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# DAUGHTERS OF KINNAKI: SRI LANKAN TAMIL WOMEN AND NGO'S IN POST CONFLICT INTERVENTIONS

Irune Martin Moral  
S4606647  
Supervisor: Dr. M. van Leeuwen  
Human Geography  
Master in Conflicts, Territories and identities  
Nijmegen School of Management  
Radboud University

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# ABSTRACT

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United Nations and international legal framework have established that inclusion of women in livelihood recovery provisions, post-conflict interventions, and in the overall peacebuilding process is essential to ensure sustainable and lasting peace. Post-war contexts pose particular challenges for women's livelihoods, whose vulnerabilities are exacerbated in the aftermath of a war. This case study aims to explore how Ngo's interventions assist Tamil widows in fisheries in Northern Sri Lanka, whose livelihoods are very much restricted by the underlying patriarchal and caste system. Tamil widows working in the fisheries face multiple complexities: first, due to the war, they have lost their spouses and became the breadwinners of the household. Considering that Tamil culture relegates women in the private sphere and the negative stigma of widowhood, these women are marginalized and have restricted access and control over resources. Second, the fishery industry is conceptualized as a male domain, which in turn, results in the lack of recognition of women's contribution to the sector. These factors further exacerbate women's vulnerabilities and hamper their means of making a living.

I have conducted the analysis applying the Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA) that helps understand the particularities of rural livelihoods and offers a holistic perspective taking account of the vulnerability context, structures, and processes that influence the accessibility to resources and livelihood outcomes. Through this approach, I analyze how NGOs address and relate to women's vulnerabilities, how they respond to structural constraints with the aim of helping these women. However, SLA has two major limitations: on one side, it fails to take into account gender power relations, and on the other, this approach does not capture the particularities of a post-conflict context. Hence, it does not capture the radical societal transformations that happened in a post-disaster setting. In order to overcome these limitations, I have employed two additional pieces of literature. I made use of Feminist Political Ecology, to examine gender-power relations that impact women's capacity to make living. Additionally, I have applied literature on peacebuilding and more in particular in the field of gender, to better understand the complexities of a post-war setting, and to gain knowledge on gendered vulnerabilities and gender role transformation.

Findings reveal that local NGOs' contribution and assistance are producing a positive impact on women's livelihood and empowerment. The analysis demonstrates that Ngo's provide a wide range of strategies and challenge the underlying patriarchal-cultural by encouraging women to participate in socio-political spheres. However, strategies that challenge the cultural-caste system that subordinate Tamil women have not been found and remain a challenge.

**Key words:** war-affected women, caste, post-conflict interventions, widows, fisheries, vulnerabilities, peacebuilding, women empowerment, gender equality, sustainable livelihoods, feminist political ecology

# PREFACE

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*The daughters of Kannaki<sup>1</sup>: Sri Lankan war-widows*, is a project that derives from my passion to understand the realities of women in the postwar period. As the granddaughter of two women who survived the war and Spanish post-war, I was always surprised by their stories of resistance, struggle, resilience and hope for a better future. However, these ambitions were conditioned by their roles of wives and mothers, and the highly patriarchal and catholic society they lived in. Gender and power are two highly determining components of the lives of men and women. In a sensitive context, it is highly significant, designing post-conflict interventions that promote a more equitable and just society based on the pillars of democracy, peace and sustainable development. I believe that it is necessary to understand how women cope with situations of extreme vulnerability, while seeing them as active agents with a voice.

The Daughters of Kannaki, illustrates the case of the war widows of northern Sri Lanka. Kannaki is a Hindu goddess and guardian of the coastal folks of Northern Sri Lanka. This deity represents a complex womanhood: the symbol of chastity, and loyal wife on one side, and outraged widow on the other. The tale of courage widow frictions with the treatment that Tamil communities professed towards its widows, harshly treated. Nowadays, for many of the 40,000 war widows in the North, Kannaki represents hope, courage and resilience in a devastated community that ostracizes and marginalizes them. This case represents an example of struggle, resilience and hope, of women affected by war.

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<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from : Pattini – Kannaki Devotion in Sri Lanka: <http://invokingthegoddess.lk/intro/>

\* Front page picture retrieved from : Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium, “outside the net” Women’s participation in fishing activities in Tricomalee District by Lokuge (2017)

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| <b>1. INTRODUCTION</b> .....   | <b>1</b>   |
| <b>1.1 Problem Statement</b> .....   | <b>2</b>   |
| 1.2 Research Questions .....   | 2-3        |
| 1.3 Societal relevance.....  | 4-5        |
| 1.4 Academic Relevance.....  | 5          |
| 1.5 Outline of the study.....  | 5          |
| <b>CHAPTER I: LITERATURE REVIEW SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS, PEACEBUILDING AND GENDER</b> .....        | <b>6</b>   |
| <b>1.1 Sustainable Livelihoods Approach</b> .....  | <b>7-8</b> |
| 1.2 Core Principles of SLA .....   | 8-9        |
| 1.3 Vulnerability Context .....  | 9-11       |
| 1.4 Capital Assets .....   | 11-12      |
| 1.5 Transforming structures and processes.....   | 13         |
| 1.6 Outcomes.....  | 13-14      |
| 1.7 Advantages and Limitations .....   | 15-16      |
| 2. Livelihoods and Gender: Feminist Political Ecology .....  | 17-18      |
| 3. Peacebuilding and gender.....   | 19         |
| 3.1 Sustainable Peacebuilding :positive peace and conflict transformation.....                     | 20         |
| 3.1.1 Livelihoods recovery: local economic development and conflict prevention .....               | 21         |
| 3.1.2 Sustainable development.....   | 22         |
| <b>3.2 Gender approach to peacebuilding and livelihoods recovery</b> .....                         | <b>23</b>  |
| 3.2.1 Gendered experiences of a war: continuum of violence and gender role<br>transformation ..... | 24-25      |
| 3.2.2 International Framework .....  | 26-27      |
| 3.2.3 Implications of integrating gender and peacebuilding.....                                    | 28         |
| 3.2.4 Gender and peacebuilding: decision making and  |            |

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| empowerment: symbiotic relationship .....   | 29-30     |
| 3.2.5 Beyond gender empowerment : transforming systems.....                                     | 31-32     |
| <b>CHAPTER II : SRI LANKAN CONTEXT .....</b>  | <b>31</b> |
| 2.1 Sri Lankan country data : ethnicities in Sri Lanka .....                                    | 31-33     |
| 2.2 Caste system and social stratification and discrimination.....                              | 34        |
| 2.2.1 Sri Lankan Tamil caste system overview.....   | 34-37     |
| 2.2.2 Fishing caste: Karaiyar.....  | 38        |
| 2.3 Sri Lankan Tamil women: gender and caste.....   | 39-42     |
| 2.3.1 Sri Lankan Tamil women education and employment .....                                     | 42-43     |
| 2.3.2 SriLankan Tamil women legal framework.....  | 44        |
| <b>CHATER III: SRI LANKAN HISTORY OF THE WARFARE AND POST CONFLICT .....</b>                    | <b>45</b> |
| 3.1 Sri Lankan conflict: review of the history .....  | 45-47     |
| 3.2 Peacebuilding and reconstruction in Northern Sri Lanka : wins and remaining challenges..... | 47-49     |
| 3.3 Sri Lankan women implications of the war: gender role transformation .....                  | 49-51     |
| <b>CHAPTER IV: SRI LANKAN FISHERIES AND WOMEN .....</b>   | <b>52</b> |
| 4.1 Background of the Sri Lankan Northern fisheries.....  | 54-55     |
| 4.1.1 Small-scale fisheries (SFF) in Northern Province.....                                     | 56        |
| 4.2 Sri Lankan Northern fisheries: vulnerabilities.....   | 56        |
| 4.2.1 Sri Lankan northern fisheries: vulnerabilities related to their livelihoods .....         | 56-57     |
| 4.2.2 Sri Lankan northern fisheries: vulnerabilities related to the conflict .....              | 57-58     |
| 4.2.3 Sri Lankan northern fisheries: vulnerabilities related to tsunami .....                   | 58        |
| 4.3.4 Sri Lankan northern fisheries: Palk Bay politics.....                                     | 59        |
| 4.3 Women in fisheries .....  | 60-61     |
| 4.3.1 Sri Lankan Tamil women in the small scale fisheries .....                                 | 62-63     |
| <b>CHAPTER V: EMPIRICAL SECTION .....</b>   | <b>64</b> |
| 5.1 Philosophical underpinnings and framework .....   | 64-65     |

|  |              |
|--|--------------|
| 5.2 Research method: case study.....           | 63-64        |
| 5.3 Data Collection .....                      | 64           |
| 5.3.1 Participants and secondary sources ..... | 65           |
| 5.4 Ethical issues .....                       | 66           |
| 5.5 Processing data .....                      | 67           |
| 5.6 Limitations of the study .....             | 67           |
| <b>CHAPTER VI: DATA ANALYSIS .....</b>         | <b>70</b>    |
| 6.1 vulnerability context .....                | 71-72        |
| 6.2 Livelihood assets .....                    | 72           |
| 6.2.1 Human asset.....                         | 73-74        |
| 6.2.2 Physical assets .....                    | 74           |
| 6.2.3 Financial assets .....                   | 74           |
| 6.2.4 Social assets .....                      | 75           |
| 6.3 Structural Barriers .....                  | 75-79        |
| 6.4 Challenges .....                           | 79-80        |
| <b>CHAPTER VII: CONCLUSIONS .....</b>          | <b>81</b>    |
| 7.1 Conclusions.....                           | 81-83        |
| 7.2 Discussion and recommendations .....       | 83           |
| 7.3 Societal relevance of the study .....      | 84-86        |
| 7.4 Academic relevance of the study .....      | 87-88        |
| 7.5 Limitations and future research.....       | 88-89        |
| <b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>                 | <b>90-91</b> |
| <b>ANNEXES.....</b>                            | <b>92-93</b> |
| 1. Interview template                          |              |
| <b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>                       | <b>94</b>    |



### *List of Abbreviations*

ADB Asian Development Bank

CEAR Spanish Commission for Refugee Aid report (Comision Española Ayuda al Refugiado),

FHH Female headed houses

FPE Feminist Political Ecology

ICAN, International Civil Society Action Network

IDPs Internally Displaced People

IDSN International Dalit Solidarity Network

FAO Food and Agriculture Organization

ILO The United Nations International Labour Organization policy

JICA, Japan International Agency

LTTE Tamil Tigers Eelam

PCR Post-conflict reconstruction

SLA Sustainable Livelihood Approach

SLFP Freedom Party of Sri Lanka

SSF Small-Scale fisheries

UN United Nations

UNDP United Nations Development Program

UNEP United Nations Environment Programme

UNP United National Party

USAID US Agency for International Development

### *List of Figures*

Figure 1: Sustainable Livelihoods Framework

Figure 2: Disaster risk and vulnerability

Figure 3 SLA assets

Figure4: Peace negative and positive

Figure 5: Sri Lanka country map

Figure 6 : Sri Lanka geographical map

Figure 7: Sri Lanka ethnic groups, religion and language location in the island.

Figure 8: Classification of the caste structure in the north of Sri Lanka

Figure 9: Map of Sri Lankan conflict. Tamil Eelam

Figure 10: Sri Lankan Northern Province's districts

Figure 11: Women's work and the cycle of invisibility

### *List of Tables*

Table 1: UN resolutions on gender and armed conflict

Table 2: Sri Lankan labor force participation

Table 3: Sri Lanka's women participation in the labor market police personnel

Table 4: Sri Lankan Northern district population during and after war

Table 5: Incidence of the Indian fishers in Palk Bay

# INTRODUCTION

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Sri Lanka was the scenario of the war between the government and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) that lasted for nearly three decades, (1983-2009). The defeat of the LTTE concluded the conflict which left thousands of deaths and many displaced in the aftermath (Crisis group, 2017). The wounds claimed by the war left a country with social, cultural and political spheres heavily disintegrated as well as a great economic degradation (Pannilag & Rai, 2014). The repercussions of the warfare are particularly prominent in the Northern and Eastern part of the country, the historical territories of the Tamils (Vithanagama, 2018). In this region, the communities' main livelihoods are the small scale fisheries, which were severely affected by the ravage of the war.

The conflict ended eleven years ago, but for the 40,000 Sri Lankan Northern Tamil widows, the struggle for their survival still continues. Women living in war torn areas face multiple types of discrimination and tend to carry the heavier burden in post-conflict environments (Maracine, 2019). This is particularly true for Sri Lankan Tamil widows who face a double burden: patriarchy and caste ridden society where being a widow is a social constrain (Klimesova and Premaratne, 2015). Northern widows, against the restrictive gender roles and Hindu beliefs were forced to become the breadwinners of their households and many of them found a chance for survival in the small scale fishery sector. Women working in the fishery sector, actively challenge the conventional gender norms that traditionally have confined them in the private sphere. Yet, fisheries are hostile sector for women workers. Fisheries are embedded in social, cultural, economic, political and ecological structures/ processes that shape gender inequities (Weeratunge and Snyder, 2004). Consequently, women's position in the fisheries is undervalued and their political representation and access to livelihood assets is limited. Although women make significant contributions to the fisheries and economy, the lack of recognition and discriminatory treatment together with the burden of the caste and religious stereotypes prevents them to have a life of dignity. Living in a threatening context fraught with highly restrictive laws and practices, making a living is a challenging endeavor that pushes women into poverty and further marginalizes war-widows.

Considering this, the main focus on this study is to understand how NGOs assist women reconstructing their livelihoods and further promote their empowerment. More specifically, this study aims to gather information on how NGOs are dealing with the institutional barriers that restrict women, in this case patriarchal and caste system. Furthermore, this thesis's objective is to understand how gender and power derived from the patriarchal and caste system play a role in post-conflict interventions.

## 1.1 Problem statement

Building peace in countries emerging from conflict is a hugely complex undertaking. Taking into account that there is a high probability of a post-conflict society relapsing into conflict, therefore, successful conflict transformation becomes a necessary precondition for sustainable development (Warnecke and Franke, 2010). Gender is an intrinsic factor for sustainable development. In this view, The United Nations security council resolution 1325 (2000) requires that women's experiences and needs must be incorporated into the political and social decisions to increase women participation in the peace process and for the commitment to protect women rights in post conflict countries (Nazeemudeen, 2019).

Although 1325 was a milestone in recognizing women's vulnerabilities in war, its capacity is limited because it implies a change in the social structure, so the women empowerment process and livelihood recovery remain ineffective.. Conflict affects women differently depending on their religion, caste, class, ethnicity, location, political affiliation, and a variety of other overlapping factors (Rajasingham-Senanayake, 2004: 149). I have detected a limited understanding of how gender roles have been transformed due to the war. Moreover, I have identified a limited academic debate on post-conflict caste-ridden settings like Sri Lanka. In this line, interventions assisting women make great contributions but these are still conditioned by the norms and beliefs based on gender stereotypes and lack of a profound understanding of gender dimension (Vithanagama, 2018).

Considering that United Nations resolutions (1325 [2000] and the proceeding resolutions) on women in armed conflicts and peacebuilding encourages women's empowerment and inclusion within the process, my immediate questions were: How Ngo's deal with these factors to empower women in the process of peacebuilding? How post-conflict provisions can better enhance women's empowerment and access to livelihood assets? How NGOs navigate local dynamics and transform gender roles in a highly patriarchal and caste-ridden community to achieve sustainable peace and development?

## 1.2 Research questions

The process of preliminary information search on Tamil women affected by war provided me with a grasp of their realities and how their livelihoods were deeply constrained as an outcome of the conflict (Vithanagama, 2018, Lakshman, 2018, Kandanearachchi and Ratnayake, 2018, Quist, 2015. Klimesova& Premaratne, 2015). This was particularly significant in the Northern region of Sri Lanka, where community's livelihoods are predominately dependant on natural resources and the main economic activity are the fisheries. Adding to the intrinsic vulnerabilities of the sector, as a consequence of the conflict, and the tsunami in 2004, the means of life of Northern communities were deeply affected. However, a striking element that sparked my attention was how people's access to livelihood assets, participation in decision-making, and benefits of post-conflict interventions were highly determined by

social stratification (Vithanagama, 2018, Elmhrst, 2015, Jayanasinge and Laksham, 2010, Rocheleau et.al, 1994). Hence, gender and caste were found to be two powerful social categories that further challenge Sri Lankan Tamil's means of living. In this context, Sri Lankan Tamil women's marginalization is twofold. On one side, these women suffer the social stigma of being widows, as according to Hindu beliefs; they are portrayed as carriers of bad luck (Herath, 2015, Hrdlickova, 2011). On the other, fishing is considered dirty work and mainly male domain (Monfort, 2015, Harper, et.al 2012, Yodanis, 2000). Apart from this, there was estimated to be 40.000 widows in the Northern Province in the aftermath of the conflict (Crisis Group, 2017). These women became the breadwinners of the households and had no other choice but engaged with income generating activities in order to maintain their families. This is illustrative of how war transformed and challenged the underlying patriarchal system, which prior to the warfare it confined women in the private sphere and relegated them as homemakers (Rajasingham-Seyanake, 2004, Lakshman(2018, Kandanearachchi and Ratnayake , 2018). Despite conflicts create new spaces for women empowerment (Sorensen, 1998) and gender equality, evidence has revealed that these wins are short-term and existing inequalities and power imbalances tend to exacerbate (Narbonalranzo, 2018, Van Der Haar, & Hilhorst, 2017). The combination of all these factors contributes to the social exclusion and invisibility of women's work and hamper their access to resources for livelihoods, and participation in social and political processes. Given that my interest is to explore how Ngos are dealing with this situation, I elaborated the main research question:

**Main research question:** How can NGOs interventions better contribute to gender transformation and women empowerment of the Tamil war widows in the small scale fishery sector of the Northern Province of Sri Lanka?

For the purpose of better understanding the particularities of Sri Lankan Tamil widows in the fisheries in the Northern Province, it is necessary to understand their roles, gender expectations, access to resources and the institutional arena that are embedded in. To achieve this, the following sub-questions were elaborated:

**Sub-question 1:** How social stratification (gender and caste) influences the fishery communities of Northern Sri Lanka?

**Sub-question 2:** How has the conflict affected gender roles in Northern Sri Lanka?

**Sub-question 3:** What are the challenges and concerns of Tamil war-affected widows in the small-scale fishery sector after the conflict?

**Sub-question 4:** How do post-conflict interventions and livelihoods recovery programs assist these women and contribute to gender transformation by the NGOs?

### 1.3 Social Relevance

This case study seeks to explore the phenomena of women affected by war in a highly patriarchal and caste ridden societies that persistently marginalized and aggravates their vulnerabilities and restrict their rights and ability to live a full life. Gender equality is an elementary pillar for the sustainable development and exclusion of women have rendered detrimental for countries and in particular post- conflict settings (Abebe, 2015). The objective of this study is to contribute to the ongoing academic debate on women within the peacebuilding process, ingrained in the provision of rural livelihood reconstruction.

By exploring what the gendered particularities, and considering other social categories such as caste, practitioners can better addressed women's needs and include them in the peacebuilding agenda. Post war interventions assisting women often overlook the cultural, political arrangement, failing to understand local traditions and community codes. How a community operates, what the gender roles are, and how these are interconnected are necessary questions that need to be addressed to prevent reinvigorating gender power imbalances. Given the fact that violence historically has been a sustaining pillar of the patriarchal system (VillellasAriño, 2010), alterations in the power and social structures after conflict are necessary to reshape gender identities (Denov and Ricard-Guay, 2013).

The case of Sri Lankan Tamil women serves to illustrate the specific issues of women within post-conflict interventions, limitations, and remaining challenges to eradicate gender discrimination and foster sustainable and lasting peace. Additionally, this case unfolds the need to consider the cultural and structural landscape that legitimizes gender disparities in a post-war environment (Cheldelin and Mutisi, 2016 Mount, 2016 and so forth).

Accordingly, gender and power elements require special attention and need to be prioritized in post conflict interventions reaching women. Yet, women's experiences on war vary depending on their status and place in the society. By exploring the gender role transformation during the conflict, raising awareness on the war-widows and the difficulties that go along with this, gives a great opportunity to learn about these experiences.

### 1.4 ACADEMIC RELEVANCE

The academic contribution of my thesis is to explore how Feminist Political Ecology theory and literature on peacebuilding and gender can complement the understanding how gender related power-differences affect women's livelihoods in conflict-affected settings. SLA is a widely applied framework to understand the lives of the poor, and it has been praised by its holistic approach that captures the multidimensional realities of the marginalized groups. It addresses the vulnerability context, hence the overall environment that may restrict dwellers means of live. Additionally, it draws attention to the goods, resources and available assets that people make use to sustain a living. Moreover, it addresses the processes and

structures, hence the institutional environment, and cultural norms that affect people's access to livelihood assets and in turn, influences the livelihood outcomes. However, this approach has been criticized as it does not address power relations and its limited applicability in disaster context. Therefore to analyze the case of Sri Lanka, SLA offers a limited analysis of the context.

As mentioned above, what is striking about the case of Sri Lanka is the element of gendered power relations, given that the caste system and patriarchy are two main contributors to women's marginalization. Applying Feminist Political Ecology I aim to overcome this limitation and better understand how these oppressive systems play a role in women's livelihood.

What is more, SLA appears to fail in the understanding of social transformation and challenges in an unstable setting. Conflicts have a tremendous impact on societies, due to the destruction of infrastructure, displacement, massive killings, but also because social structures and gender norms are transformed. I attempt to employ the literature on peacebuilding and more precisely, in the field of gender to understand how these changes affect women's livelihood possibilities. Thus, how different power systems affect women's experiences in post-conflict communities. Then, my question is: to what extent inserting the focus of gender and peacebuilding, in combination with feminist political ecology contribute to making better sense of livelihood development in a post-war setting like Sri Lanka?

## **1. 5 OUTLINE OF THE THESIS**

This thesis is structured as follows: In the first chapter I review the literature on Sustainable livelihoods, feminist political ecology where I discuss the elements of power and gender. In this chapter I include the literature review on peacebuilding and gender, which will provide insights on gender role and conflict transformation.

In Chapter 2 I aim to describe the Tamil caste community in Northern Sri Lanka, and highlight the position of Tamil women in the society. In Chapter 3 I examine the history of the conflict, and how the war affected Sri Lankan Tamil women. In Chapter 4 I analyze the fishery communities, their vulnerabilities and the role of women and their vulnerabilities in this sector. Chapter 5 I introduce the methodology and research framework. In chapter 6 I present the data analysis. Last, in chapter 7 I present the conclusions and insights, the contribution of my thesis and limitations of the study.

# CHAPTER I: LITERATURE REVIEW

## SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS

## PEACEBUILDING, AND GENDER

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The principal goal of this study is to explore how Ngo's assist Tamil widows working in the fisheries in post-war Northern Sri Lanka. Understanding how these women sustain a livelihood involves examining their complexities, strategies, access, and distribution of resources as well as engagement in socio-political spheres. This is key information to identify the vulnerabilities that hinder Tamil women's means of life and for the design of more strategic post-conflict interventions. To conduct the analysis, I have selected The Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA) to be the analytical framework of this thesis. This approach seeks to make the connection between people and the overall enabling environment that influences the outcomes of livelihood strategies (Isaac, et.al 2005).

SLA appears to be a useful analytical tool for mapping people's livelihoods. Several authors as Gunatilaka and Vithanagama (2018) have applied this framework to analyze the labor market in post-conflict Sri Lanka, claiming that the flexibility of the framework allows the representation of vulnerability conditions. However, as critiques indicate, this framework has two major shortcomings. First, SLA does not implicitly address power relations. When securing sustainable livelihoods, the use of resources is shaped by who can access and manage them. Unequal relations of power usually defined by gender, class, ethnicity translates into inequalities among people and control over resources. As gender power relations are a fundamental dimension of this thesis, I consider that this approach is insufficient to analyze this issue that constrain women affected by war. To complement SLA and bring in these power dimensions, I will make use of notions from Feminist Political Ecology (FPE). Feminist Political Ecology captures a more refined understanding of the socially and historically constructed gender power relations of a given context and unveils the existing power relations (MFF, SEI, SEAFDEC (2018). This field upholds that gender in combination with other forms of social stratification (class, caste, ethnicity) is a critical category in constituting access to natural resources (Sundberg, 2017). Considering how power relations operate is highly significant for designing programs aiming to improve livelihoods and to prevent the exacerbation of the existing social asymmetries (Anderlini, 2006).

SLA has also been criticized for its limited application in disasters or unstable settings (Collinson, 2003). Post-conflict environments are characterized by particular societal challenges, gender role transformation, and renegotiation. SLA fails to capture these complexities in these out-of-the-ordinary situations. I aim to overcome this limitation by introducing peacebuilding literature, notably in the field of gender. Including



literature on peacebuilding and gender will contribute to a better understanding of radical transformations and take account of the particularities of the post-war context that have an impact on Tamil women's livelihood in Northern Sri Lanka.

The academic relevance of this chapter then is to examine how peacebuilding and FPE can be useful to complement SLA and make better sense of livelihood development programs in post-war scenarios as Sri Lanka. The societal relevance of this chapter lies in the better understanding of the vulnerable groups and the need to better manage the social aspects of development through an integrated approach to ensure and enhance the goals of development (Vanclay and Steves, 2011).

This chapter is structured as follows: first, I provide a literature review on the Sustainable Livelihood Approach, where I also aim to discuss the key tenets and their implications for the analysis of rural communities. Second, the contributions and limitations of the approach will be highlighted. Following this, I present a section dedicated to gender and livelihoods where I discuss feminist political ecology. In the last section, I provide a literature review on peacebuilding and gender to understand how war shapes and transforms gender roles and the gendered vulnerabilities of war.

## **1. SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD APPROACH (SLA)**

### *1.1 Conceptual Framework Of Sustainable Livelihoods Approach*

The Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA) has been extensively used as an analytical tool within development studies (Nigel, 2009; Scoones, 2008; DFIF, 2008; Ellis, 2002; Chambers and Conway, 1991), and is widely recognized as offering the most comprehensive framework for understanding how people live (Levine, 2014:1). According to De Haan (2012), the Livelihood approach is an important actor-oriented perspective within the field of development, which attempts to seek improvements in people's livelihoods by looking at the full diversity of strategies that people employ to sustain their means of life and mitigate the risks and shocks. Overall, SLA places at the forefront, the capabilities, and assets of people address the vulnerabilities and other forces that may affect livelihoods, while striving to achieve the outcomes local people seek (Hughes, 2006). In this sense, Mazibuko (2013) recognizes the SLA as a 'strength base' rather than a 'need base' approach. Hence, the starting point of the roadmap to guide development practitioners' trail to enhance people's livelihoods is to observe what capabilities people have. The term 'capabilities' was coined by Amartya Sen (1983) who notes that a person's capability to live a good life is defined through a set of valuable 'beings and doings' such as, being in good health <sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup>Retrieved from Wells, T.: Sen's Capability Approach. Internet Encyclopedia Philosophy <https://iep.utm.edu/sen-cap/>

Therefore, this issue recognizes the individual's potential and resilience to face constraints (DFIF; 2008, Kollmair and Gamper; 2002). De Satgé (2004) names some household capabilities that include health, ability to work, education, and skills levels on one hand, and the power to claim entitlements to land, natural resources, social support, services on the other. The relevance of the SLA approach resides in the understanding of poverty beyond the conventional resource-based indicators such as income and instead examines the complexity of people's livelihoods through a multidimensional analysis (Fernando and Moorashinge, 2013).

Modernization theory dominated the development agenda from the late 1950s to the 1970s (Scoones, 2009) which constructed the rural as undeveloped and backward (Bradshaw, 2010). Hitherto, economic growth represented the main indicator to evaluate development (Bradshaw, 2010). Albeit, this theory has been subjected to criticism, and has been vigorously challenged due to the poor understanding of the socioeconomic development process, and overlooked social matters, such as economic sustainability and social freedoms (Ghoomar, 2010). In virtue of the imperative void to better adjust measures to rural people's needs, development practitioners and academics established a new conceptualization, which recognized the element of social protection as the basic foundation for development (Bradshaw, 2010). Therefore, SLA emerged as a response to the limited understanding of poverty and economic development at that time, which overemphasized the technicalities and productivity (Levine, 2014). Subsequently, Chambers and Conway (1992) presented the definition of livelihoods approach "*where the poor are asked about policies and are active agents of development*"<sup>3</sup>. The original definition of the SLA framework suggested by Chambers and Conway (1992) was conceived as comprising capabilities, assets, and activities required for a means of living.

## 1. 2 Core principles of SLA

SL facilitates the identification of practical priorities for development interventions (Serrat, 2017). SLA helps development practitioners to better analyze local, practices, transformations, and dynamics. Serrat (2017) describes it as an approach that encourages development workers to "think out of the box" as it frees them from conventional approaches of identifying problems and finding solutions. Therefore it represents a new standpoint in which context-specific and local perspective is included. This approach rests on a series of guiding core principles:

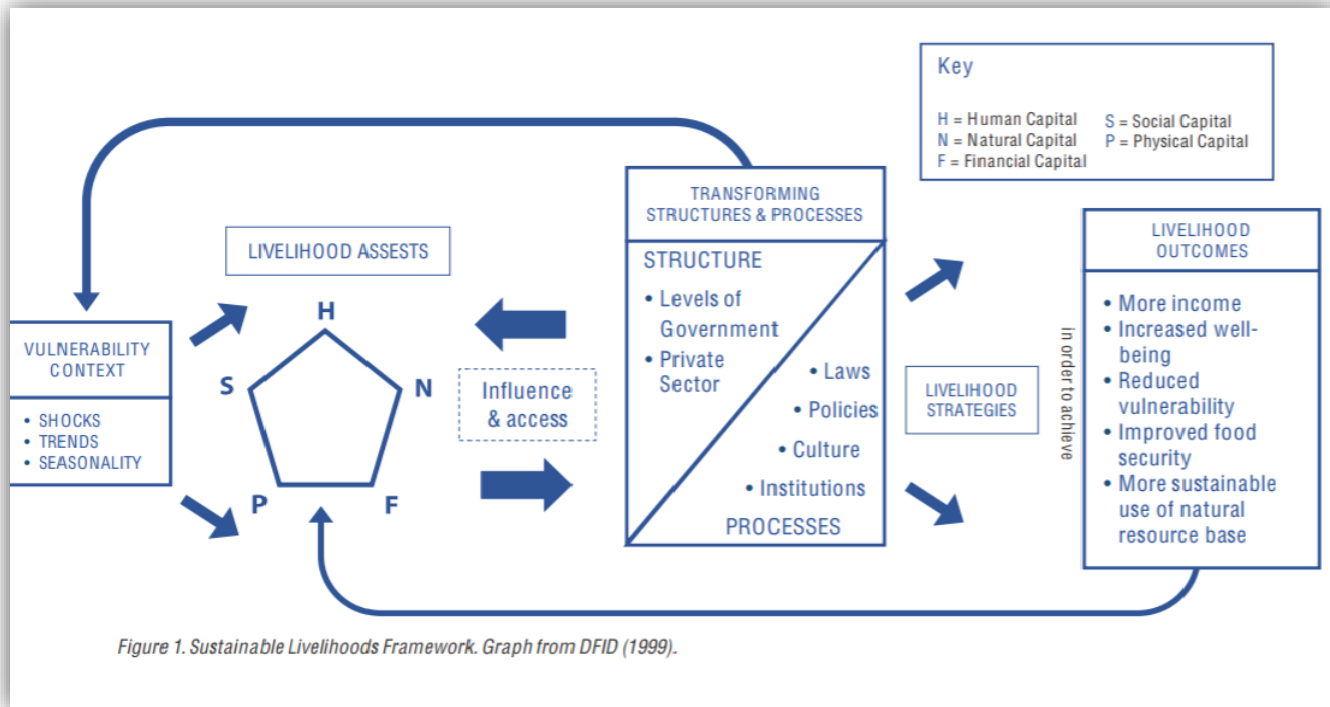
- The orientation of the framework is people-centered (DFID, 2008), where the poor and most deprived are placed upfront (Chambers, 1995). This principle the root for the end of any kind of discrimination, deprivation, and the protection of human rights. This approach fully involves people; offers support to achieve their livelihoods goals and focuses on the impact of policies upon dwellers and communities (DFID, 2008).

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<sup>3</sup>Retrieved from: Sarah Bradshaw (2019): Human rights, Human Wrongs: challenging poverty, vulnerability, and social exclusion. Theme. 1.3 from economic growth to people-centered development.

- Multi-level and participatory: the livelihood approach aims to bridge the macro and micro levels (DFIF; 1999). This attempts on one side, to emphasize the importance and impact of policies and institutions at local dynamics. The other side undertakes that the macro-level structures and processes focus lies on supporting people to build upon their strengths (Ashley and Carney, 1999). Therefore, it aspires to understand stakeholders' livelihoods in their total magnitude, by interconnecting different dimensions between people and the enabling environment that determine livelihood strategies (Serrat, 2017; DFIF, 2008).
- Holistic: Given that the SLA facilitates the identification of practical priorities on the specific particularities of the rural dwellers and acknowledges multiple influences, livelihoods strategies, and outcomes, and it applies to different special groups, (DFIF; 1999) this approach is described as holistic.
- Dynamic: With the ability to recover from stresses and shocks, it is intimately associated with the ability to perceive, predict, adapt to and exploit changes within the physical, social and economic environment (Chambers and Conway, 1991). Thus, external support must recognize the dynamic nature of livelihood strategies and demands continuous adaptation to respond to changes (Kollmair and Gamper, 2002; DFID, 1999).
- Sustainability: Kulhman and Farrington (2010) describe sustainability as maintaining well-being over a long, perhaps even indefinite period. DFIF (1999) identifies four key dimensions to sustainability – economic, institutional, social and environmental sustainability. Kollmair and Gamper (2002) suggest that a livelihood can be classified as sustainable depending on it a) reliance to endure external shocks and stresses, b) its dependency on external support, c) ability to maintain the long-term productivity of natural resources and c) not undermining the livelihood options of others.

The diagram below facilitates the visual presentation of the livelihoods approach that provides an organizing structure of the analysis. Figure 1 summarizes the main components of the livelihoods ecosystem together with the influential factors. It is worth mentioning that the arrows represent a dynamic and ongoing interdependence of the different elements within the framework.



### 1. 3 Sustainable Livelihoods Framework: Vulnerability Context

As Figure 1 illustrates, the vulnerability context represents the external scenario in which people navigate, and it has direct repercussions on the status and availability of the assets of people's livelihoods (DFID, 1999).

Early investigations of vulnerability relegated the notion to the physical resistance of structures (UNDHA, 1992). However, recent studies have amplified its extent to social and environmental processes. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) formulates the concept as the diminished incapacity of individuals or communities to anticipate, confront, resist and recover from the impact of a natural or human-induced hazard. The recognition of the interdependency between social, economic, and environmental processes as main determinants of vulnerability, underscores that the idea is an ongoing social construct (Cardona, et. all, 2012; Adger and Winkel, 2014.).In consequence,

vulnerability arises from political and historical processes embedded in cultural, social, environmental, and economic contexts which have conditioned populations' access to resources (Cardona, et.al, 2012). In this sense, Pelling (1999, 2001 cited by Kelman, 2007) stresses gender and ethnic discrimination, as a source of disempowerment and deprivation of access to basic resources, considered as a fundamental disaster condition. The Rockefeller Foundation (2013), lays out the following issues as high threats for rural dwellers: a) political marginalization and exclusion from the political system; b) gender inequalities in terms of lower wages and exclusion from decision-making processes, and, c) weak institutions and infrastructure. Therefore, vulnerability is not the only risk of a natural hazard, but as a result of unequal power distribution that places people in powerlessness, which in turn prevents them from acting upon and recovering from disasters. This alone evokes how individuals experience disasters, and how their exposure to risk is contingent on the social identity group, or social category they are ascribed to (IFRC)<sup>4</sup>.

For greater clarity of the terminology, it is important to distinguish the concept of risk, hazard, and vulnerability, sometimes used interchangeably.

Hazard is defined as a dangerous phenomenon, natural or human-made, that may disrupt livelihoods and cause impacts on socio-economic welfare<sup>5</sup>. The hazards can fall into the categories of shocks, seasonality, and critical trends (Serrat, 2017). Shocks include conflict, illnesses, floods, storms, droughts, pests, diseases. Regarding seasonality, the term refers to risk attained to a particular time frame such as prices, employment opportunities. Last, critical trends involve demographic, environmental, economic, governance, and technological trends are examples of the critical trend type of risk.

In the disaster risk management literature, exposure refers to the situation, infrastructure, housing and human assets located in hazard-prone areas" (UNISDR 2017). For example, people living on coastlines, volcanic slopes, and flood plains are more susceptible to a natural phenomenon. Though, this term also acknowledges that the risk is induced by the geographical position of the habitants. For instance, the physical isolation might place communities in a dire situation, in terms of accessibility to basic resources and institutions, while increasing their dependency on the exterior agents and vulnerability to any disruption (Pomeroy, 2013).

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<sup>4</sup>Retrieved from: IFRC: what is vulnerability? <https://www.ifrc.org/en/what-we-do/disaster-management/about-disasters/what-is-a-disaster/what-is-vulnerability/>

<sup>5</sup>Retrieved from Disaster Risk Management. United Nations Office For Outer Space: <https://www.un-spider.org/risks-and-disasters/disaster-risk-management#:~:text=Exposure%20is%20defined%20as%20%E2%80%9Cthe,of%20assets%20in%20an%20area.>

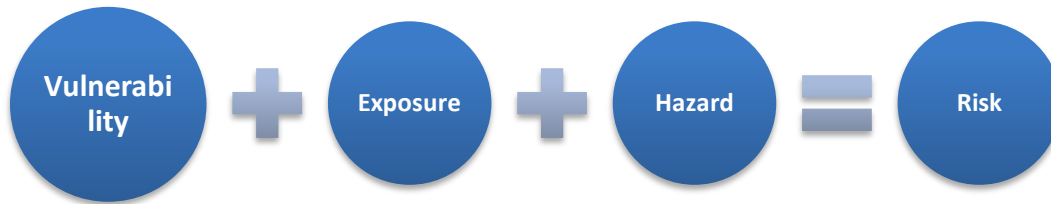


Figure 2. Disaster risk and conditioning element. Retrieved from: Prevention Web <https://www.preventionweb.net/disaster-risk/risk/exposure/>

Additionally, Isaac, et. al (2003) reminds that certain trends may have a positive impact on livelihoods, for instance, technological change. However, the poor and marginalized groups are often deprived of access to these benefits.

The study of the vulnerability of Sri Lankan Tamil women is a central point of this thesis. In this research, I attempt to analyze the vulnerability factors that condition the livelihoods of Sri Lankan Tamil women in the fishery sector. I strive to examine how different social descriptors such as: being a woman affected by war, being head of the household, Identifying as Tamil, and being a fisherwoman, place women in far sites of power and to what extent these hinder the lives of this collective. This is also a fundamental aspect that Ngo's must address to understand the livelihood outcomes and possibilities of Tamil women.

#### *1. 4 Sustainable Livelihoods Framework: Capital Assets*

The asset pentagon represents the source base that a household has at its disposal to engage in strategies to sustain its means of life as well as mitigate risks (FAO, 2005). This spans from available goods, strategies, capacities, ambitions to incentives behind decision-making (Pomeroy, 2013). Therein lies the core of the approach: instead of understanding poverty in terms of lack of income, it contemplates other aspects that contribute to a life of dignity (Chambers, 1995) and the interrelationships between them (DFIF;1999). Physical, material, and infrastructure are referred to tangible assets (Okali, 2006).

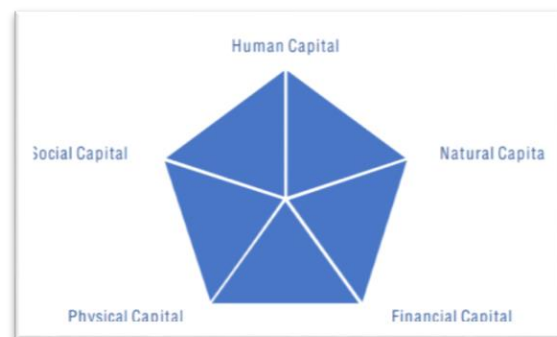


Figure 3: SLA assets retrieved from UNDP, 2015

In the following, an outline of the anatomy of livelihoods is provided (Serrat, 2017):

- ✓ Human capital: The assets in this category include: abilities, experience, work skills health, nutrition, education, knowledge, and capacity to work (UNDP, 2015).

- ✓ Natural capital encompasses natural resource stocks (soil, water, air, genetic resources, etc.) land and produces, water and aquatic resources, trees and forest products, wildlife, wild foods and fibers, biodiversity, environmental services (Scoones 1998).
- ✓ Physical capital involves infrastructure (transport, roads, vehicles, and buildings, water supply and sanitation, energy, communications), tools and technology (tools and equipment for production, seed, fertilizer, pesticides, traditional technology) (Serrat, 2017).
- ✓ Financial capital refers to savings, credit, and debt (formal, informal), pensions, wages, and insurance (SOAS, n.d)<sup>6</sup>.
- ✓ Social capital, broadly described, comprehends all the social ties and resources that individuals reckon on for their living (UNDP; 2015). Social capital embodies a series of social relationships categories: a) networks and connections (patronage, neighborhoods, kinship), b) relations of trust and mutual understanding and support, formal and informal groups, shared values and behaviors, common rules and sanctions, c) collective representation, mechanisms for participation in decision-making, leadership sanctions of either mutual or common consent.

Considering that assets are the central focus of this analytical framework and starting point of development intervention, the exploration of Tamil fisherwomen 's goods and capitals will offer very helpful information about how they construct their livelihoods and how NGOs can better assist these women. Human capital is very significant in post-war scenarios, where the demographic changes caused by the war have implications on the headship of the households (Gunatilaka and Vithanagama, 2018).

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<sup>6</sup> Retrieved from: Soas University London: Centre for Development, Environment and Policy Rural Development module (n.d.) [https://www.soas.ac.uk/cedep-demos/000\\_P530\\_RD\\_K3736-Demo/module/topindex.htm#](https://www.soas.ac.uk/cedep-demos/000_P530_RD_K3736-Demo/module/topindex.htm#)

## *1. 5 Transforming Structures and Processes*

Social capital is closely linked with political assets, which consist of structures and processes for transformation (UNDP; 2015; Scoones, 1998). These two elements provide the institutional context for livelihoods, and whereby practices may hinder or facilitate rural dweller's lives (Mumuni, 2016; Allison and Ellis 2001). They effectively determine the accessibility to different forms of capital, livelihood strategies, decision-makers, and influencers; an exchange between different kinds of capital; and any type of gains (resulting from specific livelihood strategies) (UNDP, 2015). Owing to the significant role on people's availability of resources and risk mitigation that structures and processes play, the transformation of these occupies a key position within the SLA framework (Kolmair and Gumper, 2002).

- Structures include social relations, private and public sector, institutions, and organizations.
- Serrat (2017) illustrates how processes such as regulations, policies, operational arrangements, agreements, societal norms, and practices, determine how social structures operate. Nigel (2009) point out power holders and citizenship statue as examples of political assets.

It should be noted that cultural capital holds a significant position within the SLA. It is generally, described as a system of knowledge, beliefs, customs, and norms that give meaning to the lives of the people (Oliva Abarca, 2017, Daskon and McGregor, 2014).SLA not only celebrates cultural diversity and recognizes its strong ties to the economic activity and environment (Sharma, 2011, Chambers, 1995); but it also acknowledges how it [=cultural diversity] determines people's livelihood choices and outcomes (Levine, 2014).

This aspect is particularly interesting for the study of Tamil women, in terms, of how the patriarchal and caste system restrict people's choice of livelihood and may thus be a direct impact on livelihood outcomes, as in the next chapters will be explored. Moreover, analyzing structures is highly relevant in post-conflict settings, as the institutional environment plays a key role in rebuilding livelihoods and its policies might affect people differently (Gunatilaka and Vithanagama, 2018).

## *1.6 Sustainable Livelihoods Framework' Outcomes*

As Figure 1displays, livelihood outcomes are the achievements or outputs resulting from strategies aiming to generate positive livelihoods (Morse, et. Al 2009; DFIF; 1999). Outcomes exhibit the configuration of livelihood factors and serve to understand the priorities, motivations, responses, and choices of stakeholders to improve their livelihoods (Kollmair and Gumper, 2002). This is particularly important as it bestows development practitioner's information relating to which performance indicator



should be better assessed to support activities that foster sustainable livelihoods (Kollmair and Gumper, 2002). Desirable outcomes of the strategies incorporate: raised income flow, increased well-being (i.e. non-material goods, like self-esteem, health status, access to services, sense of inclusion), reduced vulnerability, improved food security, and the application of more sustainable uses of natural resources (Kollmair and Gumper, 2002; DFIF, 1999). Considering SLA approaches must be underpinned by a commitment to poverty eradication (Ashely and Carney, 1999), it can be assumed that SLA is the driving force to the Millenium Development Goals and Poverty Reduction strategies (ID21, 2009).

The overarching end of livelihoods is to ensure wellbeing (Chambers 1995). The term suggests it is a precondition to be able to meet various human needs, ability to pursue one's goals, thrive, and feel satisfied with their life (OECD, 2011). Crucial to well-being is livelihood security, defined as adequate and sustainable access to income and resources to meet basic needs including adequate access to food, potable water, health facilities, educational opportunities, housing, time for community participation, and social integration (Frankenberger and McCaston 1998:31).

### *1. 7 Sustainable Livelihoods Framework: Advantages And Limitations*

Since it rose to prominence, SLA set a milestone in understanding the poor and has been a game-changer within the development provisions delivery. The framework has been appraised for its qualitative analysis of poverty (Serrat, 2017), and established a major shift from output to people (DFID; 1999). In this sense, this approach perceives individuals as active, dynamic, and resilient subjects (Korf, 2004).

What makes this framework revolutionary is that it demands a broader exploration in how poverty should be evaluated, taking into consideration aspects that were neglected until then, such as people's needs, priorities, and constraining factors, as well as the relationship of individuals with these aspects within their daily lives (Mumuni 2016). Development practitioners are required to understand the particularities of a given community, and this allows local perspectives to be included within the development efforts (Serrat, 2017). Lastly, an advantage of SLA is that it fosters the link between development activities and poverty reduction efforts through livelihood improvement (DFID, 1999).

However, SLA has received some criticism and some significant weaknesses have been identified. A key problem is that there has been little discussion on the utilization of SLA in disaster emergency contexts, as Zhao, et. al (2019) stress. This highlights that SLA was configured to be executed in a relatively stable setting (Lautzen and Raven-Roberts, 2003). The particularities that fail to take into account is that in times of conflict, livelihood assets may become life- and livelihood-threatening liabilities (Lautzen and Raven Roberts, 2006, Young, 2009). The livelihoods approach fails to address the complex spatiality and temporal vulnerabilities generated by the dynamics of an armed conflict ( Le Sage and Majid, 2002, Young, 2009). In this matter, many academics (Fernando and Moonseshinge, 2013, Collinson, 2003; Lautzen and Raven- Roberts, 2003, and so forth) advocate for widening livelihoods approach, to provide

aid practitioners with means to execute and monitor livelihood interventions in a conflict or disaster intervention context.

The second limitation is that this approach fails to address and include power relations. The overemphasis given to assets might end up eclipsing power dynamics and other dimensions of inequality (Van Dijk, 2011; Olson et al, 2014). As stated above, livelihoods are very much conditioned by the regulations to carry out by social institutions and processes. Yet, these processes are not neutral (Wong, 2016). Applying Bourdieu's theory of power (1979), social structures are enshrined in an overarching social system, which in turn, perpetuates the inclusion or exclusion of individuals and determines their access and claims (Wong, 2016). Then, structures and processes create new conflict arenas of power relationships: agents engage with struggles for power within their field and compete with the established hierarchy of groups (Hjellbrekke and Korsnes, 2020). In this way, considering social reproduction as an unequal process (Rizzo, 2012), livelihoods perpetuate the powers scheme and discriminatory practices (Bradshaw, 2010). Central to this question, is that gender inequalities are one of the most significant pervasive power relationships. Gender shapes power, the distribution of wealth, and access to resources (Koester, 2015). Taking this into consideration, neglecting power relations would significantly hamper the assistance to women within the development process (De Haan and Zoomers, 2005; Kabeer, 1994).

To summarize, the SLA is an analytical approach to better understand the livelihoods of the poor: how they deal with shocks and adversities, and how they manage to improve their livelihoods. SLA contributed to the reconfiguration of poverty beyond the conventional indicators and how restricted access to social services for instance can also create a vulnerable environment for the poor (Kantz, 2001). This may help development organizations and policymakers to develop activities and programs for sustainable development that better link to existing activities, capacities, and ambitions of the marginalized.

From an academic perspective, the SLA may help social scientists to further elaborate on the concepts of development and how poverty is understood. Development has been associated with the Western perspective (Pietersen, 2010). This conceptualization reflected on SLA, which in the rise of neoliberalism adopted a more individualistic development agenda (Scoones, 2009). This way of framing development seems highly problematic as prioritizes an individual's benefits over the community. This *modus operandi* is not attuned with many communities of the Global South (Brito Torres, 2014). The ethnocentric and homogenizing aspects of the dominating development trends, do not consider the social-economic, ecological, cultural, and spiritual reality of the "other" communities. As a consequence, the development of capitalism engenders increasing underdevelopment of the vulnerable communities (Gros, 1991: 132). Hence, academics can contribute to the discussions on how poverty should be understood and deconstruct the ethnocentric and western views of development. Considering different forms of operating and exploring important spheres of life other than the West, may lead to broadening the SLA tool and

better understand what is significant for marginalized groups, and further elaborate on effective approaches to end the cycle of poverty.

## 2. LIVELIHOODS AND GENDER : FEMINIST POLITICAL ECOLOGY

As mentioned above, the Sustainable livelihood approach has gained significant recognition within the development interventions in the context of poverty alleviation (Okali, 2006). However, one of the major shortcomings that this approach represents is the little attention paid to power relations and exclusion, issues that are pivotal to understand societal processes (De Haan, 2012). How the distribution of power and wealth is affected during conflict has significant implications for post-conflict practitioners'. Within this context, livelihoods are seen as sources of meaning, power, and agency within social worlds (Gunawardana, 2018). When monitoring peacebuilding or relief strategies, it is vital to pose the question *of who gets what, when, and how?*<sup>7</sup>. Answering these questions will prevent livelihood strategies from perpetuating exploitative patterns (Schafer, 2002). Gender roles together with other forms of social hierarchy affect men and women's agency to participate, benefit or expand their livelihood opportunities (Lawless, et al, 219). Consequently, gender is increasingly recognized as an integral dimension of the institutional context affecting the achievement of livelihood outcomes (Okali 2011, Stacey et. al, 2018:360). In my research project, I therefore I attempt to complement SLA with perspectives on gender and power by applying Feminist Political Ecology (FPE).

Feminist Political Ecology concentrates on the analysis of how the interconnections of gender, power, and knowledge form environmental and livelihood processes (Hoircurt, 2017). Applying FPE helps unveil gender power relations that have been forged historically and socially, and how these have been negotiated in the local context (MFF, SEI, SEAFDEC, 2018). In this interdisciplinary field, gender is considered a critical variable in shaping resource access and control and explores the struggle of men and women to sustain livelihoods and the prospects of any community for sustainable development (Rocheleau et al, 1996: 4). Thus, examines the influence of gender in managing natural resources, risks, access to decision making, and power relationships (Lutz-ley and Buecheler, 2020; Buechler and Hanson, 2015; Rocheleau et al., 1996).

Feminist Political Ecology emanated from the field of Political Ecology that emerged in the '90s (Elmhrist, 2015). Rocheleau and colleagues are prominent scholars who first combine Political ecology with a gender perspective (Rochelau et. al, 1994). Political ecology drew attention to unequal resource and wealth distribution based on class and ethnicity (Rocheleau, et al, 1994). The scope of feminist political ecology resides in analyzing gendered power relations affecting the distribution of natural and material resources (Lutz-Ley and Buecheler, 2020) and challenging gender disadvantages and inequality

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<sup>7</sup> Harold D. Lasswell's (1936) cited in Ravenhill (2016)

(Enhrimst, 2015). How poverty is feminized and deepens when women's participation as agents of environmental transformation is neglected has been widely studied by FPE academics (Sundberg, 2015). This approach gained increased recognition by analyzing the interconnections with various social stratification forms in the context of natural resource-based livelihoods (Hanson and Buecheler, 2015; Elmhirst 2011; Harris 2009; Rocheleau and Roth 2007). Evidence has stressed gender-specific impacts of ecological change and how they are shaped by the existing difference in gender asymmetries (Elmhirst, 2015).

Key to this approach is the examination of how masculinities and femininities are constructed and carried through in making a living (Hoircurt, 2016). Thusly, this approach challenges the essentialist and binary categorization of gender roles and gender division of labor (Elmhirst, 2015) and supports social and ecological transformation for women and other marginalized groups (Elmhirst, 2015). An increasing body of literature has contributed to addressing questions related to access and control of resources at different levels, from households to communities (Elmhirst, 2015).

Another key element of FPE is that provides highly relevant information about cultural, political, and economic structures by exploring how access, control, and relationships with different social agents are differentially being experienced by women (MFF, SEI, SEAFDEC, 2018; Elmhirst & Resurrección, 2008). FPE is attentive to the local dynamics and practices and rejects the universal understanding of culture, gender, or nature to explain or understand the context (Hoircurt, 2016). Accordingly, women are not treated as a homogenous group, and questions other forms of power and intersections of identities that construct people's vulnerabilities (i.e. age, class, social status, nationality, and migration status). (MFF, SEI, SEAFDEC (2018).

This is highly relevant for designing interventions, as reveals a nuanced understanding of social inequalities that hinder women's livelihoods and calls to take measures to effectively assist women. It focuses on how gendered identities are formed by a plurality of overlapping social characteristics (MFF, SEI, SEAFDEC, 2018). FPE allows looking into how Tamil women's livelihoods are shaped by socio-cultural and political power structures that further constrain their livelihoods and how these resist this scenario for their survival

### 3. PEACEBUILDING AND GENDER

In this chapter, I review the literature on peacebuilding and livelihood recovery. The literature on peacebuilding helps understand the complex dynamics in after war scenarios, and changes which have an impact on the structure of societies. Given that SLA fails to capture the complexities of an unstable context, I attempt to make use of notions of peacebuilding and gender to understand how conflict and gender role transformation affects the livelihoods of Tamil women.

Sustaining and strengthening local livelihoods is a fundamental yet challenging issue in post-war scenarios (Goldman and Young, 2015). The incorporation of livelihood and economic recovery within peacebuilding interventions is fundamental for various reasons (Mayardene and Philips, 2015). First, livelihood recovery assists people in restoring their pre-disaster livelihoods (Gyawali, et. al. 2019). The ability to generate income produces a sense of dignity and stability for people who have been affected by violence (Vithanagama, 2018). Therefore, rebuilding sustainable livelihood systems and strategies is essential for crisis recovery, for the prevention and reduction of further conflict, and risks associated with violent hostilities (UNDP, 2013).

Apart from this, the effects of the conflict disproportionately affect vulnerable groups like the poor and marginalized and heighten women's vulnerabilities (UNDP, 2013). Women in post-war Sri Lanka face profound and multi-faceted vulnerabilities, especially due to their new roles as primary breadwinners of their families, and are especially subjected to poor living standards, and gender violence (Ormhaug, 2009; Kandanearachchi and Ratnayake, 2018). Integrating gender approach in the peacebuilding process is a requirement to guarantee the protection of their rights.

For the sake of clarity, I begin this section by explaining key concepts of peacebuilding and their implications in delivering post-conflict provisions. Next, I examine the role of livelihoods in the sustainable peacebuilding process. Following I discuss how livelihoods recovery is the bulwark of local development and conflict prevention. In the last section of this unit, I provide information on peacebuilding and gender.

### 3.1 Sustainable Peacebuilding: positive peace and conflict transformation

Peacebuilding is defined as a process that facilitates the establishment of lasting peace and tries to prevent the recurrence of violence by addressing the root causes through reconciliation, institutional building, and political and economic transformation (Maiese, 2003). In the literature on peacebuilding, the notion of peace has various categories. Negative peace refers to the cessation of hostilities and violence (Bond, 2013).

The concept of positive peace was developed by John Paul Lederach (1997) and Johan Galtung (1976), prominent scholars in the field of peace studies. These academics introduced a dramatic paradigm shift in the design of peacebuilding efforts. The notion of peacebuilding was formulated as an endeavor aiming to create sustainable peace by addressing the root causes of violent conflict and developing capacities for the peaceful management of wars. These peace efforts uphold **conflict transformation** as a holistic and multi-faceted approach to manage violent conflict in all its phases (International Association for Humanitarian Policy and Conflict Research, 2008)<sup>8</sup>.

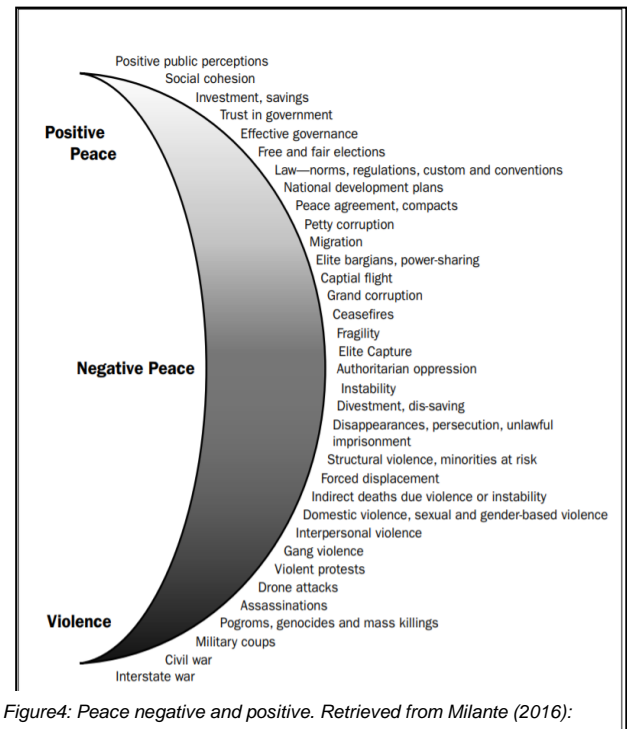


Figure4: Peace negative and positive. Retrieved from Milante (2016): Peace and development

From this perspective, the absence of structural violence is considered to be a requirement to ensure the fulfillment of human needs and the development of their rights (Galtung 1964, 1969; Arenal 1986, Sanahuja, 2018). Positive peace includes an ambitious idea of integrating human rights, gender equality, while addresses sources of inequality based on gender, ethnicity, religion, or class (Björkdahl 2012, Hendstrom and Semaratna, 2015). Consequently, this approach demands a fundamental transformation of the social structure for lasting peace (Uyangoda, 2007). Positive peace and conflict transformation standpoint.

Conflict transformation and sustainable development both pursue the ideal of a legitimately governed and economically viable peaceful society based on the rule of law (Warnecke and Franke, 2010). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 25 September 2015, recognizes not only that peace and security are prerequisites for achieving sustainable development, but that sustainable development provides the pathway to peaceful societies (Zannier, 2015).

<sup>8</sup>Retrieved from: Peacebuilding Institute: The conceptual origins of peacebuilding.<http://www.peacebuildinginitiative.org/index34ac.html?pagelid=1764>

In this regard, The United Nations Peacebuilding Commission has identified Economic revitalization, including jobs and livelihoods<sup>9</sup> as one of the pressing matters and most frequent needs for a successful peacebuilding process.

### *3.1.1 Livelihoods recovery: Local Economic Development and Conflict Prevention*

The relationship between conflict and development has been widely studied in the field of development literature. In this respect, the term “conflict trap”, coined by Paul Collier among other scholars, (2002, 2003) refers to the vicious circle of development and conflict: war hinders development, but conversely, development lessens the likelihood of war. Moreover, the mentioned author claims that growth directly helps reduce risk, as it raises the level of income, whereas low income and slow growth make a country prone to war (2009:32). In this vein, considering that warfare disrupts and slows countries' development, armed conflict is deemed to be a failure of development (World Bank, 2003).

Considering this, rebuilding livelihoods becomes an essential component of peacebuilding and economic redevelopment (United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), 2015)<sup>10</sup>. In this regard, the primary task of post-conflict development is to establish priorities for economic revival, especially local livelihoods, whilst making sure that no individuals or groups are excluded (Green, 1999:198). Livelihood production systems are the bulwark of the national economy; they constitute the basis for economic networks and institutions and are interconnected with natural resources (Goldam and Young, 2015). Additionally, local development is essential for poverty reduction, as well as for its contribution to allowing the local economy to be integrated at a regional and national level (Rosales and Urriola, 2011:04).

The United Nations International Labour Organization policy (ILO) (2009) affirms that in post-conflict settings, the creation of employment is vital as means to guarantee stability, socio-economic growth, reintegration, and sustainable peace. In this way, jobs provide communities with the means of survival and recovery<sup>11</sup>. This is a key element, as failure in assisting the reconstruction of livelihoods may further weaken the social fabric and increase vulnerability (Brennan, 2005). Under the umbrella of the Post-conflict reconstruction (PCR) program, specific measures, such as rebuilding of infrastructure (houses and roads), the establishment of the economic foundations are marshaled with the pursuit of livelihoods reconstruction (Anderlini and El-Bushra, 2012).

Nevertheless, it is vital to bear in mind that livelihood restoration is not a substitute for peacebuilding. Yet, it is considered to be a strategy enshrined in the peacebuilding strategy that actively contributes to peace and reduces tensions among the competing groups. It is evident that just improving people's livelihoods is

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<sup>9</sup>Retrieved From: The United Nations Peacebuilding Architecture  
[https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/Pbso\\_Architecture\\_Flyer.Pdf](https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/Pbso_Architecture_Flyer.Pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Retrieved from United Nations Environment Programme: Livelihoods Development Critical to Post-Conflict Peacebuilding and Economic Recovery - New Study. <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/press-release/livelihoods-development-critical-post-conflict-peacebuilding-and>

<sup>11</sup> United Nations, Internal Labour Office (ILO) 2009: United Nations Policy for Post-Conflict Employment Creation, Income Generation, and Reintegration. Geneva.

not enough to solve a conflict but significantly contributes to mitigating the consequences of the war among parties (Brenan, 2005).

### *3.1.2 Livelihoods and Peacebuilding: Sustainable Development*

Transforming potential adverse conditions generated by conflict in fragile settings is contingent on the achievement of a stable and solid future and prevents further outbreaks of hostilities (Alvarez Riascos, 2016). The goal of Sustainable livelihoods (SL) strives to achieve the elimination of poverty, protection of economic, social, political, and cultural rights of communities (Ashely and Carney, 1999). These goals are aligned with the Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015) that range from no poverty, zero hunger, peace, justice to strong institutions and so on<sup>12</sup>. Furthermore, SL places people at the center, has a rights-based approach, and seeks global sustainable development (Cediel Becerra, et al, 2017).

Apart from this, applying SL may help better understand the root causes of the conflict - given that the sustainable livelihoods' maxim is to reduce inequalities, invigorate the social network and increase social cohesion (Alvarez Riascos, 2016). Exploring people's strategies of how they make a living may help practitioners design better provisions and prevent reinforcing existing power relationships and discriminatory practices. Additionally, livelihoods are conceived as a mechanism to build trust among the competing groups and a way to build collaborative bridges and cooperation (Brenan, 2005). Thus, local discrepancies are dealt with by ensuring equal access and distribution of resources to all members of the community (Alvarez Riascos, 2016).

In summary, livelihood restoration is fundamental for peace-building strategies, through its implications on economic revival, poverty reduction, and addressing local dynamics. Restoring livelihoods is essential to enable communities to make a living and this has implications on how the impact of interventions may greatly affect the development of sustainable livelihoods. Applying SL provides key information about local people's available resources, needs, and priorities. The livelihoods approach can contribute to strengthening accessibility to assets as well as identify limitations to help people affected by war recover (Brenan; 2005). Moreover, literature on peacebuilding and conflict transformation emphasize that when a conflict is over addressing fundamental inequalities are key to achieve positive peace. This is a fundamental concern that SLA should address to avoid reinforcing the power imbalances and contribute to the end goal of building sustainable peace.

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<sup>12</sup> Retrieved from United Nations: Sustainable development goals: <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html>



### *3.2 Gender Approach To Peacebuilding And Livelihoods Recovery*

The central theme of this section is the examination of engendered peacebuilding in post-conflict contexts. This subsection argues that paying attention to the gendered experience of war is critical in designing post-conflict interventions and the peacebuilding process (Agbajobi, 2010). The rationale behind this idea is that equality between men and women is a fundamental concern to democratic societies and an unavoidable requirement for the construction of peace and sustainable development (Spanish Ministry of Presidency and Equality, 2019).

In this unit, I discuss the impact of conflict on gender roles and how this transformation, in turn, creates different vulnerabilities for men and women. I apply the feminist literature to analyze how patriarchal values resurface and exacerbate women's marginalization in the course of the peacebuilding process (Puechguirbal, 2012). Addressing underlying gender ideologies that impinge economic, political, and social institutions provides a better understanding of the complexities and implications of gender norms that determine women's and men's performance and livelihoods in peacebuilding (Jennings, 2016)

I argue that those efforts should focus on women's empowerment and intrinsic social transformation as a necessary precondition to achieve gender equality (Puechguirbal, 2012). Gender reforms are relevant to men and women and it is pressing that both are engaged in the conversations about inequalities and the construction of democratic relations with men (Jennings, 2016).

This passage starts reviewing the gendered experiences of a war, how the conflict shaped and affected women. Next, I explain the international legal framework and the importance of including gender within the peacebuilding provision. In addition to this, I explain how gender inclusion within the post-conflict interventions entails fostering women empowerment and challenging the transforming structural and gender relations.

### *3.2.1 Gendered Experiences of a war: Continuum of violence and gender roles transformation*

Violent conflicts are experienced differently by men and women (Ramirez Bonilla et al, 2011). Traditionally, war has been conceptualized as a masculine domain, in which in turn women were portrayed as the passive victims (D'Amico, 1998; NarbonaIranzo,2018). There is strong evidence proving that violence suffered by women does not originate solely from the conditions of war, but it is directly related to their subordinated position in society (Rehn and Shirleaf, 2002). In this regard, the concept continuum of violence first defined by Ferris (1990) discusses how women face different forms of sexual and gender-based violence during conflict, flight, and protected encampment (Krause, 2015:4). Furthermore, Cynthia Cockburn (2008) stresses the relation of war and post-war experiences with power imbalances between men and women established by the patriarchal system. The term continuum of violence depicts that the cessation of hostilities does not necessarily imply peace for women (Puechguirbal, 2012). Thus, it highlights the cyclical nature of patriarchal violence and establishes its continuity through different phases of violence and peace (Kostovicova, Bojicic-Dzelilovic& Henry, 2020; Cockburn, 2004). Moreover, the notion of "continuum" implies that violence is not only confined to military sites, but it adopts several shapes throughout everyday practices (Yubal-Davis, 2004; Cockburn, 2004). In this line, Giles and Hyndman (2004) argue that violence permeated at home is considered as part of broader social, political, and economic processes that are embedded in state policies, public institutions, and the global economy. Consequently, due to the gender roles established by the patriarchal system, women are exposed to very specific vulnerabilities such as kidnapping, sexual abuse, and exposure to landmines (United Nations, 2002). Gender division of labor depicts women as the primary caregivers and social attitudes may contribute to women's isolation such as the stigma towards widows and female-headed houses (Rathirane, 2013). However, as survivors of the war, women are left behind with the burden of ensuring family livelihood (Okere, 2018)

Nevertheless, in light of the growing body of literature on women's participation in conflict and peace the naturalized dichotomy of women-victims, men-soldiers conception has soon been challenged (Giles and Hyndman, 2004). Evidence has suggested that female participation in war and war-like circumstances is far more common than is generally recognized (Rajivan and Senarathne, 2011:4). Bandarage's(2010) study on Sri Lankan warfare demonstrates women's different roles as victims, perpetrators, and peacemakers. Similarly, Sorensen (1998) highlights the contribution of women towards peace, as those who ensure the livelihoods of their family members and preserve normalcy in chaos. The collapse of the traditional gender roles during warfare opens new spaces where women are compelled to take on non-traditional spheres which have implications in women's decision-making and socio-political engagement (Manchada,2016). Given the high mortality level among men, women become the breadwinners and sometimes this implies working outside the household and navigating in traditionally male-dominated

fields<sup>13</sup>. These cases confirm that violent conflict provokes social upheaval that trembles the foundation of society (Muvingui, 2016). Due to the loss of institutional structures and the need to fully utilize all available human resources traditional gender roles can get blurred perforce (Far, 2002). In this sense, conflict alters the pre-existing social constructs and opens a window of opportunity to question the structures of societies, such as gender roles (Puechguirbal, 2012).

Whether the aftermath of the conflict posits better access and position or on the contrary places women in new forms of insecurities is an extensively discussed question among peacebuilding practitioners and scholars (K.C, Van Der Haar,&Hilhorst, 2017). Studies conducted on post-conflict scenarios have detected that there is a difficulty to sustain the advancements in gender equality achieved during the conflict. Although in some places warfare has produced positive outcomes for women (Sorensen, 1998), in most post-conflict contexts have been unable to formalize and translate political gains made during conflict into post-conflict political representation (Hughes, 2009:12)<sup>14</sup>. El Bushra (2003) argues that the gains achieved during the conflict are temporary and scattered. Thus, the ideological basis and patriarchal structure seem resistant to change and the resumption of normal life and traditional roles relapses in the aftermath (Mckay, 1998). As a consequence, women tend to be unconsidered in peacebuilding efforts resulting in the invisibility of women's narratives and attendance of their specific necessities (Narbonalranzo, 2018). Moreover, not considering women as essential players in peace has led to the reinforcement of gender hierarchy (Puechguirbal, 2012).

Consequently, post-conflict initiatives must include feminist agenda to integrate concerns of gender subordination and power relations that persist in postbellum scenarios (Puechguirbal, 2012). Interventions should aim to halt discriminatory practices towards all the marginalized groups, including women, and generate economic and political changes that strengthen peace perspectives (Anderlini and El-Bushra, 2012).

Before proceeding, it is remarkable to discuss that conceptualizing women as a homogenous group is highly problematic and other social categories need to be included in the understanding of women's experiences in fragile settings (Adjei,2019). Women's vulnerabilities are shaped by their position in society (UN; 2002) and by their former positions in the conflict scenario (refugees, combatants, widows, female-headed houses, victims of sexual violence) (Sorensen, 1998). Castes, class, sexual orientations, and so forth represent other system hierarchies that intersect with the existing gender domination system and influence women's experience (Crenshaw, 1998). Considering this, Integrating a gender-relational approach is particularly relevant for the analysis of Tamil widows and to better discern their experiences

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<sup>13</sup> Retrieved from Women For women International: Economic empowerment affected by conflict  
[https://www.womenforwomen.org/sites/default/files/2019-05/WFWI\\_AffectByConflict\\_Proof.pdf](https://www.womenforwomen.org/sites/default/files/2019-05/WFWI_AffectByConflict_Proof.pdf)

<sup>14</sup>Retrieved from: Strachan, A. L., and Haider, H. (2015). Gender and conflict: Topic guide. Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham.[https://gsdrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/gender\\_conflict.pdf](https://gsdrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/gender_conflict.pdf)

and vulnerabilities shaped by their condition of women affected by war, and caste, and other social characteristics.

### *3.2.2 International Legal Framework*

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action held in 1995 gave worldwide visibility to women's concerns and envisioned gender equality in all dimensions of life<sup>15</sup>. The platform recognized women's involvement in conflict prevention and resolution as a key aspect for the promotion and maintenance of peace and security. The platform ratified that discriminatory practices against women would be exacerbated after conflict and stressed the pressing need for women to be involved in all stages of post-conflict reconstruction efforts (United Nations, 2002).

The celebration of the Beijing conference culminated in 2000 with the adoption of the 1325 resolution by The United Nations Security Council (Justino et al, 2018), which was remarkable advancements in the realm of women and armed conflict<sup>16</sup>. The promulgation of 1325 set a precedent in addressing the effects of war on women and it was the first settlement that specifically addressed concerns related to women and security. The resolution ratifies the incorporation of a gender perspective in peacebuilding and the protection of women's economic, social, and justice rights<sup>17</sup>. The basis of this resolution rest on the four following fundamental pillars: a) increased participation of women at all levels of decision-making, including regional, national, and international organs; b) protection of women and girls from gender-based violence; c) prevention of violence against women; d) provide relief and recovery mechanisms while applying a gender lens<sup>18</sup>.

UNSCR 1325 is a milestone in understanding women as key players in peace efforts and made significant advancements in broadening the peacebuilding agenda by incorporating a gender approach. This resolution has paved the way for more resolutions and interventions. These have resulted in great improvements and the development of mechanisms to monitor and evaluate women's participation and protection in post-war settings. Consequently, the UNSCR 1889 resolution (2009) drew attention to increasing women's participation and decision-making in peace and focused on the protection of women's socio-economic rights. This resolution endorses that gendered socio-economic inequalities make women more vulnerable in conflict and post-conflict situations, preventing them from participating and reinforces the culture of violence against women (Nazamudeen, 2016; True, 2013).

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<sup>15</sup>Retrieved from The Beijing Platform for Action: inspiration then and now. <https://beijing20.unwomen.org/en/about>

<sup>16</sup>Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Retrieved from: Institute of Peace United States: Academy for international conflict management and peace. Gender war and peacebuilding: <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/files/NPECSG12.pdf>

<sup>18</sup>Ibid

The following table summarizes the resolutions that have succeeded since the adoption of the 1325 settlement<sup>19</sup>:

|                               |   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| <b>Resolution 1325 (2000)</b> | <b>Acknowledged the importance of women participation in peace negotiations, Peacekeeping operations and post-conflict interventions.</b>   |
| <b>Resolution 1825 (2008)</b> | Recognizes sexual violence as a tactic of war and as a matter of international security and peace which demands a specific response.  |
| <b>Resolution 1888(2009)</b>  | Strengthen the efforts to end sexual violence in conflict   |
| <b>Resolution 1889 (2009)</b> | Establishes monitoring mechanisms to evaluate the implementation of 1325 resolution and advocates for women's participation and inclusion in peacebuilding  |
| <b>Resolution 1960 (2010)</b> | Establishes a mechanism to report sexual violence   |
| <b>Resolution 2106 (2013)</b> | Stresses accountability for perpetrators of sexual violence and enhances women's economic and political empowerment   |
| <b>Resolution 2122 (2013)</b> | Gender equality and women empowerment is critical to international peace and security and recognize the differential impact of conflicts on women and girls   |
| <b>Resolution 2493 (2019)</b> | Calls for the full implementation of all previous resolutions requests to create context-specific approaches to enhance women's participation, urge to support the equal participation of women in all stages of the peace process, and a mechanism to monitor peace. |

Table 1: UN resolutions on gender and armed conflict

<sup>19</sup> Retrieved from: Global norms and standards: Peace and security UN Women:<https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/peace-and-security/global-norms-and-standards>

### *3.2.3 Implications of integrating gender in peacebuilding*

The inclusion of gender perspectives in peacebuilding is a matter of social justice. Applying gender in peace efforts enhances legitimacy, inclusion, accountability and stresses the significant role of women's associations in monitoring peacebuilding activities (Robinson 2016). Furthermore, evidence has shown that applying a gender-sensitive approach in post-conflict interventions is beneficial to promote political inclusion, reduce gendered poverty and facilitate social and economic cohesion (Robinson, 2016). The feminist agenda is guided by the principle of equity (Munro, 2000) and this, in turn, is the foundation to sustainable peace and equality (Nazamudeen, 2016). Hence, engendering peacebuilding implies striving for positive peace (Munro, 2000). From this perspective, post-conflict backgrounds should be envisioned as opportunities to ensure women's rights (Maracine, 2016) and to renegotiate gender dynamics and power relationships (Robinson, 2016).

Apart from this, Anderlini (2006) argues that integrating a gender lens could also help identify the linkages with conflict and development issues. According to this scholar, firstly, it may help detect the gendered nature of root causes of conflict. For instance, the promotion of manhood with violence can suggest the underlying social forces that fuel violence. In this regard, the feminist approach brings power relationships and structural inequalities to the forefront by exploring the impact of warfare on gender roles (Robinson, 2016). Secondly, it contributes to the analysis of the gendered impact of conflict. For instance, the increased violence against women may hinder their involvement in development activities and affects women's employability (Anderlini, 2006). Lastly, it pinpoints the gendered dimensions of peacebuilding. As a consequence of the war, women become the breadwinners and caretakers of their relatives. Due to the conflict, women are forced to engage with new economic, social, and political roles, incrementing their responsibilities within and out of their households (Anderlini, 2006). Understanding these complexities and particularities will provide greater knowledge of how women navigate in these scenarios and their struggle for a sustainable livelihood. From an instrumentalist perspective, by understanding the different physical, social and economic vulnerabilities that women face, development agencies can better develop programs that meet women's needs and expectations.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Retrieved from: Institute of Peace United States: Academy for international conflict management and peace. Gender war and peacebuilding: <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/files/NPECSG12.pdf>

### *3.2.4 Gender and Peacebuilding : Decision-making an empowerment symbiotic relationship*

It has been discussed the potential of post-conflict to effectuate social transformation and create an optimal scenario to strengthen gender equality and foster sustainable development (Pretes, 2011). Empowering women as well as guaranteeing their participation is the foundation for enduring peace, development, good governance, human rights, and justice (United Nations, 2002). Consequently, creating an environment in which they are empowered and promote their participation is paramount to a post-conflict development agenda (Vithanagama, 2018).

The notion of empowerment in this context refers to more equitable power and control over their own lives and social statuses (Hassim, 2018). Kabeer (2005) described the concept of empowerment in terms of the ability to make choices and transform them into desired outcomes. The extent to which a person is empowered is contingent on their agency and the institutional structure they are embedded in (Aslop and Heinsoh, 2005). In this sense, the agency is defined as the cognitive capacity to make choices, which is closely linked to self-perceptions, reflections of their place in society, self-worth, and personhood (Kabeer, 2018:2). Distribution and accessibility to livelihood assets determine how the agency is exercised and in turn, these conditions determine women's capacity to ensure livelihoods (Kabeer, 2005, Mount, 2016). Further, women empowerment requires a structural rework and reconfiguration of institutions, cultural barriers, customary practices that have shaped gender relationships, division of labor which constrain women's decision-making powers (Vithanagama, 2018). In conclusion, women's empowerment can be understood as a way to redress unequal power relationships, structures, and institutions that result in unequal power distribution, limited access to assets, resources, and, subordination in the political and social sphere (Abrar-ul-haq et al, 2017).

Therefore the debate on the empowerment of women underlines how different economic and non-economic domains are interlinked and contribute to women's empowerment. Solid evidence on this field has demonstrated that economic empowerment advances women socio-political empowerment, by giving them space in the political realm, presence in the communities, and access to services<sup>21</sup>. Hence, decision-making and women's economic empowerments maintain a symbiotic relationship (Nazamudeen, 2016). Studies have suggested that societies, where women hold higher social, economic, and political status, are less prone to be engaged in violent conflict (Gizellis, 2009). Furthermore, women's empowerment and participation in economic affairs, such as the labor market and access to property, have a relevant impact on the economic and social development of countries (Cediel Becerra, et.al, 2017). Similarly, considering that the Sustainable livelihood approach goal is poverty eradication women's economic empowerment represents an indisputable value to economic growth and for overall economic recovery (Ruiz Abril, 2009). Conversely, when women are not financially stable, the capacity for decision-making and the capacity to question institutions might be compromised (Nazamudeen, 2016).

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<sup>21</sup>Retrieved from Women for Women International: economic empowerment for women in conflict  
[https://www.womenforwomen.org/sites/default/files/2019-05/WFWI\\_AffectByConflict\\_Proof.pdf](https://www.womenforwomen.org/sites/default/files/2019-05/WFWI_AffectByConflict_Proof.pdf)

Subordinated positions in their communities, roles as caretakers restrict their mobility and employment choices and contribute to women disempowerment (Kandaneerachchi and Ratnayake, 2018)

Despite the significant efforts to call for the increased participation of women under the auspices of the United Nations 1325 resolution, shortcomings have been detected in its effectuation. Evidence has demonstrated that most post-conflict and livelihood reconstruction provisions disregard gender transformation roles that occurred during conflict and its aftermath (Vithanagama, 2018). Maxwell et al. (2017:32) identify a pattern of post-conflict livelihood recovery programs tending to neglect the context, needs, and priorities of the population as market factors, formal and informal institutions, and gender dimensions that play a significant role in deciding who can access and succeed in various livelihoods. In connection with this, Kabeer (2018) observes that agricultural provisions tend to overlook the necessities of women farmers as these often are implemented by men. Another factor is that deficient knowledge of what is relevant for people's livelihoods derives into ineffective strategies, such as microcredit programs (Kabeer, 2018). Additionally, rebuilding infrastructure and restoring services as means to create employment are prioritized within the post-conflict agenda (Ruiz Abril, 2009).

Following, Ruiz Abril (2009) summarized the obstacles that constrain women economic empowerment and livelihoods in a) access to control over economic resources ( assets ownership by discriminatory practices); b) transform assets into economic opportunities ( exploitative working conditions, market segregation, domestic duties, and depressed wages); c) control over income and transform income into strategic choices ( socio-culturally defined gender norms resulting in women being placed in far sites of power decision). Additionally, the disintegration of the social fabric and loss of assets deepen women's vulnerabilities (Vithanagama, 2018). Widowhood might determine a situation of isolation and discrimination for women and women-headed households'(IASC, 2006)<sup>22</sup>. Gender-based violence and low psychological well-being stem from trauma are important elements that undermine women's empowerment (Ruiz Abril, 2009). Failing to integrate gender in the political and economic framework compromises not only women's rights and participation in decision-making but also control over economic resources and livelihood opportunities (True, 2013).

Because of this, the ongoing discussion revolves around how to maximize the potential of peacebuilding in the construction of more equitable gender relations and foster women's participation in the decision-making tables (Sorensen, 1998). In other words, how livelihood reconstruction could more effectively catalyze women's empowerment and gender equality?

The gender-sensitive approach integrated into livelihood post-conflict interventions required an extensive investigation on the skills, vulnerabilities, and responsibilities of affected women. Interventions should aim to create spaces where gender discrimination and unequal access to resources are challenged. Consideration of gender division of labor is crucial to gain insights into women's availability and responsibilities within their households. Another element to gauge is the promotion of nontraditional jobs.

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<sup>22</sup>IASC Gender Handbook (2006). Gender and livelihoods in emergencies.



In communities emerging from conflict, “masculine” sectors are in high demands and can offer alternatives to their livelihoods (IASC, 2006)

### *3.2.5 Beyond gender empowerment: transforming systems*

Integrating gender analysis and developing strategic measures for women is highly significant yet, insufficient to redress historical gender inequalities and power imbalance (Jennings, 2016). Although post-conflict interventions have the goal of achieving sustainable development and improving the living conditions of people, unless specific measures are taken, these may be reinforcing gender hierarchy (Alley et al, n.d). Moreover, discourses of women empowerment have often placed the onus on women, under the assumption that when women are given economic and political access, gender inequalities would be reversed (Degi Mount, 2016).

. As Siluvaithasan&Strokke (2006) discuss, the resolution of a conflict requires a fundamental transformation of the social structure as well as the dynamics of the conflict. In this respect, the post-conflict arena should be considered as an opportunity to seize gender relationships and pave the way for a democratic and human rights-based system (Parlevliet, 2010). Empowerment policies should recognize the structural causes that impede women's participation and establish measures to overturn the prevailing gender ideologies (Cheldelin and Mutisi, 2016).

Harder (2011) asserts that the process of deconstructing patriarchy entails broadening the understanding of peace, security, state, and democracy to adequately assess mechanisms of gendered inclusion and exclusion. Given the fact that violence historically has been a sustaining pillar of the patriarchal system (VillellasAriño, 2010), alterations in the power and social structures after conflict are necessary to reshape gender identities (Denov and Ricard-Guay, 2013). Examination of structures that perpetuate gender norms should parallelly address the way men and women think about their identities (Wright, 2014, Birchall, 2019). Therefore, the transformation of mindsets, attitudes, and behaviors is a fundamental part of empowerment (Jenings, 2016).

Critical attention should be paid to how gender relationships, experiences, and dynamics are fraught with moral conundrums originated from the underlying social structure (Harris, 2004). Avruch (1998) stresses that what is generally accepted as culture, social norms and expectations uncover gender power symmetries. To this degree, behaviors, expectations, and practices, which are rooted in a rigid social code, perpetuate gender power imbalances<sup>23</sup>. Thus, culture is a constituent of the political agenda (Avrch, 1998). On this subject, exploring how masculinities and femininities are constructed, as well as state gendered practices is essential to undergo a political and social transformation (Harders, 2011). In this regard, militarized notions of masculinity can fuel violence in the following cases: motivating men to

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<sup>23</sup>Retrieved from Men, Masculinities, and Changing Power: A Discussion Paper on Engaging Men in Gender Equality From Beijing 1995 to 2015

exercise violence, promotion of violent masculinities to recruit soldiers, portraying violence as a symbol of manhood, or encouraging men who feel unable to live up to societal expectations of masculinity to join armed groups (Wright, 2014 p.7, Birchall, 2019: 13). Strategies should engage men to be actively committed to redistributing power in both their personal lives and in larger spheres.<sup>24</sup> Post-conflict agendas should pursue building gender relations based on democratic and equality values (Connell, 2001, Harders, 2011). In addition to this, efforts focusing on encouraging men to join dialogues and challenge power dynamics are key constituents<sup>25</sup>. Designing a social space for men to discuss how to deal with the socio-psychological impact of these changes and reflect on gender roles will be beneficial in building towards gender equity (Jennings, 2016). Lastly, it is important to remark that countries affected by violent conflict require cultural sensitivity (Cheng-Hopkins, 2010). However, in many cases, women's rights have often been overlooked for the benefit of cultural traditions which normalize and institutionalized patriarchy (Porter, 2003). Attention to cultural specificity is required in peacebuilding but not at the expense of human rights (Porter, 2003).

As a recapitulation, this chapter argues that livelihood recovery is central in the peacebuilding process. It not only contributes to sustainable development but also to rebuild people's livelihoods and conflict prevention. In the critical aftermath of a conflict, adopting a gender approach is key to ensure lasting peace and protect human rights. The literature analysis of this section stresses the urgency to look at the prevalent cultural gender ideologies and deconstruct gender as only women's concern. This might be achieved by exploring how cultural, social norms influence, constrains, and order social institutions and individuals in day-to-day life (Degi Mount, 2016). This process demands making inequalities visible and unveiling the subtle gender discrimination embedded in the way society operates (Puechguirbal, 2012). It is galvanized how traditional socio-economic responsibilities, the social dimension, and appropriate behavior shape women's performance and expectations in choosing a livelihood (True, 2013). Challenging the patriarchal system requires the participation of men and women to reshape gender disparities and power imbalances. Gender and peacebuilding literature take account of the societal and gender role transformation and address the specific vulnerabilities of women in a insecure environment. By integrating these I attempted to overcome the limitations of SLA in unstable settings.

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<sup>24</sup> Men, Masculinities, and Changing Power: A Discussion Paper on Engaging Men in Gender Equality From Beijing 1995 to 2015

<sup>25</sup> *ibid*

# CHAPTER II: SRI LANKAN CONTEXT

In this chapter, I aim to provide a contextualization of the present case study's background. This unit aims to explore the particularities of the ethnic landscape of Sri Lanka to better understand the complexities of Tamil women affected by war. The ethnic element is highly significant for this study to understand how Tamil caste-ridden fishery communities in the Northern Province operate, how gender relations are shaped, and understand the structural barriers of Tamil women affected by war's livelihoods. Therefore, discerning the subordination of women in the social, economic, and political realm requires an analysis of how caste stratification intersects with patriarchy that further aggravates women's vulnerabilities (Pal, 2018).

Considering this, I examine the stratification system's principles and practices in Northern communities. Next, I discuss the fishing caste to investigate how their culture and status in the hierarchy might be. This might provide information about how women affected by war living in the fishery communities are positioned on a social scale. Additionally, I explore the gender roles of women through different aspects of culture, traditions, and gender expectations to better understand the structural constraints that legitimize gender inequalities and unequal access to resources. Last, I analyze women's rights within the Sri Lankan legal framework as well as access to employment and education to understand the status of women in society is.

## 2.1 SRI LANKA COUNTRY DATA ETHNICITIES IN SRI LANKA: BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Sri Lanka, also known as the "tear of India", or "the island of thousand names" (Green, 2011) is just 37 kilometers away from India separated by the Strait of Palk. It has a length of 500 km from North to South and 315 from East to West, covering an area of 62,610 square kilometers. This country enjoys a position of great geostrategic interest attributable to its important marine routes (Lewer & William, 2006).



Figure5: Sri Lanka geographical map.

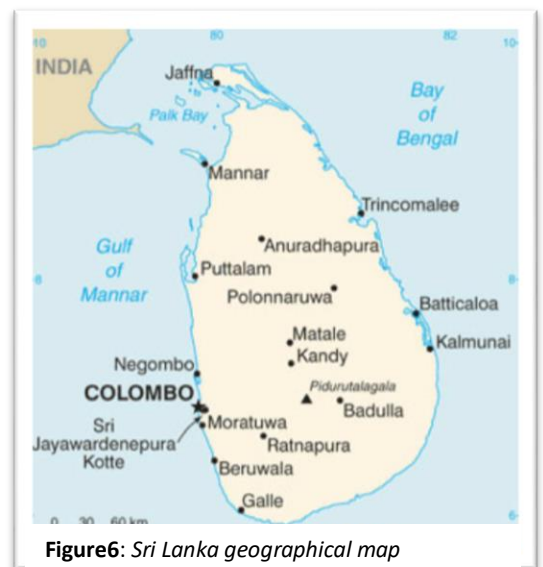


Figure6: Sri Lanka geographical map

Sri Lanka is home to 21 million inhabitants according to the latest United Nations estimates<sup>26,27</sup> Given the wide range of diversity in terms of ethnic groups, languages, and religions, Sri Lanka's society is considered plural and multicultural (see table below). The majority of the population is Sinhalese (74.9 percent). Yet, there are more than 20 minorities and indigenous groups which include Sri Lankan Tamils (11.2 %), Indian Tamils (4.2%), Sri Lankan Moors/Muslims (9.3 %), Malays (0.2 %), Burghers (0.2 %), Sri Lankan Chetty (5,600), Bharatha (1,700) and Wanniyala-Aetto (also known as Veddhas) which estimates suggest around 2,000, though (Minority Rights International 2018, Nazim, 2017)<sup>28</sup>.

Following, I present a general review of the most relevant ethnicities for this case study:

- ❖ *Sinhalese*: The Sinhalese represents 74% of the total population, officially comprising 16 million people based on Sri Lanka's Department of Census & Statistics (2012).<sup>29</sup> The Sinhala are distinguished fundamentally by the language "Sinhala" which is an Indo-European language. The predominant religion of this community is Buddhism (Ross and Savada, 1988). The distribution of the population varies greatly by region, however, with Sinhalese constituted an estimated 95.0 percent of the population in Southern Province, while in Eastern Province the estimate descend to 23.2 percent and just 3.0 percent in Northern Province (Minority Rights International,2018)<sup>30</sup>.
- ❖ *Sri Lankan & Indian Tamils*: There is a distinction based on the origin within this community, although the spoken language is Tamil. The so-called Ceylon Tamils or Jaffna Tamils are predominantly found in the Northern and Eastern parts of Sri Lanka, and their origin dates back to many centuries ago. On the other side, Indian Tamils in the Central hilly plantation areas; and are descendants of comparatively recent work migrants. The Indian Tamils came to Sri Lanka under British sponsorship to work on plantations in the central highlands. Indian Tamils live mainly in the plantation areas as estate laborers and are most numerous in the Kandy, Nuwara Eliya, and Badulla Districts. Both Tamil groups are predominantly Hindu with a small percentage of Christians. Tamil communities worship Hinduism (Ross and Savada,1984; Ministry of National Coexistence, Dialogue and Official Languages, 2017; Minority rights International, 2018)

<sup>26</sup>Retrieved from United Nations Country Profile:

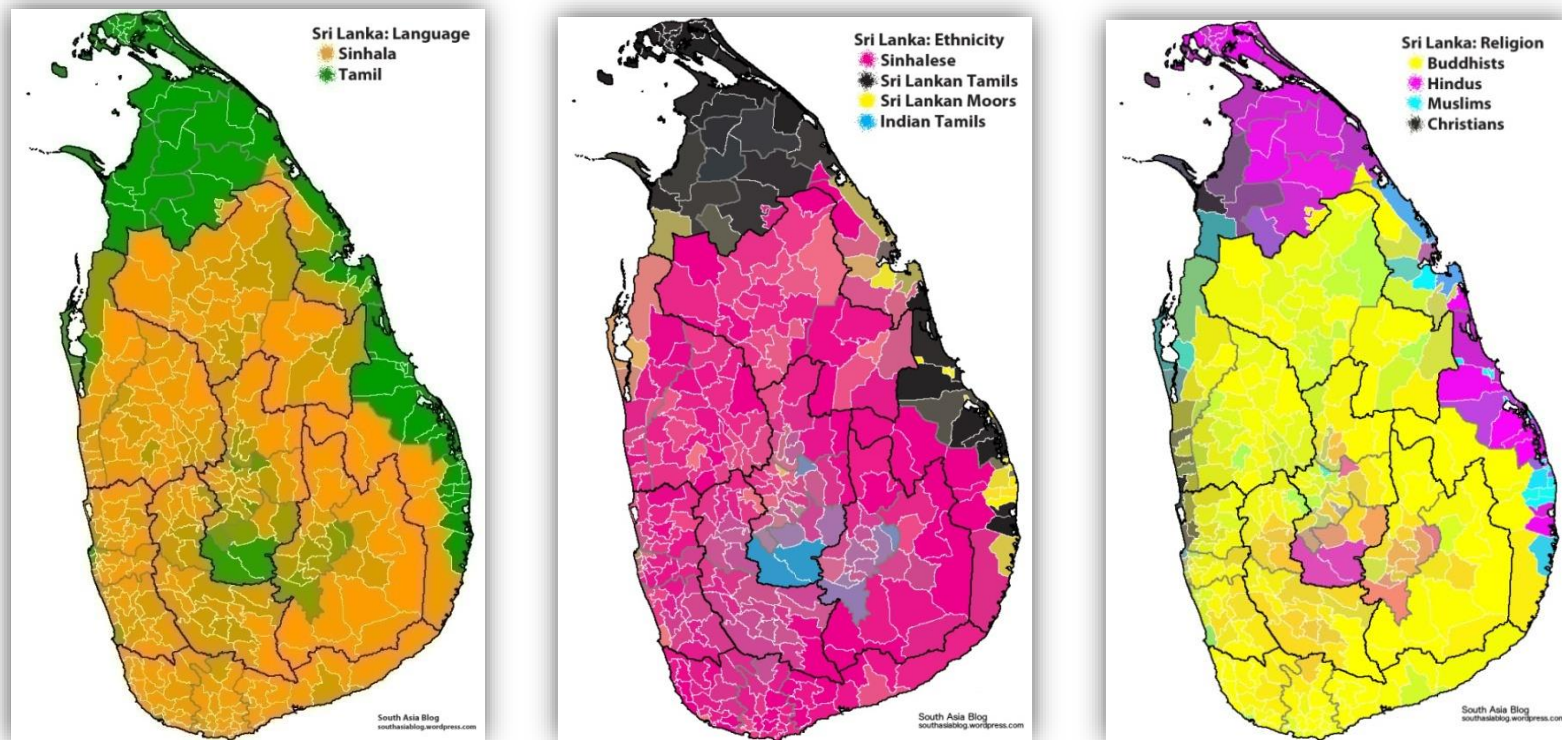
[http://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx/\\_Images/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=Sri%20Lanka](http://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx/_Images/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=Sri%20Lanka)

<sup>27</sup> Retrieved from <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/sri-lanka-population/> 4th august 2019

<sup>28</sup> Figures 5 and 6 retrieved from Google Image

<sup>29</sup>Census of Population and Housing of Sri Lanka, 2012 - Table A3: Population by district, ethnic group, and sex . *Department of Census & Statistics, Sri Lanka*. Archived (PDF).

<sup>30</sup> Retrieved from Minority Rights Group International: Sri Lanka. Last update, March 2018. <https://minorityrights.org/country/sri-lanka/>



**Figure 7:** Sri Lanka ethnic groups, religion, and language location on the island. Retrieved from : South Asia Blog (2014), *The demographics of Sri Lanka*

## 2.2 CASTE SYSTEM: SOCIAL STRATIFICATION AND DISCRIMINATION

As Risman (2014) stated, caste comprised one of the elements of social stratification in Sri Lanka. The International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN)<sup>31</sup>, an organization working against caste discrimination describes caste as a form of social and economic governance that is based on principles and customary rules. Among the distinguishing characteristics of a caste system are the rigidity and an almost total normative closure, that is to say, that nobody who was born in a certain caste can move up or down in the social scale. Another important aspect is its high degree of institutionalization as well as the rights and duties of each caste. It is a very ritualistic system and that means that strict rules are observed in relationships and social interactions. The religion has provided this justification through a detailed specific code and provides necessary sanctions to enforce these obligations. Reincarnation is central to Hindu teachings and it is believed that depending on the degree to which the obligations of each caste are fulfilled, the person will experience an ascending or descending reincarnation (Requena, Salazar, and Radl, 2013).

The assignment of basic rights between various castes is unequal and hierarchical, with those at the top enjoying the most rights and privileges coupled with the least duties, and those at the bottom without rights and being forced to perform most duties that are considered impure (IDSN, n.d). This hierarchical division runs contrary to the belief that “all human beings are free and equal in dignity and rights” as stated in Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights<sup>32</sup>. Caste discrimination involves massive violations of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. Caste-affected communities are denied a life of dignity and equality, (IDSN, n.d). The United Nations Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (2017) indicated caste-based discrimination prevails in state institutions resulting in poor access to basic services for oppressed caste groups.

### 2.2.1 *Sri Lankan Tamil Caste System: An Overview*

There are several caste systems within the country, but for the sake of this paper, the Northern Sri Lankan Tamil caste system will be explored. Note that the number of castes among Tamils in Sri Lanka is significantly smaller than in India (Hrdlicková, 2011). The accepted view over the Northern Tamil caste System agrees that it was derived from South India and is well established in the northern region of the country (Mahroof, 2000). In the words of Silva, Sevapragasan, and Changes (2009:6) the caste system among Sri Lankan Tamils in Jaffna is considered to be the most rigid and the one with clearly defined patterns of inequality, discrimination, and social rejection driven by a religiously articulated notion of

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<sup>31</sup>International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN), retrieved from: <https://idsn.org/caste-discrimination/>

<sup>32</sup>Universal Declaration of Human Rights retrieved from <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

untouchability. However, the Sri Lankan caste system is more flexible comparing to the Indian context. Sri Lankan caste's foundation has been configured based on a more secular ranking upheld by the state, land ownership and tenure, religious organizations and rituals, and firmly rooted notions of inherent superiority and inferiority<sup>33</sup>

Efforts to eradicate this system have been included in the constitution, which prohibits discrimination against persons because of his/her caste, work, or descent to any disadvantage about access to shops, public restaurants, and places of public worship of his/her religion in Article 12 (2)<sup>34</sup>. These measures have “hidden” caste discrimination, creating a grey area, where this issue is not institutionally addressed, yet remains being practiced in many communities with exploitative consequences for the marginalized population<sup>35</sup>. Because this category is not included in any official database there is no accurate information about the population affected by caste-based discrimination. Yet, it is estimated that between 20 and 30 % of the population bear upon the unjust conditions of the caste system, and internally displaced camps in Jaffna are still persistent (Silva et al, 2007).

The caste system is divided into three main categories ( see figure 5 below). The dominant caste within the Northern region is the *Vellalars*, except in some coastal regions where the *karaiyar* outnumber them and have ritual superiority (Risman, 2014). Members from this caste have held power, influence, and high status in Jaffna society due to their condition of land-owners (Silva, et.al, 2009). Vellalar's occupation then is engaged with farming and comprises one of the major producers.

Panchamar caste encompasses Vannâr (washerman), Ampattar (barber), Pallar (Landless laborers), Nalavar (Palm wine (toddy) tappers), and Parayar (Funeral drummers) which are considered the bottom layer of the Jaffna caste system. These are traditionally accorded untouchable status in Jaffna society and represent the deprived castes (Silva, et.al 2009). Despite the doctrine of purity/impurity that considers these strata polluted, the work carried out by these castes is essential, which has led them less to be enslaved throughout history (Mahroof, 2000). The oppressed caste tends to be the poorer and most vulnerable due to discrimination and unequal treatment (Borooah, 2005, Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium, SLRC, 2016).

In between Vellalars and Panchamars, some intermediary castes are consisting of artisans, such as Kosavar (potter), Karaiyar (fisher), Thumilar (fisher, boatman) represents the major producers. These castes are concerned with fishing, navigation, intercostals trading, boat-wise transfer of people. In addition to this, vestigial occupations, for instance, Nattuvanar (musician) also belong to this caste. These groups also experienced discrimination from the dominant caste in matters such as temple administration, education, employment, and land market (Mahroof, 2000).

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<sup>33</sup>Retrieved from: Joint NGO Submission by the IMADR Asia Committee, Human Development Organisation and the International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2008, pag.2

<sup>34</sup>Ibidem

<sup>35</sup>Ibidem



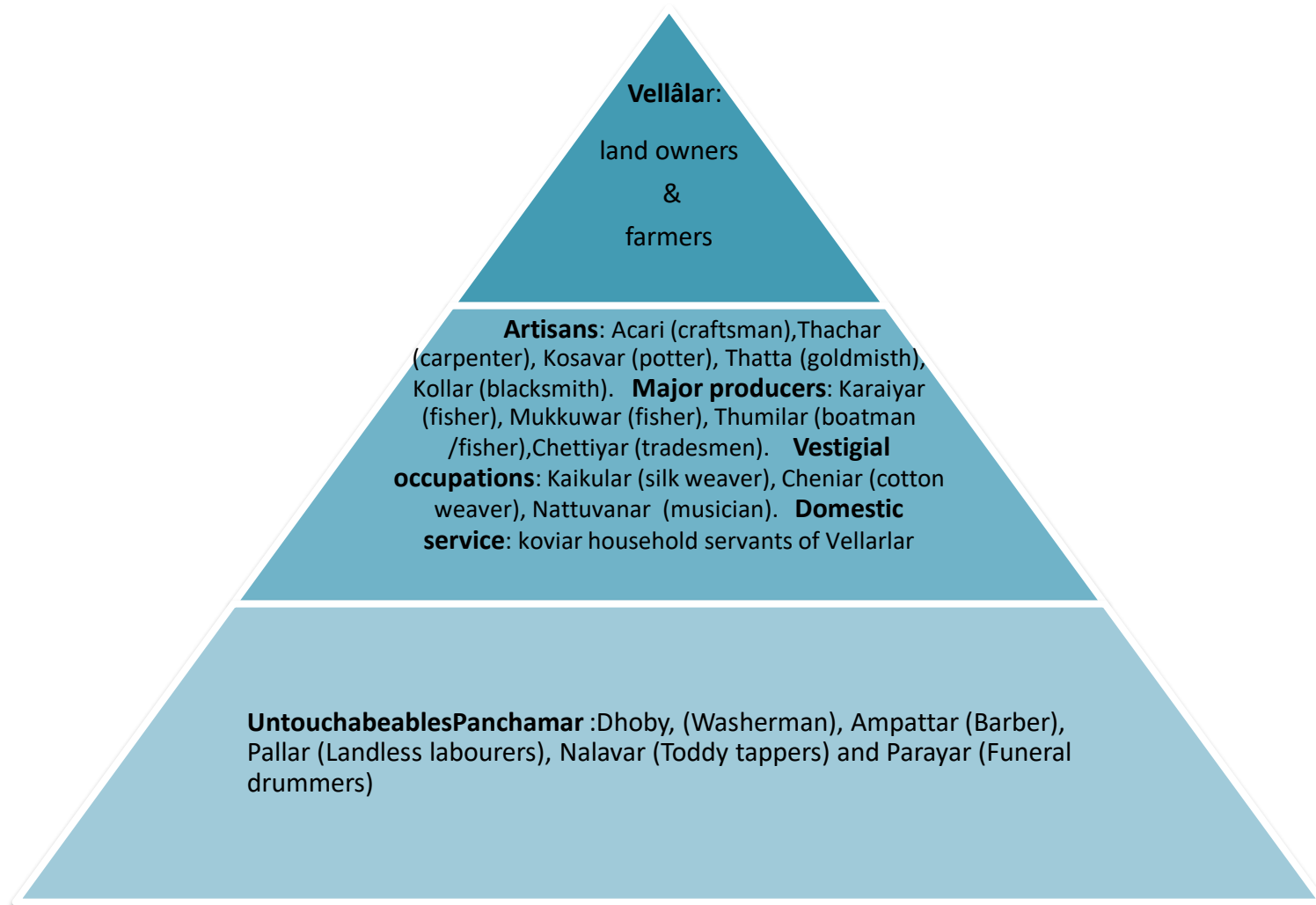
Throughout history, there have been movements against the caste system, and several struggles rooting for equality burst in 1920 (SLRC, 2016). During the conflict, the LTTE strived to unify all Tamils irrespective of caste, class and other divisions gave voice and agency to the non-Vellâlar groups in Jaffna society. That is the reason why many of the marginalized castes joined forces with LTTE due to its anti-caste discrimination philosophy (SLRC; 2016). Notwithstanding, the LTTE's nationalist goal of establishing an overarching Tamil identity silenced a potential Dalit struggle (Ravikumar, 2002). In a conflict or disaster context like Jaffna, caste-based discrimination hinders the provision and access to services and particularly threatens state reconciliation and recovery as it limits the capacity of people to build safe and resilient livelihoods, and reinforces marginalization and chronic poverty (SLRC, 2016). What is more, equity in provision and access to services is particularly important in post-conflict contexts to ensure that marginalized groups are actively included in the reconstruction process while helps address some of the underlying structures. Furthermore, marginal castes within Tamil communities suffer from a legacy of marginalization, forced service obligations, indignities and deprivations, like landlessness<sup>36</sup> This situation is further accentuated in post-conflict settings, and the success and effectiveness of post-conflict provisions are at stake if these do not reach the most vulnerable population.

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<sup>36</sup> Retrieved from: The state of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in Sri Lanka: A joint Civil society, Shadow Report to the United Nations Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, April 2017



**Figure 8:** classification of the totality of the caste structure in the north of Ceylon (Jaffna region) is presented below. The article is written by Mahroof, 2000 and Risman (2014) was used to create the social pyramid.



### *2.2.2 Fishing Caste In Northern Province: Karaiyar*

The Karaiyar refers to the fishing community in Jaffna (Srikanthan, 2013). Traditionally, these people engaged in deep-sea fishing, with legends pointing to a royal lineage and a history of warriors and mercenaries at sea (Roberts, 1982; Silva, Siyapragasam&Thanges, 2009). In addition to the Karaiyar, the Thimilar and the Mukkuvar are other old fishing communities in the coastal regions of Sri Lanka (Srikanthan, 2013). The hierarchy of the Karaiyar was formalized based on authority service relationships rather than in terms of their purity. Comparing to other coastal castes in Sri Lanka, the Karaiyar is higher than the rest of the castes in coastal regions (Srikanthan, 2013). Karaiyars claim to be equal to Vellalar (agriculturalists) and their position in the society as one of the dominant castes has been strengthened due to modern fishing technologies, which slowly and gradually empowered them with increased economic power (Srikanthan, 2013).

According to the Hindu concepts of pure and impure, this caste is considered polluted. Simoons (1974) in his study about fish avoidance in India and nearby areas, suggests that the rationale behind this can be found in the conception that that fish is considered to be a dirty creature and that fishing and fish-eating are low-class activities. Furthermore, there is belief in sacred water and sacred fish, in connection with the worship of particular deities such as Vishnu. Last, the ahimsa, a concept in Hinduism which refers to causing no harm and nonviolence to sentient things (Simoons, 1974). Because of this, fishing has long been a despised occupation, as its practices are contrary to Hindu as well as Buddhist ethics of killings (Gupta, 2003). Nevertheless,

Despite being a deviation from the ideal behavior, most of the Hindu castes eat fish of one kind. Religious concerns are set apart for the dietary needs of the communities. According to Arasaratnam (1964), fish was an important ingredient in the diet of most people in the historical times of Sri Lanka. What is more, fish is a much-desired food in the former Ceylon and a very important economic activity in the country (Srikanthan, 2013).

### 2.3 SRI LANKAN TAMIL WOMEN: GENDER AND CASTE

Gender is a socially constructed set of distinctions and evaluations that reflects power and culture as well as social functions (Gunawardene, 2016:66). Simone de Beauvoir (1949) proclaimed that “One is not born, but rather becomes a woman”, highlighting that gender is a cultural construction based on the biological sex. Therefore, this "becoming" is conditioned by a given culture and society that has awarded women the status of "others". Considering this, the gender mechanism divides the chores and rewards of social life into men's and women's roles (Calhoun et al, 1997: 240, Gunawardene, 2016:66). Thus, gender can be defined as the set of characteristics, roles, and behavior patterns that distinguish women from men. Accordingly, gender is a significant form of social stratification (Gunawardene, 2016).

In this matter, the socialization process, defined as the process that ensures which boundaries are established and by which means those boundaries are maintained according to the established model (Spina 2017:237 ), plays a significant role when determining the differentiate duties for men and women. The established system of values and beliefs are maintained by the community's social, religious, and political practices which pertain to the process of the so-called, social reproduction, a term coined by Passeron and Bordieu (1977). In line with these authors, this concept refers to how social relations are produced and reproduced in society through social, political, cultural practices, and behavioral patterns. The processes and strategies tend to ensure, from one generation to another, exclusions and constraints whose general configuration defines the relations between dominant classes and dominated classes (Avila Francés, 2005). As a consequence, boys are encouraged to develop physical strength and girls cultivate fragility and weakness. In addition, resulting from this differential learning process, women are constrained to domestic roles, marriage, and motherhood that in turn, exclude other possibilities in their lives (Gunawardene, 2016).

Gender and caste intersect with the patriarchal system conceiving unbalanced power relations between men and women (Pal, 2018). A significant body of literature has examined the interrelation of gender, caste, and class, primarily concerned with women's subordination and experience (Velaskar, 2016). Gender and caste power relations are deeply intersected and overlapped resulting in inequality, domination and power manifested in the social organization (Velaskar, 2016). Thus, gender ideology legitimizes not only structures of patriarchy but also the very organization of caste (Liddle and Joshi 1986, Rege, 1998:44). In this regard, different studies have portrayed Tamil women as highly constrained agents due to the patriarchal system and caste-ridden Hindu culture (Senanayake-Rajashingam, 2004). Through the structural hierarchy of caste, the ethos of inequality and segregation of power is perpetuated (Patil, 2013). Caste serves as a justification for women subjugation and oppression that often are targets

of the system's violence and discrimination<sup>37</sup>. Admittedly, the existing caste system has repercussions on gender dynamics and interrelations within its agents. In this regard, gender expectations have been shaped by the caste, as Hrdlicková (2011) noted different caste have diverse attitudes toward gender, as women and men are expected to take upon different roles depending on their caste. In this regard, many women have defined their subordination as their destiny, as it is inscribed in their religious beliefs (Herath, 2015). Sexual and division of labor are articulated in the caste system, where women are confined in the private sphere as means to protect their purity (Rege, 1998). Thusly, mobility is very restricted and not socially accepted when a woman incorporates into the labor market (Pat, 2018). Caste and gender also shaped the environment in the labor market, where women are often employed in low-status jobs exposing them to sexual harassment and violence (Saracini and Shanmugavelan, 2019).

The emphasis on purity and restrained behavior within the Hindu societies lays within the framework on the construction of legitimate and proper behavior (Spina, 2017:238). The Tamil gender stereotyping in Sri Lankan Tamil communities has its foundation in Dravidian beliefs, where women as biological beings possess "anaku", hence a dangerous power yet protective. Women's anaku is an advantage when a woman adopts a self-restraining behavior, such as chastity, known as *karpu* (Hrdlicková, 2011:77). According to Hindu teachings, the inferior status of women is justified by their evil and weak nature, impure desires, wrath, dishonesty, and bad conduct. Although ideally men should also be dedicated to maintaining the *karpu*, in reality, women are the ones exposed to public scrutiny. The rules of chastity apply to women's all aspects of life (Hrdlicková, 2011:76). However, *karpu* is a term that generalizes not only chastity but practices that are usually deemed to be male, for instance: climbing trees, mixing with unrelated men, etc. Tamil women are also expected to dress properly and are required to hide their bodies. It is believed that a woman is responsible for preserving her status and adopting the necessary measures in order not to be addressed as unchaste, by remaining in domestic spheres and avoiding contact with non-familiar men (Hrdlicková, 2011). Women are considered to be the guardians of their community's honor (Pat, 2018). As a consequence their sexual freedom is compromised as the chastity of women is strongly related to their caste status (Pat, 2018). Maintaining the purity of women is important to safeguard the position and prestige of the family within the wider social hierarchy (Pat, 2018). This is achieved by restricting the mobility of women, or through isolation (Pat, 2018). Consequently, Women limited power and access to resources affects their capabilities and possibilities to make a livelihood and increases the likelihood of falling into poverty and be subjected to violence (Sarani and Shanmugavelan, 2019). On the contrary, the practice of purity on men is rather flexible and their honor is preserved through their women (Pat, 2018).

Marriage occupies a key location in the Hindu social structure (Spina, 2017:241). Chastity is essential to seek a partner. The highest recognition for a woman is when she is wife. When she is married she

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<sup>37</sup> Retrieved from: International Dalit Solidarity Network: Caste and Gender Justice. Delivering on the UN Global Goals for Dalit women and girls, 2019

remains in the domestic sphere, and when she is in the public sphere she follows the rules of gender segregation (Hrdlicková,2011 ). For women in Hindu society is more than a rite of passage into adult society; it provides a woman with a public social identity: women have often been defined through the parameters of marriage (Spina, 2017). The ultimate duty of women, when married, is to treat the husband with respect, bear children, and remain self-controlled and submissive. The family reputation lies on the shoulder of Tamil women, no matter what kind of misfortune occurred within the family, the woman is responsible for her family. What is more, Tamil mothers are the transmitters of the culture and the ones who ensure that daughters will be responsible for keeping their karpu (Hrdlicková ,2011). Due to Hindu doctrine, it is assumed that a woman first is a daughter to her parents then a wife to her husband, and finally a widow to her son (Seneviratne And Currie,1994). This is derived from the notion that the ideal womanhood is represented as a homemaker who attends to domestic chores and is engaged in childbearing. On the other side, the man must protect and watch women in the interest of their offspring. (Currie & Kapadia, 1983, p. 31, Seneviratne and Currie,1994:598 ) The concept of 'male breadwinner' and the syndrome of dependency and subordination are seen to shape gender dimensions and interrelations (Japan International Cooperation Agency, 2010). . In conclusion, women's position in society is contingent on a male figure and women allocation in the society is determined by the position their families enjoy (Jayatilaka,n.d).

However, when a woman does not maintain chastity and follow strict rules, it is conceived that she is no longer fit for marriage (Hrdlicková,2011 ). Moreover, divorce is also perceived as undesirable as it represents the disintegration of the family. In this issue, divorced women and widows share the same status (Hrdlicková, 2011). A concerning matter is that a woman who has been rape is seen as *unkarkuopu* " the one whose chastity has been destroyed" And automatically is made responsible, and is no longer fit for marriage(Hrdlicková,2011 ).

The concept of a single woman does not enjoy social acceptance as the conception of male protection continues to dominate women's behavior (Seneviratne And Currie,1994).In Hindu societies, generally, a woman is bound to her husband even after his death, and that "divorce and remarriage did not fall within the social mores of a Hindu marriage" (Wimala de Silva, 2002:214, Spina, 2017.243). The loss of a husband is considered an auspicious factor (Seneviratne And Jan Currie,1994:597 ). When a woman becomes a widow, her position in society rapidly changes, although this woman can have assistance from her closest relatives, is considered to be an omen, they bring bad luck because they lack a male element (Hrdlicková,2011 ). Hence, the loss of a husband brings absolute misery to widows' life (Seneviratne And Jan Currie,1994:598). Significantly, the death of the husband is attributed to the lack of chastity and bad behavior that the woman had in this or previous life (Wadley, 1980, Seneviratne And Jan Currie,1994:599). A report of the United Nations Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights April (2017) revealed that married Tamil women from Jaffna, are deprived of their right to alienate their immovable property without the consent of their husbands. These discriminatory practices deeply affected

women in the aftermath of the conflict, and due to the lack of "head of the family", impoverishing their lives (CEAR, 2012), as in the next chapter will be shown. Furthermore, caste inequalities also affect the relationships between different groups of women and determine their participation in development programs disempowering those from subordinated castes (Sarani and Shanmugavelan, 2019).

### *2.3.1 Sri Lankan Tamil women: education and employment*

Sri Lanka has fared well in recent years by promoting health and education opportunities for women (Weib, 2018). Successive governments have invested heavily in education, health, and welfare programs and this has been associated with the country achieving levels of life expectancy and literacy (Gunawardene, 2016), a sector that has promoted equal access to education in all three levels and found for both, either men or women a high level of literacy, 97.7%, and 98.6% respectively (Koutihan, 2018). Along with these strategies, elimination of certain cultural practices of male dominance such as dowry deaths, widow immolation, preference for a son, honor killings, or female circumcision have been eradicated (Gunawardena, 2015).

However, evidence shows that education does not seem to have empowered women adequately because it does not challenge existing socio-cultural practices by promoting equality; rather the educational system reproduces the gendered socialization (ADB, 1999, Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA), 2010). Not only textbooks and traditions play a role in perpetuating inequitable gender norms and stereotypes (Kouithan, 2018), but also the acceptance of assumptions such as gender-appropriate training and occupations and behavior in the 'hidden' curriculum from pre-school to tertiary education (Jayaweera, 1993, Gunawardena et al 2005, Abhayadeva, 2008, Abeyasekera, 2008) contribute to the reproduction of the traditional gender roles (JICA, 2010). In war-affected areas, the emphasis on holding on to tradition, culture, and family values, represents a coping mechanism in response to the destabilization of the traditional family unit as a result of the long-lasting conflict (Kouithan, 2018).

Furthermore, women are heavily involved in non-wage work, such as agricultural farming, domestic duties, which are socially undervalued (JICA, 2010). Either in urban or rural settings, women continue to suffer discrimination in wages and lack of recognition (Herath, 2015). Asian Development Bank (2018) has indicated that on one side, women that work suffer sexual harassment and violence among other discriminatory practices. Apart from this, the low representation of women in high positions is challenged by family responsibilities together with the gendered association of leadership (Herath, 2015). Although the Sri Lankan law establishes equality in employment in the Public Sector, in practice women do not have legal protection against discrimination in the private sector, where, on occasions, they are paid less than men for the same job and have difficulties rising to positions of responsibility (CEAR, 2012).

**Table 4.06 : Labour Force Participation Rate by Province**

| Province      | Women | Men  |
|---------------|-------|------|
|               | %     | %    |
| Western       | 33.7  | 73.3 |
| Central       | 38.3  | 74.2 |
| Southern      | 35.7  | 74.4 |
| Northern      | 25.2  | 72.1 |
| Eastern       | 21.5  | 71.7 |
| North Western | 39.4  | 77.3 |
| North Central | 42.0  | 79.8 |
| Uva           | 45.6  | 76.2 |
| Sabaragamuwa  | 41.5  | 76.3 |

Source : Sri Lanka Labour force Survey, 2015.

**Table 2:** In this table it is visible how the largest workforce outside the home is made up of men. It is especially striking, in the regions where the Tamil communities reside, in the North and the East; there are the lowest rates in the country regarding the participation of women in the labor market (Tables retrieved from the Department of census and Statics of the Government of Sri Lanka<sup>38</sup>).

**Table 20. Police personnel by designation and sex 2017**

| Designation  | Both Sexes   |              | Male         |             | Female      |             |
|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
|  | No           | %            | No           | %           | No          | %           |
| Inspector General of Police/Senior Deputy Inspector General of Police/Deputy Inspector General of Police | 49           | 100.0        | 49           | 100.0       | 0           | 0.0         |
| Senior Superintendent of Police  | 50           | 100.0        | 50           | 100.0       | 0           | 0.0         |
| Superintendent of Police   | 111          | 100.0        | 100          | 90.1        | 11          | 9.9         |
| Assistant Superintendent of Police   | 258          | 100.0        | 257          | 99.6        | 1           | 0.4         |
|  |              | 0.0          |              |             |             |             |
| Chief Inspector of Police  | 745          | 100.0        | 728          | 97.7        | 17          | 2.3         |
| Inspector of Police  | 2562         | 100.0        | 2355         | 91.9        | 207         | 8.1         |
| Sub Inspector of Police  | 6528         | 100.0        | 5904         | 90.4        | 624         | 9.6         |
| Sergeant Major   | 2            | 100.0        | 2            | 100.0       | 0           | 0.0         |
| Sergeant   | 17166        | 100.0        | 15598        | 90.9        | 1568        | 9.1         |
| Sergeant Driver  | 654          | 100.0        | 654          | 100.0       | 0           | 0.0         |
| Police Constable   | 53965        | 100.0        | 47621        | 88.2        | 6344        | 11.8        |
| Police Constable Driver  | 3575         | 100.0        | 3575         | 100.0       | 0           | 0.0         |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>85665</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>76893</b> | <b>89.8</b> | <b>8772</b> | <b>10.2</b> |

Source : Sri Lanka Police

**Table 3:** The present tables are representative of the gender division in Sri Lanka. Police personnel table shows very low women participation; there are a total of 10, 2%. The rationale behind this fact is that police is configured as a more masculine job. Looking at the academic staff in schools, the participation increases up to 79.0% percent, socially considered to be a more feminine job.

<sup>38</sup>Retrieved from Sri Lanka Government Statistics <http://www.statistics.gov.lk/Gender%20Statistics/MoreInfo.php>

### *2.3.2 Sri Lankan Tamil women: legal framework*

In the constitution of 1978, Sri Lanka aimed to guarantee equal rights, parity in property and financial transactions as well as protection against violence (Japan International Cooperation Agency, 2010). Moreover, Sri Lankans ratified the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights, Civil and Political Rights and (ii) Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the Optional Protocol for CEDAW in 1981 (Gunawardene, 2015). Withal, JICA (2010) reported several limitations and pitfalls within the existing legal framework, such as the constitutional provision on fundamental rights is limited to the public sector and excluding the private sphere. A practice that disadvantages women financially is the distribution of the family state. Although Sri Lankan property law has promoted several changes in favor of women, difficulties to obtain loans from formal lending institutions are persistent. Due to the patriarchal system, everything is in the husband's name, and in consequence, Tamil women cannot transact money without their husband's consent. (Herath, 2015). The customary law of each ethnic or religious group related to family law, including divorce, child custody, and inheritance, result in de facto discrimination against women (CEAR, 2012). Although, universal franchise for both sexes as early as 1931, this has not been reflected in the politics of the country (ADB, 2018). In this matter, the United Nations Development Programme on Human Development reports that just 5.8 % of the parliament chairs were held by women in 2019. When women achieve a position in politics, insignificant portfolios are handed to them (Herath, 2015). In conclusion, women remain underrepresented in politics and public administration.

As a summary, this chapter suggests that Sri Lankan Tamil women are victims of interlocking oppressing systems: patriarchal and ideas and beliefs related to the caste system. In this chapter, I aim to describe the social and institutional climate in which Tamil women navigate and negotiate. As discussed, the status of women within the community determines their life expectations, aspirations, and livelihood possibilities, information highly significant to understand war-affected women's struggles, realities, and aspirations to make a living in post-war Northern Sri Lanka.



# CHAPTER III: SRI LANKA HISTORY OF THE WARFARE AND POST-CONFLICT

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In this chapter, I review the history of the Sri Lankan conflict to understand the socio-political dynamics between Tamils and Sinhalese and its implications in the post-conflict process. I particularly focus on the consequences of the violent warfare on the Northern Province, the historically inhabited regions by the Tamil community (Walker, 2016).

Apart from this, in the last subsections, I explore the implications of the war on women and gender roles. I seek to explore how gender roles have been transformed and challenged as a consequence of the war. I analyze how Tamil women-headed houses are dealing with the legacy of the war and their challenges to make a livelihood in the peacebuilding stage. This analysis's objective is to address Tamil widows female-headed houses challenges, and concerns in the post-conflict stage in Northern communities.

## 3.1 SRI LANKAN CONFLICT: A REVIEW OF THE HISTORY

After 400 years of colonial rule by Portuguese, Dutch and British, in February of 1948, Sri Lanka finally achieved its long-awaited freedom (Lewer and William, 2006). In the independence era, efforts were made to establish a sovereign state under democratic principles (Meyer and Maduan, 2015). The Freedom Party of Sri Lanka (SLFP), which won the first elections of the country, was led by Solomón Bandanaraïke. The new leader, who was a Sinhala nationalist, engaged with exclusionary practices against Tamils and began to remove the influences of British colonization, as well as to encourage political exclusion of the Tamil population (Meyer and Maduan, 2015). The proclamation of the Sinhala Only Act in 1956 had a great impact on the unequal distribution of access to power and resources such as education and public sector jobs, (Venugopal, 2003). This policy implementation together with state patronage aggravated the socio-political scenario (Walker, 2016:5). Concurrently, the government started resettling Sinhalese communities from the South to the so-called Dry Zones, which for centuries had been predominantly inhabited by Tamil-speaking populations (Walker, 2016). Such measures were seen as an attempt to disarticulate the Tamil community and fulfill the culmination of Sinhalese colonialism.

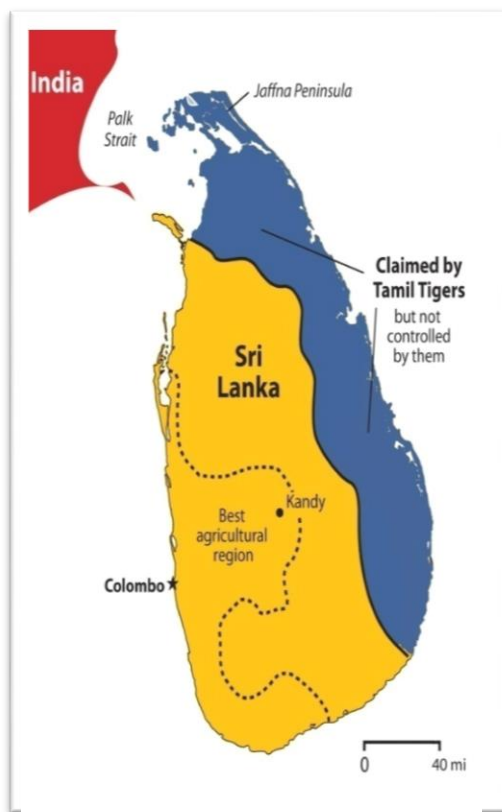
In 1972 the government adopted a new constitution that gave priority to Buddhism and changed the island's name from Ceylon to Sri Lanka (the Sinhalese name for the country) (Berkeley Center, 2013). Furthermore, the new constitution intended to eliminate minority rights and protection, which had severe repercussions on Tamil communities.

Simultaneously, between the 1950s and 1970 Sri Lankan Tamil movements sought self-determination within the framework of the existing state (Sathananthan, 1998). The principal goal was to establish a federal government whereby Tamils could guarantee the rights of their community and ensure power-sharing arrangement with the Sinhalese in Colombo (Ibid). At this stage, the Tamil movement focused on *satyagraha* i.e., peaceful campaigns (Ibid), although these were met with brutality and violence from the state (Walker, 2016:5). In 1958 anti-Tamil riots erupted, events that contributed to the polarization of the society, growth of ethnonationalism, and the altercations heightened the escalation of violence. Considering that Tamil rights were categorically rejected the increasing demands for self-determination and armed liberation emerged as a result (Sathananthan, 1998).

As mentioned above in the course of the events, Tamil political parties sought to encourage federal reforms to safeguard Tamil rights. This inquiry ended in 1974 when Tamil political parties merged into the

Tamil United Liberation Front, which openly came to advocate separatism through the Vaddukoddai resolution (Krishnamohan, 2017). Two years later, in 1976 Liberation Tamil Tigers Eelam (LTTE) came into existence (Gonsalves, 2003). The LTTE rapidly engaged in wide-scale violence whose strategies encompassed terrorist attacks and counter-attacks (Walker, 2016). The LTTE developed a complex military group with several divisions such as Sea Tigers, the Air Tigers, an elite fighting wing, a suicide commando unit (the Black Tigers), among others (Walker, 2016). From the beginning of May 1976, the LTTE was led by Velupillai Prabhakaran and began the process of eliminating competitors inside and outside of his group (Cook and Launsbery, 2017; Hoffman 2009). By the mid-1980s, the LTTE gained control of the Northern, Hindu-majority region of the island (Jaffna Peninsula), and eliminated rivals within the Tamil community in 1983 (Berkeley Center, 2013).

Meanwhile, The United National Party (UNP) which held the power from 1977 to 1988 encouraged and sustained violence against Tamils through its mandate and more precisely in 1977, 1978, 1981. After years of violent encounters, in 1983 the riots named Black July culminated in armed conflict (Walker, 2016).



**Figure 9.** Map of Sri Lankan conflict. The area in blue is what the Tamil considered as their homeland Eelam. Retrieved from *World Regional Geography: People, Places, and Globalization*. [University of Minnesota Libraries](#) (n.d.)

Violence broke out the night following an ambush by the LTTE militants in Jaffna, where 13 Sinhalese soldiers were assassinated. Consecutively, the violence spread all over the country with 3000 people dead and 200.000 people homeless (Heidemann, 2017:385). The government defended this attack as a response to the threats of Tamils and as a punishment (Wickramasinghe, 2014:30, Heidemann,2017:385). This episode derived into 4 consequent Eelam Wars that left the country ravaged by violence. In 2009, the conflict escalated to such an extent that Sri Lankan troops went into a total offensive: they captured the main headquarters of the Tamil Tigers. The final confrontation began in which thousands of civilians were caught in the crossfire (Cook and Launsbery, 2017). Throughout 2006 and 2007, in its rush to exterminate the Tigers, the army showed little regard for the Tamil civilians, reportedly firing shells within the designated 'no-fire zones' (NFZs), while the Tigers, in turn, blocked escape routes for civilians in a desperate attempt to win international sympathy (Walker, 2016:13; HRW 2009a). Despite the guerrillas offering a ceasefire and some multilateral organizations calling for an end to the confrontation, the Sri Lankan government went ahead with the onslaught (Cook and Launsbery, 2017).

On May 19, 2009, President Mahinda Rajapaksa declared victory over the Tamil Tigers and the death of its founder and leader Velupillai Prabhakaran. Thus, the war between the Sri Lankan government against the secessionist guerilla of the Tamil Tigers ended in Sri Lanka, after 26 years of fighting (Usuaga Pérez, 2019; The Associated Press, 2013).

The final clarification of this unit is that although I have described the dynamics between Tamil and Sinhalese, it is important to bear in mind that external actors did take part in the conflict. Therefore, the Sri Lankan war is not strictly a civil war in the sense of two groups over the monopoly of physical force within the country (Gersovitz and Kriger, 2013). India, being a regional power not only did not manage to stop the violent conflict in Sri Lanka but also the Indian government quietly supported the military offensive of the Sri Lankan government and even took a clear position against the investigation of war crimes by the United Nations Human Rights Council after the end of the hostilities representatives had clear sympathy for the LTTE (Destradi, 2010:06).

### **3.2 PEACEBUILDING AND RECONSTRUCTION IN NORTHERN SRI LANKA: WINS AND REMAINING CHALLENGES**

The destructive effects of the war, along with the excessive usage of violence against civilians posed a major challenge for the post-conflict peacebuilding process. The Northern Province, which had been under LTTE control for decades (Thalpawila, 2016), was particularly affected by the conflict (Kanagarathnam, 2019). In this region, most of the infrastructure, public facilities, and factories were destroyed (Thalpawila, 2016). In the immediate aftermath, the president at the time, Mahinda Rajapaksa launched the Northern Spring program, a post-conflict reconstruction development project specifically for the Northern Province (Kanagarathnam, 2019). This plan was formulated in consultancy with several

councils, Sri Lankan security forces, UN agencies, international and local NGOs (Thalpawila, 2016). These initiatives notably focused on physical reconstruction, including schools, fisheries, harbors, and transportation facilities (Kanagarathnam, 2019). This plan was instrumental to rebuild the water supply, agriculture, and resettlement of Internally Displaced People (IDPs) (Vithanagama, 2018). Sri Lankan Government introduced as well poverty alleviation programs aiming to improve people's livelihoods and sustainable development (Jabbar and Sajeetha, 2014). Educational and health care provisions were deployed, and efforts for the reintegration of former combatants have been notorious (Jabbar and Sajeetha, 2014). In 2012, the Trilingual model was implemented, regarding Tamil and Sinhala as official languages, sharing equal recognition as an effort to maintain and celebrate the country's diversity (Jabbar and Sajeetha, 2014).

Despite the efforts taken, the program has not given the expected results and several pitfalls have been detected in the post-war recovery provisions. On one side, a major source of criticism comes from the resettlement of internally displaced people. Sri Lankan government has prioritized physical infrastructure and has neglected other key aspects of reconciliation as resettling IDPs and trauma counseling (Kanagarathama, 2019; Bowden and Binns, 2016). Deficient attendance to social and psychological issues, together with the constraining environment to make a living, poses a great challenge for the reconstruction and development of the Northern Province (Bowden and Binns, 2016).

The second source of criticism is that the government has not addressed the underlying root causes of the conflict (Viziru, 2014). Social justice and accountability remain undervalued (Islam and Hasam, 2015). This is particularly pressing in the North and East where killings, disappearances, displacement, sexual violence, and post-war militarization continue being unaddressed (Seoighe, 2017). Although the government attempted to promote post-war reconciliation by the establishment of the Lessons Learned and Reconciliation Commission, this received strong critics due to its impartiality (Viziru, 2014).

An especially troubling issue is that reconciliation is seen as adopting the Sinhalese identity and even though the Tamil language enjoys official recognition, it is still perceived as a threat (Aliff, 2016). Moreover, Government-sponsored Sinhalese settlements and the construction of Buddha temples in the North were seen as a measure of assimilation and diminishment of Tamil culture (Viziru, 2014). Aliff (2016) argues that in the name of reconciliation an escalation of ethnic polarization is unfolding as the state is directing its effort to impose a Sinhala Buddhist hegemony over Tamil areas (Aliff, 2016, Rajamanorharan, 2012).

These measures have direct repercussions on the development and reconstruction efforts, which have benefited the Sinhala population and excluded the minorities of the country (Jabbar and Sajeetha, 2014). Thalpawile (2016) highlights the deficient vocational training skills, prevent Tamils from obtaining post-conflict program benefits. In this line, Bowden and Binns (2016) stress the need to include the Tamil youth in the development process, as being one of the most affected and vulnerable groups. On top of

that, the heavy military presence of the region who do not only disrupt normalcy and increments feeling of threat but also are involved in agricultural and commercial activities that damages the local socio-economic fabric (Viziru, 2014).

### **3.3 SRI LANKAN WOMEN'S IMPLICATIONS OF THE WAR: GENDER ROLE TRANSFORMATION**

The implications of a long-term armed conflict, financial downturn, and highly patriarchal system created a vulnerable and sensitive environment for war-affected women in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka. Although a relatively small group of women participated in the conflict, the majority experienced the indirect effects of the war by being exposed to the crude post-conflict realities (Vithanagama, 2018).

The outcome of the war brought mixed ramifications in terms of women's empowerment and livelihood activities (Vithanagama, 2018). On one hand, this situation has brought short-term advancements for women empowerment where the dominant traditional gender roles have been challenged. As an outcome, new spaces for women's agency have been carved (Rajasingham- Seyanake, 2004). As an example of this, women were recruited to LTTE combat units known as Black Tigers (Gunawardena, 2017). Whether women's recruitment was based on the will to foster female emancipation or came from the military operational needs has been a matter of discussion. Yet, the participation of women in military roles represents a drastic change in the performance of Tamil women in society (Jordan and Denov, 2007). Additionally, women played an important role as peace activists by appealing for mobilizations to promote peace and human rights (Hrdlicková, 2011). The Jaffna Mother Front formed in 1980 engaged in anti-war politics through nonviolent political marches and protests (Koens and Gunawardana, 2020). Apart from this, Lakshman(2018) conducted study highlights that widowed women became empowered and gained confidence by being employed. Kethaki Kandanearachchi and Rapti Ratnayake (2018) discuss that women's resilience in overcoming the atrocities of war has been notable and have tried to benefit from the economic opportunities available to them.

Sri Lankan armed conflict left an estimate of 40,000 war widows in the North who had no choice but to take over the headship of the household (Crisis Group, 2017). The post-war scenario propelled women to adopt nontraditional roles by becoming the breadwinners of the house (Kandanearachchi and Ratnayake, 2018). The term female-headed houses (FHH) should not be limited to those whose spouses are deceased, but also entails the households of women whose husbands or relatives are dependant, disabled or unemployed. Thus, the concept refers to the one who provides care and organization for the household (Kandanearachchi and Ratnayake, 2018).

Women who adopted the headship of the household do it under precarious conditions that further aggravate their vulnerability (Subramaniam, 2018). Many female-headed households remain economically disadvantaged and exposed to conditions of poverty, exploitation, violence, and social

exclusion (Kandanearachchi and Ratnayake, 2018). Poor health, restricted access to human and physical assets is distinctive of women-headed households (Kandanearachchi and Ratnayake, 2018). The economic situation for conflict-affected women in the North is extremely difficult. Many livelihood assets were looted or destroyed (Crisis Group, 2017). The land is occupied by the military and many have lost ownership over land (Crisis Group, 2017). Because of this, this particular group is deemed as highly particular vulnerable (Subramaniam, 2018).

First, lack of education or training for employment opportunities hampers their accessibility in the labor market (Hrdlicková, 2011). Due to this, many women are driven to search for employment in the informal sector that further deteriorates their livelihood outcomes due to the slave-like conditions and discrimination (Chingono 1996, Lakshman, 2018). In addition to this, most work opportunities are in construction and other roles generally regarded as unsuitable for women, limiting their access to employment (Klimesova and Premaratne, 2015). Furthermore, women-headed households are discriminated by employers for reasons of caste and gender (Crisis Group, 2017). Many times their mobility and employment choices are limited due to their role as primary care providers (Vithanagama, 2018). The difficulty of balancing work and family life represents an overriding impediment to the economic empowerment of women. The social pressure on the role of mothers and wives influences their engagement in economic activities. Shortage on providing child care support service have added weight on women. Flexible workplaces that take into consideration these women's needs are seldom (Kandanearachchi and Ratnayake, 2018).

Thus, shortages in job opportunities and the dominant patriarchal system are the most significant contributors to women's disempowerment and triggered existing inequalities in Northern Sri Lanka (Vithanagama, 2018). In a community where women are expected to remain in the private realm, female breadwinners are depicted as aberrations and traditional law violators (De Alwis, 2000). Kandanearachchi and Ratnayake's (2018) study illustrates how gender roles are deeply entrenched and integrated into women's expectations and behavior, that many of them have self-imposed restrictions that dynamited their empowerment and restrain them from seeking employment outside their households. Additionally, these authors assert that the pressure of maintaining family prestige relies on women that in turn, prevent them from incorporating into the labor market or education system. This situation has placed great pressure on women and particularly widows that face a double marginalization as main providers and social stigma on widowhood (Klimesova and Premaratne, 2015).

The legacy of the war left a rather challenging horizon for women's rights and security in Sri Lanka. A highly militarized environment created a military phobia that prevented women to look for income-generating activities and heavily constrained women's livelihoods possibilities (Sarvananthan, 2014; Lakshman, 2018). Moreover, many Tamil women have become disabled or injured by gunfire, mines, and torture (Crisis Group., 2017). Additionally, women in post-conflict Sri Lanka suffer discrimination to access resources, political and social realm and remain being subjected to male's authority (Kandanearachchi and Ratnayake, 2018). All these factors together with the collapse of the social fabric and lack of support



have created an insecure environment for women affected by war in Northern Sri Lanka (Crisis Group, 2017).

Psychological unwellness is a major issue among Tamil women. Subramaniam (2018) observed in the study on psychological effects of war on Northern women, that many have witnessed the death or separation of family, children, and relatives during the war. In many cases, family members were arrested or subjected to forced disappearances. Distressing memories and severe emotional pain continue affecting these women. This factor particularly affects women-headed households who have added complexities to cope with such as the weight of economic responsibilities, the social stigma attached to patriarchal and caste values (Subramaniam, 2018). Dealing with trauma in Northern Sri Lanka is reflected in the increase in drug consumption, suicide rates, domestic and social violence (Crisis Group, 2017).

Fleeing from the battle between LTTE and the government, led women to seek for refuge in camps. It is estimated that still 40,000 Tamils remain living in these facilities (Crisis Group, 2017). Restrictions on mobility, deficient infrastructure, and services made women prone to vulnerable situations (De Rivero, 2000). Asymmetric power relations, gender-based violence, and general insecurity have contributed to restricted freedom for women that still are expected to fulfill their traditional duties (De Rivero, 2000). However, this seems to have been to some extent beneficial for women as, Hadrlicková (2011) argues that displaced wives had a better chance to find employment performing feminine tasks as cooking, cleaning. Furthermore, due to the increased insecurity in the camps, they have been gradually involved in camp management and forming women in leadership positions. The author argues that within the camps distinction between the public and the private domain was blurred and men lost their significance in the public sphere while women became more present due to their economic independence and control over the family income.

Unstable backgrounds may exacerbate the prevailing patterns of discrimination, and systemic sexual violence is employed as a war tactic<sup>39</sup>. War is an inherently patriarchal activity, and rape is one of the most extreme expressions of the patriarchal drive toward masculine domination over women (Manjoo and McRaith, 2011:11). The cases of sexual domestic abuse are prevalent across Sri Lanka but particularly significant in the North. Crisis Group (2017) reports many cases of rape and sexual abuse within the ID camps. Unbalanced power relations result in women seeking protection and economic benefits in return for sexual favors (Withanage, 2014). Justice for sexual and gender crimes are uncommon considering that victims are reluctant to pursue legal actions fearing social stigma (Crisis Group, 2017). Due to the issues and social challenges that rape poses, this has been identified to be one of the deterrents of achieving empowerment (Lakshman, 2018). Besides, ICAN (2013) has reported that human trafficking is a concern in war-affected areas. Given scarce opportunities for livelihoods, many women are recruited to work as housemaids in the Middle East. Women and girls living in IDP camps are primarily trafficked and these are vulnerable to exploitation and violence.

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<sup>39</sup> Retrieved from: United Nations Human Rights office of the High commissioner: Rape Weapon of War (n.d).

# CHAPTER IV: SRI LANKAN FISHERIES AND WOMEN

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This chapter gives a brief introduction to the Sri Lankan Northern fishery sector. In this unit I describe the very particular scenario of fishing communities to understand the dynamics and challenges of these communities. Additionally, I explore the specific gender challenges and constraints in this sector to gain an understanding of how these elements impact women's livelihoods. I highlight the structural barriers, hence the institutional and social dimensions that difficult women's livelihoods in the fisheries. Next, I describe Tamil women affected by war who are engaged in this sector to better assess their vulnerabilities in a post-conflict environment. This is very valuable information to understand the gender relations among fishing families, including how the war has changed gender relationships and how gender relationships have altered again after the war.

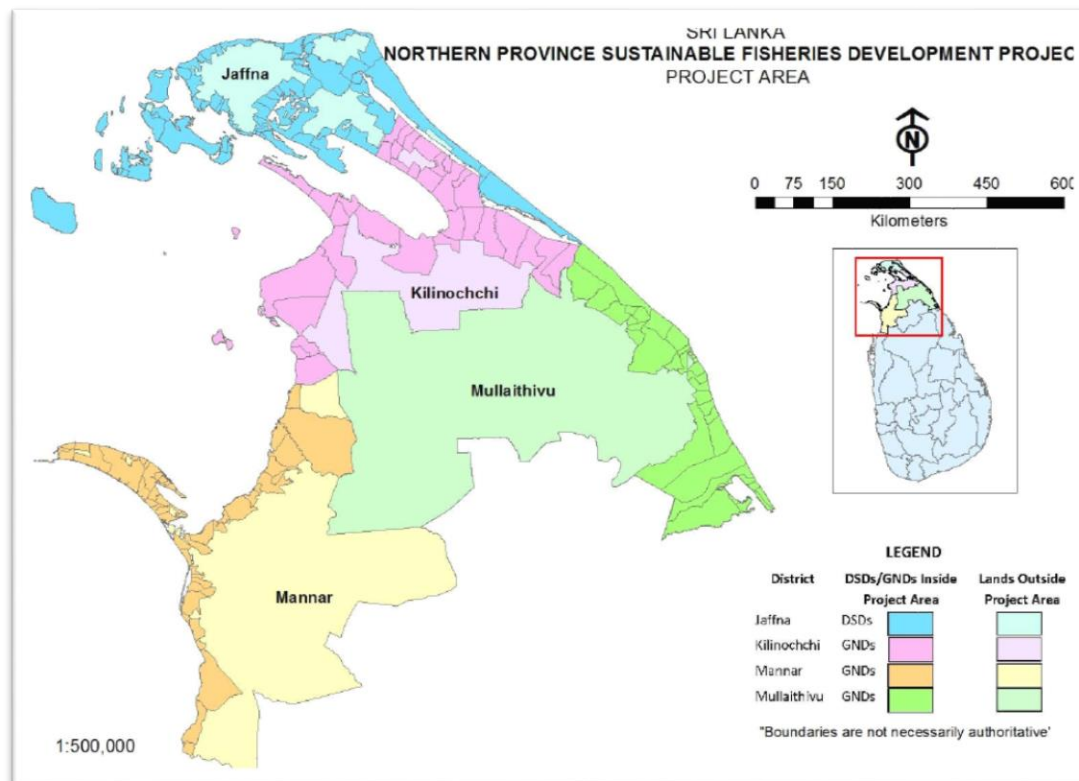
## 4.1 BACKGROUND OF THE SRI LANKAN NORTHERN FISHERIES

Being an island nation in the Indian Ocean, Sri Lankan territorial sea covers an area of 21,500 sq km and internal waters that include lagoons and estuaries of 1580 sq km together with man-made reservoirs of 5200 sq km (Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic resources development, 2018). Sri Lanka has a vast sea area and rich marine resources which contains a variety of species of finfish, shellfish, and holothurians (Sosai, 2015). Considering these suitable conditions, fishing has a long tradition in Sri Lanka that goes back to over two thousand years and it was one of the primary economic activities of the coastal communities (Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic resources development, 2018). This sector is not only the source of food provision for the rural and urban people in the country, it is also an income generation activity (Nadanasabesan, 2015). Besides, Sri Lanka is located in the center of the Indian Ocean and occupies a strategically important point in international shipping lanes (De Silva and Yamao, 2007).

Concerning The Northern Province, it consists of 5 districts, 4 of which are coastal; Mannar, Mullaithivu, Killinochchi, Jaffna, and Vavuniya, which is landlocked. The northern province has a total area of 8,884 km<sup>2</sup> and is surrounded by the Gulf of Mannar and Palk Bay to the west, Palk Strait to the northwest, the Bay of Bengal to the north and east, the North Central and North Western Provinces to the east and south, respectively (Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Development and Rural Economic Affairs for the Asian Development Bank, 2018 ). Fisheries in this area have been predominant economic



activities, and provide livelihoods for more than 40.0000 families in the Northern Province and before the escalation of the conflict, the Northern Province contributed substantially to the economy accounted for 40% of its marine fish catch (ADB, 2017)<sup>40</sup>. The fishery sector comprises three broad categories, namely (1) marine (further, sub-divided into coastal and offshore fisheries); (2) inland, and (3) aquaculture (Mukkarama, et. al 2010). This study focuses on the coastal fisheries of the Northern Province of Sri Lanka, and particularly on the small-scale fisheries.



**Figure10:** Sri Lankan northern districts fisheries, retrieved from “Fishing for sustainable profits in the northern province, Aruliah (2019)

<sup>40</sup>Retrieved from: FGC ANZDEC Limited (FCG ANZDEC), New Zealand in association with Resources Development Consultants Ltd. (RDC), Sri Lanka for the Asian Development Bank

#### *4.1.1 Small-Scale fisheries (SSF) in Northern Province*

The vast majority of fishers are involved in small-scale fisheries in Northern Sri Lanka (Pathmanandakumar, 2017). Small scale fishing is one of the oldest human livelihood activities, which is deeply rooted in local communities, traditions, and values (FAO<sup>41</sup>). Small-scale fisheries make an important contribution to nutrition, food security, sustainable livelihoods, and poverty alleviation – especially in developing countries (FAO)<sup>42</sup>. The small-scale fisheries are generally described, as artisanal, local, coastal, traditional, subsistence, nonindustrial, and poor (Pathmanandakumar, 2017). Small-scale fisheries own low capital and are organized according to caste and ethnicity (Ibrahim, 202). The fishing fleet is mainly outboard motor craft, non-motorized traditional, traditional stationary fishing gear (View figure below). In the coastal areas, traditional craft, such as *vallams* and *kattumarans*, are largely employed (Scholtens and Bavinck, 2012).

## **4.2 SRI LANKAN NORTHERN FISHERIES: VULNERABILITIES**

Sri Lankan small-scale fisheries face multiple vulnerabilities spanning from geopolitics, conflict, and tsunami, and recovery policies. In addition, mere fishing activity is attached to several challenges as seasonality. In this subsection, I review the main challenges and constraints of the small-scale fisheries in Northern Sri Lanka.

#### *4.2.1 Sri Lankan northern fisheries: vulnerabilities related to their livelihoods*

For inhabitants of the coastal fishing communities, this is the only means of livelihood. This dependency makes them vulnerable to the uncertainty and risks involved such as lack of income in the offseason (Lokuage and Munas, 2011). This is further challenged due to the decline of the fish stocks that threatens the productivity, food security, and livelihoods of the fishery communities ( Pathmanandakuma, 2017). As Sosai (2015) argues the usage of illegal fishing methods has increased in recent years such as the employment of dynamite, harmful materials or substances, and bottom trawling methods. All of these methods are common throughout the coastal areas of Sri Lanka, especially in the Palk Bay region and Gulf of Mannar, both in Northern Sri Lanka (Sosai, 2015). The environmental implications of these practices have endangered coral reefs and contributed to the pollution of the sea (Thiviyan and Jayakody,

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<sup>41</sup>Retrieved from: Small Scale Fisheries <http://www.fao.org/fishery/ssf/en>

<sup>42</sup>Retrieved from: Family Farming Knowledge Platform <http://www.fao.org/family-farming/themes/small-scale-fisheries/en/>

2016). Moreover, concerns about the health of the marine include overfishing of near shore resources, erosion and environmental degradation of coastal areas and inshore waters as a result of industrial development, expanding shrimp culture, agricultural run-off, and tourism (FAO; 2016). The key principle of maximizing fishing resources has prevailed over sustainable management in Sri Lanka. As a result, the depletion of fishery resources, particularly in the coastal waters is taking place.

In addition, the deficient physical assets for their livelihood represent a challenge for this community. In the North, there are not natural fishery harbors, and fishermen from the North are forced to travel for extended distances. Although there have been developed some facilities (drydock and repair, fuel, refrigeration, storage, and processing facilities) these have not been strategically located, which difficult fishermen access.<sup>43</sup>. . In terms of economic activities, small-scale fishermen faced many constraints including cycles of debt attributed to the intrinsic seasonality of fishing practices; the lack of capital required to access suitable technology and to diversify fishing methods. In addition, the government prioritized offshore fisheries (Nadasabesan, 2015; Fernando and Moonesinghe, 2012).

#### *4.2.2 Sri Lankan northern fisheries: vulnerabilities related to the conflict*

The long-lasting conflict had severe repercussions on the fisheries of Northern Sri Lanka (Nadasabesan, 2015). The armed conflict deeply affected the fishery sector and destroyed the livelihoods of fishing families in the Northeastern part of the country (Nadasabesan, 2015). During the war, fishers lost their fishing rights due to military and terrorist operations (Ibrahim, 2020). The armed conflict and military activities in the northern ports together with the establishment of the high-security zone in the marine waters, strict restrictions imposed on fishermen, aerial bombardment configure the main causes of hardship among the citizens of this region and their well-being ( Siluvaithasan and Stokke, 2006). Consequently, restrictions on access to fishing grounds also contributed to the decreased of the catch (Nadasabesan, 2015). Northern fisheries were deeply affected by internal and international displacement, loss of property including fishing gear, and destruction of 12,193 dwellings of fishing families (Sosai, 2015, Siluvaithasan and Stokke, 2006 Normann et al. 2003). According to the Jaffna District fisheries extension officers, before the burst of the warfare, there were 22,563 fishing families and 106 fishing villages. In the course of the conflict, only 10,688 families and 11,192 active fishermen remained in Jaffna (Siluvaithasan and Stokke, 2006; Department of fisheries, 1999).

Pre-war time's data have demonstrated that the Northern Province was the most productive of the country, landing 34% of the total fish production in Sri Lanka (Scholtens, 2016). While the Jaffna District alone provided 20-25% of the total fish production in Sri Lanka before 1983, its contribution was reduced

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<sup>43</sup> Retrieved from: Final Report (2017) SRI: Northern Province Sustainable Fisheries Development Project - PPTA FCG ANZDEC Limited (FCG ANZDEC), New Zealand in association with Resources Development Consultants Ltd. (RDC) for the Asian Development Bank.

to 3- 5% by the end of the third Eelam war (Siluvaithasan and Stokke, 2006; Department of Fisheries 1999).

The outcome of the conflict led to the uneven development of fisheries in Sri Lanka's war zones as compared to fisheries in the rest of the country (Scholtens, 2016). The northern fisheries industries, are prominently technically and economically disadvantaged comparing to their southern equivalent, which continued to develop and expand during the war (Mayadune and Philips, 2016).

The conflict left dramatic socioeconomic conditions within the coastal communities of the Northern Province of Sri Lanka. According to the Northern Province Sustainable Fisheries Development Project (2017), the incidence of poverty in two coastal districts within the province, Mannar and Mullaitivu, remains high at 20.1% and 28.8% respectively, compared to 6.7% nationally. What is more, monthly household income per person is the second-lowest of Sri Lanka's nine provinces.

**Table 2: Fishing Population by District During and After the War**

| District    | Category           | 1999   | 2011   | Total<br>Population<br>2011* | Percentage<br>Fishermen<br>2010 |
|-------------|--------------------|--------|--------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Jaffna      | Fishing households | 10,698 | 17,579 |                              |                                 |
|             | Fishing population | 48,653 | 76,820 | 5,67,229                     | 14                              |
| Kilinochchi | Fishing households | na     | 3,220  |                              |                                 |
|             | Fishing population | na     | 12,000 | 1,03,717                     | 12                              |
| Mannar      | Fishing households | 4,165  | 7,840  |                              |                                 |
|             | Fishing population | 20,637 | 30,181 | 95,430                       | 32                              |
| Total       | Fishing households | na     | 28,639 |                              |                                 |
|             | Fishing population | na     | 19,001 | 7,66,376                     | 16                              |

Source: \* MFARD (2011) and Department of Census and Statistics 2012.

Table 4: In this table, the population engagement trend can be observed. Retrieved from Scholtens and Bavinck, 2012

#### *4.2.3 Sri Lankan northern fisheries: vulnerabilities related to the Tsunami*

Regarding the matter of the Asian Tsunami, it affected more than two-thirds of Sri Lanka's coastline including the northern, eastern, southern and southwestern coasts of Sri Lanka causing catastrophic destruction and loss of life (Caldecott and Wickremasinghe, 2005) The fishery suffered great damage, taking away the lives of 31,000 people, about 7,000 went missing (GOSL, 2005).

The damage to the fisheries industry, fishing boats, and implements, fishing communities, and livelihoods was enormous. Ten out of twelve of the main fishing ports were destroyed with extensive loss of essential infrastructures such as ice plants, cold rooms, workshops, slipways, and marine structures.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>44</sup> FAO: Impacts of the Tsunami on Fisheries, Aquaculture and Coastal Livelihoods (as of 11:30 hrs, 05 January 2005) NACA/FAO/SEAFDEC/BOBP-IGO

Fishing assets (outboard motors, ice storage, fishing gear, and nets) were destroyed as well as most of the damaged boats were washed ashore by the powerful waves. This has caused huge environmental damage (De Silva and Yamao, 2007).

#### *4.2.4 Sri Lankan Small Scale Fisheries Vulnerabilities: Palk Bay Geopolitics*

The neighboring Indian state of Tamil Nadu expanded and became increasingly dependent on north Sri Lankans arising a concern about transboundary fisheries (Scholtens; 2016). Indian trawl fishers in the Palk Bay regularly engage in cross-border fishing to the detriment of Sri Lankan artisanal fishers who struggle to gain access to their fishing grounds in the face of intrusion by technologically superior South Indian trawlers, who pose a threat to the livelihoods of the fishing families in northern Sri Lanka (Menon, Bavinck, and Manimohan, 2016).

**Table 5: Response to Question ‘How Are You Affected by Indian Trawlers?’  
(N=569 – More Answers Possible)**

|            | Loss/Damage of Nets | Loss of Income | Loss of Fishing Days | Loss of Fish Resources |
|------------|---------------------|----------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| Frequency  | 314                 | 322            | 407                  | 383                    |
| Percentage | 55.2                | 56.6           | 71.5                 | 67.3                   |

Table 5: Effect of the arrival of Indian trawlers. In the study conducted by Scholtens and Bavinck, 2012, the participants revealed the impact of Indian fishers on their livelihoods

In addition to the vulnerabilities explained above, the structural barriers as government policies seem to have an important impact on the SSF. The Northern Province's small-scale fisheries are bound to several constraints due to the poor planning and management of this sector. Weak governance, corruption, poor stakeholders participation, deficient enforcement, and the lack of institutional capacity contributed to the mismatch between institutional frameworks and small scale fishers (Pathmanandakumar, 2017)

To conclude, added to the already vulnerable situation of fishing communities, as one of the hardest-hit areas of the country affected by the long-running armed conflict, and subsequently, by the tsunami of 2004, the residents of the Northern Province have experienced severe hardship (Northern Province Sustainable Fisheries Development Project, 2017). The arrival of Indian fishers contributed to the dwindling of the fisheries which had also contributed to decreases in the fish stock. Unsustainable fishing practices and reduction of access to fish grounds due to the arrival of as a consequence of the natural disasters, the armed conflict, and poor public sector governance has been the inability of most fisheries activities to recover along with the hardships of fishing communities to secure a dependable livelihood. This all together makes fishermen the poorest industry workers and one of the most vulnerable communities in Sri Lankan society (Arunatilake, Gunawardena, Marawila, & Samaratunga, Senaratne, & Thibbotuwawa, 2008).

## 4.3 WOMEN IN FISHERIES

Globally, women make a substantial contribution to the fishing sector. According to CGIR (2017) the 200 million people employed in fisheries and aquaculture, women make up around half of the workforce. In developing countries, women do up to 90 percent of secondary activities related to the sector including preparing the gear, processing, selling, and so on (CGIR, 2017).

Even though women's role in fisheries is crucial, there is a combination of factors including limited access and control over assets and resources, constraining gender norms, unpaid work, and barriers to sustaining entrepreneurship that prevents women from having equal opportunities and access to leadership positions (CGIR, 2017). This is the case especially in developing countries, where cultural traditions; social conventions, or even laws such as the right to property limit women's potential in the fishery sector (WFF)<sup>45</sup>. These results in women having fewer opportunities, receiving smaller returns from fisheries, and are left in poverty situations. Challenging this is significant for reasons of social justice and gender equity which are essential to achieve sustainable goals (CGEIR, 2017).

An important constraining element that explains gender inequality in the fisheries is the prevailing patriarchal system and gender roles. Yodanis (2000: 268) has observed that women's social position is affected by the gendered socialization process in fishing villages. Fishing has been traditionally an activity associated with men, hence the term fisherman' implies that fishing is performed by males (Harper, et.al 2012). Concurrently, the patriarchal paradigm determines the hierarchy, authority, power, competition, development, control of human and natural resources, and domination of others is shaped by males to their benefit (Monfrot, 2015). This is reflected in the gendered division of labor which is a key element to understand gender disparities within this sector. The distinction between productive (employment income generation) and reproductive activities (household chores, childcare) in rural economies is often blurred (Weetaneuge and Syned, 2009). On many occasions, women's work in fisheries is considered as an extension of their household's duties, and the reason behind why women's performance is often ignored. (Harper, et. all 2012). Productive activities are often conducted by men, whereas women tend to undertake both. These, gender disparities shaped the differential repartition of benefits, access to resources, and livelihood opportunities and highlight the ideological underpinnings of gender roles (Weetaneuge and Syned, 2009).

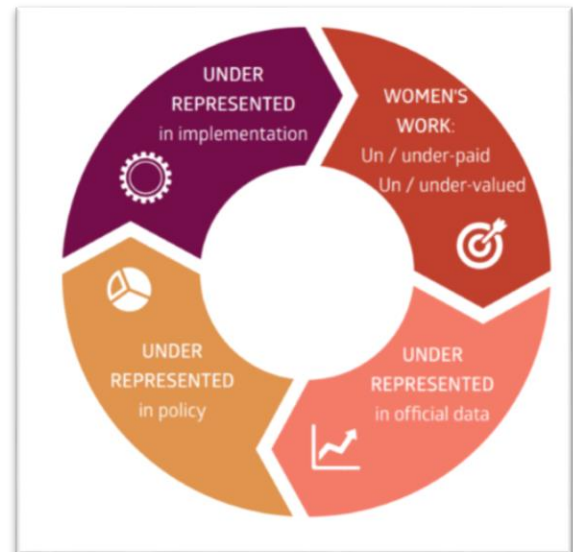
This gendered conception of fisheries has led to gender blind policies because policy-makers have traditionally assumed– that fisheries are largely a male domain (FAO, 2016). Policymakers have

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<sup>45</sup><https://www.fishforward.eu/en/project/the-role-of-women-in-the-fishing-industry/>

traditionally focused on formal and paid fishing activities, which are widely accomplished by men. This has resulted in neglecting the unpaid, indirect, and informal tasks that women perform. As a consequence, women's contributions are not valued and recognized (Harper, et al, 2017).

Eventually, the lack of this recognition has not only led to overlook women's contributions but also, led to their marginalization, and hinders the creation of gender-sensitive policies (Harper,et. all,2017). Nevertheless, FAO notifies that sex-disaggregated data is not sufficient to reflect the reality and the real position of women working in the various segments of the industry, since it does not manifest their responsibilities, access, and control over resources, assets, credits, information, training, and technology, nor the power and access to decision-making or leadership (FAO, 2015). Additionally, the fact that the major focus resides on large-scale productions highlights the lack of recognition of the small-scale fisheries, an area where women are predominant (Frangoudes and Gerrad, 2018).



**Figure 11.** Women's work and the cycle of invisibility  
Author: Manuela Marazzi. Retrieved from FAO (2017)  
Towards gender-equitable small-scale fisheries governance and development



#### *4.3.1 Sri Lankan Tamil Women in the small-scale fishery sector*

In Northern Sri Lanka women actively participate in the sector. While it is usually men who went into the sea to collect fish, women in the north are responsible for, drying and processing ( cleaning, cutting, salting, packing) the fish as well as selling it in the market (Shivany, 2019). Moreover, Tamil women are involved in pre-harvest activities, as preparing the boat and doing all the requirements that support the male fishers (Lokuge and Munas, 2011). To a lesser extent, in some villages, women are involved in fishing with beach seines and few own a boat (Shivany, 2019).

Gender disparities are prevalent in small-scale fisheries of Northern Sri Lanka. Women's contribution to fisheries remains invisible, although in some districts has been observed that up to 30% of the revenues were attributable to women's performance in the sector (MFF, SEI, SEAFDEC, 2018). Gender disparities are also reflected in the gendered division of labor. Wage disparities between men and women are not able, due to gender-discriminatory practices and women's limited skills for higher wage activities (ADB, 2010). Besides this, women have longer working hours, it is estimated that t women are working 15%–25% longer hours than men (taking unpaid household work into account (ADB, 2010). In few regions of the Asian continent, women's lack of involvement in fish capture is linked to the notion of 'pollution' ( Lokuge, 2017, Gupta, 2003; Thompson, 1985) and the Sri Lanka Tamil community is not an exception. Monfort (2015) stated that the reason why women are discouraged to go fishing is that women are thought to bring bad luck and women are portrayed as physically weak to go to sea.

The 30 years of war, left a delicate scene for the inhabitants of the North of the island and especially for the widows headed households. Although there is little known about women's performance in the fisheries during the war, due to insufficient documentation (Lokuge and Hilhorst, 2017), literature on women in post-war scenarios reveal the impediments that further increase women's vulnerabilities. The conflict intensified the existing inequalities and the livelihoods for widows remain to be very fragile (Quist, 2015). Selling dry fish is their main task and this is subjected to the seasonality of the activity (Quist, 2015), an activity that does not provide economic stability and contributed to women's vulnerability. Many widows have lost their houses and livelihood equipment due to war. Quist (2015) notes that women in the fishing sector are denied access to fishing grounds to rebuild their livelihoods because these are confiscated by the government and occupied by the army. Fishing licenses are given to southerner Sinhala to fish in the North, which results in limited work and is mostly given to men. Wages are significantly less than their male counterparts in the fisheries (Quist, 2015) In the absence of adequate facilities for fish processing, these activities are conducted with poor hygienic standards (Quist, 2015).

It is worth mentioning, that a considerable swift in regard of the perception of the gender division has been identified as Wannasundera (2006:14) stated, once where exploitation of the aquatic natural resources was considered as an extension of the reproductive activities in an earlier generation, it is now



considered as a productive activity of women affected by conflict. However, this perception appears to be unaccompanied of the recognition, and benefits for women.

.In conclusion, women's participation is constrained or affected by strong cultural rules, robust societal conventions, and even in some cases by discriminatory laws (Monfort, 2015). The lack of recognition of women's contribution undervalues the economic and social benefits they provide (Lentisco& Lee, 2015). Moreover, it further aggravates the marginalization of women and increases their vulnerability in the fishing sector (Bennett, 2005).

# CHAPTER V: EMPIRICAL SECTION

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The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the research methodology of the case study on Tamil widows of Northern Sri Lanka. This chapter will provide an insight into the process of deciding upon the methodology to be employed in this study with a strong emphasis on the underlying theoretical and philosophical assumptions. Additionally, the process of literature review as a methodological approach will be discussed.

## 5.1 Philosophical Underpinnings and Framework

Considering that the main goal of this thesis is to gather information about Sri Lankan Tamil women's war and livelihood experiences, and understand how post-conflict interventions assist them, qualitative methods of inquiry were adopted to respond to research questions. The qualitative methodology provides tools for researchers to study complex phenomena within their contexts. (Baxter and Jack, 2010). Moreover, Creswell (2013) argues that this method consists of gaining a deeper understanding of feelings, points of view, experiences, and struggles of people. Qualitative research is a form of social inquiry that stresses the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences and the world in which they live to understand the social reality of individuals<sup>46</sup>.

The present qualitative research is embedded in a transformative framework. The basis of this theory is that it tries to raise awareness among the population about social justice and exposes the situations and problems that minority, marginalized groups in society face (Creswell, 2013). According to Mertens (2007) within this paradigm realities are constructed and shaped by social-political, cultural, economic, and ethnic values. Thus, power relations are a key tenet to understand how people's livelihoods and privileges or restrictions are allocated. The transformative framework provides a mechanism for addressing the complexities of research in culturally complex settings and includes the voices that are disenfranchised based on gender, race or ethnicity, or other social identifiers (Mertens, 2007).

The philosophical assumptions associated with the transformative paradigm provide a framework for addressing inequality and injustice in society (Creswell, 2013). The ontological assumption of this approach lies on that reality is constructed and determines the certain position of power and social exclusion, questions such as how reality is defined, Who is being benefited or privileged, What are the

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<sup>46</sup> Retrieved from: Blackwell publications: Introduction to qualitative research:  
[https://www.blackwellpublishing.com/content/BPL/Images/Content\\_store/Sample\\_chapter/9780632052844/001-025%5B1%5D.pdf](https://www.blackwellpublishing.com/content/BPL/Images/Content_store/Sample_chapter/9780632052844/001-025%5B1%5D.pdf)

social justice implications of accepting these power imbalances are questions that this paradigm aims to address (Mertens, 2007). The fundamental dogma of this transformative framework is that data is not neutral and it reflects social relationships, and therefore the information aims to assist individuals to improve their situation (Mertens, 2009). Regarding the epistemological assumption is that knowledge is historically and socially constructed, so in an attempt to conduct the study researchers have to engage with the participants, and awareness of existing power relations is critical. Considering that Sri Lankan Tamil women's concerns are very much related to power relations and issues of social oppression and exclusion this paradigm has shaped the investigation.

Last, this research integrates the feminist standpoint, which draws attention to women's diverse situations and the institutions' that frame women's conditions (Creswell, 2013). A prevailing theme within these studies is the subjugation of women within the patriarchal system (Creswell, 2013). Gender is considered a basic organizing principle (Creswell, 2013; Lather, 1991) that shapes women's lives that shape the conditions of their lives. Recent critical trend addresses intersectionality, which includes different interlocked categories, as identity, class, race, ethnicity, and so on (Creswell, 2013). Carastathis (2014) argues that within feminist theories intersectionality has been popularized given that it claims that women's lives are constructed by the convergence of multiple interwoven systems of oppression. This notion applied in the methodology, unveils the dominant and hegemonic powers by making social experiences visible and helps identify the real-world phenomena of structural, political, and representational intersectionality (Carastathis (2014: 307).

## **5.2 Research method: A case study**

A case study has been the method selected to conduct the research. A case study is characterized by a thorough holistic and in-depth exploration of the study's issues (Kumar, 2010). Hence, it is a comprehensive description of an individual case and its analysis. This research method is usually employed to answer the "why" and "how" of human experiences, behavior, opinion, and so on (Yin, 2003). This design is very useful when exploring an area community and it is focused on understanding key matters (Kumar, 2010). Regarding the exploration of Sri Lankan Tamil women, this method was appropriate to deep analyze and cover contextual conditions which are highly pertinent to the issues discussed in this thesis (Yin, 2003)

This thesis is based on a single case unit; hence it can be denominated as a "single intrinsic case study" that in words of Creswell (2013) focuses on specific concerns bounded to one case that illustrates a phenomenon. By analyzing the case of Sri Lankan Tamil women, I intend to explore women's complexities and vulnerabilities in post-conflict interventions and I aim to contribute to the ongoing debate

of how provisions should better enhance women empowerment while considering the socio-cultural particularities, such caste system in this case.

The case of Sri Lanka can be extrapolated to comprehend how rural livelihood dynamics are affected and transformed by a conflict. This case is very particular about the caste system, and the sub-questions above attempt to provide significant information on how rural dynamics and this social stratification shape people's livelihoods. Although the caste system is prominent in South Asian countries (Indian, Nepal), it can contribute to the understanding of how gender disempowerment and inequality are naturalized through different mechanisms. It also provides insights into how patriarchal roles operate in rural communities affected by war. Rural livelihoods provide significant information on how gender norms by analyzing how wealth is distributed, who has access to them, people's choices, and engagement in different political or economic spheres (Nazneen, 2010). Consequently, this thesis may allow examining how gender and power in rural areas play a role in women's status and post-conflict scenarios.

In addition to this, this study may serve to better comprehend social resistance towards women empowerment and gender equality in highly patriarchal settings. This is very relevant information for practitioners and academics, that may facilitate designing strategic interventions to foster gender equality and sustainable development. Regarding academics, this might contribute to the ongoing debate on peacebuilding and gender and what the limitations and realities of war-affected women are.

## 5.3 Data Collection

The preliminary intention of this thesis was to conduct research on the field and interview Sri Lankan Tamil fisherwomen, as well as organizations closely working with women affected by war in fishery communities. By doing this, I could gain firsthand knowledge, conduct observations, and further grasp local socio-cultural dynamics. However, in light of the pandemic caused by the covid-19 and its consequent restrictions in mobility this possibility vanished. Instead, I sought multiple sources of information available and accessible given the fact that I could not travel to Sri Lanka. Even if I could not be physically present, I intended to gain significant information to better illustrate in detail the case. To achieve this goal I classified the information sources available on primary and secondary sources.

Regarding primary sources, I intended to conduct online interviews with local organizations. The criteria to find the potential participants were based on location, and the organization's nature or field of work. The participants were required to be part of an organization located in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka. Given the particularities and challenges of the Northern region, I aimed to get to know how local organizations navigate in post-conflict scenarios. The second precondition was that the organization needed to specifically work with women and attend to women's concerns.

### *5.3.1 Participants and secondary sources*

The data information for this study is based on interviews and visual content ( documentary) and reports published.

The organizations/participants were interviewed are the following:

1. Participant 1: National Fisheries Solidarity Movement(NAFSO): organizes fishermen to lobby the government to defend their rights and to bring about good environmental practice in coastal areas.NAFSO envisions a free, just, and prosperous society, where resources are distributed equally, and justice, peace, and human rights prevail for all people regardless of race, caste, religion, and gender. NAFSO's mission is the establishment of sustainable fisheries and food sovereignty to reduce poverty and disempowerment in Sri Lanka. This organization works at local, regional and national level, having committees throughout the country. This organization is actively engaged with women, and has implemented several projects to assist women affected by war and women in the fisheries. I organized the interview with the director of the organization together with the coordinator of women's development project.
2. Participant 2: I interviewed a feminist researcher specialized in small-scale fisheries and with extensive experience in Sri Lanka. Although she is not a local, she has researched women affected by war in Northern province of Sri Lanka, published several articles about the consequences of the war on widows and the social implications. Due to her extensive expertise and her experience on the field, I consider her input very reliable and illustrative for this study.
3. Participant 3: Villuthu is local organization based in the capital city and advocates for gender equality, peace, and human rights. Their mission is to strengthen the capacities of women and youth groups for civic engagement as well as strengthening other stakeholders such as the state, media, and academia and to engage meaningfully with them and lend a platform for voice, in addition to representing their issues. The person I interviewed is a lawyer working for the organization and heavily involved in advocacy work.
4. Participant 4: I interviewed a Sri Lankan woman who has been gender rights activist for 20 years. She works for the government, local networks and civil society organizations. Moreover, she is a column writer, has actively advocated for women's rights and gave training to women affected by war and marginalized women including women in fisheries.

The conducted interviews were in-depth and semi-structured. I outlined the main concerns I needed to address for the research and wrote down supporting questions to gather information, but additional questions were made encountered during the interviews.

Apart from this, I attempted to collect secondary source information, obtained from a documentary, and PARCIC organization reports.

The documentary "Sri Lanka: Widows of War" was retrieved from the Al Jazeera media channel published in 2015. This documentary explores the realities of women affected by war in the North, include different perspectives and voices.

The Pacific Asia Resource Center, also known as PARCI, is a non-government organization. The mission of PARCIC is to extend direct support to people afflicted by violence or natural disasters and to help them achieve self-reliance. Supported by the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA), this organization developed the program "the Dried Fish Project for Women in Jaffna Fishing Community". That project was to be conducted for three years from October 2010 to September 2013. Although I tried making contact with them, my attempts were unsuccessful. Nevertheless, I include their report and assessment on the project of Dried Fish, which provided interesting information about cultural aspects of fishing communities and the challenges the project faced during its implementation.

## 5.4 Ethical issues

The current study was subject to certain ethical issues. Participants were informed regarding the objectives of the study, while they were reassured that their answers were treated as confidential and used only for academic purposes and only for the particular research. I attempt to create a climate of comfort where participants felt free to express themselves and share their perceptions, experiences, and opinions.

I was concerned about my perceptions and understanding of women's empowerment is could conflict with the local perspectives on the issue. Although a scientist must be objective to carry out an effective analysis, the way one interprets the world is embedded within one's beliefs and principles. I was aware that my feminist position is conditioned by my environment, and Western ideas. To avoid misunderstandings and to be as respectful as possible, I asked local NGO members about their idea of female empowerment and encourage them to discuss the issue. The assessment carried out in this study might assist these organizations to focus on challenging the traditional and patriarchal systems, and may be develop strategies for this

## 5.5 Processing data

The application I used to analyze the data is ATLAS.TI 9. This application allowed me to codify the text, exploring the main concerns and operationalization the information. After transcribing the interviews I attempted to create codes and groups of codes based on the main topics of the research. I created memos and notes that later on help me concluding and report meaningful information.

## 5.6 Limitations of the study

The limitation of this research is that the size of the sample is very small. Due to the impossibility to conduct research on the field, I could only conduct 4 interviews. Although the interviews were in-depth and I could gather highly relevant information, a bigger sample with more interviews and including different perspectives is advisable to enhance the reliability of the research. Including Government bodies or authorities in the research could as well provide a better understanding of the issues and pitfalls of post-conflict interventions. It is challenging to generalize when exploring a single case study, so comparing multiple case studies would be advisable to further elaborate on hypotheses or theories.

Last, In some cases, the internet connection was deficient and I could not finish the interview, which left some questions unanswered.

# CHAPTER VI: DATA ANALYSIS

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This unit is dedicated to the analysis of the gathered data through interviews and secondary sources of information.

In my study, I aim to answer the questions of how NGOs assist women in highly patriarchal and caste-ridden post-conflict Sri Lanka. I attempt to explore how NGOs address women's vulnerabilities, access to livelihood assets, and how they respond to livelihood structures and processes. I intended to specifically gather information about how organizations understood women's vulnerabilities, how they tried to respond to them, and the effectiveness of their responses in helping those women in Sri Lanka.

To conduct the data analysis I applied the Sustainable Livelihood Approach combined with Feminist Political Ecology to explore the data obtained from the participants and secondary sources of information. The livelihood approach is useful to analyze the strategies that people employ to make a living. This approach helps analyze the vulnerability context (the external socio-political environment, risk, hazards) of Sri Lankan Tamil widows in fisheries are embedded in. SLA identifies livelihood assets (human, natural, physical, financial, and social) that people utilize to make a living. Last, employing SLA helped explore structural/processes, hence, the elements that provide the institutional context for livelihoods, and influence access to livelihoods and livelihood outcomes. By applying gender perspective through Feminist Political Ecology, I will specifically examine how gender and power intertwined; constrain women's access and control over resources, distribution of risks and gains, gender symmetries in political and social dimensions, and livelihood options.

The data analysis derives from the SLA scheme, so it is divided into four categories: vulnerability context, livelihood assets, and structural barriers. Last, I investigate Ngo's particular challenges and how they respond to them.

First of all, when conducting the interviews with local NGOs, to avoid misunderstandings I addressed the question of what women's empowerment means for them. Villuthu, NAFSO, and participant 4 argued from their understanding enabling individual agency, capacity to articulate issues, engage powerfully while seeking for structural change that has historically discriminated women.



## 6.1 Vulnerability context

The first set of analyses focuses on the vulnerability context. This refers to the external scenario, the surrounding socio, political, cultural environment in which people live and may diminish their capacity to recovering from disaster. Additionally, I examine how different hazards (natural and human-made hazards, shocks (conflict, covid-19) disrupt livelihoods. In this section, I aim to explore how NGOs address and perceive the vulnerability context of Tamil women they are assisting.

The fishery sector brings along a series of challenges that create a vulnerable environment for women working in this sector. Fisheries are attained to seasonality which doesn't provide a stable income for women. “ *if the boats don't go out to see my family will be stranded. It'll be difficult that day. When the bad weather comes, we starve* ( Documentary, 03:58)

However, the data reflected that the conflict (man-made hazard) is the main contributor and shaped the vulnerability context of Tamil women's livelihoods. The gathered information discusses how women have been further marginalized as a consequence of the conflict and many searches for income in fishing and garment factories. Consequently, the war has changed the role of women and pushes them to participate in the labor market to palliate the economic distress. Gender-based violence, general insecurity, internally displaced camps, high militarization of the region, and heavy consumption of drugs have been identified to be the most pressing issues deriving from the conflict. Participants reported that heavy military presence in the Northern Province poses a major threat to women's security and livelihood reconstruction.

Participant 3 (04:48): *And what is significantly important is all these conflict-affected areas have three-quarters of the armed forces deployed in there. [ ...]. the Armed Forces take up so much of the land in the north that women were scared to challenge*

Internally Displaced Camps, represents a significant threat to women's integrity, security, and access to welfare services. There have been reported 16 internal displaced camps where women do not access to livelihood assets such as land, access to basic facilities that deeply constrain women's recovery of their daily lives, as Participant 1 highlighted: *they don't have very basic facilities, basic infrastructure, they don't have proper housing. They don't have a proper water facility and they face many numerous difficulties in those camps* (08:42). Due to the location of ID camps, many women live far from their agricultural or fishery lands, restricting their livelihood possibilities. In an attempt to make some income, many women exercise prostitution as participant 1 asserted “*they want to sell their bodies*” (14:51).

Drug and alcohol addiction has been described to be an important contributor to women's vulnerability. Participants raised concerns about the drastic increase in drug trafficking within a conflict-affected area. However, considering the large number of soldiers deployed in the north, it is striking that illegal activities are carried out. Participants 3 commented that “*. what is significantly important is all these conflict-*

*affected areas have three-quarters of the armed forces deployed in there. (...). So then the real question goes as to how is this trafficking increasing, when you have so much of your protection defense mechanism employed, and the allegation that has come out is that it is a state-supported or politically supported mechanism that is enabling this drug trafficking department (04:48).* This appears to be a significant issue since many women became head of the households due to husband's addiction, therefore, incapacity to uphold the headship of the household:

Participant 3: *And now, even within women headed household, we've got a new group, (...), Yes, traditionally, our men were the head of the household, and now they're under drug addiction. And therefore, by that, we have become the head of the household. And not only do we have to take care of ourselves and our household, but without any external or state support, we also have to deal and take care of the person who is under that addiction with our family member (04:48).*

Gender-based violence is another element of vulnerability as Participant 3 (04:48) has argued “*Collectively, women have put sexual and gender-based violence as their main priority issue that sexual and gender-based violence because it's so high*”.

Last, All these vulnerabilities, power imbalances, unequal access, and participation which constrain women's livelihoods have been exacerbated by the ongoing covid-19 pandemic. Political, economic, social environment create women's marginalization, and the restrictions on mobility, bring along many difficulties for women participant 3 stated “*ith the COVID pandemic, it's even more crazy, because travel restrictions are high*” (04:48) participant 1 “, *they are having some problems the pandemic caused more severe situation because the markets are close and they cannot transport*” (31:03)

NGOs do also take into consideration the consequences and vulnerabilities of war and understand the challenges these women face. NAFSO programs are oriented to assist drug-addicted, reconciliation efforts, and implementation of multi-ethnic dialogues. Besides, they offer a wide range of support “*psychological support, moral support, livelihood support, all these types of ideas and apply to support these women to gain back dignity, self-confidence (participant 1, 21:36)*

## *6.2 Livelihood assets*

Livelihood assets refer to the available goods to sustain a living. This spans from physical (equipment, infrastructure,) human (education, experience), financial (loans), natural (land, water resources), social (decision-making, collective representation). In this section, I analyze how NGOs are assisting women in accessing livelihood assets and the assets they are providing to help Tamil women in making a living.

### 6.2.1 Human assets

It has been detected that in the Northern fisheries receiving an education is not regarded as an important issue. Participant 4 clearly stated this concern" *They do fishing, and they don't have a proper proper economic background (...) So many people dropped out.. So what happens in future they are not educated...They don't understand the importance of education. Education is not a priority.. to fish is a priority*" (08:30). Additionally, specific training on business management has been limited, which limits women potential in generating income, "But investing in, in the business of women having their own business, then that is very little done" (Participant 2, 38:56)

NGO's have detected this issue and therefore, the analysis reveals that they provide a wide range of human assets, namely education, training, and vocational skills. Exploration of the data has indicated that Ngo's focus on gender issues directs their efforts to enhance women's political participation, and human capital assets ( training and developing vocational skills). Most of the strategies work in the areas of leadership, provides training courses for women's economic and political empowerment. By providing relevant training courses it is aimed to improve women's productivity which in turn will better their financial situation and economic empowerment. It is particularly relevant that NGOs do understand the particularities of women in fishing communities, as they offer specific training to improve the marketing of the product. This has been found in Nafso and Parcic. Regarding Nafso (participant 1), they developed a vocational training program to enhance women's skills and productivity in their work in the fisheries. "*there is one specific thing is that we provided some skills for particular workday engaging,(...) if it is dry fish production or any other particular activity that they engage* (2:00:33)

Capacity building and providing women with training for their business are just examples of programs they offer. They provide tailor-made programs to adjust to the specific needs of women: training on running a business, *and* financial assistance. Additionally, they are now monitoring women's performance to increase their income and how to be more profitable. Nafso has developed a wide range of interventions delivering specific training, educational programs, to rights advocacy: *gender leadership, sovereignty, and food security aspects, rights are and many other aspects related to their lives* ( Participant 1 34:58).

In the case of Parcic, the activities that have been conducted to support widows in fish drying to improve their skill by creating a business and guarantee a regular income. The strategy followed by PARCIC was to invite a retired professional Japanese fisherman to teach women how to manufacture the fish applying sanitary methods to dry fish. Moreover, PARCIC workers provided training to ensure the quality of the product and business training.

Apart from the training related to the fisheries, NGO's provide a different range of training as an aim to diversify women's income sources " *but they are getting alternative training to do some, you know,*

*handcraft things or community to others by using the natural product, whatever is available in the location, there are a lot of handcraft things with a coconut and other things “ (Participant 4, 11:31)*

### 6.2.2 Physical assets

Livelihood provision in post-conflict Northern Sri Lanka appears to have been shaped by traditional gender roles, where equipment "suitable for females" was provided.

“they give them like a sewing machine but not they don't invest like improving the technology for fish drying or to the preservation of fish or fish selling technology techniques, marketing knowledge. They used to get very stereotypical support in traditional women's roles like the woman is at home staying at home doing some sewing and raising some cow and some chicken (Participant 2, 36:59). Relevant information on this has not been found. Ngo's have been focusing on educational and vocational training rather than on providing equipment. This might be attributable to the limited resources of the Ngo's or they focus on capacity building.

### 6.2.3 Financial assets

Considering the financial assets, several concerns have been detected. A particular concern is how microcredits are being managed. Participants have informed that access to credits is intimately attached to political ideology (state patronage) as participant 2 (42:59) stated *"Depending on the political support if you are longing to the political party empower you and your members to the cooperative. And you're a very active supporter you have more opportunity to get along with them than if you are not"*.

The second is that NGO interventions tend to target women. This could be interpreted as a mechanism to improve women's economic situation and foster their empowerment under the assumption that women payback: *women, are also easier to get credits because a lot of these NGOs and microcredit organizations target women because women are more, I would say that they paid back better than men* (participant 2, 42:59). However, an issue derived from this is that many times women ask for loans that are not even for their benefit. This, together with the unethical mechanisms and conditions to repay the financial credits that have caused distress to women affecting their mental health and general well-being.

Participant 3 (31:03): *the microfinance finance companies it's becoming a severe issue and the depth of the severity is that some of the women commit suicide because they could not pay the loans. So they are suffering from that and they finally commit suicide as well.*

In this regard, the Villuthu organization researched how microcredits were managed and discovered that 52 women committed suicide due to an unethical, unlawful microfinancing loan scheme (Participant 3). Their work served to denounce the situation of women struggling with their debts.

#### 6.2.4 Social assets

Social assets entail all the social connections that individuals lie on for their livelihoods. It encompasses networks, formal or informal groups, collective representation, mechanisms for participation in decision-making, leadership, and so forth.

Efforts to create platforms for women to discuss their issues and concerns have been noted. Moreover, creating a space where women can discuss their issues, can also propel political and social awareness that in turn challenges the existing inequalities and unjust practices for women. NAFSO has created a series of committees at the local, district, province, and national levels.”*The committees are platforms where women were encouraged to discuss their specific issues and find joint solutions to overcome them, They organize meetings between women, so they come from different parts of the country. So they can exchange information and they can get to know each other. So that that is, I think, important way* (Participant 1, 27:57).

#### 6.3 Structural barriers

The institutional landscape, hence government bodies and policies have an impact on women affected by war in a post-conflict environment. In this unit, I review the legislations, policies, and societal norms that influence women's accessibility to livelihood assets. I examine the structural barriers of the government in the post-conflict process, and next, I focus on the legislative network of the fisheries. Last, I analyze the overarching social structure, looking at the cultural practices and believes. Structures within the livelihood approach refer to the relations, private and public sector, institutions, and organizations that regulate social structures, norms, and policies. The institutional arrangements play a key role in livelihoods.

First, I analyze the institutional response to Tamil women affected by war in Northern Sri Lanka. Findings demonstrate that the central government does not draw enough attention to rural livelihood recovery programs, since the priority of the government has been to invest in macroeconomic projects. Lack of a national livelihoods program and deficient support for women's livelihood has a notorious impact on women's livelihood possibilities and well-being. These have an impact on women's livelihood access to financial or physical assets, access and participation in livelihood recovery programs “*So, livelihood opportunities for those persons, there is no access policy that enables these people to be included in livelihood or any other social services* (Participant 3, 04:48).

Even when the government support women, the assistance has been inadequate. A significant testimony found in the documentary serves to illustrate this “*Every month she receives just \$2 in government assistance. [she] needs a water pump and help to farm her land. Yet the meager assistance she receives is barely enough to buy food* (15:35).

Apart from the deficient support provided by the government, results demonstrate that Sri Lankan authorities do provide differential assistance to women affected by the war based on their ethnicity. The

documentary analyzed demonstrates that *"that only widows on the winning side of the conflict, the Sinhalese receive any financial assistance. If their people are dead, they receive aid. So now we're getting nothing. We're getting no support, (...)"*(Sri Lankan war widows documentary, 18:50).

In addition to this, the government discards the recognition of women's headed households. There is a shortage of statistical data on the women-headed household. This group is a very heterogeneous group encompassing widows who lost their relatives to the war, disability yet *"the government still hasn't come with an inclusive definition that encompasses all these women"* (Participant 3, 04:48)". Lack of recognition translates into no official data and acknowledgment of women's vulnerabilities as an outcome of the conflict. Data asserts that *widows in Northern province have been the last to get help even though they're among the most desperate* ( Documentary:19:32).

Post-conflict livelihood interventions were designed without taking into consideration women's choices, needs, and preferences and based on gender role stereotypes. The provision was more "item-providing" oriented rather than providing women integral support to rebuild their livelihoods, protect their rights, and enhance women's empowerment. In addition to this, the post-conflict livelihood recovery did not take into account the needs of these women, which further incremented their vulnerabilities. Interventions have supply women with items without any consideration to their skills and training. Because women were dependant on their husbands did not develop any vocational skills to work in income-generating activities. What is more, these women struggle to navigate in the public sphere, which hampers their participation in political and decision-making tables. So, the programs focused on women are inefficient and do not strategically improve widows' situation *"They had no skills (...) they struggle because they've been no programs to teach them how to fend for themselves. The problems are not properly understood by the government and NGOs. As a result, they're often scammed and taken advantage of"* (Documentary, 19:32). Last, Government has not made major advancements in addressing root causes of the conflict and attending to women's demands concerning the disappearances and reconciliation efforts. *"all this, these women who lost their husbands and sons, (...) they were searching for them in prisons in that list and all that they were not taken seriously by the government"* (participant 2, 04:48)

Considering the structural barriers in the fishing sector, findings have revealed that there is not sufficient recognition of women's participation in the fisheries. Even though the narratives show that women are actively involved in fishery activities *"women prepare the nets, the women go to get the loans. The women go to sell the fish to soar to fish"* (Participant 2, 38:56).

*"Fisherwomen, (...) who contribute to the national economy, but they don't get any social security from the government and the state policy or laws, provisions or their own home, fishermen help the husbands and the family in doing business and subordinated work, but their work is not recognized"* (Participant 4, 00:50)

Given that the fishery sector is subjected to seasonality, and small-scale fisheries usually depend on the catch of the day, limited access to physical, human, and financial capitals do not assist women in fishery communities to be better prepared to overcome the risks of employment. This restricted access aggravates their vulnerability and their livelihood possibilities and outcomes. *when the women are saying, okay, I just want to buy a boat, and I buy a boat, can someone give me a loan that I'm going to repay, and then turn around and tell them I'm sorry, but you guys (referring to women) are not eligible* (Participant 3, 04:48)

Gender discrimination and limited access to resources prevent women from purchasing suitable equipment and physical assets to carry out their livelihoods. This leads to women being dependant on men and hinders their economic empowerment: *"we have to depend on the men for deep fishing, deep-sea fishing. So even though traditionally, I come from a family of has this livelihood. Now that I'm a woman head of the household, and I don't have a man in the house, I have to depend on someone else* (Participant 3, 04:48)

Fishing is an activity that enjoys low status, and low recognition in this case also means low wages. Low retribution also brings economic instability and distress, which again, further challenges women's livelihoods, economic empowerment, and control over resources and assets: *"I mean, it is a fact that people who do manual jobs are getting very low pay, they get low status"* (participant 2, 1:15:54)

This is also a contributor to women's vulnerabilities." *they don't even recognize their work. So she's maybe subordinated to the husband or son or father, but they don't give money to her(...). she doesn't have control over the money and resource, her work is invisible*(participant 4, 04:19).

The assessment of processes and structures reveals that cultural and customary practices, political standpoints, and deficient gender provision within the government and foreign investors contribute to women's exploitation, marginalization, and vulnerability. First of all, Tamil customary practices significantly hamper women's access to economic, social, and public spheres. The social stigma attached to widows is a remarkable source of discrimination towards women, which remains being socially and culturally displaced. In line with this, customary laws "Thesavalamai", referring to the ancient traditional laws are being practiced and are determinant in shaping women's access to goods. Women are required to present their husband's consent to be able to access and benefit from any service.

*Participant 1(14:02): In the northern and eastern part of the country when the husband dies, then women became widows, they are not socially recognized as they were not welcome in important events, weddings, or any other special events in the families in the society. They are neglected and marginalized. (...). So they are socially excluded from the society, their society their community they are rejected*

*Participant 3 8 (05:38): if I'm a married woman from the north if I was to sell land, my husband also has to sign that transfer agreement, even though it is my land. So that law is also there.*

Gender division of labor has an impact on government and foreign investors' policies. Women are invisible and due to their absence within political and social spheres, the mechanisms to protect their



rights are scarce. Participants reported that exploitative practices, bare minimum wages are being paid and deficient institutional support to protect women's rights. *"private investors come in without any safety measures for women you know, and you know, we are creating a landscape where (women) can be exploited in many ways..(participant 3, 46:12)*

Government's and institutions' underlying patriarchal ideas reflect women's poor recognition and restricted access and control over resources. Women are expected to stay within the households, and as a consequence, women's access to the political arena and inclusion within policies remains limited " *our cultural norms and system manifest women are subordinated, and we cook and clean and take care of children and men have to work. And man's sauce controller, that's how we have been brought up the patriarchal culture"* (Participant 4, 06:17).

In this point, it is visible how cultural codes interchanged with the political/ institutional policies, have an impact on women's livelihoods. Hence, because women cannot own livelihood assets, women are invisible to the institutions, and in turn, they are not taken into account for institutional policies. Consequently, women's right in the labor market, participation in the political arena, and ultimately their empowerment process is at stake.

Participant 3 (18:07). *The women go to sell the fish to soar to fish. They do so many types of works. But of course, the government sees does not see they are invisible by the government. The government only sees the boat owner and the boat owner is most of the time the man Yeah, so. So that and also cooperatives are only male members that are there are no women in the cooperatives. So our government is not investing. And then the government is just having a very traditional look at women. They want to have all these garment factories, export garment factories, and other export-oriented factories, (...) So that would be a good opportunity, employment opportunity for women. But you see in those factories, it's like slavery work.*

This issue was reported by PARCIC as well, *"The first issue we struggled with was the caste system. The caste system remains deeply rooted, particularly in Jaffna District in Sri Lanka. The belief of women holding lower status is entrenched within the Hindu beliefs "They believe a woman is lower status is due to reincarnation hierarchy. So a woman is in her previous life has being a man who makes a mistake"*(participant 2, 19:32).

The analysis of the collected data shows that the interviewed organizations (Nafso and Villuthu) understand this legal, cultural and political's structure that constrain women's livelihoods and empowerment. These NGOs actively promote women's rights, protection, and recognition, and they conduct advocacy work, research, and organize congresses where government authorities are invited to participate.

In the case of Villuavithu, efforts are directed towards human rights advocacy, social denounce to promote women's participation and empowerment. Their advocacy work encompasses unveiling the *"structural historic discrimination"*(Participant 3, 04:46). Besides this, they also engaged with elaborating recommendations for the government, and demanding gender-sensitive policies: *"one of our advocacy*



*efforts, we rallied the network, around 20,000 women got together and demanded the state thing, these are the recommendations that we are putting forward (...)* (Participant 3)

In respect of Nafso's program to foster women's organization is twofold. The organization is focused on women's political empowerment and financial independence. *"to address all these issues, economic social, political and other related issues, we are working in two aspects one is to empower the women as well as provide some economic development, economic assistance for their livelihood, (Participant 1, 33:39).* The advocacy work encompasses sign petitions, collecting signatures, and inviting politicians for dialogue to get the attention of the media from the people from the government. Evidence suggests that NAFSO aims to challenge power structures, organizing processes, mobilizing process, and involving women in the political dimension. They have created several working groups that include leaders, academics, youth, and other civil society.

## **6.4 Challenges**

Challenges faced by Ngo's in implementing their initiatives unveil the heavyweight of Hindu-patriarchal beliefs of the society.

In the case of PARCIC, it was reported that the main challenge was that women were not expected to be economically independent. The caste system remains deeply rooted, and women were reluctant to manipulate the fish. Parcic gave training in making high-quality dried fish and eliminating the deficiencies of manufacturing. This organization invited retired professional fisherman from Japan to train women how to manipulate the fish with hygienic methods, ensure product quality as well as develop new sales channels. A striking fact is how these organizations assist these women, encouraged them to touch the fish by participating in the training. According to the report mindset of women began to change once the business took off. Findings suggest that when these Tamil women saw other women manipulating the fish, and they saw the benefits and success, their ideologies became more flexible.

Community resistance towards gender equality and powersharing has been identified and represents a challenge for women's empowerment: *" we go to talk with men about rights or training. This male group doesn't like women getting the training, she's more independent. She's not listening to me. This kind of complaints we get from all the sectors(..)* (Participant 4, 04:04).

*"Because, in a fisheries cooperative societies, it is only the men, only the main other members. And there is no tradition in many parts of the North that women engage in these types of activities, organizing (...)* (Participant 1).

Nafso addressed this issue by providing promoting cooperation between the Women's Federation and fishermen societies federation cooperative in the North: *Men realize that women are having some power, and having abilities, and they want to exploit that, they want to get the capacities into the cycles so that they will allow them to come in, they will allow them to engage. Now, they are suggesting that they have to speak at the meetings and they are allowing them to be (Participant 1, 1:34:35)*

Highly interesting was the response of Participant 4 when asked how they dealt with this complexity. Participant 4 reported that they include men in the debate, encourage them to rethink their masculinity.

Regarding NAFSO, the participants declared that the major shortages are limitations in providing material assistance. Due to the insufficient funds to assist women, there is a challenge in deciding who gets the assistance and a certain level of competition among women.

Another challenge reported by NAFSO is political patronage, where government authorities want to get involved and benefit specific individuals over others. Participant 1 reported that *the government may be having some, you know, biases, they wanted to provide some assistance to those women with their own biases, maybe some kind of you know, various type of sexual rights and so on*. When asked about the lessons learned, it was noticeable the mistrust towards the government *“the other thing that we learned from this is that how to do evasion from the government officials and how to get their support shortly, very carefully to overcome these issues with their capacities there are limits how we get the involvement of government officials also another ( Participant 1, 1:55:03)*.

# CHAPTER VII: CONCLUSIONS

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The key core of my thesis has been to investigate gender power relations in post-conflict interventions by analyzing the specific case of Northern Sri Lankan widows. Particularly, I have attempted to examine how patriarchy intertwined with the caste system determines women's capability to rebuild their livelihoods in a highly sensitive environment as post-conflict. The principal objective of this study is to explore measures and strategies adopted by NGOs that support widows in the fishery sector, a particularly vulnerable group. Accordingly, the main research question: How can NGOs' interventions better contribute to gender transformation and women empowerment of the Tamil war widows in the small-scale fishery sector of the Northern Province of Sri Lanka? was formulated. I have conducted the research applying the sustainable livelihoods approach, which assists in dissecting livelihoods assets (physical, financial, and so forth), the overarching institutional landscape (government policies, customary laws, etc), and livelihood outcomes. Considering that gender and power are pressing dimensions, I have combined this analysis with feminist political ecology that further explores gender power relations and gives account to the caste element. Additionally, I have used literature on peacebuilding and gender to capture the radical societal transformation and understand the particular vulnerabilities of a post-conflict scenario.

To answer the main research question, I began with the exploration of how social stratification (gender and caste) influences the fishery communities of Northern Sri Lanka (sub-question 1). The analysis indicates that Sri Lankan Northern Province upholds a rigid system where gender, caste intersect with patriarchy resulting in the perpetuation of gender discrimination practices. These beliefs are influenced by the religious rules, resulting in traditional practices, which are deeply rooted in the society, and therefore, transforming these represents a big challenge (Seneviratne and Currie, 1994). These practices are detrimental for widows, who are expelled from the public sphere and whose vulnerabilities are exacerbated. Sri Lankan women enjoy high status compared to the rest of South Asia, and the country has been praised for its achievements towards gender equality (ADB, 2018). Yet, gender ideology still prevails and hinders the empowerment of women and the development of their full potential (Guawardene, 2015, Asian Development Bank, 1999). Even when women are employed, these are expected to fulfill the domestic duties along with the professional career (Herath, 2015). Therefore, gender needs still to be mainstreamed into the national or local planning process (Weib, 2018). The gendered socialization in the education system reflects and helps reinforce the prevailing power relations (Kouithan, 2018). Thus, Sri Lankan Tamil women continue to be portrayed as the reproducers, nurturers, and transmitters of the traditional culture and nation (DeAlwis, 2000). Then, it is evident that the social construction of male breadwinners and the subordinate status of women shape and reflect attitudes in the family, community, and state organs. Assumptions and attitudes derived from the traditional gender ideologies adversely impact women whose lives and opportunities are highly constrained and limited (JICA 2010). Women are not encouraged to challenge the patriarchal system and reinforce through the

educational system gender division which in turn, imbalances vocational-related training and reduces their life chances in the labor force (JICA,2010). As a result, women are concentrated in non-paid works working inside the household, while men are more involved in outside home works (Hart, 2014). Thus, the labor market in Sri Lanka is seen as a major source of gender inequality, depriving women of their equal rights and opportunities to obtain remunerative employment (Gunawardene, 2015).

Subquestion 2 aims to analyze how the conflict transformed gender roles. The conflict appeared to have created significant spaces for women, and seemingly gender equality gained a momentum. Women, who were relegated in the private sphere, challenged the prevailing patriarchal/ caste system by incorporating in the LTTE forces, labor market, and by participating in mass mobilizations for justice. However, these gains have been limited and not been translated into a considerable transformation and advancement towards gender equality. Gender roles have resurfaced, and the momentum brought by the war has not been capitalized. Evidence from the literature and the information gathered during the data analysis has revealed that gender discrimination has been reinforced and violence against women has been significant. Sri Lankan Tamil widows continue to suffer gender-based violence, restricted access to the labor market, restricted participation in political and social life. The customary laws continue preventing these women from livelihood assets ownership. These all result in placing widows in a rather challenging position for their survival. The analysis indicates that although caste and patriarchal systems long preceded the war, there appeared not only unaltered but represent the main contributors to women marginalization in post-conflict Sri Lanka and deterrents of gender equality. In this line, Vithanagama (2018) argues that the economic distress produced by the war has forced women to engage in income-generating activities. Yet, the rationale behind this is to survive, rather than a political awareness. This was confirmed in my research study as well, as participant 4 stated that entering the labor market as means to sustain their relatives but it did not mean to break the gender roles stereotypes. *“ but this doesn't mean as breaking gender stereotype, but it's based on the economic yeah she's alone she needs money, but the women do not have any economic support. So that's when they are coming. It's not breaking the gender stereotypes..*

Regarding what challenges and concerns of Tamil war-affected widows were in the small-scale fishery sector were ( sub-question 3) I intended to explore the specific particularities of the fishing sector. The analysis of Northern communities has disclosed a wide range of vulnerabilities of the fisheries. The conflicts, the Tsunami, Indian trawlers, together with the deficient planning and management of the fisheries have created a very difficult environment for local livelihoods. Destruction of livelihood assets, restricted access to the sea, poor infrastructure have been detected to be major impediments for local fishers. Tamil war-widows are not only affected by these conditions, but also by the intrinsic patriarchal system. Findings point out that the fisheries are deeply ingrained in social, cultural, and political processes. The conception of fisheries being a male domain fails to include women and recognize their work. The work carried out by women is considered to be part of their household chores. Due to this,

women working in this sector do receive less income, spend long hours working, and hardly participate in policymaking.

The information above serves to understand the situation of war widows, how gender roles influence women's place in the community, and how these have been transformed in the course of the conflict and post-conflict. This knowledge is highly relevant to answer the main research question about how NGO interventions could better contribute to gender transformation and women empowerment of the Tamil war widows in the small-scale fishery sector of the Northern Province of Sri Lanka. The data findings suggest that NGO's initiatives are holistically supporting women's empowerment through different programs. Ngo's focusing on women, provide psychological assistance for women dealing with trauma, promoting livelihood programs and capacity building to assist women in rebuilding their livelihoods, providing training and developing their skills to be economically independent. Villuthu and Nafso, the interviewed NGOs encourage women to participate in the social, political domain, while at the same time advocate for women's rights and human rights protection. The assistance provided to women to meet their social, psychological, economic, and well-being needs has exceeded my expectations and has contributed to women's ownership of the sociopolitical and economic dimensions. Considering that the central government has been criticized for its deficient efforts to assist northern communities, and more in particular widows, I believe the case of Sri Lanka is illustrative of how grassroots initiatives fulfill the duties of the government. I consider that these NGOs are the driving agents of peace, human rights protection, and sustainable development.

## 7.2 Discussion and recommendations

When assessing the effectiveness of the programs and strategies aiming at Tamil women's empowerment, It was highly significant to find how interventions strive to challenge the traditional patriarchal system by creating spaces for women's political representation. NGOs also draw attention to palliate community's resistance towards gender equality and direct their efforts to include men in the discussion and encourage them to reflect on their masculinities. I believe these measures contribute to gender equality and the foundation of democratic relationships between men and women. However, in my research, I have not found any strategy that addresses the caste-based power imbalances. As mentioned before, Tamil widows' negative stigma derives from the Hindu beliefs and caste/Tamil culture is a very important element that justifies these women's marginalization. I would recommend that Ngo's should also develop strategies, measures, and platforms where these beliefs are being discussed and questioned. These strategies should include the community, where women and men reflect on the impact of these practices and jointly discuss potential solutions. Ngo's should encourage the abolition of this traditional custom which is detrimental not only for women but for the community's well-being.

### 7.3 Societal Relevance Of The Study

Lessons learned from these experiences highlight the need for directing efforts towards gender transformation. Thus, strategies to further challenge the existing systematic discrimination and stimulate gender transformation roles have been very scarce. Nafso workers highlighted their achievement of creating a space for women and men in the political and decision-making arena. I believe this is an initiative that marks the way forward. However, I consider that a meaningful transformation of masculinities and femininities are both equally indispensable to achieve gender equality. When analyzing the strategies of the NGOs, I found that men are rarely given a platform to discuss their issues, and share experiences. A particularly interesting issue is how drugs are allegedly being supplied by the army and how this resulted in drug abuse increase, which has pushed women to take the headship of the household. The usage of drugs during conflict and after as a measure to deal with trauma was not new to me, but it was beyond my imagination the magnitude of the concern. Practically, although these women are not widows, they still carry the burden of being breadwinners and responsible for household chores. The data analysis displayed the increase of drug abuse and gender-based violence in the North. I interpret this data as the outcome of men not being able to express their emotions and being unable to deal with the trauma, which is an issue deriving from the expected gender role. Apart from this, women are targeted in microcredit programs, which may conflict with men's expected role as "breadwinner" and head of the house. This information points out the urgency to direct efforts to assist men dealing with the legacy of the war, and their trauma. This might help reduce insecurity and contribute to the overall healing of the community.

Additionally, given the importance of reflecting and deconstructing the traditional gender roles and challenge the prevailing gender discrimination, I concur that spaces for men are required to further challenge patriarchy and achieve a more inclusive and just society. Men and women's decisions and behaviors' are profoundly shaped by rigid traditions and cultural norms, which in turn perpetuate power imbalances<sup>47</sup>. Thus, drawing attention to cultural traditions to redress power asymmetries is pivotal to the empowerment agenda (Cheldelin and Mutisi, 2016). This research has demonstrated that the social stigma on widows is a key contributor to women's constant battle for economic stability, physical safety, and livelihood possibilities. Broadening the discussion about how gender norms affect both women and men may allow us to better understanding how gender roles shape their lives and seek more effective ways to encourage men and women to engage in the conversation. Nevertheless, I recognize that NGOs might have limited capacity to transform social structures, and this should be conducted by all the institutions, government policies to challenge the traditional gender roles.

Apart from this, the conceptualization of women's empowerment and how this concept is framed is very significant. I argue that the way gender equality is understood influences the process of women's

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<sup>47</sup> Men, Masculinities, and Changing Power: A Discussion Paper on Engaging Men in Gender Equality From Beijing 1995 to 2015

empowerment. Gender equality is not attained to women solely, but this requires the commitment and participation of society as a whole. Yet, it has been seen that in many cases, including Sri Lanka many gender development programs still uphold the conventional gender roles and portray women as the caregivers and the assistance in line with their traditional social expectations (Lasksham, 2018). Thus, a gender-sensitive approach within the framework is required to better address women's necessities, aspirations, and needs, and break down the traditional gender norms. Looking at the prevalent cultural gender ideologies requires deconstructing gender and exploring how cultural, social norms influence, constrains, and order social institutions and individuals in day-to-day life (Degi Mount, 2016). How to capitalize the momentum gained during the conflict to broaden spaces for women in peacebuilding remains a challenge.

In contrast to the policies and measures articulated by the UN in the peace-building process for women's protection, the Sri Lankan government has seemed to fail in fulfilling these. Sri Lankan authorities have not made enough advancement to protect women's rights (Gunawardene, 2016). Women working outside their households are suffering from exploitative policies and low wages that further restrict their means of life. In addition, discriminatory practices based on ethnicity have been found, which contributes to Tamil women's marginalization and vulnerability. Governments and institutions need to include gender in all the stages, decision-making policies, and strategies and to guarantee their protection.

In line with this, The Sri Lankan government needs to conduct a meaningful transitional justice that includes a legal framework inclusive of all minorities, all being represented in the government bodies, and work towards the reconciliation of the country (Crisis Group, 2017). Evidence has demonstrated that government policies for community reconciliation have met several challenges. The government has heavily invested in physical infrastructure (Kanagaratham, 2019). Yet, efforts to address the underlying root causes and promote sustainable conflict transformations have been scarce (Jabbar and Sajeetha, 2014). The findings indicate that the prevailing discriminatory practices by the Sri Lankan authorities towards Tamils put at stake the foundation of sustainable peace and development. Informants have argued that actions for reconciliation and address of root causes of the conflict remain neglected. During the interviews, participants stated that there has been no political will to give a state-centered response for conflict-affected people. Tamil population remains marginalized, oppressed, and continuously neglected by the government. Considering the history of political patronage of the central government in combination with the dire situation of the Tamil population, this might plant the seed for a renewed relapse of conflict. As Devotta (2005) argues, when minority communities are being marginalized, tensions emerge, that in turn, undermines the state's ability to function and cause distrust among those diminished towards the state's institutions. Therefore, it is pressing to execute reconciliation programs for long-term peace.

In a conclusion, challenging gender norms and the patriarchal system is a long-term process that requires the involvement of all social bodies and institutions, ranging from education, government policies to individuals' perceptions and construction of masculinities and femininities. The way people are assimilated in the socialization process needs to undergo a structural reform and demands specific gender policies to advance towards gender equality and human rights protection. In the case of Sri Lanka, evidence has demonstrated that organizations involved in assisting Tamil widows have little space for maneuver, due to the deficient support from local and government authorities. I think that real measures should be taken to protect women's rights. It is undoubtedly true that accepting the United Nations and the Committee's acts against discrimination against women means taking a step forward. However, there is a risk that these acts will remain mere cosmetic changes if they are not incorporated into the country's institutions, and a gender vision is promoted within them as well as by educational, legislative, legal, and educational and institutional personnel. Changing attitudes, behaviors, and the underlying patriarchal system requires revising the gendered socialization, which plays a key role in the configuration of gender stereotypes. In this sense, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2012)<sup>48</sup> reflection on gendered socialization and claimed women education is based on their expected gender roles *"Because I am female, I am expected to aspire to marriage. I am expected to make my life choices always keeping in mind that marriage is the most important. Now, marriage can be a good thing. It can be a source of joy and love and mutual support, but why do we teach girls to aspire to marriage and we don't teach boys the same?"*

I think reflecting on this question, why there is a differential socialization and how it could be changed is the starting point to rethink on gender roles, transform structures to achieve gender equality and lasting peace.

Last, I believe this investigation might help development practitioners and livelihood assistance workers to better consider gender-specific vulnerabilities, experiences, and ambitions, which hopefully, might bring more adjusted programs aiming at women. The findings presented here provide a starting point for further examination of livelihoods recovery within a peacebuilding framework from a gender perspective. Many Non-governmental organizations are increasingly gaining attention and are looked upon as alternative agencies in promoting awareness, change, and development in society. The present study aims to contribute to the discussion on how interventions could better reach women affected by war and explores how cultural and gender norms constrain their livelihoods. This is key information to design effective programs for assisting and supporting women in these scenarios

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<sup>48</sup>Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2012): We should all be feminists presented as a TED talk given in the United Kingdom at TEDxEuston, in 2012. Retrieved from: <https://www.ted.com/search?q=We+should+all+be+feminists>



## 7.4 ACADEMIC RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

In my study, I employed the sustainable livelihood framework in order to analyze how Ngo's working with Tamil women address their vulnerabilities, access to livelihood assets, and how they respond to livelihood structures and processes. SLA provides an alternative to the modernization thinking, which did not take into account local perspectives and vulnerability was understood in terms of income. SLA provided a more holistic perspective of the local environment, vulnerability context and better understanding of how people make a living. SLA has been very useful in understanding what livelihoods consist of, and outlying, dissecting all the elements to understand women's livelihood in fishery communities. This approach helped me understand what vulnerability context is, and how the combination of hazards, risks creates a vulnerable situation for women. Although this framework has become dominant, two major limitations have been identified. SLA fails to capture gender power relations and the societal transformations in post-conflict settings. In my thesis, the Sri Lankan case highlights that elements of culture (caste/Hindu) together with patriarchal system are two significant elements that constrain women's livelihood. I attempted to apply peacebuilding literature and feminist political ecology to better address these shortcomings. I conclude that inserting these two additional theories have contributed to the understanding of women's vulnerabilities and power relations in a disaster setting, and have complemented SLA framework.

First, the literature on peacebuilding and gender helped gain knowledge on transformations of power relations in post-conflict and the specific vulnerabilities of women. The literature review on this issue highlights the importance of securing and integrating women's economic, social, and political rights in post-conflict interventions. In this respect, my study shows how the existing power arrangements further constrain and push women into poverty, by limiting their access, control, and participation in the livelihood recovery process. Besides this, my study may contribute to a better understanding of women's specific particularities in post-war. Women's vulnerabilities are shaped by their status in society and many social categories have a role in placing women in vulnerable situations. My study specifically focuses on the caste/Tamil culture, and how Hindu practices further reinforce gender disparities. Literature review on gender and caste highlighted that the gendered experiences of war have been heterogeneous. Minorities including Tamil women have significantly experienced violence and sexual abuse in comparison to other women. Understanding the heterogeneity of experiences is fundamental to better address women's concerns in war and post-war communities and broaden the discussion of how peacebuilding efforts could better enhance women's empowerment. I believe that peacebuilding and gender analysis has contributed to SLA, to better examine the vulnerabilities of women in a disaster setting and to capture the gender role transformations that have an impact on the structures and processes of livelihoods, and in turn, determines the accessibility and means of living of Tamil widows in Northern Sri Lanka.

One of the major difficulties of this approach is that it is very complex, and since all the elements and dimensions are interlinked, gender power relations might be diluted and not properly addressed. The case of Sri Lanka poses a challenge when analyzing the vulnerability context: gender power relations, institutional environment deeply ingrained in the state and local institutions, the outcome of the war, and the particular vulnerabilities of the fishery sector. By applying feminist political ecology, I intentionally bring to the forefront gender and power relations, and I could properly examine how different social categories (caste, gender) influence the livelihoods of women affected by war. This approach has contributed to SLA by specifically exploring gender power asymmetries in accessing to resources, political/decision-making arena, constraints in goods ownerships. FPE has unveiled how patriarchy, ethnicity and caste influence women's livelihoods and in this way, has complemented SLA by addressing gender power relations. My case demonstrates that gender and caste play a key role in determining who can access to resources, therefore the combination of SLA and FPE is highly beneficial.

In conclusion, FPE and peacebuilding literature complement SLA and help address gender power relations, better understand specific vulnerabilities as the outcome of a war, gender transformations that impact the access, control of women's livelihoods.

## **7.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

Due to the limitations of a master thesis research (limited word account, resources), and the ongoing worldwide pandemic with covid-19 the research has met several limitations concerning obtaining data. The challenge for future studies will be to include in the analysis the natural environment. A significant number of studies have explored the roles of environmental factors as key motivating sources of conflict and as catalysts to escalate and sustain conflicts (Young and Goldman, 2015). Given the pressing urgency of global warming and scarcity of goods, analysis of the usage of natural resources will provide important information about people's livelihoods and constraints. How natural resources have been affected, manipulated during the war and their degradation may provide essential information for livelihood reconstruction within peacebuilding.

Another challenge for future research is the analysis of the political economy of war. I first attempted to integrate this approach into my thesis. Nonetheless, it did not contribute to understanding women's affected by war and gender power relations. That is the reason why I decided to exclude it. However, I believe that this framework would help understand how war economies are transformed and shape people's vulnerabilities in the course of the conflict. The nature of the political economy of the war is to examine the interaction of power; hence the political sphere with the economic processes of society, and this is reflected in the distribution of power and access to resources (Collinson, 2003). How the distribution of power and wealth is affected during conflict has significant implications for relief practitioners'. Understanding how power has been shaped during war and transformation will minimize its

negative impact, reduce the manipulation of relief, identify peace spoilers and increase security (LeBillon, Macrae, Leader and East, 2000).

Apart from this, my thesis solely focuses on the very particular vulnerabilities of widows in the fisheries. For the post-conflict and peacebuilding process would be advisable to consider other types of categories. Ex-combatants are an example of other categories of women that should be explored .. These women have transgressed the conventional gender norms by participating in the armed conflict. Yet, in many cases, these remain ostracized and marginalized. This factor puts in jeopardy the peacebuilding process and lasting peace. Many studies have highlighted the difficulties of these women in reintegrating and reconstructing their lives. Analysis of what is failing in the process of Demilitarization, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) and detecting the pitfalls that prevent women from actively being part of the society and constrains in their livelihoods would be an interesting investigation. Following this, I believe studying how different social categories impact women's livelihoods would be advisable. When reading and exploring women's narratives on their livelihoods, and how these are constrained, a recurrent question that came to my mind was how sexual identity affects women's livelihoods. The narratives and explorations of women automatically assume women's experiences from a hetero-normative standpoint. I find it urgent to broaden our understanding capacity of experiences, and include the particularities of women and men that have a different sexual orientation and how these affect their participation in society and means of life.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

89

The aim of this thesis was to analyze conflict settings. This case study all widows working in Northern Province consequences of the war, but also the caste system that restrict their access to resources. I examine how NGOs could better assist women in livelihood recovery in post-war Sri Lanka. I explore how NGOs could better address Sri Lankan Tamil women in the North not only suffer from the consequences of the war but also make a living in the fisheries due to the patriarchal and control over resources. I examine how NGOs understand their limitations to sustain a living by applying sustainable livelihood approach. This framework is employed to holistically explore the lives of the poor and better understand the local dynamics. However, due to the limitations of SLA, that fails to capture gender power relations in an unstable context I apply Feminist political ecology in combination with peacebuilding and gender literature to overcome these limitations and better capture the vulnerabilities of these women. On one side, Feminist Political ecology allows investigating power gender relations taking into account caste. On the other, peacebuilding and gender, contribute to the understanding of gender transformation after war, and the particular vulnerabilities of Tamil women.

In the first chapter, I discuss sustainable livelihood approach, feminist political ecology, peacebuilding and gender, which provides knowledge on these issues.

In the second chapter, I provide detailed information about Sri Lankan society, I explore the caste system, and how gender relations and caste place women in a subordinated place in the society.

In the third chapter, I review Sri Lankan conflict and the implications of the aftermath of the war. Additionally, I analyze the post-conflict process and the remaining challenges. In this chapter I also describe the implications of the war on women and how gender roles have been shaped in the Northern Tamil community. Chapter four offers an overview of the fisheries in Sri Lanka and the particular vulnerabilities related to their livelihoods, conflict, tsunami and external factors as Indian trawlers.

Findings reveal that NGOs have strategically understood women's complexities in this context, offer a wide range of assistance to these women: training, psychological assistance, and so forth. In fact, NGOs have facilitated women's access to political and decision making tables by creating platforms where they can voice their particular issues. Moreover, NGOs challenge the patriarchal system by promoting men and

women's joint committees. However, efforts to challenge the caste system, which ostracizes Tamil widows have not been found and this remains a challenge.

The academic contribution of this thesis is that tries to understand the gender role transformation and urges to include gender in the provision of post-conflict and peacebuilding. The academic relevance is that I tried to measure the effectiveness of applying SLA in combination with feminist political ecology and gender and peacebuilding literature to better address women's vulnerabilities. My thesis suggest that the combination of these theories have resulted in a better understanding women's complexities in post war scenarios and gender role transformations.

# ANNEXES

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## 1) Template of the questions for Interviews

### A) Women empowerment and gender role transformation in the society in post-conflict settings and reconstruction initiatives. Gender roles

This theme is directly connected with the sub question: How the conflict-affected gender roles in Northern Sri Lanka? And what are the challenges and concerns of Tamil war-affected widows in the small-scale fishery sector?

Information about how NGOs engage with women empowerment how they perceive women empowerment, what are the realities and dynamics in the community; how they carry out strategies taking into account the specific vulnerabilities in a difficult context: Gender roles, gender transformation.

Questions:

- How would you define women empowerment?
- In your opinion, how do you think the conflict and tsunami impacted on gender roles?
- Till what extend do you believe religious Hindu beliefs play a role in women's performance in the fishery sector?
- How would you define gender roles in the fishing community? Which are the main vulnerabilities of war-affected women in the fishery sector?
- How do your interventions' deal with the negative social stigma of women affected by war?
- How did your organization deal with the legacy of war and Hindu beliefs when assisting women?
- Do you think there is a resistance towards women empowerment by the community? How do your interventions navigate in this situation?
- In which way does your project engage with gender role transformation of the community?
- How do you think the initiative has impacted on the lives of women affected by war in fishing communities?
- Which elements would you identify as remaining constraints for widowed women in the fishing sector?
- How do you think the initiatives have impacted on the gender roles of the community?

### B) Livelihoods' reconstruction with a gender lens

Gather information about how the initiatives were carried out, the difficulties of implementing strategies to build sustainable livelihoods for war affected women in the small scale fishery sector

Understanding the interventions of NGO, closely linked with the main questions, How can NGOs interventions better contribute to gender role transformation of the Tamil war widows in the small-scale fishery sector of the Northern Province of Sri Lanka?

- Would you consider women empowerment an Import key for livelihood reconstruction?
- How do you apply gender lens in livelihood approach interventions? What kind of strategies do you employ for women empowerment?
- What challenges did you find when implementing a gender-sensitive livelihood intervention in the fishery? How did you overcome such difficulties?
- Do you think women's economic empowerment has influenced or changed the fishery community's gender relations?
- How would you evaluate your interventions? What are the lessons learned from the project?
- In your opinion, what changes are still needed in order to better execute gender-sensitive interventions for livelihood reconstruction in Sri Lanka?

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