on the political moment in which this study took place, given that crimes including alleged war crimes, such as sexual violence and torture, were themes that arose during this research. Fear and mistrust abound until the point where I met the study's narrators. The data collection for this study took place in 2019, a moment in Sri Lanka's political history that was amenable to such qualitative inquiry that necessitated direct contact with survivors of war. During formal and informal interviews, several individuals expressed their doubts that this

research could have taken place during the previous political regime of Mahinda Rajapaksa, who served as President during the final stages of war until 2015 and who is largely seen as highly sensitive and protective against any public scrutiny regarding the conclusion of the country's civil war (Samath, 2009, 2010). During informal interviews, many participants mentioned that the Sirisena government that was in power during my research in 2019 was far more conducive to research, particularly foreign research, and that my arrival came at an opportune moment.

Even during the relatively brief political opening during which my research took place, however, the political climate was not devoid of fear or suspicion, understood here as a vestige of a brutal war where civilians and combatants alike had to adopt new ways of coping and survival. One of the narrators with a long history of association with the LTTE, illustrated this lingering suspicion of outsiders during our second life history session together. He explained that after our first session, he did some reconnaissance work of his own, questioning other people he thought we may have spoken to, in an attempt to decipher our motivations and possible affiliations. This interaction underscored for me and the RA how narrators brought with them to our LH sessions feelings of fear, suspicion, and even trauma, all of which still colour the daily existence of so many of this study's narrators, and for some groups in particular.

Widowhood, Identity and In/Security

The construction of widows in Tamil society in Northern Sri Lanka has been explored in this thesis, as well as by many other feminist analysts (Blackburn, 2010; De Alwis, 2002; Rajasingham-Senanayake, 2004; Tambiah, 2004). While there has been some research into the social and economic gains enjoyed by some women widowed during the war, these women are likely in the minority, with the majority of widows in the Vanni experiencing a constant struggle for security, economic stability, and social dignity largely due to patriarchal notions of purity and

ideal womanhood being linked to marriage (De Alwis, 2002). Drawing from the narrator accounts of the widows in this study, life histories indicate that the continual insecurity challenges that widows face in Kilinochchi emanate from three distinct yet mutually reinforcing levels – the macro-level, such as state-level security actors; the meso-level, in this case specifically referring to development actors; and the micro or interpersonal community level. These three levels work in tandem to create situations of insecurity and vulnerability that are uniquely experienced by widows but can be extrapolated out as a viable framework to understand insecurity as felt and experienced by other groups as well.

State security personnel abound in the Vanni and serve as a physical embodiment of the heightened militarism present in the current post-war period (Jegatheeswaran, 2017). Despite their mandate to ensure national security, the reality for many widows is that security actors often do quite the opposite, and impose fear, threats and harm at the interpersonal level. For widows, this can be especially troubling due to their status as ‘unprotected’ in the absence of a husband. This lack of spousal (read: male) protection can be recognized and seized upon by opportunistic individuals who leverage their inordinate relative power. One of the widows²⁷ in this study’s sample describes one incident where a CID operative proposed marriage, citing the burden of caring for her three children and the absence of any surviving family members. He promised to take care of her. Given the context of the CID and their association with disappearances and allegations of mistreatment of detainees, she was terrified. She also had to be strategic, carefully weighing her limited set of undesirable options. She shares that she was *“afraid, as he was an intelligence officer. I had no one to protect me.”* She tried to rebuff his advances, stating that she *“hadn’t really thought about”* remarriage, trying to avoid the subject.

²⁷ Given the sensitivity of information shared, I have chosen not to reveal the name of the narrator to further protect her identity

She was petrified, fearing she “*would be abducted by a white van*”. Eventually, the operative was transferred, and the narrator was released from this potentially dangerous situation, while simultaneously being released from the previous set of poor options. The fear and vulnerability of the narrator is palpable in this story, which highlights the intersecting forces of patriarchal and socially constructed narratives about widows’ (perceived) sexual availability and need for protection. The construction of a widow as helpless and available in the above scenario is compounded by the sharply unequal power relations between a civilian widowed woman and a male member of a highly resourced and prominent state security apparatus, all of which work together to produce situations of limited choice for widows, and possibly unmarried women, in the post-war period. The patriarchal ideas around women’s need for male protection and their perceived vulnerability produces a different type of vulnerable situation whereby women must negotiate the gendered power dynamics of forms of masculinity that seek to ‘protect’ women, but actually present threats of harm and inflict immense stress and fear on women. In this example, patriarchal norms be seen as one of many chronic adversities that women – and some men – must contend with as they navigate power differentials to make the best, least-worst decisions for their safety and wellbeing.

For some, engaging with development work and association with NGOs and civil society organizations can expose individuals to certain risks of harm and harassment, which are directly related to their position within society. In the case of widows, their socially loaded label as ‘widow’ brings about heightened experiences of vulnerability, risk of harm and feelings of insecurity. Vasuki’s experience underscores these risks. As part of her work with a civil society organization, her mobile phone number was made publicly available. Soon after, she began receiving unwanted phone calls from men – from some as young as her older son – all of them

sexual in nature, with many of the calls ending in threats. Vasuki steeled herself from these threatening phone calls, focusing instead on her children's welfare. She explains, "*I don't care about whatever happens to me. But I cannot tolerate if something happens to my children. But I can't please them not to do anything against my children. If I do so, they will understand my sensitive issue. Then, they will blackmail me using that point*" (LH8A pg. 14). Vasuki considers giving in to the demands for a sexual relationship with the caller, if only to appease him and eventually give her and her children some peace. She "*doesn't care*" what happens to her, showing selflessness, altruism and a willingness for self-sacrifice for the sake of her children's safety. However, she knows that succumbing to these sexual demands will not be the end of the story, since the caller will be in a position to exploit her "*sensitive issue*", understood as her status as a widow in society, which heaps upon Vasuki a complex load of social cultural norms to delicately balance and maintain. Again, we see how having a restricted set of options to choose from in terms of how to act – or not act – to defend, protect, and maintain, let alone improve one's well-being is directly linked to patriarchal norms around masculinities and femininities. The construction of 'widow' in this society as being perceived as sexually available to men has led Vasuki to be presented with a limited selection of suboptimal choices to overcome adversity: either cede to the callers' sexual advances in the hopes that they cease their harassment or reject these propositions and hope that no further harassment – or worse – ensues.

Vasuki's story sheds light on how even a small detail such as making a phone number available can have detrimental consequences for women's and widows' security. Further, although Vasuki does not comment on how these incidents have impacted her involvement in the Community Based Organization (CBO), it is conceivable that some women and even men who carry the burden of harmful labels and increased vulnerability to harassment – or worse – may

choose not to participate in development or social activities after doing the calculus of potential risk of harm and deepened insecurity. As discussed in Chapter Four, the example of male and female ex-combatants opting to stay at home and not participate in community activities for fear of constant surveillance by state security actors is another illustration of how continued insecurity in the post-war context can inhibit individuals from full participation in activities that may contribute towards empowerment and/or transformational change (Usoof-Thowfeek, 2018).

One theme that was continually raised by narrators when discussing widowhood and life in Kilinochchi was the power of reputation, which often takes place at the micro or community and individual level. The heavy responsibility to uphold a certain public image commensurate with one's gender, status, or "label" such as 'widow', 'ex-combatant' (see [Gowrinathan, 2012](#)) is a tricky balancing act that many narrators raised during life history sessions. For widows, the state of one's reputation occupies much space in their lives. As Thamilini succinctly summarizes, "*widows are worried because of the wrong perception of the society*" (LH2B pg. 16). Widows' concern for their reputation can impact their behaviour, movements, and with whom they associate. Vasuki reports that she cannot even have a brother of hers over to her home, lest some neighbours "*fabricate several stories like these*" (LH8A pg. 16). The subject of this gossip and reputational damage stems from the implication of a widow's improper (sexual) behaviour, but these expectations extend to a widow's physical self. "*If I become fat, someone will gossip that I am using some tablets like that. If I become thin, then they will gossip that I am suffering from some [illness]. There will be gossips by even seeing our physical body*", says Vasuki (LH8A pg. 15). The fixation on the widow then extends beyond her behaviour to how she presents physically, not only through choices of dress or the decision to erase or apply the *pottu*²⁸, but

²⁸ Symbol of marriage; during the war and in the welfare camps, some widows still applied the vermillion mark between their foreheads despite the cultural norm preventing widows from doing so (Rajasingham-Senayake, 2004)

also her physical, corporeal body itself. These reflections illustrate the extent to which widows' behaviour and choices are monitored, policed, restricted, and judged by society, further reinforcing chronic adversity, and gendered in/security. In this context, widows are effectively boxed into a fixed set of norms and expectations that reinforce the social policing that maintains the place of stigma upon which the patriarchal gender order relies.

Amidst this reputational balancing act, some widows have chosen a path that prioritizes their independence and autonomy over protection and social acceptance. In Chapter Six, I discuss in depth how empowerment can be expressed as independence, which offers new insights into how we understand and articulate empowerment, however the implications for the discussion on widowhood and insecurity are relevant here. Vasuki, for example, chooses to remain living alone with her children instead of living with any of her relatives, even though she admits it would be easier since she could “*manage some issues*” as “*this society will not let any widow live happily*”. Despite these advantages of living with family, she concludes that since she managed to live through the war, she could live alone and not be sheltered by her relatives as she was when she was young. Vasuki's life history sessions revealed that she grew up privileged, sheltered and pampered by her relatives until their untimely deaths during the war. Now facing life as a widow, navigating the trauma of so much loss, Vasuki seems to have found an intrinsic motivation to live with more control over her life, despite the risks and challenges of doing so as a young widow. Drawing upon these moments of strength, inner self-worth and confidence indicates something very valuable about how individuals navigate through social and structural challenges more successfully than perhaps could be predicted by static models of women and femininities that rely on essentialization and underexplored consequences of war.

When met with development programming opportunities, it is no wonder that Vasuki stands out as an individual who has gained much from her encounters with the development apparatus. She was primed to do so, thanks to her process of conscientization that unfolded along the course of a life shaped by trauma, war, and gendered expectations, as well as moments of joy such as the birth of her children and memories of time spent with her husband. This nuanced example of navigating conditions of insecurity and vulnerability through drawing upon one's own strength and inner qualities is important to recognize, since it problematizes generalized assumptions about how widowhood, femininities, insecurity, and development interact in the post-war period. Not all widows will default to perceived economically and socially secure positions but may in some cases make calculated decisions to navigate the intersecting forms and factors of inequality and prevailing patriarchal norms for the sake of their own sense of worth and achievement.

For widows who are ex-combatants, the burden of upholding a pristine reputation within society is doubly weighted. Socially constructed narratives about female ex-combatants and their association with sexual violence and abuse during and after war (Gunasekera & Pathiraja, 2019) already stacks the social odds against their favour in terms of social inclusion. Compounded with social attitudes towards widows, ex-combatant women carry a heavy burden when it comes to reputation control. Reputational damage, unfortunately, is not confined to an individual herself, and fears that reputational harm may visit her children only increase anxiety and creative efforts to protect children from this type of harm. As Thamilini shares, *"I did not tell my children about my involvement in the LTTE. As they are school-going children, I did not tell them because of the fear about any issues in this regard"* (LH2A pg. 4). Thamilini must navigate all of these identities and labels that have been bestowed upon her – widow, ex-combatant – in the face of

judgements, maltreatment and attitudes derived from the perceived qualities and values that are socioculturally assigned to these labels (Gowrinathan, 2012; Gunasekera & Pathiraja, 2019).

This phenomenon speaks to one of the main contributions of Critical Feminist Security Theories introduced in Chapter Two, namely that the category of ‘woman’ is inherently unstable, constantly shifting, and inherently dependent and shaped by ethno-national and geographic locations (Mohanty, 2003). For Thamilini, how she moves through her community, raises her children, and engages in income generation activities are always informed by her various identities, which are in constant flux according to the situation she finds herself in.

Reconceptualizing Sexual and Other Forms of Violence

Feminist theorists writing on the gendered nature of the ‘new wars’ (Chinkin & Kaldor, 2013; Parpart, 2011) have revealed how armed conflict is no longer confined to fixed battlefields involving armed male combatants, as once conceptualized by traditional driven mainstream theory. Instead, these new wars have now spilled over into the civilian landscape, often instrumentalizing civilians (often women and children, but also certain groups of men and others) for military purposes, in contradiction to the Geneva Conventions and other international laws that codify what is acceptable during armed conflict. Feminists have contributed valuable insights into how insecurity and violence –particularly sexual violence – is felt, gendered and experienced (Alison, 2007; Cockburn, 2004; Dolan, 2014; Sjoberg, 2016). Researchers have made advances in reconceptualizing violence as a highly gendered phenomenon that is propelled by and reproduces gendered norms and contribute to new constructions of femininities and masculinities (Alison, 2007; Baaz & Stern, 2009; Seifert, 1996; Tambiah, 2004).

In this section, I present how sexual and other violence has been experienced and is described by the narrators in this study. For the purposes of this study, I invoke the WHO’s

definition of sexual violence, which includes “any sexual act or attempt to obtain a sexual act, or unwanted sexual comments or acts to traffic, that are directed against a person’s sexuality using coercion by anyone, regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including at home and at work” (World Health Organization, 2002, p. 149). This definition includes threats or actual commission of sexual harassment, exploitation, blackmail and other forms of coercion, and rape. I apply three frames to examine sexual violence: the macro looks at violence committed by state actors; the meso examines violence that is committed by development actors; and the micro, violence committed by community members. Through applying these three levels to the post-war period, I expand on others’ work reconceptualizing violence to demonstrate the multiple levels in which men and women in post-war Kilinochchi continue to experience, navigate, and protect themselves from violence. Although this section will focus primarily on sexual violence, including harassment and exploitation, other forms of violence such as torture are brought in to expand our knowledge of how violence can manifest in gendered ways and contribute to a larger context of gendered insecurity in the post-war period.

Macro: Committed by State Actors

At the macro level, violence committed against civilians or community members by state actors was raised as a threat in the current period, with particular risks of this faced by those with specific identities including ex-combatants. As discussed in Chapter Four, the constant surveillance of former LTTE members negatively impacts on various aspects of life for these individuals and contributes to negative psychosocial outcomes. Beyond the surveillance itself, the constant fear that one could be abducted by a ‘white van’ instills fear and feelings of insecurity in the daily lives of those who experience threats of abduction and even torture, which was raised during life history sessions.

Torture during war has been found to be used against men and women in different ways due not only to the physical differences between men and women (males and females), but because of “different meanings culturally ascribed to the male and female body” (Cockburn, 2004, p. 36). Alfred, a former high-ranking intelligence officer within the LTTE, continues to live with the constant threat of further abduction and torture at the hands of state security forces. He explicitly uses the term “*torture*” to describe these incidents, unambiguous about what he lived through. He tells us, “*I was taken two to three times by the Sri Lankan Army Camp where I was assaulted. I came home after being assaulted by the Army. My physical condition was also weak at that time as I was tortured by the Army*” (LH9B pg. 12). He shares that the most recent event took place in 2018, one year before sitting down with our research team for his life history sessions. He recalls the impact that this had had not only on him, but also on his family: “*[t]hen, once again, I was summoned for investigation at fourth floor on [date in 2018]...when I left to go to Colombo for interrogation, my family started crying like I passed away*” (LH9A pg. 1). Although Alfred does not detail the nature of his torture – and the ethical principles upon which this research is based dictates that we respect his choice not to expound further – it has been documented elsewhere that many men and women who were former LTTE combatants and who are arrested in the post-war period by security forces are subject to torture, including sexual violence and rape (Hogg, 2013).

It should be clearly noted that neither Alfred nor any of the other narrators in this study disclosed that they themselves had survived sexual violence at the hands of state actors in the aftermath of the war. However, research and human rights reporting have documented how sexual violence marked the immediate post-war period, targeting Tamil women but also Tamil men including former LTTE combatants (Hogg, 2013; International Crisis Group, 2011; Lyons,

2017; Touquet, 2018). Violence and sexual violence committed by armed actors, therefore, is not confined to the timeframe of war, but rather presents a real and present danger for men and women – including male and female ex-combatants – into the present day. The threat of torture and sexual violence at the hand of state actors represents a pernicious element of structural insecurity, given the state’s role as duty bearers in the protection of its citizens and civilians.

Violence committed by state actors, such as security personnel including armed forces and police officers, can have a legacy impact, especially when it comes to violence committed in previous stages of the post-war period. Even for those who have not survived themselves torture or sexual violence committed by state actors, witnessing such acts or even knowing that they occurred can leave indelible marks on individuals and communities as feelings of resentment, anger and grief foment in the post-war period. Chandran remembers, *“I saw those incidents. Army soldiers get transferred once every three months. From the Corporal ranked army soldier to the CO ranked Army Officer did several atrocities to Tamil women during this period [after resettlement]. No one can refuse this”* (LH2A pg. 9). Many narrators mourn the loss of Tamil culture as one of the greatest injuries suffered during the war, with some relating this to the perceived increase in sexual violence or *“sexual abuses”*. This collective impact of insecurity as a result of sexual violence committed by state actors only further entrenches this grief and intensifies the prevailing context of insecurity felt and lived by men and women in Kilinochchi. The ‘poisonous knowledge’ (Das, 2000) of sexual violence committed against members of the Tamil community in Northern Sri Lanka continues to reverberate long after the war has concluded.

Meso: Committed by Development Actors

Disturbingly yet not unsurprisingly, some narrators reported experiencing violence and harassment while conducting duties directly associated with, and in some cases while engaged by, development institutions i.e., NGOs. This represents a major breach of ethics of humanitarian and development actors and is in violation with Sri Lanka's national laws regarding workplace harassment and violence. In other sectors of the economy, it has been well documented in Sri Lanka that women in particular face heightened risks of sexual harassment, discrimination, and other forms of violence in the workplace (Adams et al., 2019; Adikaram, 2018; Wanasundera, 2000). While women in the North face unequal livelihood opportunities compared with men (Sarvananthan et al., 2017; Silva et al., 2018), the development sector can represent one of the few opportunities to earn some income serving as a volunteer, contract worker, or temporary worker. However, the gendered hierarchy that exists in society, shaped by conflict and post-war norms and expectations about women and other groups, clearly seeps into the development apparatus²⁹. Development institutions and project staff – both 'international' and 'national' – are influenced by and in turn contribute to the sociocultural gendered ordering that is at work in the communities in which development actors are imbedded. Sexual violence committed by development actors in Kilinochchi takes place in a context marked by a dearth of resources for survivors, and in a climate of (perceived or real) impunity for perpetrators. The risks of calling out aggressors poses innumerable risks of further harm, least of all reputational, for the survivor, particularly if she is already under heightened scrutiny and societal judgement based on other factors of her identity, such as her status as a widow and/or ex-combatant.

²⁹ Indeed, while institutions produce and reproduce gender relations within societies (Bedford, 2009; Connell, 2005a), institutions – including development institutions such as NGOs and donors – can *themselves* be understood as being gendered (Chappell, 2010; Kenney, 1996; Montoya, 2016).

Thamilini describes a disturbing event that took place when she was working as a casual worker for a local development organization who partnered with an international NGO.

It happened to me in some occasions when I was working....I went to get a photocopy of a document in my workplace. There was an attempt made to exploit me sexually. When I told him that I was suffering from fever, he touched in the guise of testing the temperature. I told him to take his hand away. Then I did not go to work after that incident (LH2A pg. 17).

She found out later that another friend of hers whom she had recommended for a job at that organization “*stopped working there after he attempted to exploit her sexually. She did not tell me at that time. She told me ‘he should learn a good lesson from somebody. That is why I did not tell it to anybody’*” (LH2A pg. 17). Unfortunately, this was not Thamilini’s first encounter with sexual harassment associated with an NGO worker. Another time while working as a volunteer with an international NGO, Thamilini was harassed by a (married) male field officer who insisted on calling her at night and engaged in “*abusive talks*” of a sexual nature. She eventually told her local GS (Grama Sevaka), however it is unclear if the officer met with any recourse. For Thamilini, simply sharing her struggles privately with someone she trusts implicitly and in whom she feels confident will not divulge such sensitive information is a significant source of support. However, beyond this outlet, Thamilini does not feel that she has any other form of recourse for justice.

Development actors can themselves contribute to harm and perpetuate violence through failing to check and prevent abuse of unequal power relations and opportunities for abuse of power in a context of interpretations of certain categories e.g., women, widows. This is even more urgent in a sociocultural context emerging from war and recovery that has produced and reproduced certain ideals of what it means to be a ‘man’ or ‘woman’ in this society. If widows are seen as inherently sexually available, unprotected and otherwise worth less than others, and if

these attitudes and beliefs are supported by wider society, opportunities for exploitation and abuse of power will prevail, particularly if no recourse or support services are available or perceived as being available.

Micro: Committed by Community Members

Many of this study's narrators shared incidents of sexual violence that they have experienced at the hands of other community members. Discussing sexual violence in any context is extremely difficult, and comes with risks of exposure, ridicule, rejection, retaliation, and other consequences for speaking out. The lack of reporting on sexual violence in any culture or context is a challenge in all contexts, and in societies where sexuality and gender norms are so closely knit together with purity, honour and pride, the stakes to disclose any experience of sexual violence for the sake of support, justice or even validation often prove too high for survivors to report. For male survivors, the real risks of rejection, further humiliation and traumatization, coupled with a lack of supportive resources equipped to support men, make reporting even more challenging for this group. Another barrier to accessing support and justice for survivors is the lack of Tamil-speaking police officers in the North, which one local NGO working on SGBV pointed to as one of the reasons preventing cases of sexual violence to be properly handled. Also, the perception amongst the Tamil community in the post-war period is that there is no difference between the police and the military, given the blurring of these lines through the militarization of the Vanni and the history of the police during the war. Although there are Women and Child Bureaus set up within police stations in various districts, women are reluctant to access these services due to the historical association of the police with the military (KII6). Being a survivor also carries other social costs. In some cases, if a (female) survivor of sexual violence later gets engaged, the community will inform the man and "*make trouble*"

(KII8). As well, the dowry that a survivor's family must offer the groom's family is often expected to be double the usual amount (KII8).

When sexual violence is committed by individuals who inhabit the same physical neighbourhoods, shops, banks, and public spaces as the survivor, the pressures and risks can be even further compounded since being exposed as a 'sexual violence victim/survivor' or other label can divide communities and result in rejection and ostracization of a survivor. It is not surprising, then, that only a handful of narrators shared their stories, often in hushed tones and with repeated assurances that no names would be revealed. The following are some of these stories of the 'everyday' forms of sexual violence at the hands of men living in narrators' own communities.

Kamalanayaki shared how her daughter faced sexual harassment in the streets while commuting to and from work. She recalls, "*[s]he [daughter] used to tell the issues sometimes... "Mother! A person was telling me something [lewd] when I was going to work by bicycle...I did not listen to what he said..."* (LHB pg. 22). This form of sexual violence, in the form of harassment while women occupy public spaces, speaks directly to the shifting gender norms and behaviours of women that challenge previously determined cultural restrictions on women's movements and presence. The presence of a woman in public signals to some men (and some women, in other ways) that their physical self is open for interpretation, commentary, policing, abuse, and sexual advances. Although more women are now able to 'enjoy' the 'freedom' of expanded public presence and mobility, this new freedom comes at the cost of constant risk. These risks often require that women and others who are subjected to this harassment must make quick decisions from a set of undesirable options that each carry with it further implications that could threaten one's social reputation and safety.

Another female narrator spoke at length about the various incidents of sexual harassment, intimidation, and violence that she has suffered as a young widow trying to protect herself and her children in the face of insecurity. Beginning with the very infrastructure of her home, which had no doors, she lays out how she lacks even basic physical protection. But the physical is compounded by the sociocultural, as societal attitudes towards her only render her more exposed to sexual and other forms of violence, constituting part of the chronic adversities that she must constantly navigate. As a result of this dangerous blend of factors that render women and particularly widows exposed to risks of sexual violence, many narrators reported great suffering. For example, in 2011, when one narrator was working for the AG's office, she returned home one night, put her younger children to bed and went to sleep. Her eldest son came home later that evening, and said he saw a strange man lurking around behind the house. Terrified, she searched everywhere, but could not find anyone. On another occasion, she looked up from her bed late at night to find *"a hand with a camera phone over the wall. When I shouted at him, he ran away. I couldn't chase him as I didn't know how many of them were there and whether they had knives or not. I pretended to call my son and told him to wake up"* Petrified, she *"couldn't sleep on that day and I kept on praying till the next day dawn"* (LH8A pg. 11-12).

The incidents described above took place in and around a woman's own home, indicating that even when following the social script and remaining in one's own private residence, women – in this case a widow – are subject to threats of sexual violence. For these women, there seems to be no safe space, and little security. Insecurity underpins everything they do, everywhere they go, including even remaining in one's own home.

One factor that was raised in connection to interpersonal violence, particularly against women, was the presence of drugs and alcohol within the community. The introduction and

use/abuse of substances in Kilinochchi can be seen as a portal through which to understand some of the social changes, concerns, and challenges that the narrators understand to be unfolding in the societies in which they live. The use of alcohol and drugs may not be a root cause of violence against women, *per se* – that is, not everyone who consumes these substances will commit such acts. However, what is clear from how often and the ways in which alcohol and drugs are discussed by the narrators is that the use of these substances contributes to and enables sexual and other violence in the community, has thus influenced the larger insecurity context, and that these impacts are translated in gendered ways in the lives of male and female narrators.

Nagenthiram discusses the impacts of how the introduction of illicit alcohol and drugs into the community has had an impact on violence against women. He says, “[t]he younger generation consumes these things [drugs and alcohol]...then their feelings will get aggressiveness and brutality. I am speaking to you consciously now. But those who consumed it will behave in a brutal way. Marijuana, illicit liquor, and narcotic tablet...we don’t know how these things entered into our District” (LH5B pg. 3). When probed on how the consumption of substances influences behaviour, Nagenthiram says they engage in “bad activities” such as “[c]atching girls...beating them...cutting them...they will get this sort of thuggish mindset” (LH5B pg. 3). Thamilini shares her story of confronting her brother after his wife came to Thamilini seeking safety after he physically assaulted her. When Thamilini confronted her brother at his home, she found *kasippu* (locally brewed alcohol) and scolded him for his drinking. She admonished him for assaulting her sister-in-law, however, it was the alcohol that drew her ire and condemnation, so much so that Thamilini then confronted a man she knew was brewing and distributing *kasippu*. When the man saw Thamilini coming, he poured out his barrels, ran away, and never manufactured *kasippu* again. Thamilini later concludes, “[w]omen

are affected if the men are addicted to liquor” (LH2B pg. 16). Thamilini illustrates that even in the face of insecurity and factors that undermine the safety of women and men, there are moments of agency, where one is able to act within the socioculturally mediated frameworks imposed upon a community. Thamilini, as Chapter Six later establishes, is a woman of inner motivation, courage, and independence, which likely propelled her to confront the *kasippu* maker. Other women or men may not have had the confidence to do so.

Notably, the incidents of sexual violence revealed in this study were uniquely discussed by female narrators, or by male narrators in relation to women and girls. Chandran, for example, offers a list of the contributing factors to the prevailing context of insecurity that he feels, naming “*not only theft, but also the consumption of cannabis and narcotics and sexual abuses*” (LH3A pg. 5). Men did cite fear and actual incidents of more physical forms of violence, such as violence with weapons including knives and swords³⁰, and, on the macro level, the threat of ‘white van abduction’. The fact that only women disclosed incidents of sexual violence by community members may suggest that women are more likely to experience this form of violence. However, it is most likely that what is reported does not reveal the full scope of sexual violence incidents that take place in a community. Underreporting is a global challenge, given myriad factors including stigma, lack of trust in authorities, and other barriers. When it comes to men, research elsewhere in other contexts points to the long-standing practice of sexual violence committed against men and boys during war (Gorris, 2015; Solangon & Patel, 2012). The silence in this study around male experiences of sexual violence is expected, given that male survivors

³⁰ Although not mentioned explicitly by the narrators, this reference to violence committed with ‘swords’ is likely a vague reference to the emergence of ‘Grease *Yakas*’ (Grease Devils), sword-wielding men with painted faces widely rumoured to thieve, attack, and sexually assault women in the post-war period. For a nuanced discussion on the rumours and ‘moral panic’ surrounding Grease *Yakas* and the intersection of resistance to post-war militarization, please see Rajasingham-Senanayake (2022).

are often shrouded in stigma, shame, and perceptions of emasculation. Not one narrator cited or even raised the possibility of men experiencing sexual violence, despite research indicating that this does occur. It should be noted that the risks of sexual violence perpetrated at all three levels discussed in this section are more pronounced for members of the LGBTQ+ community, however given the cultural norms around these identities, these groups are much harder to study and therefore reveal.

Reconceptualizing Peace and Security

As mentioned at the outset of this chapter, one of the major contributions of CFST is to problematize the assumption that women are protected by the state during times of peace and conflict (Blanchard, 2003). This has been supported empirically, both by feminist researchers and in the preceding section. As discussed in this dissertation, the post-war period presents unique challenges to women and men in terms on several fronts, including how femininities and masculinities are fomented in light of gains towards gender equality made during conflict, as well as challenges to traditional gender structures and hierarchies that produced a particular set of gender relations in society. The threats and risks that women and men face in the post-war period are also unique, largely in part due to the structural context that overlays the possibilities to enact agency, or to engage in process of empowerment, all with the view to welcoming positive changes in one's life and for those around them. The assumption that the state acts as an inherent protector, offering a degree of protection from harm to women, has already been debunked by several of the findings explored in this chapter. Exposure to risks of sexual and other forms of violence stands out as perhaps the most blatant expression of this failure to protect from – and in some cases, implicit in the act of – violence. This section explores how state institutions set up to protect, deliver justice, and otherwise provide recourse for injustices and

transgressions are widely seen to have failed the narrators in this study. The findings discussed below support the important contribution from CFST that speaks to the failure in terms of women during peace and conflict, but also extends the scope of who this failure impacts to include men. This perceived failure on the part of the state was raised again and again by narrators as both a material and symbolic confirmation that Tamil women and men live life in a context marked by precarity and insecurity that is exacerbated by an acute lack of accessible protection that would be reasonably expected of the state.

Lack of State Protection, Justice, and Recourse

When speaking about the horrific nature of the war, narrators were often sure to recognize that all sides including the LTTE committed acts that they did not agree with, such as the forced recruitment of children. However, many looked back at the various periods of the war where the LTTE parallel state was in full force with a form of nostalgia, even longing, for a time when rules were upheld, justice seemed to be meted out swiftly and fairly, and one felt secure and protected by the *de facto* LTTE state set up in the North. Narrators often invoked examples of the situations of insecurity that they face today, comparing them to the past and how they were or may have been dealt with differently. What is clear is that insecurity affects not only women, widows and marginalized groups such as ex-combatants, but also groups of men and even those in positions of authority who might otherwise be assumed to enjoy more power in a society. This points to a more nuanced understanding of how the post-war period is felt by all segments of communities, and how these experiences are shaped by gender and other factors of identity.

Some narrators looked to the war period to highlight the difference in protection offered by the NGOs and development organizations, in relation to the protection available to them now in the post-war period. This was often done with nostalgia, although tempered with the

realization that NGOs were not able to provide full protection of civilians from the war.

Nagenthiram, for example, shared that he felt more secure during the war when NGOs engaged in humanitarian assistance, than in the current day when the roles of development actors have shifted to more development programming. He assesses, “[w]hen the air bombers were rounding [overhead] here, ICRC vehicle used to come to the spot and it used [their car headlights] to diffuse the light. Thus, we could be protected 25-50%. We can’t say that 100% security was given by it. But, we were 50% protected by it” (LH5B pg. 23).

Many narrators rejected the idea that the absence of war has meant the return to peace, an idea known in the peace literature as ‘negative peace’ (Galtung, 1969). Chandran compares the immediate periods before and after the end of the war, recalling that although the war had brought a “tense situation fearing whether the Kfir³¹ fighter will come to bomb or shell attack with happen” the only difference now is that “we don’t hear only the shelling sounds” (LH3A pg. 5). Other narrators also cite the swift justice brought by the LTTE in case of any infraction or crime, which was punished swiftly and often invoking harsh punishments where perpetrators were even “shot dead at the road junctions”. Chandran concludes that in the current climate, the “government administration does not take proper action” to address issues of violence, crime and the proliferation of illegal substances that he sees as plaguing current society (LH3A pg. 5). What Chandran points to is the larger issue of a lack of justice or protection from the state. This has left him feeling vulnerable and unprotected in the post-war moment, evidenced when he shares that when he was hospitalized for an operation, he kept his absence a secret from even his neighbours, lest anyone come and steal from his home. In a situation of low trust in the justice system and authorities to protect him, Chandran has had to be creative in efforts to protect

³¹ An Israeli-made bomber jet, used heavily by the Sri Lankan Air Force during the war and easily identifiable, often only by their sound, by many civilians in the North.

himself, such as not revealing when he is absent from his property for any length of time, and his assertion that he would not interfere should he find himself as a bystander to any crime committed in the moment. While Chandran's set of choices in these cases are more desirable than those presented to many of the women in this study, his experiences nonetheless represent the specific chronic adversities that men are subjected to related to a lack of state protection and justice. Understanding how Chandran and other men feel exposed to threats of theft and violence, and the choices that they must make in this context, contributes to our understanding of how the perceptions of state failure to protect extends beyond women to include men and shapes how men experience and contend with chronic adversities.

As previously discussed, one of the introduction and abuse of illicit alcohol and drugs was one of the most cited societal blights cited by narrators during life history sessions. The origin and precise date of appearance of these substances into Tamil society in Kilinochchi is unclear, but many have theories and opinions of how it impacts the present-day security situation. Some believe drugs came in from foreign countries, permitted entry into the country by corrupt border officials. Whatever their origin, whatever their journey, alcohol and drugs are clearly on the minds of the narrators and have impacted the recovery and development of people in the North. This larger, possibly transnational criminal issue of drugs and alcohol ties local realities to global networks and transaction flows. Their impact is also gendered, affecting different groups of men and women differently, as seen in the previous section connecting substance abuse to violence against women in public and in private domains, as well as threats of violence against men in the public sphere.

In a context marked by a lack of protection or justice afforded by state structures and institutions, including police, the courts, and even the ubiquitous military presence, feelings of

insecurity thrive. The irony of the heavy military presence in Kilinochchi and the Vanni that is tasked with the larger project of national security and counterterrorism is its adverse impact on the felt insecurity of everyday people living in Kilinochchi. The lack of recourse or justice has left many feeling that even if they are transgressed against, they have nowhere to turn and are left on their own to protect themselves and their families from harm. Some narrators do not have any faith that reporting to the police or other justice or protection institution would be of any benefit, and even that *“the police will fuel the issue instead of solving it”* (LH5B pg. 23). Nagenthiram recalls recently approaching his local GA (Government Agent) to lodge a complaint. The GA told him, *“I am also in the same situation in which you are, though I am in this seat. I also don’t know what to do.’ If it is so, the GAs are also afraid of something here. People are also afraid of something. I don’t know what it is exactly”* (LH5B pg. 23-24).

Nagenthiram’s story illustrates that even those in positions of authority struggle to maintain and uphold justice and protection of people, which only further entrenches a feeling of exposure and fear. He later raises the topic of alcohol and drugs to argue that people in the North have lost their culture, now engaging in activities and behaviour that was previously unknown or which was quickly remedied. He relates this to his own personal security, felt as a man moving through Kilinochchi. He shares, *“[i]f I question anyone asking, ‘Child! Why did you consume alcohol’ then the boy will come to assault me. Persons of our age cannot open our mouth. We had to be very patient in running our shop because if I have a quarrel with even a small boy, he will come to me with ten persons with knives. We are sad about this. We did not live in a circumstance like this before”* (LH5A pg. 9). This window into how a man in his 50s, on the surface seen as enjoying relative power and position in his community by virtue of his age, gender and relative wealth, shows that in the absence of a trusted system of security, protection,

and justice, even he is afraid of a “boy” and feels he must not voice his opinions or call attention to one’s potentially harmful behaviour.

Harm could emerge from macro state security forces or from other individual community members living in Kilinochchi. The mere presence of government security forces is enough to instil a sense of fear and anxiety for those who have survived the war and come out on the other side in Kilinochchi. For Kamalanayaki, the proximity of STF³² forces near her home is a constant reminder of what she suffered and witnessed during the war and has made her fearful of their presence. She shares that “*we get afraid even for a cracking sound of a cracker [firework]. We all will be arrested if something happens here*” (LH1A pg. 10). Again, fear emerges as a dominant feeling that colours men’s and women’s encounters with the actors and institutions that are meant to offer protection and security. Instead of peace and security, the everyday is marked by fear and insecurity.

The increased militarization in Kilinochchi and the Vanni has led many like Kamalanayaki to come into contact with various aspects of the state military and security apparatus. In the Vanni in particular, the blurring of military and civilian spaces has only entrenched feelings of mistrust and fear amongst the civilian population. The deepening of the Civil Security Department (CSD)’s presence in civilian spaces in the Vanni, for example, and has created a situation where many civilians are dependent upon security forces for their livelihoods. CSD has set up numerous agriculture farms and other income generation activities that represent some of the only livelihood options for many in the North, particularly women (Jegatheeswaran, 2017). Disentangling civilians from military and security-related structures in the North has been called for as a necessary step in fostering potential for a lasting peace and

³² An elite unit of the Sri Lankan police that focuses on ‘counterterrorism’ and ‘counter-insurgency’

hope for a participatory democracy (Jegatheeswaran, 2017). Relevant to this study, it is not possible to imagine a full enjoyment of rights and opportunities for development if one is constantly under threat – perceived or real – imposed by heavy military presence and intervention in civilian life.

In the context of a deepening brand of militarization that represents the national majority Sinhalese, but which does not deliver enhanced security or justice to the regional majority Tamil civilians living in the Vanni, it is not surprising then that some narrators expressed wistfulness and a romanticized desire to return to some aspects of the past when the LTTE ran a *de facto* state apparatus. This longing for the LTTE-run past suggests a willingness on the part of civilians to sacrifice certain freedoms and even some human rights for the sake of larger security, representing a type of social contract between a population and a governing entity. If this is the case, what does this say about the pursuit of gender equality, and the programs that aim to advance towards it? One interpretation is that in the context of development programming, until security, protection and justice can be reasonably secured and expected by people of all genders, ethnicities, political affiliations and combatant histories, among other factors, the likelihood of any social transformational societal change will be stalled or impeded.

Impact of Gendered In/Security on Behaviour, Movements and Access to Resources

This chapter has thus far explored interlocking and cross-cutting themes of alcohol and substance abuse within the community; risks of sexual and other violence emanating from three levels of society; the perceived lack of security and justice; and how all of these relate to factors of identity including gender, marital status and former association with the LTTE. In this section, I present how these characteristics of the insecurity that prevails present-day Kilinochchi effectively work together to shape the behaviours, coping mechanisms, and influence the ability

to fully participate in development programs and activities that may provide benefit to constituents.

Many narrators are acutely aware of the overarching security presence and heightened militarization of the North, which has blurred the lines between civilian and military spaces, with deep impacts on the social functioning of communities in the Vanni (Jegatheeswaran, 2017). For former LTTE combatants who suffer under the pressure of constant surveillance and attendant threats of arrest, abduction and worse, the sustained state of alertness and suspicion is ever present. For Alfred, his intimate knowledge of intelligence systems and tactics to penetrate and extract information have rendered him all too alert to potential threats to his or his family's security. Unbeknownst to us, when we first met Alfred, he ran us through his internal process of analysis to determine who we might be working for, and for what agenda. On our second life history session, he confessed that he did not fully trust us, sharing, "*I had a doubt about you in my mind. The reason for that is...as far as Sri Lanka is concerned, the prevailing situation in this country is something different...I know how and who would infiltrate into villages. That is why I was so confused about who you are*" (LH9B pg. 1). Alfred also pondered if we were working for a foreign government, perhaps the Indian government, to gather intelligence about him. For Alfred, the post-war period has not brought peace, but rather a new and heightened form of insecurity and constant suspicion that still requires him to be on high alert, and which informs his choices on where he moves and with whom he associates.

The constant hum of suspicion that Alfred expresses may lead him and others, including former combatants, to disengage from community activities and programs that are delivered by entities viewed as 'foreign'. Although Alfred does share with us that he has attended some church and NGO workshops on themes such as cigarette cessation and gender equality, he states

his preference to do “*social work*” on his own terms. This both confirms and challenges the literature on former combatants that has shown their apprehension and reluctance to participate in community life, including development activities (Gunasekera & Pathiraja, 2019; Usoof-Thowfeek, 2018). On the one hand, Alfred is engaged in his community and concerned about social issues he sees as important. However, he is hesitant to broach a relationship with a formal institution such as a local or international NGO, beyond that of one-time recipient of motorbike tools and a sewing machine for his wife.

Another way that narrators shared that their choices and behaviours have been shaped by the gendered nature of insecurity that persists in Kilinochchi is being highly selective of one’s interpersonal social interactions and relationships. One reason is to protect one’s reputation within the community, which is of paramount importance for women and especially those branded with contentious labels such as ‘widow’. Another reason is to protect one’s physical and psychological safety. This is especially true of widows and other women who are perceived as being sexually available and are therefore at an increased risk of sexual violence including harassment. This has led some women and widows, such as Thamilini, to opt out of unnecessary contact with men altogether, to avoid being “*deceived by them by being enslaved to the love and care sometimes [to avoid being ordered around in the name of love]*” (LH2A pg. 16). For Thamilini, association with men in general has proven to be too toxic, too risky, too problematic, that for her the best way to cope is to simply cut men out of her inner circle. In Tamil society where remarriage is not encouraged³³, the possibility of widowed women to seek out new romantic relationships is socially risky as well as potentially physically and sexually risky.

³³ As compared to Muslim communities in Sri Lanka, where remarriage is seen to restore a women’s (male) protection and social status in the community (Blackburn, 2010).

Thamilini's choice to cut off any close relationships with men underscores this. For her, the risks are just too great.

Nagenthiram summarizes neatly how all the structural factors discussed in this chapter coalesce to prevent his family from fully benefitting from the programs and offerings from NGOs and development projects. It is worth exploring in detail how he describes his own hesitancy and eventual decision to prevent his grown daughter from attending an NGO meeting:

As I told you, there are many issues in the roads because of those who are under the influence of alcohol. Beautiful girls are affected frequently. That is why, I didn't allow her [my daughter] to go there [NGO meeting]. As I told you earlier, if something happened against us, then I am not in a position to fight against it now. If we go to the police station, the police will say that it may be something accidental. You just leave it from here. A girl may be easily convinced. That is why, I didn't allow her to go there. I have to make a good life for her (LH5B pg. 25).

Here, Nagenthiram has recognized the risks of potential physical harm –and the attendant social consequences related to patriarchal cultural norms, stigma and reputation that would befall her – that may visit his daughter if she were to travel in town to participate in the NGO meeting. This passage succinctly illustrates the gendered nature and increased risks for particularly women facing a society that is marked by the use of substances, the potential risk of sexual harassment and sexual violence, as well as the reputational damage his daughter might incur, and the perceived lack of any recourse should an incident take place. It is unknown what the long-term benefit of attending this meeting might have been. Would his daughter have forged new social networks, started the process of learning new skills, or found a safe place to explore her own reserves of confidence and self-worth? What is clear is that she was not permitted to attend in the name of safety and security (defined and enforced by her father), and therefore missed the opportunity for any of these opportunities for empowerment to transpire.

Vasuki has also made a strategic choice to forgo a livelihood opportunity, which may have made significant contributions to her household income and her ability to take care of her three children in the absence of a breadwinning husband or other contributing family members. Instead, however, she has done the calculus and has arrived at the decision that there are certain livelihood activities that come with risks too great to take on for a woman in her position. When the GS offered to help her find a shop to run, a business she was familiar with from her time working with her husband when he was alive, she calculated the risks in light of her new position in this post-war society, and thus her situation of vulnerability. She refused to run on her own a business that would expose her to “*different types of persons*”, who “*may come to buy cigarette when they are under the influence of alcohol. If I shout at them, then it will spoil my image. That is why I didn’t like to run a shop*” (LH8A pg. 17). Vasuki recognizes that she could have further “*uplifted*” her life had she been able to start a shop. However, her status as a widow and the reputational risks that she would face daily is just too much for her to manage. She is unequivocal in where she lays the blame for this barrier to her livelihood “*Who placed obstacles? The society*” (LH8A pg. 17). Also, we see again how alcohol use and abuse amongst men contribute to this feeling of insecurity, and that if ever confronted by someone under the influence, Vasuki fears that she would not be able to defend herself – or her reputation. Further, Vasuki’s assertion that she “*can’t run a shop alone*” speaks directly to the lack of protection that her husband would have provided if he were alive and helping with the business, alluding to the fear of potential physical or even sexual violence that Vasuki may encounter. As with Nagenthiram, the interlocking factors of alcohol and substance abuse, violence and identity have worked to prevent Vasuki from taking advantage of economic or other opportunities that may have benefitted her in the long term. In this way, Vasuki and others make strategic decisions

based on a limited set of options. While Vasuki may be empowered to make these decisions in the first place, her choices are constrained by deeply disempowering social processes that are informed by patriarchal norms and practices that would create the conditions for violence and other forms of harm.

A well-designed development intervention that is informed by feminist perspectives and accounts for the social restrictions, power relations and underlying gendered insecurity factors can mean the difference in terms of how particularly women, but also men, participate and subsequently benefit from a given program. Punithavathi, for example, describes how bringing the agricultural work to her home, and not to a paddy (rice) field that would require a commute, has allowed her to engage directly with an agricultural program. Had this not been the case, she would have had to stay home while her husband tended to the fields. This is directly linked – although not expressed as such – to gendered insecurity and gendered expectations on what it means to be a good woman, what Tamil women are expected to do and not do. She explains how *“[g]ents can go to faraway places to bring grasses. If we [women] want to go to paddy lands to bring grasses to our cows, then we should hire a vehicle”* (LH10B pg. 11).

The fact that Punithavathi does not explicitly or directly name what is going on – neither the gendered expectations of her as a woman, nor the nature of the security threat *per se* – represents a silence. This silence can be understood as indicative of a naturalized gendering of Punithavathi and Tamil women in general. It is simply understood that she should not go into the field, should not take a motorbike, should not stay out late, even if it was to work and contribute to the household income base, which would be beneficial to her family. Intertwined with these gendered expectations of the ‘good Tamil woman’ are the real and perceived threats to women’s safety. The threat of harm – sexual harassment, sexual violence, or kidnapping for instance –

compounds and reinforces these gendered identities of women as those who must be protected, whose reputations and the reputations of their families must be protected, and therefore must be kept out of public domain.

Discussion

This chapter has explored the structural context in which development programming has taken place in post-war Kilinochchi. It has focussed on the gendered in/security that narrators and other community members experience, negotiate and endure in their daily lives. Drawing from the life histories of narrators and complemented by key informant interviews, this chapter has revisited three of the major contributions of Critical Feminist Security Theories (CFST). These contributions were: the problematization of the assumption that women are protected by the state during times of war and peace; the analysis of how the ‘productive destructiveness’ of men’s and women’s identities are shaped by war and the myriad ways that masculinities and femininities affect and are affected by conflict and violence; and new ways of thinking about sexual violence related to conflict. These contributions were discussed in relation to the major themes that arose during listening sessions with narrators. These themes are widowhood and in/security; threat and actual sexual violence; a lack of state protection and justice; and the impact of gendered in/security on behaviour, movement, and access to resources including participation in development programming. Through applying the three frames of macro (state level), meso (development apparatus level) and micro (interpersonal/community level) dynamics to these themes of in/security, we can begin to peel back the layers of the complex social underpinnings of the gendered in/security that persists in Kilinochchi today. These three levels of inquiry into the dynamics of gendered in/security in post-war Kilinochchi show that multiple levels of society are implicit and complicit in constructing situations of in/security, which have

different impacts on different people that are both highly gendered and relate to masculinities, femininities, and identities, such as ‘widow’, ‘ex-combatant’, and ‘sexual violence survivor’.

In this chapter, I have drawn connections between how insecurity is produced and reinforced by multiple levels of society, and in turn works to reinforce and reproduce the gendered conditions of insecurity in the post-war phase. The post-war period is marked by a particular militarism that has shown signs of increasing in presence and control, especially in the North. However, beyond state security actors and their ironic role in entrenching insecurity for those who live in the Kilinochchi, other segments of society contribute to and are intertwined within these dynamics. Beyond militarism and security related to state armed forces, debates within Human Security have pointed out that various non-military dimensions have deep and lasting implications for the individual’s well-being, and considering these aspects helps to ‘widen’ the concept of security (Owen, 2004, p. 380) and shed light on different contexts that are currently lacking within mainstream human security discourse.

The findings presented in this chapter provide confirmation and support for the three major contributions of CFST as listed above, while also offering an opportunity to expand them and move them forward. The assumption that women are under the protection of the state is proven to be problematic, debunked with careful empirical and theoretical work conducted by feminist security researchers. What the narrators in this study also reveal is that men, too, feel vulnerable and unprotected by a state that is perceived to be inadequate to ensure the protection of its population, particularly a population that has suffered so greatly during the final days of war. The ongoing militarization and blurring of civilian and military spaces, boundaries and social domains further entrenches the feeling amongst narrators that the state is deeply entwined in their lives under the guise of ‘national security’ and protection, and yet ironically provides

neither for the Tamil people living in Kilinochchi. Other, non-military aspects of insecurity also prevail and persist as critical factors that shape the daily lives of narrators. The examples provided by some of the narrators of trying to access justice, such as through reporting incidents of violence or theft, only to be met with perceived indifference or inability to adequately handle such cases illustrate the futility of expecting protection or justice from institutions that have historically served to undermine one's community. The result is a perpetual fear on the part of both men and women that should any injustice befall them, that individuals and families are on their own to protect themselves and that no justice should be expected.

The insights shared by the narrators reveal the intricacies of living lives in a context of gendered in/security, where the relational nature of patriarchal cultural norms and the larger structures of in/security produce limited, often undesirable options for both men and women to act. As the narrators have shared, this context continually creates situations where both men and women are faced with sets of undesirable or limited choices to seek protection and safety, and to create or capitalize on opportunities for improving their lives. For women, this can take the form of choosing between enduring sexual advances by a more senior colleague at work or resigning and walking away from one of few available income earning opportunities. Restricted choices facing men may lead them to protect their daughters and prevent them from participating in potentially beneficial development programs as a way of navigating punishing patriarchal cultural norms and practices that would lead to serious reputational or physical harm. These calculated decisions from a limited set of choices represents what can be understood as restricted agency, where individuals are able to make choices but who are acting "within multiple hierarchical structures and specific contexts" (Alison, 2004, p. 449). In this context, restricted

agency is highly informed by patriarchal gender relations within society and how the inform and are in turn informed by the prevailing structural factors of insecurity in the post-war North.

Much of the literature and empirical work emerging from CFST has been centered around the armed conflict or war period, with good reason considering the dearth of critical inquiry into armed conflict that spurred this sphere of research. Some of the insights generated within this body of knowledge has reached into the post-war period, with particular importance to problematizing the very notion of a defined ‘post-conflict’ period beyond the absence of war (Cockburn, 2004; Meintjes et al., 2001). The findings in this chapter clearly illustrate that other contributions from the CFST domain can also be expanded to include the post-war period, notably exploring how reconceptualizations of violence and sexual violence in post-war contexts can be seen as extensions of the dynamics of violence and sexual violence that take place during war. Shifting attitudes and behaviours that unfold over the course of war and in turn shape how one understands what it means to be a ‘man’ or ‘woman’ or ‘widow’ point to a complex construction of masculinities and femininities in a given society. How these gender constructions manifest in various ways are numerous, including governing how one can access resources, the degree of public mobility they can enjoy, and to what extent they may participate in development programs and activities.

As the findings have illustrated, several participants cited the impact of use and abuse of alcohol and drugs in the community, raised to highlight various elements of change within – and often attitudes of dismay towards – current post-war Tamil society. These discussions on alcohol and drugs can serve as a cross-cutting proxy indicator that crosscuts through many social issues related to structural issues of gendered in/security. Narrators discussed these substances in various ways, including to highlight the perceived lack of justice or protection by authorities

through the proliferation of illicit substances in the community, to the interpersonal and gendered impacts of men's substance use and increased threats of violence against women, to hints of alcohol as a coping mechanism acting as a balm of damaged masculinities and deep psychological wounds relating to individual and collective trauma.

Widely recognized models of interpersonal violence, such as the ecological model (see World Health Organization, 2002) recognize substance use and abuse as one of a multitude of factors contributing to one's propensity to commit and/or be a victim of interpersonal violence (physical, sexual, emotional, and other forms). In this model, substance abuse is not considered to be a root cause of violence, *per se*. Many of the narrators blamed the introduction of illicit narcotics and alcohol into the society in the post-war period, however in other instances they also acknowledge that violence against women and other problems did exist. According to the narrators, both issues of violence against women and substance abuse in the post-war society speak to the prevailing context of a lack of protection where justice and enforcement institutions cannot be relied upon to deliver or maintain security. Traced along the accounts from narrators, we can see how the theme of 'alcohol and drugs' as an identified societal scourge actually reveals the ways in which the situation in Kilinochchi offers new ways of thinking about the reconceptualization of violence (committed against women, men, and taking on new forms in the post-war context), as well as the reconceptualization of peace and security, whereby the absence of war does not equate to peace for the lives of the narrators and their communities.

The findings presented in this chapter point to several implications for development programming aiming to promote gender equality and/or women's empowerment in post-war settings such as Northern Sri Lanka. Firstly, the larger structural issues in each context serve not as a stagnant backdrop, but as an intervening force that interacts with agency, particularly in

creating the conditions for expressions of restricted agency. These dynamics can have tangible impacts on the extent to which individuals and communities can access development programs and activities. These impacts are, of course, highly gendered, and can take the form of barriers such as restrictions on women's movements for fear of exposure to sexual violence and harassment in public spaces including while en route to attend an activity. They can also take the form of sociocultural barriers, such as the calculations that men and women constantly make in relation to the risks to their social reputation, often in relation to how their identity is constructed within the society. While these decisions are often made by individuals for themselves, they can also be taken and imposed by often male family members, such as fathers or husbands. These contextually informed, complex structural factors must be carefully accounted for when designing, implementing, and evaluating gender equality programming.

Secondly, programs must be informed by the strategic calculus that individuals (and their family members) make in order to arrive at decisions amidst a gendered in/secure context. The intersecting identities of individuals within society – including widows, women, ex-combatants, men, divorcé(e)s, and myriad other social identities can work with fluid masculinities and femininities – or what it means to be a man or woman in this place at this time – to put up obstacles or barriers to accessing resources that would improve one's life or improve gender relations at the wider societal level. When Vasuki declines support to open a shop due to fear of damage to her reputation, and sexual or other violence through encountering men under the influence of drugs or alcohol, this represents a lost opportunity for her that she herself recognizes. However, Vasuki's story underscores the importance of self-worth, independence, and feelings of achievements as sometimes more valuable to pursue than opting for a seemingly 'safer' option of staying with family members who might have been perceived as able to offer

more social, economic and physical security than living alone with her children would. The decision to sacrifice one's economic capital may be made in lieu of keeping intact or attempting to preserve more valuable assets, such as social capital. For widows and other women especially, this calculus is done through a sharp lens of reputational importance where the social stakes are very high and are deeply connected to patriarchal gendered norms and societal realities.

Recognizing these calculations that lead to decisions on whether and to what extent men and women can participate – and gain from – development programs is crucial. Introduced in Chapter Two, the Feminism and Development/Disasters (FAD²) approach can be a useful framework for the development apparatus to embrace, since it accounts for multiple forms of identity – including ethnonational identity – and moves beyond simply gender to include history, culture, geography among other things. FAD² is generally more encompassing than applications of frameworks based on gender and is in line with the spirit of the findings, which point to a need to take a more holistic, longer-term view of lived lives.

Although this chapter has laid out a complex and multidimensional picture of the situation facing those living in Kilinochchi, the narrators also demonstrate that even amid seemingly insurmountable structural challenges, moments of empowerment, agency, positive change, and even something akin to transformation in relation to gender equality and women's sociocultural position were evident. The next chapter will explore these opportunities and intricacies in greater detail, with special attention paid to the contributions and limitations that gender and development programming and the larger development apparatus have had on these complex social processes of challenge and change.

CHAPTER SIX: Empowerment, Agency, and Meaning: Making Sense of Encounters with Development

This chapter explores the opinions, experiences and sense-making that narrators expressed about the development programs in which they participated. The perspectives presented here were collected during life history sessions with the narrators and are further complemented by some reflections from key informant interviews with development actors. Overall, narrators appreciated the post-war gender mainstreamed livelihood programs that were extended to them, and yet these interventions are also seen as largely insufficient in the long-term and often inappropriately designed and delivered. Beyond the commentary on the overall availability and design of the programs, narrators revealed instances of empowerment, agency, and even transformation as directly attributed to their participation in gender mainstreamed programs. In these cases, narrators expressed empowerment in new and surprising ways, which both complement and expand our current understanding of empowerment, agency and the social value of development operations. Specifically, narrators spoke of ‘courage’, ‘independence’, and moving into new physical and social spaces. Despite gains in these areas, however, women’s processes of empowerment are impeded, and expressions of agency are restricted by prevailing structural issues, including gendered in/security, discussed in the previous chapter, as well as entrenched patriarchal gender norms and attitudes around masculinities and femininities.

In this chapter, I begin by presenting the political and historical context of NGOs and development programming in Sri Lanka, and a discussion on the nature of gender mainstreamed programs in the post-war period. Building upon this contextual foundation, I then examine how narrators make sense of gender mainstreamed development programs in the post-war period, drawing on tensions of expressed criticism and gratitude. Next, I analyze how the narrators

express empowerment, highlighting some new ways in which empowerment is conceived by those pursuing it. This section also offers a critical evaluation of the limits of understanding lived experiences through the lens of empowerment. I follow this with a discussion on the role of collective agency and network building, two corollary processes that narrators associated with positive personal changes. Next, I analyze how agency amongst the narrators is inextricably linked to individuals' own contributions and coping mechanisms, returning to the concept of restricted agency. I then examine the larger social value and meaning of gender and development programming, particularly its potential to promote intrinsic validation and confidence amongst constituents through interactions with development actors. Before concluding with further analysis and discussion of the contributions of these findings to the larger literature on empowerment, agency and development discourse, I revisit the issue of war-related trauma and 'poisonous knowledge' to build upon my arguments around the relational nature of agency and structure and the importance of addressing this relationship within gender and development programming. This section approaches how deep-seated, prevailing trauma continue to influence the extent to which narrators are able or willing to access gender mainstreamed development programs and opportunities. Other coping strategies developed and adopted to mitigate risks of harm – harassment, surveillance, further trauma – are also discussed in relation to how the gendered experience of trauma remains an under-addressed, pernicious and constituting factor in how individuals can benefit from development programming.

[NGOs and Development Programming in Sri Lanka: A Brief History](#)

Civil society and NGOs in particular have had a long history in Sri Lanka, dating back to Christian-affiliated missions of the nineteenth century (Asian Development Bank, 2013). The relationship between the government and the NGO sector has experienced various periods of

tension, which have overlaid the larger political context of the country. In the 1970s saw the liberalization of the Sri Lankan economy and a relaxation of travel restrictions, which led to a proliferation of the NGO sector, particularly those agencies with international ties. However, the general “anti-statist ideologies” of many NGOs led the government to view NGOs in a negative light, and accused them of “undermining national security, disrupting ethnic harmony and supporting terrorism”, sentiments that only increased after the commencement of the civil war in 1983 (Asian Development Bank, 2013, p. 2). The government subsequently placed restrictions on NGOs and demanded greater transparency and accountability. Pressure from foreign donors on the state to share responsibility for poverty alleviation with NGOs further exacerbated the government’s scrutiny of civil society. In 1996, the Government of Sri Lanka set up the National Secretariat for the Registration of NGOs, and in 1998 further amended the Voluntary Social Services Organizations (Registration and Supervision) (Amendment) Act to enable greater supervision of the sector (National Secretariat for Non Governmental Organizations, 2017).

Due to the contentious history between the government and civil society, especially foreign NGOs, the development and humanitarian space has experienced various periods of openness and closures during the war and post-war periods. In the early 2000s, there was influx of aid connected to peace and security efforts, echoing donor interests and geopolitical agendas at the time (Orjuela, 2005). When the Indian Ocean tsunami hit the eastern coast of Sri Lanka in 2004, a flurry of aid organizations – and foreign currency – rushed into the country and was mostly channelled through NGOs (Asian Development Bank, 2013). This flow of funds fomented further tension between NGOs and the government. Nearing the end of the war, in 2008 the government set up a select committee of parliament to investigate NGO operations to determine their influence on national and social well-being (Asian Development Bank, 2013).

This event began a crackdown on NGOs and the larger campaign to expel foreign entities before the final stages of the war.

During the Rajapaksa Presidency (2005-2015), the relationship between national and international NGOs and the government once again became tense, particularly as the GoSL ramped up its offensive against the LTTE and took bold measures to restrict foreign presence in the conflict zones. In the post-war period of the mid-2010s, President Rajapaksa cracked down further on NGOs, preventing them from holding press conferences or putting out press releases, and requiring them to submit for approval their activities one year in advance (Dibbert, 2014). In practical terms, the stranglehold that the GoSL exerted on NGOs meant that some programs were off limits, seen as too contentious or threats to national security. For example, one long-time NGO worker recalls that before 2016, NGOs could not be seen engaging in psychosocial support work, as this was viewed as a veiled attempt to uncover human rights claims by the survivors of war (Personal Interview, 24, August 2018). It is within this contentious operating climate that the gender and development programs were implemented in Kilinochchi and around the Vanni.

Gender Mainstreamed Programming in the Post-War Period

As discussed in Chapter Two, the tendency to push for a return to the pre-war status quo can lead to backsliding on gains made during conflict (Harders, 2011; Parpart, 2015). This is often reinforced by the disconnect between assumptions of planners and policy makers who base post-conflict programs on unexamined gender assumptions that essentialize both women and men. This was the case in the Sri Lankan context, where NGO-delivered programming emphasized care-giving and welfare (Manchanda, 2005). Even when considered, ‘gender’ was largely interpreted within development programs in terms of women’s participation, or the modification of material goods provided to women based on outdated gender assumptions. The

faulty equation of gender mainstreaming to women's participation has been seen elsewhere within the larger development sector (Parpart, 2014a). As discussed later in this chapter, despite the social value placed on interactions with development actors through monitoring and evaluation activities, the rush to deliver post-war programs in the early 2010s meant that these operational activities often did not take place. This failure to maintain visibility into how programs were being received blinded many NGOs to some of the operational shortcomings and even duplications of effort. As one locally based researcher commented, "at one point, in one village every woman had two or three sewing machines" (Personal Interview, 28 August 2018).

Once people began to be resettled after the war, national and international NGO programs in the North flourished, often furnishing material goods with a basic-needs approach. Shelter and water and sanitation (WASH) sector-related programs were favoured with some livelihoods activities. Later, the focus then moved on to more development-oriented programs, including awareness sessions and skills training. Despite robust policies and conceptual frameworks on gender and gender mainstreaming that had been developed at this time at the headquarters of most back donors of these NGOs, gender often came as an afterthought. One senior development worker with an INGO reflected on how the phenomenon of the 'tyranny of the urgent' swept aside any meaningful consideration for gender during the post-war relief and recover phases, and that only "*in the development part only they think about the gender, earlier they don't have time to think about the gender*" (KII5). This privileging of the material conditions and basic needs at the expense of addressing the more strategic gender interests and other gendered, social aspects of recovery reflects an underlying attitude amongst development practitioners that gender is an expendable 'add-on' that lies somewhere outside of the central issues of war, recovery and

justice, despite evidence that demonstrates the opposite (see for example Cockburn, 2004; Kottegoda, 2012; Ní Aoláin et al., 2011).

While not directly impacted by the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004, the knock-on effects of this large-scale disaster on the NGO sector reached Kilinochchi and its development ecosystem. Many skilled aid workers were reassigned to the affected areas, leaving a vacuum of human resources and skills, including those related to gender (KII1, KII2). Further, the tsunami response had a particular impact on the women's rights movement and the ways in which 'gender' was being 'done' in Sri Lanka by NGOs. The post-tsunami period drew many national women's rights activists away from grassroots organizing and folded them into bureaucratic INGOs (Hyndman, 2008). This 'professionalization' of grassroots NGOs led to the depoliticization of 'gender' to fit international interpretations and technical processes of proposal development, monitoring and evaluation (Hyndman & de Alwis, 2003).

The application of 'gender' in this context also excluded some groups, notably men and boys. Assumptions based on essentialized understandings of men have led largely to their disenfranchisement and exclusion from NGO programs, particularly after the immediate relief and recovery phases. The application of the term 'gender' to mean 'women' has meant that programs largely target women – including widows, female ex-combatants, and other subsets of the category 'woman' – to the exclusion of men (KII3). Further, where men have been involved in longer-term programs, this has largely been reflective of other critiques of post-war programming that have further entrenched pre-war gender stereotypes, such as offering skills development training in traditionally 'masculine' fields of bike repair. This critique is relevant not only for NGO programs, but also for the government-run 'rehabilitation programs' set up in the immediate post-war period to retrain ex-LTTE cadres, which saw women engaged in

cooking, tailoring, and pre-school training, while men were trained in plumbing, carpentry and use of chemical fertilizer (Gunasekera & Pathiraja, 2019). From a feminist perspective, the interpretation of gender mainstreaming of livelihood programs, particularly in the early days of the resettlement and recovery period, reflects a deprioritization of efforts that would challenge the underlying factors of gender inequality, including patriarchal structures and social norms, and instead focused on short-term technical solutions to complex gender problems. Beyond these critiques, the narrators in this study make sense of these programs differently, notably with a mix of gratitude and criticism directed at both those who designed the interventions, as well as the constituents who received them.

Locating Responsibility and Ownership of Gender Mainstreamed Programming

According to the ten narrators in this study, gender-mainstreamed NGO programming was most appreciated at two distinct periods following the war when these programs were delivered, firstly in the immediate post-war months, during the ‘recovery’ phase of transition (2009-2012) when resettlement was underway, and during the current ‘development’ phase, understood to have commenced after 2012. In-kind assistance – or programs that furnished material goods to recipients such as shelter materials, toilets, farm tools, and irrigation equipment – were provided to narrators was most appreciated during a particular period, namely in the acute recovery phase immediately after the war, or for many, after they were released from the Welfare Camps around 2011-2012. For those narrators who commented on their feelings regarding their participation in and reception of development programming, these were largely positive. For example, when asked how he felt receiving help from NGOs, Thampaiyah says, “*I was proud of it. They gave us [help] to uplift our lives. I was happy about it*” (LH7B pg. 17). When Vasuki received cash assistance during the resettlement period, she describes the elation and relief that

she felt: *“When I was receiving that money, it was like seeing God by my own eyes as that money was really helpful to give food to my children”* (LH8B pg. 12). Given the heavy toll that war took on so many people’s lives, it is no wonder that gratitude and relief were common feelings expressed by those who received assistance in the immediate aftermath. However, in the ensuing months and years when individuals, families and communities began to rebuild new lives, a more critical view of development programming began to emerge.

Despite expressions of gratitude, several narrators pointed out that these programs were sometimes insufficient or even inappropriate in the short-term to meet the material needs of constituents. Narrators spoke of inadequate funds to rebuild homes, inappropriate choices for breeds of animals, and the inherent limitations of NGO programming to meet the full needs of a population emerging from a traumatizing, protracted war. As Vasuki explains, she received chickens in 2010 valuing Rs. 50,000, but this was a failure: *“[t]hey died because of the infectious disease. It was not successful unlike [when] we grew our country breed chickens....I bought tablets for [the chickens]. But, it did not work out”* (LH8B pg. 13). She also had to lay out her own money to pay for medicine, although other narrators recalled that some other programs like cattle raising covered veterinary costs. Still, Vasuki concludes, *“the helps that I received from NGOs changed my life a lot”* (LH8B pg. 18). Even when narrators pointed out the shortcomings of the assistance they received, they were hesitant to assign blame to the NGOs, who were largely seen to be well-meaning and *“doing their best”* to help a war-affected population. Kamalanayaki says that even though the materials she received to reinforce her roof only lasted a few years, necessitating her to replace them by her own means, she is *“not coming to condemn the helps that they did for us”* (LH1B pg. 2).

For some narrators, the reception of livelihood assistance felt like an imposition, something that was thrust upon them without much consideration of the wishes of the recipients. Yalini describes that she was “*forcefully given*” a water pump, even though she and her family did not work in agriculture. Rather, she would have preferred to receive a goat or cow, which she speculates “*would have uplifted our life even more*” (LH4B pg. 18). Interestingly, in the next breath, Yalini removes the responsibility from the NGOs and places it on the part of those in her community who received these in-kind materials, charging that “*our people did not make the best use of the help rendered by the NGOs.*”

Several narrators recognize their own contributions to the development process not only to fill in the gaps left by insufficient or inappropriate assistance, but also as a prerequisite for participating in these programs in the first place. Thampaiyah recounts that he had to demonstrate that he was equipped and able to take care of a cow, through demonstrating how well he raised a cow previously given to him by a local politician. Only then was he selected by a Canadian NGO to receive a different breed of cow. Through this process, Thampaiyah reflects that he is “*proud*” to have received this second cow. In this way, Thampaiyah casts the NGO not only in an economic role of simply furnishing material benefits to achieve a sustainable livelihood, but also in a social role, where the NGO validates the hard work and efforts, and recognizes him as a worthy recipient of assistance. Similarly, Thamilini points to her “*patience and taking responsibility*” as qualities recognized by an international NGO who recruited her to participate in a skills training program (LH2A pg. 9).

What is also clear from the data is how narrators are keenly aware of much of the complex dynamics of the aid industry, how NGOs operate, and how these tensions play out in the implementation of development programming. The way that narrators evaluate the assistance

provided to them in various phases after the war points to an awareness of the tensions that exist between the interests of implementing agencies, such as NGOs, and the needs of the communities who they serve. As Vasuki speculates that the primary motivations of NGOs rest in the pressure to report measurable outcomes to their back donors, with the quality of the program taking second priority: “[w]hat they want is...this NGO gave these assistances to these numbers of beneficiaries. That is all they need...[laughing]” (LH8B pg. 11-12).

Narrators frequently pondered the inner workings, dynamics, pressures, and operational realities at play behind the gender mainstreamed programs that they were presented with. This curiosity and oftentimes knowledge and understanding of these dynamics suggest that recipients of development programming are neither ignorant nor disinterested in the mechanics of development programming. On the contrary, many individuals are all too aware of how pressures such as reporting high numbers of beneficiaries and offloading materials within a given time frame can lead to inappropriate distribution, targeting those who may not be in most need, and selecting types of assistance that do not correspond to actual needs. There is also an acute awareness on the part of constituents about where aid money flows, how it is distributed, preferred models of assistance, and above all, responsibilities of the state as a duty bearer to deliver on basic human rights such as housing, water, and protection/security. Alfred, for example, critiques the overall approach of some NGOs, such as World Vision’s sponsorship model. He has estimated what the donations might amount to and ponders how much of these funds make it to the targeted children and their communities: “*I have a doubt in this process. The thing is those who are abroad send 1 lakh or 2 lakhs money to the children. But, these children are provided books and notebooks only...I wonder whether those who are in World Vision take that money*” (LH9B pg. 5). Perhaps Alfred has not considered overhead or other administrative

costs, but his critique reflects the suspicion and concerns of other community members that international NGOs are not the best-placed actors to address community needs and priorities.

Narrators also demonstrate awareness, creativity, and potential to address some of the challenges faced by development actors on the ground, and often made suggestions that reflected their own innate knowledge of their realities. Narrators call for more participation, ownership, choice, and accountability in development programming. Narrators often had creative solutions to some of the problems they saw were plaguing development programs. Many suggestions included tapping into local knowledge sources, or engaging volunteers from the community to help monitor how the livelihood assistance was being taken up by the recipients. Some of the failures that narrators witnessed led them to conclude that cash would have been preferable to in-kind donations.

The reflections from the narrators described above problematize any static dichotomy of the passive recipient/active giver relationship that characterizes development programming. Rather, what narrators embody here is a much more active constituent who has a sophistication of knowledge about their realities, often coming with tangible, creative solutions that would have improved the outcomes of the programs which they often did not have any say in. Recipients are able to make valuable contributions via intrinsic qualities of motivation, knowledge, suggestions, solutions, and also even labour and capital contributions to fill gaps left behind by insufficient provisions. The social value placed on interactions with development programming that involves instances of participation and validation are also noted and compel us to look beyond merely reaching program targets and assessing sector-related impacts (such as livelihoods) to probe the interrelated psychosocial, intrinsic, and social value that development programs can foster and encourage.

One of the key themes raised by the narrators' life histories is the value and impact of having sustained or periodic relationships with NGOs amidst larger structural factors that cannot be addressed simply by gender mainstreamed NGO programming. Although NGOs may play an important role at a given time or time periods in one's life, the larger social structure in which lives are imbedded, and in which gendered norms and expectations are constantly produced and reproduced, remain an overriding force. One male NGO worker describes how this influences the degree to which gender workshops that include men are limited in their potential to foster lasting change: "...after this session, he [a man] will go [back] to the same cultural norm... That will change, you know, short short [temporarily]. So it can't change within a few minutes or within an hour, it takes time" (KII5 pg. 2). This NGO worker recognizes that a sustained investment is required, that gender relations and attitudes take time to change. This reflection suggests a humility in what can reasonably be expected of NGO programming when 'gender' is applied to programming that translates into short-term, isolated activities such as awareness raising sessions or workshops.

Several key informants point to donor cycles and requirements that emphasize measurable results that focus on output and are expected to take place in a limited amount of time. The reporting requirements placed on local and international NGOs who implement gender mainstreamed or gender targeted programs often emphasize measurable outputs. This emphasis can cause immense challenges and even frustration amongst program staff who struggle to achieve pre-determined targets. The emphasis on measurability further limits the utility of evaluation and reporting exercises, as the restricted scope and timeframe of evaluations prevent more nuanced shifts in gender norms to be identified, understood and captured. In some cases, indicators are prefabricated outside of the program context with little input from NGO workers

let alone communities in the project site. As another female worker at an international NGO lamented, “*they [donors] set the indicators before the project, they set the indicators...these number of men are there, got awareness, this percentage of boys got awareness. But it’s very hard to reach. But mostly, I write, I wrote the challenges. How I, why I couldn’t approach, why I couldn’t reach that number...In the challenges column [of reports to donors], I wrote everything*” (KII6 pg. 16).

One phenomenon discussed by several NGO workers and reflected, too, by the narrators, is the practice of repeatedly selecting the same beneficiaries, despite scarce resources. This is explained by some development workers as a strategy to ensure that development investments produce positive results, since a constituent who has already received some assistance and demonstrated ‘good use’ of it will continue to do so, thus making any future investments probable. As one key informant states, “*if they are getting returns from their livelihood, all NGOs will support them*” (KII4). This echoes the perceptions expressed by the narrators, who often faulted constituents themselves for not making the best use of the opportunity of receiving assistance, but who squandered it, even buying “*luxury goods*”. Again, we see the tendency for recipients to internalize the responsibility of “*making good use*” out of scant opportunities extended to them, rather than locating this responsibility on the NGOs or donors who fund, design and implement the programs, not to mention the ultimate duty bearer, the state.

Interestingly, perceptions of who is considered “*worthy*” of development programming and who is perceived as a bad investment intersects with the timeframe of evaluations, which usually happens within a few months of the conclusion of a project. As one key informant shares, it is possible to track long-term impacts, but this is only done informally through visits to the same communities for the purposes of implementing new projects. So, while some long-term

evaluations may take place, this is usually done informally and as a function of selecting the same beneficiaries, or at least the same beneficiary communities to work with. While there are good arguments for NGOs to develop long-standing relationships with selected communities – such as allowing the formation of trust – the lack of a formalized or institutionalized commitment to long-term evaluation is an opportunity lost.

What Yalini and the other narrators mentioned above illustrate is a hesitation to lay blame or responsibility fully at the door of development actors. Rather, there is an internalized feeling of responsibility that narrators have assumed, both as individuals and as a community who must persevere and improve their own situation. These expressions of ownership and responsibility run counter to stereotypes that depict development recipients as ‘lazy’ or ‘dependent’ on aid (Dhanani, 2019), waiting around for handouts. Further, the distribution of responsibility and duty of care in the post-war period in terms of realizing basic rights and needs is perceived by the narrators not as resting (solely) with the state, but with themselves.

The practical challenges of ‘doing’ gender and development work are multifold, as illustrated in Chapter Two’s exploration of the literature. Amongst these challenges include the relatively short timeframe of funding cycles and limited resources to address complex, deeply-rooted processes of (re)constructing gender relations and hierarchies (Kabeer, 1994; Wallace, 2020). The findings in this section contribute to our understanding of this tension, underlining how institutional pressures and dynamics that form the backdrop of gender mainstreamed programming are translated on the ground. The narrators in this study demonstrate a sophisticated understanding and knowledge of these dynamics, and how they influence what is being offered through development programming in their community. Despite narrators’ acknowledgement of the shortcomings of programs to bring about positive transformational

change, narrators resist laying blame or responsibility on these NGOs. Instead, narrators tend to internalize failures and carve out space for their own participation and ownership in the development process, even where this space was not created for them. Practically, narrators often called upon their own resources (labour, financial capital, social capital) to contribute to their own development process. They often filled in gaps themselves left by inadequate programming, and mobilized resourcefulness, motivation, material, and other resources. Sometimes the contributions from constituents were a requirement of the program in order to release the next level of material as in Thampaiyah's case, but most often this was a 'natural' inclination of narrators to be active in their own recovery. The desire and capacity of narrators to take ownership of their own development, recovery and empowerment processes demonstrates how development constituents disrupts notions of the 'passive' recipient and highlights some of the weaknesses of aid programs. These findings point to opportunities for a greater emphasis on development models that emphasize partnership and cooperation between development programs and recipients. These models would move beyond simply improving efficiency of development programs and outcomes but contribute to enhancing recipients' social and intrinsic value and connection to the process.

Empowerment

As explored in the literature review, the process of empowerment has been framed in many ways – framed as the *power to* act and make changes to one's reality and challenge gender hierarchies (Parpart et al., 2002); *power over* people, resources and structures, or a more "generative or productive form of power" (Rowlands, 1997, p. 13); and *power within*, or individual conscientization (Kabeer, 1999b). Another interpretation of empowerment and power is *power with*, where working in tandem with others is more powerful than working alone

(Parpart et al., 2002; Rowlands, 1997). Through exploring individuals' lived experiences through life histories, the narrators in this study offer new interpretations of empowerment that both contribute to and expand our existing understanding of the empowerment process. Three significant articulations of empowerment emerged from narrators sharing their life histories, namely: courage; independence; and occupying new spaces, both physical and social.

Empowerment as Courage

Thamilini details a change process that has improved her life and which she attributes not only to the NGO trainings and programs in which she participated, but also to her own intrinsic qualities that include courage. Thamilini begins speaking about courage in relation to her survival during the war: *"I would have died if I had not been courageous after the demise of my husband. As I stood courageously, I could come to this stage. I do not miss any meetings and workshops taken place here"* (LH2A pg. 4). We quickly see how "courage" is a corollary for other feelings that she has cultivated, such as fearlessness and confidence. She later shares, *"I was so scared of speaking in the meetings before. Then I developed my skills in speaking in the meetings fearlessly"* (LH2B pg. 4). For Thamilini, the courage that she drew upon to *"come to this stage"* was the raw material that propelled her to keep going after her husband was killed in the war. When these intrinsic qualities were met with external opportunities provided by NGOs to develop her confidence and leadership skills, new avenues opened up to address not only Thamilini's practical needs but also her strategic interests (C. O. N. Moser, 1993).

Thamilini's empowerment journey touches on several of the theoretical framings of empowerment that were presented earlier. She has tapped into and developed the *power within* through developing feelings of courage and fearlessness and confidence. She then calls upon these newly-improved intrinsic resources to exercise the *power to* question and challenge the

overarching structure – the patriarchal culture and institutions – that she understands to be unjust. In terms of *power over* resources and people, Thamilini’s status as a widow and head of her household means that she is obligated to be strategic and creative in providing for herself and her children in a society that has strongly imbedded norms that restrict women, and particularly widows’, ability to do so. These mediating social forces render Thamilini able to exercise a form of restricted agency to make choices from a limited set of options. However, through her long-standing relationships with local and international NGOs, either as a recipient, a volunteer, or a casual worker, Thamilini has been able to transcend some of these boundaries and enter public and social spaces that might not otherwise be available to her. Her membership in local women’s associations and other networks, some of which were set up by NGOs in the wake of the war to promote women’s recovery and development, have provided some opportunities to improve her social support and status. However, involvement with these groups has not been uncomplicated for Thamilini, who shares that she experienced stress and rejection when she had a falling out with the leader of one such group, which she attributes in part to her outspokenness, another expression of her courage.

Many narrators point to the intrinsic qualities that they called upon to overcome the immense obstacles they faced in the post-war recovery period. These character resources are most apparent when narrators who are widows speak of how they navigate societal barriers and expectations with the practical needs to survive, not to mention the strategic interest they may hold. The personal qualities of these women in particular stand out as resources that they possessed prior to any involvement with NGO programming. These resources can be understood as the intrinsic capital, which is an extension of the Bourdieusian concept of social capital, which refers to the “social networks that an agent can use to influence others or acquire resources”

(Chenhall et al., 2010, p. 738). Unlike social capital, which relies on relationships with others, I use the term intrinsic capital here to refer to the individual and internal qualities that one possesses or develops that can be leveraged to acquire resources and exercise various forms of power and agency. Relevant for our discussion on empowerment, this intrinsic capital can form part of an individual's resources in Kabeer's empowerment framework of resources (pre-conditions), agency (process) and achievements (outcomes) (Kabeer, 1999b). When met with opportunities presented through NGO programming, these resources could be enhanced, further developed, and form part of someone's empowerment journey. Thamilini illustrates this well. She describes how her own intrinsic capital, defined as courage, propelled her to keep going after losing her husband, and also how this raw capital was later enhanced through her interaction with the development apparatus through applying what she learned through attending trainings delivered by NGOs.

Returning to Kabeer's empowerment framework, courage can be understood as a resource or a pre-condition that exists internally within Thamilini and other individuals that they bring to the empowerment process. This courage could be catalyzed as part of the agency (or process) element of empowerment, which then leads to certain achievements or outcomes. However, while courage may be understood as a resource, it is *improved* courage that is the achievement or outcome of the empowerment journey of women. Thamilini possessed a certain level or capacity for courage before ever encountering the development apparatus, evident when she speaks of her childhood as a somewhat rebellious and fearless girl growing up in the Vanni. However, it is only when she encounters the development apparatus through multiple points of entry as a casual worker, constituent/recipient, and volunteer with gender mainstreamed programs, does her courage ignite and blossom, leading her to be able to speak up and demand

justice for herself and her community. Thus, courage can be theorized as occupying several stops and iterations along one's long and winding process of empowerment.

Intrinsic capital, like other forms of capital, can co-exist and even be mutually constituting of other forms such as social capital. When Thamilini takes on the role of casual worker or volunteer with an NGO, the courage, confidence, and fearlessness she brings may be catalyzed through the strong social relationships and networks with others that these encounters may foster. Also, developing a strengthened sense of purpose and meaning through engaging in service to others can in turn boost feelings of courage, confidence, and fearlessness.

Collaboration with others and collective action, therefore, has the potential not only to apply a multiplier effect to intrinsic capital and other resources, but also to promote the exercise of *power with*.

Vathana pinpoints that her most powerful moments in life have been when she acts as part of a team with her women's organization. She says, "*I think doing as a team is more powerful than doing as an individual. We will not succeed in anything if we do it alone*" (LH6B pg. 10). She then describes an example when she and her group members confronted some would-be land grabbers from Colombo, asking to see some authorization to claim a parcel of land. She considers, "*If I had gone alone to speak like that, nothing would have happened in favour of us...I was afraid of the police before. I was afraid of everything. But now, I have the guts to go anywhere to speak [laughing]*" (LH6B pg. 10-11). Vathana later attributes this feeling of power directly to the work of NGOs, who provided training and some organizational support for her "*...we should thank NGOs for this as they picked us up from villages and we were prepared by the trainings that the NGOs gave to us. They gave us the courage by telling us how we should approach and how we should go forward*" (LH6B pg. 11). Connecting back to the

theme of empowerment as courage, Vathana illustrates how working with teams within women's associations and with others in general has built her confidence and her skills, mobilizing her *power within* to exercise the power "*to question the government officials*". Here, Vathana demonstrates how various conceptions of power and empowerment can work in tandem. Working collectively with others towards a common goal of challenging injustice and patriarchal systems, she demonstrates *power with* and the *power to* question authority. These expressions of power in turn enhance her *power within* as she builds her own confidence and inner "*guts*" or courage. Vathana illustrates that while various forms of capital can be mutually reinforcing, so, too, can diverse forms of power complement one another.

Empowerment as Independence

Another expression of empowerment that was articulated through some of the narrators' life histories was the desire for, and pride in, achieving independence from a variety of actors and institutions, including NGOs and development actors. For many narrators, independence was cited as a strong driving force for them to work hard to improve their situations. The desire to live free from formal debt was mentioned several times, often a commentary on the predatory credit institutions that have flourished in the post-war north and which plunge borrowers into cycles of debt and have been found to exploit women and widows in particular in the name of women's empowerment and poverty alleviation (Kadirgamar & Kadirgamar, 2019). Most narrators are acutely aware of the role that NGOs have played in their life in the resettlement period but are eager to point out the temporality of programs and motivations to live free from an unequal giver/receiver relationship. Beyond the desire to avoid formal indebtedness to a financial institution, narrators describe independence as a feeling, a state of being, and a source of pride.

Several narrators stated a clear goal of theirs is living a life independent of assistance from others or institutions including NGOs.

The pursuit of independence from NGO or other assistance stands in contrast to the (neoliberal) critique of development that aiding a ‘needy’ population will breed dependence and discourage hard work or innovation. While some research has suggested that the provision of development assistance may create a moral hazard by preventing ownership, disincentivizing innovation and creating cycles of dependence on handouts, this research is most compelling when dealing with bilateral and multilateral state-level assistance in the context of official overseas development assistance, and often cites corruption and the absence of good governance as underlying drivers of failure (see for example Moyo, 2009). At the program level, the narrators in this study often took care to acknowledge the role that NGOs had in the aftermath of the war when people “*had nothing*”, but that now is the time for them to stand on their own two feet. Rather, what the narrators demonstrate is that emerging from war, having nothing to build from, receiving some initial injection of support – whether financial, housing, or otherwise – was instrumental to individuals pursuing a path of independence from NGOs, which was repeatedly articulated by the narrators. In the words of Vathana, “[w]e came to a [good] stage now. We don’t like to get it again and again” (LH6B pg. 17).

Independence is expressed and enacted by narrators in different ways. Citing suspicions of corruption, Nagenthiram reflects, “[t]hough the money comes through NGOs nowadays, those who distribute the money take a part of it for them[selves]...before distributing to the people in need” (LH5A pg. 3). As such, he is saving for his daughters so that they will never need to “*approach others for help*”. Again, we see the theme of independence emerge, with Nagenthiram now in a position to save money to care for his family since receiving further

assistance from NGOs is not a desirable or possible option. As the male head of his household, he embraces his socially ascribed duty to provide for his family, and thus enacts a particular form of masculinity that is linked to the pursuit of independence and self-reliance, coupled with taking care of and providing for his family, including his two adult daughters.

The pursuit of independence points to agentic actors working within the structural confines set by the larger in/security and the socioculturally mediated context to pursue self-reliance and reduce or eliminate any social or financial debt to others. Again, we see the drive of agentic actors to make positive changes in their lives through calling upon their own resources (intrinsic, financial, social) and leveraging the temporary support provided by gender mainstreamed programming to do so. One of the potential limitations of this strategy, however, is the challenge of transforming wider unequal gendered power relations or addressing the gendered in/security that prevails in the post-war period in the Vanni. As such, we must understand the potential for gender mainstreamed programs delivered in such a way to be limited, thus calling for humility in our expectations of what can be achieved by the model of gender mainstreamed development programming that has been applied in Kilinochchi in the past decade.

Empowerment as Moving into New Social and Physical Spaces

As discussed in the literature review, armed conflict disrupts gender norms and creates spaces for the reimagining of gender dynamics and newly drawn power relations (Harders, 2011; Moran, 2010; Parpart, 2015). In the Sri Lankan context, war indeed has disrupted much of the social fabric and organization of families and communities. In some cases, this has meant that gendered coping mechanisms employed during the war, such as women going outside the home to run errands and do the shopping, has expanded the socially-acceptable realms in which

women can operate (Rajasingham-Senanayake, 2004). However, these gendered gains can also be subjected to a backsliding in the post-conflict/post-war period (Pankhurst, 2008; Parpart, 2015). On the surface, this new enjoyment of social and physical mobility can itself be interpreted as a significant move towards gender equality, and an advancement of women's empowerment. On closer inspection, however, the story is much more complicated and necessitates an analysis of how patriarchal gender relations are still very much, to borrow from Cockburn's metaphor in relation to gender relations and war, "pushing the wheel around" (Cockburn, 2010, p. 150).

In Kilinochchi, the post-war context saw an influx of NGO programs being implemented, bringing new opportunities to engage in several ways with the development apparatus and in the various pre-existing and newly created (and often NGO-supported) women's community-based organizations. Some women share that they had previously felt restricted by their husbands, who question or even prohibit them from engaging with social or community activities outside of the house. But the prospect of learning new skills, connecting with others, and in turn bringing this new knowledge back to the family and household, many women saw this new programmatic environment as an opportunity too enticing to pass up. The strategies women employed to ease or circumvent previously held gender norms around women's mobility deserve attention. Yalini describes her experience: "*My husband was not interested in sending me to get involved in this project for just Rs. 10,000 as we can earn much more than that if both of us work together at home. But, I was interested in getting engaged into it as I am eager to develop my skills....I told my husband about it. He said OK for it if I could manage those things [housework]. Then only, I said OK*" (LH4B pg. 3).

Yalini's story illustrates several gendered dynamics at play in her efforts to be involved in a mental health project. Firstly, Yalini herself expresses that she values learning over earning, looking to attend the training even though she could be making more money if she stayed home and worked alongside her husband. Secondly, Yalini is thinking not only of her own learning opportunities, but how this training would have a multiplying impact on the lives of her daughter and her community in general. Lastly, while her husband did not prevent her from attending, she still feels bound by his lack of explicit permission to accept the training offer. She is able to secure her husband's support only after she agrees to "*manage those things*" – referring here to tasks related to her reproductive labour role within the household, such as cooking and getting her daughter off to school. Yalini, like other women narrators, must balance her reproductive, productive and community roles in order to negotiate with her husband to secure the support to participate in the project.

Moving into new spaces previously unoccupied by women can be seen as a marker of success and an advancement towards gender equality. However, with further interrogation, it becomes apparent that for many women, the benefits of operating outside of the home, building networks with others, and expanding one's ability to learn new skills and gain new knowledge does not replace domestic duties and expectations. Rather, taking on new roles outside of the house adds to what feminist theorists have termed the 'triple burden' or 'triple role', where women are tasked with taking on reproductive, productive and community-building duties (C. O. N. Moser, 1993). For widows, this is only compounded as single women bear the responsibility of earning enough productive income to support her family, and so the burden is even more acute.

Several life histories point to a constant tension for narrators, particularly women, with entering this new terrain of engaging in social work outside of the home. The prevailing fear revolves around the cultural norm that what happens within a family should be kept private, and not aired for neighbours or outsiders. This expectation is particularly played out in the lives of women, whose very movements are monitored and policed by community members, both men and women. The themes of reputation and the tension between private/public image is central to the everyday gendered realities. For example, Chandran describes the tension between protecting a family's privacy and addressing issues that may necessitate outside intervention, including gender bias. Chandran draws the link between private/public reputation of a family and culture, offering that "*[t]here are issues which are related to culture. Though there are cultural issues, we cannot speak out about it...they [the family in question] will try to solve those issues without getting it known to public...If these issues are brought to public, the particular family will be affected*" (LH3B pg. 11). Although he does not offer an explicit commentary on the gendered nature of this tension, his vague references to "*these issues*" are construed as those relating to women's and men's behaviour.

Yalini shares her own experience walking the tight rope of public/private spheres: "*[my husband] thinks...if these types of domestic issues are leaked to outside through these organizations [NGOs], then I may also disclose our family issues by accident. He was afraid of that at the beginning*" (LH5B pg. 15). Determined not to be deterred from her goal of volunteering with a mental health NGO, she applied some of what she had already learned to convince her husband to allow her to continue in the program: "*I could gradually change his thoughts after I studied counseling. I am happy about it. There may be some constructive changes in my family through the NGO works where I am engaged in*" (LH5B pg. 15). Here,

Yalini demonstrates that she was right in thinking that she could apply what she learned through the training program offered by the NGO to her family's situation. In this case, she mobilized these learnings to enable herself to navigate her husband's sensitivities about reputation to continue participating in NGO training, a public space newly available to her.

Chandran and Yalini touch on an important cultural norm that dictates that what goes on in the household should not be shared outside, lest others know about and pass judgement on their personal affairs. Yalini shares that her engagement in social work has been causing some tension at home, as her husband still fears that their personal business will be exposed to the outside community. She explains, *"as I am doing these social works continuously, I have some issues in my home. My husband told me, "You give up these social works. You don't want this". Despite what he told me, I should do these works in certain situations"* (LH4B pg. 28). Here, Yalini demonstrates how she exercises her agency through the power to challenge the gender norms enforced in her own home by her husband and is ultimately able to circumvent his protestations and continue pursuing the work that brings her joy and meaning. Yalini, thus, demonstrates some degree of empowerment, made possible in part through her connections to the development apparatus and the NGOs with which she has been affiliated.

While the women narrators in this study have pointed to moments or enhanced feelings of empowerment as exhibited by moving into new spaces, taking steps into new gendered terrain is not uncontested or unchallenged by others who still hold on to patriarchal gender expectations of women. Some of the men in this study exhibited these gendered social norms when speaking of women's physical movements. These narrators often did so with criticism, disapproval, and even derision.

Chandran, a divorced man in his 40s, sees the proliferation of mobile phones in the North as a major detriment to the culture, understood here in part as the traditionally held gender norms that dictate how and when women and girls (and men and boys) are to communicate with one another. Chandran expresses his suspicion of girls' behaviour and activities as exemplified by their mobile phone use: "*Before the use of mobile phones, culture was not damaged like what is happening today. What a boy told something to a girl when she was going on the road, it might have been a problem at that time. But, the phone which should be kept inside the handbag is now on the ears.* (LH7B pg. 16). Here Chandran's reference to the handbag clearly indicates how he feels it is women and girls who are in the wrong for using their phones, not the boys who may be saying inappropriate things to them.

Thampaiyah, a married man from an older generation, offered his commentary on how access to technology has had a negative influence on women and girls in his community. He theorizes, "*[t]he girls who use mobile phones...won't come to a good stage. If they use mobile phones like that unnecessarily, then it will damage their image. If a girl calls a boy over the phone, then he will tell it to another four persons. Such kinds of girls spoil their image themselves*" (LH7B pg. 12). The theme of image tarnishing is never far from conversations around women's role and place in society, given the entrenched meaning and values attached to women in Tamil society, and ideas about what it means to be a good, Tamil woman (Gowrinathan, 2012; Rajasingham-Senanayake, 2004). However, as Thampaiyah, Chandran and other men and women in these communities continue to frame women as the bearers of family honour and reputation, it is always the responsibility of the woman or girl to uphold a good image of herself as seen by society, despite what actions others may take. Within these

patriarchal social structures, it is never the duty of men and others to refrain from exercising aggression, abusing power, or inflicting other harmful acts on women and girls.

The persistent attitudes of some men in this study towards women's newfound freedom of movement – social and physical – within society harkens back to the phenomenon of backlash that takes place in many post-war societies (Meintjes et al., 2001; Pankhurst, 2008). Gains made by women through the reordering of gender relations during and after war draw resistance and are often contested by those who traditionally hold a larger share of power, often men. The process of empowerment, thus, is neither a straightforward nor unmitigated journey. Rather, women in particular must navigate the various roadblocks that entrenched patriarchal gender norms have put up for them and which persist in old and new forms. The attitudes expressed by Chandran and Thampaiyah around mobile phones centers this technology as a proxy for all the ways in which women and girls' movements are policed, noticed, judged by men and women in larger society. The influx of new technologies at once opens new ways for women to communicate with one another and with others, however it also leaves them exposed to judgement and scorn for their perceived transgression of the gendered expectations of women's behaviour.

The Limitations of Understanding Lived Experiences through the Lens of Empowerment

Empowerment as a ubiquitous buzzword within development policy and practice is framed as an unquestionably desirable objective, with all its promise to deliver positive change for women and drive various development goals. However, there are instances where empowerment is neither pursued choice nor with the express will of the individual. As a result of the war, displacement and the need to assume income generating responsibilities have led to a dislocation of women who have lost their husbands from rigid and restrictive social practices that

would see widows secluded from society, and has challenged the belief that widows are unclean or ‘polluted’ (Manchanda, 2001; Rajasingham-Senanayake, 2004). Widows in this study share that they were ill-prepared to be thrust into these new roles, often due to their gendered childhoods of being cared for and socially sheltered by their (often male) family members as girls, and later cared for by their husbands as young women. Vasuki, for example, looks back at her path from a doted-upon girl – the favourite child in her family, according to her – to a young wife whose husband arranged for all the household duties so that she lived “*without knowing the outside world...my husband took care of me like that*” (LH8A pg. 2). So isolated from the public sphere as a girl and then a wife, that when she suddenly found herself widowed, she “*did not even know how to buy 1 kg of sugar*” (LH8A pg. 2). These longitudinal self-reflections pose questions related to how empowerment and agency are understood by development actors and within the literature, specifically how choice operates as a component of these concepts. What does it mean when a woman has no choice but to assume characteristics, behaviours and actions that transgress traditional gender norms and may masquerade as empowerment, but are in fact driven by simple survival? What role do motivation, interests and desires play in enacting choice?

Equating agency to choice is problematic since it is difficult to untangle the difference between the actions one takes and the results these actions yield, particularly when acting in one’s own interests (Hemmings & Treacher Kabesh, 2013). The experiences shared by narrators who embody widowhood contribute to this analysis of empowerment, agency, and choice, demonstrating that a woman’s socially constructed identity, in this case a woman as widow, propels her into new spaces, not by virtue of her choosing to do so (action) but rather by imperative of survival (results). For widows, unwanted circumstances have ushered in an

‘ambivalent empowerment’ whereby women occupy new spaces and challenge cultural frameworks, however this is accompanied by a burden of guilt as these women are able to move into new spaces as a result of their deep loss (Manchanda, 2001). These findings add new dimension to our understanding of agency as related to yet distinct from choice.

Examining lived experience through the lens of empowerment is useful in elucidating the new and expanded ways in which individuals themselves make sense of these concepts. However, development organizations often apply gender mainstreaming as a tool and women’s empowerment as a concept in ways that often translate into targeting women only for programs and workshops. Moving beyond critiques of the logic and rhetorical justification, the result is that this approach offers women more and unique opportunities over men to explore and develop various forms of power and agency, including intrinsic capital; progress towards independence; and - sometimes by virtue of participating in these programs alone – moving into new social and physical spaces. However, as we have seen earlier in this chapter, while targeting only women may have improved some of the female narrators’ sense of self-worth, courage, and confidence, moving into new spaces is still mediated by the men in their lives, guided by the prevailing gender and social norms that influence women’s movements, public engagement, and perceived value and worth in the community. For widows, this is a double-edged sword since they are at once free from the possible constraints or restrictions that a husband may set upon them but are not immune to the wider socially produced patriarchal gender norms and expectations and must constantly contend with concepts of purity and reputation. While their movements may not be monitored or influenced by husbands, widows are still subject to the watchful eye of society.

The Role of Collective Agency and Network Building in Empowerment

This chapter has previously explored how some narrator' express feeling "most powerful" when working as part of a team. Delving deeper, we can see how network building and collective action and agency can play important roles in one's journey of empowerment and in how one expresses agency. Through connecting, consolidating risk, and acting as a unit, the value of working in consort with others can foster feelings of courage and other intrinsic qualities that can be related to agency and empowerment. In this regard, Yalini's account of working with a local women's CBO is worth exploring in depth, as this case illustrates the role of collective agency within one's journey of empowerment. Relevantly, the women's CBO that Yalini refers to here was in fact one of the women's development organizations that were set up by NGOs in the post-war period precisely to encourage participation, networking, and provide a platform for women.

Yalini richly describes the agency that she and other women in her community enacted when they identified that the current practices of NGOs implementing livelihood assistance programs were inefficient and ill-designed. It is worth reading her full account of how she identified this problem, and how she and her fellow women's group members acted, thus exhibiting a capacity to act within the socioculturally mediated context of her life in Kilinochchi. She recalls that she and her fellow group members identified a trend whereby "*some people sold the livelihood assistances such as chickens and goats given to them*" by NGOs. This is one example where constituents did not assume full or even most of the responsibility for not taking full advantage of the offerings from NGOs, flawed as they may be. Rather, Yalini and her fellow groupmates put the onus to change directly on the NGOs, who oversaw the design and implementation of the program. From their standpoint, the people could not be faulted for their

lack of knowledge on how to enter these new livelihood activities, since many had never raised chickens or goats before, and since “[p]eople were badly in need of money at that time.” As such, “*the [women’s organization] staged massive protests with regard to [the flawed livelihood project] ...thus, we pressured them [NGOs] by asking them that they [NGOs] should provide the livelihood assistances only after the trainings are provided to the beneficiaries... They were unaware of the benefits of the livelihoods assistance at that time*” (LH4B pg. 21).

Yalini recounts how working as a part of a women’s group consolidated power with the members, which they were then able to mobilize to effect change. Perceiving ‘beneficiary’ selection processes to be unsound and unfair, Yalini’s women’s group pressured NGOs to adopt better, more efficient and fair practices of implementing their programs. The group’s proposed approach included selecting beneficiaries in all locations, providing trainings to recipients, and verifying “*whether the beneficiaries are really interested in the particular livelihood assistance only*” (LH4B pg. 22). This example demonstrates the social capital leveraged by Yalini and her women’s group, which worked to consolidate risk – risk of backlash against women for stepping into the public sphere, for speaking up, and for demanding the change they saw necessary. In the end, the women catalyzed change, and the NGOs began ensuring that recipients of livestock and poultry received some form of training for the care of livestock. The women’s group’s socioculturally mediated capacity to act in this case – going through the GS to garner his support, working through proper channels, and yet eschewing traditional roles of women as remaining in the house and concerning themselves only with private matters of the household – points to an expression of agency and *power with* amongst Yalini and her fellow group members.

Yalini’s story again demonstrates the innate knowledge that individuals living in communities targeted for gender mainstreamed programming have, that the intended

‘beneficiaries’ of these programs are capable of recognizing weaknesses in programs, and offering concrete, creative solutions to resolve these issues. Yalini’s women’s group not only demonstrated the capacity to identify the problem of materials being sold, but also proved themselves highly capable of conducting a sophisticated analysis that led the members to identify the upstream issue that the practical needs of constituents were not being met, and therefore people were making strategic choices to sell off what they perceived as less useful goods in favour of items that were deemed more beneficial. The suggestion to provide training on how to put these goods to best use and derive the most benefit from them – as well as the corollary benefits that these types of activities can confer, such as network building and encouraging women to enter new spaces – illustrates the value of consulting and working in partnership with local actors, including local women’s groups. As we have already seen above, however, many NGOs did not have the rigorous monitoring and evaluation systems in place – nor the interest or latitude – that would have revealed these opportunities to understand the impact their programs were having, or how to ameliorate any issues.

Factors of Empowerment

Narrators who attribute feelings of empowerment to the programs in which they participated had three main factors in common: firstly, they enjoyed closer proximity and tighter relationships with the NGOs and development process, including formal or informal working relationships with local leaders such as a GS (local government agent). Secondly, the types of programs narrators participated in as recipients went beyond in-kind material donation to include trainings, skills development and learning opportunities. Thirdly, gender played a role: all narrators who described moments of empowerment, agency or other significant personal and social changes in their lives were women. This last finding is in part the result to the

interpretation of gender mainstreaming that had been applied to development programs in the Vanni in the post-war period, which applied an inclusion or participation approach to gender, rather than a truly mainstreamed one that would have sought to transform unequal power and gender relations. Not unexpectedly, then, women narrators seem to have been incorporated much more closely into the fabric and operations of gender mainstreamed programs than men.

Other factors of narrators' empowerment journeys included support from husbands amongst those who were married, which supports previous studies on intimate partnerships and women's livelihoods opportunities (see for example Lakshman, 2017). For narrators who are widows, the role of intrinsic capital or motivation was of particular importance in negotiating social and cultural barriers in order to meet the higher needs of protection and basic livelihoods for their families, despite additional challenges for widows in the North to secure livelihoods (Gunatilaka & Vithanagama, 2018; Lakshman, 2017). Amongst the ten narrators whose life histories inform this research, two stand out as examples of those for whom their encounters with the development apparatus have had the most positive impacts: Thamilini and Yalini. This section will delve more deeply into their journeys.

Amongst the narrators, Thamilini has perhaps the longest and most expansive history interacting with NGOs in various capacities. She attended trainings and worked as a volunteer or leader within these programs, which spanned themes of women in politics; mental health support; savings and financial skills; beneficiary verification; and first aid. Thamilini's story demonstrates the blurred lines between strict categories of 'beneficiary' and 'development worker'. This fluidity points to a connection between how integrated constituents are within the development apparatus, to their perceived transformation or benefits from these encounters with development. Thamilini can speak knowledgeably about the inner functions of NGOs and other

aspects of the wider development apparatus, and while she is often critical of the process of selecting ‘beneficiaries’ and delivering programs, she reiterates her gratitude and attribution of her own skills, such as effective communication and problem solving.

Thamilini’s experience demonstrates how NGO programs have been interwoven throughout the last few decades of her life. Casual and volunteer work with NGOs has allowed Thamilini to earn some infrequent yet appreciated income thus improving her capacity to provide for her children independently and avoiding the debt traps that have ensnared so many other women in the Vanni. She has also been able to expand her skill set and cultivate feelings of courage or intrinsic capital, while also forging social networks and strengthening her social capital. Thamilini has moved back and forth between being a recipient of assistance from NGOs and being part of the system that delivers these very programs. Again, the fixed dichotomy of receiver/giver is problematized and complicated. Beyond that, however, the relationship between individuals and the institutions that are set up to provide assistance is much more complex, as are the impacts of these relationships.

For Thamilini, although she credits NGOs with supporting her empowerment journey, this was not a straightforward path without risk. Twice in her career as a volunteer/casual worker with NGOs she has experienced sexual harassment by a staff member. Sexual harassment against women in the workplace is an unfortunately common experience for women across Sri Lanka (Niriella, 2015). However, as a (Tamil) widow, Thamilini is subjected to a specific set of gender codes and expectations, including the assumption that she is sexually available and unprotected in the absence of a husband. Tamil widows are defying the social construction of widows as inauspicious through entering the public domain and working to support themselves and their families (Rajasingham-Senanayake, 2004). However, as Thamilini demonstrates, engaging in

income generation activities or community-building activities, such as engaging with NGO programming as a volunteer or casual worker, still carries risks of harm that impedes widows and women in general from achieving their full potential and fully pursuing their empowerment process.

Yalini works as a volunteer for a local mental health NGO but has been volunteering with and for local and international NGOs for almost a decade. As presented earlier in this chapter, Yalini describes how she has applied what she has learned as a volunteer to improve her own situation, including helping her navigate gendered terrain with her husband to convince him to support her participation in further training offered by her current NGO. Yalini also credits her own actions for changing her husband's behaviour towards their daughter, affirming that she "*brought him to this stage step by step*", and that she "*changed him a lot by my love*" (LH4B pg. 10-11).

Yalini's own account of her husband's transformation as a result of her own actions and approaches, much of which was acquired through her extended engagement across programs implemented by one NGO, suggests that sustained relationships with NGOs and engagement in non-material assistance has the potential to have an impact on how women can negotiate their position within socially constructed daily lives. This may be intuitive. The more one is familiar with the development apparatus and structure, the better one may be able to access its benefits and navigate around its peculiarities, such as 'beneficiary' selection processes. However, gaining this inside access to the NGO world – either as a volunteer, a constituent/recipient, or a casual worker – is exclusive and anything but universal. Not everyone in each community can be engaged by an NGO as a volunteer, contact person, or staff. This insider access and close

engagement is an avenue for building one's intrinsic and social capital through building confidence, courage, and expanding social networks.

As already established, the interpretation of gender mainstreaming in the post-war period in Kilinochchi favoured a WID approach, targeting women for women-only projects that address gender, either explicitly or implicitly. It is no surprise, then, that among the ten narrators in this study, those who are best able to articulate their reflections on their encounters with the development apparatus are those who have enjoyed multiple encounters over time, most of whom are women. As a corollary of this finding, the data shows that men have much weaker relationships with NGOs than women, which has consequences for how they perceive and can therefore benefit from programs and services. The men in this study report that the nature of their relationships with NGOs is often characterized by a handful of interactions, mostly revolving around the reception of in-kind material goods such as a toilet (Chandran, Nagenthiram), housing materials and/or funds (Thampaiyah, Alfred), a cow (Thampaiyah, Nagenthiram), or tools (Alfred). Men's limited contact with and resulting understanding of the work NGOs do has prevented men from forming the same kinds of relationships that some women in Kilinochchi have enjoyed, and thus have not been privy to the same levels of understanding and knowledge of the ways in which the development apparatus functions, nor have they benefitted from same opportunities as women. The institutional distance experienced by men vis-à-vis NGOs in Kilinochchi may have a knock-on effect for other (female) members in these men's families. Nagenthiram, for example, describes how he did not allow his daughter to participate in NGO-led programs, citing his fear that "*any issues may come*" because "*women are soft-hearted*", alluding to the possibility that she will be negatively influenced by what was discussed at the

trainings. Nagenthiram displays a level of distrust and even misunderstanding towards NGOs and their programs, which informed his decision to prevent his adult daughter from participating.

The application of WID/women-targeted programs under the guise of gender programming misses the opportunity to build relationships (and dispel misunderstandings) and trust from men and other members of communities. Thinking of the negotiation process between husbands and wives around women engaging with NGOs and working outside of the home, failing to involve, inform, and otherwise engage men and other community members effectively downloaded all the responsibility to women. Finding ways to address the gendered power dynamics that play out at the household and community levels would have supported women and men to benefit from the programs and services being offered by NGOs.

[Agency, Contributions and Coping Mechanisms](#)

In the context of insufficient aid programming to meet the immediate often basic needs of narrators during the resettlement period, narrators demonstrate the capacity to call upon various resources and strategies to meet these needs. This section explores how narrators mobilized their own agency, called upon their own pre-existing and created resources, and made their own contributions to the process of recovery and development. These findings demonstrate three main points. Firstly, that the framework of resilience is insufficient to fully uncover the complex ways in which narrators survive and cope with chronic adversities since it fails to account for the tradeoffs between the practical gender needs of survival and the larger strategic gender interests of challenging structural inequalities and justice. Secondly, that development cannot be seen as a unidirectional pathway with fixed ‘givers’ and ‘receivers’, but rather that constituents of development programming are active agents in and contributors to their own development process and empowerment journeys. Thirdly, that despite these contributions from constituents,

the expressions of agency that narrators demonstrate through their coping mechanisms and contributions to the development process remains representative of restricted agency, that is when individuals make choices “within multiple hierarchical structures and specific contexts” (Alison, 2004, p. 449).

Most of the women narrators in this study shared that at one point or another, they leveraged their jewels – often a wedding necklace, or *thalikodi*³⁴ – as financial capital to meet basic needs of their families. This was most often discussed in reference to filling in funding gaps left by the housing programs delivered by UN agencies and the Governments of Sri Lanka and India. These strategies often include pawning jewelry as a regular resource-building activity to feed into the debt/repayment cycle. This is often coupled with other creative ways to unlock resources, such as calling in family members to assist with physical labour (social and physical capital), enjoying membership into a traditional savings club (*seetti*), and/or taking out loans from financial institutions, including predatory microloan companies. As Vasuki explains, “*I was provided the housing scheme. I completed building my home using the money got from pawning my jewels. As my brother’s son is a mason, I didn’t need to pay labour cost. Thus, I completed the construction*” (LH8A pg. 6). For women whose husbands have died or are still missing, the wedding necklace is imbued with an even deeper emotional attachment and pawning this with the risk of losing it if she cannot pay back the loan to retrieve it, must be excruciating. However, faced with few options, pawning jewelry is often one of the few tools within women’s remit to leverage access to much-needed financial capital. Choosing to pawn jewelry with immense sentimental value represents an example of restricted agency, where women are made to choose from a scant selection of uncomfortable or even painful choices. Further, pawning

³⁴ Sometimes called a *mangala sutra*, or “holy thread”, the groom ties the *thalikodi* around the bride’s neck to create a knot, symbolizing her status as a married woman. Narrators in this study used the term *thalikodi*, reflected here.

jewelry may bring temporary financial relief to these women, this act is a coping mechanism to address immediate practical needs and does little to challenge or change the larger structural inequalities.

From the narrators' accounts, pawning of jewelry is a unique coping strategy amongst women, which makes sense since the highest value and most prevalent item to pawn is the *thalikodi* bestowed upon women during the marriage ceremony. Women face sociocultural obstacles in accessing regulated bank loans. These obstacles include lack of collateral, which is directly tied to women's lack of access to land titles and the adherence to customary inheritance laws (*Thesawalamai*) that restrict women's access to collateral to unlock credit (Sarvananthan et al., 2017). Further, social expectations of women that prevent them from engaging in 'external' business outside of the home persist as a mediating factor. In this way, narrators are able to draw upon their own resources and enact a form of restricted agency, however only within the gendered structural limits that mediate the availability of choice, limits that include laws and other institutions that perpetuate gender inequality.

Kamalanayaki's experience managing the assistance she received, demonstrating her ability to call upon her own resources and therefore revealing a more complicated reality than the simply binary of passive recipient/active giver. Kamalanayaki tells us, "*I benefited from the chickens because I [raised] them well. We fulfilled our needs from it and also we earned money by selling it...we were really benefitted by it*" (LH1B pg. 13). Here Kamalanayaki attributes her success not simply from receiving chickens, but also to her own care and efforts in raising the chickens and being creative when she and her husband faced financial difficulties, such as allowing the chickens to eat grass and food waste instead of buying more fodder after the supplies given to them with the chickens ran out.

Thamilini also highlights that her own work ethic is what has driven her own recovery and development. The child of a single mother, Thamilini found herself a widow at a young age. She had everything to prove, and nothing to lose. Interestingly, Thamilini draws a comparison to what she has been able to accomplish – as a woman, as a widow, as a female heading her household – to men, summarizing that “[a] woman can do the work which is done by a man.” And “I myself built this home with the help of a mason. I went to work in an organization for seven days. I was paid 7,000 Rs.³⁵ totally as the daily wage was. 1,000 Rs.³⁶ per day. I built a column to erect by using the cement which was bought using that 7,000 Rs. I myself got engaged in building this home like a male. I did those works using that money.” Later, she explains her own success:

According to me, I did not spend more than even Rs. 10 to build the house other than the Rs. 5 ½ lakhs [provided by the housing program]. I did not know any other works. Then, I started going to daily wage works in the paddy fields. I and my younger brother dug the foundation. We made the concrete blocks. We carried the roof tiles to the top. When I was doing those works, a barrel fell down on my feet and my nail was damaged.... Many people came from UNHCR. Two or three white people also came here. After seeing my home, they congratulated me as I had built my home within the budget and within the period of time as per the agreement...After I bought this cow, a sister living at our neighbourhood home asked me how much money I spent to buy this cow....She told me that others are jealous of men as no such improvements happening even in the male headed homes. She further told me, “you work like a man. That is why others are jealous of you.” I did not say anything for that. I asked her what I should do for that. I worked hard to buy it. I don’t bother about others. It is me. Why should I get worried about others’ comments? I work hard. That is all (LH2B pg. 9).

Another way that narrators expressed their restricted agency was navigating around perceptions of partiality in process of delivering aid and programs. In the face of a persistent feeling amongst constituents that the ‘beneficiaries’ selected by NGOs, or their local governmental partners was unfair, unfounded, and even based on a system of corruption, many

³⁵ Approximately \$64 CAD in 2009

³⁶ Approximately \$9 CAD in 2009

narrators made strategic decisions to distance themselves from this charge. One way of doing so was to avoid being one of the early recipients of a given program. This would quell any suspicions that an individual was associated with the impartial development process and would avoid tarnishing well-earned social capital that an individual may have built up in the community through social engagement and CBO membership. When the housing assistance program was being implemented in her village, Kamalanayaki calculated the risks and benefits. She weighed her options and concluded that had she received assistance in the first wave, *“it would have been said that GS had done it in favour of me...then others would have come to fight with me”* (LH1A pg. 3).

Kamalanayaki is acutely aware of the perception that she would cast in the community if she were to receive the housing scheme, given her job working with the GS. Instead, she did not *“fight”* to be put on the list of ‘beneficiaries’ for the first or second stage of the program. Pleased, she reflects on this outcome: *“I was not scolded by others...I was somewhat happy about it”* (LH1A pg. 3). Although she would have benefitted economically from receiving housing assistance (materials, cash, or other forms as part of the scheme), she preferred to remain unselected for the sake of her reputation. She chose to forgo a chance to increase her economic capital for the sake of her social capital, articulated as ‘reputation’. Here, Kamalanayaki demonstrates a strong theme that emerged, particularly amongst women and most emphatically amongst narrators who are widows, which points to an acute and constant concern about how one is perceived in the community by others, as well as to an acute awareness of what will increase one’s situation of vulnerability. The prevailing patriarchal gender norms that dictate how men, boys, and particularly women and girls behave is a strong motivating force for so much of how narrators described how individuals navigate their daily lives. Here, one can see

how even the perception of impartiality on the part of an individual is so undesirable, and the desire for acceptance by and connection to the community, that one is prepared to sacrifice a potentially beneficial opportunity to improve one's condition.

As explored throughout this chapter and in more detail in this section, narrators illustrate expressions of agency that are deeply connected to social contexts, and which highlight the contributions that individuals make towards effecting changes in their lives and communities. Prior to NGO programming, individuals have lived gendered lives, which have furnished each person with a unique well of resources that can be called upon and even enhanced as one endeavours to affect positive change. Constituents will make conscious choices that are available to them, through the gendered, mediated ways that are socioculturally specific, and which may surprise or undermine programmatic goals or targets. This challenges assumptions that recipients are passive, and that they will readily accept any assistance, no matter the form. Further, the findings discussed in this section confirm that coping strategies are gendered. The pawning of wedding jewels and leveraging financial capital to meet basic needs may be perceived as an expression of restricted agency, however this act takes place within structural limitations and questions the equation of a seemingly agentic act of choice. Without addressing structural limitations, however, these acts only meet practical needs of narrators and not their strategic gender interests.

The Roles and Meaning of NGO Programming in Narrators' Lives

One surprising finding from the life history data was how narrators interpreted the technical processes and stops along the programmatic cycle were interpreted, and the meaning these held in the lives of those who received these programs. Monitoring and evaluation activities were seen as events that bestowed meaning, validation, and encouragement upon those

who received these visits and follow ups. Where no monitoring or evaluation activities took place on the part of the implementing NGO or partner organization – which seems to have been all too common, especially in the years directly following the resettlement period – narrators felt slighted and ignored. The recipients of these programs had missed the opportunity to share their valuable experiences, ideas, and suggestions for improvement. The narrators interpreted the lack of follow up activities by NGOs as a major pitfall of the programs, since development agencies failed to see for themselves whether and to what extent their projects were having an impact in the lives of the recipients.

While some of the narrators expressed concern and displeasure at the lack of monitoring they experienced, other narrators who had engaged continuously with NGOs pointed to the importance and value they placed on the visits they received from project staff before, during and after their participation in various livelihood programs. Punithavathi and her husband, for example, underwent a lengthy process to receive grass seeds and agricultural equipment from a development organization. After they received the initial material, the organization made frequent visits to monitor and support Punithavathi and her husband in their home. It is worth exploring Punithavathi's perspective in more depth, as it reveals the ways in which the seemingly mundane processual elements of development programming can themselves have a significant impact on the lives of recipients. Punithavathi says,

They call us for meeting once every 5 to 6 months. They come to monitor this frequently to check whether we continue this or not.

Q: Do you know how did they choose the persons to be provided this scheme?

LH10: They chose those who maintain this continuously and those who do it committedly for their schemes. In order to identify that, they do continuous monitoring. We got the seeds first and showed the output. Then only, I was selected to be benefitted by this scheme (LH10B pg. 3).

Later she adds,

[a]ccording to them [NGO/donor], we do extra work . We grew more grass than what they expected us to do. Our efforts are high. If they ask us to do ½ acre, then we do 1 acre. As they saw that we would do it successfully, they decided to give [more] to us. They will give assistance to those who [are able] to do it successfully. Their plan is like that. They will support as much as we make an effort (LH10B pg. 12).

Punithavathi later reveals what this continual monitoring and careful beneficiary selection process means to her. She reflects,

We are happy when they come to our home. They motivate us to do more by giving us further guidance. They see my daughters as the children who support their parents while they are studying well. They motivate my daughters to study well. Whenever they come to our home, they motivate my daughters to study well (LH10B pg. 12).

The development agency has also selected Punithavathi as a role model and positive example to other project participants, which has compounded the feelings of pride, confidence, and capacity within Punithavathi. She shares,

We are very happy about [being held up as examples during USAID training] as we have the chances to talking to people. We feel very happy when we guide others and motivate others to come up well (LH10B pg. 16)

What Punithavathi illustrates here is the role that NGOs and development programs can play in promoting feelings of self-worth and confidence, as well as fostering network building, particularly for women and those who may not otherwise have opportunities to engage in certain livelihood activities or access larger social circles or structures, such as incoming cohorts of agricultural program participants. Through participating in this agricultural program, Punithavathi has also increased her collaboration and social networking skills, as well as her confidence in mastering the technical skills that she has learned through the program. However,

beyond what might easily be included in such a project's goals and objectives, is the underlying meaning that Punithavathi places on the continued visits from the development agency. With each visit, the relationship she and her husband have built with the organization deepens, as does her feelings of self-confidence, and validation that she is doing good work. However, even with these improvements in self-confidence, skills and social capital, the ability of programs such as the one in which Punithavathi participates is implemented in a context of existing and evolving power relations that must be understood in order to avoid exacerbating existing inequalities and divisions.

Some of these larger structural issues, such as gendered in/security and the attendant restrictions these place on women such as Punithavathi to engage in agriculture outside of her home, have been discussed in the previous chapter. The next section addresses another of these looming, structural factors, which underpins nearly almost all the life histories that were shared during this study: trauma and the psychosocial impacts of surviving war.

The Prevailing Trauma of War

So far, this chapter has explored the complex experiences of narrators related to themes of empowerment, agency, and chronic adversities. The previous chapter examined the structural issues that inhibit and place limits on any intervention that seeks to address gender inequality and promote empowerment, agency, and chronic adversities, focusing on gendered insecurity and the prevailing context of militarization of the North. Yet another, more insidious and deep-seated set of issues remains unaddressed and unresolved within the hearts, minds and souls of the narrators and their communities: the trauma of war. As mentioned in Chapter 4, almost every one of the narrators in this study shared their deeply traumatic stories – in various detail – of multiple displacement, fear, deprivation, and ultimately survival in the current iteration of the post-war

period. However, what the narrators describe is that the proverbial scars of war remain deep. It is important to turn our attention not only to the ways in which trauma has impacted the daily lives of constituents, but also how these persistent and everyday struggles can limit or mitigate the extent to which certain individuals are able or secure enough to access NGO programming. Without a clearer understanding of the impact of the historical realities, particularly trauma of war and how it continues to seep into daily life, we will only have a partial and misunderstood point of reference upon which to analyze gender mainstreamed programs and the contributions of development programming towards gender equality.

The implications of the trauma that narrators and their communities carry with them today was revealed in three main ways: 1. in affecting the daily functioning of the narrators and their families; 2. In limiting the extent to which constituents can participate in and benefit from development programming; and 3. In coping with mental health struggles and processing of trauma whilst negotiating gendered expectations, roles, and societal attitudes, particularly towards widows. Together, these three findings have implications for the extent to which development programming is equipped to address these challenges, and thus points to a need to recognize the pervasive mental suffering and support those who emerge from a traumatic war if communities are to move on.

During life history sessions, many narrators began with or soon arrived at their experiences during the war. As Chapter Four illustrated, most of these stories were harrowing, detailing multiple displacements, deprivation of food, water, medical supplies, separation or loss of loved ones and neighbours, and sustaining injuries themselves. What became clear from the collection of these stories is that the trauma that these individuals have sustained and survived

still haunt them today and have an impact on many people's daily functioning and ability to fully recover from the war, beyond securing basic needs.

Kamalanayaki lost her daughter just after reaching the Welfare Camp in the final days of war, dying in hospital from an undetermined illness. Ten years later, Kamalanayaki shares, *"Even now the face of my daughter when she died comes across my mind"* (LH1B pg. 7). Yalini painfully recalls how she lost three younger brothers during a bout of shelling. She remembers, *"[t]hen I got imaginary thinking [hallucinations]. Like...brother is coming...he is calling me...I used to think of him, and I couldn't eat"* (LH4A pg. 8). Nagenthiram continues to suffer from short-term memory loss after the trauma of living through multiples displacements, deprivation, and loss. He laments, *"I cannot forget the war environment in my life. After I got resettled, I forget what I said on the previous day...after that my mindset got changed due to war. Most of those in my age experience this same issue"* (LH5A pg. 7).

Widows are faced with the seemingly insurmountable challenges of struggling with the invisible scars of war, while also navigating new terrain that often translates into stigma, ostracization, and limited or total absence of social support networks. In this context, some widows who emerged from the war have at one time contemplated a grave option: suicide. War-related trauma and post-war circumstances have been found to be contributing factors to an increasing suicide rate in Kilinochchi that plateaued in 2012, but with an increasing attempted suicide rate (Somasundaram & Sivayokan, 2013). Faced with deep feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, the inevitable stigma of being both a widow and a former LTTE combatant and seeing no clear way to improve her and her family's situation, Thamilini was one such widow who once considered that ending her life and those of her children was the best, perhaps only, option. Thamilini quietly shares one of the lowest moments in her life after her husband died and

she was left to rebuild alone. Her ability to cope in the face of hardships, multiplied because of her status as widow and amplified by her experiences of trauma and loss, came to a head a few years ago. Her son was ill, and she felt hopeless. She recalls her desperation, *“I held the hands of my two children to commit suicide by jumping into the running train. My elder daughter told me not to do so as my son would get well soon. I could not bear the sadness at that time”* (LH2A pg. 16). Fortunately, her daughter’s pleas were heard, and Thamilini pulled herself and her family back from the brink that day.

For women who have lost their husband and now find themselves occupying the new label of ‘widow’, the loss and trauma is now compounded by the gender norms and attitudes surrounding widowhood that they must learn to navigate, or, where possible, challenge. After resettling in Kilinochchi as a young widow, Vasuki faced enormous difficulties trying to rebuild a new life for herself and her children. She recalls, *“It was very difficult to be alone at that age because of this society. No one viewed me as their sister. I was frustrated because of that. I was in a position to die with my children after consuming poison. I even went to that extreme stage”* (LH8A pg. 3).

Beyond the experiences of the individual, many narrators connected war-related trauma to a more collective loss impacting the family, as well as the wider culture. One way in which narrators expressed this was through feelings of hopelessness for their own personal future, lamenting happier days before the war or even during periods of peace between battles. The driving force for many narrators to keep going was their motivation to secure a better future for their children, often marked by the securing of marriages and education. Other narrators made specific reference to the trauma suffered by their entire community of Tamils in the Vanni. Yalini recounts a harrowing story of the final days of war. She had finally reached a checkpoint

amidst heavy shelling. Yalini and other women were asked to remove her clothes and were searched in public, in front of men. If they refused, they were beaten with a baton. Yalini points to this moment as an assault on her culture, Tamil culture, not just an assault on her and the other women in line. She mourns, “[t]his incident was the indication that we lost our rights, identities, and culture there. We still remember that” (LH4A pg. 9). After sharing some details of his own experience of the final days of war, Chandran echoes this lament, simply stating, “we lost our Tamil culture here” (LH3A pg. 9).

The type of ‘collective trauma’ described here may have more significance in collectivist communities, whereby the individual is “embedded within the family and community so much so that traumatic events are experienced through the larger unit and the impact will also manifest at that level” (Somasundaram, 2010, p. 7). Veena Das’ work is useful in articulating how “brutal injury” against a group’s way of being with one another leads to what she terms “poisonous knowledge” that must be engaged through a “knowledge of suffering” (Das, 2000, p. 221). Considering that several narrators referenced the loss of culture experienced throughout the war, this is particularly relevant in helping to understand how witnessing or surviving trauma levied against an entire group can have deep and lasting impacts, as violence “seeps into the ongoing relationships and becomes a kind of atmosphere that cannot be expelled to an ‘outside’” (Das, 2000, p. 2008). The collective nature of trauma compels development programs and interventions that are designed to offer support to survivors of trauma to recognize and understand the role of the family and community.

Another impact of the traumatic legacy of war that follows the narrators of this study is the inhibiting effect it has on individuals to access programs and services, particularly development programming. Life history data shows that many narrators are quite critical of their

neighbours who did not capitalize or take full advantage of the opportunity when NGOs came to implement their livelihood and other programs³⁷. However, what is surprising is how narrators often related this inability to fully participate in programs to the grief and trauma that so many people continue to carry in the post-war period. For example, Yalini attributes the inability of others to capitalize from the furnishing of these goods to mental scars of war, which inhibits even those with the physical capital to make use of it as they struggle to overcome traumatic losses, *“because [they] have so many pains in [their] heart”*. Nagenthiram also points to the psychological trauma that has prevented people in his community from fully taking advantage of the assistance provided to them. He says, *“the things were not properly utilized for the betterment of the people. It was not enough [for the] people. The war scars, to which the people of North and East are subjected, are yet to be healed. Shall I talk about these things?”* (LH5B, pg. 2).

From the life histories shared for this research, it was clear that trauma and the impact of the war on mental health often act as a mitigating factor in how development programs are and can be accessed. However, there are also indications that the act of receiving assistance from NGOs may have unintended positive mental health impacts. Vasuki, who received both a cow and chickens from different NGOs at different times after the war, credits NGOs with helping her to overcome her psychological struggles. *“When I came here to resettle, I was with deep sorrows. I did not have the idea about how I am going to lead my life with my children when I came here to resettle. The helps that I received from the NGOs put an end to those sorrows of*

³⁷ This criticism leveled at constituents themselves co-exists in parallel with larger criticisms of how development programming was designed and implemented, as discussed in the first section of this chapter.

mine” (LH8B pg. 19). It seems that for some constituents of development programs, the material value of the assistance is helpful, but moreover, the symbolic value that is carried with this provision that conveys the message of validation, worthiness and hope are immeasurable. The social value that narrators place on their encounters with NGOs and the wider development apparatus contributes to our knowledge of how constituents understand their receipt of goods and other forms of participation in gender mainstreamed and other development programs, suggesting that the true impact of a program may extend far beyond the provision of goods, skills, or knowledge, but also touches on self-worth, self-esteem, and hope for the future. For trauma-affected communities, this can be invaluable in promoting pathways to heal and rebuild their lives.

Narrator accounts heard in this study suggest that the ways in which trauma and mental health struggle are experienced are highly gendered. Psychosocial and mental health issues remain an intensely private matter, with socio-cultural norms influencing the extent to which narrators were able to discuss feelings of suffering, or access help. For men, the absence of anyone with whom to share their psychological pain was revealed only once, while other men referenced their struggles without acknowledging or expressing interest in seeking help. This male silence indicates much lies beneath and is unprocessed. Women also choose to suffer in private, however this seems to take on a different purpose as they seek to avoid reputational damage. Sometimes women in this study shared that they would confide in a trusted friend. Thamilini, a widow, points to the social risks she would face if she were to openly discuss her feelings. She instead chooses to confide in the GS, a trusted friend and role model with whom she has a long-standing working relationship.

Yet some men and women have chosen to transgress this gendered norm of suffering in private, perhaps because the psychological burden is too great to bear alone. When asked a sensitive question about the dissolution of his daughter's marriage, Nagenthiram commented, "*You can ask me. I like to share my personal things with someone in order to heal my mental scar*" (LH5B pg. 13). Despite the cultural norm expressed by other narrators to keep personal and family issues private, Nagenthiram's 'mental scar' is so painful that he is willing to cast aside this norm to try to seek relief and 'healing'. As a married man, it is possible that Nagenthiram can leverage some of his gendered social capital and take the risk of breaking that public/private barrier in favour of receiving some support. For the women in this study, and most notably those who are widows, they did not express having the same freedom. In fact, the fear of reputational damage or otherwise entrenching negative societal perceptions on them as widows and therefore being seen as 'improper' was strong enough that women reported tamping down their feelings, often suffering alone in silence.

Discussion

This chapter has explored the concepts of empowerment, agency, trauma, and the meaning that narrators assign to their encounters with NGOs and gender mainstreamed programming. Through exploring life histories with a focus on encounters with gender and development programming, new articulations of empowerment have emerged, namely empowerment as courage, empowerment as independence and empowerment as moving into new physical and social spaces. These new expressions of empowerment are also intertwined with processes of social inclusion and social relationships and these impact and contribute to feelings of empowerment. Together, these findings represent new empirical contributions to the conceptualization of empowerment through offering perspectives of development recipients,

while simultaneously building upon scholars who have contemplated empowerment through various lenses over the past few decades (see [Kabeer, 1999](#); [Parpart et al., 2002](#); [Rowlands, 1995](#)).

Empirical contributions that highlight common factors of empowerment also illuminate how gender and development programming can interact with individual processes of empowerment to enhance or inhibit these. Narrator accounts suggest some key factors that have contributed to an improved sense of empowerment, with four main factors in common: firstly, having multiple points of contact with the development apparatus, either with the same NGO or program or with various development actors, and across time; secondly, being a woman; and thirdly, participating in programs that went beyond the simple transfer of goods or cash to include trainings, workshops and other social capital-expanding activities. Finally, the support – even if tacit or passive – from husbands for married women is a major factor in determining whether and to what extent women can participate in these programs in the first place. For widowed women, this was one rare obstacle that they did not have to overcome.

Despite this potential, we also must contend with the limiting structural issues such as contexts of gendered in/security that place boundaries around this potential. The trauma of war has determining impacts on development programs, gender relations (widows), psychosocial elements, ex-combatants, and other groups. At the heart of these challenges are patriarchal norms and societal expectations that place limits on the choices that groups of both men, women and others are presented with, and which expressions of restricted agency take place.

New articulations of empowerment have been presented in this chapter, as expressed by narrators themselves. This new contribution to how empowerment is conceptualized recognizes that within Kabeer's model (Kabeer, 1999a) of Resources, Agency and Achievements, courage

can be understood as both a resource and an achievement. Other articulations of empowerment revealed through this chapter are the achievement or advancement towards a feeling or condition of independence, as well as the act of moving into new physical and social spaces. In all these ways of articulating empowerment, which both confirm and expand on existing literature on empowerment, we see agentic actors work within the structural confines set by larger insecurity and the socioculturally mediated context. These represent moments of empowerment, since empowerment is itself a process and not a destination, and exhibit “shifts in consciousness” (Cornwall, 2016, p. 345) that proponents of approaches to empowerment that emphasize the relational aspect and move away from “assets” and “opportunity structures” (Aslop et al., 2005, p. 124). The examples of (women) narrators moving into new physical and social spaces, thereby challenging previously ‘naturalized’ or embedded beliefs and norms around gender, represents what Cornwall recognizes as a second ‘lever’ to challenge gender power relations, that is engaging with “culturally embedded normative beliefs, understandings and ideas about gender, power and change” (Cornwall, 2016, p. 345). The evidence laid out in this chapter therefore contributes to and expands these previous notions of empowerment and emphasizes the importance of gradual social change.

The analysis of narrators’ life histories reveals three factors that were common amongst those narrators who spoke enthusiastically about the positive changes that they experienced in their lives in connection to encounters with the development apparatus. These commonalities were: repeated points of contact and/or sustained and evolving relationships with NGOs and development actors; gender (all were women); and, in the case of married women, support from husbands, even if tacit. These findings confirm previous literature on women’s access to sustainable livelihoods as well as women’s empowerment, who point to intimate partner support

as a key factor in enabling participation and enjoyment of opportunities afforded by livelihood programs (Lakshman, 2017). These findings further contribute new perspectives from the ‘bottom up’ on how the dynamic relationships between constituents and NGOs can contribute to women’s process of empowerment. Through largely targeting women for participation in empowerment and other gender equality programming, women were afforded more opportunities to develop dynamic and evolving relationships with development actors and institutions, and often moved fluidly between roles of ‘volunteer’, ‘casual worker’ and ‘recipient’, sometimes with the same NGO. While a further examination into how narrators make sense of these evolving relationships would offer interesting insights and new pathways for research, relevant for this study is the impact that these fluid relationships have had on women’s process of empowerment and feelings of agency. The life histories shared here suggest that the more points of contact with NGOs take place, and the longer that these contacts are sustained, improve the opportunities for women to develop various skills, both related to livelihoods as well as their capacity to maneuver and strategize around and through the gender hierarchies and relations that might otherwise have inhibited their choices, actions, opportunities, and achievements.

Narrators also demonstrated sophisticated knowledge and understanding of the complexities of NGO programming, including acknowledging that pressures, timeframes, reporting requirements and other limitations are often at odds with what development constituents view as seemingly obvious shortcomings or even blunders, such as distributing a breed of chicken ill-suited to the environment in the Vanni. Further, narrators describe in depth the various contributions they have made to their own progress and development, whether this be in the form of material goods (physical capital), mobilizing people in their networks to contribute labour (social capital) or what I have termed in this chapter ‘intrinsic capital’, or the personal

characteristics or aspects of one's personality and experiences, such as commitment, work ethic, and even courage, discussed extensively in the context of empowerment. Together, these findings compel us to reject the temptation to assign fixed dichotomies and categories to (passive) recipient/ (active) giver or donor. Narrators are often acutely aware of the complex pressures, interests, motivations, and operational limitations that national and international NGOs along with their local counterparts and partners carry with them when implementing gender mainstreamed programs.

The translation of theoretically sound and potentially transformational norms at the international level, including 'empowerment', 'gender equality' and 'gender mainstreaming' as a tool to promote either or both, often gets muddled and simplified at the implementation level. The tendency is to interpret these concepts in an instrumental, participation-focused, efficiency model that echoes the WID approaches of the 1980s. However, while the operationalization of these concepts is open for critique, this research offers new perspectives from the constituents or recipients of these programs that demonstrate that despite their interpretational shortcomings, there is still tremendous value derived from these opportunities as experienced and made sense of by constituents. Amongst these expressions of value include the validation and affirmation that is interpreted by narrators who have received NGOs returning to monitor and evaluate the progress of their programs, and in turn, the progress of these individuals and families. A seemingly technocratic process is actually imbued, from the standpoints of recipients, with meaning and value that enhances feelings of confidence, worth and progress. With this new knowledge in hand, the otherwise procedural imperative of conducting monitoring and evaluation is infused with fresh meaning and impetus and encourages development actors to

view these processes not only in terms of compliance, efficiency, and necessity, but also as part of the process of contributing to the often complicated and bumpy road to empowerment.

The thorny issue of measuring intangible and contested process such as empowerment, or expressions of agency, have sparked lively debates within gender and development discourse, as explored in Chapter Two. What the life histories of the ten narrators in this study illustrate is the value in reflecting upon not only the life cycle of a program, but upon the life stories of the individuals for whom the program was designed to reach. Through using a longitudinal perspective, we can begin to understand the trajectory of individuals' processes of empowerment and agency, as well as the larger structural context, including unearthing the cultural changes that coincide with the long-term impact of those experiences. The use of the qualitative methods, namely applying a highly open-ended listening approach and building on feminist standpoint approaches, has successfully revealed the complexities, challenges of 'doing' gender 'work', and how this is translated on the ground. This suggests new ways of approaching research and attempts to measure the impact of development programs.

Further, the ways in which narrators are able to carve out space for their own ownership within programs that may not have intentionally encouraged or made room for this, represents untapped potential and motivation for deeper participation within programs. While sometimes narrators out of necessity, sometimes out of internalized feelings of responsibility, such as in cases where shortcomings of programs were 'blamed' on recipients' own inadequacies or failure to take advantage of opportunities. This points to potential for new models of development that relocate ownership into partnership and participatory models that involve and implicate constituents in a much deeper way, emphasizing partnership-oriented models over traditionally top-down, recipient/giver dichotomous relationships. The fluid relationships embodied by

Thamilini and Yalini, for example, are testaments to the ways in which constituents' meaningful encounters with NGOs and development actors can have a multitude of impacts that may not be picked up through mainstream, time-bound methods of gathering data around monitoring, evaluation, and learning. This further strengthens the argument to bring in other actors to make use of these opportunities for learning on the institutional side, and potential for moments of empowerment and agency on the part of constituents.

Applying these time- and resource-intensive techniques may be outside the capacity of development actors, and therefore encourage new ways of working, for example partnerships with actors and constituents themselves who can operate outside of donor requirements and confines. This would also enhance the social value that constituents place on programs and interactions with NGOs, increasing commitments and ownership; recognize and honour and incorporate sophisticated knowledge, solutions, propositions, that reside amongst constituents themselves.

Thamilini and Yalini demonstrate how their encounters with the development apparatus has led to them to experiencing empowerment as courage, which has led them to speak up about injustices in their lives and in their communities. Vasuki credits her interactions with NGOs and the support she has received from them as propelling her journey towards independence – economic and otherwise – that has had a multiplier effect on her own self-worth, self-confidence, and material capacity to provide for herself and her family. Vathana's ongoing relationship with a mental health NGO and their programming targeting women has helped her renegotiate the gender relations in her own home, leading to her continued engagement with mental health work with the newly garnered support of her husband. The networks that were forged amongst particularly women, often through association with CBOs set up by NGOs in the post-war period

as well as by virtue of attending workshops also contributed to the deeper meaning and value that NGOs were able to contribute to, beyond the immediate skills, material or knowledge sharing that may have been articulated as their outputs or impact. The type of gender mainstreamed programming that was rolled out in Kilinochchi may be, according to analysts, an imperfect offering. However, what is clear is that what was delivered has facilitated positive changes in the lives of some of its constituents, and this needs to be accounted for when evaluating how these programs have been designed, implemented, and evaluated. Put another way, we must accept that some things cannot be measured, and that other forms of ‘success’ can be found that are often recipient-articulated.

Ahearn’s (2001) ‘starting point’ for defining agency is useful in its acknowledgement of these structural limitations, as well as the conceptual space to ponder further questions. Agency contributes to this working definition through explicitly exploring how both gender hierarchies and structures (relations) work together with structural factors of insecurity to produce gendered in/security, which shapes, influences, limits, compels and undermines expressions of agency and processes of empowerment. Further, the question of ‘choice’, interrogated by other scholars of agency (Hemmings & Treacher Kabesh, 2013), is also queried in this chapter, with findings suggesting that “conscious, intentional or effective” (Ahearn, 2001, p. 113) action may not always be characteristics of agency, such as in the case of widows who make choices not from a range of suitable options, but rather as part of a strategy of survival. The concept of restricted agency, therefore, provides a more appropriate and nuanced recognition of the types of agency that women and men in this study are able to exercise. Through navigating the larger patriarchal structures and gender hierarchies that influence the choices available to men, women, and others, these limiting structures can be revealed and therefore challenged.

Trauma has been explored in previous chapters as an underlying, under-addressed and influencing force that underpins the experiences and relationships of the narrators and their communities. This chapter illustrates three overlapping ways in which trauma continues to impact the narrators, specifically in limiting individuals' daily functioning; ability to access programs; and, particularly for women, adding the burden of coping with trauma while navigating gendered roles and expectations. This all suggests that wellbeing needs to be understood in new ways that include psychosocial, spiritual, and other elements of a whole life that contribute to wellbeing. The Human Flourishing framework, for example, emphasizes how various pathways of work, family, education and religious communities can influence key outcomes related to wellbeing, including happiness and life satisfaction; physical and mental health; meaning and purpose; character and virtue; and close social relationships (VanderWeele, 2017).

Together, the findings presented in this chapter call for a certain humility in what we can reasonably expect from our current model of gender mainstreamed programs, however they are designed, as they are often ill-equipped to address these structural factors, including gendered in/security as well as trauma and psychosocial wellbeing. Other models of wellbeing are instructive here and can offer much in the way of expanding how development discourse and practice works towards more holistic goals.

CHAPTER SEVEN: Conclusion

In this final chapter, I first return to the research questions that have framed the inquiry of this research. Next, I expound on the findings discussed in Chapters Five and Six and draw out the empirical, theoretical, and methodological contributions that this dissertation makes. I then propose some areas for further research that lay beyond the scope of this dissertation but would nonetheless further advance the scholarship and our understanding of these critical themes. These recommendations serve as an invitation for researchers, development policy makers, governments, and practitioners to take up and reflect upon in their respective roles within the development apparatus. I conclude this chapter, and thus the dissertation, with a final note of appreciation and acknowledgement to the people of Kilinochchi who have endured and survived, offered so much to this research, and who have so much still to offer the development process.

This dissertation has been guided by four overarching research questions that were constructed to explore various angles of constituent perspectives of gender and development programming and draw linkages to wider bodies of knowledge. Together, these research questions were useful in probing at the constituent-level how the social and gendered hierarchies and structures have changed in the decade since the war ended, how these constituents made sense of the role that development programming has played in shaping these changes, and what implications this new knowledge generated by constituents themselves presents, not only to development policy and practice, but also to the current state of bodies of critical feminist literature that informs and challenges development, writ large. As presented in Chapter One, these research questions are as follows:

1. How have the experiences, attitudes and practices related to gender and power relations changed over time in post-war communities?
2. What are the outcomes of gender and development programming, from the perspectives of development ‘constituents’? How do individuals make sense of their encounters with gender and development programming in the post-war period?
3. How can this improved, longitudinal understanding of gender equality programming from the perspectives of communities help us make sense of gender mainstreaming strategies, the challenges of translating policy into practice, and the implications of these findings for advancing critical feminist theories related to security, gender and development?
4. What are the limitations of current approaches to measuring outcomes to gender and development programming, and how can measuring those outcomes through feminist, qualitative and longitudinal methodologies reveal new insights into the experiences of ‘beneficiaries’? How can experiences of gender and development programming and gender mainstreaming be understood in new ways through alternative, feminist data collection tools and qualitative methodologies?

As discussed in Chapter One, I have revised these research questions to better reflect what this research has borne out in terms of findings and analysis. As such, the retrospective research questions that speak directly to this dissertation are the following:

1. How do constituents in Kilinochchi understand and situate their post-war (2009-present) encounters with gender and development programming within the larger events and complexities of their life course?
2. What can the perspectives of constituents of development programming reveal about the challenges of policy and praxis of promoting gender equality in post-conflict settings?

In the preceding chapters, I have endeavoured to address these questions through drawing upon a theoretical and conceptual framework based on a combination of Feminist Post-Development and Post-Structural Approaches and Critical Feminist Security Studies. In answering the two revised research questions, several core findings from my research emerge. Considering the first question regarding how constituents situate their experiences within their larger life course, these experiences varied according to the narrator. However, while most narrators spoke positively about their encounters with development programming and actors in general, many narrators offered suggestions on how to improve NGO practices such as monitoring and evaluation, and the desire of constituents to have more ownership, influence and choice built into how gender and development programs were designed and delivered. Further, while many narrators within this study were able to foster long-standing relationships with development actors and organizations, these encounters were more complex than simply receiving goods or participating in workshops. Rather, engaging in various roles over time, including volunteer, recipient, trainer, focal point, and daily worker, led to a variety of experiences that both improved and complicated the lives of constituents, particularly women.

This tension emerged in the contexts of negotiating social norms within the household to be able to participate, navigating risks of sexual harassment perpetrated by development actors, and, especially in the case of widows, continuously balancing reputational considerations with more practical and strategic interests.

In addressing the second research question, what emerged from exploring how constituents situate gender and development programming within their larger life courses is that despite the imperfect offering of development programming, opportunities for empowerment may still emerge. These moments, however, are fragile and often fleeting, and are in constant tension with the larger structural factors including patriarchal social norms and the particular form of gendered in/security that has taken shape in Kilinochchi and the Vanni. These structural factors present significant challenges for gender and development programming, which are often not equipped to address these larger issues within their programs. These findings ultimately suggest that actors operating within the development apparatus – NGOs, donors, staff, volunteers, and policies – must assume a degree of humility in what can reasonably be accomplished through gender and development programs.

This dissertation was further informed by debates on gender, structure and agency; empowerment; masculinities, femininities and intersectionality; and a consideration of the Feminism and Development/Disasters (FAD²) framework proposed by Hyndman and de Alwis (2003). My analysis and discussion of the findings from conducting life history sessions with ten participants, complemented by nine key informant interviews and two focus group discussions has produced key contributions to the literature and to the body of knowledge surrounding gender mainstreaming, gender and security, and gender and development programming, which I will now lay out.

Theoretical and Empirical Contributions

My research contributes in four distinct ways to the body of knowledge comprising Critical Feminist Security Theories. Firstly, through assuming a longitudinal approach, I have built on the temporal scope of war that much of the CFST literature concentrates upon to extend the discussion explicitly into the post-war context. Secondly, I have further demonstrated how various levels of society – delineated as macro (state level), meso (development institutions and actors) and micro (interpersonal, community level) – are mutually reinforcing, working together to reinforce and reproduce the gendered conditions of insecurity in the post-war period. Thirdly, through centering the voices of constituents and survivors of war at the heart of this methodology, I have revealed new perspectives and a richness to debate. Spotlighting these constituent perspectives contributes to righting the imbalance of institutional-level perspectives that dominate the discourse on impact and effectiveness of development interventions. Lastly, through bringing development discourse into direct conversation with CFST, this research has elucidated how structural limitations imposed by a particular context of gendered insecurity, patriarchal gender hierarchies, and the residual impacts of trauma can serve as limiting factors in the potential for gender mainstreamed development programming that aims to promote gender equality.

In Chapter Five, I enumerate three major contributions from the CFST literature that have stood out as being the most relevant to my findings and analysis. The first of these is the problematized assumption that women are protected by the state (Blanchard, 2003). I have expanded this framing to include how not only women but also men, and more specifically different types of women and men, experience a lack of justice, protection or recourse, with nowhere to turn in case of any incident. Men frame this largely in terms of theft and threats of

physical violence from younger men, often under the influence of alcohol or drugs, while women refer vaguely, or at times explicitly, to acts that could damage their reputation such as sexual harassment or violence. The increased military presence and perceived lack of will or power on the part of the post-war local justice and administrative bodies to address any issues in the community were often cited by both men and women. Thus, while the failure of the state to provide protection for women has been well documented in the literature, this study contributes the dimension to men who experience this lack of state protection and demonstrates the ways in which these experiences are both common and diverge from how women experience this failure.

The second major contribution from CFST that my dissertation builds upon is the ‘productive destructiveness’ of masculinities, femininities/identities shaped by war, power, conflict and violence (Elshtain, 1987; Enloe, 1990) as well as how insights from the intersectionality discourse has enhanced the nuanced understanding of these identities (see Berger & Guidroz, 2010; Cockburn, 2005; McCall, 2005; Peterson, 2007). My findings and analysis show how alcohol and drugs have a certain impact on not only masculinities within the culture, inspiring fear amongst both men and women, but also how this social scourge is perceived as striking at the heart of Tamil culture itself, pointing to a destruction of something lost during the war that permeates and continues to ripple outwards into the present day. I theorize alcohol and drugs here as a proxy-indicator that constituents invoke to discuss the underlying issues of trauma and destruction felt and seen during the war. Veena Das’ work on ‘poisonous knowledge’ (2000) facilitates our understanding of how witnessing, experiencing or even being aware of traumatic events that are incurred against a whole group of people can reverberate outwards and affect relationships and decisions in the years following the event itself. My research both supports and brings new empirical evidence to the literature on how

certain groups experience the post-war period, and how war has shaped their gendered identities – both of themselves, and as seen by other community members. Widows and widowhood, association with the LTTE, men as providers for their families while dealing with the deep and lasting mental scars of war are all brought into frame during the life histories in this study. Together, they reveal a picture of post-war realities that challenge mainstream perceptions of the absence of war equating to peace and add nuance to larger arguments within CFST that have successfully reconceptualized war and peace through exploring different aspects of intersectional identities.

The third contribution from CFST that my dissertation responds to is the new knowledge created around sexual violence in war (Alison, 2007; Baaz & Stern, 2009; Cunniff Gilson, 2016; Sjoberg, 2009). In relation to this insight, my work confirms what Cockburn (2004) refers to as the ‘continuum of violence’, whereby temporal periods of war and peace are blurred, and various levels of society – not just militarized state or armed forces – are complicit or engaged in different forms of violence. New analysis has been presented on how three fluid and mutually reinforcing levels of society (macro, meso, micro) produce the conditions for various forms of sexual and gender-based violence to be inflicted in the post-war period, and which groups are more at risk of experiencing these incidents. Namely, since widows are often perceived as sexually available and unprotected by a male, as well as the complex gendered expectations and reputational balancing act they must maintain at all times, render widows in a more vulnerable situation than other women. Further, ‘everyday’ forms of SGBV in the form of sexual harassment in public spaces colours the daily lives of many women. Further, my research has brought in new dimensions of gender-based violence that are not traditionally discussed within the frame of SGBV: torture. The incidents and risks of torture described in Chapter Five relate to other factors

of identity beyond simply gender, namely one's prior association with the LTTE, thus calling attention to the intersectionality of factors of individuals who are subjected to torture. The identifiable silences around the details of this torture that emerged through life histories are not unexpected, given the profound psychological and social damage associated with such events. However, the relevant literature suggests that there are gender dimensions to the types of torture that men and women former combatants may experience, and which have been documented to include sexual violence while in detention (Cockburn, 2004; Hogg, 2013; Peel et al., 2000).

These contributions have raised important implications for development programming. Larger structural issues such as gendered insecurity serve as intervening forces on development programming and can limit the extent to which objectives related to promoting gender equality or integrating gendered considerations can yield progress, let alone transformational change. Gendered insecurity can throw up physical and social barriers that are related to how individual identities are socially constructed and can work to inhibit or impede constituents' ability or desire to participate in development programs and activities. Without adequate attention paid to these structural and contextual factors and the extent to which potential recipients of development programs are able to navigate these factors, development programs will fall short of meeting the needs and interests of constituents.

Moving beyond theoretical and empirical contributions to CFST debates, my research and dissertation recognize and support the larger critique within feminist discourse that concepts such as 'empowerment', 'gender', and the tool that was proposed to help bring about transformational change, 'gender mainstreaming', were born out of political aims of transformation but have, in their application, been watered down, depoliticized and rendered mere buzzwords (Cornwall & Brock, 2005; Goldman & Little, 2015; Mukhopadhyay, 2007;

Parpart, 2014a; Rathgeber, 1990). Beyond the rhetorical critique of the interpretation of these concepts, my research demonstrates that while these applications may be clumsy or even faulty, in many instances gender mainstreamed development programming has created the space for moments of transformation to transpire that benefit for the men and women in this study. However, these moments are fragile and operate within the intervening structure of patriarchal social norms that dictate how men, women and other groups behave, interact, and heavily influence the choices available to different groups. The intersectional factors that make up individuals' identities, including one's marital status, ethnicity, historical affiliation with political and armed groups, in addition to one's gender, are all intertwined with these overarching gendered power relations, and therefore require attention to understand how positive changes can occur and have already occurred.

The development industry and the global agendas that drive it privileges measuring the measurable (Fehling et al., 2013; Fukuda-Parr et al., 2014; A. Moser, 2007). This tendency is likely a response to the tight time frames and pressures from back donors to demonstrate positive changes and 'impacts'. However, this dissertation demonstrates that there are other more nuanced yet vitally important issues and perspectives that require attention and analysis, but which may fall beyond the scope and sight of traditional development monitoring and development practices. The life histories methodology adapted and applied for this research is but one example of how applying feminist principles can unearth invaluable knowledge and contributions from the very people for who development interventions are designed.

Through examining the life histories of narrators and understanding their experience with gender mainstreamed post-war programming, new conceptions of empowerment come to light, namely courage, independence, and moving into new spaces. Building on the pioneering work

around empowerment by feminist researchers such as Kabeer (1999a), Afshar (1998), Rowlands (1997) and Batliwala (1994), these new articulations of empowerment respond each in their own way to and challenge existing understandings of empowerment and thereby expand our view. Further, my analysis of the ways in which empowerment and agency are framed by the narrators, particularly by a subset of women narrators, widows, contributes to the problematization of equating ‘agency’ to ‘choice’, since for many widows, taking certain decisions may on the surface have appeared to be agentic and even transgressive, but are understood by these individuals themselves as acts of survival. This knowledge generated by these women compels us to re-examine the limitations of exploring lived experience through the lens of empowerment, or even agency. As such, this dissertation has also revisited various forms of agency as explored through the feminist literature, and builds upon others who have propose the concept of ‘restricted agency’ (Gowrinathan, 2012; Viuhko, 2019). The emphasis that ‘restricted agency’ places on the limitations of choice and acts provides a more suitable description of the realities of the men and women in this study who make choices “through acting within multiple hierarchical structures and specific contexts” (Alison, 2004, p. 449). In my own application of the term, as supported by the empirical evidence of this research, restricted agency is neither immutable nor impervious, and must be understood within a historical frame. That is, the various choices available to an individual or collective will change over time, depending on the larger structural and contextual factors that interact with individual, community, and global domains. The choices available to specific groups of women, men, and others in the immediate aftermath of war will be different from those they face years later as dynamic gender relations continue to be constructed and reconstructed by the social and political context.

The empirical evidence revealed by this research also problematizes certain notions within development theory and practice that tends to cast ‘beneficiaries’ as passive recipients of aid, which produces an artificial static dichotomy of ‘recipient/giver’, instead of understanding constituents of development as agentic actors who make invaluable contributions to their own development processes, and who have innate knowledge and solutions to improve the implementation of development programming. Amongst the findings that support the querying of these stereotypical characterizations of constituents are the meaningful ways in which individuals and communities contribute to their own development process. To fill in the gaps left behind by poorly designed development programs, constituents often demonstrate the capabilities of shoring up not only financial, social, and other resources, but also internal qualities that they call upon to further their own process to improve their lives. As such, in Chapters Five and Six I explore the term ‘intrinsic capital’ as an extension of Bourdieu’s concept of social capital. I propose intrinsic capital as a reference to the individual and often personality-based qualities, resources, and disposition that one possesses, or develops, that can be leveraged to acquire further resources and exercise various forms of power and agency. Intrinsic capital draws our attention to the fact that constituents of development interventions are neither passive beings nor empty vessels waiting to be filled up, animated or otherwise ‘empowered’. Rather, constituents come to the development process with a mosaic of unique and often overlooked qualities and resources that, when tapped in to through sensitive and equity-minded development models, may hold the powerful potential to bring about transformative changes.

Taken together, these contributions suggest that development programming takes places along the life cycle and must be understood as junctures in time that occur within a much larger, complex life of an individual and their communities. A reconceptualization of ‘development in

gender’ – instead of ‘gender and development’ – may help to refocus the context on the ever-evolving weavings in and out of entire lives that began long before and will likely continue long after development programs complete their final evaluation. This reframing would de-center development interventions as the pinnacle of change within a person’s life, and rather situate and contextualize encounters with development actors, institutions, and processes within a full life course. The FAD² approach holds potential in this regard, with its emphasis on a more feminist analysis that moves beyond gender categories to consider historical, political, geographic, and other larger processes that interact with gender and other forms of identity construction. Through locating the complex processes of how gender and myriad other social, culture, historical and other factors specific to a context interact and produce gendered realities, the proportional influence and place that development programming holds within these processes can be reckoned with.

In sum, the depth of insights generated through this study provide new knowledge about the complicated processes of gender equality, empowerment, agency and even survival that take place within contexts of patriarchal social norms and expectations that are shaped in part by the legacies of war and its impact on gender relations. This new knowledge has built on and expanded key contributions made from within Critical Feminist Security and other bodies of critical feminist literature. Further, this dissertation makes several theoretical and conceptual advancements, including new considerations of empowerment (as courage, as independence, as moving into new social and physical spaces, as well as the importance of social networks and collective agency); agency as exercised within structural and often patriarchal limitations (restricted agency); and the unique sets of qualities and resources, including intrinsic capital, that constituents bring that poise them to be agentic actors in their own development process.

The findings from this study also highlight the need for a deep understanding of the social context to understand the nuanced changes that would be required to challenge and reform the prevailing patriarchal structures that limit men's and women's prospect of choice. Individuals engage in calculated decision-making to improve their social, economic, and other types of capital, often choosing between two difficult or undesirable decisions. Sometimes individuals focus on the 'least worst' option. This all raises questions about how sustainable changes really are when the context prevents the kinds of changes that would address the patriarchal structural limitations that heavily influence social relations.

Methodological Reflections and Contributions

The methodology for this study has been carefully constructed and applied to honour and build upon principles developed through feminist epistemology and feminist methodologies, rooted in lived experiences to form the basis of feminist knowledge (Marchand & Parpart, 2003). I have deliberately chosen to include men in this study to reflect my own epistemological and theoretical standpoint. Including both men and women facilitated an analysis on the relational aspects of gender, development, and post-war life, for which focusing solely on women would likely not allow.

Applying primarily the life history method blended with the 'listening' approach (M. B. Anderson et al., 2012) has created space for new knowledge to be shared and constructed by recipients themselves, further contributing to the wider literature and understanding of how gender, war, and development intersect. Here, standpoint feminist theories that underpin this approach have allowed for otherwise unheard voices to emerge, participate, and contribute to the discourse. It is hoped that the findings and implications of this research may further inform

development agencies, donors, governments and other actors towards a feminist, more expansive understanding of the terms central to current development operations.

The longitudinal approach central to this study has been effective in revealing how constituents of development programming situate their encounters with the development apparatus within the long and winding trajectories of their full life course. This dissertation has contributed to disabusing development actors or institutions of any assumption that recipients are passive beings waiting to be animated by the introduction of external interventions (see De Alwis, 2008; Stirrat & Henkel, 1997). Rather, through applying a methodology that blows the temporal scope of analysis wide open to include self-selected moments of significance as determined by the narrator, patterns of power, agency, suffering, grief, and joy can be revealed. Through this expanded vantage point, a more nuanced picture emerges of how relatively brief encounters with development programming take place and are therefore appropriately contextualized within a whole and gendered life. My research underlines that individuals' own histories, location and how they situate themselves within the sociocultural and political context is vitally important and require explicitly feminist methods to reveal and analyze these complex and often ever-shifting relationships with these places, histories, and contexts.

Conducting such 'thick' qualitative feminist research is resource-intensive, however, both in terms of investment on the part of the researcher as well as the research participants. Practically, it would rarely be possible for development actors and humanitarian agencies to conduct extensive life histories with every one of its so-called beneficiaries, nor is this what I am calling for. Rather, I propose a shift towards more partnership-based approaches to programming that promote building in flexibility, choice, active participation, and a humble approach that understands that development programming takes places at certain limited junctures along the

long line of individual and collective lives and must therefore be seen as ‘development in gender’. This approach can not only improve but even turn on its head how programs are designed, implemented, and evaluated, allowing us to rethink what it is that we are looking to achieve.

One recommendation that emerges from this new conception of ‘development in gender’ is the potential of exploring new partnerships that involve a variety of actors, including the constituents of development themselves. The rich literature around scholar/practitioner/community collaboration within development is instructive in this regard (see for example Chernikova, 2011; Cottrell & Parpart, 2006; Tiessen et al., 2020; Tiessen & Smillie, 2017). Forging partnerships within development programming amongst scholars, practitioners, governments, students, and constituents themselves can open new opportunities to navigate institutional barriers that development actors such as donors and NGOs may face, such as restrictive timelines, budget limitations and reporting requirements. Students and academics with different funding sources and reward structures may be able to skirt around the time and financial pressures that face development practitioners, while lending their research expertise to pursuing the deep ethnographic research that is required to better understand the long-term and nuanced experiences of development recipients that are best captured through these resource-heavy methodologies.

Partnerships with actors outside of the rigid institutional demands can offer the flexibility and resources to pursue a more qualitative, historically informed, and explicitly feminist methodological approach to capturing data and creating spaces for new knowledge to emerge. To emphasize this point, the participation of constituents and recipients themselves is therefore

imperative. This research has demonstrated the capacity and keen interest that constituents possess when it comes to their own development processes.

This study has also unearthed the significant social value that processual exercises such as monitoring and evaluation hold from the perspectives of recipients. This knowledge underscores the importance of engaging in sustained, mutually beneficial partnerships with development constituents. These partnerships would work towards enhancing feelings of ownership, validation, confidence, and even empowerment amongst constituents, while simultaneously working to meet the institutional requirements of those working within the development apparatus. Ensuring that constituents are actively engaged in and have equity within multi-stakeholder partnership models for development is therefore crucial.

A core feature of this dissertation has been the emphasis on how experiences are highly situated and context specific. However, several findings emerging from this research can be extrapolated outwards to better inform global agendas and help to address larger questions about development programming. Firstly, the finding that gendered in/security plays such a mitigating role in determining available choices and subsequent decisions on when and how to act – what I have referred to as ‘restricted agency’ throughout – offers an expanded perspective on the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda and related policies. Notably, this dissertation challenges those working on WPS programs and policies to draw from both men’s and women’s experiences during and after war, to consider these time periods as nebulous and fluid, and to address the tension between structural issues of how in/security is deeply gendered and interacts with individuals’ capacity to act. Further, the absence of LGBTQ+ voices in this research has been flagged as a limitation and should inspire those working on global agendas such as WPS to

seek out divergent, historically marginalized and invisibilized perspectives to challenge the current framing of ‘women’ as implicitly cis-gender and heterosexual.

This dissertation has also interrogated the interaction between and amongst patriarchal power relations, gendered in/security, and concepts such as empowerment and agency, an approach that could be applied in other contexts and to other forms of development programming. The methodological contributions of deep, feminist-informed, constituent-focussed qualitative methods can be modified and complemented by other methods to be applied in other contexts beyond Northern Sri Lanka. Creating space for those who encounter the development apparatus to speak of their experiences and situate these within their larger life course can yield rich and powerful new findings that may significantly impact the development sector.

New Areas of Research

The contributions made through this dissertation suggest several areas for future research and focus. Further areas of study that could complement and extend the knowledge base on how encounters with the development apparatus through gender and development programming in post-war contexts are received and made sense of by their constituents include a focus on other communities not reflected in the sample of life history participants here. There is a current gap in our understanding of how non-Tamil ethnic minorities such as Muslims have experienced post-war gender mainstreamed development programming and other encounters with the development apparatus. Given the near ethnic homogeneity of the research site of Kilinochchi chosen for this project, other geographical settings such as other parts of the Vanni or more ethnically diverse provinces such as Eastern Province may need to be approached.

Further, while this project did not succeed in including individuals who identify as gender diverse and/or members of the LGBTQ+ communities, another major knowledge gap revolves around this group in general, and in particular how their experiences diverge and offer new angles from which to understand how post-war realities shape gender relations, and whether and how development programming has been or can be responsive to these realities.

Methodologically, the contributions of this dissertation point to the value of applying feminist principles to research and applying feminist methodologies that emphasize the rebalancing of power between the researched and the researcher. Recognizing that in-depth life histories with individuals is resource intensive in terms of time, funding, and skilled human resource capacity, further research, other models that can strike a balance between resource investment and scaling up to include larger sample sizes should be explored. Leveraging partnership models across academics, practitioners, and government partners, as discussed above, would be helpful in this pursuit.

Final Note

On April 19, 2019, suicide bombers entered three luxury hotels in Colombo and three Christian churches in Batticaloa in Eastern Province. In total, 267 people were killed, and an estimated 500 were injured (BBC News, 2021). Although the attacks did not take place near my field site in the North, for many of the people I had met while in Sri Lanka, the subsequent period of crackdown on information and civilian movements, and the flare ups of inter-ethnic tensions and violence were all too reminiscent of the pre-war, war and intervening post-war years. The precarity of peace underscores almost every experience that research participants discussed, often making comparisons between ‘then’ and ‘now’, which largely referenced the LTTE-period to the current post-war period. While my departure from Sri Lanka predated the

attacks by a few weeks, the messages I received from my contacts in Sri Lanka revealed to me, even at a distance, how the wounds of war have not fully healed and that the people – particularly Tamil men and women living in the North - who survived this war have not yet been able to fully enjoy peace. These events also underscore the fragility of positive societal change, which can be undermined or altered by larger, unchecked forces at the structural level. It is for these men and women who shared so much of their time and their lives with me that I ultimately dedicate this thesis.

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