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
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**WOMEN AND CONFLICT
A CASE STUDY ON SRI LANKA**

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requirements for the award of Master of Philosophy of
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My determination to research the experience of women caught up in the conflict is rooted in witnessing the suffering women bear in the bitter conflict of Sri Lanka. However, this thesis belongs to all women who have not only borne the violence and humiliation of conflicts around the world, but to others who courageously fight to end violence and suffering. It is their suffering, tears and determination that gave me the courage to keep on going. This is dedicated to all of them.

Abstract

Images of war and discourses around armed conflict and militarisation are subject to continuous reconstruction and representations based on past and present events (Palmary 2003). Discourses therefore, do not describe the world neutrally but rather classify it, revealing some aspects of social reality while concealing others (Parker 1992). This is true when exploring women's lived experience in conflict and times of militarised nationalism. Women are constantly represented as victims or perpetrators, little recognising that women play multiple roles, depending on their situations, positionality and intersecting identities.

This thesis explores the effect of conflict and militarisation on women's lives taking a participatory action research approach to gathering and analysing the narratives of Sri Lankan women belonging to the Tamil, Sinhala, Muslim and Burgher communities living in Sri Lanka and in exile in the UK. It aims to uncover how women accommodate, participate or resist relations with militarised national liberation movements and what happens to women who accept and/or resist militarism and violence and decide to go into exile as a result of their activism/resistance.

Key themes that emerged from the women's narratives include gender based violence, constructions of womanhood and sexuality, women as actors of violence, women's political agency within militarism, women's resistance to violence and militarism, forced migration, and post conflict reconstruction.

The findings reveal that women's experiences are not homogenous and that conflict and violence impact in different ways depending on their different and inter-related identities and positionalities. While some women become victims of humiliation, gender based violence and human right abuses, there are other women who resist militarism and violence and become activists for change at micro level and at times at a macro level, for example, active political/public participation leading to change. The thesis is concluded with an overview of the challenges that Sri Lanka will face in a post conflict situation with suggestions for future research.

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CHAPTER ONE

WOMEN AND CONFLICT IN SRI LANKA

INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores the effect of conflict and militarisation on women's lives taking a participatory action research approach drawing upon the narratives of Sri Lankan women belonging to the Tamil, Sinhala, Muslim and Burgher communities living in Sri Lanka and in exile in the UK. It aims to uncover how women accommodate, participate or resist relations with militarised national liberation movements and what happens to women who accept and/or resist militarism and violence and decide to go into exile as a result of their activism/resistance.

Key themes that emerged from the women's narratives include gender based violence, constructions of womanhood and sexuality, women as actors of violence, women's political agency within militarism, women's resistance to violence and militarism, forced migration, and post conflict reconstruction that has been discussed throughout the thesis.

The findings reveal that women's experiences are not homogenous and that conflict and violence impact in different ways depending on women's different and inter-related identities and positionalities. While some women become victims of humiliation, gender based violence and human right abuses there are other women who resist militarism and violence and become activists for change at micro level and at times at a macro level, for example, active political/public participation leading to change.

Socio-political Context

Militarised conflict and political repression have a dramatic and disproportionate impact on women and girls (hereafter referred to as women), seriously threatening their security and human rights. Evidence of the abuse and exploitation of women are frequent across conflict zones, including Darfur, Rwanda, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Sri Lanka. Militarised conflict in Sri Lanka is the main focus of this thesis. Despite agreements and resolutions such as the United Nations Resolution 1325, Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and many more, violence against women continue (Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch). Testimonies across conflict zones reveal the violence, threats and intimidation women face at the hands of armed groups, own communities, families (Coomaraswamy 1998, 1999, 2005) and peace keeping forces who are assigned with civilian protection.

Women are not only targets of sexual violence and human right abuses; they also face discrimination when seeking justice due to various cultural and religious practices and gender relations that exists in the societies in which they live. The stigma attached to sexual violence in many societies prevents women from reporting the violence they undergo.

Even when women gather courage and report crimes of sexual violence, their subordinate position in society prevents them from receiving equal treatment. Under the Hudood Ordinance in Pakistan, the country's religious-based laws, a woman reporting rape is compelled to produce four witnesses to the crime or face charges of adultery (Feministing.com accessed 17/10/07). In Sri Lanka rape within marriage is recognised only if the spouses are living under judicial separation

making it difficult for women to get redress if they are faced with marital rape (Truth behind Sri Lanka's Gender development accessed 15/07/2006).

Additionally, threats and intimidation by the perpetrators who are often members of security forces, militia, gangs, or persons of power and authority (family/political/economical/religious or cultural) equally contribute to women's fear and reluctance to report sexual crimes to the authorities. Further the breakdown of the legal and judiciary services during conflict accompanied by the lack of medical care due to the closure of hospitals, breakdown in transport systems that prevent women getting to the limited health centres and financial difficulties to pay for medication and transport makes it more difficult for women to get justice for the violence they face.

The failure of governments and the legal system to prosecute offenders particularly when they are members of security forces or receive political patronage encourage the continuation of violence. There are many instances in Sri Lanka where security personnel accused of sexual violence have gone unpunished. Regular reports by humanitarian agencies (Human Rights Watch 2002) on other parts of the world confirm that this is a reality of conflict across the globe (Accord 2005).

As evident in the north of Sri Lanka and in Chapter Eight (page 234), women also become subject to abuse and exploitation in relief/refugee camps (Amnesty International 2007) and in exile. Economic hardships, breakdown of social structures and threats to personal security during conflict directly contribute to the exploitation of women exposing them to multiple vulnerabilities (Coomaraswamy 2005; Taper 2006). Added to this is the recruitment of women into non-state armies as in Sri Lanka (discussed in Chapter Five page 120), Nepal (Taper 2006) and Chechnya

(Sjoberg & Gentry 2007) that raises several questions of the status of women returning from combat.

Traditionally armed conflict is treated as a masculine activity, carried out by men, whether as state armed forces, para military groups, non state military groups or peace-keeping forces (Enloe 1993, 1989; Pankhurst 2003). This narrow perspective can produce a simplistic division of gender roles in conflict: men as the protectors (in defence of the nation, women and children), and women as victims, particularly of sexual abuse and forced abduction (Kelly 2000; Yuval-Davis 1997). Even where men are victims, the tendency is to represent them as heroes (Burguières 1990) who die for their country/people. Similar to this is the idea that relates women to peace (passivity). The belief that women are peace loving and caring has meant that women's efforts in building peace are viewed as an extension of their gender roles, rather than part of a political process. For example in Sri Lanka when women organised to resist state violence in the late 80's, the political powers appealed to them as mothers rather than political agents (See more details in Chapter Seven on the Mothers Front page 208). Often women's contribution to peace is ignored and they are excluded from peace negotiations and post conflict reconstruction when and after peace deals are signed (Cockburn 1998). Associating women with peace and passivity also ignores women's ability to commit violence and violent women are labelled as "mad or bad" rather than acknowledging their ability to engage in violence (Sjoberg & Gentry 2007).

Analyses of violent conflict in recent years have extended to take into account women's human rights in relation to gender based violence (GBV) (Bunch & Carrillo 1992). These studies have also looked at the vulnerability of internally displaced or refugee women as victims of war (Wallace 1993; Benjamin and Fancy 1998) and women's testimonies of their experiences of conflict

(Turshe and Twagiramariya 1998). Similarly there are studies, which explore men's experiences as victims of abuse during conflict, as refugees or displaced persons (Ruddick 1998; British Medical Foundation 2000), opening up a debate of men and women's agency during conflict, national liberation struggles and political repression.

Therefore, at a time where women are increasingly affected by ethno-national conflicts (Kashmir, Estimore, Chechnya) and are being incorporated into military movements in multiple and contradictory ways, it is important to understand women's diverse experiences during militarised conflict if prevention and harm minimisation strategies are to be developed to avoid further atrocities such as the mass rape in Congo, Rwanda, Liberia and Bosnia. The implementation of such strategies will only be successful if policy makers take into account how military, political and social movements influence gender identities and how these newly formed intersecting identities impact on women's lives during and after conflict. Using the case of Sri Lanka based on the available literature and the evidence gathered from the field work, this thesis aims to uncover the impact of violent conflict and nationalism on women.

Sri Lankan Case

There is a large volume of studies on the ethnic and political dimensions of the Sri Lankan conflict, its historical background and current developments (Bullion 2006; Chandraprepma 1991; Goodhand 2005; Gunaratna 1997). The humanitarian and human rights crisis has also received much attention due to international agencies such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and UNHCR to name but a few working in the country. This has been complemented by academic and feminist scholarship that have taken advantage of the myriad of opportunities presented for analysing various gender dimensions such as women's human rights

(Coomaraswamy 1998), women's changing role (De Alwis 1998; 2002), Tamil women's militancy (Alison 2003, 2004; Balasingham 1983 Sornrajah 2004) and women's peace movement (Samuel 2006).

In the context of the available literature and recognising that any conflict must be understood within its historical context (Palmary 2003) the work of Chandraprema (1991); Gunaratna (1997, 1998); Piyadasa (1984); Rupasinghe (eds 2006); and Zakaiya & Shanmugaratnam (accessed 2005) have been reviewed to map key historical events that led to the development of Tamil/Sinhala militancy.

The exploration of women's experience within nationalism and militarism in Sri Lanka raises the following key themes: gender based violence (GBV), constructions of womanhood and sexuality, women as actors of violence, women's political agency within militarism, women's resistance to violence and militarism and forced migration. The work of De Mel (2001) De Alwis (1998, 2002) and Jayewardene (1986, 1987) address the issues of women and nationalism in colonial and post colonial Sri Lanka. The work of Alison (2003, 2004); Balasingham (1983, 1993); Coomaraswamy (1996), Gonsalves (2007) Sornarajah (2004) and Thambiah (2005) explores Tamil Women's militancy and seeks to understand how Tamil women have been incorporated into nationalist militarism in post independent Sri Lanka.

While the work of Balasingham (1983, 1990, 1993, 2001) contribute to an understanding of the women combatants of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) it is essential to point out that her work is not a critical analysis of the LTTE women but work carried out in her capacity as the wife of LTTE spokesperson Anton Balasingham. However, she has shed light on the lives of the

LTTE women combatant by living alongside of these women in the camps and therefore, her work can be a valuable source in understanding the lives of LTTE women combatants.

Despite the large number of academic and feminist interventions, my review of the available literature reveals that there is a gap in knowledge about the diverse experience of women during conflict taking into account their intersecting identities. It became clear in the process of examining the literature that if the effect of militarised ethnic conflict on women is to be understood in-depth, then research would have to look at women not as a homogenous group but to study their multiple layered identities in situations of conflict. For example, a large proportion of Sri Lankan women who have entered into inter-ethnic marriages are identified with their husband's ethnicity rather than the ethnic group they were born to and therefore, these women's experience of the conflict can differ from time to time depending on their perceived ethnicity.

Similarly it is also essential that any study exploring the impact of conflict on women take into account the lived experience of women who are forced to flee the country. This is due to the understanding (Castles 2003; O'Neill 2002, 2004) that forced migration is complex and experiences in the places of origin can impact on women's lived experience and identity formation even in exile. This research has identified (Chapter Eight page 234) that women's lived experience in exile can equally have an impact on the lives of women in the place of origin.

The reasons for this lack of research on women across ethnic groups and in exile in relation to Sri Lanka can be attributed to many reasons including: a) the patriarchal notion that gender and ethnicity is fixed, that leaves little space to accept that women can have multiple ethnic identities,

such as women who marry into different ethnic groups. b) Universal representation that narrowly defines women as victims of conflict (such representations continue within the development or humanitarian fields) or perpetrators of violence and ignore the multiple intersecting identities that are created at times of conflict. C) Even when one is keen to research the experiences of Tamil women; there is little access to information, especially in the North, which is the heart of the conflict.

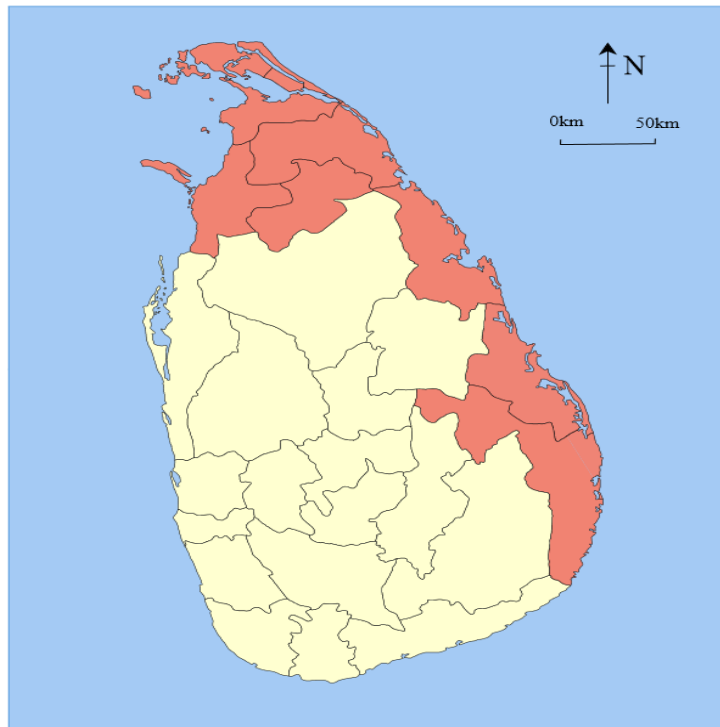


Fig 1.1. Map of Sri Lanka. The areas indicated in red are the North East which is the heart of the conflict :

Source

http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/6b/Sri_Lanka_North_Eastern_Province_locator_map.svg accesses 12/09/2011

The government has prohibited journalists and staff of international agencies into the conflict zone. On occasions where access has been granted to some journalists/researchers, the information they have been able to gather has been largely censored due to the iron glove of the

state and the LTTE. For example, interviews are arranged by the LTTE who make the decisions about which combatants can be interviewed (Alison 2003). In other instances, the LTTE have prohibited people talking to researchers on issues such as caste (Goodhand 2000).

Researching women's experience in exile has not received adequate attention due to the limited resources and the barriers faced when researching women asylum seekers/refugees that are discussed in Chapter Two (page 52).

Due to the above and many other reasons, there is a lack of research that fully captures the complex issues facing women who are caught up in the conflict. This under representation of gendered causes, costs and consequences of violence have not only seriously endangered women's lives but have also resulted in insufficient recognition of women's involvement both intended and unintended conflict situations (Lentin 1997; Jacobs *et al* 2000).

In this context the research aims to fill in the gap in the literature and looks at the lived experiences of women who are caught up in the militarised ethnic conflict of Sri Lanka including women who have fled the country. Various strategies have been adopted to overcome the barriers that involved in conducting an in-depth feminist analysis of women's experience in conflict and women's experience in exile. These are discussed in length in Chapter Two (page 54).

While this research focuses on Sri Lanka and seeks to capture the lived experience of women caught up in the conflict, it recognises that the world is a global place, particularly when historical patterns of colonialism (political and economical) and its affects are visible within global politics and in the creation of nation states. Within this context and drawing upon Enloe's (1989) analysis

that the *personal is global*, the thesis will offer an investigation of women and conflict ranging from the local, personal to the national and international. At local and national level the thesis has focused on women's experience in Sri Lanka. The thesis has drawn upon the researcher's personal positioning as a woman belonging to an ethnic group that has been marginalised due to its colonial heritage¹ and cultural prejudices. In the international context the research will explore the experiences of Sri Lankan women in exile in the UK (Chapter Eight page 234).

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Exploring the nexus between theory and practice of women's positioning within ethno-national conflict the research aims to study women and conflict in relation to Sri Lanka informed by a feminist participatory action research approach using in-depth interviews and observations in the field during 2004-2008. A central aim is to understand how women have accommodated, participated or resisted relations with militarised national liberation movements and what happens to women who accept and/or resist militarism and violence. In doing so the thesis will also explore the extent to which GBV and humiliation has been recognised in determining refugee status and maps the experience of women in exile to understand how intersecting identities such as class, caste and political affiliation in the place of origins have shaped their lives in exile. Upon completion the thesis aims to fill a gap in the current literature and contribute to the knowledge on women and conflict with specific focus on Sri Lanka, which might also feed into policy and practice.

¹ The author is a Burgher - Burghers are the descendents of the Portuguese & Dutch who colonised the maritime boundaries of the country. Dutch burgers consider themselves to be superior to the Portuguese burghers and enjoy a higher status. However, their loyalty, to the country has been met with ambiguity. On the other hand the reputation associated with Burghers as fun loving people has meant that they are looked upon as women with loose characters who do not have a place in the Sinhala or the Tamil "honourable state". However, contradictory to the reputation of the Burghers the ambiguity is that Sinhala and Tamil people are keen to adopt the life style, language and dress codes of the Burghers which is considered to be more westernised, something that is essential for climbing the social ladder.

THEORETICAL BASIS

Theoretically, the research both builds upon and develops a feminist theory of women's involvement in conflict. Intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989 Collins P. Hill 1998, 2000); Yuval Davies 2006), humiliation (Hartling 1996; Lindner 2000 O'Neill 2005;) conflict (Galtung 1969) and representation have been used as analytical tools for understanding and responding to the ways in which gender intersects with other social categories and how these intersecting identities contribute to women's experiences during conflict.

The concept of Intersectionality has been widely used to discuss black women's employment in the US (Crenshaw 1989, 1994) and to understand black women's empowerment and multiple oppressions (Collins P Hill 1998, 2000), and is increasingly entering the discussion on diversity in European equality policies (Thorvaldsdorrir 2007) and International Development (Association for Women In Development 2004). According to Yuval Davies (2006) today the issues of identity and oppression are not limited to the preoccupation of ethnicity, but continue to be at the heart of feminist theory and practice across disciplines.

Intersectionality starts from the basis that women live multiple-layered identities that derive from social relations, history and the operation of structures of power. For example, a Tamil woman may experience discrimination due to her ethnicity as a Tamil compared to a Sinhalese woman, but her class, wealth and education can give her a privileged status over Tamil/Sinhalese women who are poor, uneducated and from lower castes. Similarly, the women who married into inter-ethnic groups and ex-combatants discussed in Chapter Four (page 87), have adopted and inhabited a different identity to their past identity; and in this sense identity is always becoming.

Therefore, 'intersectionality' can be vital to understand these multiple identities, exposing the different types of advantages, disadvantages and discrimination that take place as a consequence of women's intersecting identities and social relations; and to understand the way in which racism, patriarchy, class oppressions and other discriminative practices create inequalities that structure the relative standpoints of women. Intersectionality takes into account the historical, social and political context and recognises unique individual experiences resulting from the coming together of different types of differences (Association for Women in Development 2004).

Drawing on the scholarly work of Hartling (1996); Lindner (2000, 2006) and O'Neill (2005), the concept of humiliation is adopted to argue that violence and conflict has been a response to the humiliation that the Tamil community/Tamil women was subject to at the hands of the Sinhalese not only based on their ethnicity but also due to their intersecting identities. In the same way the Sinhalese have also been subject to humiliation by some acts of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam such as the massacre of 33 Buddhist monks in Aranthalawa in 1987 and the attack on the "Dalada Maligawa" in Kandy in 1998, the most sacred place for the Sinhala Buddhists which have contributed to the protraction of the conflict. Despite the acts of violence carried out by the LTTE what emerged from the evidence of this research is that the Sinhala state and its armed forces have had the monopoly of violence and continue to humiliate the Tamil community/Tamil women using its political and military power.

Humiliation can be defined as the demeaning of a person or a group of people, subjecting them to a process that damages or strips away their pride, honour and dignity. To be humiliated is to be put down, may be forcing a person to consent to something against their will which is a deeply hurtful experience as most of the time it involves acts of force, violence and intimidation that

entails demeaning treatment, transgressing established expectations within that context. One of the characteristics of humiliation as a process is that the victims are forced into passivity and are made helpless (Lindner 2006).

The helplessness that survivors experience can lead them to act in different forms depending on their material and emotional situations/positions, intersecting identities and social relations. These may include depression, anger against oneself and the inability to resist or protect their loved ones, which can lead to self harm. Some may even turn to revenge as we discover in Chapter Five (page 120) and/or taking up militarism as women combatants to resist state violence and oppression. Lindner writes:

"All human beings yearn for recognition and respect, and that the withdrawal or denial of recognition and respect experienced as humiliation, may be the strongest force that creates rift between people and break down relationships (Lindner E. 2007)

The Tamil community have faced humiliating experiences in the form of violence and oppression at the hand of the Sinhala state and its armies. Seeds of political humiliation were planted when the right to language, land and education was withdrawn from the Tamils by state policies adopted in post-colonial Sri Lanka (Chapter Three page 67). Resistance to these humiliations have taken the form of violence by young Tamil (and also Sinhala) militants to gain legitimacy and political weight leading to further violence, which has developed into a full scale conflict/armed struggles where violence and humiliation is re-produced. This is evident in the assassination of the 13 soldiers in the Jaffna Peninsula in 1983 discussed in Chapter Three (page 68) which led to anti Tamil riots.

Despite the impacts of humiliation in protracting the conflict, the concept has not drawn academic interest in Sri Lanka. While notions around trauma and stress (Parakrama 2009; Somasundaram 2007) have received more attention when discussing conflict and refugees, humiliation is still an area that has largely been overlooked. Thomas Friedman (2003), *New York Times* columnist, states:

"If I've learned one thing covering world affairs, it's this: The single most underappreciated force in international relations is humiliation.

This thesis by investigating the complex factors leading women to take up arms (Chapter Five page 120) has attempted to highlight the phenomenon of humiliation in protracting the conflict, the way violence is used to humiliate communities and the impact this has on women's lives. This thesis argues that while humiliation has been a response to the violence faced by the Tamils and other minority groups. Humiliation is also a key factor that is protracting the conflict and dividing communities along intersecting social categories such as ethnic, class, religion and gender.

Inspired by the work of Galtung (1969) the notion of conflict adopted in this thesis is one that has emerged as a complex process involving violence and humiliation that has taken direct forms at both structural and cultural levels. Direct violence can be cited as the series of ethnic riots that took place from the early 50's (discussed in appendix 3), whereas state policies with regards to language, education and decolonisation (Chapter Three page 67) can be seen as violence inflicted at structural level - the oppressions that the Tamil community, especially women, undergo due to their intersecting social and cultural identities, which have led them to take up arms are crucial to understanding the conflict. Based on these complexities it is essential that conflict be

understood in relation to its historical context as is clearly visible in Sri Lanka. Therefore, women's experiences are analysed in keeping with the historical development of the conflict, women's inclusion to the militarised nationalistic projects (Chapter Four and Five) and women's individual/collective resistance (Chapter Four and Seven) to militarised nationalism and political oppression in post independent Sri Lanka.

Evidence gathered from the fieldwork establishes that women have resisted violence and militarism individually and collectively adopting strategies that have been associated with their traditional roles such as motherhood. Despite adopting strategies that are in line with their traditional roles, women's activism has met with resistance. Militarism and patriarchy have resorted to different methods to suppress women's resistance and political participation as we see with the Mothers Front (MF) – a group of mothers who lost their children and husbands to state violence (Chapter Seven page 208). However, even if associated with their traditional roles women's resistance cannot be viewed in isolation from their lived experience. The experience of the Mothers Front confirms that women's resistance is a result of the humiliation and the violence they faced at the hands of the state armed forces during 1987 to 1989 (Chapter Three). The humiliation and violence these women faced was a result of their identities, as mothers, wives and women who did not have political connections or wealth to protect their families.

Along with the key analytical tools of intersectionality, humiliation and conflict the concept of representation has been used to understand how women's diverse experience at times of conflict have been used by the military and media to construct highly censored versions of women's stories; and how women have resisted these representations of them as victims and or perpetrators by adopting different strategies. Given the scope of the research I was unable to

analyse the concept of representation as a major focus of the research. Instead I examine the popular representations of women at times of conflict in the dominant media forms available and argue that women have multiple layered identities rather than the popular representation as victims or perpetrators during conflict.

A dominant representation of women, common to many conflicts, is that of a woman refugee weeping over the death of her children or relatives. Along with women victims, another prevalent war image is one of a woman with a rifle over the shoulder and a baby on her back (De Mel 2001). As discussed in chapter four, the "*Armed Virgin*" can be cited as the most controversial representation of the woman combatant by the LTTE to attract women and promote its double liberation ideology of 'Liberation to the Nation and Women' (Coomaraswamy 1996).

These representations of women at times of conflict are used by media and military to promote political interpretations of war, violence and sexuality as forms of propaganda. However, the research has established that these representations are not the only experience of women during conflict. As evident in this thesis women adopt different roles and identities during conflict. At times these identities can intersect and overlap for example a refugee woman can simultaneously be a widow and a woman resisting violence in the camps. Therefore, representing women as victims or perpetrators of violence tends to serve as a basis to ignore the diverse experiences of women caught up in conflict, their resistance to militarisation and political repression, women's roles in the front lines, in training camps, their lives in refugee camps, in exile and also their lives after conflict. Then it becomes essential to examine women's diverse experiences during times of war to counter the dominant prevailing representation of women (the warrior or the victim) and

investigate the extent to which women's involvement in war/nationalist movements have altered and shaped their experience.

The existing literature on national, ethnic and cultural identity (Enloe 1989, Yuval Davis and Anthias 1989; Anthias and Yuval Davis 1992) focuses on the role of gender in the construction and re-production of ethnic-national ideologies and the representation (Sen 1993) of cultural or ethnic national identities, particularly during national liberation movements and the creation of nation states (Einhorn 1993; Enloe 1993). Studies have also emphasised that the self-definition of political groups and/or ethnic-national communities is markedly gendered (Pateman 1988). Moreover, the interrelations, connections and conflicts of class, caste, race, ethnicity and gender, with respect to the different positions of women as members of ethnic-national collectives and political movements, have been a matter of concern for feminist scholarship (Anthias and Yuval Davis 1992; Basu 2005; Jayawardena 1986; Moghadam 1994).

The literature draws from contemporary feminist theory and commentary on women and conflict. Key texts dealing with gender, ethnicity and war by feminist writers such as Cynthia Cockburn (1998, 2002, 2007), Moser & Clark (2001); Tickner (1997); Nira Yuval Davis and Anthias (1989); Enloe (1993, 1994, 2000); Eisenstein (2007) and Sjoberg & Gentry (2007) have been used to understand the gender dimensions of conflict globally. These texts along with the available literature on Sri Lanka have been used in building the framework for the research as they analyse women's involvement with nationalism, militarism and conflict, providing a genealogy of how women have both been incorporated and resisted relations with national movements, states and militarism.

Gender Based Violence (GBV)

GBV emerged as a recurring theme through the empirical and desk based research and was significant to understand how women's intersecting identities have shaped their experience of violence and humiliation and how women resist the stereotypical representation of them as victims or perpetrators of violence and men as heroes who protect their women/land. Therefore, it was essential to address GBV at the outset and across the thesis as this is a major grievance for women and at times men across the Sri Lankan community.

GBV and human rights abuse continue to be a key arbitrator in the Sri Lankan conflict that is not limited to combatants, but affects the daily lives of civilians, especially women. Women are victimised not for their involvement with military groups, but mostly due to their intersecting identities such as sexuality, ethnicity, class and political affiliations as Sarlathambi (page 22) as well as due to the involvement of the men in the family as in the case of Parvathi (Chapter Eight page 244) who was gang raped due her husband's involvement with a Tamil military group.

GBV, particularly on women, cannot be viewed as an inevitable outcome of conflict. In Sri Lanka, GBV has been used as a deliberate strategy to humiliate women, men and the communities women belong to GBV is also used to control women's bodies and punish their transgression.

On 28th December 1999, Saralathambi saravanbavanath akurukal, a mother of 29, was forcibly dragged out of her home in Jaffna by Sri Lankan Navy soldiers. The next day her body was found covered with Palmyra leaves with clothes stuffed in her mouth. It was revealed that there was evidence that she had been murdered after being raped. (Centre for Tamil Human Rights press release accessed 29/07/2008)

Saralathambi's case is not an isolated incident. There are many accounts within this thesis where women especially Tamil women have been subject to GBV. Evidence from field work shows that in most of the cases the perpetrators are men. Despite the fact that men are perceived as the primary perpetrators of GBV against women Sri Lankan experience confirms that men too become victims of sexual violence including rape (British Medical Foundation 2000) as a result of the strategies adopted to humiliate survivors or the community they belong to.

Men have faced violence mainly due to their alleged involvement with non state military groups or rival military groups, as prisoners of war, as soldiers within their own battalions, as people who diverge from gender norms (e.g. homosexuals, transgender and male pacifists) and for holding different political ideologies. In all these instances GBV has been adopted as a tool of humiliation. Despite this reality that men are subject to GBV and its effects on men and women, the politics around GBV determine who can be a victim and always celebrate men as heroes who fight for a cause and women stigmatised or sympathised as victims (Moser & Clark 2001).

Therefore, when analysing GBV in conflict, a primary myth that needs to be challenged is the representation of women as victims of GBV and the denial of women as fighters and their absence from the battlefield. Despite evidence of women's increased participation in state/non state armed groups, the popular belief is that military groups are male-dominated, 'masculine' institutions (Cockburn 1998, 2002, 2007); Enloe (1993, 1994, 2000); Eisenstein (2007) and Sjoberg & Gentry (2007) where men are the main actors in battle, and women are service providers (cooks, nurses, office workers, sex workers) for the heroes (active in battle) and fallen heroes (sick and injured). However, in reality this is not always the truth. Ruddick (1998) argues that in all conflicts there are men who are frightened and running or even courageously resisting

orders to kill. This explains the large numbers of armed force deserters (estimated to be more than 40,000) in Sri Lanka and the influx of men from the North East to other parts of the country who flee the Tamil militants.

It is estimated that one third of the LTTE combatants are women who are actively participating in combat and perpetrating violence individually and collectively. There is also an increase in the recruitment to the state military and police force. Among other examples are Chechnya (Sjoberg & Gentry 2007), Palestine (Sharoni 1997), Nepal (with the Maoist groups) and the Revolutionary Armed Force of Colombia. The Abugrahib prison scandal in Iraq is evidence not only to women's presence in battle but also to the fact that women can become perpetrators of violence (at times sexual violence) against men/other women.

Military groups attract women into these organisations with the ideology of liberation/empowerment and agents of change. Despite the revolutionary rhetoric, experience from conflict regions confirms that women in these institutions do not gain any meaningful freedom but rather become "cogs in the wheel" (Alison 2003; Coomaraswamy 1997) and not only carry out the men's orders but in many instances become sexual slaves of the leaders of these groups (Accord 2005). Evidence also suggests that no sooner the struggle is over, women who took up arms get caught in the same social patterns that existed before conflict (Moser & Clark 2001; Handrahan 2006) and become invisible (Canadian International Development Agency 2007).

The realities of militarism are that while women become actors of violence to serve the strategic interests of these institutions, the intersecting identities such as age and physical status can lead

to women simultaneously becoming victims of the patriarchal/masculine power structures that operate within military institutions. Women within militaries face sexual abuse at the hands of their leaders (Accord 2005) and other men in their groups as well as at the hands of the enemies who believe that sexual violence is the key to humiliating the entire community that women belong to (Lindner 2006). At times the sexual violence these women undergo are used by their own institutions to mobilise war (Dharmin's case in Chapter Four page 113), further humiliating women. Analysis of the agency of the LTTE woman combatant (Chapter Six 176) suggests that the way gender intersects with other social categories has meant that while some women become victims of the masculine structures, others find ways and means to negotiate their positions and at times become more powerful than some men and women. These women even go to the extent of inflicting GBV on some men questioning the very basic feministic notion that men (still) have power over women. This resonates with what Sylvia Walby (1997: 1) argues; that *"the pattern of inequality between women and men has changed as a result, but in complex ways, not simply for the better or for the worse"*.

In this changing context it becomes imperative to investigate women's agency when articulating women's experiences as actors within military/liberation movements to understand how women have negotiated their status among the militant group they are part of as well as in their wider society. The analysis in Chapter Five and Six explores the reasons for women taking up arms, intersecting gender relationships within the organisation they enlist, how women encourage or resist the power structures within the movements, how they negotiate their existence/survival within these predominantly masculine institutions and their position after the conflict is over.

While women are increasingly taking up militarism another myth is that of the warrior man defending the honour of their women and protecting their families back home. The change in military strategies has meant that today, wars are fought not in battle grounds, but increasingly in the home fronts, on streets, in market places where women and children would have access to. It is increasingly difficult to differentiate between combat and non-combat and the nexus between the front line and home front is becoming blurred. Like Saralathambi above (page 22) and Parvathi (page 242) many women have faced violence in their homes, a place considered to be a safe space. This is not only the experience of Sri Lankan women, but of many women living in conflict zones (Accord 2005; Coomaraswamy 2005).

These vulnerabilities have meant that women have to re-negotiate their roles and adopt strategies to cope with the daily militarisation of their lives. Most of the time women's coping strategies go unacknowledged when exploring their experiences of conflict, as in the case with Thilaga (page 110) that liaised with outsiders to help militant groups and later assassinated by the LTTE. At times the coping strategies adopted by women like Thilaga are misunderstood as either complying or resisting militarism. A closer analysis reveals that women are compelled to adopt various strategies in order to protect/support themselves and their families and fulfil the expectations placed on them due to their gender construction as carers. For example during the final violent confrontations in the north of Sri Lanka, civilians who refused to flee from Sri Lankan army's continuous artillery attacks were represented by the state as sympathisers of the LTTE (Interview of Defence Minister telecasted on Chanel 4 News on March 09 after the Sri Lankan army was accused of the bombing of a Hospital in the safety zone). However, in accordance with eye witness's reports, these people were not entering the displacement camps due to their fear of the Sri Lankan army who were accused of abducting, torturing and sexually abusing them on the

pretext of fighting the LTTE²; as well as their fear of the LTTE who were using them as human shields and shooting at crowds who were attempting to flee. This confirms that women do not always act on their own will but there can be other intersecting factors that determine their support/resistance to militarism.

Another important element that determines women's support to militarism is the politics of death and martyrdom. Martyrdom is so meticulously carved to gain women's approval and encourage their enlistment into military groups while oppressing and reinforcing the subordinate position of other women who do not support militarism.

The ideology of the celebration of death and martyrdom within militarised nationalism becomes central to women's suffering across cultural and national divides. Funerals of combatants or civilians become major political occasions where women's sufferings are put on parade to invoke rhetoric of patriotism and sacrifice. In Sri Lanka the "Mahaweera" (great heroes) day, is a public mourning ceremony used to politicise death and to promote the culture of martyrdom by the LTTE (See figure 5.7 and 5.8). Independence Day celebrations are used by the government to promote rhetoric such as independence from colonial power, terrorism and triumph of the military. Women as weeping mothers and wives become central to this mourning process (figure 5.3 page 142).

Politicisation around death not only makes it a site for grief but also a site of violence that can mobilise the nation to war. Women's bodies become sites of violence where the culture of martyrdom is re-produced and where contesting military groups fight in the name of honour, as evident with Dhanu (page 74) the LTTE woman combatant who assassinated the Indian Prime

² Interview with female Tamil student demonstrating in Coventry City centre on 11/04/ 2009.

minster for his role in sending the IPKF to Sri Lanka, who the LTTE claimed sexually abused her during their deployment to Jaffna.

Ironically, the society that celebrates valiant deaths and praises the mothers/wives who fulfil their duties by sending men to war, socially excludes women who become widows after the deaths of their men (Handrahan 2006). In a patriarchal society like Sri Lanka where marriage is placed in high esteem giving women social status aligned to their husband's status, widows like Puvi (page 148) who lost her husband at the very early stage of her marriage or women who have passed the marriageable age are humiliated and stigmatised. In many conservative families, widows are shunned because they are seen as bringing bad luck. Superstitious relatives go to the extent of blaming these women for their husband's death. Widows can become a liability with no social status. Often they are cast out of the husband's family home and are treated as outcasts (Coomaraswamy 1997; Thiruchandran 1997). These women are not only socially excluded, but at times can become vulnerable to the political economy of militarism that promotes sexual exploitation and even face violence and humiliation. Likewise mothers who resist violence and oppose their sons going to war are labelled as traitors and humiliated as bad mothers for failing in their duties". At times these women are also harassed using various methods including GBV violence. The Mannar Women for Democracy and Human Rights is a women's group carrying out their activities in the midst of the conflict and are facing continuing threats and humiliation (personal correspondence with the Secretary in 2006).

“Dear Zinithiya, since we got more and more humiliating e-mails, we did not use this yahoo email for long. Please send your e-mail to xxxxxxx@xxxx.xxx³. Also please don't pass our e-mail address to anyone. Below is my article on the current condition and concerns. If you decide to circulate it please take out our e-mail address. Thanks, XXXX

There are women who resist violence and militarism individually and collectively (Hollander 2005) using different strategies. Annai Poopathii (Chapter Seven page 211) who starved to death in resistance to the Indian Peace Keeping Force occupation in the North East (page 74) is proof that women are not powerless/victims of violence as militarism are eager to project. These women resist violence by transgressing the boundaries set by military groups/patriarchy in relation to women's public participation⁴ and becoming activists for peace and defenders of human rights. What the research reveals is that, whatever their motive or strategies adopted, these women's public activism is met with resistance, humiliation and suppression by the states/militaries using techniques of GBV.

Thus the question is how do women who do not support the militaries, address the issue of representation and escape state/patriarchal power structures that oppress and violate their bodies? Have the strategies adopted by women bridged or exacerbated the differences that exist when addressing intersecting issues connected to class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, (dis)ability, religion and nationality and other identities that we discuss in Chapter Three (page 57)? What happens to women who decide not to resist nor submit to violence and take the ultimate step of fleeing their communities to live in exile? How do these women come to terms with the GBV they

³ Field Code Changed

⁴ See more information in chapter seven for how patriarchy resent to women's public participation.

faced in their places of origin and how do they cope with their new lives in exile and what impact does militaristic nationalism in the country of origin have on them?

Forced Migration

Internal displacement and migration are key issues that have shaped the lives and identities of women in the north east of Sri Lanka. The increased violence, breakdown of communities and loss of livelihood have meant that people are seeing migration as a route to safety. However, as established in chapter eight, such movements cannot always be viewed as voluntary decisions. The circumstances that lead to the decision can be economic difficulties, unemployment, displacement, insecurity and shifting gender roles which are direct consequences of conflict/political instability. O'Neill (2004 pp: 22) has argued that the distinction between forced and economic migration is becoming blurred and there are complex factors that need to be investigated to determine the factors that lead to migration. This is what Stephen Castles calls 'the asylum-migration nexus' (Castles 2003) where the boundaries between economic/social migration and forced migration have become interwoven.

Even though forced migration is a result of conflict and political repression, migration can also contribute to the prolonging of conflict. While people in the diaspora may have fled the country due to intersecting reasons (Chapter Three and Eight) as this research established many have faced humiliating experiences such as GBV and continue to live in humiliation not only due to their experience in the place of origin but also due to the stigma attached to being a refugee/asylum seeker in the host country. An observation made during the field work was that the humiliation they faced has led to the desire for revenge and a few see that supporting the LTTE as a way of doing this. Some women I interviewed and met at focus groups did not agree with the LTTE and

its agenda of violence but at times felt that the LTTE is the only answer to state violence against the Tamil people.

I am not a supporter of the LTTE but I think it is because of the LTTE our people are living in dignity. Otherwise the army will occupy our land and bring in all the Sinhalese thugs like they did in the 50's (Vasuki - Tamil woman in UK; September 2005)

In the same way some Sinhala women also agreed that violence should be responded with violence and felt that the LTTE was different to Tamil people.

This is evident to the fact that humiliation is a key factor that has mobilised the Tamil/Sinhala diaspora to support militarism. While it may be argued that the financial donations especially towards the LTTE have strengthened the LTTE's military capability, the diaspora also plays an important role in building international opinion on the conflict. Demonstrations in western cities by Sri Lankan Tamils as well as anti-LTTE activists have become a method of creating awareness as well as shaping international opinion around the conflict.



Figure 1.2 Photograph of British Tamils in London staging the largest ever march, in protest of genocide (source <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=28240> accessed 31/01/ 2009)

Most importantly the diaspora contribute to the cultural revitalisation which is an important element in any nationalistic struggle by re-producing certain cultural practices that exist in the place of origin. An example of this is where I got the opportunity to participate in the Tamil New year celebrations at the Hindu Temple in East London in 2007. The occasion was marked by traditional rituals, sweet meats and colourful decorations that reminded me of a traditional New Year celebration in the villages of Sri Lanka. Having married a Tamil and living in Colombo for a period of more than seven years after my marriage, I cannot help but reflect on a time when we (our family and many other Tamil families we associated with) celebrated New Year in this traditional way as in this Temple. This confirms what Radhika Coomaraswamy (1996) argues, that the diaspora often takes greater care in continuing these practices than when living in their places of origin.

For some this desire to cling on to old traditions and practices can be a result of the fear that displacement can lead to the decay of a culture/language and identity not having the means for its re-generation within the host community. Furthermore, cultural identity and language is lost in the assimilation of new identities as people attempt to feel “included” and attain a sense of belonging. A teenage girl in her second year at University told me the following:

“I pretend that I am not a Tamil, but a Burgher. This way I am able to keep away from the Tamil and Sinhala students. They don't bother about me or the way I dress. If I tell them I am a Tamil, then they will pass remarks on my upbringing so pretending to be a Burgher helps me” (Sasha (18) December 2008)

For many who have left the country, the guilt of leaving their loved ones behind can be a major emotion that can be manipulated by the military/military groups/national movements. This is evident with the series of agitations including ‘starve to death’ campaigns that took place across Europe organised by Tamil diaspora during early 2009. Some protestors publically voiced the anger of having to flee their places of origin as well as the guilt of leaving their parents/siblings to bear the suffering of the conflict. This anger and despair have lead many to support the war efforts either ideologically or financially.

“I passed out as a doctor and was awaiting an appointment when my brother was abducted by the army in 2007, thereafter I was scared and sought political asylum in the UK, my mother and other family was living in Kilinochchi. I got to know from one of my friends that my mother was killed by the recent bombings. Now I have nobody, and the

only thing is left to me is to support these people who are starving on behalf of our people” (Interview with Tamil man who took part in the protests UK; April 2009)

This desire of some within the diaspora to keep the culture alive and get rid of their guilt can be a reason for many to view remittance towards their families or their place of origin as a way of redeeming themselves as well as addressing the financial difficulties facing their relatives. Some participants of focus groups confirmed that they regularly send money to their families in Sri Lanka. But as the Sri Lanka experience confirms, this increased responsibility? Of sending remittances to the families in the place of origin has become a serious concern, especially as it has re-enforced, for some, the class and dowry practices (see Chapter Five page 146 for more information on the dowry system) that are in place among the Tamil community.

Given these complexities around forced migration there is a real need to explore the lived experiences of women in exile if we are to understand how the conflict has affected them.

Summary

Based on the available literature and evidence gathered from the available literature and the field work, GBV, constructions of womanhood and sexuality, women as actors of violence, women's political agency within militarism, women's resistance to violence and militarism, forced migration, responsibility to protect and post conflict reconstruction are identified as themes that need a broader analysis and are hence discussed in subsequent chapters. Drawing on these themes a feminist analysis is undertaken using intersectionality, humiliation, conflict and representation as analytical tools, to uncover real life experiences of women in the conflict of Sri Lanka, informed by a feminist participatory action research approach.(O'Neill 2001, 2004, 2006, 2008; O'Neill and

Campbell 2002;) Taking a participatory action research approach to the methodology for this research will be discussed in Chapter Two.

The development of the conflict and Tamil militancy is mapped in Chapter Three to get an understanding of the background to the conflict and the humiliation faced by the Tamil community and Tamil women due to structural and cultural violence by the state that has in turn led to the development of militarism. The actors in this prolonged conflict and the military, political, diplomatic and civil society response to the conflict are also outlined. Chapter Four explores how gender and sexuality have been constructed in the national projects of post independent Sri Lanka and how women's bodies have become central in the battle of claiming the nation and its respectability; and what happens to women who resist violent militarism and nationalism. In Chapter Five the thesis explores how women have taken up arms to resist state and social oppression and what factors have pulled and pushed them to join the militaries and take up violence. Chapter Six will look at women's lived experience within non state military movements and analyse how women have negotiated their position within these highly masculine institutions; and examines their positions in a post conflict situation. In Chapter Seven using the case of the Mothers Front, I will explore the strategies women have adopted to resist violence and militarism of the state, and the militaries who are claiming to represent them. Chapter Eight examines women's experiences in exile. Chapter Nine draws on some post-conflict challenges that Sri Lanka will face in the light of re-integrating women combatants and dealing with survivors of violence and the main findings of the thesis are then drawn together in conclusion.

CHAPTER TWO

MY RESEARCH JOURNEY

WHY SRI LANKA

The motivation for focusing on women and conflict in Sri Lanka emerges from my experience as a Sri Lankan woman living through conflict until my arrival in the UK in 2000. These experiences encouraged me to build awareness of the diverse experiences of women caught up in the conflict that are so often misrepresented or ignored. Through this awareness building, the aim is to influence policy that will recognise the real lived experience of women, the scale of GBV that is taking place during conflict and work towards combating violence against women during conflict.

Within the context of the available research on Sri Lanka, Alison (2004) argues that ethno-national armed conflicts provide an interesting theoretical arena in which to examine gender roles, expectations and experiences in war and that anti-state (working against the existing state authority) liberation struggles/nationalism often provide a greater degree of ideological and practical space for women to participate as combatants than state or pro-state nationalism. The Sri Lankan conflict which has seen a large number of women take up arms with the LTTE, a minority ethnic group fighting for a separate state for the Tamils and the Janatha Vimukthi Peremune (JVP), a Marxist oriented youth group comprising mostly of the majority Sinhalese youth makes it an important case to further explore the issue set out in my aims in Chapter One.

In this chapter, I will present the journey embarked upon as a part time research student from my initial registration to completion. I will map out the key stages of the research from the methods of investigation, the data collection and analysis, the ethical considerations that I had to take into

account, the limitations faced during my field work in the UK and Sri Lanka and the steps I have taken to overcome these difficulties.

METHODS OF INVESTIGATION

The methodology adopted is informed by a feminist participatory action research (PAR) approach, based on the principles of: "inclusion; participation; valuing all local voices, and local ownership and sustainability" (O'Neill 1994, 2001; O'Neill and Campbell 2002; O'Neill 2004, 2006, 2008 pp.7) and focuses specifically upon women and their lived experiences of violent conflict and their involvement in ethnic national movements.

Pioneered by Orland Fals Borda (1991; 1999) PAR is a methodology that strives to include all participants who are involved in the research, sometimes from the design to completion. It can be seen as methodology that is grounded in developing "partnership responses to facilitate purposeful knowledge, is directed towards social change and is action oriented" (O'Neill 2004: 4).

According to Bradbury (2001: 2)

"a primary purpose of action research is to produce practical knowledge that is useful to people in the everyday conduct of their lives. A wider purpose of action research is to contribute through this practical knowledge to the increased well being economical, political, psychological, spiritual of human persons and communities and to a more equitable and sustainable partnership with wider ecology of the planet of where we are an intrinsic part".

Rather than relying on the intervention of experts to address the issues, a feminist participatory

action approach locates the participants as experts and draws attention to the role of the researched in the creation of knowledge (valuing the participants standpoint and their ability to describe and interpret their experiences thereby trying to retain the core of the participants knowledge in the analysis of the research. (O'Neill 2001).

I wanted to take a PAR approach drawing up on O'Neill's (1994; 2001) argument that feminist research should connect the triad of theory, experience and practice; and listening to the lived experiences of women can lead to the development of feminist theory aimed at changing policy. This informed my choice of methodology. Therefore, a key aim of my study is to understand and build awareness of women's experience in the conflict of Sri Lanka that will inform policy that is aimed at addressing women's needs during times of conflict at national and international level with their participation in this process.

Originally it was designed to use the PAR model to build awareness and transform policies in relation to combating violence against women during the conflict and also in the hope that the research findings could impact upon policy at national and international levels to stop the violence that is taking place in Sri Lanka. Therefore, I designed and undertook the research with this in mind. As an outcome of presenting the findings of the research at the initial stages at conferences and workshops around women and conflict I was invited to publish the work which led to a book chapter (Ganeshpanchan 2009). In 2004, I initiated a group to campaign against the violence that was taking place in Sri Lanka and was shortlisted for the Sheila Mckechnie award in 2006 which was instrumental in helping me find research participants and winning a mentoring

scheme⁵ that was useful for me to build awareness among the international community and to mobilise women's groups to lobby the UK government, EU and the UN to intervene to put an end to the GBV that is taking place in Sri Lanka. As a result I found myself playing simultaneous roles as a scholar and activist confirming what Miller argues that PAR is an explicitly political, socially-engaged approach to knowledge creation (Miller 2002).

As the research progressed it became clear that methodologically, it was too difficult to include the research participants as community researchers due to the challenges faced. These are documented later in this chapter. Therefore, the research takes a participatory approach and is not a standard example of PAR. It is based on a feminist PAR approach since the findings are fed into policy and practice to combat violence against women in conflict, using women's voices and narratives. In the future, when a reconstruction programme is undertaken for post conflict Sri Lanka there will be the opportunity to feed in the findings of this research to understand the causes that led women take up arms as well as to understand the challenges faced by women when taking up political activism to draw up policy to address these issues.

Initially, I conducted in-depth qualitative interviews and focus groups with women in the UK and Sri Lanka. (See appendix 1). Drawing on the findings from the interviews and focus groups certain key themes emerged such as GBV, displacement and forced migration that is then addressed in the chapters that follow. It is hoped that the findings of the research might help to influence and create policy addressing GBV at times of conflict and will help draw up plans for reconstruction process in a post conflict situation.

⁵ I was short listed as a candidate for the Shiela Machine award in the category of conflict resolution in 2005

Listening to the initial interviews I realised that if I used the narrative approach it would help me produce an account of the experiences of women that are not heard through the media, military discourse and the literature. Using narratives gave the opportunity for participants to reflect on their lives and experiences and produce richer and more in depth accounts, that in turn might be written up in ways that could influence policy especially in the area of combating GBV during conflict.

Women's lived experiences that are revealed through the research challenge the stereotypical representations of women as victims or perpetrators that the media and military hegemonies are eager to represent (see Chapter One and Four). These stories could also be a tool of resistance as they tell alternative stories to the ones that are produced by the media and military organisations. For example, in Chapter Four I discuss the lived experience of women sex workers who have been excluded from the grand nationality projects due to not fitting the image of the "honourable woman" and women who resist militaristic nationalism individually and collectively. These women's experiences are challenging the rhetoric of the "honourable" woman that nationalism is eager to project and reveal the political economy of militarisation and armed conflict that is often ignored but has dangerous consequences on women and society as a whole. In chapter seven the research will explore the narratives of the Mothers Front a group who used their traditional roles of motherhood to challenge state/military violence. These narratives of resistance create new knowledge that can inform, build awareness, and create opportunities for social change (O'Neill & Harindanath 2006:39-53). This awareness can lead to action/mobilisation of pressure groups such as the Sri Lanka Democracy Forum to address human rights violence taking place during conflict. Using narratives also gave the opportunity for women to speak out for themselves and reveal their own stories, an opportunity that is being denied to women by the

hegemonies that are desperate to represent and speak for them (Spivak 1993).

As such, knowledge generated using the narratives of women who are combatants, women resisting violence, involved in peace building and women in exile can provide powerful messages because they inform society of women's lived experience of conflict in opposition to the popular representation of victims and perpetrators. Knowledge generated from the participants' own experiences and the local context in which participants live provides us with an understanding of the militant movement that recruited them and the code of conduct imposed on women, which contradicts the propaganda of these same organisations as promoting women's empowerment. In the same way stories of women who have fled the conflict reveal the brutalities women undergo at the hands of state and non state military groups, which usually go unreported in the state media due to state censorship. Exiled women's narratives also reveal the lives and new identities they create for themselves as asylum seekers/refugee women and how their lived experiences in the place of origin have shaped their new identities in exile.

Further, using women's narratives having taken a PAR approach can help participants to be aware of the knowledge being generated with their participation/involvement. For example, it was made clear to the women who agreed to participate in the research that I would use the interviews to produce my thesis and academic publications. I agreed to send them copies of the publications if they wished to have them. This at times can lead to feeling a sense of achievement, of contributing to knowledge, which may be useful in influencing action/policy. However, at no time have I promised the informants that their interviews will lead to a direct change in policy as I had to be sure that I was not making a promise that I could not keep and raise unrealistic expectations among my informants.

Focus groups organised in the UK became a space where women's experiences could be shared and where women's voices are heard by me as a researcher as well as other women who participated in the focus group. Even though they knew that many among them had faced many hardships as a result of the conflict in general, listening to individual stories or situations seemed to be helpful in improving their relations within the group as well as encouraging other women to talk. The participants reflected on their past experience, exchanged information and talked about their experience in the UK such as when travelling, registering with the GP and sign posted others to agencies they found useful. An observation was that this sharing of information particularly helped the newly arrived women to the country/area as well as me as a researcher to get a wider understanding of what the woman considered important to them rather than what some agencies/authorities believed was useful to the woman.

As a PAR approach is based on gathering the everyday knowledge of the participants, "self-reflective enquiry" can be an important element to improve the understanding of social situations and social practice (May 2000; Kemmis and McTaggart 1988: 5). The participant's narratives have helped me to reflect upon women's personal stories that also gave them the opportunity to reflect on how their intersecting identities have shaped their experiences of the conflict which in turn has been used to inform this analysis.

It is hoped that the research will add to the literature on women and conflict by conceptually exploring the linkages between theoretical analysis, women's lived experiences, and possibilities for policy change that emerge from women's narratives and participation in the research process.

DATA COLLECTION

Methods adopted took a PAR approach and were qualitative in nature and consisted of;

- Focus groups developed in participation with the women participants; In-depth narratives interviews (in person and on the telephone).
- Secondary data – Reports from International agencies working in the country.
- Media and press reports
- Internal documentation from parties close to the conflict
- Other gray material – such as publicity, flyers and political propaganda

Focus groups and interviews threw up the key themes identified in Chapter One, such as gender-based violence, displacement, forced migration, justice and accountability and protection from violence that was explored in the chapters. The data was documented in field work that took place over a period of five years 2003 - 2008. Interviews were conducted with women from the UK and Sri Lanka. Following ethical guidance, participants were self selecting. Based on the findings of the focus groups and in-depth interviews, key themes were drawn up for analysis.

The research was organised into three phases.

Phase one – Literature review

In the first phase I conducted desk based research that included an ongoing literature review. The literature review was carried out through phase two and three and the period of writing up my analysis and included reviewing policy analysis and comparative studies.

Phase two: Development phase

In phase two, I developed the research tools, set up of the field work phase made contacts and established focus groups in the UK, prior to going to Sri Lanka so that I would be able to start the facilitation process immediately after my field work in Sri Lanka. I also with the support of my supervisor established an agreement with the Social Scientist Association, Colombo Sri Lanka to provide support with the field work in Sri Lanka.

Phase Three: Field work in Sri Lanka

Field work in Sri Lanka was carried out in the south (see Chapter Three Fig 3.1 page 59 for a map) as I was unable to gain permission to visit the North which is at the heart of the conflict. These interviews were carried out during October to December 2004. Thereafter, I was unable to return due to the Tsunami reconstruction work and the escalating violence. During my field work in Sri Lanka I interviewed Sinhala Ex-JVP women combatants (n-7), who have now integrated into society, former women Sinhala/Tamil activists of the Mothers Front (n-12), Sinhala Women who were affected by the JVP violence (n-14), and Tamil/Muslim women who experienced LTTE violence and fled the conflict zone to the south (n-13).

Phase four - Fieldwork in the UK

Since I was focusing on Sri Lankan women in exile, I was unable to limit myself to a specific geographical location, as women had been dispersed to locations across the UK, instead I had to work in a wider area which included the east/west ends of Newcastle Upon Tyne (North East), York, Manchester, the Midlands and London. Thereafter, I drew up a list of organisations working

with refugees/asylum seekers and ethnic minority groups⁶ and contacts were made with these organisations where I discussed the aims and methods of the research with a view to them getting involved in the research and introducing me to their service users (women) who might want to participate in the research. These organisations did not set up the interviews for me; instead those women who did want to take part were given my contact details, participant information sheet (appendix 2) and in some cases I was given their contact details. Thereafter, interviews were arranged after contacting the women who gave their consent to participate.

A range of participants were identified for interviewing and consultation. These included Sri Lankan Tamil women now in exile as asylum seekers and refugees (n-28) women who entered the UK as economic migrants and students (n-15), Former women combatants of the LTTE (n-18) who have claimed political asylum; there was one exception to this where I got the rare opportunity to interview a woman who was with the LTTE as a combatant (n-1). I was unable to arrange a face-to-face interview with her due to concerns of her safety, but carried out a telephone interview.

⁶ These organisations/agencies included:

Byker Area Resource Centre (BARC): A resource centre where weekly meetings and drop-in sessions are held for the refugee community in the Byker Area of the Newcastle upon Tyne east end,

Common Ground - (west end of Newcastle upon Tyne),

Dolphin Street Drop in Centre - (east end of Newcastle upon Tyne),

Asylum Seekers Unit - (Newcastle upon Tyne City Council),

North East Refugee Services - (Newcastle upon Tyne)

Medical Foundation North East support group (contact made through the London office)

Newcastle, First Step voluntary organisation – (Newcastle upon Tyne),

STAR Project – (Newcastle Upon Tyne Branch),,

Exile Journalist Network – (London), Tamil Women's association – (East London)

Further I interviewed women activists, former military officer of the Sri Lankan, members of statutory and voluntary sector agencies working with refugees/asylum seekers and newly arrivals and academics who worked on conflict issues.

The majority of contacts in the case of ex-combatants and political activists were made through personal introductions from friends and colleagues living in the UK and members of the Women's Network that I coordinated. Once I was introduced to the women, I asked if they were willing to participate in the interviews, and if they agreed we set up a date and time for the interview. A few telephone interviews were carried out with women where face-to-face discussions were not possible due to reasons such as safety and distance.

Four focus groups were organised in the UK. Two were conducted in Newcastle and two in London. Each group consisted of 8 – 12 women bringing the total to 49.

I participated in drop in sessions for refugees/asylum seekers organised by other organisations and women's support groups for information gathering. I also attended events such as exhibitions academic conferences/seminars where "work in progress" papers were presented to share experience and gather information with other researchers conducting similar research.

Structure of Interviews/Focus Groups

Participants who agreed to give interviews and attend focus groups were asked a number of open ended questions (see interview schedule and participant information sheet Appendix 2), which included their experiences of the conflict, why, and when they joined the movement (i.e. LTTE/JVP or other paramilitary groups), what made them leave the movement and country, their

experience of migration and in flight, and their experiences in the UK as asylum seekers/refugees. They were also asked to comment on the key ideals of the movement they joined/supported, and to share their hopes for a post-conflict situation. Thus the research also reflects on the challenges that the country will face in a post-conflict situation.

Language and interpretation was not an issue for the research. Many participants belonging to the Tamil community were able to converse in English fairly well; as such I did not have a major problem with interviews or note taking. In a few cases (4) however, even though I carried out the interviews in Tamil (as I could speak and understand Tamil), I was unable to take down notes, as I do not write Tamil. Instead, I made notes in English and then read it out to them and made sure that they agreed to the notes that I had made. When conducting interviews with the Ex-JVP combatants and Sinhala/Muslim women, language was not an issue as I am fluent in Sinhala and many spoke Sinhala and English.

METHOD OF ANALYSIS

You need to state that you undertook thematic analysis of the interview material. Due to the complexity and challenge of researching a conflict situation such as Sri Lanka it became necessary to adopt a range of methods to gather information described above. This equally presented challenges with regards to the handling of the data and establishing a hierarchy of reliability, validity and risk of transparency. I had to take extreme care when analysing the data. As a result I spent considerable time corroborating the information I gathered in Focus groups and via media reports with other sources prior to establishing the validity of the information. My own experience living through the conflict helped me to establish some information and its validity.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The research was conducted ethically and sensitively, following the guidelines of the British Sociological Association (March 2002). Ethical agreement was given by the University ethics committee. Originally, registration was with Staffordshire University and was agreed by the University Ethics Committee. Informed consent was the corner stone of the interview process. Participants were self-selecting. Confidentiality was observed and maintained throughout the research process when dealing with research participants and in transcribing the notes. Participants' names in the research have been changed to protect their identity. It was hoped that self selection and a sensitive approach to conducting the interviews would ensure that the semi-structured and in-depth interviews would highlight and support the agency of the women participants (O'Neill 2001; Mauther *et al* 2002). Ground rules for the interviews were discussed with the principal supervisor, and the use of data has been documented and shared with participants and formed the basis for an agreement that is based upon informed consent (Mauther *et al* 2002).

Some women both in the UK and Sri Lanka did not want to speak of the past atrocities and did not want their children or family to get to know about their experiences, especially if they had experienced sexual harassment. Following the ethical guidelines and my duty as a researcher I have taken all possible steps to protect the identity of the participants. I have also ensured that participants were not put under pressure or risk their safety at any time.

Furthermore, it was revealing to note that some support groups (I encountered four during my field work) were run by refugee/asylum men, and these men took precautions to prevent the researcher from approaching women in their groups. When reflecting upon this I felt that they had

assumed the role of guardian of the women, even in exile and saw the researcher as an intruder, or a threat to their male authority. Such institutions, which were very few in my experience (one in Newcastle, 1 in West Midlands and 2 in London) were reproducing the patriarchal structures that existed in the community of origin. One organisation in the Newcastle area was reluctant to give me the opportunity even to participate in the drop-in centres they held for women. The man who was managing the centre told me that he did not think that the women wanted to talk to anyone. He further stated that he and two other men in the management committee are refugees and they know exactly what the refugees needs are.

While these men seemed to have assumed the role of “protector” I also reflected that the women may have had interviews with a number of agencies/individuals and repeated their stories several times in order to access the available services, thus some of them may no longer find it useful nor want to speak to researchers. Some may feel that they are being ‘used’ by some agencies/individuals for their own benefit and they had no gain whatsoever. I made it very clear to all participants that the research was an academic exercise aimed at understanding the impact of conflict on women’s lives and awareness building. I had to be very clear that I was not promising something that I would not be able to deliver, and this honesty seemed to be reassuring to many participants.

I also sensed a degree of “not-welcome” attitude from two Tamil men at seeing their wives talking in private to me. One man went to the extent of coming into the room (twice) and reminding his wife that it was time for other chores such as feeding the kids or picking them up from school. This man’s wife wanted me to avoid visiting while her husband was at home. She also requested not to mention that she had been talking to me about her experience in Jaffna. Another woman wanted

me not to let her husband know that she told me that he was an ex-militant as he was scared that his identity may be revealed. I assured both women that I would act as they wished as it was my duty as a researcher not to compromise the safety, or the trust of my interviewees.

The interview process was at times emotionally draining as the nature of the issues researched is sensitive and personal. Some accounts of women's experiences were very distressing. I was concerned that participants may find it hard to talk about their past experiences as these may bring back memories that they were struggling to lay behind and move on. I made it clear to the participants that they did not have to speak about any aspect of their experiences if they did not want to. They were assured that they could stop at any point. I also made them aware that there was professional help available if they decided they wanted help. At all times I carried contact details of organisations such as the Women's Aid, the City council asylum seeker unit's and a list of local GP's and voluntary organisations that supported refugees and asylum seekers with me.

Agencies working with refugees/asylum seekers had a code of conduct and confidentiality, to which they had to adhere. This prohibited the agencies to reveal information about their clients without prior consent of the client. These agencies very correctly acted as gatekeepers and protected women who were too vulnerable or traumatised from getting involved in the research. Therefore, these agencies had to first approach the women first to get their consent to reveal any contact information and it was only then that I could contact the women to set up interviews. As a result I had to wait for long periods of time until they provided me with their clients' contact details so that I could arrange a meeting and this was a reason that I could not keep to the strict time lines but had to overlap the phases of research. Despite the delays I understood the benefit of

working via agencies, is that there is a further level of support available to women who may need support after an interview and was happy to work with the agencies.

Not all women I contacted were enthusiastic about participating in interviews and some refused to speak to me. As I found out later, this was due to a number of reasons, including a fear of being exposed and traced by authorities as some of them had entered the country illegally or overstayed. They did not want to be identified or be traced in fear of being deported. In the case of the women who had already been given a negative decision, they feared talking to anyone, as they did not want to get into any situation that would jeopardise their appeal process. Also, many had isolated themselves from society and did not want to meet strangers, not entirely due to fear, but also due to losing face because of their status as a refugee/asylum seeker. As they had internalised the fact that being an asylum seeker/refugee was somewhat humiliating. There were very few claiming state support but living with their friends and newfound partners who did not want to talk openly for fear of being investigated, as they had not informed the authorities of their change in circumstances.

Additionally there was an element of fear attached to the ex-combatants and their families, as they feared being tracked by the LTTE, or the government authorities, as well as other militant groups. Some strongly believed that the LTTE had a strong network within the UK and internationally⁷, and incidents such as the murder of a Sri Lankan youth in Wembley in 2006 by Sri Lankan gangs in London led to this fear.

⁷See report French investigations highlight LTTE terror over Tamil Diaspora
<http://www.peaceinsrilankan.org/InsideNews/news.asp?newsID=7049> accessed 11/04/2007

Labelling

There was the difficulty of what the label 'asylum seeker' 'refugee' meant to the women I interviewed. It soon became clear that many younger women did not want to be 'identified' as refugees/asylum seekers due to the humiliation attached to being labelled as a 'Refugee'. Some women I met at training centres, exhibitions and other public places were very keen to stress that they were not refugees/asylum seekers, but later revealed that they were. When working with focus groups, 'labelling' was not a problem as these centres were set up to provide support to the refugee/asylum seeker community and the service users were clearly asylum seekers/refugees.

Additionally distinguishing refugees/other migrants also became a challenge. For example, many Sri Lankans did not come into the country as asylum seekers but on other grounds, even though the underlying cause for their arrival was the conflict, which was proving dangerous to their lives and social well-being. In this case, it was difficult to categorically say they were asylum seekers but they were affected by the war and the only option to many was to leave the country. This is an example of the asylum-migration nexus (Castles 2003) I discuss in Chapter Eight.

Limitations

In the UK research phase the geographical dispersal of refugees/asylum seekers made it difficult to contact them. Many agencies/persons had to be approached before successful contacts were made. This was especially so with the Sri Lankan community, as the Sri Lankan population is very small (See Table 1 page 58) and the people who fled the country have dispersed throughout Western Europe and the numbers living in the UK is therefore, low compared to refugee/asylum communities of other origin (UNHCR 2005 pp 501).

A large number of refugees fled Sri Lanka during July 1983 and during the 1990's when the war escalated and were successful in their application process and are well integrated into the system, which makes it difficult to identify them without them coming forward (and they rarely volunteer due to many reasons, including the above mentioned).

In the Sri Lankan phase of the research the main constraint was my inability to go to the conflict areas due to security reasons. Therefore, I had to limit my research to the south. In the south I faced the difficulty of tracking down Ex-JVP women combatants due to the lapse of time of the uprising (approximately 32 years after the 1st uprising and 20 years after the second). Even when identified some women were frightened to talk due to the belief that the government will track them down in the event JVP decided to take up arms again (there were rumours that the JVP will resort to violence again if their demands were not met through the political process).

The risk to my own security was also a concern due to my identity as a woman belonging to an ethnic minority talking to people who were considered a security threat, I was regularly stopped at military check points and questioned and requested to produce my identification papers and what business I had in the area. Again my language skill helped me to negotiate with the security personnel. However, at times I had to negotiate my security at the expense of being humiliated. I was at times subject to sensitive remarks and jokes which were aimed at my sexuality. I was unable to respond to these remarks as the only sensible thing to do was to be silent. This made me reflect on the experience of women who have to live their daily lives with such humiliation and injustice but unable to resist due to fear for their safety. It also underpinned the decision to stop the fieldwork in Sri Lanka and to focus on interviewing exiled women in the UK. My safety as a researcher was a central aspect of the decision taken with the full support of my supervisory team.

Overcoming barriers

A range of methods were used based on the ethical guidelines to promote the fullest possible participation, ownership and to gain an appreciation of the issues for women during conflict and their lives in exile.

Due to the sensitive nature of the work, extra care had to be placed on the emotional effects of the interview process. The format and structure for interviews was prepared in consultation with the principal supervisor. Women were encouraged to participate only if they felt that they could do so and on a voluntary basis. Neither the interviewer nor the agencies that introduced them tried to influence their decision to participate.

Even though contact was made through agencies and at times individuals, in order to protect the women's identity the agencies were not informed if and when the women consented to be interviewed. No audio recordings were made of the interviews. After completion of the interviews the transcripts were read to the interviewees, giving them the opportunity to verify their statements. Telephone interviews (n-3) were recorded to help write the transcripts and this was communicated to the participants prior to the telephone conversation agreeing that no other would listen to them other than me and possibly my supervisor, but they were reassured of their anonymity. Once the recorded interview was transcribed, another call was made to read the transcripts to the interviewee to make sure they agreed with the interview material.

Skills were attained in the use of interview techniques and research methodology, and I also undertook training in counselling skills. This helped me be more confident when dealing with the agencies as they placed greater confidence in introducing their clients to a trained person. When

the need was identified, participants were sign posted to agencies providing support for refugees/asylum seekers. These advocacy skills were gained from my experience of working and training within the voluntary sector.

Assistance for the fieldwork whilst working in Sri Lanka was agreed with the Social Scientists Association of Sri Lanka (SSA). I approached the SSA together with my supervisor and it was agreed that they would offer me a base and support for the fieldwork to be undertaken in Sri Lanka. Due to the escalating violence and political situation, my supervisor advised me that fieldwork in Sri Lanka could not take place, as my safety could not be guaranteed. Therefore, I had to limit my field work to areas in the South mainly in and around Colombo and its suburbs. However, I made contacts with other organisations such as the War Widows Association and the Manna Women's Centre in Sri Lanka along with a few journalists working in the conflict zones who sent regular updates. I have also built professional relationships with the Free Media movement and the National Peace Council who regularly updated me on the conflict.

Summary

The research is informed by participatory action research methodology and seeks to capture the lived experiences of women in conflict (Sri Lanka) and in post conflict situations (i.e. living in the UK) using their own stories. Methods adopted took a feminist PAR approach, consisting of focus groups, in-depth interviews, and desk-based research. Key themes such as GBV, constructions of womanhood and sexuality, women as actors of violence, women's political agency within militarism, women's resistance to violence and militarism, forced migration, responsibility to protect and post conflict reconstruction were explored in the interviews and focus groups, along with the more qualitative aspects of women's lived experiences.

The research was conducted ethically and sensitively, following the guidelines of the British Sociological Association and in keeping with these guidelines, participants were self selected. Agencies who introduced the informants acted as gatekeepers protecting their clients.

Based on the findings of the research interviews, focus groups and observations, key themes were drawn up for analysis that is explored in the thesis. Barriers were overcome using a range of methods to promote the fullest participation of the informants.

Setting the scene for the analysis of the themes identified, the development to the conflict has been mapped in chapter three, which will help readers to understand the background to the conflict. I will explore the ethnic and religious composition of the Sri Lankan people, along with the intersecting social divisions such as caste and class that have led to competing identities and the sequence of structural violence that is used to humiliate the minority communities, and a proportion of the Sinhala community, leading to the development of Tamil and Sinhala militancy, that has paved the way for women taking up arms. The chapter will also look at the various actors and the responses to the conflict by various stake holders.

CHAPTER THREE

MAPPING THE CONFLICT

INTRODUCTION

It is important to understand the background and the responses to the conflict along with the political developments that have taken place in Sri Lanka since independence from the British in 1948 if we are to understand how women have been incorporated in to the various nation building projects that took place after independence and the impact of these programmes on the lived experiences of women. This understanding will require insight into social and cultural structures, inter/intra community relations, the grievances of the ethnic minority's especially Tamil people that have led to a claim of separate state and the responses of the majority Sinhala state/community to these claims.

The conflict even though largely defined as an ethnic conflict between Tamils and Sinhalese arising from the colonial heritage, cannot be simply reduced to a question of difference among the two ethnic groups, or a question of protecting minorities against majority rule. Neither can it be seen as a problem that will cease to exist after disarming the militants and incorporating them into the political process with cosmetic constitutional reforms that will give limited autonomy to the minorities at regional level. This research will establish that it is a more complex problem that cuts across all these spheres.

Sri Lanka has been wracked by conflict and political turmoil for more than 30 years. The commonly cited year for the beginning of hostilities is 1983, when ethnic riots broke out. However, there have been periods of violence and political unrest that date back to the early 1950s (Appendix 3). The conflict intensified in 1983 after anti-Tamil communal violence spread across

the island (Gunaratna 1997) making Sri Lanka a country with one of the protracted conflicts with an estimation of over 100,000 deaths - both in the North and the South. Thousands of people have been internally displaced (UNHCR 2009) for extensive periods and many more live as refugees within a growing Tamil diaspora internationally.

Table 1: Total Refugee population from Sri Lanka – Main countries of Asylum (UNHCR 2005: 501)

Country	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
India	64,743	64,061	63,767	60,922	57,274	50,730
France	15,183	15,774	15,938	15,062	15,304	15,602
Germany	-	-	17,403	15,121	12,850	15,304
Canada	10,591	13,161	12,873	12,563	12,062	11,076
U.K.	10,605	11,760	9,545	7,993	8,064	8,098
Other (Nordic)	23,038	17,664	13,713	10,349	8,496	7,329

Added to this is the scale of human rights violations that have continued under draconian rules such as the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) that gives the armed/police forces authority to detain people without charge for prolonged periods.

Given these complexities surrounding the conflict, it is important to understand the social and political context that led to the development of conflict. In this chapter I will briefly discuss the ethnic composition, the caste and class structures along with some events that can be framed as

having led to the development of Tamil/Sinhala militancy. In doing so, I will look at the key players in this conflict and responses to the conflict by the military, political, diplomatic and civil society.



Figure 3.1 Map of Sri Lanka showing the areas referred to throughout this thesis

Ethnic and Religious composition

Sri Lanka is a multi ethnic and multi religious country, with a population of approximately 20.2 million. The ethnic composition is somewhat disputed due to the inability to conduct a full census since 1981, at which time, of a total population of 14.8 million, Sinhalese made up for 74% Buddhist, 12.6% Sri Lankan Tamils, 5.6% Plantation⁸ Tamils, 7% Moors and 1% comprising of Burghers, Malays and Veddas⁹ (Pereira & MacSwiney 2002). Sinhalese predominantly live in the southern region and parts of the central highland. There is also a Sinhala minority in some parts of

⁸ These people, who are usually referred to as Indian or Upcountry Tamils, were brought down from South India during the British rule in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to work on the tea Plantations as seasonal workers and later became permanent workers on the plantations.

⁹ Veddas are the indigenous people living on the Island who have now become extinct.

the North and East. The North has traditionally been home to Tamils and the East to Muslims. The conflict led displacement has resulted in a considerable number of Tamil and Muslim communities moving to Colombo and other urban areas in the south. The majority of Sinhalese are Buddhists and the majority of Tamils are Hindus. There is a significant percentage of Christians among both ethnic groups. The breakdown of population according to religion is: Buddhist 69%, Hindu 15%, Catholic/Christian 8% and Muslims 8% (Pereira & MacSwiney 2002).

Although religion has not been central to the confrontations, Buddhist revivalism during Independence and thereafter the engagement of the Buddhist clergy with the political affairs has introduced a religious dimension to the conflict. Added to this is the encouragement of some monks to the war effort.

"The country has witnessed more religious violence than ever before" (Interview with Sri Lankan Sinhala woman who visited UK in July 2008).



Buddhist monks, in saffron clothes, pull their leader Galagodaatte Ganasara, right, from a stage where anti-war demonstrators were holding a peace rally in Colombo, Sri Lanka, Thursday, Aug. 17, 2006.

Fig 3.2 Image of a protest by the monks (Source www.lankalibrary.com/images/peace7 accessed 18/08/2007)

In 1990 the LTTE forced thousands of Muslims out of their Northern homeland. In 2006 there were attacks on Catholic/Christian churches in the south and central provinces. Presently the military victory of the government is represented as a Sinhala Buddhist victory rather than a collective victory for the Sri Lankans (telephone Interview with academic who visited Sri Lanka after LTTE defeat, August 2009).

Apart from the ethnic and geographical differences, the other divisions that are detrimental to social relations are the caste and class structures that are deeply rooted within society and are tools used to humiliate people.

Caste and class structures

The Sinhala/Tamil community is further divided at intra-community level on the grounds of caste, class and geography (Tennakoon 1971; Jayawardena 1987). This division is even visible in their dress code. Among the Tamils the divisions are between North, Eastern and the Plantation Tamils. The caste system deeply rooted within both communities is more complex and hierarchical, where the upper class come from the upper castes. At times these internal divisions have proved more significant than the ethnic divide, for example when upper class Tamil politicians joined the Sinhalese during the handover of power from the British rather than Plantation Tamils because Plantation Tamils are considered lower caste.

Caste is also a fact that has divided the Tamil community (North, East and Plantation Tamils) and even visible among the LTTE. An observation made was that the caste and class has played a major role in determining the support towards the LTTE. The LTTE was equally aware of this and

have warned people to avoid engaging in conversations regarding caste (Goodhand 2000). Caste and class have been used to humiliate minority groups and exclude them from the political power. The resistance to this marginalisation has paved the way for the development of Tamil/Sinhala militancy that has involved many actors.

Key Players in the conflict

The key players to this prolonged conflict that have claimed thousands of lives, displaced many and made many to flee the country can be cited as the Government of Sri Lanka (SLGO) headed by an Executive President who have unlimited power including immunity from prosecution even after he/she cease to hold office, the LTTE, the IPKF and the Norwegian peace brokers. From time to time in a fragile political environment, there have been others such as the nationalistic Sinhalese parties, the JVP a party that represents an extreme-nationalist Sinhalese view in Sri Lanka and is made up mostly of Sinhalese youth, with a potent mixture of Marxism and Nationalism, Tamil parties and non state military groups, who are equally responsible for exacerbating and promoting violence. Other minority groups, mainly the Muslims in the Northeast, the civil society, and international agencies continue to play an important role.

Two violent insurrections in 1971 and 1987 by the JVP further complicated the social and political situation. The 1971 insurrection was crushed by the then government. The brutal methods used to suppress the insurrection resulted in Mrs. Bandaranike the then prime minister being stripped of her civic rights by the UNP government who came into power in 1977. However, the 1989 insurrection was even more intense in the form of violence used by the government and the JVP. The scale of violence of 1987-1989 has led to approximately 60,000 deaths and 30,000 disappearances (Commission of inquiry 1997). Additional effects are the losses to state property,

infrastructure and the adverse impact on the economy. Most importantly, violent methods used by the JVP and state military promoted a culture of impunity, the breakdown of democratic institutions, governance, inter-social relations; creating an environment of corruption and mistrust that has spread across society.

It is beyond the scope of this study to provide a detailed mapping of the development of the conflict, which has taken many turns involving a number of national and international players. Based on a review of the literature the thesis will briefly highlight some mile stones that have set the stage for the development of Tamil/Sinhala militancy. The thesis will argue that the scale of violence that was used to humiliate the Tamil community as well as Sinhala community (GBV, human rights abuses, suicide bombings and theatrical killings, committed by all state/non state military actors), has contributed to the current crisis. Violence and impunity has become an island-wide feature. Humiliation, structural violence and GBV can be seen as a direct outcome of the conflict as well as a factor that is exacerbating the conflict.

From Independence to Republic (1948 to 1972)

There is evidence to establish that the Sinhalese and Tamils have lived in Sri Lanka, formerly known as Ceylon, from ancient times (Zakariya and Shanmugaratnam accessed in 2005) with ethnic differences being less important to the strong caste system based on occupation and colonial dynamics, which was called the *Rajakariya* system.

The Portuguese came to trade in spices but ruled the coastal areas until 1658, as did the Dutch from 1658 to 1796 until displaced by the British. In 1815, the kingdom of Kandy was ceded to the British who thereafter established their rule over the Island. Railway transportation,

communications, western medical services, English education, as well as the plantation industry (coffee, tea, and rubber) and banking systems were developed during British rule, thus leading to the creation of a new English educated middle class bourgeois (Jayawardena 2000) who made their fortune by engaging in these trades and later went on to change the political landscape of post colonial Sri Lanka.

Independence from the British was gained in 1948 by a process of peaceful constitutional evolution (Jayawardena 1987) as like India and many other countries that fought for independence, there was no discourse or struggle over the identity of the state. The independent state was formed in accordance with the Westminster model legislator based on ethnic representations giving very limited protection to minority communities.

Under these circumstances and given the deep-rooted caste and class divisions, it did not take long for ethnic and social tensions to emerge. Elections brought governments with a large Sinhala majority into power. Power hungry politicians targeting votes often engaged in ethnic nationalist rhetoric, undermining the minority communities and their demands for power sharing (Sathanathan 1998). Despite addressing the grievances of the minorities, the Sinhala Governments went on to put in place various policies and legislatures which further exacerbated the grievances.

Citizenship Act

The process of undermining checks and balances that were incorporated in the British-drawn constitution to safeguard minority rights began with the disenfranchisement of the bulk of the Indian Tamil plantation population under the Citizenship Act of 1948. The outcome of this

legislation was the majority of the Indian Tamil population being made stateless and facing humiliation as outcasts.

Sinhalese Only Act of 1956

Sinhala Buddhist cultural revivalism in the 1950s took a new phase when it entered the political arena. Serving the growth of anti-minority sentiments (De Mel 2001), Dharmapala and other Sinhala Buddhists like the editor of the 'Aryan' propagated the myth that the Sinhalese were of Aryan origin and therefore, superior to the non-Aryan Tamils and Muslims (Zackariya and Shanmugaratnam accessed 2005). The 1956 elections elected a government with a dominant Sinhala Buddhist ideology, who passed the Sinhala Only Act. This act legalised Sinhala, the language of the majority community, as the only official language, thereby affecting a considerable proportion of people who spoke Tamil and English.

Mr A was among the many affected. The transfer of court work from English to Sinhalese and his inability to communicate in Sinhalese made him leave Jaffna for Colombo. Now aged 86 years old, he still remembers the hardship he faced.

"I came to Colombo to find work. This was not easy, as several lawyers had come to Colombo by this time. I used to go every day to court and wait anxiously till I got work. There were days I found work and on other days not. We had a real difficult time, I had an unmarried daughter and a son who was about to enter university to support and pay for the rent I with my earnings, which was not very certain. This is what the Sinhalese did to us" (interview with 86 year old Tamil man living in the UK, 2004).

Speaking in parliament about the move, Dr. Colvin R. de Silva a leading socialist pointed out the disaster that it would bring upon the country and pleaded:

"Do you want two languages and one nation or one language and two nations? Parity, Mr. Speaker, we believe is the road to the freedom of our nation and the unity of its components. Otherwise two torn little bleeding states may yet arise out of our little state, ready for the imperialist to mop up that, which imperialism has only recently disgorged" (Thevanayagam 2006).

His words soon proved to be real when the policy triggered the first inter-racial riots since Independence killing hundreds of Tamil people and destroying property.

Standardisation of Education

The other controversial policy was the university admission policy, known as standardisation where the state aimed at discriminating against minority communities. This placed the minimum entry requirements for a Tamil student higher than that for a Sinhala Student (Bastian 1985). The effect of this was a drastic reduction in the number of Tamil students entering university (Jayawardena 1987). By this time the North had a well-developed education system with leading Anglican/Christian schools being established by the missionaries. The standard of education was high and a large number of students were entering university in comparison to other areas of the country. As such this was a massive blow to the Tamil youth.

This not only marginalised the Tamils within the national education system, but led to further class divisions among the Tamils. The upper class, who could afford send their children to foreign universities, while youth from the lower classes struggled to enter a local university.

State Colonisation Programme

In addition to the standardization of education and Sinhalisation of the state, the government introduced a policy of population re-distribution that further intensified the tensions. The policy was aimed at re-distributing Sinhalese population into the area known as the Dry Zone, which was considered by the Tamils to be part of their homeland.

Patrick Peebles (Feb 1990: 32) explains the population impact upon various districts in the Dry Zone and claims that the dramatic increase occurred and the change in the population cannot be confused with natural growth: *"From 1946 to 1959 Sinhalese had increased from 19 percent to 54 percent. In 1976 they constituted 83 percent of the population. Since independence, the Dry Zone has been transformed from a plural society to a homogenous Sinhalese Buddhist one."* The important aspect of this is the association with the ethnic conflict between the Sinhalese and Sri Lankan Tamils. It was the beliefs of both sides that led to the region becoming highly contested.

The First Republican Constitution

The next major junction in the deteriorating ethnic relations was the introduction of the first republican constitution in 1972, which changed the name from Ceylon to "Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka". This constitution, while proclaiming Sinhalese as the official language, declared that Buddhism had the 'foremost place' in Sri Lanka, thus almost affirming a Sinhala-Buddhist state (Jayawardena 1987). This was followed by a move towards state socialism that

sought to nationalise large parts of industry and services such as transport, railway and postal further denying the minority the only available way of fulfilling their professional aspirations in the private sector after they were overthrown from state employment by the language policy.

These state policies adopted at structural level coupled with the intersecting social divisions of class, caste and ethnicity worked towards marginalising and humiliating a significant proportion of the population. The result of this was two violent insurrections by the Sinhala youth and protracted vicious military conflict between the state and LTTE consisting of men and women from the Tamil minority who are claiming an independent state in the North east parts of the country.

Growth of militancy

The failure of successive governments to adopt an inclusive policy towards the minorities as well as discriminatory programmes aimed at humiliating Tamils and the inability to establish good governance and democracy, led to the emergence of militant Tamil nationalist group, the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) in the early 70s. Both the Tamil political parties and the TULF began to put forward demands for autonomy (Rupasinghe *eds.* 2006). The state continued to ignore these demands due to the pressure from the Sinhalese nationalists, who stressed that any concessions to Tamils would lead to a separation of the state. The refusal of the state to take Tamil demands seriously deepened the crisis and led to the 1983 riots that contributed to the growth of full scale military confrontations.

The July 1983 violence

On 23 July 1983 the LTTE killed 13 Sri Lankan Army soldiers when the truck in which they were travelling hit a landmine on Palaly road in the North of Sri Lanka. The next day the army retaliated by

killing 41 people in the Jaffna town (Interview with a retired Army Col. who served as a soldier in Jaffna in 1983: UK April 2005).

The stand taken by the government with regards to the riots was clear by a report published by Graham Ward of the Daily Telegraph, in the 18 July 1983 He quoted President Jayawardena as saying *"I am not worried about the opinion of the Jaffna people now. Now we cannot think of them. Not about their lives or of their opinion about us."* These words indicated that the Sri Lankan state had abandoned a segment of its citizens and was not prepared to listen to them any longer.

Writings on the July riots (Piyadasa 1984) and interviews with many Tamil people who left the country as a result of the violence confirm that the actions were very much planned. The ambush of the soldiers was only a convenient starting point for the already mounting tensions between the government and Tamil militants.

A driver who was working in Colombo at the time of the riots described how he had transported Tamil people in his pickup.

"I put three people in my truck and placed a canvass sheet over and filled the truck with bags of fibre pretending that I was transporting fibre to the factory and drove as fast as I could through the mobs. They (the mobs armed with clubs, bars, knives and buckets of petrol) stopped me at several places and asked if I was transporting Tamil – I was scared not only for their lives but also for mine. If I had got caught then all of us along with the truck would have been on fire. However, we managed to pass Awissalwela before dark

and I dropped them in my boss's holiday home". (Interview with Mr Welivita ; November 2004)

The rioting spread despite a curfew and moved up-country. Not only Tamil houses but also Hindu temples/schools were attacked. Areas such as Badulla, Nawalapitiya and Nuwara Eliya where plantation Tamils lived were severely affected (interview with former Teacher who lived in Badulla at the time Colombo October 2004).

The riots made it clear that the government had articulated violence against a section of its own citizens. Tamils were not only subject to violence but were humiliated. Men and women were stripped of their clothes in public and disgraced, beaten and at times raped. Tamil Houses were attacked, looted and set on fire; the perpetrators were at times the Sinhala neighbours and at times were law enforcing officers such as the police.

The humiliation faced by the Tamil community did not end after the violence. Thereafter, Tamil men were emasculated through having to give up their right to ancestral names and a symbol of fatherhood when their children assumed their mother's maiden names and religions in order to avoid violence and segregation. Women had to give up the "Pottu" on their forehead, the symbols of their marriage and being Tamil for the same reasons. Many had to leave their employment, house and properties and move into refugee camps or return to Jaffna and live in difficult conditions. For a community that had deep rooted patriarchal structures this was a massive humiliation that would never be reconciled. In the midst of this, something was certain. The country would never be the same again.

The anti-Tamil racial conflagration of 1983, the last of a series of riots can be identified as the critical point in the relations between the Tamil and Sinhalese relations.



Fig 3.3 A Tamil man being assaulted by Sinhalese mob. (Source: pact.lk/wp-content/uploads/2008/07/304 accessed 21/7/2008)



Fig 3.4: Mob surrounds a vehicle looking for Tamil people (Source: www.sangam.org/2009/07/images/BlackJuly262009 accessed 21/7/2008)



Fig 3. 5: Property belonging to Tamil businessmen in Pettah under fire. (Source: www.sangam.org/articles/2004/Riot1983 accessed 21/7/2008)

The riots not only brought back bitter memories of these past atrocities and scarred the Tamil people. It also led to the collapse of Tamil parliamentary politics. Armed struggle became the mode of call for independence. Traditional Tamil politicians were removed from their positions and militant youth with a more radical view took the place of the upper class, western educated politicians. The political struggle shifted from the parliament to the battlefields.

Politicians of both sides who strived to meet their own political ends kept past tragedies alive. Many who fled the country as victims of riots were made to believe by the militants that only a separate Tamil state would ensure permanent protection to the Tamil community, a belief that many hold to date (observations made during field work). The policies of the state and the attitudes of the Sinhala political parties further helped this mind set to develop.

India's Intervention

The fleeing of hundreds of thousands of refugees after the 1983 riots to India and to the west, creating a large Tamil diaspora can be argued as adding a new dimension to the conflict. Sri Lanka's problem became international with India becoming a key player. Indian troops were sent in to the North East for peacekeeping and to monitor a ceasefire and oversee the disarmament of the Tamil militant groups. The riots that broke out on the street of Colombo during the signing of the Accord and the attempted assault on Indian Prime Minister by a Sinhalese sailor during the guard of honour, suggest that the government's attempt to get popular support for the Accord was a failure. Occupation of the North by the Indian Peace Keeping Forces (IPKF) escalated the violence that eventually turned into an armed confrontation resulting in the Indo-LTTE war in 1987-1990 leading to increased violence against civilians by the IPKF.

Second JVP Uprising

The signing of the Accord was met with hostility by the JVP who were against any form of intervention by a foreign military in the internal affairs of the country. The JVP responded with attacks through its military wing "*Desha Premi Balakaya*" on leading government personalities, government supporters and public servants, university students of rival political groups armed forces personnel and their families.

The JVP continued its violence by attacking government buildings, including the parliament and calling for a sabotage of the elections. Their violence resulted in the breakdown of transport services, closure of schools, universities and other vital government services, thus virtually bringing the government to a collapse. In retaliation the Government's death squad, "Black cats", killed thousands of people who they believed were JVP supporters (see Chandraprema 1991; Gunaratna

1991; interviews in chapter six and my own experience of living through the conflict during this time in Sri Lanka).

Withdrawal of IPKF

With the pressure increasing from the Sinhalese political parties and the hostilities between the LTTE and IPKF increasing, the government led by Ranasinghe Premadasa who came to power in the 1989 elections had no other alternative but to request the withdrawal of IPKF from Jaffna. On 21st May 1991, Rajiv Gandhi, the former Prime minister of India (1984 to 1989), who brokered the Indo-Lanka Accord of 1987 that was responsible for bringing the IPKF to Sri Lanka, was assassinated by an alleged LTTE female suicide bomber Dhanu. India retaliated by banning all LTTE and listing the leader of the LTTE as a wanted man in connection with the assassination.

War for Peace

The appointment of Mrs. Kumaratunga under the People's Alliance (PA) in 1994 is significant to this research, not only because she was a president whose parents were both leaders of independent Sri Lanka but also because she was a woman who came to power in a male dominated society torn by conflict and violence. Her main opponent United National Party (UNP) candidate, Mrs. Dissanayake, dubbed by the media as *the lady in white* (The Sunday Times 30th October 1999) was the widow of Mr. G. Dissanayake, who was assassinated by the LTTE few weeks before the elections. Both women appealed to female voters of the country. They presented themselves as women who had lost their husbands and fathers to political violence and appealed to the women voters as mothers, daughters and wives who understood other women's grievances that ran within this bitter conflict.

This was the first time in the political history of Sri Lanka two women were the primary contestants for the highest position in the country, the Executive Presidency. The two women's political campaigns reproduced the patriarchal structures of society calling mothers to protect their children from violence and war and punish those who had taken their right to motherhood and as wives. The women voters were not considered as political agents with their right to choose independently, but as mothers, wives, daughters and sisters who had a duty towards their children/husbands. The call was directed towards women's natural instincts of motherhood to protect their children/relatives from the regime of violence, rather than an intelligent choice of protecting democracy, governance and justice.

Playing to the sentiments of the people, the media covering the election campaigns of Mrs. Kumaratunga constructed her as a charismatic leader- seeking a mandate for peace and Mrs. Dissanayake as the weeping widow of the assassinated G. Dissanayake. Apart from their status as widows, there was one other thing in common; they had political affiliation (through their husbands/fathers), class, caste, education, and connections that the majority of the women they represented did not have.

The campaigns of Mrs. Kumaratunga presented her as a catalyst for change (peace), a change that the people were eagerly waiting for after long years of bitter conflict. The media was at the forefront of reproducing the image of women's innate desire for peace or passivity. The tactics worked and she was appointed president in 1994 with an overwhelming majority.

In keeping with her election pledges, she initiated the "*Sudu Nelum Mal* movement (White Lotus) for peace and began negotiations with the LTTE. Despite Mrs. Kumaratunga's efforts to continue

negotiations, she was unable to gain the support of her party or the opposition as she had alienated the opposition by initiating a commission to investigate the disappeared and the Batalanda commission to investigate the alleged involvement of the opposition leader. At the same time there was no serious commitment from the LTTE, who was pushing for unrealistic demands such as withdrawal of the army from the North East. As a result, peace talks broke down and the period of 1994 – 2000 saw the escalation of violence and an era where the country was placed on a “war footing”, or ‘war for peace’. The country’s economic/social development activities were put on hold and resources diverted to fight the war including increasing recruitment to the armed forces. Mrs Kumaratunga narrowly escaped an LTTE assassination attempt, though lost an eye during an election rally.

CEASE FIRE OF 2002

The election of 2001 saw the defeat of PA government but Kumaratunga remained president. The new UNP government was appointed in December 2001, which led to a Norwegian-mediated ceasefire agreement (CFA) between the government and the LTTE in February 2002, which brought hope to the people. According to analysts (Bullion 2006; Goodhand 2005) the main reasons that made this peace deal possible, was the change of government, strong international pressure for a non military solution, external facilitation, and the fact that both sides considered negotiations more strategic than continued military confrontations.

The CFA led to immediate improvements in the situation. Within months the route to Jaffna re-opened allowing the free transportation of goods and people in and out of the conflict areas. This was a tremendous relief to the people in the northeast who had to bear the brunt of the conflict.

"I went to see my parents in Jaffna - I had not seen them for about two years, but now that the planes (domestic) are flying, I went during the holidays. My father came with me to Colombo, as I wanted to show his leg to a good doctor in Colombo (Telephone Interview with Mathi Tamil woman in Sri Lanka October 2004)

The diaspora responded positively and took the opportunity to visit the northeast. On return one woman told me:

"Now the war is over everything is fine, and people are happy. I visited Batticaloa and Jaffna; we also went to the temple. It was so good to go to Jaffna after we left in 1986. I took my children with me, we left Jaffna when my daughter was four months and my son has never seen the place". (42-year-old woman from Jaffna and now living in the UK, March 2004)

The atmosphere in Colombo was equally positive

"Thank god now there is no fighting, we can move about without fear, otherwise we are scared to get into a bus or go to Fort or Petta, not knowing whether we will come home. I am worried when my daughter and her children leave home for work and school-until they get home" (Telephone interview Sinhala Woman living in Wattala, Sri Lanka, April 2004)

However, soon there were complaints about the breach of the agreement by both parties (Email correspondent with former SLMM member October 2006). Additionally the Sinhala nationalistic

elements (JVP, JHU and other groups) who were opposed to any form of external mediation continued to accuse the SLMM for sympathising with the LTTE.

With the ceasefire leading nowhere and with increasing confrontations between the government forces and the LTTE a return to war was unavoidable. The subsequent general election in 2005 brought to power president Mr. Rajappkse, who adopted a hardliner approach.

As CFA violations continued attempts for a political solution failed. The government's attempts to gain wider political support from opposition parties failed and in January 2008 the CFA was unilaterally abolished by the government. Thus, allowing the government and the LTTE to continue with its violent campaign for military supremacy. The government's conduct of the war, the abuse of the civilians and the mass scale human rights violence has provoked massive demonstration across European countries by the Tamil diaspora (see Fig 1.2 in page 32). Many international agencies and governments have responded by calling on the International Criminal Court and the Security Council to investigate and try key members of the government and the military for war crimes.

In the wake of the government declaring military victory over the LTTE and where the LTTE has openly accepted that "this war has come to a bitter end" (<http://www.tamilnet.com> accessed 16/05/09) it is important for us to look at the responses to the conflict by the key stake holders as this will help us understand the complexities surrounding the conflict that will need more than a military victory by the state to end.

RESPONSES TO THE CONFLICT

As pointed out previously, violence and the response to this humiliation (individual, communal and military) has been the key factor that has determined the past and present of Sri Lankan politics.

In the following section I intend to provide a brief overview of the response to the conflict.

Military

The conflict has resulted in the militarisation of society. The use of terror, abductions and theatrical killings are widespread. Violence in the form of bomb explosions, attacks on civilians, abductions, torture, GBV and death has become a daily occurrence not only in the northeast, but also in other parts of the country, where political violence has become endemic.

The military has been assigned with the authority to make key decisions not only relating to security, but also on governance and other aspects such as culture. Since the beginning of the conflict military groups including the security forces, LTTE and politicians with connections to gangs and non state armed groups have gain increased power. There are a number of armed groups who receive state patronage but are not accountable to the state such as police commandos, armed security guards of MPs, Tamil militant groups and Home Guards, and underworld mafia who are largely backed by politicians.

In spite of the government's military victory over the LTTE, the war has been badly managed over a period of time. There are thousands of deserters who have become a major threat not only to the law and order of the south but also to the safety of women. These men are said to be behind criminal activities such as abductions, drug deals (telephone interview with woman who mentioned

that her son a former military man is in police custody for selling drugs on the streets), and sexual violence against women.

In the east and parts of the north, counter-insurgency functions have been handed over to other non-state military groups such as the Karuna Fraction¹⁰ who are responsible for widespread human rights abuse. Amnesty international reports reveal illegal torture chambers run by Military groups, where civilians have been detained and have been subject to torture and even murder.

In this context even though the government's military offensives have paid off the price on the civilians including the soldiers has been heavy. The current position of the government seems to be that after the death of its leaders the LTTE has been permanently destroyed. The victory of the government forces are celebrated in a way that adds insult to the injuries of the Tamil civilians who are undergoing tremendous suffering in the camps designed for the internally displaced. The euphoric mentality among many Sinhalese people, who came to the streets to celebrate after the victory of the military, leaves limited space for a political settlement or national reconciliation (telephone Interview with academic who visited Sri Lanka in August 2009).

Despite the government's victory it has not yet been able to account for the capture of weapons belonging to the LTTE or account for the offshore infrastructure that was possessed by the LTTE. While the government forces have captured the territory controlling and holding of the conquered territory will requires clear strategy and manpower. Therefore, it can be argued that defeating the LTTE militarily is only a short term solution and there is a real need for a political reconciliation

¹⁰ Karuna was the body guard of LTTE leader Prabhakaran later who left the organisation taking with him a group of LTTE cadres from the Eastern Province. Later he joined the Government and was instrumental in the LTTE defeat

however difficult it may be to accept. Even though the government has claimed military victory it has lost on the Tamil people's support due to the unprecedented scale of violence, humiliation and suffering it has inflicted on them. This was proved by the recent presidential elections held in February 2010 where the candidate of the opposition party Major Sarth Fonseka (the former army commander who was in office during the LTTE defeat) managed to secure the majority of votes in the North East region. There is growing diaspora who has previously distanced itself from the LTTE but is now willing to support them if they bounce back (observations made during the mass demonstrations that took place across UK during the months of March-May 2009). The Sri Lankan government have alienated many western governments by the heavy handed manner it has dealt with some diplomatic issues including the human rights violence. This lethal cocktail of unaccounted weapons, unaccounted LTTE senior cadres, people who no longer trust the government and who are willing to take revenge, financial and ideological support from a large diaspora and a alienated western governments can be very detrimental to Sri Lanka unless it builds an inclusive political culture that will uphold the rights of the minority communities.

Civil Society

The complexities of the conflict are visible in the way that the civil society has been responding to the conflict. The ethnic divisions and the geographical division between the northeast and the rest of the country - have been reinforced by the lack of interaction and frightful experiences throughout the war. This has been further inflamed by language barriers and lack of trust. These divisions are a result of the war and at the same time factors that further complicate the war.

The limited ability for civil society intervention and the lack of communication between the civil society actors of the south and north contribute to this ethnic/geographical divide. On the militants

side this is something that the LTTE encouraged among its cadres (see Chapter Six) - to distance themselves from their own community. The differences within the hardliners (nationalists on both sides) and moderates (e.g. the peace non-governmental organisations) also have contributed to the divisions. Sri Lanka's civil society is inescapably shaped by the civil war and its various actors engage in a battle over war and peace and contribute to shaping the future of the island and its people.

In this environment, the thesis argues that neither military action, nor constitutional changes by itself are sufficient to bring sustainable peace. There is a need to tackle deep-rooted grievances and prejudices of all communities including the humiliation inflicted by violence. The possible solutions to the conflict lie within a viable political solution that recognises the intersecting social divisions and the acceptance of it by all communities. As evident in this research civil society can be cited as a problem as well as a solution. Extreme nationalist groups such as the *National Movement against Terrorism* and elements of the Buddhist monks (Fig 3.2 page 60) have fuelled the conflict. On the other hand the hardliners among the Tamil community are equally to be blamed for protracting the conflict. The representation of the Tamils/Sinhalese as the deadly 'other' has divided society leaving little room for independent political space. The State and the LTTE have systematically eliminated emerging political competition. Experience to date confirms that actions at political level will always determine the ability of the civil society to build bridges across communities.

The response to the conflict is largely shaped by the way the Tamil, Sinhala and Muslim community (including military and political) have responded to the humiliation and violence including GBV faced by them at the hands of each other. Humiliation has become a vicious cycle

where violence is reproduced. Therefore, a sustainable solution will also have to address the issue of human rights violence, GBV and humiliation at inter-as well as intra community level taking into account the intersecting identities of the people across communities.

Summary

As evident from this analysis of the desk based research supplemented by interview material it can be argued that, the conflict is largely rooted in the post colonial policies adopted by the Sinhalese governments to humiliate and exclude a proportion of its people from the political process. Therefore, the crisis cannot be simply reduced to an ethnic problem. At the heart of the conflict is the state with its colonial heritage, which has worked towards discriminating and humiliating the minority communities at structural level.

Westminster model legislature inherited from the British did not provide any protection to the minorities, from the majority rule. Power conscious politicians have thrived on nationalistic sentiments for their own survival, making use of the intra-community social divisions such as class and caste to further divide people. Since independence, parties in power have relied on national rhetoric to divert attention from the inefficiency of the state. The 1983 riots are evidence of the government's success in the creation of anti ethnic tensions and dividing the people on communal lines.

In this battle for political supremacy, significant powers have been granted to the military, which have become a powerful force and have used and abused its power to fuel the government's anti-democratic ambitions and humiliate the enemy. Since the beginning of this war, the actions of the armed forces have contributed towards undermining the human rights and humiliating minority

groups as well as increased GBV. The response to this by non state armed groups including the LTTE and JVP has been no better. Until their defeat these groups work towards achieving power and political ambitions through the bullet rather than the ballot. Overall, continued violence has had negative implications for the country. Civil society influence in the process has rapidly diluted due to the intersecting social divisions as well as the draconian rules put in place by the state to silence political opponents and human rights activists.

Despite the cost to the majority of the people, the conflict and related instability have brought benefits to others such as those non state-military groups who are operating under the patronage of the government and are free to carry out violence. Some key members of the government who have benefitted economically. For some, such as the Jathaka Hela Urumaya (JHU – An extreme nationalist political party the conflict has become a means to attain political legitimacy, wealth and recognition. As such these groups continue to divide the society for their benefit.

The impacts of conflict are not contained to the North. There is a legacy of violence in the South which has an impact on social relations. The South and some parts of the central hills have been the main recruitment ground both for the JVP and the Sri Lankan army (Observations made during field work). There is also a potential of other armed group to emerge from the areas due to the short sighted actions of the government who have provided young men with weapons at village level to fight the LTTE (Rathnayake 2007) as well as with the LTTE carders who have gone into hiding after the LTTE defeat. Therefore, it could be suggested that the conflict is the result of a complex mix of intersecting factors, which have changed and inflated over time. Any attempt for resolution will have to be negotiated within this context.

The conflict has not merely affected political and social relations. It has also affected gender relations. Apart from the obvious example of women bearing arms on both sides (Chapter Five page 120), in many other respects women's lives have been affected in different and complex ways (Chapter Four and Six) depending on their intersecting identities such as class, ethnicity and political affiliation. Women are caught in the power struggle between the political parties as well as the competing militaries. As discussed in Chapter Four (page 87), in this militarisation process women's bodies have become sites of war where violence has been reproduced.

While there is a tendency to view military victory and a political package as the solution to the war, the research has established that it is a more complex situation that requires a wider frame of analysis if there is going to be an acceptable solution to all communities. Long-term structural stability in Sri Lanka depends on fundamental reforms of the state and the institutionalization of democratic policies as well as reconciling the humiliation faced by minorities. The longer the violence and human rights abuse continues, the harder the task becomes. Establishing peace will involve building a new political culture that can accept and include all intersecting social categories such as gender, class and ethnicity and restore the self esteem of the survivors of violence and humiliation and to uphold human security.

Women's situation within this military nationalism has remained neglected for too long by analysis of the conflict that has gone along with the representation of women as victims or perpetrators of violence with little understanding of the intersecting identities of women. In Chapter Four the thesis will explore the relationship between women and militarised nationalism and examine how women and their sexuality have been constructed within the militarised nationalistic discourse in its attempt to create the respectable state. Using examples such as the imposition of a dress

code and the cases where women have been subject to humiliation and violence I will analyse the impact of militarisation on women's lives and how the military have used and abused women in their attempt to gain military supremacy.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CONSTRUCTION OF WOMENHOOD AND SEXUALITY WITHIN MILITARISED

NATIONALISM

Women and their sexuality have become important to anti-colonial, nationalist movements in late nineteenth and early twentieth century South Asia (Chatterjee 1999; De Mel 2001; Jayawardena 1986). Women's sexuality has not only been central in the construction of the nation but also used in defending the nation's honour and purity (Yuval Davies & Anthias 1989). This construction of womanhood solely based on sexuality have rendered women's bodies to become sites where violence can be unleashed and the communities these women belong to be humiliated and punished. Yasmin Thambiah (2005) suggests that this is due to the idea that any form of sexual transgression (consented or forced) outside the marriage has the capacity to make society further disintegrated - is a belief that can be powerfully manipulated. This is especially true where long term war has compromised social process and institutions that signal normalcy and when national identity is seen to be under threat (Palmary 2003). In this context, it becomes essential to protect the honour of the nation by protecting the women who belong to the nation from the "enemy" as well as from their own sexual transgressions. Thus, men fight to protect their women's honour and at the same time dishonour the enemy women or at times even men who are emasculated by the act of rape (Zarkov 2001; BMF 2000).

Pettman argues that when comparing nationalist struggles across the world there is a remarkable similarity in the way women are constructed in the nation building projects which is a reminder that nationalism is always gendered (Wilford 1998). Although the historical context of nation building

can be different from each other for example such as in the creation of Pakistan where a new state was formed primarily on religion as, opposed to Sri Lanka where there was no question of state formation, there are commonalities in representations patriarchal, patterns of control and mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. This is particularly so with regard to the ways in which exclusive national identities are constructed through gendered, hierarchies and how these experiences have been narrated (De Mel 2001; Jayawardena 1986).

A key way in which women are represented during armed conflict and national building projects is that through women's caring and nurturing roles. Through these roles women are constructed as caregivers, educators of children and keepers of family relations and assigned the task of transmitting social and cultural customs and values (Yuval Davies 1992; Palmary 2003). Often women's behaviour and appearance such as in the clothes they wear become signifiers of culture. The transgression of these boundaries (i.e accepted behaviour/clothes) are dealt with severe punishment such as disowning by the community, subjecting to violence and humiliation and at times even death as evident from the case of Sriyalatha (page 106) and Thilaga (page 110) in this chapter.

In Sri Lanka the relationship women have had with nationalism during the struggle for independence from the colonial power and throughout the struggle for the anticipated Tamil state have proven to be difficult. (De Mel 2001; Jayawardena 1986; Sornarajah 2004; Zakariya & Shanmuganathan accessed 2005). As identified in Chapter Three, the conflict has led to adverse political and social impacts ranging from the militarisation of society, humiliation of a large proportion of people due to the structural violence of the state, GBV including women taking up arms to fight the state is discussed further in chapter five. The construction of womanhood and the

relationship between men and women have been key to the success of this struggle for the “imagined state” (read nations) (Anderson 1983). Militarism has also called upon women to protect the culture and the honour of the nation (Yuval Davies & Anthias 1989) and become biological reproducers of valiant sons who protect the land (Sornarajah 2004).

Despite the fact that women are incorporated into nation building programmes in many different and contradictory ways, what is common to many militarised nationalistic projects is the representation of women either as victims or perpetrators of sexual transgressions, including violence. This narrow representation has failed to recognise that women live multiple and layered identities and has undermined the diverse lived experience of women at times of conflict and militarism.

As the research established, women experience conflict in many different ways based on their intersecting identities and overlapping gendered roles assigned to them within their communities. Despite these diverse experiences, representing women only as “victims and/or perpetrators” tends to serve the needs of the military and political ambitions of hegemonies that control women’s lives/bodies.

Drawing upon the available literature and the fieldwork this chapter will explore how womanhood and sexuality have been constructed at times of militarised ethnic national liberation struggles, women’s experience within the discourse of nationalism and how women negotiate and resist the control of their bodies. It is expected that these cases will provide insight into how gender and sexuality are constructed, represented and controlled in the interest of militarised, nationalist projects where women’s bodies become central.



Fig: 4.1 A Palestinian women carrying a child in one hand and a weapon in the other. In the background is the Flag of the Nation.

(Source treyjackson.typepad.com/junction/images/femal.accessed 22/7/2006)

Women's bodies as the pride of nation

There is evidence to suggest that during the campaign for independence a significant strand of nationalist and colonial agitation took place over the status and bodies of Ceylonese women both within and outside the domestic sphere (De Alwis 2002; De Mel 2001). It was women's bodies and their upbringing that were produced as the repositories and signifiers of local culture and tradition through political discourse as well as popular culture (De Alwis 2002; De Mel 2001). The education of women, their employment, their struggle for political rights and taking up public roles has been seen as potential threats to tradition and family life. In their book *Casting Pearls* Malathi

de Alwis & Kumari Jayawardena (2001) describe how the women's franchise movement were met with resistance from senior politicians such as Dr. Ponnambalam Ramanathan and other right wing politicians who dominated the political arena at the time.

"Do not throw pearls before swine, for they will turn and rend you. What suits European Women will not suit us" (Sir P Ramanathan in his reply to Donoughmore Commission, Nov 1927: 248)

This is evident to how women's participation in public life has been resented and subjected to humiliation by patriarchy even during the struggle for independence from the colonial powers. The resistance and violence faced by the Mothers Front from the state and the LTTE (Chapter Seven page 208) is evident to that militarism and patriarchy will always restrict women's political/public participation using GBV and humiliation as tools of oppression, when women challenges their authority and existence.

In Sri Lanka the early stages of independency the revival of the nation/culture was set around the concepts of land and language (De Mel 2001; Sornarajah 2004). Thereafter during the late 50's women's bodies became the sites of communal violence. When ethnic riots broke out large numbers of women were subject to humiliation through the use of rape and sexual abuse (information gathered during field work and authors reflections of the 1983 riots). Violence on women was not only from the enemy but also within the community. Such violence was justified as a course to protect the honour and integrity of the community. Women's bodies that were the sites of violence were considered not worthy of life and Zakriya & Shanmuganathan (accessed

2005) reveals how Muslim women were asked to jump into wells rather than being raped by Sinhala mobs.

When the political struggle was replaced by the military struggle for a separate homeland, the unprecedented scale of violence by the militants and the response to this violence by the state (page 68) contributed to the militarisation of society. The militarisation of society can be defined as a process, by which a person gradually comes to be controlled and comes to depend for his/her wellbeing on the military and its ideas. The more a person is transformed by the militarisation process the more he/she come to imagine military needs and militarised presumptions to be not only valuable but also to be normal. This process can also involve cultural as well as institutional, ideological and economic transformation (Enloe 2000; Chenoy 2002). As such it could be argued that the formation and ideologies of military, whether of the state or a guerrilla movement, are primarily based on power and control that is mostly associated with patriarchal structures. These structures privilege certain constructions of masculinity, which require the representation of women/feminine as the "other" (Chenoy 2002; Enloe 2000; Yuval Davies 1997; Thambiah 2005). Bodies that do not fall within these privileged groups are humiliated and punished with the use of GBV.

Under this militarisation process the Sri Lankan state and the LTTE have used various strategies to increase their methods of surveillance on public especially on women in the perceived interest of national security. Security itself is narrowly defined in terms such as security of military and political personal, machinery and economic targets. This conception of security and the representation that the enemy (i.e Tamil/Sinhala) being the most dangerous form of insecurity, have raised questions about the intersections of security. This "fear of the enemy" has ignored

other forms of insecurity such as GBV, abductions and extrajudicial killings, child abuse, poor governance and domestic violence that humiliate and destroy women's self respect, identity and lives. This process of militarisation has left no space for intersecting divisions such as different ethnic identities, loyalty and political positioning. Loyalty under militarisation has been demanded forcibly through the use of GBV, intimidation and humiliation as witnessed in Sri Lanka.

The state has deployed instruments such as the PTA against political rivals branding them as national threats and accusing them of treason to justify its intrusion into the private life (Rathnayake 2007; observations made in the field). This intrusion has gone to the extent of surveillance over sexual practices through raids on brothels and guesthouses in areas of the capital under the guise of housing terrorists (Thambiah 2005). Also to communication equipment such as checking mobile phones and laptops (Rathnayake 2007; telephone interview with NGO worker in Vuniya Aug 2009) and on national media through press censorships, and intimidating media personnel who disobey state guidelines.

This censorship has also been extended to films by removing sexual scenes from certain films, even though these films were to be released under the adult's only category (Rathnayake 2007). According to Rathnayake (2007) addressing issues around economic crisis, poverty, gender discrimination and sexual politics through cinema are crucial in understanding society. As such it is incomprehensible that the authorities are eager to prevent public engagement with these issues but rather only provide the people with miss-interpreted information that can be used to inflate government and military pride.

Critics suggest that (Ratnayake 2007) the reality is that the Ministry of Defence is under instructions to prevent anything they consider a challenge to State authority. Rather they pretend that these issues interfere with national security and curtail any public/intellectual engagement with such topics.

As evident from the regular humanitarian agency reports, displacements, rapes, disappearances, abductions, assassinations, mass killings are not considered a threat to national security. These human rights violations and GBV have become acceptable to the state under the guise of defeating the enemy. People are told that the government and its armed forces are engaged in protecting the country from all insecurities. Despite that, there is a genocide or "war without witness" (Channel 4 news 11th May 09) in the North.¹¹

What is shameful is that while the government is engaging in this surveillance of its citizens, the conduct of the armed forces and at times politician's, goes unchecked. Over the recent years the human rights violence in the country has escalated beyond comprehension, thousands of people have been killed, displaced or imprisoned in displacement camps without access to humanitarian agencies. More than 2000 unidentified, mutilated, decapitated and burned bodies have been found in the capital and the surrounding region (Telephone interview with journalist in Colombo March 2009). While the UN Co-ordination offices for Humanitarian affairs have reported that over 13,000 Tamil civilians have disappeared from the government held relief camps (<http://www.Tamil>

¹¹ There is an increase on violence, abductions in the heart of Colombo, intimidation and violence on opposition political party candidates at election time. Even when the Eastern province was liberated from the Tigers a woman who was in a safe house was raped and most recently two sisters were abducted and raped in Baticoloa (Telephone interview with journalist October 2007).

Net.com accessed 02/06/2009). These incidents for the state however, are clearly far less dangerous.

For the LTTE on the other hand, honour and respectability has been linked to sexual surveillance of its women as well as its military and the recovery of dying national culture. The Sinhala armed forces are considered morally and sexually corrupt because their occupation of the peninsula has increased the availability of alcohol and the visibility of prostitution (Ratnayake 2007; information gathered at focus groups). The LTTE also engaged in the use of the services of women to seduce the enemy and blackmail them¹². Further, the LTTE have encouraged humiliating punishments on women prisoners (interview in Chapter Five page 140 with ex-woman combatant Thavamini who was on duty at LTTE prison). Therefore, sexual surveillance has become essential in the interest of military and moral-sexual security of the nation as well as pursuing a Hippocratic liberation policy for its women (Chapter Five page 120).

The state and the LTTE's attempts to cleanse the society have created a binary between the respectability of women and women's sexuality. Women's bodies have become the battleground where competing militaries (i.e. state and the non state armed forces) battle for the honour of the anticipated state. In this contest women are called upon to bear the burden of protecting the respectability of the nation and producing valiant sons (Yuval Davies & Anthias 1989). Women who are asserting their re-productive rights and making choices are intimidated and stigmatised. In August 2008 a horrifying protest took place in front of a Hospital in the suburbs of Colombo, by Buddhist monks opposing LRT (a simple, safe method of family planning) operations on women by accusing them of a move to drive the Sinhala nation to extinction. Due to the disruption

caused, the procedures were stopped and the women were asked to leave. In a country where the cost of living has sky rocketed due to the conflict, it is a woman's right to family planning. This is also legal in the constitution. While this was not instigated by the government or military, the reasons that triggered the protest are that the extremist Sinhalese fear that family planning will lead to the reduction of the Sinhala population and that this is a conspiracy by the NGO's who they allege are sympathisers of the LTTE.

While there is an attempt to control women's sexuality and reproductive rights, the breakdown of social order has simultaneously created space for women to re-negotiate gender positions, economic responsibilities, personal security and autonomy including sexual behaviour (De Mel 2001; Thambiah 2005). This articulation of gender roles and sexuality that cuts across identities such as ethnicity, class and political affiliations has increased the security vulnerabilities to some women who are deemed a threat to "national security" i.e. Tamil women, and women in public roles by entering/associating with communities/groups that are deemed to be the "other" such as the Mannar Women's Centre (page 29) who was threatened by the use of intimidation and violence for their campaign for peace.

The disruptions to social structures and processes have created a discursive space for some women to transgress boundaries where other women are more tightly controlled. For example, the continuation of class and caste lines becomes difficult in relief camps and creates an environment conducive for intermarriages to take place, while at the same time outside of these camps there are strict controls preventing women living/belonging to rival groups or interacting with men/women who are deemed enemies.

¹² Interview with former army colonel on the report on the army's worse scandal in 2007.

Therefore, the transgression of women's sexual and social autonomy that threatens social order can be seen as less welcoming within male dominated nationalist agendas. For the continuation of patriarchy values and military can only be achieved through control of civil society and especially women's bodies. There is no space for negotiation within such strict codes of conduct. In this process curbing women's sexuality and policing women's bodies becomes essential not only to protect the "honour" of the women but also to protect the honour of the nation, loyalty to the armies that represent the nation and the sustainability of the patriarchal structures that are challenged during war.

In comparing national liberation struggles in places such as Colombia¹³, Ecuador¹⁴ and elsewhere it is evident that no sooner the conflict is over, the women who were drawn in to the national struggle had to revert back to their place in society (Enloe 2000). However, for Sri Lankan women protecting the honour and containment of their sexuality has become a priority. The conflict has resulted in the occupation of the north by Sinhala military men and the mass scale displacement of Tamil people into other areas out of the North. These movements of people across the regions have compromised the traditional patriarchal practices by the Tamil community. Thus, the Tamil culture needs to be protected and women's sexuality and reproductive role needs to be controlled. At the same time there is also the need to recruit women into combat to meet the requirements and fighting strategies.

In 2002, the attempt to re-claim culture and protect the honour of the homeland, the LTTE published a handbill. It called upon women to preserve the culture through a dress code in a

¹³ See Justice for Colombia <http://www.justiceforcolombia.org/>

¹⁴ Documentary on Chanel 4 unreported world on the banning of abortions March 2008.

context where Tamil culture and Tamil self-determination had been comprised by the Sri Lanka armed forces. The handbill insisted that women dress in a manner that preserved Tamil culture. Married women were accused of dressing like teenage girls rather than in culturally sensitive attire that signalled they were married. They also claimed that school going teenagers, both girls and boys were loitering on the beach consuming liquor. It urged students to honour those who had martyred¹⁵ themselves in the nationalist cause and called for protests against films that promoted perversion. In conclusion, it read *"True women's rights and women's freedom are based on your education and awareness. Love your land, think of its people, think of its future and make your decision"*¹⁶.

This was not the first and last attempt by the LTTE to control women, even when women were recruited as combatants. A poster put up in Jaffna as early as in 1984 imposed the Ten Commandments for women. This dictated that all young women should wear traditional dress (sari), married women should not be seen in public in housecoats, and women should wear their hair long and not ride bicycles. Women were threatened with being whipped if they chose to disobey these commandments. The LTTE at the time denied anything to do with it, but later they issued a statement in which it called for a similar code of conduct.

"It is important for women to take care in their dress, in their pottu and make-up. It does not mean that we are enslaved if we dress according to tradition. Some married women say that it is expensive to wear saris. This is not acceptable. Women should dress simply, and they should not attract men by their way of dressing. Some women say that is difficult

¹⁵ This was an example of how the politics of sacrifice and martyrdom worked towards influencing women's lives.

¹⁶ A hard copy of this hand bill is available at the Centre for Ethnic Studies, Colombo Sri Lanka

to maintain long hair. These pretensions are wrong. We are engaged in a struggle for national liberation. But the changes, which have been taking place in our culture, only demean our society.” (De Mel 2001: 216)

This statement directed at women and the younger generation at large can be seen as a desperate attempt by the LTTE who on the one hand were unable to cope with the cultural/social changes that were sweeping across the Tamil society that they themselves were largely responsible for; and to re-gain support from the conservative older generation within the community. When there was no visible “compliance”, other statements were issued in 2005 showing how determined the LTTE were to control and restrict women’s behaviour and dress.

LTTE issues dress code for Tamils

Sri Lanka’s Tamil Tigers have imposed dress restrictions for Tamil youth, sources in Jaffna said. Posters put up by the LTTE have detailed separate dress codes for females and males. The growth of beard and long hair has been forbidden for young men. For girls, close-fitting shirts and skirts have been banned along with the wearing of trousers. Instead girls have been asked to wear the Tamil costume of Shalwar Kameez .(Udayan, October 17, 2005)

The response to this from the Tamil community in Jaffna as reported in the same news item was:

“This seems worse than the Taliban. But how to protest?” a young Tamil university student wondered, lamenting that her student allowance was not sufficient to invest in a whole new wardrobe. “Normally a directive like this would bring us out onto the roads in

fiery protest. But this is Jaffna and for us it is like living in a killing field," a woman rights activist said.

However, while the response from the women's groups in the northeast was of anger one woman in the UK told me this:

"I don't think it is a bad thing, especially things like short skirts are not very good for women. More than that now even the low caste girls our dressing like our girls and they behave like our children. Those days we even don't give them water in cups, we use glass jars and once they use we throw it away, but now they even wear clothes like us and want to be equals".

This woman in her early forties wore skirts and trousers and was adopting the western style of living. Reflecting on what she said made me think that this woman's approval of the dress code was based on her anger that women from lower castes¹⁷ wore clothes that were usually worn only by the upper castes and she thought that such dresses should only be worn by women of higher status. This was a clear example of how the dress determined the caste and class in this highly divided society.

The imposition of the dress code by the LTTE in preserving the culture seemed incomprehensible. Despite the claims (De Alwis 2002; Balasingham 1993; Hoole 1990 *et al*.) that the Jaffna society was a traditional society, there were people who were very much urbanised even in the mid 70's. Young boys with long hair and bell bottoms (the beatle styles) were seen in Jaffna during the mid 70's and early 80's. I met two men who were educated in the UK and lived in Jaffna during the

early 80's. They showed me old photos of themselves wearing such styles. It was not only the clothing but sex out of wedlock was a norm for young men who were being educated in western countries in the 70's (Interview with two men who were studying in the UK in the mid 70's. One was living together with his ex-girl friend who was also a Tamil 2006). This was also true for some women (interview with woman journalist Helen (page 244) who lived in the UK during the 70's and returned to Sri Lanka in 1991). While the other admitted that he had several girl friends during that time (interview in 2004). Alcohol on the beach was a recreation to many youngsters (without the knowledge of their parents) and love affairs between young girls and boys of school going age were not uncommon¹⁸. Films produced in India featuring famous actors and actresses such as Shivaji Ganeshan and Jayalalitha were regularly screened in Jaffna. These were films full of music, dance and erotic love scenes.

If the cultural changes were already in place, especially with the mass flux of people to western countries for education, employment and as a result of displacement to other parts of the country (mainly to the capital Colombo) and the winds of change were already blowing across society, protection of culture could not be the primary reason for imposing the dress code.

This research has identified how the containment of women and their sexuality, (in this case via the dress code) is essential for the military machine. Enloe (1989, 2000) demonstrates how gender, women's sexuality and sex work inform military ideologies and the process of militarization, with different and even contradictory consequences depending on their position

¹⁷ See chapter three page 66 for how the Sri Lanka society is divided on caste.

¹⁸ I came into contact with many men and women who are now in their middle age who had formed love affairs during their school years. Some of them continued with their relationships and went on to marry each other, while other relationships ended due to many reasons.

either as combatants, wives of military men and diplomats, workers and sex workers and mediated by factors such as class, ethnicity.

As analysed in Chapter Five, the recruitment of women combatants was vital for the LTTE's to capitalise on its double liberation ideology (Coomaraswamy 1996) and promote the rhetoric of liberation to the land and liberation to the women. While it was essential to recruit women on ideological/strategic reasons at the same time the inclusion of women would have jeopardised the masculine nature of the military. Hence it became essential to assimilate women to become masculine "objects" to minimise the risk of sexual transgression among cadres. The dress can be considered a primary tool in this de-sexualizing process. LTTE women are required to wear combat gear and have short or tied up hair with no makeup or jewel other than the cyanide capsule on their neck (Interview with former woman combatant Thavamini (page 140). When they were not fighting women were given trousers and white shirts rather than any other attire that would impose any signs of femininity.

Traditionally, white colour within Sri Lankan culture is associated with passivity. Women dressed in white are considered to be in mourning. Therefore, it is considered not suitable for young and married woman to wear white unless they are in mourning.

While the women combatants had to be de-sexualised, women within the community needed to be constructed as feminine and submissive so that, they would not challenge the authority of their men, i.e. the LTTE. While the sari and long hair-imposed femininity, the behaviour that refrained them from interacting with other men in the community or cycling (mobility) was to contain their sexuality and independence, so that they would always seek to be "protected" by their men.

Controlling women's sexuality and behaviour was also imperative to preserve the patriarchal structures that are the corner stone of the Tamil society. As a result of the recruitment of men into military groups, many married women are left to survive on their own. In the absence of their men, these women need to be protected from interacting with other men in the community as well as outsiders (i.e. men of the armed forces who have been dispatched to these areas). At the same time there is a risk that these women who are deprived of sexual relationships within marriage may turn to relationships outside marriage. Even though I was unable to find evidence of this during field work due to the sensitive nature of the issue, a Tamil language newspaper *Virakesari* on 2 April 2006, reported an Member of Parliament for the Tamila National Alliance Mr. Ariyanethiran in a speech at a seminar on Women & Culture chaired by the LTTE district commander for Ampara stating that he had evidence of 'sexual misconduct' of women Non Governmental Organisation workers in the East and of numerous abortions that were taking place as a result of such misconduct¹⁹.

Therefore, restrictions had to be placed to preserve the pride of the community (nation) as well as the honour of men and women who are fighting. It was also not advisable to expose the young militants to the luxuries of life, which they were not privy to in the jungles.

Secondly, the changing life styles of women and girls meant more mobility and access to modern life styles that give women social and economical independence. Many men who are returning from the war have not developed social skills that can attract women (this also can be true in the case of some men who are more modernised and who did not join the armed groups). During my research through the interviews I had with the Tamil diaspora and the observations made I was

¹⁹ http://www.peacewomen.org/news/SriLanka/Jun06/use_of_culture_to_control.html accessed 03/03/ 2009

able to gather evidence of many parents who had children of marriageable age who were anxious about finding suitable partners for their daughters and sons, who were westernized. As the woman in an earlier interview told me:

"I can't force my daughter to marry a boy from Jaffna because I know their way of living will not be acceptable to her, also I can't allow her to marry any other than a Sri Lankan because that will disgrace the family – I don't understand what to do, so I pray for her daily" (Saroja (45) London 2006²⁰)

Apart from the risk of women entering into relationships outside their homes to satisfy their sexual needs, there was also a bigger risk of women taking up sexual activities as a means to survive the economic hardships. Unrestricted sexual freedom also posed the threat of unwanted liaisons with men, which could result in distraction to the LTTE cadres and to the recruitment of cadres as men who have lovers or family would be reluctant to join the LTTE.

Added to this is the politics of martyrdom that is essential for the uninterrupted recruitment of cadres to the LTTE. To become a widow of a hero is the ultimate sacrifice that a woman can make for the nation and such sacrifice had to be placed in high esteem. It was a way to keep up the morale of male combatants who chose to fight in the knowledge that their wives will remember them forever by not marrying again and at the same time for the women in the community to appreciate the "widowed" women as role models who have contributed to the cause by sacrificing their men.

²⁰ See also chapter eight pages for the narrative of another woman who told me that she encouraged her husband to strengthen friendship with another family who had a young boy they considered suitable for their daughter.

There is also the danger of liaisons between Sinhalese military men and Tamil women, which can contaminate the “pure race” ideology, and would dishonour the community. This would also send signals of disloyalty to the military, which is associated with the nation (in this case the LTTE). Any form of sexual activity regardless of the circumstance can often be considered risky because this leaves space for compromising the loyalty to the military or national body (Thambiah 2005).

In these circumstances it is of the interest of the LTTE to put restrictions on women to control their sexuality and the most effective way of this controlling process was imposing a dress code and putting restrictions on women’s behaviour.

Dress as a symbol of ‘othernesses

As discussed above while being associated with culture, women’s honour and a way of de-sexualising women, the dress code also became a symbol which differentiates one from another (person/culture) and through such differentiation enhanced national pride. As we have seen in Chapter Three (page 57) the dress code has been a way of identifying the community/class or caste of a person and also dividing the community on these lines such as up country/low country Sinhalese, or Sinhalese and Tamils. For example, when President Mrs. Kumaratunga wore a shalwar Kamiz for a ceremony, there was controversy as to how could the president of the country be wearing such an outfit, which was not traditional Sinhalese attire. Here, the issue became not of her immodesty, but the fact that the outfit she chose did not portray a Sinhala woman. The political impact of this was not immediately visible, although Kumaratunga was later accused of being a traitor for granting concessions to the LTTE as well as adopting western values.

The dress code became a symbol of not only women's honour but also women's ethnicity and transgressing this was bringing dishonour to the community she represented.

"I married a man from Jaffna, my sister married a Sinhalese, on the first day my mother-in law met my sister she was wearing the Kandyan dress (osariya) and she never liked my sister thereafter just because she did not like Kandyan people. At the same time my husband did not allow me to wear a kandyan osari, even though I liked it because it look beautiful on my figure - this is how divided our people can be". (Interview with a woman married to a Tamil UK 2005)

The potential of being identified as the other through the dress also increased the vulnerability Tamil women who are considered a threat to national security. At times women who transgressed the dress code were vulnerable to danger and humiliation

Sriyalatha's case which took place in Colombo in March 2000 just before I left Sri Lanka and reported in the media is an example of this²¹. The woman Sriyalatha (pseudo name) was dressed in a salwar kameez, pants with a long loose top and a shawl draped over her upper body. It is also a dress worn by female suicide bombers because it helps conceal explosives. Security officers became suspicious of the woman's behaviour and asked for her identity card. She did not have one in her possession and had responded in faltering Sinhalese. The security men alerted a nearby military checkpoint. The armed personnel, all men, forced the woman at gunpoint to strip in public. On finding that she had no explosives, "embarrassed" police official took her to the

²¹ See Sri Lankan police order female LTTE suspect to strip publicly at gunpoint Source Tamil Canadian <http://www.tamilcanadian.com/eelam/hrights/index.php/FULL=1000863> accessed 29/07/2004

nearest police station where her identity was established as a Sinhala woman from Kurunegala, a predominantly Sinhala town close to Colombo. It was also established that she worked as a sex worker in the city.

Subsequently, it was revealed that she was from a poor rural family. Her lover, a soldier had died in service. Unable to obtain his salary or any compensation given to families of dead soldiers because she was not legally married to him and having no other way to support their child, she had come looking for work and had met some other sex workers, and seeing no other alternative joined them. As she had no place in Colombo she spent most of the nights with a client or otherwise at the central bus station. She had lost her identity card and was unable to obtain a new one since she did not have the necessary documents such as a birth certificate. .

On the day of her arrest she arrived in a place expecting to meet a client. When he did not turn up she began loitering to find another. The Temple Tree area in which she arrived was considered vulnerable as it was the official residence of the prime minister but occupied by the President at the time and was under surveillance. Two armed forces men approached her and asked for her identity card²², when she could not produce one, they asked her to raise her arms. Out of fear that she would be shot, she kept still. At gunpoint she was asked to raise her kameez and remove her undergarments. Later she was taken to the police station and held there for four days, during which time she was physically assaulted by those who bombarded her with questions for which she had no answer, she was eventually taken before a magistrate on the charge of “failing to identify herself properly” and released.

²² This is a photo card issued to all citizens above the age of eighteen stating their, name, DOB, ethnicity, sex and place of birth.

The only reason for this woman's humiliation and harassment which is also routinely directed by the security forces against anyone who is deemed to be Tamil (interviews in focus groups and my own experience in the field), was that she was dressed in attire, which was commonly worn by Tamil women of her age. While the politics of the dress code is one side of the coin, her story, which was covered in the newspapers reveals the other side. Women have become more vulnerable to entering sex work as a result of conflict related economic and social vulnerabilities. There are more than 8,000 sex workers in Colombo district, according to Community Strength Development Foundation, an NGO (2010). On one hand, it is the outcome of recreational schemes of the armed forces, as Enloe (2000) discuss in the context of international militarization. However, it is difficult to locate evidence of a policy on sex work by the armed forces in Sri Lanka. Yasmin Thambiah (2005) suggests that there is a positive reception by senior officers to offer awareness training to their troops on sexually transmitted diseases/HIV, which indicates that the military is well aware that men regularly visit sex workers and they do not forbid this.

Enloe (1989, 2000) has drawn clear links between the military and prostitution/sex industry, showing how prostitution has been strategically used to boost the morale of the military. I did not find evidence in my research to suggest that brothels or sex houses were organised exclusively for the military in Sri Lanka, unlike in the Philippines. Instead the sex industry is organised by civilians in places such as Anuradhapura, which is the main transit point for the military (observations made during field work; Rathnayake 2007) and Katunayake around the free trade zones, where there is a large military presence. There are many brothels, which are run by women. Politicians, police and armed personal become the key clients²³. Having clients from the

²³ See report "Deputy Minister sips beer in brothel Sunday observer <http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2004/06/13/new14.html> accessed 16/6/2004

police forces or the armed forces is vital for these institutions not only to boost their profit, but also to safeguard themselves from arrest²⁴. Sex work for many women has become a response to the breakdown in economic and social systems, which are a direct outcome of conflict and violence and the result of poverty and unemployment. Others had been sex workers prior to the war. The sex industry is a hidden part of the society and is becoming increasingly visible due to the militarisation as well as the tourist industry in Sri Lanka (Thambiah 2005; Ganeshpanchan 2000).

Transgressing the boundaries of respectability

If women's sexuality and respectability become the corner stone of the nation building process, then what happens to women who transgress these boundaries voluntarily or involuntarily? In a militarised environment sex workers or those perceived to be sex workers become especially vulnerable to the accusation of being traitors and informants. Primarily because, they are unable to select their clients and are compelled to provide services to any person who pays. Sometimes their services can be solicited by force. An example of this emerged during my fieldwork when I contacted an informant for an interview. A brothel operating in Colombo was visited by a group of policemen who were off duty. The men who had been drinking and gambling early that evening did not have the money to pay and were asked to leave the place. Angered by this, they raided the brothel the next morning on the pretext of the brothel being illegal. The women including the owner were arrested and released on bail; my informant was among them who were arrested and later released.

²⁴ Sex work remains criminalised in Sri Lanka under the vagrants ordinance and brothels ordinance of the Sri Lanka Penal code.

At times women's transgression and prejudice against them can result in these women being subject to extrajudicial punishments including death. Thilaga's (pseudo name) story was narrated to me by a relative of hers in the East London focus group. During 1989 Thilaga was living in Jaffna with her children. Her husband had abandoned them some time back and she received no support from him or her relatives towards bringing up the children and was facing financial difficulties. Soon rumours spread that she was prostituting herself. The reason behind this was that she had male university students as lodgers. This is a common problem faced by many women, who live in and around universities even in areas in the south. The simple fact that they keep male lodgers for an extra income is seen as a sexually transgressing incident even if they are married and living with their husbands. On the other hand having female lodgers, is not viewed in such a way and has no repercussions on the man of the house. She was also helping out the 'boys' a term commonly used by local people in the north east when refereeing to the militants in numerous ways. As such, her house was open to regular visitors who were invariably men. Such interactions ensured that the allegations of prostitution persisted.

According to my informant Thilaga had been a helpful person who interacted well in the community. She always helped others in matters such as liaising military (state and non state) who were primarily men. This was also a reason for the rumours to intensify- simply because she was transgressing the sexual code of conduct that dictated women should not interact with men outside the family and she paid the ultimate price for her transgression. In 1989 she was shot dead by the LTTE. Her murder was justified by alleging that she was a loose woman with a "bad character" a label also accorded to women who ideologically disagreed with the LTTE (De Mel 2001; Thambiah 2005).

Why did Thilaga become an enemy? Was it her sexual relations or her political affiliations? Thilaga's interactions with members of rival military groups without any fear meant that she could not be trusted. In real life as revealed by my informant she was a woman of integrity who went out of her way to help her friends as well as the "boys" and hence could be perceived as disloyal to the LTTE. The LTTE in its bid to become the sole representative of the Tamil people wanted the elimination of other military groups, this required total support and loyalty from the civilians. Women like Thilaga²⁵ were not acting in keeping with this. Her support to other military groups and the interactions with outsiders meant that, the LTTE's authority was being challenged, which is not what they aspired to in their image building process. Thus she needed to be eradicated, to heal the wounds of their dented pride as well as to terrorize the community. However, the rumours they spread constructed her as a loose woman that dishonoured the community and needed eliminating to protect the respectability of the community and the imagined nation sending out the message to other women that such transgression would not be tolerated.

Thilaga and Sriyalatha became symbols of immorality to a nationalist discourse that punished defiance of marriage, which is the foundation of the patriarchal society. These women's non-alignment with social norms rendered them interacting with men from various backgrounds and entering into a sexual relationships outside marriage. Both these women did not conform to the what is expected of a woman within the Sinahla/Tamil community.

While Thilaga and Sriyalatha became agents of moral corruption in the eyes of the an institution that demands honour and respectability from women (but does not place it in high esteem for

²⁵ There were numerous other women, who were impassioned by the LTTE for not obeying orders or who were supportive of other military groups. See chapter 4 for more details.

women who are deemed the “other”), they had to be punished for their defiance. However, at times women who transgressed these very norms are made icons for achieving the (sick) ambitions of the institutions when it suits them revealing the hypocrisy around these institutions. Dharmini whose case is discussed below was one woman who became vulnerable to the political economy of militarisation and paid the price for it with her life. Understanding how women’s sexuality can become a powerful sentiment that can mobilise the community against the “other” the LTTE choose to avenge war in her name rather than disown her. This is a clear indication that women’s bodies become sites of war that can be used and abused to fulfil the needs of the state/military – military groups that claim to represent women.

Bodies as sites of war

As discussed in this thesis women's bodies have become sites where violence have been unleashed. It can be argued that the sexual violence women experience are not just by-products of war but are used as a deliberate military strategy, to control women and humiliate the community these women belong to. However, women are not only victims of physical violence at times of conflict. Time after time women’s bodies have become sites of war, where violence is waged and legitimised between nation states/military in the name of women²⁶. Dharmini’s story revealed to me by a woman journalist during a telephone interview (2005) shows how a sex workers body became the site of a war.

²⁶ For example the US decision to wage war in Afghanistan was justified by the treatment of women by the Taliban regime and even today the success of the interventions is projected in terms of women’s freedom.

In December 2005, Dharmini a Tamil women from Jaffna went missing. The next day her dead body weighted down by stones, was found in a well. To date there is no evidence to what led to her death. However, according to my informant, Dharmini was a sex worker who serviced the naval personnel²⁷ - and therefore, that was the reason for her death.

No one to date knows if Dharmini was another victim at the hands of the armed forces or whether she was punished by the LTTE like Thilaga who 'serviced' the enemy? But interestingly a few days later a landmine killed several naval personnel in Mannar. The LTTE claimed responsibility for the attack as revenge for the killing of Dharmini.

Until now I have not been able to find any evidence suggesting who killed Dharmini or the motive behind it, but what is certain is that after her death she became a player (or a pawn) in the battle of the nation. Retaliatory attacks were carried out over her death. A sex worker, who had no place in the honourable nation, became an important character in the continuation of violence. This woman's body, became central to the military's ambitions. Thus, the LTTE who would have gone to any extreme to punish her as they did with Thilaga (page 110), used Dharmini to wage war in the name of the nation.

This is not the only time that the fight over the meaning of a woman's body has been appropriated by nationalism. Dhanu (page 74), who killed Rajiv Gandhi was one such woman celebrated for her violent act by the LTTE. Justifying her deed, the LTTE put out a statement claiming that she

²⁷ See also http://tamilweek.com/Jaffna_University_flash_point_of_tension_1225.html accessed 10/05/2009 for a brief mentioning of the event.

was subject to rape at the hands of the IPKF and that her decision to assassinate the Prime minister was an act of revenge (De Mel 2001).

In reality, Dhanu by her rape became a woman that needed eliminating, for she was a woman who brought shame on her community, she like Dharmini (page 113), Thilaga (page 110) and Sriyalatha (page 106) did not belong to the notion of "purity and respectability" and had no place in the "honourable nation". However, by joining the LTTE and appropriating an identity as a combatant Dhanu (Page 74) was given the opportunity to redeem herself, and her community from the humiliation by assassinating the man who was instrumental in the humiliation she/the Tamil community suffered²⁸. This way her new identity as a Tamil woman combatant gave her a more privileged status than Thilaga and Dharmini who were Tamil women but who chose to provide sexual services to the enemy rather than join the LTTE and fight the enemy. By portraying Dhanu as a woman who killed for revenge, the LTTE gave meaning to her act of terror, sending out the message that "death is better than being sexually contaminated" or in other terms the option for women who have lost their chastity even involuntarily is only death. In the same way the story of Koneswari Murugesupillai (page 134) a young mother, who was gang raped by police became the cause for the central policy camp battle described in Chapter Five.

As evident through these cases women and sexuality are interlinked with militarised Sinhalese/Tamil nationalism. Militarisation has constructed strict gender roles, but at the same time has also created the space enabling women to transgress these, whether as combatants, refugees or as sex workers (Thambiah 2005) creating new identities for women within the

²⁸ Later Dhanu's family was honoured by the LTTE leader for the act of her bravery and the service to the Tamil Nation.

dominant Tamil identity. In this nationalist encounter, women are also expected to safeguard the land and reproduce the culture (i.e. Tami/Sinhala culture), through their sexual conduct and dress. Women have been figured as territory to be conquered and claimed, appropriated and mythologized (De Mel 2001; Thambai 2005; Sornarajah 2004). The case of Dharmini (page 113) reminds us of this ambiguity - on the one hand, she is a site where national pride is asserted. On the other hand, as a sex worker selling her services to the enemy she is hardly the woman who Tamil nationalism would want to lay claim to. Rather, she is a traitor to the cause, betraying the purity of the nation and its women.

The women in Sri Lanka especially in the North are well aware of what could result in LTTE's discovery of a woman interacting/providing sexual service to the military. Ultimately, if Dharmini wasn't already dead, she would have been killed by the LTTE who went on to mobilise violence in her name. This exposes the hypocrisy of LTTE nationalism that cruelly value lives like Dharmini's (page 113), Dhanu (page 74) and Koneswari (page 134) only in death.

The lived experiences of these women caught up in the conflict gathered through field work are also part of a wider trajectory of the militarised nationalist discourse – about lives that are forgotten. These are women that have simply disappeared from the myth of nationalism, the “protection of the motherland/the respectable state”. In reality, these are invisible lives that have been created by the militarised national agenda that will never be visible, accepted or accounted for.

If this is the humiliating treatment rendered to women who do not fall within the notion of the pure and respectable state, then what happens to women who transcend these very notions and

possess intersecting identities such as widows, women who suffer from disease and who are disabled– where do they belong within this able bodied, militarised national project?

Ratha was an elderly lady in her early 70's when I met her. She was the second in a family of five children who were all girls.

“I became a widow when my husband met with an accident. Thereafter, I lived with my parents and after their death by myself. Since I had no children I looked after all my four sister's children. Even when my elder sister died I took over her responsibilities and cared for the children. Despite all this I never was able to attend any of the children's weddings happily, everywhere I went I had to always sit at the back, and was not allowed to wish them well, as I was a widow. I feel so sad when I think of all this but what can I do, I can't bring them bad luck, and my sister's children are my own (Interview with woman in Sri Lanka 2004).

Despite the increased number of widows (a majority of these women are very young women) as a result of the conflict and LTTE calling for women's liberation from oppressive structures, there is no evidence of the LTTE trying to change the existing social attitudes towards widows within the Tamil community. As such these women continue to live outside the social sphere at times facing tremendous economical and social vulnerability. Equally appalling is the situation of older women who have been displaced without any social/ family support and are also subject to security vulnerabilities that need exploring in depth in a future study.

Summary

Militarised nationalism has used symbols such as the dress code to divide, control and humiliate women who have resisted and transgressed the boundaries set by society. While controlling some women's bodies, militarism has created space for other women to transgress the boundaries and appropriate intersecting sexual identities such as victim of sexual violence or women exchanging sexual services for profit. In this process of reconstructing womanhood and controlling women's bodies, sexuality has been dangerously associated with respectability and the nation's honour, little taking into account the vulnerabilities faced by women and the lived experiences of women caught up in this prolonged and vicious conflict.

Caught up between two military opponents, each claiming to represent the interests of the nation and security of its people, the woman addressed in the LTTE handbill, Sriyalatha, Thilaga, and Dharmini due to their intersecting identities and lived experience have become potentially dangerous women who must be humiliated, controlled or eliminated using GBV. The danger these women pose is their ability to transgress sexually and enter into sexual relations outside marriage which is the corner stone of patriarchal society. Other women like Dhanu who are deemed "impure" due to the sexual violence they have faced at the hands of the enemies are given the opportunity of redeeming themselves by becoming human bombs and causing destruction to the enemy rather than live and humiliate their communities.

With the expansion of militarism there are an increasing number of women entering into sexual partnerships with military men either through conventional marriages or through unconventional relationships such as Sriyalatha who lived with a partner. There is also an increasing amount of sex work taking place in and around military camps in areas such as Katunayke, Trincomalee and

military transit centres such as Anuradhapura. The conflict related displacement and breakdown of subsistence economies have increased women's economic vulnerabilities; with increasing pressure to provide for their families in the absence of their men who are either being killed or disabled in the battle or who have lost their income generating avenues due to the conflict and displacement.

Sriyalatha, the woman who was stripped and humiliated in public at a check point in the heart of Colombo and Dharmini who was dumped in the well, tells us a story that uncovers the veil of this social denial of the relationship between militarism and sex industry which is well documented by Enloe (1989). Their stories reveal the lived experiences of women living in the margins in and outside of the conflict zones that have been affected by the reality of the militarisation. The reality is there are many more women who have become vulnerable to the same humiliating life styles as these women (observations made in the field), but yet the wider society seems to be blind to the reality of the sexual exploitation of women that is taking place in the context of the militarisation of the society.

In this attempt to re-claim the nation and the honour of its citizens, women who transgress the boundaries are presented as the other and are subject to humiliation and punishment using GBV. In contrast to this militarisation also creates space for some women to transgress the set boundaries of womanhood by becoming combatants. The hypocrisy of these military institutions are such that at many times women engaged in prostitution or who have been subject to sexual violence have been used to fulfil the ambitions of the military by deploying them to seduce and coerce the enemy. At other times women like Dhanu who have lost their respectability through sexual violence have been recruited to blow up the enemy - making themselves into walking

human bombs. Most ambiguously women like Dharmini who is said to have provided sexual services to the navy have been used to mobilise the nation into battle.

In becoming combatants, women like Dhanu (page 74) and many more whom I have interviewed (in Chapter Five) create a complex intersecting binary as a) defenders of violence as well as b) protagonist of the wars that are waged in the name of women. However, a closer analysis of these women's lives tells us a story that these women live multiple overlapping lives as women, mothers, daughters, sisters, victims of sexual abuse, prostitutes who are caught up in the military economy of sexual exploitation as well as combatants who have taken up arms to resist violence/militarism. Their support to militarism as discussed in Chapter Five is due to the intersecting and at times humiliating lived experiences that they have encountered that is so often ignored by the hegemonies who are eager to represent and construct "what it is to be a woman" during times of conflict.

In Chapter Five the thesis will explore the lived experiences of the women combatants of the LTTE and examine the various discourses around women militants. Thereafter using the women's narratives the thesis will explore the intersecting factors that have led women to join the militarism and take up violence. I will argue that women's enrolments into military units are not always voluntary as claimed by the LTTE by providing evidence of forced recruitment and child recruitment.

CHAPTER FIVE

WOMEN COMBATANTS OF THE LTTE

As evident in Chapter Four militarised nationalism, while denouncing and eliminating women who do not fit in with the “honourable state” due to their sexual contamination or transgression, have simultaneously created space for some women to transgress the boundaries set by society by recruiting them as combatants. In this process of “inclusion” the women combatants are subject to sexual control through prohibiting them to have any sexual relations inside or outside the movement and their bodies transformed to meet the needs of the military body (i.e. masculine heterosexual, single, young, and healthy) through a rigorous training regime

In Sri Lanka women have played diverse roles in the Sinhalese/Tamil nationalistic movement (De Mel 2001; Samuel 2006) as in other militarised nationalist movements in countries such as Zimbabwe, South Africa and Chechnya (Sjoberg & Gentry 2007). A large number of women have been recruited to the State and non-state military groups. According to the history of the Sri Lankan armed forces Women's Corps (SLAWC) was formed in September 1979 as an unarmed, non-combatant support unit with the assistance of the Women's Royal Army Corps²⁹. Hence there has been an increase of women's recruitment into the state armed forces as well as non state military groups. However, the majority of the female recruitment has been into the LTTE, which will be the main focus of this chapter.

²⁹ See <http://www.flickr.com/photos/8586609@N04/2386121573/> for more details of the Sri Lankan Army history and the Women's Corps.

The primary aim of this chapter is to explore what motivates women to join militarism and support violence. In doing so this chapter will briefly look at the history of Sinhala/Tamil women's violent militarism and the military/public discourse around women combatants. Thereafter, using narratives of ex-women combatants who are in exile in the UK, the chapter aims to explore the factors that have motivated women to take up arms and analyses their lived experience within the organisations. Given the intersecting identities women possess, this sample is not a full representation of the experience of all women within the LTTE and the JVP. However, it is hoped that the narratives of women and their lived experience will facilitate an understanding of the reasons women give to support violent militarism and what happens to women when they leave the movements and return to their communities.

HISTORY OF WOMEN'S VIOLENT MILITANCY

JVP combatants

Evidence can be gathered from the fading public memory, few media reports, various documents (Basu 2005) and websites to confirm women's participation in the early stages of the JVP (1971-77). As to the number of women within the organisation in 1971 it is estimated that there had been 2000 women on its "A List³⁰" which comprised of 1,000 full-time members. There was also a "B List" made of sympathizers who were not directly involved in combat and a "C List" made of those who could be approached for help. There is evident confirming that women were on these lists (information gathered from a woman who was with the movement at the time and continues to be a JVP supporter). However apart from this limited information I was unable to gather in-depth information of the women cadres and their lived experiences within the organisation during 1971 other than for the work by De Mel (2001) who gives us a glimpse of information into

Manamperi and a another woman cadre Juliet (pseudo name) who lived in the jungles of Wilpattu during the 70's with a few other women.

Premawathi Manamperi, crowned a beauty queen in the Kataragam, was the most celebrated woman cadre of the JVP³¹. Her murder remains a public memory³² to date.

Manamperi age 22, who was crowned a beauty queen was arrested on April 16 by Police and taken to the nearby Army camp where she was allegedly raped and tortured. A day after her arrest, she was stripped naked and made to walk nude in public, repeating the words "I have followed all five classes³³" After she had walked about 200 yards, she was shot. They left her thinking her to be dead. Later realising she was still alive; she was shot again in the head. (As revealed by an elderly woman during field work in Sri Lanka October 2004)

While there is evidence that Manamperi participated in classes, there is no evidence suggesting that she was an active combat. Her role had been mainly in a supportive capacity. During field work I was able to track down three women who joined the movement in the 1970's through

³⁰ These lists indicate how the organisation ranked their cadres and the rank they belonged to.

³¹ She has been made an icon like Dhanu of the LTTE, in both cases the violence suffered at the hands of the military has been used and abused to gain sympathy.

³² There is a song by Anton John dedicated to her memory and still popular to date that describes her ordeal.

³³ Indoctrinate classes. The purpose behind the five lectures was to explain in simple and plain language the politics of social revolution. The leftist and the Marxists in Ceylon expressed their views in an abstract doctrinaire fashion, with lot of high-sounding phrases, which were alien to the ordinary common man in the country. Wijeweera and his men formulated lectures on such topics such as:

- Crisis of the capitalist system in Ceylon;
- The history of the left movement in Ceylon;
- The history of the socialist revolutions;
- Indian expansion, and;
- The path of revolution in Ceylon

personal contacts; however, they did not agree to an interview. Two women wanted to leave the past behind as they said they have lost faith in their leaders and the entire political system and did not want their children or the community they now live in to know of their previous political activities. Both these women confirmed that they were in active combat and took part in organised attacks. The other woman was still actively supporting the party but did not want to be identified as she feared any future repercussions. In her words:

“The political situation is now worse than the 80’s. One never knows when they (army) will come for you, especially in the future if our party decide to take up arms again³⁴ we will be the first people that the government will haunt” (interview with Parami (pseudo name) in Sri Lanka October 2004)

These women’s lived experiences confirmed that women joined the movement due to various intersecting factors such as poverty, class oppression, unemployment and political discontent. The second insurrection³⁵ during the 1987/1989 was one of the darkest periods in Sri Lankan history. Many women who joined the JVP faced the consequences of their transgression³⁶. Some narrowly escaped death at the hands of state forces while others were imprisoned and faced humiliation, sexual violence and abuse.

³⁴ There was high speculation that the JVP will resort to militant activities again if the Government is not keeping its promises.

³⁵ Details in Mapping the Conflict Chapter three page 57.

³⁶ Commission of Inquiry (1997).

Tamil women's militancy

When speaking of Tamil women's militancy the focal point becomes the LTTE woman combatant. However, there have been a number of Tamil militant groups like the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO) (Gunaratna 1997; Hoole R *et al*, 1990) who began recruiting women to combat before the LTTE³⁷ which highlights the differences based on political, class and caste among the women combatants. Despite the fact that there has been other groups who recruited women, the LTTE women have drawn the attention of the world due mainly due to their military supremacy.

Since the formation of the LTTE woman's wing, through their attacks, suicide missions and high profile assassinations these women have been subject to not only security scrutiny but also to scrutiny by the media, academics and the public (Alison 2003; Coomaraswamy 1996; De Mel 2001; Sornarajah 2004). These women are identified and feared (Gunaratna 1997) as the most deadliest and efficient guerrilla forces in the world.

Represented as *Birds of Freedom* (Balasingham 1990; 1993; 2001) the LTTE women have been represented as the symbol of women's liberation, who have taken up arms to fight injustice and oppression. The women undergo a rigorous military training similar to the male cadres³⁸. Recently there have been many films such as the "Terrorist" by Santhos Sivan³⁹ and another

³⁷ The EPRLF began recruiting women in large numbers for military training since the 1983. This was followed by the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) in early 1985 with the establishment of five training camps for girls in Rathatha Nadu, Tanjaore Tamil Nadu. The Eelam Revolutionary Organization for Students (EROS) also developed a large women's wing.

³⁸ There are many photographs on the Tamil Net showing the training of women.

³⁹ For more information <http://www.terrorist-thefilm.com/> and to purchase the DVD on Amzon.

controversial film by Norwegian producer Beate Arnestad "My daughter the terrorist,"⁴⁰ which has dominated the media headlines.



Figure 5.1 LTTE Combatants in Training (Source Tamil Net, <http://tamilnet/> accessed 26/06/2007)

Engaged in some of the most dangerous attacks, these women have been killed in large numbers in battles and suicide missions⁴¹. Like their male comrades, women fighters are also celebrated as "heroes" romanticising the culture of suicide martyrdom among women. The effectiveness of their training is proved by the women's capability in the use of very sophisticated military technology and the attacks they have carried out. Some women have been recruited to the Sea

⁴⁰ can be accessed www.youtube.com/watch?v=wTF7Png8S9Y.

⁴¹ See file://C:\DOCUME~1\zgan\LOCALS~1\Temp\triODBJP.htm accessed 07/06/2005 for a list of LTTE suicidal missions.

Tigers and Black Tigers squads. These squads can be named as the *killer machine* of the LTTE and comprise of men and women who are groomed for suicide missions⁴².

The role and function performed by women combatants during the early stages of the struggle is acknowledged in a document entitled *Women and the Revolution*: published by the LTTE (1983)

“Our women unit co-ordinated and worked with popular women organisations, trade unions, industrial training centres, health and welfare associations, educational institutes and were campaigning and organising women for the national struggle”.

According to Balasingham the , the first training camp exclusively for women is said to have been set up in Jaffna in October 1987 and got its own leadership in 1989 (Balasingham 1993). Prior to this there is evidence (Rupasinghe *et al* 2006) that the women were trained in India in Tamil Nadu during 1985. While this was the period that saw the highest number of women recruited to the organisation, it is also the time that saw an unprecedented scale of violence against women at the hands of the IPKF in the north east as well as by the Sri Lanka army and the JVP in other parts of the country.

Balasingham (1993) claims that the first battle women participated was against the Sri Lankan forces in July 1986 in Mannar. Thereafter, women have fought against the IPKF and state military participating in suicide missions against political and economical targets including the

⁴² The First Black Tiger Miller drove an explosive laden truck on Sri Lanka Army (SLA) troops garrisoned in a school in Vadamaradchi, killing more than 40 SLA troopers on 5th July 1987. Since his death, 81 Black Tigers, 63 men and 18 women, have died in action on land, and 241 cadres, 169 men and 72 women, have died at sea, (Source July 2007 Tamileelam Heroes Secretariat).

assassination of Indian Prime Minister Women combatants are deployed to man checkpoints and defence bunkers in the areas under LTTE controlled, at times in close proximity to army camps, increasing their vulnerability. These women have been carrying out their work in difficult conditions demonstrating that women are not passive victims of violence but are able to appropriate multiple, intersecting identities that derive from their lived experiences. The woman combatant's physical ability, courage, commitment and dedication to the task have refuted the notion that militarism is a job for the men.

Women combatant's contribution has been crucial to the military advancement and operational strategies of the LTTE. Women have not only been involved in fighting but also involved in non-combatant roles such as medical care, food supplies, transportation of arms and ammunitions, which was essential to the war effort. It was the women who lead the "*organising*" and "*mobilising*" of the public, in street protests, in boycotts and other forms of demonstrations. It is also note worthy that the participants in these protests and demonstrations during the IPKF (page 74) occupation were mainly women.

According to the LTTE, in the Indo-LTTE war (page 74) twenty-six women fighters have been killed. These figures are the LTTE version of the deaths. Given that the women's wing were only trained for battle two years before and until then had been untrained civilians, let alone the IPKF being the world's third most powerful army, there is much evidence to disbelief these figures than to accept them. The LTTE never admitted the actual number of women combatants enlisted or how many have been killed in battle (women or men) or any loss to military equipment and ammunition. The University Teachers for Human Rights estimates that (UTHR October 1987) there were approximately 1,700 women killed during the period.

The defence ministry estimates that since the formation of the women's wing in 1984, 3,728 women have sacrificed their lives in these battles (Defence Ministry 2000). The most number of deaths occurred in the year 2000. Given the fact that government sources traditionally exaggerate enemy deaths this is also not an accurate figure. Therefore, it is difficult to ascertain how many women have joined the armed struggles or how many hundreds have died in these battles. My analysis is that in the count up to 2009, this number of deaths is bound to be on the increase as there have been several suicide attacks and continuous military confrontations in the North which has led to the military defeat of the LTTE.

In a context where the Sri Lankan armed forces have numerical superiority over the LTTE, the female suicide bomber has become an invaluable instrument and a tactical weapon in the LTTE military strategy and the battle against power. The most famous among them is Dhanu (page 74) who blew herself up killing Indian Prime minister Rajiv Gandhi. Shobhna was the first Tamil woman to sacrifice her life in the Karainagar Naval Base attack in 1985. Despite this Shobanha's sacrifice is hardly mentioned as she was not a LTTE cadre and Malathi is widely acknowledged as the first woman martyr (LTTE literature/propaganda material) who died after swallowing cyanide capsule⁴³. The exclusion of Shobana from the public memory is evidence to LTTE's politics of martyrdom that only celebrates the deaths of LTTE carders and not the "other" however great their acts of sacrifice are.



Figure 5.2: LTTE Women Cadre in the early stages of their struggle-(Source: http://sangam.org/taraki/articles/2006/05-05_LTTE_30th.php?uid=1720 accessed 29/5/2006).

CHANGING ROLE OF WOMEN

Caught up in the battle for political autonomy the lives of Sri Lankan women have changed significantly (De Alwis 2002). Women have transformed themselves into public figures engaging in activities that have traditionally been the men's domain. Women have faced endless sufferings and humiliation as victims of violence and political oppression. They have been stigmatised and harshly punished for being seen to be disobeying social norms as evident in the field work. Such sufferings have been inflicted upon them due to their intersecting identities and the gendered constructions that prevail within the Sri Lanka society. Despite these obstacles women have had to take on the roles assigned to men in their absence by protecting their families (young children and old siblings) and becoming bread winners proving that identity is not fixed and that is always evolving as well as overlapping and intersecting, especially where the social order is disrupted in

times such as conflict. As refugees and internally displaced women, they have had to take on additional responsibilities in volatile situations. Apart from their domestic responsibilities women have assumed the added burden of searching for their missing loved ones either abducted or killed by the armed forces/military groups. They have spent days and months travelling from one detention centre to another, meeting politicians and agency staff to seek justice (communications with Visaka Dharmadasa War widows Association) stepping into public activism (Mothers Front Chapter Seven page 208). This has blurred the nexus of the battle field and the home front. However, in the myth of men as the protector and women as victims, their resistance, coping mechanisms or compliance with military groups has been under acknowledged leaving a gap in how women's experiences in times of conflict have been perceived in the context of Sri Lanka.

Women's incorporation into the military especially the non state military groups has shaped the way in which women are seen in society. The inclusion of women into military has seen her advancing from a supportive role at the early stages to a combat role. Through her involvement in the political duties of the LTTE/JVP organisations she has been given the opportunity to engage in more public activities such as organising protests, marches, mobilising other women/civilians. Women have been given the opportunity to build on their political awareness, for example, the 5 lessons of the JVP (see note in page 122)/training within the LTTE. On the military front, her decision to take up arms has challenged the way that women are perceived within Sri Lankan society as well as the discourses around women and militarism itself. And these women have emerged from the position of "protected" to be the "protector" once again denouncing the representation of women as passive victims of violence.

Though these women's participation is perceived to be shaping the future of society especially in relation to women's position and the military/military groups' struggle, their stories that contain their lived experiences and memories have been censored, ignored or under represented. Even in the limited instances where they are being given a voice (Balasingham 1983; 1993), they have been subject to the politics of representation by military organisations that represent them and "talk for them" rather than talk with them (Spivak 1993) like in the case of Dhanu (page 74) who was represented as a woman who killed for revenge.

DISCOURSE AROUND CAUSES FOR ENLISTMENT

The recruitment of women into the military or the mobilisation of resource for war can be argued as a gendering process. Militarisation draws on the stereotypical representations of gender in the definitions of "masculinity" and "femininity" for its functioning and maintenance ignoring that women live multiple and layered lives and appropriate intersecting identities based on their lived experiences. Women are widely categorized as "protected" and "defended". This definition and the separation of protector from the protected are essential to both sexism and militarism. Then the question that needs exploring is that what makes military groups move beyond this stereotypical representation and recruit women as combatants?

Equally important is the destruction of militarism of women. As the case studies presented in chapter four shows time after time women have been exploited by militarism and have been subject to GBV and humiliation. Yet what motivates women to join military groups and perpetrate violence? When mass destruction is unfolded on the streets, and one witnesses the dismembered body parts scattered on the streets, one cannot avoid asking these questions. Why

do these young women take up arms to cause such destruction to themselves leave alone their enemy?

It is public knowledge in the North and East that until the LTTE military defeat there were women enlisting as combatants (Interviews with women in exile Chapter Eight; Vidurupola 2005) and engaging in violence. There are other women such as the JVP activists and the Movement against Terrorism who actively advocate a military solution to the ethnic conflict challenging the myth that women are naturally peaceful.

Military leaders of the state and some experts have (Coomaraswamy 1996) argued that the recruitment of women into LTTE combat was a result of the Tigers facing difficulties in manpower. For others (Balasingham 1983; 1993, and LTTE sympathisers) these women are leading the battles because they are fierce fighters who are resisting state oppression. For the LTTE propaganda mechanism their women cadres are the ultimate symbol for women's liberation.

"Though the armed resistance campaign of the Liberation Tigers has a history extended to seventeen years, the women's military structure has a six year old history. The conservative nature of our social formation, its oppressive structures against women, its gender discrimination, has contributed to the delayed development of women's participatory role in the armed struggle". (LTTE Propaganda material, February 1990).

In a society based on patriarchal traditions, the introduction of feminist ideas like "liberation" and "empowerment" can be powerful messages that encourage women to join military organisations.

But is the enlistment of women purely based on these feminist and political ideologies? What are the other motives that drive women to take up militarism and violence?

The military/public representation around why women join military groups as active combatants in the context of Sri Lanka is critical to our understanding of the politics of representation. For the LTTE, these women are the "*birds of freedom*" (Balasingham 1983; 1993) fighting oppression. For the anti-LTTE groups (i.e. state/military) these women are "somewhat abnormal or brain washed" and the public/feminist discourse consider these women to be victims of an oppressive system (Social/State/LTTE). While various discourses are eager to represent the woman combatant in a manner that meets their agendas, it is clear that the lived experience of women who have decided to take up violence have been completely ignored and the combatants are labelled as "young Tamil women" fighting for a separate state.

Contradictory to this popular representation, the research has established that there are other identities within this dominant category of "Young Tamil Women". For example, there are Sinhalese women who have joined the LTTE for many reasons (information gathered from focus groups) refuting that all female combatants are Tamil women. Similarly there were Muslim and Burgher women within the JVP confirming that all JVP combatants were not Sinhalese. Prior to analysing the narratives of the women regarding the reasons for their taking up arms, the following section will briefly discuss the various discourses surrounding the LTTE combatant.

LTTE representation

On August 20th, 2000, at the central camp police station in Amparai, a town in the East, policemen were preparing for an inspection by a senior official the next morning when the LTTE

surrounded the police station. The attacks killed 15 policemen and many more injured. Some had run away from the LTTE unable to stand the attack and the LTTE drove away with the weapons belonging to the camp. Later it emerged that most of the attackers were fighters from the women's unit of the LTTE.

"We wanted to avenge the rape of Koneswari Murugesupillai and were proud that we were able to destroy the police station where she was raped and killed," said 25-year-old woman Banukah, the political leader of the women's wing of the LTTE for eastern Sri Lanka. (Ganeshpanchan, unpublished MA dissertation Staffordshire 2002)

She was referring to the alleged gang rape and murder of a woman in front of her family members at the police station in 1997. The retaliatory attack was carried out on the anniversary of the incident. (Ganeshpanchan 2002 Unpublished MA dissertation Staffordshire University) - this was later supported by a journalist working in the area and also with the many reports on the murder of Koneswari⁴⁴.

These are the dominant categories in which the LTTE represents the women combatant: either victims of oppression/violence or empowered by taking up arms. By this narrow representation, the LTTE like the other discourses (state, military and public) have failed to take into account that women do have other identities that go beyond the representations of victims and perpetrators.

⁴⁴ <http://www.tamilnation.org/indictment/rape/001222dbs.htm> accessed 22/2/2007.

In an address to women cadres on International Women's day on March 8th 1996 the leader of the LTTE is quoted to have described the liberation of the Tamil women as

"The fervent child that was born out of the Tamil 'national liberation movement'. The women's liberation. Its rise and progress is an incomparably unique chapter in history, for the awakening of the nation and the salvation of the women. The Tamil Eelam revolutionary woman has transformed into a tigress fierce and fiery, she has taken up arms to fight injustice" (Source <http://eelamweb.com/1996> accessed 11/09/ 2004)

There are many such views about the women cadres in the writings of Balasingham (1993, 2001).

Like the LTTE leader, Adele Ann is eager to construct a binary between the national struggle and women's militancy. Through this, there is a deliberate attempt to maintain that women's liberation can come only through the engagement with the LTTE/military groups. This representation ignores the wider engagement of women such as Nay sum Saravanamuttu who was a member in the state council as early as the 1920's and Meenachi Ammal Natesa Aiyar who was a prominent activist during the Suffrage movement in 1928 within Tamil society who has actively worked for social change even long before the LTTE came into existence⁴⁵. Associating women's militancy with the national struggle then excludes those women such as Dharmini (page 113), Thilaga (page 110) and Sriyalatha (page 106) identified in Chapter Four and other women's groups who fought for the right to vote and lobbied for independence from the colonial rule. It also leaves no space for women from other minority communities such as the Muslim women who have faced the violence of the LTTE when they and their families were forcibly evicted from the North. Muslim

⁴⁵ More information about suffrage movement in Kumari Jayewardene & Malathi de Alwis, Casting pearls (SSA)Colombo).

women have been subject to violence and humiliation for a prolonged period (Zakariya and Shanmugartnam accessed 2005). These women are also placed in a subordinate position due to the cultural and religious practices that exist within the Muslim community and face multiple oppression.

Then as the LTTE leadership claim is liberation only for women who take up arms and is the enlistment of these women purely for the causes of liberation or defending their homelands? What other possible motives could there be for the women to take up arms and to choose to kill and be killed? In search of answers I turn to the military that have had firsthand experience of the fighting capabilities of these women.

Military representation

The Military representation of the LTTE female combatant is of revenge and grievances and somewhat abnormal and brainwashed.

There is no doubt that these women are drugged. if not how can they fight like men, how can a normal person blow up themselves like they do knowing that they will be dead in the same time (Interview with former military spokesperson UK 2006).

Despite the military's public face to construct these women as abnormal; three military men I interviewed completely rejected the idea that these women are abnormal,

"A soldier is a soldier for me despite being a woman or man, they are ready to kill, I know there will be lot of people who believe that these women are drugged but I don't".

When I asked about the quotation of their spokesperson one said:

"In any military there will be men and women who are drugged and brainwashed, but then one only tells the side of the story that one want to hear. I have come across several women combatants during my posting to the North, they seemed to be very normal like you and me, and some are very young attractive women. Once we fought a women's battalion and killed several women, we managed to remove the bodies of a few of them to the camp. I left the bodies in charge of a junior officer and went out. On returning I caught the junior officer tampering with one woman's body. I kicked him out immediately, but what I am trying to tell you is that these woman look so normal even when they are dead (Interview with a former Military officer UK 2007)

All three men had been deployed to the front line and experienced the fighting capabilities of the LTTE women which led them to privately contradict the image of the woman combatant that the leaders of the state military is trying so hard to portray. I was also unable to establish any past history of use of substance by any of the ex-women combatants I interviewed. As for the allegations of brainwashing the women said they underwent regular training using various mediums such as political lessons, physical activities and visual and audios that elaborated and re-enforced the culture of LTTE martyrdom which they had internalised.

Public representation

While the LTTE and its sympathisers project women combatants as brave women fighting for the liberation of their sisters and the land the public discourse (academics/feminists/segment of civil society and segment of the media) look at the women in a more ambiguous way. For some, these women have turned to violence as a result of social oppression and believe that women gain limited empowerment by joining the LTTE but raise questions as to how they should be treated in a post conflict society (De Mel 2001) for their violence, while for some (Coomaraswamy 1997) they are fulfilling the manpower needed by the LTTE rather than the liberation rhetoric.

Dr. Rajini Thirnagama, was an LTTE sympathiser in its early stages, but due to her strong feminist ideologies was later rejected and distanced herself from the movement. The price she paid for this resistance was her life. She was shot dead in Jaffna while cycling home in 1989, allegedly by the LTTE. A book she co-authored, the *Broken Palmyra*, gives us an insight into the circumstances that have attracted these young women to the organisation and take up weapons for change within the Tamil Society.

“One cannot be inspired when one sees the women of the LTTE, two by two in the night with their AKS slung over the shoulder, patrolling the entrances of Jaffna City. One cannot but admire the dedication and toughness of their training, seen in the video films put out by the LTTE. One could see the nationalist fervour and the romantic vision of women in arms defending the nation. This becomes a great draw for the women to join the militant movements, our social status quo, and its restriction on creative expressions for women and the evils of the dowry system are some of the social factors that led to their initial recruitment. Moreover, the political climate created by the struggle in the past decade and the increasing loss of men to state terrorist and the world at large as refugees and

emigrants are some contributory factors necessitating women's recruitment. However, it would be an over statement to say that it is the climate of "liberation" the kind of literature that is available, the knowledge of the experience of women in other struggles from far flung corners of the worlds or the rebelliousness against being kept out of the centre of the struggle that was drawing the fertile minds of young women to active participation" (Hoole et al 1990 pp 325)

She suggests that women were drawn into the organisation not only by this romantic notion of "liberation" as its leader and advocates are eager to stress, but also as a result of the social inequalities that they are faced with.

While the LTTE, military and public representation of the women combatants are not only divided this representation has ignored the multiple and layered identities and experience of Tamil women such as Dr Thiranagama who were educated and married to a Sinhala man but yet supported the LTTE in its early days and other women such as Thavamini (page 140) who are caught up in the conflict. Using women's narratives of their lived experience the following section will try to facilitate the understanding around the motives that drive women to join and support militaries.

Women's Voices

From interviews with ex-women combatants now in exile in the UK, I have tried to understand the motives that have led to their enlistment so that it might help us understand some issues surrounding women's support and involvement in militarism. In addition to women's narratives and interviews, I have used evidence gathered from secondary sources such as human rights

organisations, publications of women's organisations working in the north east and media reports for a border analysis on why women join militarism.

The following intersecting, push and pull factors have emerged in my findings as trigger points that motivated women to take up arms. However, it is essential to bear in mind that there are other intersecting factors such as the notion of humiliation that the Tamil community and the structural violence carried out by the state that have encouraged the recruitment to the LTTE.

Push Factors

Victims of Violence

As discussed in chapter one GBV has become a key arbitrator in the conflict. The occupation of the North by the army and IPKF resulted in large-scale violence including GBV on women and girls. The natural reactions to the humiliation inflicted by these horrendous acts can be the desire for revenge. This was evident with the case of the attack on the police camp (page 134) that murdered Koneswari. But however great the desire for revenge, the question is how one individual would take on a mighty army? The only alternative for people who wanted revenge was to join the LTTE or any other armed group who could match the power of the enemy and this is what the LTTE manipulated and thrived on.

During interviews two participants confirmed that they had suffered violence. For one woman, I will refer to her as Thavamini (below), violence was the primary cause for her to join the LTTE. The other woman Ranu (page 239) fled the country in fear of further violence, seeking asylum in the UK. According to Thavamini there were other women in her unit who were subject to sexual violence that led to their enrolment.

Thavamini's (then 22) story

"After coming from the market, I was alone when I heard knocks on the door. It was two IPKF men asking for water. While I went in they followed me inside and closed the door. One man told me, that if I shouted he would shoot me while the other pushed me on to the floor. When I fell he pulled my clothes off (silence...) when he finished the other one took his place. (By now she was clearly in distress her face turning red and choking-I told her that she did not have to continue.....) After a few minutes she continued... they left and I was devastated... I knew what happened to the other women who faced such things in the village.... A few weeks before a woman committed suicide because of such incidentⁱ... I must have stayed there for a long time -- I was a virgin until then. I wanted to kill myself, but then the whole village will know what happened to me and it will be a shame on my family.... Next day I took my dirty clothes and burnt them- I watched my virginity burn in that fire; I walked to the sentry point...never to come home again. "Nobody in my unit knew why I really joined. I told them I was scared after what happened to my neighbour⁴⁶-later I got to know other girls who had faced the same kind of things. But we did not talk about these things openly because we did not want others to know and also it was not encouraged. (Interview with ex-woman Combatant in exile in UK May 2006).

Thavamini served the LTTE for several years, during which time she says, she fought the IPKF and the Sri Lanka army and suffered gun injuries that resulted in the in amputation of her left leg. Thereafter, she was discharged and fled the country with the help of a relative in fear of being apprehended by the army.

Apart from the violence to their own bodies, many have also experienced the violent deaths of their husbands, brothers, fathers or other family members and have witnessed extreme violence against other women like Krishanthi Kumarasamy a school girl abducted at a chek point gang raped and murdered by Sri Lankan army soldiers, Saralathambi (page 22) and many more.

As such the experience and fear of violence and the humiliation caused by such violence is a primary factor that has pushed some women to support the LTTE.



Figure: 5.3 Women weeping for their relatives on Maha veera⁴⁷ day (Source <http://tamilnet.com> accessed 22/8/2007)

The LTTE continue to re-ignite the memories of these gruesome events by celebrating anniversaries with further acts of violence. Celebrating death and martyrdom are strategies

⁴⁶ A married woman in her neighbourhood had been raped few weeks ago

adopted by the LTTE to justify violence and the suffering women/men have to undergo. It is also a strategy adopted to shift the blame onto the Armed forces/other groups and to distance civilians from the state forces culminating in fear and hatred. The physiology of fear, anger and humiliation leaves them with no other alternative but to extend their support to the LTTE who claim to be fighting to avenge the pride of the Tamils and re-claim the land from the invaders. In this battle women's bodies have been transformed to sites of war where violence is reproduced to achieve the military ambitions of the state and LTTE.

Inflicted by either party, GBV is used to humiliate women and the community they belong to. Further, violence is used to extort information on perceived involvement of women or the involvement of their spouses and other relatives, to suppress dissenting voices and to instil fear among the civilians. At all times, the methods adopted are humiliating, brutal and extreme. Sexuality has been a central theme. Methods used have been sexual assaults, gang rape, placing hand grenades in the vagina, the cutting/burning of nipples, inserting S-Ion pipes⁴⁸ into the vagina and other forms of torture⁴⁹.

While violence from state armed forces have become a main factor for joining military groups, violence at the hands of the LTTE have also encouraged women to join them out of fear of the repercussions of not doing so (case of forced recruitment in this chapter page 169). The LTTE

⁴⁷ The day celebrating the heroes- where LTTE combatants who died in battle are remembered.

⁴⁸ S-Ion is the trade name given to these pipes which made of a material stronger than plastic and is used for construction purposes.

⁴⁹ See reports of the Human rights organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights watch , the report of the commission of the involuntary removal (1997) full reference cited in the reference section and case studies in this research .

have been forcefully recruiting civilian women to join the organisation as well as training other women to fight.



Figure 5.4: Training of Civilian women by a LTTE woman cadre. (Source: news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_pictures/4753509.stm accessed 22/8/2006)



Fig 5.5: Training of Civilian womenwww. (Source: tamilnet.com/img/publish/2006/02/self_def accessed 22/8/2006)

"They to come to the village at night and threaten us and take away all the food left in the house. At times they clash with the army and come running into houses and hide forcing us to lie to the army putting our lives in danger. (Reflections of a woman now living in the York, UK; March 2005).

It was evident that violence and the fear of it has been a key contributing factor for women to join military groups. While violence has become a key factor, another intersecting factor has been the humiliation women face as a result of social oppression.

Social and Cultural Oppression

Social and cultural oppression can be argued as the biggest enemy in the lives of Tamil women. The oppression women undergo is not limited to caste and class as documented in Chapter Three (page 61). Poverty, the burden of dowry and social exclusion are other common oppressions in many women's lives which have driven them to find alternative choices.

Mathavi's story

Mathavi (then 18) was the youngest of a family of four. Her father a rich and respected man in the village took pride in educating all of his children. After completing her Advanced level⁵⁰she received a scholarship to enter a university abroad. There she met a man not so wealthy as her family. Despite the differences in wealth, Mathavi's parents agreed to the marriage and the groom was given a handsome dowry in cash and property. The boy who completed his degree went on to further education rather than

⁵⁰ University entrance exam conducted by the Ministry of Education of Sri Lanka.

gaining employment. He used all the money he was given as a dowry to pay the dowry for his sisters. Mathavi was left to work and earn for the family. She was forced to ask for more money from her parents to provide for the man's family, which she did in fear of her husband and the in-laws. She carries the scars of this to date (Interview in May 2004 in the UK when she visited her brother).

According to Sornarajah (2004) and as evidence gathered from the field work, dowry and the ideology surrounding dowry is an issue of anxiety for Tamil women across class and caste. Women are faced with the burden of dowry that is deeply rooted within the Tamil society⁵¹. The ideology of dowry cannot be viewed in the superficial context as a gift that is given to the new couple to start their life together. It can be argued as a more complex patriarchal process, which has been adopted to undermine the value of women. Through dowry the family transfers the ownership of the women who is traditionally viewed as a dependent due to her not earning a wage, to the family that she is married into. Even when the woman is educated and earning it is the woman who pays the dowry and not the man which confirms that in patriarchal cultures women are considered a burden.

While Mathavi's parents were able to afford the dowry and even supplement it further, many parents of young women are not able to meet the demanded dowries resulting in many being given in marriage to incompatible men who did not seek large sums of money. At the same time there is also the issue when parents can afford to pay large sums of money, in such cases women were given in marriage to men who were above their status either in terms of caste, class or education. Women who got into such marriages suffer in silence not being able to cope with the

families they married into as the man's family constantly looks down upon the woman either due to her being from a lower caste or being uneducated. As such, the system of dowry affects women in different ways.

Abirami (then 26), from a wealthy family in Colombo was given in marriage to a surgeon paying a large dowry. Unknown to the girl's family the man had several affairs. He in fact had been living with another woman. However, when offered the amount of money he gave up his relationship and married Abirami. After marriage the mother of the man moved in to live with the couple and there was constant rift between the mother and daughter-in-law. This rift came to the point of the couple being separated for a while. Rumours spread that while the family was falling apart the man had again continued to carry on with his extra marital affairs encouraged by his mother. Abirami by now was pregnant and not working and was suffering with depression. However, after much intervention the couple were re-united and they moved to the UK. As of today they live a life that is full of rift and suspicion, but put up with the marriage for the sake of the child. (Story revealed by a woman in the East London focus group in 2005 UK)

In the fieldwork women gave examples of the breakup of families, domestic violence and at times even suicide caused by dowries. The issue of dowries sometimes even haunted the young women after their marriage and at times even after the death of the husband.

Puvi's story related to me by her sister who now lives in the UK (2006)

⁵¹ This is also practiced among the Sinhalese.

Puvi the elder of four girls was given in marriage to a public servant with a dowry in cash and jewellery. After marriage at the age of 24 she went to live with her husband's family. Unknown to Puvi's family the man was an alcoholic and was in debt. A few years later her husband committed suicide. After her husband's death, she stayed with his relatives. When her father went to bring her home and they got ready to leave the house, his mother-in-law asked Puvi for all the jewellery that she owned as those were a part of the dowry and that the dowry belonged to the husband and in his absence to his parents. Puvi's father, without further questioning asked his daughter to leave the jewellery behind. It was only years later that they got to know that Puvi even took the savings from her book and gave to the man's parents to settle the debt that they said the man incurred due to his drinking habits. Puvi never got married nor wore any jewellery there after (Puvi was the Aunty of a woman in one of the Focus Groups 2005)

The majority of women joining the LTTE are said to be from lower castes and class, for the conflict related displacement has seen the outward migration of the well to do, affluent people out of the north and east either to other parts of the country or overseas. Their prospects of marriage are bleak as a result of the intersecting social problems such as poverty, the burden of dowry and caste systems that prevail in society. Many young women have no social status, no educational attainment or wealth, which are prerequisites for marriage. The war has also taken away the lives of the many thousands of young men while many have left the country as asylum seekers.

Even though the LTTE has pledged to end the caste and dowry system they have not been successful in this. Today the expected dowry is ever much higher than it ever was and there is

much pressure on parents to find new ways of paying dowries rather than the traditional ways of paying by property as lands do not fetch much value due to the conflict.

Evidence gathered from the field work showed that there are intersecting reasons for the dowry system to be intact within the Tamil community and for the LTTE not actively promoting its abolition.

Firstly, the war has seen an increase in the number of men leaving the north east, joining military groups or being abducted. As a result, young suitable men are in much demand and the parents of boys seek large amounts of dowry (money, jewellery property outside the conflict areas) from girls as this has become a viable lucrative trade.

For the women living in the conflict zones marrying a western citizen is a passage to safety. Parents of these women will pay the sums demanded by men rather than sacrificing their daughter to the LTTE or to face violence from military forces. During my field work in the UK I met a young woman who had paid SL Rs. 40 lacs (approximately £20,000) to a man who had residency in the UK as dowry.

Parents of women pay the dowry and in the absence of the father it is the responsibility of the brothers to find dowry for their sisters. In the light of many young men joining the LTTE or being unemployed or dead, the only way for them is to get girls with large dowries so they can pay dowry for their unmarried sisters.

Promises by the LTTE to end the practice of dowry can be seen as a way to make women buy into the liberation rhetoric. There is no evidence suggesting that the LTTE has earnestly attempted to end the practice of dowry. The LTTE was aware that if it had to gain support in the wider community, they had to adopt a blind eye, as it is a fundamental part in the contract of marriage and the Tamil community have relied on it as a financial instrument to top up their family wealth for centuries as well as to boost the pride of the family. For the family that received the dowry it was a pride that their sons were valued at a "high price" as well as for the families offering dowry, the pride is associated in the purchasing power of a son-in law who brings status to their families. In such circumstances, the abolition of the dowry is not something that the patriarchal Tamil society is likely to approve and if the LTTE had adopted a different policy, it would have not been in the favour of the LTTE as it would have led to a reduction in the support they received from the Tamil people.

On the other hand, the realities of the conflict have created a more conducive environment for the oppressive system to flourish, which is also partly the responsibility of the LTTE and therefore, they were unable to force such a fundamental change on the people.

More importantly it is also a way for the men who joined the LTTE to evade their responsibility of earning for the dowry of their sisters as the LTTE in no way wants them to be seen as people who are tied up by family responsibilities but only dedicated to the organisation.

Equally oppressive is the caste system that has been deep rooted within the society, inhibiting women's progress; even at times leading them to take their own lives. This is a case where one woman had to take her own life

Saratha from an upper caste family fell in love with a boy from a lower caste in her neighbourhood. With growing intimidation towards the boy and virtual house arrest for Saratha by her parents, the young woman saw no prospect of her getting married to the man she loved so she chose what she thought was the only option available to her to commit suicide. She set herself on fire, sustained severe burns and succumbed to her injuries. (Story as narrated by a family member living in Newcastle May 2005 UK).

Despite the changes taking place within the Jaffna community, the practice of dowry, caste and class continues to play a prominent role in determining social relations. Even while the upper class Jaffna man/woman sympathies with the cause of the LTTE, one thing that keeps them distanced from the LTTE is the caste consciousness.

This was the answer I got from one man when I asked him if he would ever return to Jaffna-

"How can we live under those low caste men and women telling us what to do... our family was a leading family in Jaffna, we never even entertained lower caste people into our court yard"

Another woman was furious when her daughter decided to sell their ancestral property (now abandoned) to a low cast woman who lived on rent from the property.

“What would our neighbours think of us... all who lived in that street were upper caste people, and now when we sell our house to some low caste people? They will be very angry with us” (Woman in Newcastle focus group; May 2005)

In a society where caste is deep rooted for young women and men who are from lower caste and low classes within society - the few ways for upward mobilisation is education, economic status or marrying into an upper caste family. However, social memory is such that even when such people attain some status within society - their social interactions are being scrutinised by the lens of caste - an example of this can be the situation of the late Sri Lankan president Mr. Ranasinghe Premadasa and his wife Mrs. Hema Premadasa. Mr. Premadasa was a man from a lower caste and class - despite his hard work and achievement of president in the country his every move was interpreted with the stigma of a lower caste man.

As such social oppression within the same community has become another key factor for young women to support militarism. While in the same way caste and class have also become factors for some women to oppose militarism

“I can remember when we went to get our papers signed to leave Jaffna, Kittu was riding on a motor bike and every one had to give room for him to pass as if he was the lord-the boys at the desk who were issuing the papers were from our own village-low caste fellows, so how can we go there and live again, you know when low caste fellows get power or money how they try to show off” (reflections of a woman of her flight to safety now living in UK 2006)

The burden of the dowry system combined with the caste, class and the loss of livelihoods due to the conflict has meant that women also face economic vulnerabilities that have pushed them towards the organisation.

Economic reasons

In her study of the El Salvador conflict under the dictatorship of General Hernandez that cost 30,000 lives over a twelve-year period Ana Cristina Ibanez (Ibanez 2001) recalls that the majority of women were found in the neediest social class. She suggests that this might explain why so many women joined or supported the guerrilla's and responded to the call to build a better future for their children and fulfilled their social identity of self-sacrifice and 'giving themselves for others'. This has also been true in recent conflict in Nepal (Interview with an NGO worker stationed in Nepal UK 2006).

In the context of Sri Lanka the social crisis in the deep down south of the country in the early 70's and late 80's described in chapter three was an example where the young men and women of the JVP took up arms to fight a regime that excluded them from the mainstream social and economical benefits, a core concept they even hold today after entering mainstream politics (see interview with Vijitha Rohana, published on info Lanka 31/12/2007). Unemployment and economic inequalities played a major role for the JVP to gain support, but the political indoctrinated classes they conducted reinforced the youths' anxieties and persuaded them to embark on the path of violence.

This has been true among the Tamil community, if one carefully analyses the context in which the LTTE came into existence, was social exclusion and injustice against the Tamil community from the state as well as their own community i.e. the upper class Tamil politicians who betrayed the common people during the early post independence era (see Chapter Three page 57). Pushpam's story is an example of a woman choosing to join the LTTE to escape the economic situation she was in.

Pushpam's story

"I was 19 years old when I ran away from home. My parents wanted me to get married to a man who I did not like. I begged them to leave me to study. They did not listen to me. The man whom they arranged was rich and had promised my father that he would redeem some land for us, which my father mortgaged to give my elder sister in marriage a few years ago. He also did not ask for any dowry so my parents thought it was a good marriage for me.

One afternoon in the pretence of going to see my friend I went to a check point and told the woman guards there that I want to go with them. They asked a few questions about my family and I told them the truth.

I was not angry with my parents because I know they wanted me to marry that man because they wanted me to be happy and my family was poor they could not afford to teach me or give me in marriage to a better man, but then I felt let down so I did not want to go and visit them.

I stayed with the LTTE for almost ten years, during this time I fought in many battles-one day a few of us were manning a road side barrier and came under heavy shelling, one died and I was injured – so there after I could not continue and I was discharged.

What do you think about the LTTE: (she laughs loudly)-

“At least there is a place for women like us who have nobody to turn to- they teach us how to be courageous and not to be shaken by defeat, which are things you can’t learn by living in Jaffna society. But I think women need a better life - for that matter anything than living in the jungle and fighting - sometimes it is fun but then it is not a way of life forever- even when I was with them I missed the life outside, I like nice things in life, but you don’t get them there.

Have you killed anyone?

“how do you know how many you kill when you fire a weapon in the dark, may be one may be a dozen or may be none - you go to kill and they come to kill so the lucky ones escape and others get killed”.

Do you regret killing?

“I will not kill anybody now, but then I had to do it and if I did not do it - I would have got killed” (Interview with Pushpam ex LTTE combatant in UK March 2005)

Pushpam joined the LTTE to escape a situation that she did not want to enter into due to economical difficulties. She had no hatred towards the LTTE or the Army as she thought they were all fighting a war and they were performing a job - the only regret she had was not being

able to get a university education - and being disabled⁵² she finds it difficult now, but is constantly reading and trying to improve her knowledge of the outside world.

While economic oppression is a primary cause for enlistment the economic benefits also have been an important element in the support to militarism. As we have discussed earlier in Chapter Three (page 57), in any conflict there are people who benefit from the conflict.

It can be suggested that economic oppression was a common factor that linked women from all ethnic groups to join military groups. Also this has been a common fact for men and women to join military groups.

However, while the LTTE claims women's liberation, it has made limited effort to eradicate the existing social inequalities that exist within the Tamil community. As pointed out in page 146 the LTTE did not adopt effective measures to end the practice of dowry, class or caste systems. The conflict has further exacerbated these social problems and women have become more vulnerable. There are a large number of women who have become widows and elderly women are struggling to make a living facing humiliation and trauma. As evident in chapter four this vulnerability has lead to women taking up alternative income generating avenues such as sex work (Dharmini page 113) and working as domestic aids (see Parvathi in page 243) facing further exploitation.

The breakdown of the economic system has also meant that there has been limited opportunity for many young men and women to get an education mainly due their parent's inability to pay for

⁵² Face partly burnt, and paralysed below the knees.

schooling. While economic reasons are only part of the story, the fear of sending children out due to the fear of violence/abduction has meant that more and more girls are dropping out of school and seeing the LTTE as an alternative.

Breakdown of education

The breakdown of the economy and the education system due to the conflict has raised several problems at community level that have led to the falling number of students from school and the falling standard of education. This is not only a problem in the conflict zones, but also the latest Ordinary Level results in Sri Lanka in 2007 showed that 51% had failed the exam, this is due to many reasons. There are many children who are unable to attend school due to the army occupying school buildings, destruction of school buildings, refugees being placed in schools, and therefore these children are vulnerable to easy recruitment to military groups.



Figure 5.6, shows LTTE women, show a group of school girls in uniform, how to handle weapons.

(Source: <http://www.irmep.org/essays/hf.htm> accessed 22/02/2006).

The regular LTTE drills often take place outside schools in order to attract young children –this is a further pull factor. This was also confirmed by Thavamini in her interview (page 140)

Furthermore the fear of sending children to school due to harassment at check points, recruitment by the LTTE or other military groups and aerial bombardments has seen children drop out of school. While increased economic hardships on the families also mean that girls drop out of school early. For a society, where education for men is a must for upward mobility and a means of attracting a woman with a large dowry, there is little encouragement for women to take up education in difficult circumstances.

The recruitment drive of the Sri Lankan forces are also playing an important role for the Sinhala youth to take up military and para-military activities as a solution to unemployment and lack of educational facilities (Ratnayake 2007). Many young men and women are leaving school after achieving their Ordinary Level to join the forces (personal observations made in the field).

While the push factors are documented above that may support women to join military groups there are also other intersecting factors, which can pull them towards the cause that military groups are fighting for.

Pull Factors

Nationalism and Ethnicity

Nationality and Ethnicity are sentiments that can be manipulated towards mobilising people against each other that lead to violence as seen in the cases of the partition in India, Kosovo and

many other conflict zones. This has been equally true in relation to the post independence nation building process in Sri Lanka, where people with political interests, used nationalistic rhetoric to divide communities and gain political legitimacy. Nationalism while creating the notion of “us” versus “them” calls in women to play diverse rolls such as reproducing the culture (Yuval Davies & Anthias 1989). These roles created for women demand the loyalty to the nation and its armies that represent them as seen in chapter four. Women who do not comply with these demands are excluded from the nation state. Despite the political manipulation surrounding militarised nationalism which we have discussed through this research, these aspirations have played a significant role in women’s motivation to support military groups. This support not only comes in terms of ideology, but also women have chosen to join military groups and become active combatants. Participants in the research echoed the sentiments of nationalism and national pride and quite often related to them as Tamils who were being oppressed by the Sinhalese.

While nationalism was a complex and hidden factor that has motivated women to join the armies, they also see the LTTE as an alternative to mainstream politics; the Sinhala political hegemony that they thought had denied them their rights.

Alternative to mainstream politics

Hammani (1997) suggests that joining secret terrorist organisations may be a way for women who live in oppressed communities to see themselves as fighting for social justice. In its initial stages in the 1970’s the LTTE presented themselves as an alternative to the crippling Tamil parliamentary politics, which was dominated by the upper class, western educated, male Tamil politicians who had failed the Tamil people. This was made more feasible by structural violence by the state discussed in length in Chapter Three. As a result, the LTTE was successful in making people

believe that an armed struggle and a separate homeland would be the only way to address the grievances of the Tamils. This was a major drive for the younger men and women to join the organisation.

This was the case with Rajini Thiranagama and her sister Nirmala (page 138) who supported the LTTE cause in the early stages, when it presented an alternative political solution for the grievances of the Tamil community. Nirmala was even imprisoned due to her support to the LTTE. These women were educated women of independent thought, but when they realised the real face of the LTTE, they distanced themselves and faced severe repercussions; Nirmala had to again go into exile and Rajini was murdered.

In any society young people are naturally in search of radical solutions to the political and social problems faced by the community. This has been proven by the JVP experience, where many who joined the movement were young men and women and the majority university students.

The universities have always provided a fertile ground for social change. For example, the revolution that brought Fidel Castro into power began in the University of Havana⁵³. As such, it is no surprise that we see a large number of university students joining the militant movements at the early stages giving the LTTE a socialist outlook rather than of a guerrilla group. These young people may have believed that they would realise their dream of a separate state/revolution within a few years and reap the benefits; which not came to be so⁵⁴. When the LTTE and other armed

⁵³ Information gathered from various books on Fidel castor and Chef Guevara and my visit to Cuba in 2009.

⁵⁴ I made contact with many University students at the time, who are now in the UK. They all knew at least one person who had joined the militants (LTTE or other group). One recalled how his best mate a young bright medical student at the time, left his career and joined the LTTE and lost his legs in a lond mine and later was murdered by the Army.

groups were deviating from the promised path of liberation and taking up the root of violence it can be that many students were disillusioned and wanted to leave. Some of them who left the LTTE had to flee the country, many were trapped and could not leave and sacrificed their lives in the battles “he was in the Medical faculty with me in the first year and then left to join the LTTE- after that I got to know he lost both his legs” (Interview with a Tamil doctor now in the UK . Others like Vijithaharan⁵⁵, who wanted to leave, paid the price with their lives for their defiance.

The authoritarian nature of the LTTE is such that even if members left the organisation, in very rare circumstance due to reasons such as disability, they still had to assist the organisation in other ways, but they were not allowed to return. Therefore, they are more likely to stay with the organisation rather than leaving and be intimidated.

While for some the LTTE was an alternative to mainstream politics, some women (and even men) saw the life that the LTTE promised as a new way of life. This was especially after the 1983 riots, when young men who were brought up in Colombo came into the scene, for example, the men who had adopted the Colombo urbanised life style wore gear that aroused youth sentiments and attracted them to the organisation (Interview with former LTTE supporter now living in the UK 2007).

Militarism as a way of life

Contradictory to the “liberation” ideology there are some women who see that militarism can be a way of life - another job, as one woman told me.

⁵⁵ Vijithaharan was student at the Jaffna university

Kanka's story

I am happy to be a soldier. One-sees women soldiers in the Sri Lanka army- why don't you ask them why do they join? Surely some will say for a job, likewise this is a job for me-only I did not get paid, but I was taken care of -I also got the opportunity to learn how to live in the society which otherwise I would I have not got. Do you think those woman out there who wear a heap of gold around their big fat necks walking on the streets are happy? Then you are mistaken-do you know how many women are suffering in silence within the four walls of their houses, how many are being ill treated by their husbands and in-laws? I am not worried about finding food for my children or my husband; we all do the chores here and everyone looks after each other. Even when I see the army I smile - I am happy, either I will kill them or they will kill me any way one day we all have to die-and the cause is worthwhile so I am happy (Telephone interview Kanka, Woman combat July 2006).

This woman did not give me any information about her or the movement-she was the only woman I had the opportunity to interview within the organisation, therefore, she was reluctant to provide any information that would lead to her identification. With the little information she revealed she seemed to be a formidable woman who could face up to any challenge.

It was clear, that Kanka joined the organisation she saw it as an alternative to the life outside. She also proved that women are not always driven by their gender or victimisation to take up violence. But her reference to "other women are suffering" indicated that oppression she had witnessed was

one reason that led to her decision to join, though it had not directly affected her. She had a valid point in her argument – if state military groups employed women then why not the LTTE?

Does the fact that women are recruited by organisations such as the LTTE (either who refer to them as freedom fighters or liberation fighters or terrorist groups as their opponents may call them) can be less empowering than when women are recruited into formal military groups? The two interviews I had with the women from the formal military (Irangani and Sriyalatha) are evidence to that women serving in the formal military do not enjoy any more status than a women in a guerrilla movement apart from a remuneration that helped support their families⁵⁶. Kanaka's answer to my question of what will life be when peace comes: *"I will only know about it if I happen to live until that date, and I am sure our leader will take care of it"*, it struck me hard. Even though she was a strong woman who made a choice to follow her heart, her dependency on the leader to take care of her (women's) future in a post conflict situation somewhat surprised me. If women are thought to depend on a single person and have no voice in defining their own liberation/future, then can it be called autonomy?⁵⁷ They also see the leader/s as role models that they themselves aspire to be and this has become another important pull factor.

Glorification of Military/Role Models

According to Dr. Thiranagama (page 138) it is clear that many joined the LTTE due to its symbols and role models. The interview with Thavamini (page 140) revealed that the new recruits were

⁵⁶ See also article in Metro dated 5th July 07 where a woman was sexually harassed by an army sergeant in the British army.

⁵⁷ My fears for Kanka's reliance on the leader had proved to be valid with the unexpected defeat of the LTTE by the Sri Lankan army in May 2009. The LTTE leader and his top men are said to be killed and the army continues its spree of killing suspected LTTE men and women.

mainly children of school age. They usually performed drills near schools or in playgrounds where children gather (see photograph Fig 5.6 in page158).

The cult of martyrdom has been embedded in the LTTE discourse through various symbols and traditions. The LTTE practice to built cemeteries for the heroes is entirely radical change from the Hindu custom of cremation and scattering the ashes in running water (see picture in Fig 5.3 of these cemeteries page 143). The main purpose of this may be to re-create the images of the fallen men and women to arouse people's sentiments.



Fig 5.7 Memorial arcs commemorating fallen Black Tigers set up on roads during the Mahaweera week in Vanni (Source: www.tamilnet.com/img/publish/2007/07/bt_day_1... accessed 12/10/2007)



Fig 5.8 LTTE leader lit the flame of sacrifice among Black Tiger cadres in Vanni (Source: www.tamilnet.com/img/publish/2007/07/bt_day_L... Accessed 12/10/2007)

While all these sentiments are push and pull factors for women to join the organisation there are also arguments that the labour shortage was a key factor for the LTTE in adopting its double liberation policy.

Labour shortage

Dr. Coomaraswamy (1996) argues that women have been a major source of labour for the LTTE and that while the women's wing was established in 1984 it is only after years that the women are being deployed for fighting, which is also in the period that saw the increase in fighting. Thereafter, anti LTTE elements have followed her steps and argued that this is in fact what motivated the LTTE to recruit women to its rank, especially as it was the time that the LTTE was engaged in a war with the IPKF and were trying to increase their manpower. The LTTE has been interpreting the enlistment of women into their ranks as a result of "liberation" from the Sinhala

state and oppressive structures and have denied any suggestions that the increase in recruitment was a necessity to inflate their ranks⁵⁸.

An analysis of the early stages of the movement confirms that women's recruitment began during the early 80's when the popularity of the Elam movement was at its peak as the 83 riots saw an influx of recruits (information gathered from field work). As such, it is difficult to state that the militants were short of manpower. Therefore, the recruitment of women can be argued as a trend, which began, in the early phase of the Tamil militancy, rather than a shortage of "man power". The LTTE had come under tremendous pressure for excluding women when other militant groups were recruiting women. On one hand, the LTTE wanted to be ahead of other military groups to be represented as the leading party; also they wanted to give a human face into their struggle to be recognised as a truly liberation army with a pseudo "gender mainstreaming" policy that can attract large benefits including international funding.

Later on with the military capabilities and strategies such as using Black Tigers and Sea Tigers the "human bomb" was seen as a more effective tool against the sophisticated military weapons and the numerical advantage of the Sri Lankan army. Women became more suitable for this task as they were less suspected as well as their ability to conceal the weapons and explosives among their clothes. There have also been many reports stating that women have been used to transport grenades hidden inside their vaginas. Virgins or non-virgins have been used in this heinous act and the case of Dhanu (page 74) is evidence of the vulnerability of women due to this. There was

⁵⁸ But have continued with the forcible recruitment of young girls (and boys) (save the Children 2005, UNICEF 2006, UTHR 2004, Amnesty International, and National Peace Council 2007).

also the added dimension of “surprise” when attacked by a woman as suicide missions were new to Sri Lanka at the early stages of the development of militancy.

Based on this evidence, even though one might conveniently argue that the expansion of the LTTE in the 80's and threat from the IPKF is connected with “man power crisis” to which young Tamil women were seen as a part of the solution, I would argue otherwise and say that these recruitments were a matter based on “the military and political advantage” rather than only “numbers”. Furthermore, used as strategy to gain international sympathy giving the organisation a human face and also attracting much needed funds to purchase weapons and build the organisation. But considering the intersecting factors there has also been a compliance from the women itself who have chosen to join the LTTE due to some of the reasons identified by their own narratives which made it easier for the LTTE to validate its actions of recruitment of women into the ranks.

While the LTTE was engaged in this manipulation of people's sentiments, the women who had no social status on their own and were constantly under the rule of their men or faces social oppression also saw that joining the organisation was a path to freedom (Balasingham 1993). The power they gained in the ranks of the LTTE was something they had never experienced in their lives; therefore, this can be a motivating factor especially for young women.

Attaining Power

A controversy took place when LTTE women refused to remove their belts with the emblem of the LTTE symbol the Tiger, in the army controlled areas as agreed in the CFA. It can be suggested as a sign of power struggle that runs within the militaristic discourse. The uniform is what

distinguished military and a non-military personnel to the public. Therefore, to remove that symbol of power induced rebellion. In this case the LTTE women did not want to put aside their symbols of power even at the risk of being identified as an LTTE cadre and violating the Cease Fire Agreement (page 74). Women would prefer to risk their lives and the path to peace rather than remove the belt - they wanted to be distinctive and show off their power. The power they enjoyed over the normal civilians, to terrorise them, to instil fear and see people go silent in front of them and humiliate and emasculate the men who had refused the path of voice by not joining the LTTE. This limited power was something that women would have never enjoyed within the Tamil community where men are considered the head of household and community and women's role was to obey their men, rather challenge them.

In situations where women have taken up arms and participated in violence confirms that this has been the result of patriarchal intervention (Nepal, Colombia, El Salvador, India). It can be argued that when women saw violence as means to gain power that otherwise they do not enjoy in society. As such they are inclined to resort to masculine acts. This has been the case of some women who joined the military, they see the power in the military uniform and sense the fear that surround their 'being' and enjoy it. As the JVP woman Kalyanimala who told me (page 198) that, she enjoyed terrorising a school principal using one single letter.

Also, when one analyses the acts of violence some of the women combatants inflicted on fellow women prisoners and child soldiers (see page for interview with about the treatment of prisoners by women wardens), it was clear that they had acted with a sense of inflated ego - which only the military uniform can provide them with. For a society that was dominated by men, to have power

over those very same men with the use of violence, can be a very attractive incentive to join the military/military groups.

Despite these intersecting factors, the LTTE (as many other armed groups) are accused of forced recruitment that they have denied to date. However, I found evidence of forced recruitment from the literature (Save the Children 2005) as well as in my field work.

Forced Recruitment

While many informants confirmed that they joined voluntarily it is also common knowledge that the LTTE forcibly recruited large number of men and women to combat as well as child soldiers (Gunaratna accessed 2004). According to a Save the children report in 2005, there are more than 5,000 children in the armed ranks of the LTTE. This is one story of a young girl who was recruited forcibly

Chitra's story

I lived with my brother who was a student at Eastern University and two younger sisters. One night we had a visit from a group of men. They were in search of my brother; we told that he had not come home as he was staying with his friends. First they did not believe and searched the house, after realising that that he was not in, one man told my mother that when he came home to ask him to report to the camp. My mother frightfully asked if he had done anything wrong, then the man replied it is not him who has done wrong, but you, it is a mother's duty to send their children to fight for the land, what mother are you if you don't encourage him to join us? My mother begged the man saying that my brother was a student and that he had only another year to graduate, then he laughed and retorted what is education without a land, there are so many young people giving their

lives, why can't he? If you don't send him we will take another, so you decide... we will give you time till tomorrow afternoon and we will be back...They left us. We all began to cry, we all loved our brother and he wanted to be a doctor one-day. How could we ruin his future...after much contemplation I decided to take his place. As said so the next day they came back for him... and I asked if t I come and leave my brother alone... the men were angry but then another man whispered and they agreed. So I went with them, if I did not they would have killed my brother-the previous week they set fire to one of our neighbours house when the boy refused to join and ran away from the village. If they did that to our house what would happen to my mother and younger sisters. We had no father. So I joined...

I left after 12 years, and got married to XXXX he was also in the organisation but got injured and was discharged, we have no children. After I joined my brother did not come home in fear, he had to go into hiding....

I would have never joined if I had a choice...but I saved my brother's life...

My husband is kind to me most of the time... but at times he has his mood swings and gets very angry at me...for the small thing...at times he used to scream in his dreams and shout and struggle... I am worried.

There is also the added dimension of child recruitment that has made the LTTE unpopular in the eyes of the UN and other human right agencies. This is also an issue that the government has used to criticise the LTTE time after time branding them as child abductors.

CHILD RECRUITMENT

Child recruitment has been a major problem that the Tamil community has had to face. Over the year the LTTE and other militant groups have been recruiting children in to their ranks (Gunaratna 2004; Save the Children 2005). While there was no organised effort to recruit children at large, it is public knowledge that the JVP too had young children in their ranks mostly carrying out non-combatant tasks.

Selvamani, a Tamil girl living in eastern Sri Lanka was only 15 when rebel forces began pressurising her to join them. 'First they sent letters, then they began visiting my house' she said, "they told my family, each house has to turn over one child. If you don't agree, we will take a child anyway". Not long afterward in August 2002, soldiers from the LTTE abducted Selvamani while she was walking to class. They took her to a military training camp where she learned to use weapons, including landmines and bombs. During training when she became too weary to continue and asked to rest, the rebels beat her. (Toronto Star 19/12/2004)



Figure: 5.9 Photos of young children who are in the LTTE

(Source: <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/Sinhala/child.htm> accessed 13/12/2004)

Unfortunately the scope of the research did not permit me the ability to conduct research around child recruitment and therefore, I could not gather information to carry out in-depth analysis in this area.

While the above are only a few reasons that encouraged the enlistment, there were also some isolated cases where children facing domestic violence/abuse in their homes decided to run away from home and join the LTTE, but these did not represent a major pattern in the available literature or the interviews I conducted.

There is also evidence where women who do not fit into the militaries idealistic body have been recruited into military organisations (i.e. pregnant, married, lesbians) to perform tasks that can only can be carried out by these types of women.(i.e. spying, carrying ammunition, seducing enemies) suggesting that women's incorporation in to the military/military groups are purely based on the needs of the militaristic institution that recruit them rather than women's autonomous choice or their liberation as the LTTE argues.

Summary

From the field work it is clear that women have been recruited into military groups since the 80's and the early recruitments were into the PLOTE and the EPRLF and fewer into the LTTE. Later there was a rapid increase in the number of women in the LTTE creating debate on whether the decision to recruit women was due to its double liberation policy or to fill in the manpower shortage. The research established that the recruitment has not always been voluntary as claimed by the LTTE for the purpose of double liberation or forcibly as claimed by anti-LTTE

groups. Neither can be seen in the light of being drugged or brainwashed and pure oppression as constructed by the military/ public discourse.

Women's narratives confirm that there have been a number of intersecting factors that encouraged their enlistment into the militaries, mainly the LTTE. Among these are GBV and the associated humiliation from the state/other military groups, economic hardships prior to the conflict and as a result of the conflict, Social oppression due to the position of women in society, power and nationalistic aspirations. Despite these intersecting reasons the representation of the women combatants are either as drugged and brain washed, or for the LTTE propaganda mechanism women are liberation fighters fighting the oppression of the state and its militaries. These narrow representations have ignored women's diverse experience in conflict and confined them to the image of victims or perpetrators of violence. Despite the rhetoric of liberation, evidence gathered from the field work suggests that the LTTE recruitment of women combatants has been as a result of the strategic value women add to the fighting machines and the operation of the organisations. At other times the recruitment has been forced and has included the recruitment of children, women who are pregnant, sex workers and older women.

Whatever the reasons behind their enlistment military groups, who recruit women, adopt different strategies to maintain the masculine nature of the institutions. The LTTE have been no different. The rigorous training that women cadres undergo and the strict code of conduct creating the ultimate combatant, have required women to transform into masculine military bodies and adopt masculine norms. Through this training women have not only been able to challenge the notion that the military is for men but women have also created new intersecting identities for themselves

such as Tamil women combatants who are fighting to avenge the humiliation that their communities have been subject to at the hands of the state.

In doing so, these women have evolved from being girls to fierce combatants, stepping into a sense of collective purpose and power and, re-enforcing the culture of militaristic violence that is a norm of the military especially when engaged in conflict. Women share some privileges and positions of power as a result of their combatant identity, thereby refuting that women are powerless, inherently peaceful and passive. However, what is concerning is that military groups that take so much care in transforming women into masculine symbols do not take the same care when returning these women into society after the conflict.

The following chapter will focus on women's lives within militarism and explore the experience of women within these organisations looking at the structures that are put in place to maintain the masculine nature of the institutions. It will explore their lives within the organisations, coping mechanism and how women negotiate power within these camps to understand how empowered women are, as argued by the LTTE. Using the ex-combatants experience (LTTE and JVP) the next chapter also analyses women's experience in a post conflict society.

CHAPTER SIX

AGENCY WITHIN MILITARISM

In chapter five my research findings identified the interconnecting factors that have motivated women's enrolment in militarised organisations. These included experience of violence, humiliation, fear of violence, social and economical oppression, and the belief that these organisation like the LTTE would bring radical change, in contrast to mainstream politics that denied women meaningful political participation (other than casting their vote). For some women like Pushpam (page 154) the decision to join the military/military groups was a route to escape the situations they are in, rather than a decision they would make if the circumstances were different. For others it has been the sentiments of nationalism as well as an alternative way to participate in the politics that govern their lives.

Given these findings it is important to question to what extent a decision made by external pull/push pressure can be described as empowering/liberating. What is the extent of women's 'agency' under these conditions? Or are their 'choices' within the very limited constraints I have outlined evidence of ideological and structural change? While there is an increasing scholarship around women's agency within militarism (Coomaraswamy 1996; Enloe 1989, 2000; Eisenstein 2007; Moser & Clark eds 2001; Sjoberg & Gentry 2007), it is useful to explore how relevant these debates are in the context of Sri Lanka where it is estimated that women constitute one third of the LTTE fighting force (UTHR 1987) as well as the increasing numbers of recruits in to the state military.

Using women's own narratives and my observations in the field, supported by the available literature (Alison 2003; Balasingham 1983, 1993; De Mel 2001), this chapter will try to understand women's experiences further and will examine whether their enlistment has been, in any sense, liberating as claimed by the LTTE and its sympathisers. Analysis will begin by exploring women's lives within the LTTE camps.

Training within camps

There is evidence supported by some of the narratives from my interviewees that after recruitment women undergo a structured regime of training. This training includes physical fitness, loading and dismounting arms, defence techniques, sabotage, manning checkpoints and explosive handling.

"During the early days we were trained in self-defence, use of weapons and warfare. When we were not on duty we were given time to read. The readings were most of the time material prepared by the organisation. In addition to the weapons training we were taught how to kill ourselves if we got caught to the army" (Interview with ex-woman Combatant Thavamini in exile in UK May 2006).

Thavamini reflected on the discomfort and fear of handling arms. *"Initially I was afraid, but gradually got used to it after watching how other girls handled their weapons".*

In addition to the physical training, indoctrination is used to increase the effectiveness of the cadres as it essential that new recruits develop a strong belief in the cause of the struggle. This process is conducted by the senior cadre's at times using videos and other visuals. A participants in one of the Focus Group confirmed that she had seen the LTTE using visuals in a school to a group for students where she used to be working in the office. Thavamini described that these materials include stories and photographs of other cadres who had sacrificed their lives to the cause. This type of indoctrination is a critical tool in reconsolidating the rhetoric around death and sacrifice that was discussed in chapter one.

An analysis of the training women undergo reveals such structured training while re-inventing the politics of martyrdom is also aimed at breaking down the new recruit's civil identity and giving them a military identity based on the ideologies and subculture of the organisation. Thereby effectively distancing the recruits from the wider community and breaking down their family/community ties. This isolating process is essential to keep the combatants fully focused and motivated to the cause they enlisted in.

Thavamini's (page 140) and Pushpam's (154) narratives made it clear that the girls were constantly exposed to danger and violence in the course of carrying out their work as combatants, which eventually rendered it as normal behaviour, as in the case of . This resonates with Kelman (1973; 1989) who argues about normalisation of violence and Enloe's (1989) argument about the process of militarisation –which states that when individuals perpetrate acts of violence and torture over time they tend to see themselves as performing a routine, even a professional job. The women's reflections on their lives in the camps gave me the impression that they were used to a daily routine which they became accustomed to as time went by. As war drags on violence

becomes normative and an act they learn not to question. This is also evident within the wider Sri Lankan society. The culture of impunity that began with the JVP suppression has continued to date with more depth that has become normative, ie., much of the society has not come forward to question the violence and human right abuse that are taking place in the North East but seemed to be content with the idea that the government is engaged in fighting terrorism.

"In any war there will be these incidents and women will be raped so that can't be changed" (Interview with a female member of the Sri Lankan Lawyers Association, UK October 2006)

In this process of constructing the military body and rendering violence routine, cadres who lacked the stamina are forced to keep up with the others through punishment, using inhumane methods such as regular beatings and standing in the sun without water for hours. New recruits who try to escape are dealt with severe punishments, which are put on display to instil fear in others. While women are trained vigorously to create the ultimate soldiers, there is also the need to have a clear division between the sexes for a number of reasons. Firstly for making sure they are fully focused to the cause and Secondly, to "buy in" the male cadres and wider community approval for the recruitment of women (Balasingham 1983; 1993).

Sexual Division of Labour

It is clear that women suffer from the sexual divisions of labour that are reinforced by the elaborative cultivation of militant women who are being represented as the symbol of liberation. In this image building process, women combatants are pressured to prove that they are as capable as their male counterparts. As we see in Adel Ann's writings (Balasingham 1993) and the images

in Chapter Five (page 120) the female combatant is being inflated to “ultimate militant” Their physical capability, training, courage and dedication are reinforced along with their physical appearance. No makeup, some with short hair and others with hair tied up in combat uniform. Women who sacrifice their lives are glorified as martyrs. This construction of the combatant has not included women who are unable to meet the physical requirements such as Thavamini and Pushpam who were discharged after their disability. Further while representing the female combatant as the ultimate soldier, the LTTE has failed to simultaneously challenge the ideology of existing gender roles within the wider community; as such dominant forms of masculinity and femininity within the Tamil culture remain intact. Men and women entering the organisation and women returning to the society continue to be governed by these ideologies.

Balasingham (1983; 1993) confirms that in the early days women were recruited into supportive roles due to the reluctance of the male cadres to accept women's capability to fight. Even after several years when the women have proved their capabilities, there is no evidence of a significant change to this policy. Women are assigned a combination of duties from support service to active combat. According to Thavamini these roles seem to be multiple and fluid, cutting across women's traditional duties and military duties. This establishes the fact that despite women taking up men's work they have not been relieved from their traditional roles and hence suffer the double burden.

“We managed our own camps and did work such as cleaning and cooking. We had to cook for the boys when we were put on those duties. We were also used to recruit other members and train them. This was often done by means of visiting schools and camps.

At times I was also put on duty to guard the women prisoners” (Interview with ex-woman Combatant Thavamini in exile in UK May 2006).

At the same time, the LTTE use senior women cadres who are either disabled or who chose not to fight any more, to discharge duties associated with women’s traditional role of caring and nurturing. These women are assigned roles such as taking care of the young child recruits or work in orphanages and elders homes. Contrary to this, injured male cadres continue to carry on as combatants or in other political roles despite their age or disability. An example is Thamichelvam, the former LTTE peace negotiator who was disabled and could not fight but was assigned a chief political role. The LTTE policy towards the disabled and injured woman combatants is evidence to the sexual division of labour that exists within the organisation that is in line with the wider Tamil community.

This ambiguity within the organisation that continues to maintain the division of labour based on gender roles, whilst promoting the able bodied, masculine culture has meant that women have to negotiate the different power structures operating within the camps and the organisation.

Negotiating power

Rosalind Coward (1992) warns feminist against the inclination to think about gender relations as a straightforward and unambiguous relation of power where men by definition are given the stronger position. This she finds not only problematic but also unproductive. While she concedes that women are yet still worse off than men in many areas, at the same time, it is important to note that the scenario is no longer clearly defined *“the picture at the moment is much more muddled and uneven, men are still often the beneficiaries of how gender works in society, but now women*

some times are as well (Coward 1999: 212). Coward's argument is proven to be valid to an extent when analysing the power relations that exist among the LTTE women cadres. There was evidence from the interviews confirming that women enjoy positions of power depending on their intersecting identities such as in terms of ranks and duties assigned. The women's wing headed by a senior cadre Thamilini and the duties of the peace secretariat have been handed to a woman cadre Interviews with my informants confirmed that governors of the women's prisons are senior women cadres who used violent methods to intimidate the inmates. The brutal methods used by the woman wardens and the tactics junior cadres adopted such as carrying out instructions without questioning or not coming forward to help inmates was evident to the fact that as part of the official positions of power, there are informal power structures that operate within the camps that women have to negotiate.

After hearing about the women prisons from Thavamini (page 140) I wanted to explore this further with her to understand the power relations that existed within the camps.

Who were these prisoners?

"They were mostly women who were thought to have given information to the army or IPKF and supporters of other groups. Some were women who had either their sons or husbands join other groups"

What did you do with them?

"I don't know much about them, XXXX and a few others were in charge of the camps, I was called on occasionally to guard one, but I know that the treatment woman in this camp got was not a good. Sometimes, I used to hear them scream, and just fallen like dead bodies on the ground in the hot sun after punishments"

Did you ever try to help them?

"No it would be the end of our life, we had nothing to do with those prisoners, we were asked to carry out orders and we could not go beyond what we were told to do unless we wanted to punish them further".

How did you recruit others?

"We used different methods, sometimes we go to schools and put up displays or sometimes-just talk to children and ask them to come with us" (continuation of Thavamini's interview UK May 2006).

Despite women's subordinate position within the Tamil community, it was clear the LTTE women enjoyed a privileged position over other women and even some men in the community due to their identity as a LTTE combatant as well as their ability to inflict violence and terrorise the community. As identified in Chapter Five power over the other was a factor that encouraged some women to enlist into the organisation

While women combatants are governed by the LTTE code of conduct, ideology and the needs of the organisation which are instilled from the time of induction, the behaviour of the prison wardens and some senior cadres suggests that there are some women who are given powers to use their discretion in matters such as the method and extent of punishment/violence they use to intimidate inmates or the new recruits. Women are allowed to go into the villages and recruit children, collect (at times forcibly) food items and take ransoms from civilians (information gathered from focus groups). This suggests that even within the dominant identity of the woman combatant some women enjoy different statuses and hold different positions of power, at times directly reporting to the leader.

However, this freedom is conditional and cannot be seen as complete autonomy as independency is not a practice that is encouraged by the LTTE/military. Military groups discourage any sort of criticism and cultivation of independent thought. The main reason for this is that these military groups gain supremacy by oppressing the other groups and humiliating them through the use of violence including GBV. Therefore, blind loyalty and the ability to carry out violence without remorse or questioning are essential for maintaining the power base of the organisation. This has been true with the LTTE too. The LTTE gained power on a pseudo liberation rhetoric that advocated "liberation to nation and to women" yet their real power was based on the monopoly of violence. A culture of critical thinking or questioning is detrimental to its survival and the LTTE did not encourage or tolerate any form of critical thinking or insubordination from its cadres or civilians. This was the problem that the LTTE encountered with Nirmala Nithyananthan who supported the LTTE in the early days as well as those like Thilaga (page 110) and Dharmini (page 113) in Chapter Four who resisted the LTTE orders and interacted with the enemy men.

Adele Balasingham in her *The Will to Freedom* (2003: pp 86-87) writes the following:

Mr Pirabakaran was less than enthusiastic about the prospect of Nirmala joining the LTTE and a contradiction in feminist perception was clearly evident. For him, Nirmala's conception and projection of women liberation did not tally with his view or vision of Tamil women's liberation. In Mr Pirabakaran's ideological perspective, Nirmala's idea of a women's liberation represented more stereotyped conception of Western women's liberation than an emancipation which the masses of Tamil women could identify with and embrace as their own. Delegating the task of building the women's wing of the LTTE to Nirmala was not in Mr Pirabakaran's scheme of things".

Thus it can be established that the perception of women's liberation within the LTTE is that of the leaders or the men's perspectives of what women should be. The organisation has rigorously projected the leader as the mid-wife of women's agency (De Mel 2001) rather than the women themselves. Women like blindly accepted this and relied on their leader's wisdom.

Similar to the LTTE, within the JVP there is hardly a discourse around feminism. Rather the JVP advocates economic oppression of the working classes; it has not focused on the intersecting oppressions that lie within the working class and how class intersects with other social categories. So, like the LTTE, the JVP have drawn a binary between liberation to the land and liberation to its women without appreciating the intersecting identities and social divisions that exists among the Tamil community. This then raises questions, in a society that has constantly worked towards the subordination of women, how is liberation perceived and who defines the yardsticks of this liberation. Is it the men, or the women themselves?

Even the limited training women gained through following the five lessons of the JVP or the political training within the LTTE, narrowly defines the beliefs of the respective organisations rather than critically analysing the wider political theories. In this sense despite the JVP entering mainstream politics in the early 90's, there have not been any visible attempts to include its women's cadres into the political process, nor to encourage women to come forward to actively take up politics.

While the LTTE have given some form of freedom to women to decide on the use of violence and to humiliate their enemy, without leaving any space for competing political ideologies within the organisation and wider community, they have denied the opportunity for women to engage in

political activities, other than activities that benefit the organisation. The intimidation faced by the Jaffna Mother's Front discussed in Chapter Eight (page 234) is evident to the totalitarian nature of the LTTE. On many occasions the LTTE in their striving to be recognised as the sole representative of the Tamil people have worked towards brutally eradicating dissenting political voices including the assassination of political opponents such as the Jaffna mayor Ms Sarojini Yogeswaran.

Whilst striving to become the sole representative of the Tamil people, the LTTE have worked towards controlling women's potential transgression using the various patriarchal tools that exist in the Tamil community such as 'kinship' to creating a hierarchy and to avoid any sexual relationship among the cadres.

Kinship as a method of control

Even though the combatants are groomed to end their family and community ties in the transformation from being a civilian to a combatant, the Sri Lankan experience shows that military organisations simultaneously use the kinship structures that exist in the wider community as strategies to maintain a hierarchy and strict division between the sexes and the leadership.

The authority of the LTTE as well as the JVP are vested in the leadership who are addressed the elder "*Aiyya*" or "*Anna*" and the younger ones "*Thambi*" (if man) or "*Thangattchi*" (if women). Within the JVP they refer to each other as "*Sahodaraya*" (brother) or "*Sahodari*" (sister), which continues the patriarchal kinship. Such relationships are an extension of the existing social relations and can be seen as a strategy that is introduced into these organisations to help maintain a hierarchy as well as to control sexual interactions between men and women. This is evident to the fluidity of

these non state military groups that give them the ability to selectively adopt some practices that exist in the community that can be of strategically value to their sustainability. This fluidity is also something that these groups dangerously manipulate blurring the nexus of combatant and non combatant.

The adoption of such hierarchies actively discourages sexual relationships among its cadres as well as working towards maintaining the hierarchy of power, which is fundamental to a well focused, disciplined military. The LTTE is widely recognised for its strict code of conduct around the behaviour and sexual relationships of its cadres⁵⁹ .

This may also be due to the rigidly segregated pattern of training and deployment they undergo. This is not to suggest that there were no such relationships or incidents. There have been reports of an LTTE cadre having sexual relations with a young girl in the community who later became pregnant. Also some of the participants I interviewed revealed that there were some women who were attracted to fellow male cadres, but this was not a subject they spoke about in public. In Thavamini's interview (page 140) she revealed that there were times when male cadres visited women held in the prisons at night and at those times they could hear sounds of singing and partying until late in the night, meaning that there were interactions between the men and women.

As for sexual harassment within the organisations there have been reports of LTTE cadre attempting to rape young girls⁶⁰. While there can be some element of truth to this I was unable to

⁵⁹ Writing of military experts such, Narayanswamy (2004) *Inside the elusive mind: Prabahakaran*: Colombo, Sri Lanka, Vijitha Yapa Publications .

⁶⁰ See report Rumour sparks violence in Sri Lanka <http://www.dawn.com/2005/10/30/int11.htm> accessed 31/10/2005.

establish the full facts surrounding this report or any other incidents of sexual violence within the camps. However, some incidents of torture methods for dissidents and punishments of young combats constituted acts of sexual harassment. It has been noted that sexually violent acts towards women were not reported especially due to fear of the LTTE and also because the crimes were sexual in nature they are under reported. There is also a lack of understanding of what constitutes a sexual act especially among young children. And therefore, perpetrators are able to get away with acts of a sexual nature such as rubbing, caressing and fondling.

I was thirteen years old when I went to spend the holiday with my Grandma. One afternoon I was playing with my cousin, when our driver agreed to join us. We were happy as we thought he was a kind man. Later when I was leaning on the bonnet of the car, he came behind me and was pressing his private parts on my body. I never realised or knew what he was doing at the time. It is only now I know that it is sexual harassment. Later this man was accused of making a domestic aid pregnant – so now I am putting these incidents together and thinking how naive I was even at 13 years of age. (Interview with female scholar July 2007)

Even though this interview had no direct relevance to the LTTE, it is evidence of the wider attitude towards sexual harassment in the wider community.

In this context one cannot totally deny that there were no sexual relationships or harassment within the LTTE.

While sexual relations are prohibited within the organisation, there is no restriction on married men joining the organisation and they continue to consummate their marriages. Most of the high ranking LTTE men are married including the leader himself. The rule applies only to younger cadres. Therefore, the code on sexual relations can be seen as a strategy to curb the sexual activities of the younger cadres especially women, in order to preserve the LTTE image as a highly disciplined military. Maintaining this image became particularly important when they saw the need to recruit women and the dangers associated with it. Therefore, these restrictions had to be imposed. This also can be the reason for the birth of the concept of the "armed virgin", which is now vigorously denied by the women and the organisation (Interview with Kanka page 161). At the same time, despite the rhetoric of women's liberation, the policy of recruiting only young women suggests that the organisation sees married women as an obstacle, (as opposed to male cadres), due to the responsibilities attached to being a mother and wife and therefore they not only avoid recruiting married women but also discourage marriage while in combat.

One of my interviewees described her lack of relationships whilst serving the LTTE

"No, we were concentrating on the war, it was not practice to have relationships between cadres, if found out we would have been punished, but I think there were girls who fancied other men but we never spoke about those things openly. At times when I was on guard at the prison camps sometimes there were men coming in the nights, which we all knew but did not discuss with any one". (Interview with Thavamini continued)

The JVP had a similar policy and had a ban on relationships between cadres. However, unlike the LTTE, the JVP was not successful in promoting this ban on relationships due to fact that the support for the JVP came from people who lived in the community rather than in isolation like the

LTTE cadres in the jungle. Therefore, only a very few JVP members who lived in the jungles were bound by the rule and not the wider membership.

Military body

This ideology was that the individual members of the military/military group's body constituted the "able body" of the military/military groups and once their bodies were no longer useful to the military/military groups they are asked to leave the organisation. My informants Thavamini (page 140) and Kanka (page 162) were discharged from the organisation after sustaining injuries. However, they did not see that their disability rendered them of "no use" or the need for their dismissal. Both women were unable to accept that by being disabled they were no longer part of "an able body" for the purpose of the military. Thavamini told me that when she was asked to resign, she begged but was ordered to leave. While I wanted to know more about the treatment of the women I asked her what did she do when she was sick or tired or on the days when she was menstruating?

I don't remember a day I was sick, but there are no official rest days, we always had to do something or another, there were times when we could have a good laugh with the other cadres but usually while doing something. Life went on as normal, even during menstruation. But there were younger girls who were sometime crying in pain or unable get involved in training, but then they were forced to get on with their work.

What did you use as sanitary towels?

(She laughs) *why do you ask me these things? (A question back to me) we did not have these sophisticated things, like other women in villages we used the normal cloths those days. Yes they were bit troublesome but that is what we had to do with.*

The women I interviewed did not elaborate on their sexual lives within the organisation as they were deprived of such freedom. Many of them were also unaware of the politics of sexuality surrounding their lives because they were not taught to critically look at the existing gender relation within Tamil community but only accept it as the norm. This inability to understand and comprehend the effects of military and war on their gender and sexuality have been largely due to the fact that talking of sex in public has been a taboo in Sri Lankan society. Also the lack of any in-depth study on gender and sexuality within the military/non state military groups renders the need for this research to be undertaken.

Politics of sexuality

Despite large-scale sexual violence and harassment of women both in the community and organisation, there is ambiguity in the LTTE/JVP attitudes towards sexual harassment and women's sexuality. Neither, the LTTE and the JVP have entered into any discourse around the sexual violence women undergo other than when it suits their agendas. They use incidents of sexual violence on their cadres to undermine the enemy rather than seeking justice for the women. Seeking justice for the victims has been left to the human rights organisations and other women's groups. The LTTE or JVP has never reported any sexual violence on active combatants. If they did, they would have tarnished the image of the "honourable women", which the organisations strive to maintain.

Even though some argue (De Mel 2001) that the LTTE has given the opportunity for women to kill themselves when apprehended through the use of the cyanide capsule and open up a public discourse on the sexual violence that women undergo, I would argue that is not in the interests of women. Rather it is to protect the organisation and to avoid cadres giving out any information under duress. Women who fail to bite the capsule and are apprehended undergo brutal treatment at the hands of their captivators.

As we have identified in chapter four with the case of Dhanu (page 74) it could be argued that that this practice implies that a sexually contaminated woman is of no worth and should redeem themselves and their community by blowing themselves up. This is a re-enforcement of the existing social practice of stigmatising women who have faced sexual violence.

On the one hand, the LTTE and the JVP while capitalising on sexual violence such as in the case with Dharmini (page 113) and Manaperi (page 122) when they had the opportunity, have resorted to the same methods against women who are deemed to be enemies. The treatment of the women prisoners by the LTTE was in complete contrast to the policy that the LTTE adopted in the propaganda mechanism of women's liberation. Some women at the Focus Groups remembered the LTTE while assaulting women screamed at these women saying *"What liberation for you all, women should be in the house not on the roads"* (Information gathered from the focus group 2005).

The LTTE also went to the extremes of naming and shaming women as loose women who did not abide by their ideology such as Thilaga in Chapter Four (page 110), and Rajini Thiranagam (page 138). The JVP resorted to acts of sexual/physical harassment on women who did not join them or

support them like the brutal and humiliating treatment of Sagarika Gomez who they claimed disobeyed their orders. Sagarika a Sinhalese woman was a gifted television presenter and a musician. She was abducted by a group of masked men from her house in Dehiwela. The next day her naked body with a broken glass stuck to her vagina was found lying on the beach. Her alleged crime was to perform at an election rally of the UNP on the request of the President Premadasa (Sunday *Silumina News Paper* 1989).

Apart from violence directed at humiliating and intimidating women who resisted their authority, the LTTE have also exploited the sexuality of women combatants in degrading acts in many different ways. Firstly, women have been portrayed as victims of sexual violence. They have gone to extremes to publicise acts of sexual violence against Tamil women for propaganda reasons not considering the trauma and humiliation faced by the women and their families. Secondly, women have been projected as icons of virginity, representing them as a-sexual and depriving these young women of any form of sexual pleasure by restricting their sexual relations, thus keeping in line with the Tamil community who try to control women's sexuality, to gain approval from the wider community. Thirdly, they have used these women as role models to encourage recruitment of others in to the organization thereby demonising other women who are not in line with this sexual containment. What is contradictory is that while creating this model those women combatants must preserve their virginity. As a means of controlling sexuality, they have repeatedly exploited women and their bodies to transport weapons hidden under the clothes, grenades and at time ammunition hidden in the vagina, taking advantage of the fact that women would be less suspicious to the army. More inhumanly the LTTE have used a pregnant woman as a human bomb in order to kill a defence official in Colombo in 2006). This is also contradictory to their rhetoric around "mother and land" as discussed in chapter seven. Through the use of

pregnant women as suicide bombers the LTTE have brought more hardship and disrespect to women. Such exploitation of women's bodies and their sexuality, in no way explains the image that the LTTE was trying to portray of women as liberated through militarism. Rather analyses of the relationship the women combatants have had with the wider community reveal that these women's relationship with the community is quite ambiguous.

Relationship with community

Evidence gathered from the interviews and the focus groups revealed that to some extent the relationship between the LTTE women combatant and the community is based mainly on fear rather acceptance. The LTTE have not hesitated to unleash violence on civilians if they deemed to be challenging their authority. The women combatants have been in the forefront carrying out the LTTEs agenda of violence. As argued in Chapter Five some women seemed to have enjoyed this power that they had over the civilians and at times even over members of other military groups.

While the female LTTE combatant gained recognition as "capable militants", they have not fulfilled the expectations of "birds of freedom", nor have helped to promote Tamil women's position within society. In fact through the evidence gathered during the focus groups and the observations made it could be argued that the tactics used by women cadre's such as hiding weapons underneath their clothes and lifting their garments to fire at the army, have demeaned Tamil women's status within the society. For a community, which places self-respect and decency in high esteem, such behaviour has been humiliating. This sometimes has worked towards treating women combatants as loose women with no moral values by the wider society.

These military strategies adopted have further endangered women's lives in the community having made them vulnerable to harassment, GBV and sexual violence at the hands of the armed forces that have little regard to women's intersecting identities and social difference but rather consider all Tamil women to be combatants. The home, which was once considered safe for women, is no longer safe. Many women have been subject to rape and murder in their homes during search operations and army visits and even more humiliatingly have been assaulted in front of their children, husbands and other relatives (As Parvathi page 243). This was virtually "social death" for many women and led many to leave their communities and some to commit suicide.

Women's safety has been jeopardized and they faced the risk of increasing GBV. There has been an increase of suicide missions by women especially around the suburbs of Colombo, as well as women being subjected to increased harassment at checkpoints and other public places. Women have been stripped off in the guise of body searches in public as in the case of Sriyalatha (page 106). In one incident reported, a Tamil woman was searched by the police at a check point and released, the men noted her address and later that night they entered the place where she lived and gang raped her (information gathered at focus group 2006).

The conflict and related deaths have made scores of women, widows in the community. The position of a widow like Puvi in the traditional Hindu society is social death (page 147). The LTTE have not made an earnest effort to improve these widows status within the society rather putting further pressure on them with the increased military activities against the armed forces and civilians. Further there seems to be an explicit "blaming the victim" culture even within the LTTE as evident by the hand bill in chapter four where it says "married women are dressing up as young

girls". Also unmarried women, have no social status within the society and it is considered inappropriate for a woman to be unmarried after a certain age. A challenge that will face the post conflict society is that a large number of unmarried women who have passed the age of marriage will be left behind (the woman cadres who leave the organization) which the LTTE is responsible for. The LTTE who in its initial stages articulated the double liberation policy, when confronted with the changes it brought on the society seemed to have been compelled to take a different approach and have put women's issues on the back burner. In such a situation then it is worth while asking what will be the position of women who are leaving the military/military groups life and integrating into the community.

Whatever the reasons that led women to join the military/military groups, the community reactions towards returning girls are ambiguous. In general women who join the LTTE were assumed to be of "loose character", sexually abused or had 'lost their value'. The organisation itself encouraged this especially the way they went on to justify the acts of violence women carried out, or when they had to gain international sympathy for their activities and prove that women were abused by the enemy. As evident by the research they have used women's sexuality when it suited them for political manipulation little realising that this would be used again on the women on their return to the community. Whether the girls had left their families by their own free will to join the organisation or even when they were forcibly recruited, the attitude that women had dishonoured their families/communities seemed not to change.

In my encounters with many Tamil men over the duration of this study who defended the LTTE and its ideology, there was a great sense of silence when the issue of women combatants was taken up. I asked a man who was so keen to defend the recruitment of women "will you ever

marry a woman who fought with the LTTE?" the answer was short "No"- but when I asked why? He simply said, "*Can we stop this conversation now.*" (Interview with Tamil academic in the UK 2006).

This resistance to take up the issue of women as fighters and the community perception towards them after they left their uniforms raised several questions as to women's position in a post conflict society.

A soldier who returned from Jaffna told me the following story

A young girl discharged from the LTTE had fallen in love with a man in the area. Knowing her past the parents of the boy did not approve of their affair. Angry with her future mother-in-law's comments about her, the young woman visited the boy's mother one afternoon and threatened her with a gun. Scared for her life the old woman ran to the nearest checkpoint screaming for help. However, no action was taken against her despite the fact that she pointed a firearm at a civilian as it was a private matter and no injuries had taken place (Telephone Interview with a Sri Lanka Army Soldier in March 2005 when he visited the UK).

Reintegration Ex-Combatants of the JVP

Since the armed conflict between the LTTE and the Government forces have come to an unexpected turn with the elimination of the LTTE leadership it is impossible and too soon to research LTTE women's position in a post conflict situation at this moment of the conflict. However, it is hoped that the narratives of the Ex-JVP women and other Tamil Militant women,

who left the LTTE, as well as the interviews with the ex-LTTE women who have left the movement and who are now in exile will help us to understand the situation of women returning from combat.

An analysis of the reflections of LTTE women's experiences reveal that women were attracted to the organisation not necessarily by the romantic rhetoric of revolution or liberation, but due to push and pull factors such as revenge, fear of violence are explored in Chapter Five (page 120). These factors are not exhaustive. While it is important to get an understanding of why women take up arms and violence in order to address the root causes of violence, it becomes equally important to know how they will re-integrate into society and what sort of identities they create for themselves if we are to understand women's political/social advancement through militarism. This becomes especially useful in the face of the claim that the LTTE stands for the liberation of the nation and women. In my field work I interviewed an EX-JVP combatant Kalyanimala (198) who was with the movement during the 2nd up rise in the late 1980's. She agreed to give me an interview and her story gives us a glimpse into her new life.

Kalyanimala's story

Kalyanimala was 16 yrs old ready to leave school when she was attracted to the JVP in the 1988 through the brother of her class mate. At first she was reluctant to join but was asked by her friends to carry out tasks such as delivering letters or taking a message to designated people. Gradually she became accustomed to the dangers attached to the work and then began to enjoy it. '

It was at times very interesting to see a person receive a letter⁶¹ and how they reacted to the contents, actually I think we enjoyed that part more' 'Once I delivered a letter to a headmaster of the village school who was hated by the pupils. Within 24 hours he became a totally different man, but then later it appeared to be a hoax'... this was the type of things we enjoyed more.

Now I have three grown up children. They do not know about my past as they all grew up in the town and they have had no contact with the village. Now I don't think about those things, I was never deep into the movement; it was the thrill of being young that dragged me in so for me it was not a difficult thing to leave that past behind me... I would never like my children to get involved in such things. (interview with ex-JVP women Kalyanimala now living in Narahenpita- Sri Lanka October 2004)

Like Kalayanimala there were other women who joined the JVP and faced the risk of violence.

Many of them survived to tell their stories but some were not so lucky.

Many women have suffered due to the involvement of their husbands. The Commission on the disappeared in 1997 found that 33% of the disappearances and abductions were not because of women's direct involvement but due the involvement of a male family member. In one case reported, soldiers who were searching for the two sons of one woman killed her on the allegation that she was "loud mouthed" One of the most devastating examples before the commission was where the security forces killed seven members of one family, six of whom were women (one six

⁶¹ The JVP used letters as its method of written communication if it was aimed at an individual, if it was aimed at a community they would put up a poster/s on a lamp post or a parapet wall in a central location.

year old) on the basis of one male's alleged involvement with the JVP (Commission on the disappeared in 1997).

Many times women have become victims of violence due to the involvement of their male relatives with the non state militaries. Despite the sacrifices women make on behalf of their men, there is evidence that once the conflict is over that women have been let down by the men like Leela below

Leela's story

Lela was outcaste because of her marriage to Anil who was from a lower cast. Unknown to Lela, Anil had joined the JVP and was a co-coordinator for the area. One night the police came in search of him.

"I was heavily pregnant with my fourth child, they asked for him and I did not know where he was, but they were not happy and started to beat and punch me, they did not have any consideration for my physical status....when they had enough they left saying they will come back. We were lucky they did not do any major harm to us. I have not seen my husband ever since. After his disappearance we had a very hard time... I used to work in houses and get some money and food and old clothes for my children... we did not even have a proper house. After some years I got to know that my husband is alive and married again to another woman. God must punish him for what he put us through... someone also told me that he is now well off and he won a sweep ticket (lottery)... there is no god otherwise a man like him would not win a ticket... any way I don't want him now. I have looked after my children with great difficulty and I will continue to do so (interview with woman living in Hendeniya, Sri Lanka October 2004).

The breakdown of law and order created opportunities for private militia and gangs to take political/personal vengeance over their opponents. Such personal attacks were reported regularly, the culprits pretended to be either from the military or the JVP and carried out their underhand work without any obstacle since always there was someone to take the blame. One famous case was the murder of a large number of students in an area named Embilipitiya instigated by a school principal who sought revenge on the students due to the belief that his daughter was having an affair with one of the students. He killed the rest for helping the teenage lovers. (Samuel 2006).

It was not only the state who was responsible for this culture of impunity. The JVP had to take equal responsibility for the violence during these two phases. There were numerous counter attacks by both sides when an incident took place, for example, if police personnel were killed by the JVP the next day a JVP member was killed by the police in revenge.

An ex-Air force senior officer revealed how he killed 15 alleged JVP activists (including their family members) for assassinating a brother of one of his junior officers. - *'I went with a group of my men and killed 15 people because of him, because this rascal had the nerve to go against me'* (telephone interview in December 2005 with the informant who has now migrated to Australia)

The JVP was not as advanced a military organisation as the LTTE. While they advocated social revolution, a closer study of the JVP and its political agenda makes it clear that they did not have a clear vision of what exactly was to be achieved from their action for social revolution can never be static and is constantly changing. Their political agenda was not an inclusive one. They wanted to mobilise the working class, without understanding the intersecting social divisions and identities

within this wider category of “working class”. As such they were far from military capability, discipline, and the end result was that the LTTE possessed but also had no defined long term objective. As a result it was not difficult for the state to defeat the military wing of the JVP with the use of violence. After the military defeat and the capture of the leader, the JVP entered the political mainstream by continuing to participate in the electoral process.

Women within the JVP were not engaged in combat roles and were not trained or disciplined to fight, unlike the LTTE woman. Therefore, women did not have to go through an unlearning process and were able to revert back to the traditional roles quickly. Rather, the insecurities that women face during the unrest and the resulting militarization of the society meant that women became more reluctant to join in any kind of public activities⁶² after the uprising (page 73). The LTTE woman on the other hand is removed from her community, all personal ties are set aside and they live in isolation in the jungles for a longer period. In the process of making the military body women are required to learn the traits of the militaristic role model.

As we have identified in Chapter five the circumstances that women took up arms were not purely based on the ideology of nationalism or class structure. Women faced multiple intersecting vulnerabilities in a society that is fiercely dominated by social exclusion, poverty and oppressions; as such the contributory factors for their enlistment were complex. The LTTE women and the JVP women cadres have proved that even within the dominant category of woman combatant there are intersecting identities depending on the lived experiences of these women.

Summary

From the evidence in this chapter it can be argued that the recruitment of women into the militaries is not an automatic path for liberation or empowerment. Women in military institutions such as the LTTE and JVP have to negotiate interesting power relations that exist within these organisations. While there are some women who hold formal leadership roles I would strongly argue that this is based on strategic need as in the case of the LTTE who wanted to be recognised as a true liberation army and to secure international support. Military institutions are overwhelmingly male dominant institutions and men still head the military and political units. While leadership is not the only yardstick to measure empowerment, it is important to take into account the decision making power as well, as the ability to make choices for one self is totally absent within these military organisations.

A closer analysis of the training within the camps, the sexual division of labour, the kinship methods of control and how women negotiate power are evident so that militaries while recruiting women to fulfil the operational needs of the institution take precautions to minimise the risk of women's inclusion in to the organisation. These military groups adopt various strategies to maintain the patriarchal structures of these inherently masculine institutions. In doing so, these institutions while distancing them from the society through a code of conduct have not been reluctant to adopt some practices like sexual division of labour and kinship that exists within the community. Further while creating a binary between women's liberation through joining the military, these military organisations such as the LTTE or the JVP have not made an attempt to address the stereotypes and social prejudices around women in society. The imposition of a dress

⁶² See interview with woman who was with the first JVP uprising in 1971 in chapter five page

code (chapter four page 105) and the punishments rendered to women have only worked towards re-enforcing the oppressive structures faced by women.

The unwillingness of the LTTE to change social attitudes around women and the attempt to manipulate existing cultural practices such as dowry, caste and widowhood has meant that it has reflected the way that women cadres are perceived within the community. It is evident that the women combatants have gained limited status among the community as LTTE women and this is only as a result of their identity as combatants to holds power to terrorise and humiliate the community. No sooner are they out of their uniforms and ranks than these women revert to the traditional role as carers assigned to women in the community.

The experience of disabled LTTE women like Thavamini (page 140) and Kanka (page 161) and the absence of women in the public spheres within groups such as the Tamil United Liberation Front after the Indo Lanka accord is an example of how women who took up arms reverted to their gendered positions after the military struggle was over. There is also evidence from the women combatants of the JVP who reverted back to their socially assigned positions after the end of the revolution.

Even in times of conflict women like Parvathi (page 242) gain an enhanced status within the community due to the over lapping of gender roles in the absence of their men, in many instances after the return of the men, women also return to their gendered roles and continue to live their lives within the structures that are in place within the community (Zaroza 1998). There is also evidence as in the case of Leela (page 200) that men at times abandon their wives and children leaving women to face hardships and humiliation. For some civilian women due to their

intersecting identities as single mothers, widow or social activists their time in the military/military groups may have transformed their lives, while for the majority of women the situation will be different. Evidence from recent conflicts such as Nepal (Interview with UN worker deployed to Nepal, December 2008) proves that no sooner women get out of the military/military groups and join the community – unless there is a change in the structures of the society, they continue to be subjected to the existing patriarchal structures.

Since the LTTE have not challenged their existing social structures but rather at times worked towards re-enforcing them even before the end of the revolution through acts such as the dress code (Chapter Four page 105), there is strong possibility that women returning from combat will be sucked into the prevailing social order. The thesis argues that unless there is a change in the attitudes in the community the status of the returning women LTTE combatants is not going to be any different. This has been further proved with the military defeat of the LTTE. Now the remaining cadres have lost their leaders who they completely relied upon they see no future with the LTTE. The Sri Lankan army who has a track record with regard to sexual violence against women even when the LTTE was in power is more likely to continue their abuse without any fear of resistance. With the governments military victory the bolstered egos of the politicians and the Sinhala nationalistic are viewing the Tamil community as losers and the Tamil community is further humiliated.

Hence, there is not going to be any form of empowerment for the returning women and they will continue to live in fear of being apprehended by the army and will face intimidation from the community who may use them as scapegoats or just blame these women for the suffering the community has faced at the hands of the Sri Lankan state.

Therefore, as evident from this chapter women's agency is contingent within the military/non state military groups on norms, expectations, structural and social inequalities and are not substantial and sustainable. Recruiting women into the organisation has not given women liberation as claimed by the LTTE as women continue to suffer the sexual division of labour even within these organisations and at times become exploited by the very organisations that recruit them. However, what cannot be denied is that they lived experience of the women combatants has proved that women if given the opportunity are capable of challenging the social constructions of them as passive and peace loving. These women have also proved that the military and combat is no longer a man's domain but that women are equally capable of engaging in militarism and adopting masculine traits and are able to resort to violence when required. The Tamil women have proved that women are not homogenous category but can adopt different intersecting identities and can simultaneously become protectors and perpetrators of violence. These women have proved that men are not the only defenders of the land as militarised nationalism is eager to project, but women are equally motivated and capable of defending the land and their people.

While the women combatants have taken up militarism and violence to resist the subordinate positions that they face within community, there are other women who challenge violence and militarism through the traditional roles assigned to them. In doing so these women have set an example to their sisters that challenging violence need not be through violence but using their intersecting identities such as motherhood.

In the next chapter using the example of the Mothers Front the thesis will focus on how women have organised to resist militarism and nationalism despite their intersecting identities such as caste, class and ethnicity. In doing so I will analyse how patriarchy has worked towards the

resisting women's public participation with the use of intersecting divisions in society that have been used by patriarchy to divide women on ethnic and political lines and how women have responded to them.

CHAPTER SEVEN

MOTHERHOOD AS A TOOL OF RESISTANCE

While the thesis has discussed the popular representation of women as victims or perpetrators of militarised nationalism, there are other women who resist violence and militarism. In doing so they have proved that women are not homogenous groups but appropriate multiple, layered identities, other than the representations that militarism and nationalism are eager to construct. Despite extreme repression, exclusion from the political and decision-making process and intimidation by the military groups, these women come forward to resist violence, humiliation and political oppression by taking up arms and joining military groups as combatants. Yet other women have responded to the conflict in Sri Lanka by becoming activists for peace and Human Rights (Samuel 2006) and, openly denouncing militarism and nationalism. Either way these women challenge the narrow representation that women are passive victims of violence.

This chapter will examine "The Mothers Front" a group who went on to challenge the state and the military holding them responsible for the large scale human rights violence during the 2nd JVP insurrection and discuss the strategies they adopted to challenge the state and its military. The Mothers Front has been selected over many other women's groups as it was able to recruit more than twenty five thousand members to its Southern band; this is an achievement that never seen in the history of Sri Lanka's women's movement.

In setting the context to this chapter I will briefly look at the women's efforts to organise against violence in post independent Sri Lanka and the birth of the MF as a movement.

Organising against violence

The contemporary Sri Lanka's women's movement is comprised of women from diverse backgrounds and is focused on a diverse range of social and political issues of concern to women (De Alwis; De Mel 2001; Samuel 2006). However, with the growing state of violence women have no longer been able to focus solely on gender inequalities such as equal pay and citizenship rights, but had to pay greater attention to human rights and the political violence that was becoming a reality of the day.

Women's activism in opposing violence, as a 'solution' to the conflict was first articulated via the agitations against the Prevention of Terrorism Act, which came into effect in 1979 (Samuel 2006). Women mobilised themselves calling for a non violent solution to the conflict in the 1970 and early 1980's. The results of their activism have given birth to such human rights groups in the country as the *Civil Rights Movement*, *The Movement for Inter Racial Justice and Equality* and the *Movement for the Defence of Democratic rights*.

In 1982 *The Women's Action Committee* (WAC) was formed to advocate for women's rights, human rights protection and a negotiated settlement to the ethnic conflict. In 1984 *Women for Peace* was formed which called on all political parties as well as Tamil militant groups fighting for self determination in the north east of the country to meet at an All Party Conference. The coalition also focused on war related displacements which gave rise to the violation of a range of social economic and political rights with specific gender discriminations (Samuel 2006).

The period between 1987-90 proved to be an unforgettable period in Sri Lankan history. The arrival of the IPKF signed in July 1987 and the welcome it received by the WAC drew hostilities from nationalistic parties such as the JVP.

"First I received a letter threatening me to resign immediately, or face repercussions. The letter accused me of being a traitor to the motherland and said death was the punishment. I was scared and decided to leave, I attended one more meeting to inform my decision to the committee as I thought I owed them an explanation, but I did not go home that day, I stayed with a friend of mine - the next day I learnt that the night before my house was set on fire. (Woman activist of the WAC-interview in Colombo 2004)

In this context of intimidation, harassment and humiliation the WAC was unable to carry on their activities and went into hiding. Later in 1990 they re-formed as the *Mothers and Daughters of Lanka* (MDL). The MDL lobbied for a negotiated settlement to the conflict; and appealed to the JVP and the LTTE to stop the killings (De Mel 2001; Samuel 2006 and information gathered during interviews).

Groups such as the MDL set the foundation for 'mother politics (De Mel 2001)' to be re-invented, moving away from the nationalistic military discourse of valiant mothers who sent their sons to battle (Soornarajah 2004). This time not as mothers who send their sons to battle rather as mothers who stood up to protect their sons and daughters from the very same nationalistic militarism discourse that robbed them of their right to motherhood.

The Mothers Front

During the climate of fear that resulted with the IPKF occupation in Jaffna many Tamil women in Jaffna came forward to challenge the authorities. Calling themselves *the Mothers Front* they organised a march and demanded the government to release information on the whereabouts of the men and youths (husbands, sons, and daughters brothers and other relatives) who had been arrested by armed forces (information gathered from discussions during focus groups).

The *Jaffna Mothers Front* actively mobilised its members against the IPKF violence. In 1987 one of its members Annai Poopathi, fasted to death to protest the presence of the IPKF. Later, she was immortalised by the LTTE who continue to commemorate her and initiated a scholarship in her name.

"Today, we cherish the memory of a great martyr and salute her supreme sacrifice. Mother Poopathi has earned our highest esteem as one of the noble martyrs who have become legends in the history of our liberation struggle. As a woman, as a mother, as the maternal head of the family, Poopathi amma transcended her ordinary life and the bonds of existential attachment in sacrificing her life for the emancipation of her nation".
(Speech made by LTTE leader on the second death anniversary April 1988 posted on Tamil Net)

Following in the footsteps of the North and East, in 1990, *the Mothers Front* was formed in the south to protest the "disappearance" of children/husbands during the 1987/89 uprising. Unlike the *Jaffna Mothers Front*, which emerged spontaneously, the *Mothers Front* in the South were

initiated and received political patronage from politicians such as Mahinda Rajapakse⁶³. De Mel (2001) suggests that these, politicians have been influenced by the Mayo de Plaza of Argentina and recognised the potential of politicising motherhood. The mothers demanded a climate where they could raise their sons, be with their husbands and lead a normal life (Island 9th February 1991).

Their mass mobilisation and the adoption of ancient cultural and religious rituals such as sacrificing animal blood to the gods had a tremendous impact on the society. These rituals were a sign of the anger and the hatred that the mothers harboured against the enemy as well as the courage of the women to come forward to perform such rituals that were associated with destruction rather than nurturing. Most importantly, the Mothers actions created a space for other civil society groups to come forward at a time when human rights activist were being targeted and killed with impunity.

The performances of rituals such as the sacrifice of animal blood and heaping of curses challenged the popular notion of women's desire for peace. A closer analysis of the women's actions amplifies the ability of women when faced by violence and humiliation to transgress this notion of passivity and become equally vengeful and violent even without use of physical violence. By these acts women created a space for not only revealing their desire for the perpetrators of violence to be punished but also for other women who have experienced similar violence and have been humiliated to join hands in solidarity to fight the common enemy i.e. the government of the day not using political terminology or rhetoric but using the traditional role assigned to women which was motherhood.

⁶³ An SLFP Hardcore who went on to become the president in 2005.

Using the notion of Motherhood as a tool of resistance

From observations made of the Indian women's movement, Raka Ray (1999) suggests that protest movements are not only influenced by other social movements but also by local cultures, histories and institutions of politics. As such it is unavoidable that the complex role that is assigned to motherhood in Sri Lanka played a key role for motherhood to be used for political purposes through groups like the *Mothers Front* and the MDL. However, as this thesis will argue, it is this very same complexity that surrounds motherhood, which was instrumental in challenging militaristic nationalism and contributed to the success of the *Mothers Front* that also became central to its vulnerability in the political environment in which it existed.

As discussed in Chapter Three (page 57), Land and Language were central to the post independent nation building programmes adopted by the Sinhala Buddhist and the responses to these by the Tamils. The struggle as early as in the 1956 was around protecting the language. When state aided land colonised by Sinhala settlers in largely Tamil areas became intense with the colonization of the dry Zone⁶⁴ the Tamils argued that the state was aiming to permanently alter the landscape of the Tamil homeland, the movement to protect Tamil language, reclaim and fight for Tamil land became paramount.

The borders of the nation become contested by the geographical limits where Tamil was spoken and was represented by the Tamil homeland⁶⁵. The territorial dimension overtook Tamil cultural nationalism to militarised nationalism with aspirations for a separate state (Sornarajah 2004). As

⁶⁴ See chapter three for more details page 73.

⁶⁵ See full text of the LTTE leaders 2008 heroes day speech which re-articulates the mother land concept [LTTE leader pays homage on Heroes Day \[TamilNet, Thursday, 27 November 2008, 17:30 GMT\]](http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=71&artid=27600)
<http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=71&artid=27600>

the struggle evolved and claims for a separate homeland emerged, the image of the mother became an indicator for the 'mother land'. This was a shift of the construction of the mother from language (mother tongue) to land (mother land). The land and the mother were presented as one and the same.

As Soornaraja (2004) recalls after the 1983 ethnic riots when the militant movement began recruiting in large numbers, it became practice for mothers to place a vermilion mark on the foreheads of the recruits reminding them they would defend their land with their blood/life before training. Accordingly, young men queued up at the podium during campaign meetings to receive similar marks on their foreheads in blood, swearing their allegiance to the motherland. Here a male figure standing on the podium would cut his hand and paint the mark on the forehead of the new recruit. Such rituals involving the notions of blood, the Tamil mother's honour, male valour rendered the agency of the women inactive, relying on her sons to protect her. Significantly, there was an absence of the daughters in this imagination, keeping in line with the popular belief that women were to be protected rather than protectors. However, as time went with the recruitment of women to the militant movement the practice was replaced by the commemoration ceremonies for dead heroes giving rise to a culture of celebrating death⁶⁶.

While the Sinhala nationalist discourse equated the use of language to construct the notion of motherhood (*Sri Lanka Matha*) with the language (*Mawu Basa*) and land (*Mawu Bima*), based on the field work I would argue that it did not succeed to the extent of the Tamil nationalist discourse of the LTTE (Soornaraja 2004). The LTTE have used rituals such as the vermilion mark and the

⁶⁶ See full text of the LTTE leaders 2008 heroes day speech with photographs which re-articulate the mother land concept- LTTE leader pays homage on Heroes Day[TamilNet, Thursday, 27 November 2008, 17:30

hero's day to project and glorify the brave mother. Instead motherhood became a method of resistance deployed by the Sinhala women who lost their sons to state/military violence.

I would argue that the inability of the state and its military to re-invent the brave mother was due to many reasons. First of all, the Sinhala state was constructed as the protagonist of the ethnic conflict. The various policies adopted by the state to intimidate and humiliate the Tamil community using structural violence further established its position as the protagonist. Tamil militancy was projected as defending the homeland and fighting state oppression. Therefore, the Tamil military groups/LTTE was able to capitalise on this demonization of the state and cultivate the idea that defending the motherland from the protagonist needed courage and loyalty and the duty of the son was to protect the mother/land.

Secondly, the state had the numerical advantage of manpower and did not face the difficulties in recruitment. When faced with difficulties in sustaining the numbers or wanting to recruit in large numbers during the 1990's the state used popular culture⁶⁷ to re-invent the concept of the brave mother and the motherland. However, unemployment and economical hardships in the South meant that many young men and women joined the forces in large numbers for the attractive pay it offered rather than the government propaganda. As a result of this economical benefit Sri Lankan military never had a recruitment problem, but certainly faced problems in retention.

Added to this was the challenge posed to the state by feminist organisations and other human rights organisations. These groups vigorously condemned the states suppression of the minority

MT]://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=71&artid=27600 accessed 23rd December 08

⁶⁷ Mainly songs, theatre and television recruitment adverts and drama.

communities and the mass scale human rights violence by armed forces (Samuel 2006). The image constructed of the armed forces was not of valiant heroes, but perpetrators of violence who went on to kill Tamil/ Sinhala youth.

Thus even the limited attempts of the government to re-invent nationalist sentiments with the use of popular culture did not have the same affect that the Tamil militancy projected. Rather this image of the state as perpetrators of violence and the military as the state killer machine deflated the powerful sentiment of nationalism and patriotism attaching negative connotations with 'nationalism'.

Further, motherhood while becoming a central trope within nationalism went on to challenge the militarised nationalist discourse through organisations such as the *Mothers Front*. This was a challenge posed to the state and its armed forces. Hence, the state and its military could not capitalise on the notion of motherhood even if they wished to do so within their political ideology and the image of the valiant mother who sent their sons to war was replaced by the mothers who were weeping for their children and using solidarity and ancient rituals to challenge the state and the military.

Motherhood was to become a greater force in the way it mobilised to challenge the state during this time. The priority for the mothers was to trace the disappeared and get the authorities to release those that had been detained without charge. The women demanded death certificates⁶⁸ and compensation for those missing for over a year (The Island February 1991). Their aim was to

⁶⁸ This was essential to establish the death of the persons and to claim any compensation as well as for them to claim any property that belonged to the dead persons.

support the women who had suffered immensely at the hands of the brutal regime physically⁶⁹, psychologically and economically due to the loss of their husbands and sons/daughters.

They succeeded in recruiting large numbers of women to the movement. The meetings held by the organisation were an enormous success. De Mel (2001) notes that within a period of six months they had formed offices in ten other districts and in Matara alone one thousand five hundred women were elected to co-ordinate the group's activities. By 1992 their numbers had increased to approximately twenty five thousand.

On the 19th of February 1991, the Front held their first convention at the Town Hall in Colombo and 10 resolutions were passed ⁷⁰ the first being;

"The president and the government release information on the whereabouts of the disappeared and what has happened to them and the that local and foreign human rights organisations like the Red Cross insist on such information from the Government."

On the same day a rally was organised in the suburbs of Colombo, where a large number of women from the South and a few from the Northeast attended. The rally was addressed by Dr. Saravanmuttu⁷¹, who was appointed the co-coordinator, Mrs. Sirimavo Bandarnayake⁷² and Chandrika Bandarnayake. One woman who represented the Tamil community addressed the

⁶⁹ Many women were subject to violence and torture at the hands of the state forces not due to their involvement but as a result of the involvement of their husbands/children – see commission report for detailed accounts on the type of harassment women had to undergo.

⁷⁰ N de Mel (2001) pp 245 for more information on the resolution – full reference in references section.

⁷¹ Dr Saravanmuttu lost her own son Richard de Soyza who was a media person and a human rights activist to state terror.

⁷² Mr. Bandaranayake was the world's first women prime minister and represented the Sri Lanka Freedom Party.

gathering. The messages of the rally were of solidarity not only nationally, but also internationally to be independent from any political affiliations and to hold the government responsible for the atrocities it had committed (Researchers experience living in Colombo Sri Lanka in 1991).

Apart from the public appearances many women took to religious ceremonies and pleaded with gods and goddesses to protect their loved ones.. They looked towards spirits and fortune-tellers⁷³ to enlighten them as to the whereabouts of the missing. Women actively engaged in making vows and made offerings at famous places of worship that they believed had the power to perform miracles. This was a moment where the act of grieving, transgressed from being a private act to a political act.

Women marched to places of worship to beg the deities to inflict curses and to plead for revenge. Many of the curses targeted president Premadasa himself. They used ancient rituals such as devil dancing ceremonies, offering blood to the gods (animal blood), chanting spells and so on to intimidate him. They even went to the extent of holding an event on his birthday pleading that the gods to punish him for the atrocities. Later in 1993, many women believed that the violent death of Mr. Premadasa at the hands of a LTTE suicide bomber on May Day procession in Colombo was a direct response to their pleas. There were celebrations on the streets on hearing of his death and some even went to the extent to light fire crackers.

The symbolically powerful method of protest adopted by the *Mothers Front* was turning the very act of private mourning to a public spectacle. The weeping women became a part of a

⁷³ This is an ancient and common practice in Sri Lanka even today for people especially women to go to fortune tellers to look to the future.

performance that they conceived as grieving for violence. At first this appeared as materialistic, reinforcing roles for women built on their passive protective characteristic and exclusion from formal political process. However, later the methods turned out to be unavoidably political. A more concentrated analysis of these women's activities throws light on the possibilities of disruptive traditional constructs (Helwig 1993 in Sivrsky 2000: 241; Ganeshpanchan 2009) that I have drawn attention to in the subsequent sections.

Through the politicisation and manipulation of women's traditional roles in mourning rights as a method of resistance these women used the symbolic strength of motherhood to enable their actions. Some women I interviewed (Kusuma, Charita, Indrani, Suriyarachci) connected themselves with the simple private mode of protest and the freedom from the dictates of a formal organisation. They said they were able to go to the temple or Devala in their own time and do the Kannlaw's (weeping) apart from the organised ones.

"This suited me better, because I was able to go to the gatherings without antagonising my husband-he did not approve of me of joining any organisations or committees in the village earlier, but with the front, I tell him I am going to the temple or to the Devla and he does not object (Suruyarachchi- A mother who lost her son to the violence Interview in Colombo 2004).

This highlights an important point with regard to how patriarchy dictates women's political participation. When women came out of their private space and took up a public role either through protest or politics, it was resented by the patriarchal structures with the use of intimidation, GBV and humiliation as with the case of the MDL. But the strategies used by the Front show that the mothers identified the weaknesses of the opponent as well as the limitations

women faced in taking up public roles, collective resistance they therefore, choose to adopt strategies which conformed to their traditional roles as mothers and healers and took to more private acts such as pleading with the gods and heaping curses on their enemies.

Some women I interviewed (Somalatha, Chandrani and Piyawathi) identified 'simplicity' of approach as to why they became involved with the Mother's Front.

"The Front was not like other organisations- it was simple and yet effective-we were women with little political knowledge but we were able to understand what went on within the organisation and what we were fighting for" (Interview with Chandrani Sri Lanka 2004)

In the context of conflict when women's traditional obligations are involved in anti nationalist discourse as seen earlier and women's political resistance may thus be limited, due to numerous reasons, the use of "acceptable" images provides a point of access from which to subvert social orders (Cornell 2004: 109) and mount resistance. Like other women's movements such as the Women in Black (Ganeshpanchan 2009), and the Mayo de Plaza in Argentina that make use of women's traditional roles as a method of resistance, the *Mothers Front* was able to do this by accessing a language of grief, that itself crossed many borders and is associated with women's roles as mothers or wives. The public spectacle of grief and emotion disrupts its association with the private realm. This is made more potent by the extension of mourning for the "other" (for the Tamils/Sinhala). In this way the action speaks to not only to local and national audiences, but also projects acknowledgement and support to people further and becomes a form of political resistance, which can be less confronting and quite distinct from standard protests.

State/public response to women's public participation

Drawing from traditionalist imagery does not necessarily mean public acceptance. Negative, even violent responses from public audience are common when women are perceived as disloyal to the nation/political authority. Many women reported abuse and violence from state sponsored gangs and thugs. While many also faced abuse from people from rival political groups within the communities they lived, often from relatives in the armed forces or those who were subject to JVP/LTTE violence.

An educated man in the suburb of Colombo commented to me at the time (field notes Colombo 2004):

"These women come from the mother's front and fathers back"

Despite antagonism and humiliating remarks from some sections of the community, the public sympathy and support that the Front received was becoming clear by the growing members, the support from other women's groups and human rights organisations. It was the methods adopted by the Front that challenged the government of the day. The Women's actions and the mode of protest had a dramatic effect on the government. The president initially responded by declaring sympathy for the women. He emphasised that the children had been led astray by disgruntled elements and that the state had taken over the rehabilitation of their children who would be released soon. On the contrary the then defence minister Mr. Wijeratne was more antagonistic, he without remorse shifted the blame towards the mothers for having failed in their duty to their children as well as to the nation (De Alwis 2002), insulting them for taking part in the demonstration; he also increased surveillance on the women on the grounds that they were a threat.

When they failed to put an end to the protests of the mothers, the government continued its attacks on the movement and went on to shame the opposition party for its political opportunism rather than supporting the government to eradicate terrorism/annihilation. Human rights activists who supported the mothers were blamed for doing so, by saying that they were the very same people who mounted pressure to crush the JVP. They were tagged as hypocrites who at the height of the JVP violence did not come out to organise or protest against its brutality toward innocent people, including a number of Buddhist priests, armed soldiers and their family members, public servants and women themselves (The Island June 26; 1992).

From the inception the mothers and the government were engaged in a bitter battle, using all possible tactics to out bid each other. When the government realised that they were engaged in a losing battle, it organised a rally to coincide with the international women's day led by Mrs. Premadasa, the wife of the President, in which the mothers mourned the death of those killed by the JVP and the LTTE (Researchers experience living through the JVP unrest during 1987-1989). This gathering gained much publicity through the state media. Not giving in to the action of the *Mothers Front* the government, later in July 1992 initiated its own Front, which comprised women from the Gampaha district where many mothers had faced violence and loss of their children due to JVP violence. The creation of a UNP Front led to tension between the women.

Tension and positioning within the women's movement

As evident throughout the available literature, appeals to notions of solidarity in the inaugural day rallies and the claims of the non-political alliance were not without difficulties and tensions. Both *Mothers Fronts (the first and second)* in the South were divided on intersecting divisions such as political affiliations and experience of violence and hence associated themselves with the two

main political parties the SLFP⁷⁴ and the UNP⁷⁵. The first Mothers *Front* that was associated with the opposition party had a larger support from other women's groups and human rights organisations than the government initiated Front. On the issue of legitimacy, the Mothers *Front* was further ahead than the government rendition which had affiliated itself with a political party who resorted to violence and showed no regard for human rights. However, the fact there were women who joined the government backed group, was an indication that the first *Mother's Front* were unable to cut across the intersecting social and political divisions and unite all mothers whose children had been killed or those who had disappeared.

In the same way, the original Southern Front also failed to connect with the Northern and Eastern Mothers to strengthen its positioning. Despite the North-eastern mothers receiving LTTE patronage at the initial stages (see page for LTTE leader's remarks) during the campaigns against the government and the IPKF, when the LTTE realised that the mothers took a further step and were challenging them, they then decided to intimidate the members and suppress the mothers. We could speculate that if the Southern group supported the Northern group, there would have been a greater possibility that the Northern group would have survived the LTTE intimidation. Apart from the inauguration and day rallies where there was Tamil representation, the Front failed to network with the North-eastern groups. Even with the inclusion of Mrs. Manorani Sarawanamuttu who became president, as we will discuss later, it can be argued her appointment was a matter of convenience rather than a matter of acceptance.

⁷⁴ Opposition party

⁷⁵ Ruling party

This unpreparedness to work across the intersecting divisions such as political and ethnic lines is a common factor that can be seen within the wider women's movement. The women's movement today in Sri Lanka is largely divided on political, ethnic as well as geographical lines. These differences have become an obstacle for women to unite. In Sri Lanka, today there are a large number of women's organisations operating on various levels and on various issues. The Beijing process saw the creation of a network called the Sri Lanka Women's NGO Forum. This included over forty women's organisations from all over the island, representing all sectors of society. However, despite these vast numbers of women's groups, there were no attempts at collective action amongst the women's groups. Many women's groups seem comfortable working to their own agendas rather than mobilising the limited resources and working in collaboration. There is no clear evidence to suggest that women have tried to reach out to each other and gather on a common platform.

As one woman pointed out:

"There is no women's movement today in Sri Lanka, but only women's projects - we are so divided on so many lines and we can't seem to agree on a single issue" – (interview in London June 07)

As a result many women's groups such as the Mannar Women's association had to struggle on their own to bring the human rights violence of Tamil/Muslim women into the public agenda. They not only worked in isolation, but also faced intimidation (correspondence with the association page 29) in their efforts to bring the violence against women to the public attention. The response to the first *Mothers Front* and other women's groups/feminists was also a matter of concern. While

many celebrated the success and participated in their rallies they were nevertheless divided in their response toward the first *Mothers Front*.

"We were unable to join them in their protests as they were supported by the SLFP, so we went on our own- the Lipton circus rally was different it was a commemoration for Rajini and that was different (A woman's group member in Colombo 2004)

Even though the first *Mothers Front* comprised members from grassroots in the south, it was founded, and continued to be co-ordinated by politicians from the opposition party. As such others women's groups were unable to work with a group who had affiliated themselves with a political party.

It was also of concern that the limited agenda of the first *Southern Mothers Front* precluded it from calling attention to similar issues faced by Tamil and Muslim women in the North and the East of the Island. From the evidence gathered in the field and my own experience living in Sri Lanka at the time I am aware that the *first Mothers Front* did not extend its call (in practice) to other parts of the country, to areas such as Kandy, Matale, Badulla, where many women had faced the same experiences as the women in the Matara district. Therefore, the Front was symbolically associated with South and the SLFP, rather than a nationwide movement.

There were many reasons for this. Firstly, the founders of the Front were hardcore SLFP people from the down south and the central parts were not SLFP strong holds therefore, they cling on to their political differences rather than addressing women's needs.

Secondly, the social and geographical divide between the Sinhala community as upcountry and low country meant that these politicians who represented the low country and were instrumental in initiating the *First Mothers Front* did not want to enter into any alliance with the Kandyan or up country politicians even in the face of disaster.

Thirdly, as the upcountry was a UNP stronghold, there was no political backing for the women who faced such grievances so they had to fight their battle outside of any political support. As they felt that they could not do so without intimidation they were, therefore completely isolated and grieved on their own.

Added to this, the women from the south were more socially and politically exposed than the up country women (the majority came from the poor plantation areas who didn't have the ability to read and write due to poor literacy rates)⁷⁶ and limited political awareness and were not able to organise themselves for such mass mobilisation on their own.

Apart from these divisions the first Front also, in its resolution and campaigns always targeted the then president and his government as the protagonists and never accused the JVP or the LTTE who were equally responsible for the violence. This was another reason that the front was subject to humiliation and intimidation from local people who had been victims of the JVP and LTTE violence. The JVP who were one of the main contributors to the violence were clearly exempted from the call to stop the violence and the blame was on the Government. Furthermore, the first

⁷⁶ The plantation women have been living in poverty and deprivation since the colonial times. Successive governments have done very little to improve their standards of life due to many reasons that is beyond the scope of this research.

Fronts failure to project itself as an independent movement, cutting across interlocking political and cultural boundaries that would have brought all mothers together was a concern too.

Summary

The complexities that surround gender roles at times of conflict become central in the formation of the *Mother's Front*. In a culture where mothers are called upon to produce valiant sons to protect the motherland, the mobilisation of mothers to protect sons and challenge the state was historical. The image of the grieving mother was a slap in the face for the nationalist discourse, which does not valorise grieving mothers when their sons are sent to battle. The mother's grief in public was evidence of the gruesome realities of violent nationalism and the intersecting identities women appropriate for themselves plus the lived experiences of women in times of conflict. The coming together of the mothers unmasked the realities of the politics of valiant mothers and martyrdom that patriarchal state (masculinity) tries to so vigorously defend. The mothers coming forward to challenge the state was proof of transgression by mothers of expected norms of the nation state and proved that the state was not able to protect citizens. At the same time mothers were successful in challenging a government and humiliating senior members of the government by naming and shaming them, that robbed their right to motherhood in a most brutal way.

The *Mothers Front* was a unique movement committed against war and political violence. They access women's mobilisation by drawing on their collective grief rather than the representation of women as essentially of "peaceful nature". Public protests drew on the symbolic power of women's traditional roles in grieving and caring, thereby resisting hegemonic representations of women as victims and perpetrators.

Despite successfully challenging the governments human rights abuse and naming and shaming the perpetrators through the commission of the disappeared and arbitrary removals today after more than 15 years of the First *Mother Fronts* formation, it can be argued that the influence it had on the women's movement especially the peace movement is very minimal. The reality is that women have not been able to forge a strong movement that is able to challenge the government or the political parties who are opposed to any form of peace deal; and women's voices have been totally absent from the peace table. There are many reasons for this.

Firstly, the political patronage received by the *Mothers Front* (both groups) has been a deciding factor. The strong support it received from the SLFP was based on political opportunism. The Mothers were used as a tool in shaming the UNP and bringing Mrs. Kumaratunga to power, rather than being inclusive and fighting for justice for the mothers who lost their children to state terror. This alienated a proportion of women who were faced with similar violence at the hands of the JVP/LTTE and therefore, many turned to the UNP Mothers Front whilst many more were totally excluded and left to grieve on their own.

As discussed in Chapter Three (page 74), Mrs. Kumaratunga's political campaigns presented her to the nation as a woman who had lost her husband and father to violence rather than being viewed as a politician, in an attempt to assimilate her with other women of the Front. It was a sinister move. This was a deliberate attempt to mislead women. Mrs. Kumaratunga was first and foremost a politician from a political background and she enjoyed many privileges due to her affiliations, class and caste, which the majority of the 'mothers' could not dream of. For example, a widow from the South or North faced greater economical difficulties, social stigmatisation and vulnerability to GBV than Mrs. Kumaratunga. In that sense Mrs. Kumaratunga's position of a

widow, rather than becoming a hindrance to her, elevated her position within the society and gave her a status of legitimacy to power as a woman who had lost her father and husband to the violence and would understand the other women's suffering. Also a major reason that prevents women entering politics is the lack of financial capability and political connection – which was not an obstacle to Mrs. Kumaratunga. Hence, assimilating Mrs. Kumaratunga with the women of the *Mothers Front* was a misrepresentation of the women's intersecting identities and lived experience of a woman situated within the social cultural positioning of Sri Lanka. Apart from its leaders and some of the activists the majority of women were from the lower ranks of the social ladder for they were the ones who were most affected by state violence.

You can find the feminists and peace activists in Barefoot⁷⁷ or in Mango tree in Colombo; they don't understand the common mans problems-(an interview with activist based in UK August 07)

Despite its call for solidarity that went beyond the divisions, in reality the *Mothers Front* was unable to escape the intersecting social divisions such as class and political difference that have been long rooted within the larger Sri Lankan society, and has even extended to the Diaspora (see Chapter Eight page 234).

Once in power Mrs Kumaratunga became entangled in the same conflict with the LTTE, and went on to place the country on a war footing during 1995 which is a clear contradiction to her election pledges. The Front was left to carry on its struggle of challenging human rights violence but this

⁷⁷ A shop, which is situated in Colombo, and caters for the elite and expats. A UK comparison would be a mini version of John Lewis, Selfridges

time without any political backing. Now its major champion has become the perpetrator of the very same cause that galvanised them. Mrs. Kumaratunga's government was unable to take a stand on the human rights issue, despite instigating two commissions but there were no significant efforts to improve the situation of violence or punish the perpetrators. The purpose of this commission was mostly to keep her election promises and stigmatise the previous government. In fact Mr. Wickremasinghe who was the main target of the Batalanda Commission went on to become Prime Minister of the country during her time as President and the JVP who were equally responsible for the violence was a main alliance in her subsequent People's Alliance Government. Likewise Mr. Rajapakse's era (current) has seen a re-invention of the same period of Human Rights violence but in a more brutal manner.

In the same way the UNP backed second Mothers front used the women to gain points on the violence of the JVP/LTTE, thus both groups were at odds despite their call for solidarity. On the other hand, the LTTE who supported the Mothers Front when they challenged state violence became hostile towards the mothers, when they directed their agitations towards the LTTE. Many women had to leave Jaffna (Interview March 2007 with a woman who faced violence and due to her connections to the Jaffna Mothers Front, she is now in Exile in the UK and campaigning for democracy in Sri Lanka).

Thus "motherhood" was subjected to power politics that were in place at the time and the front was not able to escape it. The *Mothers Front* even though it was able to challenge and resist violence, was not a movement that incorporated feminist values/agendas, and therefore did not have a vision for the future. The fact that it was based on materialistic values and social stereotyping of women as mothers rather than citizens with political rights did not give it the

advantage of moving beyond the cause it had formed as well as transgressing the social divides of class, political affiliations and ethnicity. The Front also failed to understand the intersecting identities such as the political, ethnic, cast and class divisions of women who faced violence and lost their loved ones to state/JVP/LTTE violence. Even Dr. Manorani was seen as Tamil but rather than understanding her intersecting identity as a Tamil woman married to a Sinhala man. By the act of her marrying a Sinhalese she became included in the ethnic collectivism. While the leaders saw her status as a mother who lost a son and as prominent human rights activist a woman of Tamil origin could be manipulated to their advantage, and were ever ready to include her into the organisation. This can be argued as the real motive behind the inclusion of Dr Manorani rather than her ethnicity. As an activist revealed to me she married a Tamil man and carried the Tamil name. When she entered into the public domain to challenge violence through a Woman's group in the UK she was cast as an LTTE agent despite the fact that she was of the same class of Dr. Sarawanmuttu, a professional in her own right and was not even of Tamil origin like Dr. Manorani. Therefore, it was not Dr. Saravanmuttu's class or ethnicity that mattered, but how her status could be "politicised" to the advantage of the male Sinhala dominated leadership.

"We are so divided; even having a Tamil name seems to be the wrong thing these days. When I was in Colombo I was constantly harassed. Now in the UK, the moment they (Sinhala) hear my second name, they re-act differently. They distance themselves from me as if I am poisonous. As far as I can tell them what they like to hear, they are happy but the moment I talk the real stuff then they brand me as LTTE. I have had several people call me and tell that there are e-mails going around branding me an LTTE agent.... it does not bother me being called an LTTE because I am not one... yet it hurts me... to

think that people are so narrow minded.... even persons who called themselves educated..." (Supporter of the Women's Network-UK 2006)

The Front was entangled in these complexities and had to work within these restrictions. However, one could argue that it emerged to campaign for a certain cause and once they had reached a point where they could have been satisfied with the outcome that they ceased to become a major force, which is a reasonable argument. But the outcome of their actions that resulted in the commission was clearly a political stunt of the Chandrika government and a white wash to gain political legitimacy, which many of the women failed to understand or accept. Thereafter, some women were given compensation and some women received political favours such as jobs under the patronage of the ministers involved but for the women who did not join the movement they were left out of such compensation or favours.

The disappearance of the *Mothers Front* from the political landscape of Sri Lanka goes to prove that when women enter politics within patriarchy especially in developing countries where they depend on the assistance of the male leaders, they are unable to play a role or radically change the sexual politics and end up playing political roles on their leaders terms; or accordance of their gender constructions. However, as we have identified in this research with the LTTE combatants when women transgress the traditional roles and appropriate new identities, they also achieve empowerment at micro level that if harnessed can lead to greater change in time to come. Within the climate which we discussed above it was inevitable that the *Mothers Front* would revert from a major force to another women's group that was struggling to overcome major barriers i.e. political violence and patriarchal controls faced by many women's groups in Sri Lanka today. By aligning with the political parties who saw the opportunity to mobilise the mothers against the ruling UNP

and later who abandoned them when they came into power the *Mothers Front* failed to define its own political objectives.

The *Mothers Front* was an example where women rejected violence, militarism and nationalism and joined hands to take a stand against violence to refute the notion that they are not victims of violence. There were other women, who did not engage with militarism either as combatants or resisters but chose instead to flee their places of origin and live in exile. Chapter eight I will explore the lived experience of women who have chosen to flee their places of origin and live in exile. The chapter also explores their experiences in flight and their identity formation in the host country I also examine the intersecting identities of women living in what Castles (2003) calls the asylum-migration nexus

CHAPTER EIGHT

GENDERED EXPERIENCE IN EXILE

Forced migration and internal displacement have become a key characteristic in Sri Lanka. From the mid fifties there has been a continuous out flow of people to other countries as well as internal displacement. The vast majority have been displaced internally and live in relief camps in the border villages of the conflict zones and some have moved to other parts of the country. Many have fled to India or have sought asylum in the west. These vicious cycles of displacement have been a result of the series of communal violence⁷⁸, military offences, and activities of the non state militaries including the LTTE. Due to my inability to carry out research with internally displaced persons⁷⁹ this chapter will look at the issue of international forced migration and will research the experience of Tamil women in exile in the UK.

The popular perception is that forced migration is a phenomenon of conflict and political violence. In the case of Sri Lanka the early migration is seen as due primarily to economic or cultural reasons. However, a closer look at the national rebuilding process and the social cultural changes that took place in relation to language, education and land⁸⁰, after post independence suggests that such migration cannot always be classified as economic. The Burgher⁸¹ community migrated in the mid 50s and early 70's and thereafter, virtually to the extent of extinction, and the upper class Tamils migrated to the west for education and employment purposes starting from the mid 70's. Both of these migrations were a result of the discriminative practices adopted by the Sinhala

⁷⁸ See Appendix three.

⁷⁹ The escalating violence meant that I was not able to carry out field work in the conflict areas and the border villages due to safety reasons.

⁸⁰ See Chapter three Mapping the Conflict pages 70-73 .

government at structural level. In recent times with the escalating conflict many have migrated as dependents of their spouses, students, and as highly skilled migrants rather than asylum seekers, but the underlying factor for their migration was the conflict and their inability to live the lives they wanted to live due to the increasing threat to their lives and the humiliation they faced living as second class citizens in their own country. The causes and consequences of the conflict have compelled many to leave the country, using different methods. People who are able to afford and have the skills chose to do so and become economic migrants rather seek 'asylum'. Therefore, in reality forced/migration is a more complex process what Stephen Castles calls 'the asylum-migration nexus' (Castles 2003). He argues that the distinction between forced and economic migration is becoming blurred; and there is a need to investigate the more complex factors that determine migration (O'Neill 2004, 2010). The historical context where men migrated to the urban cities in search of employment, education and upward mobility whilst women remained within the rural base has changed (Ganeshpanchan 1999). Today women are leaving their rural base in search of social and economical prosperity. Such movements cannot always be viewed as voluntary choices. The circumstances that lead to migration can be; increasing economic difficulties, unemployment, displacement, social insecurity and shifting gender roles, which may be a direct consequence of conflict/political repression and social instability. The latter reasons compel people to leave.

Despite the reasons that led to their displacement, the reality is that displacement not only changes people's economic and social conditions, but also alters traditional gender roles and creates new identities for people (Zaroza 1998). These new roles and identities affect women differently depending on their intersecting identities such as age, class and education. For

⁸¹ See note in chapter one

example, while displacement can create space for some women's enhanced mobility and public participation, it can also restrict mobility for others, depending on their intersecting identities such as age, the disabled and people who cannot speak the dialect of the host community.

Added to this, the state policies and the public discourse towards migrants in the host communities can become an important factor in shaping women's identity in exile. For example, the host community's (ie.UK and other European countries) reluctance to accept GBV/persecution as a cause for asylum has resulted in many women having to seek asylum attached to their husbands as dependents rather than on their own. These women continue to live as dependents with limited legal status which re-enforces the patriarchal structures even in exile. This was true with many of the participants. Even in the event of economic migration, many have entered the UK as dependents and continue to live as such.

Exploring some of these issues this chapter will try to uncover the lived experience of Sri Lankan women in exile in the UK. Using women's narratives and my observations in the field, the research will try to understand the background to their flight, their lived experience in flight and their lives in settlement. I will discuss challenges faced by women who are seeking asylum when negotiating their new identities and how this has shaped their lives in the host country.

Escaping Violence

Rupa, 37, entered the UK in 1998 not as an asylum seeker but as a dependent of her husband Ragu, a UK resident. The circumstances that led her to leave Jaffna, her hometown in Rupa's words were:

"After appa (father) died in 1985 we continued to live in Jaffna. This was the time the IPKF were in Jaffna. One afternoon I was at home with grandma, when two IPKF men came. They asked me who was at home and I said it was only myself and grandma. Then they forced their way in locking the front door behind them. One man grabbed me by my hand while the other pointed his gun at me. They ordered me to remove my clothes (looks to see if her children are listening). I started to scream and shout. Then one man hit me on my face. Grandma heard me shout and had run out to the garden from the back door asking for help. Her screaming had drawn the attention of the neighbourhood who began to make noise running towards our house. Hearing the neighbours shouting, the two men ran away and I escaped only with a swollen face". Thereafter we left Jaffna where my marriage to Ragu was arranged (Interview with Sri Lankan Tamil woman now in UK 2005)

Rupa did not apply for asylum but joined her spouse as a dependent. However, the reasons that led to her migration were the conflict and fear of violence. Violence is a factor for many women living through conflict to migrate but also as evident in Chapter Five (page 120), a reason that encourages women's support towards and involvement in military groups.

Despite the fact that women are increasingly affected by GBV during conflict, there is little recognition of the impact of violence on women when deciding on asylum cases. As a result, women like Rupa (above) and Ranu (page 238) who have faced GBV face many difficulties. This was also true of some women who I met at focus groups. These women have had to go through a long arduous process of appealing against the decisions to reject their claims for asylum on the grounds of sexual violence.

"I have waited for more than four years to get my status. I am fed up with this; I have not seen my children for all this time I feel like going home even if they kill me" (Women in Newcastle focus group May 2005).

This woman had left the country in fear of her life. She was raped in police custody while her husband was on the run; her children are with her parents in Jaffna. Many have faced further violence after deportation.

Muthuthamby Vanitha was reportedly arrested on 19 November 1998 by the Kotahena police in Colombo. She allegedly attempted to seek asylum in France, from where she was deported back to Sri Lanka in early October and detained for one week, during which she was beaten with iron pipes on her stomach and not allowed to use the bathroom. She was examined by a JMO who is said to have found evidence of torture.

Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture E/CN.4/2000/9.02/02/2000

(http://www.sangam.org/FB_REPORTS/00UNTorture.htm_accessed 14/12/2008)

Torture/bodily harm and fear of further repressions

Ranu, age 32, fled Sri Lanka in 2001 after been subject to abduction and torture by the Sri Lankan Army. Her claim for asylum was first rejected on insufficient evidence. Later, she was referred to a Medical officer and was given the opportunity to provide fresh evidence. After a long waiting period where she had to undergo much hardship, she was granted refugee status.

Ranu's story

I was detained at a checkpoint and taken to the army camp...they asked about a shooting in the area the day before about which I knew nothing, but they refused to believe me, they first scared me by making me to listen to others scream when being beaten, I was scared and cried and pleaded with them., then they laughed and mocked. They threatened me saying that if I did not tell them what I knew, I would suffer the same. By now they were angry with me and one man slapped me several times and left me in the room. After a while two men came again and started to questioned me, they made me sit on a chair and tied my hands behind... I could not move, they question me again and when I refused to answer they burnt me with their cigarette butts (showed faded scars on her face and neck), and pulled me by my hair. Then they removed bonds from my hands and asked me to stand up; when I stood up they pressed me against the wall grabbing my throat saying that they would kill me. I could not move or breathe; one man even punched me in my stomach. I was feeling lifeless, I have had no water or food for the whole day and now I didn't know what time it was. When I fell on the floor one man tore my clothes off while the other was watching (starts to cry and holds my hand). The next morning, I was still lying on the floor and had no strength to get up, lying down I looked at myself and realised I was naked.

After some time I heard footsteps, I closed my eyes tight, and was thinking this is my last day on earth, the door opened and I heard them come, a man screamed at me to get up, I had opened my eyes by now, but had no strength and when I tried to sit up I fell on the floor again, then he pulled me by my hands and made me sit on the chair. The other man who was with him threw my torn dress towards me asked me what my name was. That

was the first time they asked me my name. Again they asked me the same questions that the other men had asked me previously but I had no answers or even could not answer, as I could not gather any strength to talk. Then they asked me to follow them. With much difficulty, I stood up and holding the wall walked behind them. We came to an office where they asked me to sign a statement written in Sinhalese. I did not know what it was as I don't understand the language, but as now I had nothing to lose and knew that I was destined to die, I just signed it.

They told me that there was someone waiting for me and I could go home. But if I told anyone of what had happened that they would come after me again so I should keep quite. I could not believe what I was hearing. I saw my father with some other elderly man, my father embraced me and we started to cry but we could not stay there any longer, we quickly got out of the place as the men were shouting for us to leave. Afterwards, I learnt that the other man with my father was a lawyer and that my father paid a large sum to retain his services. I also learned that the statement I signed was one claiming that I had given the names of the people who were involved in the shooting. This was not true, but now who would believe me, only I know what happened to me in the camp, which I can't tell the outside world. But I knew I was in danger if the people who were responsible for the shooting got to know this, which was going to happen anyway. I stayed in Colombo for a few days. After I came to Colombo my father through a friend of his arranged for me to come here. First, we came to Singapore and there I stayed in a safe house for about a month and then came to the UK. My father had friends here, so he thought it was safer for me to be here than any other place

Ranu is one woman that escaped death and had managed to flee into exile. Many other women like Krishanthi Kumarasamy (page) who was abducted at a check point never came back again.

These women's stories are examples where the asylum policies and their associated services still tend to be dominated by the stereotypical image of the male political activist escaping persecution followed by his wife and family, rather than understanding the danger women face in conflict zones.

"Most asylum seekers are young, single men who have deserted their families for economic gain" Lord Rooker, Immigration Minister, May 2002 (Dumper 2002 pp 2)

The lack of understanding of the effects of conflict on women and the stereotyping of the asylum seeker has shaped the design and implementation of asylum policy at all levels but also the public discourse. Despite the increased number of women taking up political/military activities, (chapter five) only a very low number of women apply for asylum status (Dumper 2002; Asylum Aid 2003). Unfortunately, I was unable to find gender specific statistics on Sri Lankan asylum seekers but the empirical research findings and any available literature (Asylum aid 2003) made it clear that many women come into the country as dependents attached to their husbands status. This traditional gender bias does not fully recognise women's experience in conflict and has left women at a disadvantage when claiming asylum.

Violence due to involvement of spouse/relatives

The gendered realities of conflict are that women are victims of violence and face security threats, not only because of their own involvement, but mainly due to the involvement of their male relatives. This is often not considered when assessing applications for asylum and many women have to face many difficulties in proving their case.

Parvathi fled the country in 2001 with her young family after facing rape as a result of her husband's involvement with the LTTE.

Muttu was a member of the organisation. So it is because of him that we had to come here. On that night I heard the dogs bark and footsteps coming toward our house, I thought it was Muttu, but the big bang on the door made me realise it was the army. They broke open the door. The children started screaming and I think the whole village heard the noise. The men went into all the rooms and they were screaming in anger. One man asked me where my husband was; I said I did not know. Then he caught me by my hair and shook me while shouting at me asking the same questions, then slapped me and kicked me, screaming at the children to keep quiet, but I heard them crying. Two men dragged me to the kitchen (she did not go into to detail of the incident, but summed up) I don't know what happened. After, I was hospitalised for several days, while the neighbours looked after my children. Once I recovered, Muttu made arrangements for us to leave the village after we left, Muttu also left and claimed asylum. He came here before us and we joined him after. During his absence, I had to look after the family, I did not have a way of supporting my family so I worked in a house and earned some money

which was hardly enough to sustain us. We had to borrow some money from a friend of Muttu to come here. I asked if she wanted to return: How could I live there again... the whole village knows what happened to me, how I could leave my children to grow up with that stigma... I never want to go home again.

The patriarchal attitude that women are the property of men and that to sexually abuse the women is to humiliate the enemy men has meant that more and more women face sexual violence. However, not recognising sexual violence as grounds for asylum has meant that these women face further difficulties in seeking protection.

Despite the violence, women also face economical hardships and displacement that leads them to flee their place of origin and seek a place of safety.

Loss of livelihood/displacement

Apart from the direct threat of violence there are also other intersecting factors such as loss of house and property due to area bombardment by the armed forces or the forced evacuation of civilians by the LTTE that have lead to displacement. Raji was one of the boat people who sought refuge in India in 1998. Her story has a better ending than the countless others who attempted to flee the conflict during the years. Raji's village in Jaffna was affected by the war, as a teenager, and single, she left with her Mother and Brother when the army went on a bombing spree in 1998. They escaped in a fishing boat to India with eight other people. Thereafter, she met her husband and together they fled to the UK. She now has very little hope of returning.

Now my home is here, where I live with my husband and children. My mother and brother are in India so there is no need for me to go back to Jaffna. Even if I go to Jaffna my husband is in danger he would be killed by the LTTE and then what would happen to my children, and me so how can I go back?

(Interview with Tamil woman living in Southwalk, August 2005).

For Raji, the violence and the hardships she experienced in her country of origin has meant that she no longer considered it to be her home and challenged the idealised view of home. For her home was where her husband and children live and where she did not have to face further violence or live with the fear of violence. While many other women still referred to home as their place of origin which was Jaffna. In that sense I felt that Raji had moved beyond the feeling of nostalgia that some women harboured who I met in the focus. This nostalgic feeling is something that Zarzosa (1998) considers only as a strategy that is adopted to survive in exile, particularly during the period of rejecting the host society.

Political activism and resisting state/military violence

Some women I interviewed entered the UK as political activists and faced violence/repression either at the hands of the government, the LTTE, or other military groups for being members of rival groups or taking up political activities. I have documented many of their interviews in Chapter four.

Helen was a journalist and worked for a leading newspaper in Sri Lanka. She covered many stories of political importance including the Krishanthi Kuamrasmay case (page). She was an

official reporter to cover the peace talks of 1994, which collapsed due to the assassination of Mr. Gamini Dissanayake⁸². As a result she was constantly harassed by the police and imprisoned in 1995 and later released. No longer able to continue with her work she fled the country in fear of her life and claimed asylum in the UK.

While these are only partial factors that have led to women's displacement, there are many other reasons that have led to their entry into the UK, sometimes directly, or at times via other countries such as India or Singapore. Their journeys have not always been safe and eventless. Many women have faced greater dangers and at times even lost their lives in flight.

Parimala was a seventeen-year-old married woman. She joined her family and a group of refugees to escape to India. On landing in Rameswaran her husband reported her as missing. A few days after her body was washed over to the shore and was identified by her husband. The police were unable to identify the cause of death as her body was heavily decomposed and the case did not go further (as revealed by an informant in a focus group September 2005 she was one of the women on the boat).

In another incident

Sinnarasa Anthonymala, a 17-year-old girl from Jaffna, was reportedly shot in the thigh by the Navy while travelling on a boat to India on 16 July 1995 and taken to the Kankesanthurai navy camp, where she was allegedly stripped of her clothing and tortured by being struck on the head with an iron rod, for which she needed stitches. She was also allegedly handcuffed at the ankles and suspended upside down from a window bar,

⁸² See chapter three for more information.

electric wires were applied on her body, and she was burnt with cigarettes and heated metal rods. On 28 August 1995, she was allegedly transferred to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), where she was reportedly cut on the back of her neck, hit on the mouth and hit on her left leg with a piece of wood. After a month she was allegedly forced to sign seven statements typed in Sinhalese⁸³ On her body the examining medical officer reportedly found a number of irregular marks and scars that corroborated all of her testimony of being tortured.

UN Special Rapporteur on Torture E/CN.4/2000/9.02/02/2000

http://www.sangam.org/FB_REPORTS/00UNTorture.htm accessed 14/12/ 2008.

While the research has uncovered some reasons for women to seek asylum/go into exile they are not exhaustive. Whatever the reason for their flight, upon arrival these women face much difficulty.

Arrival

Not only do women have to undergo violence and intimidation in their villages and homes, but they have also faced many forms of violence whilst in flight and on their arrival to the host countries.

Ritu was from the North. When her parents suspected that she was an informant of the LTTE, they wanted her to leave the village soon as the army would come for her. Arrangements were made to send her to a person named Jegga in India. Arriving in India, Jegga took her to a house,

⁸³ Many Tamil women are unable to read or write Sinhalese therefore, the military/police take advantage of this and get

where there were other women; she lived in the house for about a week. Even though Jegga had obtained money from her mother he also demanded sexual services. After a few days Jegga arranged a visa for her to the UK. Having no other way she had to work according to Jegga's plan. From India she was flown to Zurich, Frankfurt, Denmark and finally arrived in the UK after more than a week of leaving India.

I was scared and devastated; you will not understand the things that went through my head. Not knowing what would happen to me as if what had happened already was not enough (by this she meant the abuse of Jegga). Finally she arrived in the UK and was detained. My application was rejected first, but then after appealing and agreeing to cooperate with the police I was granted status (interview with woman who fled the country with the help of a people trafficker UK August 2005).

Ritu's narrative is an example of the exploitation women undergo at the hands of the organised traffickers and agents such as Jegga who thrive on women's vulnerability. These agents not only obtain large sums of money but some also abuse women for their own pleasure⁸⁴. However, the complexities around forced migration are such that the only alternative women may have is to obtain the services of these agents to escape violence, torture, harassment at the hands of the state/non state military in the conflict zones.

signatures for false statements under duress

⁸⁴ See Report "Refugee Women seek asylum in LTTE Office <http://www.tamilnet.com/print.html?artid=11467&catid=13> accessed 02/08/2004 where twelve women who lived in refugee camps in Tamil Nadu since 1990 were trapped into returning clandestinely by boat where they were promised foreign jobs. Upon arrival these women have been held in safe houses in the suburbs of Colombo

Like Ritu there were many women in the focus groups who had paid traffickers to get them to the UK. Some revealed that they paid handsome amounts of cash to these traffickers to bring them to safety and had travelled across eastern Asia and Europe to get to their final destination.

In Exile

Many women simultaneously face extreme social discrimination due to their new identity and social positioning as asylum seekers/refugees in exile. As their stories reveal, the personal loss of identity as a result of the violence and humiliation they have faced has made them feel isolated (Interviews with women in focus groups). This is further exacerbated by the experience they have to undergo in the UK. All these women I interviewed for this research have integrated within the host communities differently and live very different lives to each other. However, an observation was that these women's' integration into the host communities have largely been shaped by their lived experience as well as the intersecting identities in their place of origin.

For example Ranu (page 238) who experienced sexual violence is unmarried and lives in a council flat. She is not employed and is dependent on state benefits. She rarely goes out to socialise with others due to unexplained fear and shame. Several times during our interview she went to the door to see if it was locked and drew the curtains. She also broke down in tears and I felt that she was under depression⁸⁵. I later contacted an outreach worker of a charity that was working with refugees and asylum seekers with the consent of Ranu and helped her to get more help. I gave her a call six months after we initially met and was told she was continuing her

⁸⁵ I asked her if she had talked to her GP about her distress and she said yes and she was prescribed of medication but she felt that it did not help her.

treatment and is feeling much better and looking forward to the summer as a relative of hers will be visiting her.

What is evident is that if Ranu had received the emotional support she needed at the very early stage of her arrival, she would have integrated into the community more effectively. Ritu (page 246) continued to be single, but said she had a lover who was a former combatant of another Tamil militant group. They had no plans of marriage as he is already married. She lives a life of isolation in a flat provided by the council and does not want to mix with other Tamil people in the community in fear that they will come to know of her relationship with a married man. Parvathi (page 242) though had faced violence and had integrated well into the community and now lives a better life. Her husband Muttu owns an off license and they live in a multi ethnic area where there are other Sri Lankan (Sinhala as well as Tamil) and therefore, they don't feel isolated. She has limited interaction with the host community other than when they came to the shop where she helps out her husband at times. She has built close ties with the Sri Lankan Tamil community who live in the area. Her husband is involved in many societies and organisations and gets involved in organising activities for the Tamil community and she enjoys participating in them. Her family and the social interactions seemed to have helped her to come to terms with her past experiences. However, her relations with the Sinhala community in the area are not very cordial, "*I hate them, they are the ones who ruined our lives*" she says.

Raji's story (page 244) seems to have a better ending when considering the unfortunate tales of many other women and girls who fled their villages. But it is not such a happy ending for her in the UK. The UK did not turn out to be the dreamland she thought it would be. While she is lucky to be alive and escape from the LTTE and army, she is unable to escape the cruel social structures

that she lives in. She is unemployed and looks after her kids at home, while her husband works locally as a clerical officer.

"I feel very frustrated – and hardly go out, even when we go out, the looks I get on the streets and in public places are very heart- breaking, they look at us like we are dirt. They know little about the lives we spent in Jaffna. If it were not for this war, we would have been living better lives than most of these people who live here.

I asked her why she did not take up a job or further training. *"I have to take care of my children, and I am the one who drops them off and picks them up from school and do all their work, my husband has no time for them, he has to earn for us. Also, I don't like going out to work, I never went out on my own, nor has any woman in our family ever gone out to work"*

Many women including Parvathi (page 242) and Raji (page 244) have voluntarily accepted the role that has been assigned to them as mothers, wives and carers accepting the gender roles assigned to them in their place of origin. Parvathi though had transgressed these during the stage of her husband's early exile where she had to care for her family. Upon re-uniting with her husband she has reverted to her former role as mother and carer. The fact whether this was by choice or forced upon her was a question even she was unable to answer. *I think Muttu expects me to be at home I also did not feel comfortable going about on my own.* Parvathi's experience tells us the status of many women who transgress their gender roles during conflict and take on additional responsibilities to care for their children/families in the absence of the men. Upon return of the men either from combat or exile, these women return to their original roles and continue to live in the shadows of their men either as wives/mothers/daughters or carers.

Both women (Parvathi and Raji) have not moved from their traditional roles even in exile. Despite the average income that is generated by their husbands these women continue to live as housewives and dependents. They are not considered wealthy or upper class and do not feel comfortable interacting with the host community.

For Helen (page 244) the story is very different. She freely moves about and holds many voluntary positions within the society of journalists and refugees. Despite her acceptance in to society, she had been economically marginalised and is still unemployed. She has been deprived of her career as a journalist. When I met her she was feeling frustrated by not being able to do what she always loved. Her income as a self employed translator is not a regular income and she faces financial difficulties too. Yet, she has not given up hope and is in continuous search of employment as a journalist.

A closer analysis of these women's integration processes seems to draw links to the social status they enjoyed in their place of origin. For Rupa, the better status she enjoyed in Jaffna was key to her being proposed to by an educated upper class man that led to her marriage and move to the UK. Her husband's status as a professional and the income was sufficient for them to live a comfortable life without Rupa (page 238) being employed. I also met several other women during my field work who, held professional jobs such as doctors, accountants, lawyers and academics. All these women had either held such jobs in their place of origin or came from upper class/upper middle class families or were educated in the UK and many had married men who were already residents in the UK and some paying large sums of dowry. For Helen (page 244), despite discrimination in the labour market, her ability to speak fluently and having held a job have made her acceptable as a professional in the host community. However, this was not the case for many

women I interviewed who despite their qualifications and skills feel discriminated against in the labour market and therefore, have given up working altogether.

Many women such as Raji (page 244) and Parvathi (page 242), who did not enjoy such status and connections in their place of origin they are now socially marginalised and live very difficult lives in the UK depending on their spouses. Even women like Parvathi who helped in their husbands business considered themselves as unemployed. Some who had paid jobs worked in supermarkets, post offices, schools as class room assistants or dinner ladies.

The discrimination these women face is not only from the host community, but also from their own community, either from people who have migrated in the early 70's or who are now well established or sometimes by people who live in the same status as asylum seekers/refugees.

"I don't feel comfortable coming for the focus groups, I don't want to get insulted by the other woman, she is from the same village as me but from a higher caste family so even now she thinks that she can treat me like when she was in Jaffna" (Woman at Focus group West end Newcastle 2005).

These two women entered into constant arguments over their disagreements during the meetings at times, interrupting the process, later I realised that they were not only divided on caste, but also had issues surrounding their political affiliations. Therefore, it can be argued that class and caste are important factors not only for the Sri Lankan Tamil women, who live in Jaffna, but also a deciding factor that determines their migration patterns, their settlement and the social networks they enter into as a result event in exile.

Other intersecting divisions such as their political affiliations that continues to divided them even in exile, show sufficient evidence to confirm that various political groups continued their work despite their exile, as I discovered during field work where I met a former LTTE cadre who has now joined a rival political group and was collecting funds for their political activities in the UK these groups continued to be divided on these lines rather than gathering round a common identity.

More striking were the differences between the women of the two communities (i.e. Tamil and Sinhala). While Tamil and Sinhala women have joined separate community organisations aimed at providing support to other members of their respective community, during my field work I was unable to find evidence where Tamil and Sinhala women came together to work in partnership under one banner as “Sri Lankan” women in the diaspora. Some Tamil women like Parvathi (page 242) believed that it was not possible to build any form of relationship with the Sinhalese. Even the women, who had better lives in comparison to the lives they spent in Jaffna, believed that they were victims of Sinhala oppression. Many women seemed to cling on to the past nostalgia of the “happy days” and found it difficult to move on.

How happily we lived in Jaffna, but see what these people did to us now we have to come and live here because of them .I don't think we will ever be able to go back to Sri Lanka and live because now it is a Sinhala country, they are wiping out the Tamils. (Interview with Tamil Woman, Coventry 2006)

However, for women like Helen (page 244) and another member of the Women’s Network were more open to building relations with the Sinhalese and said they enjoyed close relationships with Sinhalese friends during the time they lived in Colombo. Another member of the Network

complained that (see extract in page) she was alienated due to her Tamil name and at times she was cast as an LTTE sympathiser even when she was not.

Complex relationships between Forced Migration and Gender

While forced migration is a result of the conflict, political repression and exclusive national building programmes, as witnessed in the case of Sri Lanka, plus many other conflict zones. It is also a more complex process that further exacerbates and encourages conflict and social violence. The economic and social vulnerabilities created around displacement and forced migration can manifest in many different ways and lead to the prolonging of conflict and the creation of new political and social oppression, especially for women, who become the most vulnerable, due to their sexuality and social status. In this section, I will explore how research findings evidence that forced migration has led to the prolonging of the conflict as a result of the financial and ideological support of the diaspora and how such financial contribution has worked towards further oppressing women.

A key feature of the conflict has been the financial/ideological support by the Tamil diaspora towards the LTTE cause and the anti LTTE campaigns of the Sinhala community, which are taking part on the streets of western cities⁸⁶. Apart from the direct financial donations⁸⁷ and ideological support towards the political parties/groups, the regular remittance towards the families and dependants living in Sri Lanka becomes vital for sustaining the war economy. The diaspora plays an important role in building international opinion on the conflict. Anti SL Government/Anti

⁸⁶Demonstrations in July 2007 by the Tamil Community in Trafalgar Square London calling for the international community to pay attention to the Human Rights Violence that is taking place in the Sri Lanka recognise the Tamil self determination

⁸⁷ See BBC Report on 21st March 07 London

war demonstrations on the streets of London and other western cities, regular seminars, conferences and other political lobbying are important elements in the LTTE/State propaganda mechanism that contribute to re-invent and whitewash the reality behind the causes and consequences of the conflict.

While financial remittance from the diaspora not only serves towards the sustainability of the economy, but also works towards re-inventing oppressive practices that existed in pre-conflict society such as the dowry (page 146) and class (page 61). For example, there is an increased demand for dowry in the North East of Sri Lanka today and parents must comply in providing this if they want to give their daughters in marriage to a suitably qualified man who has resident status in the west. This is one way for many women to escape the violence that is a reality of the conflict zones. However, it is the well to do or those who have relatives abroad that can afford this kind of payment for their daughters. For the women who are unable to afford such payments, they are left to deal with the harsh realities of the war or seek the services of human traffickers like Jegga (page 247). As seen in Chapter Five (page 146) the dowry system and poverty (page) have been some of the reasons that have encouraged women to take up arms and commit violence. The reality of the Tamil community is that rather than abandoning these patriarchal systems that oppress women, the society has re-enforced these cruel cultural practices leaving women more vulnerable to humiliation and violence.

Women as protectors of culture

While economic and ideological contribution plays an important role that helps in the continuation of the conflict, the cultural revitalisation is a key element in any nationalistic struggle. The diaspora contributes to the struggle by maintaining and re-creating such nationalistic symbols. As Radihika

Coomaraswamy argues, the Diaspora takes greater care in continuing these practices than when living in their places of origin (Coomaraswamy 1996). Patriarchal structures that operate within these societies call upon women to engage in their roles as cultural reproducers in boundary makers (Yuval Davis 1987), even in exile, thus placing greater pressure on women. In her paper *Dancing the War*, Christina Natali (2006) reveals how a Sri Lankan Tamil woman had spent over £5000 to conduct an Arangathram dance recital of her daughter in the UK – when asked why she had spent this money she said because they wanted to maintain the tradition. Another Sri Lankan family living in North London spent over £10,000 to conduct three ceremonies for relatives the occasion of their daughter on attaining the age of 13 years. The grandmother of the girl, who was a school teacher in Jaffna, and now living with the family said to me:

“It is important “that we maintain these traditions as we need to teach our children how to carry on our culture and traditions” (telephone interview with Tamil woman in the UK, July 2006).

This re-confirms that militarised anti-nationalism while assigning women the role to protect their cultures, simultaneously use women’s’ bodies and sexualities to maintain the notion of the honourable state.

Decay of Culture

Displacement also can lead to the erosion of a culture/language and identity by not having the means for its re-generation within the host community. For example, parents of many second generation Sri Lankan young men and women are faced with the dilemma of arranging suitable partners for their children and having to reluctantly cope with an increased number of mixed

marriages or inter-caste marriages, which they would have not otherwise permitted in their place of origin. This has also led to some parents, seeking potentially suitable partners at very young ages and making close ties with such families so that when the marriageable age is reached they will not have to face the burden of their children not marrying into outsider castes/ethnic groups.

My husband's friend is from Jaffna, and I have a son who is at university. He is an ideal match for our elder daughter so I always ask my husband to keep in touch with his friend so that when the time comes we can make a proposal, but I am a bit anxious, we don't know what these girls and boys will be up to when they leave home for university. (A mother who has a grown up daughter of 16 years 2006)

On the other hand, many second generation Tamil children are faced with pressure to be included or accepted as "an insider" and tend to change or reject the upbringing of their parents/elders and adopt their own identity through the assimilation of new identities to become "included".

While this integration process (to adopt the culture and values of the host community) works towards the decay or death of a culture, another factor that leads to this are the issues concerning migrants who either return to or visit their homeland. With the signing of the CFA, there have been many people returning home, mostly for a short visit, who take on a new found identities, and wealth.

Identity formation in exile

What is at stake in an ethnic conflict and ethnocide in Sri Lanka is more than the mortality of bodies, more than the destruction of life and the demise of security. Rather, what is at stake, especially for those whose bodies have been spared the destruction of death, is a

death of a way of being- in- the world, the death of that which constitutes their identity, honour and dignity (Daniel 1996: 68)

Over the years, literature regarding identity politics among resettled refugees and immigrants has grown in recent times (Zaroza 1998). Zetter argues that identity has become one of the key points of analysis in understanding a refugee life (1991). While for Malkki identity is dynamic and a key-element in the creation of people's (self) images, especially when it comes from 'refugeeness' (Malkki 1992). It is true to say that refugees and immigrants continue to struggle with the changing and intersecting identities in strange foreign contexts, often caught up between unknown languages and cultures, among strange people and a strange land, quite often facing hostilities and humiliation.

Gender becomes fundamental to the process of identity construction, especially in situations of conflict, war and displacement (Schrijvers 1999; Zarosa 1998). It can be argued that in times of exile, gender is re-negotiated as we see with the women who take on extended roles during the absence of their men. As Schrijvers (1999) suggest gender is located in the centre of human identity and dignity and has far-ranging consequences for the overall positioning of women. It determines to a great extent the way in which people experience their lives, insofar as it refers to "relations of power, privilege and prestige". It is clear that the research evidences that gender constitutes a key element in the Tamil women's lives, at times of normality, as well as in conflict and in displacement and exile.

For many of the women who participated in this research, their exclusion had begun long before they were made to leave their places of origin. They were women who were excluded from the

political process that in the first place contributed to their exile. They were women, deprived of any political status that enjoyed a marginalised social status of being “mothers”, “wives” and also had other intersection identities based on factors such as castes and class. Many had lost their jobs, which they held in local schools, banks and other offices, which had to be closed down, and many were internally displaced.

This was exile without moving (Zrosa 1998), they had lost almost everything that belonged to them, even the safety of their private spaces, their home. Many women were harassed, abducted, raped, and at times murdered within these spaces. They were unable to travel around freely to attend to their daily tasks, the streets, the fields and the market, which were once their socializing places became hostile to them. The military, IPKF or non-state military actors were operating in these areas which lead to a restriction of women’s mobility. The outside world, full of tragedy, people arrested, tortured and killed. Imprisonment, disappearances, harassment were daily experiences of many women’s lives (see Chapter Four, Five, Eight), forming the brutalities of the regime that claimed to represent them as well as from the military. Their places of origin were destroyed and women were left to negotiate between the past and present, the future of their lives, the safety of their children, and their families.

In these circumstances in exile their intersecting identity, which were re-constructed around being an asylum seeker/refugee, and foreigner, even if they have come as racialised? As economic migrants or in to marriage women continued to be treated as “dependents”. Added to this, they were women and therefore, gained a dual identity of refugee/asylum seeker women/dependent, which has governed every aspect of their new identities.

The identities they have formed for themselves intervene within this dual identity of “refugee/asylum seeker dependent/woman”, which is constructed differently for a man. Within this major category, women’s experiences are not universal. There are intersecting identities that they have created for themselves, such as the members of the Women’s Network, who have become campaigners for ending GBV during times of conflict, women like Helen (page 244) who is contributing effortlessly as a volunteer for many groups and other women who hold professional jobs and have reached the peak of their careers. Among this major identity “Tamil/refugee women” there are other sub/intersecting identities that have emerged and that women associate themselves with.

Lives destroyed by violence

Many women like Ranu (page 238) and Parvathi (page 244), invariably semiconsciously adopted an identity of women with no self-respect. The social and cultural practices that humiliate women who have faced sexual violence have triggered this. They constantly worry about the future and past memories of their violence. Often, they (women like Ranu (page 238) and Parvathi (page 242)) have had no time to grieve, but had to take on the responsibilities of looking after their families or struggling to leave to a safer place, to escape further violence. Added to this, they also fear that when their partners get to know of the violence they will leave them.

For Parvathi, Muttu had accepted her and taken responsibility upon himself for her tragedy.

Whatever, he says, I am sure one day this will come to haunt me, she says with tears in her eyes, and you know how our men react to these things, I also suspect that is why he doesn't want me to go about on my own”

Ranu does not have a partner and faces the prospect of never having one for the rest of her life.

"How can I ever have a relationship with a man?" She asks me.

Widowhood

Four women in the East London focus group, were widowed, and three in the Newcastle groups. For all these women and for many other families who are now in exile, the husband was the head of the household and sole income generator. In the absence of their men, these women are suddenly left with the responsibility of providing for the families and managing the household. Many women had no previous experience with income generating-activities and experienced difficulty finding employment and raising children alone, especially when there is hardly any support available for them.

Apart from being economically vulnerable, these women also face the social death of becoming a widow in a community that celebrates married women as the auspicious woman (Coomaraswamy 1996). Being a widow among a very superstitious community like the Tamil community, means that these women are placed at the very bottom of the social strata. Widows are not allowed to participate in any social activities, as they are considered signs of bad omen. As Ratha in (page 115) experienced, she was barred from taking a front seat in a wedding ceremony of her sisters children.

Widowed women are also considered unlucky and that is the reason that they had lost their husbands – here women are blamed for their victimisation, and it is not the conflict or the causes that led to the man's death.

Dependence

Many women who had come in to the country have done so attached to the status of their men, or a male relative and do not enjoy any form of rights, at times they live in constant fear of their partners abandoning them. Their economic dependency has also meant that they have to undergo many difficulties such as living in violent relationships, especially where many men have been subject to either being prisoners or combatants, and are now facing difficulty in fitting back into the community.

He is a good man, but at times he can be very volatile and burst out for the slightest thing and become violent. When he is angry he does not know what he is doing. But after that he will be begging for pardon (A woman at a Focus group who did not want to give an interview).

Poor/uneducated

The discourse that poverty creates conflict has dominated the western public discourse, which builds on the attitude that conflict arises due to poverty, and therefore, views asylum seekers as living in poverty in their places of origin. As such, especially women who enter the country are viewed as poor, uneducated, deprived and oppressed. This is also a problem that many women have to deal with when seeking employment. Many employers do not accept the qualifications women have gained in their places of origin and request that these women be re-trained (See Helen's case in page 244). As a result of these stereotypical identities, women suffer economically, as well as social marginalisation. As discussed in chapter four, such economical vulnerabilities also can lead to women being coerced to prostitution/trafficking. Link needed to the next quote/point.

When I arrived newly in 2000, I wanted to register with the Finchley job centre and was asked to see an employment adviser. She asked me about my computer skills to which I said I had used a computer for more than 10 years and was very fluent in the use of packages such as word and excel. She looked at me in disbelief and asked me "Have you used a computer in the UK?" This made me angry and sad but I politely asked her "is there a difference in a computer be it in Sri Lanka or the UK" to which she had no answer. (Authors own recollection of 2000 when I arrived in UK)

Security

In an atmosphere of hostility and coming to a strange land, security is another very real concern for many women who are in exile.

I live with my daughter. The area that we have been dispersed to is a very deprived area. Crime and poverty is not new to this place. Being a refugee we are constantly subject to harassment, once they threw stones through a window and broke the glass, the boys laugh and pass remarks at us on the streets. I can't go anywhere alone or send my daughter; I have to accompany her even to school. A few weeks ago when we were out they had broken into the house and destroyed the little things we had. I complained to the social worker, but not to the police, if the police come then they will get more hostile towards us. I have asked to be re-housed and am on the waiting list (Woman in East end of Newcastle focus group August 2005).

Negotiating Past Memory

The political value of what is forgotten reminds us of the deep connection between "memory and freedom" (Passerni 1983: 196)

As a result of the increased multidisciplinary enquiries into refugee resettlement, refugee's physiological adoption has recently come to the forefront in both academic literature and organisational agenda. It is now generally accepted that the refugees that have lived through violent experiences such as war or torture may suffer profound psychological duress during re-settlement exile given the traumatic events they have suffered (UNHCR). Such experiences are also considered to be a rather violent process, which persists in destroying the psychology of the survivor long after their actual occurrence even when far distant from danger (Manz 1995: 161). It is believed that permanent re-settlement and its founding principles may afford refugees some degree of psychological assurance by implying that they should never again have to face their perpetrators or violence again, and thus they may be able to cope with their memories and experiences of violence whilst removed from the environment in which the trauma occurred.

However, despite this understanding there seems to be very little support for women especially those coming from ethnic communities that treat sexual violence still as a stigma that they are unable to reveal to anybody.

"I want to cry, cry all the time, if I only could scream and tell what happened to me. If I could only ask them to give those papers to me, I would tear r them in their faces. If I could only go back and live without fear" (Interview with Ranu continued)"

Another woman said,

Those days were the happiest days of our lives, we all lived happily, I can still remember how the children played with other children, and the women frequently visited us at home. During the New Year, we all got new clothes and children used to get money; it make them so happy. Now we are left alone, even when we get together with others, there is no happiness as such. We all have sadness in our stories” (middle aged woman living in East London, October 2005).

“Now that we are old, we can't get used to living here, there at home there would be somebody always at home... now my daughter and son- in- law goes out to work and after the children go to school I am left alone. I hate this; there is nobody to talk to and I can't even go to the temple.... I have not gone to a temple for many years now... in Jaffna I always went to the temple on Fridays. Now, even I don't have friends to telephone, as many of them are dead and gone. I am praying daily that I must also die soon” (76 year old woman who was the mother of one of my informants).

While part of the fear is the stigma attached to telling their stores, there are also the power relations that run within the families, where even when the women are prepared to talk and take steps their men deprive them of seeking outside help.

I have never been to a GP after I came to this place other than for treating my children- it is not that I don't want to see one, but that my husband always discourages me saying that I don't have any illness and it is that I am just imagining. Now, I am around 45 years old but can't do anything about it, even when I complain he gets angry and tells me if you want you can go – but then I know he won't approve if I do it (interview with woman, Coventry 2006).

This woman's story is associated with the power relations that exist in patriarchal societies like the Tamil community even in exile which was also a barrier when conducting interviews that I have discussed in Chapter Two (page 36).

On the other hand, despite these issues, the support system never understands that women's positioning are different from culture to culture, and that treating women universally is detrimental to their well being especially when they have faced such traumatic experiences in life. The refugee support system typically emphasise infrastructural assistance and material aid rather than psychological support during reintegration (Farwell 2001: 44). As such unresolved memories of violence can make re-settlement a highly troublesome process, particularly when one is unable to leave behind the memories of the "home", a place that was filled with traumatic historical events, far from the natural process of reintegration such as in the case of Ranu (page 238), Ritu (page 246), Parvathi (page 242) and other women whom I interviewed.

This is the reality for thousands of Sri Lanka women, since the beginning of war, violence has become a harsh reality and has largely shaped collective memories of the Tamil community, in particular (see Appendix 3) repeated attacks on Tamil villages, by state military attacks have produced a "culture of terror", This has further exacerbated the violence that was perpetrated by the Tamil militant groups who have from time to time taken control over the North and East and continue to do so. Violence has been the "motor of oppression" (Green 1994) used by the Sri Lankan state against its Tamil citizens. However, the memory of such violence has formed the core of my interviews with most of the women who have now settled in the UK.

Summary

The conflict related violence and the breakdown of economic and social systems have resulted in many seeking asylum across borders, blurring the nexus of forced and economic migration. Women's increased involvement in conflict has seen women increasingly becoming targets of GBV. Despite the changing nature of women's experience at times of conflict, policy on asylum and migration in the UK have failed to recognise women's intersecting identities and the lived experiences, when deciding on asylum and refugee status (Asylum Aid 2003). As such, women face multiple vulnerabilities from the time they made the decision to leave the conflict areas.

Narratives of women's exile are only one aspect about the political or social experiences they have to struggle with. However, these are also narratives about humiliation, GBV, loss, anger, suffering and they are stories of acceptance and belonging that is absent when discussing the lived experience of women in conflict. They are also narratives of truth, deception and betrayal that are testimony to the experiences these women and many other women face in their places of origin during conflict and political repression, in flight and in exile. These narratives bear testimony of the power of violence, oppression and humiliation, to destroy one's identity. These are narratives of women who have faced the brutalities of war and have been betrayed by the policy makers, who have failed to take into account that women have intersecting identities based on their caste, class, ethnicity, political affiliation and have been incorporated into conflict in different ways when formulating policy and have neglected their responsibility to protect women.

For these women settlement has meant not only re-location to another part of the world, but also reinventing new intersecting identities followed by a deeply complicated individual process of negotiating past and present forms of violence/humiliation. In this sense identities are always

evolving. As a result of agency approaches to re-settlement which often falls short of promoting successful social/mental re-integration, women face many difficulties in flight and in exile upon their re-settlement in their new homes. However, for many women who have faced violence or witnessed violence, it is the emotional well being that has mattered most of all and it is past GBV that they are unable to come to terms with, but the institutions have played little attention to this.

While these women have managed to re-construct their lives in different ways, what happens to the women who are unable to flee their societies? What protection is available to these women, when the state who is responsible for their protection becomes the protagonist? Will policies adopted by the international agencies be adequate to protect these women? In search of answers to these questions I will, in the next chapter look at a piece of international law UN1325 that is designed to protect and promote the participation of women during times of conflict and in peace building to explore the effectiveness of these types of legislation in providing justice to women and holding the perpetrators accountable for the atrocities committed. The final chapter draws together the main points in conclusion and makes recommendations for practice and policy.

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUDING ANALYSIS

Exploring the nexus between the theory and practice of women's positioning within the militarised conflict situation in Sri Lanka, the thesis examines how women have accommodated, participated or resisted relations with militarised ethnic national liberation movements and what happens to women who accept and/or resist militarism and violence. In doing so the research mapped the conflict (Chapter Three page 57) and explored how violence at structural level has led to the development of militarised ethnic conflicts and argued that the humiliation suffered by the minority groups especially the Tamils has led to the prolonging of the conflict.

The theoretical framework of the thesis drew upon feminist theories of Intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989, 1991, 1994; Collins P. Hill (1998, 2000); Yuval Davies 2006; Walby 2007; Thorvaldsdorrir 2007), humiliation (Lindner 2000, 2006; O'Neill 2005; Hartling 1996) conflict (Galtung 1969) as analytical tools to uncover the real life experiences of women in the conflict of Sri Lanka. Given the scope of the research I was unable to analyse the concept of representation in length. Instead I examined the popular representations of women at times of conflict in the dominant media forms and argue that women have multiple layered identities rather than the popular representation as victims or perpetrators during conflict. The research was informed by a feminist participatory action research approach (Orland Fals Borda 1991; 1999) based on the principles of: "inclusion; participation; valuing all local voices, and local ownership and sustainability" (O'Neill 1994, 2001; O'Neill and Campbell 2002; O'Neill 2004, 2006, 2008 pp.7) which focuses specifically upon women and their lived experiences of violent conflict and their involvement in ethnic national

movements and using in-depth interviews and observations in the field during 2004-2007.

Based on the available literature and evidence gathered during the field work, GBV, constructions of womanhood and sexuality, women as actors of violence, women's political agency within militarism, women's resistance to violence and militarism, forced migration, responsibility to protect and post conflict reconstruction emerged as key themes that were analysed in depth.

From the research undertaken for this thesis, in-depth interviews and observations there is evidenced that the protracted conflict in Sri Lanka is fundamentally rooted in the failure of the post colonial Sinhalese governments to accommodate intersecting interests and needs of the multi ethnic community in its nation building programmes (Chapter Three). Instead, democracy based on the understanding "as the choice of the majority" has been used as a tool to re-affirm majority rule over the minority communities. This partial concept of democracy has worked towards bringing Sinhala led political parties to power and today state power is purely seated within the majority Sinhala rulers who have developed the notion of Sri Lanka as a Sinhala Buddhist country, leaving no space for competing ideologies. The growth and development of Tamil militancy discussed in Chapter Three and the paradox of women taking up arms discussed in Chapter Five is a result of this structural violence, humiliation and the marginalisation of minority communities that has taken place since independence. The grievances are not limited to the minority communities but also visible within the Sinhala majority. Intersecting social divisions such as class and caste have worked towards excluding a significant proportion of Sinhalese people. The JVP crisis discussed in chapter three (page 69) is an example of how this exclusion has led to violence.

Caught up in this long battle for political and military supremacy, Sri Lankan women have been incorporated into militarised nationalism in multiple and contradictory ways. Women have suffered the burden of multiple oppression including GBV and humiliation due to their intersecting identities such as ethnicity, caste and class and other social and cultural practices that exist within the Sri Lankan society. Faced with this oppression and humiliation women have taken up arms to fight against the oppressive structures that have governed their lives. There is evidence that women have gone beyond the popular representations (defined as victims or perpetrators) and have resisted and challenged violence and oppression and have become agents of change at micro and macro level.

Evidence gathered from Chapter four (page 87) reveals that women's sexuality has been central to their lived experience during militarised armed conflict. Rape and sexual violence have been used by state and non state military groups not only to humiliate women and the communities these women belong to and punish women's transgression but also to mobilise violence. In particular the nature of GBV inflicted on Tamil women is evidence of how sexual violence has been used as a military strategy in this process to humiliate the enemy and encourage further violence (Dharmini page 113). Despite evidence that confirms men have also been subject to sexual violence and rape as prisoners of war, members of rival military groups, or for holding different political beliefs, the politics around GBV have determined that only women can become victims of sexual violence and therefore, sexual violence continues to be used against women with no evidence of meaningful intervention from the state or international institutions to stop such crimes.

Militarisation has also worked towards controlling and re-shaping women's bodies to meet the needs of these institutions. In this process of constructing the respectable/virtuous woman, sexual surveillance has become a controlling mechanism including placing strictures on their behaviour and dress code. The dress has been used as a tool to control sexuality and to divide the community as discussed in Chapter Four (page 87). Women like Sriyalatha (page 106) in Chapter Four who do not conform to this dress code and women like Thilaga (page 110) and Dharmini (page 113) who transgress the notions of respectability have been punished with the use of violence.

While controlling and excluding some women's bodies, militarism has simultaneously worked towards encouraging other women to transgress social boundaries by recruiting them as combatants. In this militarisation process, women have been associated with the notion of liberation of the land implying that women's path to liberation is only through joining the military that fight to protect the land. This binary between militarism and women has excluded a large proportion of women who do not support the militaries yet who have worked towards resisting and challenging women's subordinate position in society. Such as the many women who are working for women's economical and social rights, women who have fought for the free vote and many who joined the agitations for independence from the colonial rule. These women, who came forward to protect women's rights at times risking their own lives, have not only been excluded but also have faced inhumane punishments for their insubordination to the militaries.

Analysis of the lived experience of the women combatants in Chapter Five (page 120) and Six (page 177) reveal that despite this claim of liberation through the military even the limited power

that women combatants gain by joining the military has come not without its price. Tamil women have paid a heavy price for their transgression as combatants due to the existing social attitudes as well as the masculine nature of these predominantly patriarchal military organisations. Women's lives in the camps and the lived experience of LTTE and ex-JVP ex-combatants in exile reveal that women's enlistment into the non state militaries has not been an automatic path to empowerment, as claimed by these organisations and their sympathisers. For example despite the double liberation ideology of the LTTE (Coomaraswamy 1996), the research suggests that the recruitment of women has been due to a strategic need rather than in the interests of women.

Along with economic hardships it is evident that women within the military (the state and non-state) face many other forms of discrimination due to the masculine nature of these institutions. Despite increased recruitment into combat in all armies women are underrepresented in positions of leadership. Even when assigned with positions of power, women are expected to perform to standards set, which are in relation to men. Given these circumstances and the discrimination women face, due to how gender intersects with other social categories, there is a real danger that women who joined the military groups especially the non state military will return to a society that has inherited poverty, dependency and exploitation that in the first place in part, and to varying degrees, pushed them or compelled them into supporting revolutionary militarism.

With no other employability skills, lack of alternative employment within the communities and sometimes having sustained humiliation as a result of undergoing sexual violence, the trauma of violence as well as perpetrating violence, or as disabled women, women returning from combat will be left to depend on support provided by state or other non-governmental agencies, such as

Ranu (page 238) who now live on state support. This is further made more complicated with the economical strain that the conflict has brought upon the north east.

There are others who have used their traditional roles such as mothers, daughters and wives to resist violence and militarism. The Mother's Front (page 208) is an example, where women have taken collective action for resistance using their traditional role. The Mothers Front used their traditional identities along with traditional ritual to resist and challenge violence. However, given that militarism and patriarchy will always resent women's public participation, women's resistance has not been an easy route. Women have faced tremendous difficulties, antagonism and humiliation in their public activism. The fate of the Jaffna Mothers Front is an example of the obstacles women face when challenging violence (page 208). Yet these women refute the stereotypical representation of women as victims and perpetrators of violence. The resistance strategies adopted by women of the Mothers Front where blood and animal sacrifices are made to inflict curses on the people who robbed them of their right to motherhood while challenging the military/media discourse of women as victims of violence have also de-constructed the image that women are innately peaceful.

As stated previously women have adopted different strategies to cope with the daily militarisation of their lives, some women like Saralthambi (page 22) became victims of violence and, women like Leela (page 200) have been subject to violence due to their husband and continue to live in the village day after day reflecting on their experience. Whereas others have faced violence and joined the LTTE and fought against the enemy who humiliated them and adopted strategies to resist violence. All these women have experienced conflict in many different ways depending on their intersecting identities. While their experience have been shaped by their intersecting

identities, the conflict has also created new identities for them such as ex-combatants, members of the mothers front and sex workers who sell sex in the military occupied areas and in this sense identities are always in the becoming.

What was also clear during the field work was that when discussing women's experience of the conflict, what has gone unrecognised is the experience of women who chose to flee the country and live in exile. From the mid fifties, there has been a continuous flow of people voluntarily and involuntarily leaving the country, evidence gathered from the field work and as discussed in Chapter Eight shows that these women's lives in exile have been largely shaped on their ability to integrate with the host community. Women like Helen (page 244) have been able to integrate into society and hold responsible posts such as the secretary of a media group. Other women like some members of the Women's Network have created new identities for themselves as campaigners for peace.

The research has established that women's lived experience in conflict is largely shaped by the their individual and varying identities of women and how these identities intersect with other social categories such as caste and class as well as the humiliation they have faced as a result of their identities. By adopting intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989, 1991, 1994; Collins P. Hill 1998, 2000); Yuval Davies 2006; Walby 1997; 2007; Thorvaldsdorrir 2007), as an analytical tool, the research has argued that the popular representation of women as victims of violence and perpetrators are only a strategy adopted by the the military and media to mask the realities of militarism. The lived experience of the informants of this research and the observations made during field work have proved that women are not a homogenous group but individual women with

varied identities based on their social status such as class, caste and political affiliation to name but a few and these identities shape their lived experience at times of conflict as well as peace.

The experience of members of Mother Front, the Mannar women's group and the Network for Peace and Freedom has refuted the notion that women are not passive victims of violence or aggressive perpetrators, but are capable of challenging these stereotypical representations of themselves and creating new positive identities for themselves (even though this is very minimal) at micro level either through their transgression of traditional roles and taking up men's work in the absence of men or taking up a public role to challenge violence and political oppression. While it is important to remember that in a traditional patriarchal society like the Tamil community one cannot expect a sharp paradigm shift within a few decades and therefore, we cannot completely dismiss the idea that these women will become more independent and empowered with a gradual transformation of the society as in the case of some women who are in exile. In the same way the transgression of the women of the Mothers Front, Mannar Women's Centre and the Network for Peace and Freedom who came forward to challenge the political violence can be seen as sowing the seeds for women's future active participation in the political arena even at local governmental level.

Despite the fact that some of these women vanished from the political arena thus does not in any way mean that they have reverted to the previous submissive positions. The advancement these women gained at micro level can be a valuable experience for their future activism and political participation as well as encouraging other women to follow their steps. This has been evident by the increased number of women coming forward to contest local council elections and holding posts in recent times as well as holding other public posts. However, this transformation will only

be fully achieved with a well planned and inclusive post conflict programme addressing the real challenges the country will face in post conflict situation.

Post conflict challenges

Given these complexities of the conflict, the challenges facing post conflict Sri Lanka can be broadly divided into four categories: humanitarian, security, governance, and economic development keeping gender at the heart. Understanding these challenges will be the key to addressing some of the issues faced by women during conflict.

The humanitarian challenges will include, returning internally displaced persons, refugees, addressing humiliation and trauma of victims of violence as well as the combatants of both sides, establishment of property rights of the displaced persons, and the demobilization of combatants and their reintegration into society. According to local non-governmental agencies, there are currently about 200,000 displaced people including 40,000 children. About 27,000 displaced children are facing multiple vulnerabilities such as starvation, recruitment to armed forces, sex industry, and child labour and trafficking there are a large proportion of children in the LTTE ranks. These children who are in settlement camps as well as in the LTTE ranks lack access to education, housing, health care and safe parenting. Many of these children also have been victims of violence or have witnessed brutal forms of violence such as murder/torture of their parents, rape of their mothers/sisters and violence to other family members including the elderly siblings. Added to this, are the numerous social problems facing women and girls who are

displaced, who are left to support their families single handed, and thousands of women who have become widows on both sides of the conflict⁸⁸.

The fighting and displacement has destroyed the livelihoods, the properties of those who have fled have been re-occupied by intruders. The government itself has taken steps to handover the land of displaced Tamil/Muslim people in a sinister manner as they did during the decolonization (chapter three page 73) as well as planning to build military bases for its armed forces. Returning properties to rightful owners will be an early post-conflict challenge as there will for once be no land available as most of the properties have been distributed to new owners and there are also the problems of people not being able to claim rightful ownership due to lack of necessary documentation as well as land not being suitable to use for living/cultivation/farming due to contamination by land mines, pollution from chemicals due to bombardment and other military activities.

The transition from military to civilian life requires a rapid assessment of the needs of ex-combatants who are men, women and children. To avoid a resurgence of hostilities, ex-combatants should be provided not only with economic reintegration assistance training, employment and social care, but also assistance to come to terms with the scars of the humiliation and violence. The violence they have undergone/perpetrated and the disabilities sustained, there will be considerable need to pay special attention to women especially those who have faced the bitter experience of sexual violence and torture at the hands of the state and non state militaries. However, such programmes will have to take into account the intersecting identities of women and diverse experience rather than a universal approach as “women who have faced violence”.

⁸⁸ See chapter three for more on this issue

Security challenges include clearing landmines, disarming and re-integrating the rebels (DDR) and most importantly reforming the justice and security sector. Both the LTTE and the state military have utilized landmines to defend themselves, to blow up enemy vehicles and enemy targets. Mass scale shelling and aerial bombardments have become a daily reality of the civilian lives. In such situations restoring security can be a major challenge not only because people continue to distrust the government military but also due to the security needs of men and women that differ and any programmes will have to make sure that the security needs of women are given as equal priority as the men.

The LTTE as well as other non-state military that have been used to power with the use of guns and violence, hence disarmament will be a big challenge for post-conflict Sri Lanka. There will need to be considerable incentives for these men/women to hand over their weapons, the main tool which they have gained legitimacy through. Also, they will have to be assured of safety and security if the government is to convince them to hand over their weapons. Not only must most of the rebels be integrated into the military/military groups, but there is a need to reform the entire security sector if security is to be restored, not only for the civilians, but also for the combatants both men and women who are being re-integrated as well as the state armed men who become redundant after the conflict is over. Such reforms must include redefining civil-military relations, building respect for the civilian leadership, requiring transparency and accountability along with taking a more gender-sensitive approach.

At the level of governance, Sri Lanka's main challenges include re-establishing its human rights record, introducing changes to the constitution, and strengthening institutions of local government

while giving substantial power to the minority communities. It is evident that the current constitution of the country doesn't provide enough authority and power to the local governments. Decentralization and other political reforms to strengthen the capacity of local government institutions could serve to create a new forum for resolving a wide range of grievances. The role of the Executive Presidency lies at the centre of the constitutional discussion.

While re-addressing the deficiencies of the constitution and legislature, there is also a need to address the human rights records of the military and build good governance with the state institutions. Poor governance, corruption and malpractice have become an epidemic starting from the top level. As discussed in chapter three, allegations of bribery and corruption against military and politicians at high level is not uncommon in Sri Lanka. This has seriously undermined the trust of the people in the political system. The constitution that is designed to give the executive unlimited power even after leaving office has become a serious deterrent to bringing charges against the people who commit crimes/corruption at the highest level. There is also the political patronage that ensures many of these corrupt politicians and officials enjoy "immunity". Even if the LTTE is totally eradicated, if good governance is not restored and people are left to be governed by the same political clan, there are no guarantees to say that there will not be another uprising of the masses similar to the JVP within the Sinhala community itself that will see more women come forward to challenge the state either militarily or politically as the foundations are already in place.

In conclusion it can be argued that humiliation, gender based violence and the lack of understanding in the intersecting social divisions have become the key in defining this conflict and

any future research that is undertaken will have to bear these key theoretical concepts in mind when examining the conditions of post conflict Sri Lanka.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Experiences from other post-conflict societies such as Nepal and Sierra Leone show that the main characteristics of post-conflict societies are that they require leadership, resources allocation, labour and skills. With such demand placed on them, societies emerging from conflict by no means can afford to forget women or ignore gender-related impediments and opportunities. If Sri Lanka is to actively promote women's participation in the post conflict reconstruction it would be essential to take a rights-based approach that will guarantee women's fundamental right to: protection from gender based violence, to participate meaningfully in public life especially in positions of policymaking and resource allocation whilst understanding the intersecting identities of women and thereafter giving women the opportunity to benefit substantially in the reconstruction process.

This raises difficult questions as to the women returning from combat. As in the case of the JVP, they came from the poorest strata of the Sinhala community and had faced discrimination not only prior to becoming combatants, but also after returning to their communities as there was no real change either socially or economically after the revolution. The JVP despite its political and class rhetoric were unable to change the social structures other than leaving a dark shadow of violence, thus creating a precedent for the use of violence opposed to democracy. Even after entering the political mainstream they have not been able to become a major political force and gain the support of the majority. Their political weight has been limited to forming alliances and making up the seats that the ruling parties need to sustain power, and therefore balancing the scale.

Given the composition of the LTTE, there is no guarantee that this would be any different. The LTTE have been in power with the use of violence and intimidation, rather than through a democratic process. Like the current Zimbabwe Zanu PF, who also have come in to power with the use of violence and continue to use it as a tool to hold on to power. In the same way, it will be difficult for the LTTE cadres who have been trained to hold on to the barrel to choose to be governed by the ballot as proved with other dissident groups such as EPDP and the Karuna faction who use violence covertly to intimidate and silence their opponents.

Also, there is no evidence of any form of political evolution within the LTTE which is a military organisation. The LTTE gender policy is based on the vision of its leadership of Prabhakaran who the government claim is no longer alive. Therefore, it is unrealistic to believe that there would be any real change of political mindset that will allow women to become active participants in any power sharing programme as it will always be “men over women”, as is happening in the South.

In these circumstances, future research will have to focus on the disarmament and demobilization of women combatants to see how realistic the liberation policy of the LTTE has been in post-conflict Sri Lanka even though with the military defeat of the LTTE in May 2009 and the death of its leadership as claimed by the Government the women's positioning is going to be more complicated (if at all any are left after the military massacre). Any such research will have to bear in mind the intersecting identities of women and the diverse experience of these women within the communities and the ranks of the military institutions they enlisted into. Methodologically such research should also take a participatory action research approach that is based on the principals of inclusion, participation, and valuing all voices (O'Neill 2001, 2008) that will enable women to narrate their lived experience during and after the conflict without being subject to the representations of the state/military institutions that claim to represent them.

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Appendix 1

The research was carried out between March 2003 and July 2008 on a part time basis. Originally registration was with Staffordshire University and transferred to Loughborough in December 2005. Due to the difficulties faced during the field work, the rapidly changing situation in Sri Lanka and my re-registration process I was unable to keep to strict deadlines and there was an overlap at times.

Timescale

Phase	Research Activity	Description	Time Scale
Phase 1 UK Based	a) Submitted proposal to Staffordshire University for registration b) Literature Review and incorporation of previous research into first chapter		March 2003 to December 2003
Phase 2 UK Based	Development Phase: Developing research tools, setting up of the field work phase.		January 2004 to September 2004

	<p>Establishing agreement with the Social Scientist Association, Colombo Sri Lanka to provide support during field work in Sri Lanka</p> <p>Making contacts and Establishing focus groups in the UK, prior to going to Sri Lanka so that I would be able to start the facilitation process immediately after my field work in Sri Lanka</p>		
Phase 3 Sri Lankan	<p>In-depth interviews with Ex-JVP woman combatants,</p> <p>Women who have</p>	<p>The field work in Sri Lanka had to be limited to this period as I could not return thereafter due to the</p>	<p>October 2004 to December 2004</p>

	<p>faced violence from the military groups and Women activists of the Mothers Front and other women's groups</p>	<p>escalating violence and Tsunami on the 24th of December 04 and my safety could not be guaranteed – However, I continued to keep in touch with the groups that I made contact and conducted telephone interviews for regular updates</p>	
<p>Phase 4 UK based</p>	<p>In-depth interviews with research participants</p> <p>Facilitating focus groups</p>	<p>LTTE Ex-combatants who are in exile Sri Lankan Tamil women in Exile</p> <p>4 groups – Each group consisted 8 to 12 women</p>	<p>January 2005 to July 2007</p> <p>I also had to re-register with Loughborough during this time as my supervisor joined Loughborough and Staffordshire could not</p>

			<p>provide me with a supervisor</p> <p>In April 07 I submitted my progress report to Loughborough where it was agreed that I was able to start writing up</p>
Phase 5 UK Based	Analysing data from field work and preparation of thesis		August 2007 to date

Appendix 2

Schedule to interviews

To all participants:

I wish to confirm that this research is a part of my PhD study. My main aim of the research is to understand the way the Sri Lankan conflict has impacted on women's lives. If you wish to take part in this research either to give me an interview or attend a focus group, I will be very grateful to you. Any information you provide will be strictly confidential and will be used only for writing up my theses and producing some academic papers. However, if you don't want me to I will not include any information you give me in any other publications that I may produce in the future but will only use the information to write up my analysis for the thesis. Your names, address or any other contact details that can identify you will not be revealed. I also undertake to send you copies of the publications that I may include your information if you wish to have them.

Some of the questions I will ask you in the interviews will be:

What is your ethnicity (this is to understand how ethnicity have influenced your experience)

What is your experience with the military groups (any of the non state military groups or the army).

Have you been a member of any of the groups, if yes, which one .

Would you like to tell me why you joined the group

How did you spend your time in the camps (i.e what was it like to be a combatant)

Any other questions that I will want to ask leading from the answers you give me

However, if you don't want to answer any of these questions you can choose to do so. I will only want to know what you are prepared to tell me. If you don't want you don't have to

I thank you very much for your cooperation, you can contact me at any time on e-mail or by phone, my contact details are available from the office you receive this form. If you are not prepared now, please call me even at a later date and I will talk to you. Interviews can be arranged at a place you like to meet up with me. However the places for the focus groups will be informed to you once you agree to join up a group and this will be nearer to your area.

Please feel free to contact me if you want any more information or any clarifications of the process. I am able to speak English/Tamil and Sinhala so don't be put off if you don't speak any one of these languages.

Thank you all

Zinthiya Ganehspanchan

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Appendix 3

15 th December 1955	Ceylon (as known then) was admitted to the United nations, after 7 years of wait, along with 15 other nations
5 th June 1956	Tamil Parliamentarians attacked by Sinhalese mobs, 150 Tamils killed- The date the 'Sinhalese Only' bill was introduced by Prime minister S W R D Bandaranaike in the house of Parliament, as an act of protest, Chelvanayakam, the leader of the Federal Party, led a party of 300 Tamil volunteers and staged a sit down Satyagraha (peaceful protest) of the kind popularised by mahatma Gandhi in the days of the Indian freedom Struggle
6 th June 1956	S W R D Bandaranaike introduced the 'Sinhalese Only' official language bill in the House of Representatives. Rioting spreads in the City with Tamils being manhandled in buses, trains and on the streets. Among the victims were two Tamil Lawyers A.C. Maharaja and S. Sharvananda (Later who became chief justice of Sri Lanka). They were pulled out of a car they were travelling and attacked by a mob. Indian Tamil shops attacked and looted. More serious disturbances occurred in the Eastern Province, in Batticaloa, Trincomalee and in Gal Oya valley where a large number of deaths were reported. In 10 days of sporadic rioting, an estimated 150 persons were killed, the majority of victims being Tamils. This marks the beginning of the phase in the Island's history when Tamils are subject to physical violence.
22 nd May 1958	Anti-Tamil riots break down. At Vavuniya (160 miles north of Colombo), four

	<p>Tamils were murdered, other assaults and robbed. In Polonnaruwa and Hingurakgoda, where Tamils are cut (stabbed) with homemade swords, grass cutting knives or clubbed to death or burnt alive. Nearly a 100 are believed killed in Polonnaruwa along on the night of 25th May. Riots spread to all parts of the island, 28th may At Panadura, south of Colombo a mob attacks a Hindu Sivan Temple, pulls out the officiating Brahmin priest, pours petrol on him, and burns him alive. Elsewhere in Colombo rioting gets worse?</p> <p>The government requisitions five British ships and a French ship to take 9,426 Tamil refugees from Colombo to Jaffna, out of an estimated 12,000 men, women and children who were herded in temporary refugee camps. The operation, directed by the Ceylon Navy, is carried out in two stages during the nights of June 2-3 and 5-6 conditions of complete secrecy.</p>
25 th May 1958	<p>On the night of May 25, 1958 one of the most heinous crimes in the history of Ceylon was carried out. Almost simultaneously, on the Government farm at Polonnaruwa and Hingurakgods, the thugs struck remorse. The Tamil labourers in the Polonnaruwa sugar cane plantation fled when they saw the enemy approaching and hid in sugar cane bushes. The goondas wasted no time. They set the sugar cane alight and flushed out the Tamils. As they came out screaming, men women and children were cut down with homemade swords, grass cutting knives and katties or pulped under heavy clubs.</p>

20 th 1961	February	<p>On the 20th at around 7.30 a.m. when around 200 volunteers led by Federal Party leader Chelvanayakam, squat opposite all entrances to the Jaffna provincial secretariat in a Satyagrah protest, a huge crowd gathers filling the streets, pavements and all approaches. A bomb and stones are thrown at the Satyagrah in front of the Jaffna Kachcheri causing severe injuries to them by government sponsored thugs.</p> <p>April 18 A special train carrying the soldiers arrives in Jaffna at 2.30 a.m. and the troops are promptly moved into the sprawling secretariat grounds through the rear, while about 2000 satyagrahis, nearly 90 of them women, unaware of the development tired from the days' fasting and prayers in the hot sun are yet squatting or stretched out at the secretariat entrances, Some of them in deep slumber. While usually there are thousands of supporters during the day, there are hardly any at that hour of the night.</p> <p>The crackdown begins. Some Police officers emerge first, approach towards MPs. A Amirthalingam and V Dharmalingam, who had been keeping watch, and inform them they had been instructed to take them into custody under the Emergency Regulation. The MPs submit without protest and Mrs Amirthlingam is also taken into custody. Thereafter an estimated 500 army men, some of them carrying rifles, swoop on the passive Satyagrahis, attack them with rifle butts, belts and clubs, The sleeping volunteers wake up groaning and writhing in pain. They are trampled with boots, kicked and</p>
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	<p>dragged away from the entrances. Proctor S Nadarahjah, one of the joint secretaries of the Federal Party sustain head and shoulder injuries, another Congress MP Mr. M Sivasithamparam who fearing assault on the Women Satyagrhis, stands with his arms stretched out and is himself attacked and sustain injuries. The men pull down the Federal Party "post office" structure, smash up cars and bicycles parked in the vicinity, ripping tyres with bayonest and ramming the windscreens.</p> <p>All news from the Northern and Eastern Provinces are strictly censored, government statements allege that resistance continued in the province and that it sometimes took violent forms, whereas in fact strict non-violence is observed by the proclamation of the Emergency.</p>
<p>31-may – 4 June 1981</p>	<p>Sinhalese police and army go on the rampage burning parts of the city of Jaffna, Hundreds of shops reduced to ashes and the Jaffna market square set on flame; They burn the post office of the TULF and the house of the Jaffna MP V Yogeswaran. On 1st June civilians on the roads are attacked. The Jaffna public library, which was considered to be among the best in Asia, with its 90,000 volumes and rare documents and irreplaceable manuscripts on the history and culture of the Tamils, is set alight. They also burn the press of Elanadu , which is the only Tamil daily in the Tamil areas.</p> <p>On 2nd June the army and police continue to burn shops in many areas in the peninsula. On the same day, after Emergency is declared and curfew is</p>

		<p>imposed in Jaffna, the army kill two persons. On 3rd and 4th June 5 people are killed. On 4th June four members of parliament are arrested for no apparent reason and later released. Several other Tamils are also arrested.</p>
10-14 1981	August	<p>Violence spreads to the entire country from 10th August and Tamils become victims of mass murder, assaults, hacking, burning, looting and raping and other forms of genocide attacks. In Amparai many houses belonging to the Tamils are burned by Sinhalese mobs assisted by the Security forces, A large number of shops are also burned and approximately 500 Tamils are made homeless. Violence is particularly directed against the plantation workers, Thugs attack 43-estate s in the Ratnapura district. The line rooms (the houses which comprise only one room and built in a line where the workers live) are looted and burnt ad thousands of Plantation Tamils made refugees.</p> <p>Many Tamils killed are over 40,000 became refugees. On 14th August President Jayawardena admits that the violence in the Ratnapura area has been an organised one.</p>
23 July 1983		<p>Anti Tamil riots and massacres take place in Colombo and other Sinhalese areas. The world witnesses the worst violence against Tamils in Sri Lanka History, which has been planned and executed by elements with the government. Enormous damage caused to Tamil owned property. The cost of re-construction is estimated at Rs 133 million. But this is quite apart from the cost of human lives and the untold suffering caused in purely human terms for many people who are innocent men, women and children. Tamils in</p>

	<p>the South flee to their homeland in the North. Over 3,000 Tamils are killed, Many burnt alive, and Over 150,000 became refugees. Hundreds of Tamils flee to neighbouring India and the West.</p>
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Appendix 4

List of conference papers submitted

"Perpetrators or Victims of violence" – The Role of Private Security companies. Paper presented for the Department of Political Science conference at the University of Bristol (November 2008)

"Women's violence in Global Politics" : Paper presented for the ESRC Feminist International Relations Seminar series - Manchester University (August 2008)

"Understanding women's collective violence", *the paper explored* the common representation of crime and criminals and was presented at the University of Warwick 2 day conference, (May 2008)

"Mothering the other", Explored how women have challenged political violence and militarism using their gendered identities. Paper presented at the Civil Liberties and Anarchy Conference Loughborough University (2007)

"Aid for peace" – the paper explored the dangers associated with using development aid for fulfilling political agendas of donor countries: Sovereignty and its discontent organised by the University of Oxford dept of Politics (2007)

"UNR 1325 a conflict transformation tool for small states" – the paper explored the contribution that the resolution can make to bring peace to conflict states. Small States conference, University of Birmingham (April 2006)

Truth telling for Justice – the paper explored the importance of truth finding missions to negotiate permanent peace and what happens when such commissions are established for gaining political edge. Conference organised by the University of St John's York (October 2006)

Human security and development ; A joint paper presented at the Globalisation conference organised by the University of Newcastle (August 2005)

"Doing Participatory Action Research with Women Refugees/Asylum Seekers", Force Migration Student Conference (2005)

Cultural Violence in the context of Conflict, British Society of Criminology, (12-14 July, 2005)
Leeds (Funded by Staffordshire university)

Nationalism, Gender and Identity Politics, Sixth Inter University Graduate Conference, Cambridge,
May 2005

Conducting Participatory Action Research with refugees and asylum Seekers: Postgraduate
conference, York, March 2005

Gendering the War, Postgraduate Conference at University of Salford, September 2004,