Making Meaning
of
Meaning-Making

A Case Study of
Feminist Research Methodology
in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

While women-related (WR) research has proliferated in Sri Lanka since 1975, research focusing on such literature and on research methodology is limited. My research concentrates on the theoretical frameworks, ontological and epistemological standpoints, methods, politics and ethics that constitute WR research methodology in Sri Lanka. In effect, it considers the ways in which researchers extract / construct meanings to fulfil feminist objectives in research. Consequently, the work covers the epistemological gap in methodology within local Women's Studies; and enriches international research by highlighting the Sri Lankan situation through being generalisable to wider theoretical objectives.

Women-relatedness of research is posited as a paradigmatic shift in knowledge-making within which research activism takes place. The umbrella concept and materiality of WR research methodology is case studied through constituent case studies of method, ontology, epistemology, theory, and politics / ethics. This involves conceptualising / engaging with the particularities of Sri Lankan ontological politics; an epistemology of gender that originates from a sense of being / doing; the method of literature reviewing as an epistemic project; theory on methodology as epistemology and feminisms as a form of ethical politics.

Sri Lankan women's studies and discourse compose a somewhat abstract ontology for my research purpose, while WR research methodology is captured / constructed in research through the examination of research texts and interviews. My own methodology is founded on the principle of knowledge as a process of both discovery and construction. Analysis of research is from multiple theoretical locations and methodological intersects of positivism and postmodernism; as well as feminist standpoints, postcolonialism, and reflexivity. The ultimate aim of the study is not only conceptual unity, but also, conceptual contestation.

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PART I – How Meaning was Made by Me

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ABREVIATIONS

ANCL - Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd.

CBO – Community-based Organisation

CENWOR - Centre for Women's Research

FTZs - Free Trade Zones

GM – Gender Mainstreaming

INGO - International Non-Governmental Organisation

IoE – Institute of Education

JVP – Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna

LSSP - Lanka Sama Samaja Pakshaya

LTTE - Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam

NGO - Non-Governmental Organisation

SAP – Structural Adjustment Programme

SLFP – Sri Lanka Freedom Party

SSA – Social Scientists' Association

SLWNGOF - Sri Lanka Women's Non-Governmental Organisations Forum

UNCEDAW - United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women

UNP - United National Party

WERC – Women's Education and Research Centre

WMC – Women and Media Collective
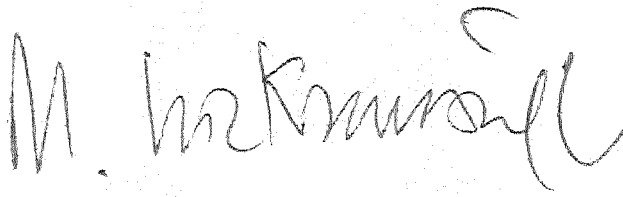
WR – Women-related

DECLARATION

I declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

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DEDICATION

For Ranil who, despite his wisecracks, has unswervingly
sustained me.

For Thatha, who is no longer there to see.

For Amma, who has from childhood motivated me to
achieve.

For England-Amma, Papa, Maya and Rashmee, who
laid the foundations.

For Y Punchi-Amma for providing the support services.

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When I tell people that my thesis is on feminist research methodology, I receive a range of responses. They span from a slight blankness at the idea of working on feminism to a horror of the boredom of working on methodology; from a straightforward grasp of methods to the incomprehension of obscurity. This usually requires further elucidation on my part as to what constitutes feminist research methodology.

This is the very reason for my thesis; since it is my intention to engage with / conceptualise the complexities of the research act. Many people have inspired, influenced, excited, assisted, supported, promoted me in this process. I would like to express my sincere appreciation for their support and contributions during the last forty-two months or so.

In particular, I would like to place on record the intellectual contributions of my respondents – researchers of women-related (WR) issues in Sri Lanka. Despite their initial diffidence about their capacity to contribute to the topic, it was their acquiescence and generous donation of time, experiences and intellectual capital that form the foundation of my work. Though political and ethical reasons prevent individual acknowledgement, many thanks (they know who they are).

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While Nyokabi Kamau has been a fellow traveller in this project, I record with sadness and consternation how three of us - friends – Kamalini Wijayatilake, Jayani Amarasiri and myself started on this journey of making meaning from our Masters in Women's Studies to our PhDs. We were supposed to motivate and mentor, support and sustain one another along the way. Yet, Kamalini is no longer with us and Jayani has succumbed to the pressures of work. Had Kamalini been with us, I have no doubt that she would have been the one to nourish my intellect, allay my insecurities, and strengthen my hand. It has thus been a lonely stretch of work during the last three years, and the completion of my PhD is a bittersweet achievement.

I am also exceedingly grateful to my mother Shiranee, and my aunt Radha for providing encouragement and support during these months.

Finally, I would like to express my love and gratitude to Ranil, my partner / husband, for tolerating, pressurising, promoting and sustaining me through this project.

Maithree Wickramasinghe
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INTRODUCTIONS

An Introduction to the Genesis of the Research Topic

This thesis aims to look at the ways and means by which Sri Lankan researchers of WR research inhabit, engage with and represent / construct the multiple realities of women and society through research. In particular, it explores ways of making meaning for the political, ideological and ethical purposes of promoting individual and social change. However, it does so with the understanding that the possibility of representing and constructing complete knowledge of realities is highly problematic and debatable; and that the ultimate aim of social transformation is equally incomplete and relative. Given the play of subjectivity and human capacity, knowledge can only be partial and situated, rather than transcendent (Haraway, 1988), and social action conditional and pragmatic.

In Sri Lanka, as in many other countries, interest in women's rights and issues came to a head with the institution of the United Nations International Year of Women (1975) and the United Nations Decade of Women (1975 – 1985). Since then, WR research has boomed in many disciplinary directions, encompassing various interdisciplinary subjects. Yet on the whole, there has been little research that has looked specifically

at research methodology in Sri Lanka (for instance, at how Sri Lankan realities are represented / constructed in research; or at the theories or ethics of knowledge and meaning-making). An overview of women-related research literature indicated that there were few, sporadic exceptions (Goonatilake, 1985; de Alwis, 1994a; Wanasundera, 1995; Schrijvers, 1996; Bandarage, 1998; Jayatilaka, 1998; de Alwis, 2004; Emmanuel, 2006). These problematised aspects of research methodology *per se*, such as using gender frameworks or participatory methods. Literature that theorised holistically on research methodology was virtually nonexistent. One possible reason for this is that research methodology has usually been understood as research methods, and therefore of secondary importance. Many researchers were inclined to include writing on the theoretical and methodological aspects of their work as an ancillary part of other WR topics. Consequently, there has not been much critical discussion amongst researchers and writers on feminist theories or methods in Sri Lanka. Even definitions or categorisations as to what constitutes feminist / gender / women's studies[1] have yet to be discursively debated or theorised.

This may reflect a wider gap in research methodology training, especially at postgraduate level, within Sri Lankan universities. As a lecturer working within academia, it was my observation that, where given,

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[1] Women's Studies refers to the discipline while women's studies refer to studies of WR research.

methodology training tends to be basic, narrow, discipline-bound, and dated. A little before I started on my Ph.D. research forty-two months ago, a colleague from the Department of Fine Arts at the university where I teach gave a lecture on the application of scientific methods to Humanities as a 'fresh perspective' on research methodology. This seems to indicate that for him research methodology has not progressed beyond a positivist framework based on empiricism - that sees scientific knowledge as the connection between ideas and realities (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002).

Furthermore, my personal experience as a graduate student in Women's Studies in the mid-1990s, consisted of training in a methodology module that did not reflect extensive awareness of feminist research methodologies – apart from a couple of handouts (which were not discussed in class). Certainly, at the time, there was insufficient provision for even the most fundamental of methodological debates in the classroom, such as the qualitative / quantitative divide or merger, and its implications for feminisms, or the inscription of reflexivity. A colleague and I attending the programme can testify to a degree of anxiety at the time as to whether feminist research methodologies in dissertation writing (such as the inclusion of subjective experiences) would be accepted by the university hierarchy. This signifies the hegemony within academia with regard to what is deigned acceptable and legitimate as serious academic inquiry - since positivism reigns as the institutionally sanctioned methodological approach.

Yet this state of affairs belied feminist research literature that subscribed to different knowledge paradigms and approaches. These involved poststructuralism including deconstruction (Derrida, 1976) which is anti-foundationalist; which reads the social and cultural world like a text without prioritising one single reading and without fixing meaning. They also entailed social constructionism which sees people as being produced through social interactions as opposed to biological maturation or genetic interventions (Hepburn, 2006: 38 - 40).

Counter-hegemonic activity within academia such as utilising feminist research methodologies took place amidst an element of institutional uncertainty. This indicates the vulnerability of the discipline of Women's Studies and its methodologies. While some effort has been made in subsequent years for the programme concerned to rectify the situation, the application of feminist research methodologies in student research is still not considered to be of critical value by the academic establishment.

I too lacked formal training in research methodology until my PhD research. My experiences of researching and writing during the last 15 years have been governed by personal readings on the topic, and for the most part, by intuition. Intuition, which can be traced to a childhood consciousness of women's oppression, but which I cannot necessarily attribute to shocking

experiences of abuse or suppression (except for the control exerted by an overprotective father). However, I could attribute it to micropolitics (Morley, 1999), or the daily little oppressions and injustices of life. Instances that come to mind include my extended family respecting male leadership in domestic emergencies as opposed to women's contributions; the much-read children's author Enid Blyton's images of boys as being more exciting than girls; incidences of sexual harassment by a male neighbour and strangers; seclusion and exclusion due to the religious practices of purity and the cultural practices of puberty. To some extent, the resulting experiential and instinctive knowledge of gender differences, inequality and women's oppression translated themselves into part of my research methodology in my work (on women in development, feminist literary practice, gender and disaster management, and gender at the workplace). Though I have not theorised on this phenomenon and the general role of intuition in research methodology in my work, I believe it is one area of interest that requires future study.

The more I looked at WR research, the more I became interested in how research processes try to capture / compose, or rather, make meaning of the realities within the Sri Lankan context – despite postmodernist implications about the authenticity (if not the possibility) of being able to do so. Furthermore, I believe that in order to make knowledge claims both valid and authoritative (Ramazanoglu and Holland,

2002) - despite the instability of such claims - the focus on research methodology is vital. These were the main reasons why I selected this research topic. For me, research methodology consists of:

- An awareness of the unstable and often conflated multiple realities of life and researching.

- The significance attributed to constructing the evolution of knowledge on the research topic.

- The influence of the assumptions and justifications about knowledge.

- Theorisations that generalise or deconstruct research interests.

- The ethical and political inferences about research processes and the methods employed.

I am also aware that any consideration of research methodology is both a theorisation on knowledge and a theory of knowledge production (Letherby, 2003:5). Consequently, my research study is an epistemological[2] exercise. While this thesis is by no means the final word on feminist research methodology in Sri Lanka, it may well be the beginning.

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[2] This relates to theorisations of knowledge production and meaning-making.

An Introduction to the Thesis Structure and Chapters

This thesis is structured in three parts. Part I, consisting of Chapters 1 and 2, will engage with my methodology in researching WR research methodology in Sri Lanka. Part II will be a partial attempt at constructing an archaeology (Foucault, 1972) of women's studies and feminist research in the country and the epistemological inferences of such research. Part III will present a case study of research methodology in Sri Lanka; its discursive form and conceptual structure will constitute chapters of the components of research methodology.

Chapter 1 will focus on the research design and the multiple frameworks and parameters within which my work is constituted / located. My research questions will be formulated to facilitate an exploratory / theoretical study of local research from a methodological viewpoint[3]. It will be exploratory because of the general dearth of research on methodology and will argue for the use of a case study as the best approach to respond to questions of process (Mason, 2002). As far as I am aware, case studying the concept / materiality of research methodology is a new research dynamic. This involves exploring the implications of case studying research praxis (Lather, 1986; 1991; Stanley, 1990a), justifying the use of this particular theoretical framework (and others), and placing them *vis-à-vis* my

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[3] It takes into account the ontological, epistemological, theoretical, ethical, political and technical aspects of research processes.

conceptualisations of realities (ontology[4]) and my standpoints about knowledge (epistemology). It entails further the consideration of my subjectivity in terms of ideological, social and disciplinary locations as well as the ethics and politics of researching. In this endeavour, I will blend modernist[5] and postmodernist[6] perspectives, which I see as a complementary rather than a contradictory process.

In Chapter 2, I will engage with the actual research processes of making meaning, or researching methodology within the Sri Lankan context. I will introduce my methods of inquiry and the methodological issues surrounding their usage. These include the reasons for incorporating a literature review of feminist research methodology[7] and a general overview of women-related research[8] in the island. Clarifications about reading international literature on feminist research methodology will also be made at this juncture. I will then discuss the methodological issues originating from textual analysis and interviewing. These include the power dynamics of interviewing colleagues and the use of research literature as examples, illustrations and representations of realities (Mason, 2002). Furthermore, reference will be made to

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[4] Ontology refers to understandings of the nature / perception of realities.

[5] Modernism is based on the Enlightenment traditions of positivism, empiricism and realism.

[6] If I am to essentialise postmodernism through definition, then, a view of the world as multiple, anti-foundational, fragmented, discontinuous, and based on the discursive.

[7] Literature on methodology with stated feminist ideological leanings.

[8] This refers to literature on women as a subject.

the pilot project that was undertaken as part of the PhD process and the lessons learned. Finally, the chapter will involve looking at the simultaneous processes of data analysis and writing up - in terms of developing a methodological matrix that has its origins in local discourses[9] (Foucault, 1972), as well as international debates.

Part II is concerned with some of the ontological and epistemological concerns of my research project. Chapter 3 will promote an archaeology of WR research in the country taking Foucault's (*ibid.*) methodology as a starting point. As part of a modernist project, I trace and frame the literature on women from 1975 to the present day, against the background in which research takes place (a brief excursion will be made to establish that there were waves of writing on WR issues before 1975). I will discuss some of the dominant historical and political trends of the last 30 years such as economic liberalisation and development initiatives from 1977 onwards, the North East conflict in the country spanning over 25 years and the Asian tsunami of 2004. Furthermore, I will situate WR research within women's activism in the country, especially with regard to the institutionalisation of women's movements into non-governmental organisations (NGOs)[10]. There will be a

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[9] Discourse incorporates speech, writing, knowledge practices; it is a way of representing knowledge about a particular topic at a given time.

[10] NGOs (as opposed to the State) are local organisations that undertake micro-level activities relating to welfare, development, politics, knowledge, credit and income generation (usually with foreign funding).

profiling of researchers, as well as an indication of the on-the-ground politics and economics of research production, including research determinants such as language, organisations, dissemination, and funding.

In Chapter 4, I will situate WR research in Sri Lanka in terms of an overarching epistemic frame. I will thus change my focus from the external factors relating to knowledge production to consider the epistemological significance of WR research. In doing so I will propose conceptualising the awareness of and deliberation on women in research processes as a new paradigm in knowledge. This will challenge the existing notions of women, gender and feminism as types of research in the country. Instead, it will establish that the epistemological awareness of women offers a meta-concept that encompasses all WR research and writing. Such a paradigm will be constructed by focusing on the ways in which researchers make methodological usage of the modernist approach of constructing bipolarities - in terms of absence and presence, and activism and passivism. I will also consider the poststructuralist problems of making such an argument (for example, by pointing out the instability and conflations in such categorisations).

The chapters in Part III consist of individual case studies of aspects of research methodology in Sri Lanka. These include method (Chapter 5), ontology (Chapter 6), epistemology (Chapter 7), theory (Chapter 8) and ethics / politics (Chapter 9).

Accordingly, Chapter 5 will look at the research method of the literature review; paying attention to an aspect of research methodology that is often neglected or taken for granted. It is my argument that reviewing research literature is not a separate research activity to contextualise research; but rather, that it represents / constructs the epistemic evolution of the research subject. I will take the example of my own literature review on feminist research methodology in Sri Lanka where I consider the methodological implications of WR researching to make this argument. This includes researchers' textual notions and classifications of what constitutes WR research and a discussion of the methodological implications of empiricist, historical and cultural factors, as well as action and fusion research. I will argue that the Literature Review is the foundation on which further knowledge is generated, and should thus form a distinct epistemological project. It is also a method of legitimising and formalising feminist research methodology despite the conceptual problems of the instability, subjectivity and arbitrariness of such a modernist project. Thus the literature review will be undertaken not necessarily as a critique, but as another way of making meaning.

Chapter 6 will concentrate on ontology – but not in terms of grand conceptualisations about the nature of realities such as postmodernism or phenomenology[11]

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[11] The perspective of reality based on conscious awareness, subjective intentionality and objects.

(Harre, 2006: 220). Rather, I will focus on the minor realities or conditions of existence that impinge on and engage researchers. They are understood as a matrix of competing realities of research or ontological politics. They are a) the impetus of international influences / legal standards; b) the epistemologies of gender mainstreaming of disciplines and institutions; c) contemporaneous socio-political developments that provide local imperatives; and d) the internal personal political drive of researchers. I will argue that these ontological politics of researching are symbiotic with the epistemologies of WR research.

Chapter 7 will focus on epistemology. I will look at the concept of gender as an epistemology or theory of knowledge and argue that it is an epistemology that is based on an aspect of existence - gender. To make this point, I will identify the following ontological aspects of gender: a) gender as comparison and contrast - that is the sense of either being male or female; b) gender as a process of identification and differentiation involved in the making of identity of a woman and in 'transgendering'; c) gender as an abstract (or the translation of gender into a universal) that constitutes 'being / doing' women; d) gender as personification – when inanimate objects are considered male or female; e) gender as ideals or prototypes for future realities. It will be my central argument that these aspects of reality, or ways of doing / being gender, are also simultaneously aspects of epistemology or ways of knowing gender. These ontological aspects direct the theoretical

constructions, principles of analysis, ideological /
political objectives and specific methodologies that
constitute gender epistemology.

Another aspect of methodology – theorisation - will be
the crux of Chapter 8. I will begin by recording /
constructing and deconstructing local theoretical debates
pertaining to feminist research methodology. I will then
construct theory on methodology through interviews
with researchers. This involves the examination and
composition of feminist standpoints (Harding, 2004b)
and intersectionality (Grillo, 2006) within the Sri
Lankan epistemic community (Ramazanoglu and
Holland, 2002) of Women's Studies, and the ways in
which knowledge is situated (Haraway, 1988). Finally,
by bringing in postmodernist perspectives, I will
'unmake' my theorisations to further my underlying
argument that making meaning in research involves
adopting / adapting a fusion of modernist /
postmodernist approaches to realise the process fully.

The final Chapter, 9, will concentrate on researchers'
concerns with the political and ethical implications of
the research process in Sri Lanka. As a feminist, I
believe that politics and ethics are invariably intertwined
within the research process. I will argue that WR
research constitutes a feminist ethical politics of 'good'
and consider the problematic of its very location in
'goodness' - whether it be in altruism, democracy or
Marxism. I will also look at feminist ethics as political
strategy and action; the practical, on-the-ground

problems and the political gains accrued from such action in Sri Lanka. I will conclude this chapter by focusing on the politics / ethics involved in research methods.

Thus, the chapters of Part III will form individual case studies of the different aspects of the umbrella case study on feminist research methodology. The amalgamation of these five aspects of methodology in researching delineates a framework for methodological praxis within the Sri Lankan context in particular, and the global context in general. It must be noted that these methodological guidelines are offered, not as a concrete framework, but as methodological possibilities that would facilitate WR research to be intellectually robust and politically solid, and to withstand the criticisms that are levied against WR research - especially in Sri Lanka.

An Introduction to the Definitions and Parameters of Making Meaning

In this thesis, 'women-related' research is defined as writing by women, on women / gender / feminisms, for women and men. I will confine myself to work on Sri Lanka that is published in the English language. The rationale for this is discussed in Chapter 2.

Research and writing refer to literature identified as written by women that centre on women as a topic or standpoint of interest. These include women's issues

(such as puberty or violence against women) from feminist as well as non-feminist perspectives; and work on general issues (such as poverty / the media) from feminist and gender perspectives. Research refers to formal published research studies and writing refers to less formal books and articles.

Respondents are WR researchers who were interviewed for their viewpoints and discourses on WR research and methodology. They include researchers from academia, independent research institutions, freelance researchers, and consultant researchers[12]. For Chapter 3, I will draw on informal conversations with some of the early feminist activists and writers in the country. Despite my central interest in the work of women, I will consider two works by men as an exception, where men have collaborated with women or expressed specific feminist standpoints.

In this context, 'discourse' (Foucault, 1972:107 - 108) for the purpose of my thesis, will refer to the ideas, standpoints, theorisations and debates that are represented / constructed in research and writing, as well as those articulated by participant researchers during interviews.

'Feminism' is conceptualised as the consciousness, analysis, critique of, or any form of activism against the psychological, ideological, political, structural and

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[12] This refers to researchers who are retained to conduct consultancies and evaluations for NGOs.

micro forces of power and its transmissions that particularly affect women. Likewise, it implies the continuing promotion of alternative choices and commitment to changes for women (and men) *via* personal identities, divergent ideologies / discourses, socio-political and cultural structures / practices - locally and internationally. 'Feminisms' in the plural is utilised to convey the pluralism and contestations within feminism (Warhol and Herndl, 1997) as there is usually no singular strand of feminism adhered to in research.

'Research methodology' I take to be distinct from 'methods' (Holland and Ramazanoglu, 2002), though there is a common tendency to conflate / confuse the term methodology with methods. Unlike Harding (1987) and Letherby (2003) who see methodology as divorced from methods and epistemologies, I conceptualise methodology as constituting methods, analytical frameworks, theorisation, epistemology and ontology as well as the ethical and political considerations of researching, in a way similar to that theorised by Dunne, Pryor, and Yates (2005).

The term 'research praxis' refers to the fusion of theory and practice within the political / ethical aims of feminisms. It assumes that at least some of the stated intentions of feminist research methodology are realised in research practice and that the methodologies utilised at ground level are theorised. This is despite the epistemological and practical problems of transformative and emancipatory research (Lather, 1986;

1991; Stanley, 1990; Letherby, 2006). In fact, my thesis is an attempt at research praxis.

I understand and construct the phrases 'meaning-making' and 'making meaning' as compounded metaphors. It is a play on words, to indicate how researching research methodology also involves researching research. Making meaning refers to my own act of researching. Meaning-making is conceptualised as having multiple connotations. It refers to the general practice of researching, or the construction / representation of realities through methodology. It implies the discursive possibility not only of discovering knowledge, but also of constructing it. The phrase will be used to indicate the making of collective sense, through a formal, accepted academic process *via* the use of research methodology, for an epistemic community. Finally, it will be conceptualised as making personal sense - through the processes of personal experiences (Collins, 1990) and of assimilation at an individual psychological level.

I will use the singular pronoun 'I' to refer to myself reflexively; primarily as a feminist researcher and subliminally in terms of my other identities – notwithstanding the instability of the self. Despite the antipathy of feminists towards the collective pronoun of 'we', because of its assumptions of being male or white feminist as norms (Kramarae and Treichler, 1985), I use it in two ways. Firstly, I want to convey the implied ethos of the sisterhood (however tenuous) of feminists in

the country, since they do unite from time to time for political purposes. Secondly, I use it to indicate the work of myself and co-authors.

It is an accepted academic practice that writing on specificities other than the Anglo-American is constantly expected to qualify itself by name and location. In fact, 'Western' is taken to be the norm, while the local is expected to be clarified. While I am aware that I am writing for a global readership at this point, I will attempt, through this thesis, to challenge this hegemony. Consequently, what I refer to as the norm is the Sri Lankan context. Any references to global literature will be qualified as such.

PART ONE

How Meaning Was Made by Me

The implicit assumption guiding Part One of this thesis is that any consideration of research methodology entails investigating the frameworks and processes of making meaning. Chapter 1 will thus focus on my personal, conceptual, ontological, epistemological, theoretical, and methodological frameworks of making meaning, while Chapter 2 will investigate / construct my actual processes of making meaning.

CHAPTER ONE

MY RESEARCH METHODOLOGY I

The Frameworks of Making Meaning

This Chapter will be a reflexive process of framing and situating my thesis. Firstly, I will state the research questions that outline the conceptual parameters of my study. I will then conceptualise the methodological approach of the case study which will be my vehicle / structure to ask and answer these research questions. Next, I will turn inwards and contemplate my subjective positioning, interests and motivations for focusing on this particular topic. I will then discuss the ontological / epistemological understandings, theoretical and methodological influences, and finally the political and ethical concerns that underpin the research questions and design as a whole.

Research Questions

My research questions arose from a preliminary survey of the body of WR research in Sri Lanka, as well as the study of Wanasundera's bibliographies of research on women (1990; 1997; 2001; 2002). As noted in the Introductions, they were also hinged on my field experiences firstly as a student, and then as a teacher,

activist, consultant, and researcher in the field of gender, feminist and women's studies during the past twenty-one years.

The following research questions were designed to engage with the content, directions, relations, locations, and processes of WR research in Sri Lanka at a conceptual / discursive level and at the level of practice. One objective of my thesis was to define and locate WR research in Sri Lanka methodologically. Another was to provide more in-depth analysis of the aspects of feminist research methodology. Thus, some research questions were intended to produce descriptive and contextual information from extensive literature surveying, while other questions were formulated to provide more specific viewpoints from interviews and comprehensive examples from textual analysis.

1) What are the key theoretical frameworks / paradigms / approaches to WR research adhered to within the Sri Lankan context? How do they operate?

2) What are the key theoretical concepts adhered to in such research? How are they conceptualised?

3) How do research processes generate / construct knowledge *vis-à-vis* WR research? What / who is included and what / who is left out?

4) What are the practical advantages, challenges and limitations of conceptualising / applying particular research methodologies?

5) What constitutes feminist research within the Sri Lankan research *fora* and how is it / can it be defined? Is it based on research objectives, empathy and common experiences, content, design, process, methodology, identity, political intent, accountability, other factors, or a combination of all these?

6) What are the 'disciplines' engaged in WR research and how are these issues covered in WR research?

While these questions directed the overall data generated / constructed, the data also implied sub-questions associated with these key questions. These were not consciously expressed by me during the initial stages of research; however I have referred to them in the body of the text and as part of my argument in writing up.

A Case Study of Feminist Research Methodology

The decision to adopt a case study approach in investigating / composing feminist research methodology in Sri Lanka arose from the dearth of literature on the research topic. The case study is the most appropriate approach for an exploratory study as it is designed to capture / construct the multiple facets of

the research subject anticipated by questions beginning with 'what' and 'how'. As argued by Yin (2003), the 'how' questions, in particular, pre-empt descriptive and exploratory responses. This is because the case study as an approach engages with, captures, and composes the 'multifarious phenomena that constitute the life cycle of the unit' (Cohen and Manion, 1997:106). Thus, the choice of the case study approach / framework in responding to the above research questions evolved from my interest in the case as opposed to the application of other qualitative or quantitative methods (Stake, 2005). Furthermore:

> a case study is both a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry (Stake, 2005:444).

I thus chose to interpret the case study not only as an approach of investigation but also as a psychosocial, discursive construction of the researcher. While Stake (2000:437) categorises case studies into three groups - as intrinsic, instrumental and collective, my case study of research methodology is visualised as a combination of all three. It is intrinsic due to its specificity of interest in the individual case of the Sri Lankan context (as it contextualises / theorises on research methodology in terms of the multiple, unstable, and intersecting realities of researching in Sri Lanka). It is instrumental of research methodology as a whole as it provides a methodological framework for researching within the international (and local) contexts (Conclusions). Furthermore, though it is not collective in the sense

argued by Stake (2000) of encompassing multiple cases; it is collective in terms of composing what I will go on to argue are the multiple facets of research methodology.

My conceptualisation of a case study was influenced to some extent by Yin's much cited work on case-studying, which defines the scope of the case study as:

> an empirical inquiry that investigates contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomena and context is not clearly evident (2003:13).

My thesis concurs with such a definition to the extent that I am studying a contemporary phenomenon (that of the concept and practice of research methodology) within its real-life context, in the domain[13] (Foucault, 1998) of Women's Studies in Sri Lanka. It is not possible to distinguish the boundaries of this phenomenon given the ambiguity of the parameters of women's studies. For instance, how can Women's Studies as a discipline be defined and demarcated within the universities and the NGOs? In such a context, where would gender training be placed? Who would constitute women's studies researchers as opposed to gender researchers and feminist researchers? What about grey literature - or literature that does not conform to the strict definition of research? Where is discourse located and how is it constructed? Attempting to respond to such questions convey how the phenomena studied are indistinct and perhaps even eclectic. Further, any efforts

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[13] This is inclusive of formal and informal knowledge.

at constructing boundaries would always be subjective. Thus, my work differs from Yin's (2003) strict definition of an empirical study; for it combined interviews with textual exploration, and is therefore an amalgamation of both conceptual and empirical investigations. This is because my research questions have theoretical as well as material implications. Not only do they operate at the theoretical and discursive level, but they also require material data generation.

Case Studies within a Case Study

Consequently, I have used the case-study strategy in a less traditional way, as I have not case-studied a single case, comprising a location or historical event or political action; or even case-studied people. Rather, following the feminist tradition of innovative case-studying as discussed by Reinharz (1992), my use of case study is at both the conceptual and material levels. I have case studied the concept and practice of feminist research methodology in Sri Lanka - in other words, praxis (Lather, 1986; 1991; Stanley, 1990), at macro and micro levels. Within the macro case study of research methodology, I have explored / constructed the specific methodological aspects of research methodology such as theory, ontology, epistemology, method, and politics / ethics. Accordingly, I have studied case studies within a case study. The collective case studies constitute aspects of research methodology - within the primary case study of research methodology. As such, these aspects themselves are concepts and parts of practice and do not represent aspects of a singular case in the conventional

sense. Furthermore, they were not selected on the basis of Yin's (2003) logic of replication; but rather, as an exploratory study to showcase the various aspects or facets.

Deem and Brehony (1994) have argued that models of case study research that plot a series of stages in a linear fashion are problematic. This is because research processes prove to be less logical, and more 'complex and multi-linear' or interactive, depending on the researcher's view / engagement with the condition and progression of realities (1994:160). To illustrate the point, I consider my own research process, which involved a crisscross of research activities framed by the consecutive deadlines associated with PhD work. Interviewing for the pilot project provided data for the chapters on background and literature overview; the literature overview provided data for the background and triangulated[14] the data from the interviews. Analyses of interviews and texts coincided with writing up. Writing up has inspired different theoretical frameworks to the ones originally conceptualised. Thus, these research activities were not always executed in a linear fashion, but sometimes simultaneously, and interchangeably.

The case study of aspects of research methodology has strengthened my arguments on what I define as feminist research methodology - as signifying ontology,

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[14] Even though, triangulation was not a particular objective of my research methodology as I believe research to be a combined process of discovery and construction.

epistemology, theorisations, ethics and politics as well as method. At the same time, it has questioned the stability of such a definition, because of the numerous linkages, overlaps, symbioses, and contradictions amongst these aspects of methodology that were composed / illustrated through the process. I do not see a contradiction in the practice of simultaneously defining and deconstructing my research topic. In fact, I propose that such an exercise results in different levels and dimensions of making meaning.

Before proceeding further, in the interests of reflexivity, I need to bare / compose my methodological positionings. Consequently, I will consider the possible influences, concepts, politics, values and theories that I, both consciously, as well as unconsciously, brought into the research process. These are dependent on a number of factors. They involve the practicalities of the ground situation and the issues and debates pertaining to research methodology that emanate from Sri Lankan research praxis. The role of the researcher - as a fragmented subject with a history of life experiences, personal / theoretical interests and preferences is equally significant, as are the frameworks and parameters of the PhD research process imposed by the Institute of Education (University of London) and my own life experiences during this time. These factors will be discussed at length during the course of this chapter and the next.

Positioning Myself in Making Meaning

My selection of the research topic was, as argued earlier, ' a result of the scarcity of research material and expertise in the area and the fact that I had not benefited from adequate formal training on research methodology *per se* in Sri Lanka. I was also personally interested in looking at the theoretical debates in feminisms - particularly the issues arising from gender, feminisms and women's research from a methodological standpoint.

Discipline and Work Roles

However, my entry into research methodology, particularly into such areas of methodological thought as theory, values, ontology, epistemology, and metaphysics is not through philosophy. Discipline-wise, my original training was in English literature under the aegis of Humanities, though subsequently nursed in the interdisciplinary domains of Women's Studies. My current training, in PhD research, was driven by the theoretical tools of education, sociology and the social sciences under formal methodological instruction at the Institute of Education and my reading on feminist research methodology. Thus, my early training in English Literature made me familiar with feminist literary theories and criticisms of varying theoretical hues (Wickramasinghe, 2002) spanning the Anglo-American tradition to postcolonialism and poststructuralism. Later, while researching for my Masters on the topic of women / gender and

development practices, I trained myself in conducting sociological research according to positivist paradigms linked to the modernist projects of Enlightenment and education. This training and subconscious conditioning in the above theoretical traditions and the disciplines of English literature and Women's Studies are central to my methodological decisions for the PhD; as will be discussed later.

Other fragments of myself that I deem to be influential in the research process include the many hats that I wear professionally - as an academic / lecturer in the Department of English (University of Kelaniya), as a researcher in women, feminist and gender studies, as a gender policy consultant, and as a wayside activist on women's issues. I believe that my multiple experiences of feminist research and activism led me to amalgamate what are considered to be disparate strands of gender evaluation research, academic work, and action research.

Conceptualising varying strands of research under a common umbrella of WR research may erase, essentialise and artificially unify differences. But it also allows for analysis that works not on categorisations but on different methodological levels. For example, take my argument of conceptualising women as a paradigm (Chapter 4), or of gender as an epistemology (Chapter 7), as opposed to categories of research.

Family

During the last few years, the PhD constantly impacted on and interplayed with how I lived my life – in fact, it defined my life. Yet, despite my intentions of being professional about the research process, there were other facets in my life that impacted on my work. These were beyond my control because of the woman that I was, am, have to be, and want to be. Some of these attained particular significance during the period under question, to the extent of shaping my research decisions. For instance, take the facts that I am the only child of a sickly mother (my father being dead); a wife to a leading politician holding public office; and a feminist friend to women more than men. As a result, the decision whether I worked on my research in London or in Colombo was dependent on my mother's state of health. The compulsion to abandon my work sporadically was a result of the vagaries of my husband's political career – such as elections and electoral victories / defeats, renovating and moving houses. A plunge into depression followed the untimely death from cancer of a close friend and colleague. Throughout the research process I was handicapped with bouts of rheumatoid arthritis and resultant backaches, neck and arm pain. Moreover, as far as the external country situation was concerned, there were many tumultuous incidents during this period. There was violence and sporadic warfare due to the raging ethnic conflict[15] in the north and east of Sri Lanka; successive elections and extrajudicial activity

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[15]This is the militarised conflict arising between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) over the demand for a separate state for the Tamil people in the North East of the country.

reflected the unstable political situation in the country and there was the unexpected human disaster of the Asian tsunami. These events, I believe, made me more sensitive to certain standpoints and approaches than others. Thus, not only were these experiences instrumental in the multiple and intersecting positionings that I adopted, but they also directed the external decisions made *vis-à-vis* my research process.

Ethnicity

There are tensions between how one conceptualises oneself and how one is perceived within the different social strata of the local context. Usually, my name signifies me socially and culturally as a Sinhala Buddhist - despite my personal convictions of multiculturalism and multi-religiosity as important ideological and political standpoints. The language (of naming) thus places me in a privileged position within the Sri Lankan context as a member of the dominant community (Watson and Maguire, 1997). Yet such social attributions of racial and religious purity and 'legitimacy' in the current context are compromised by the island's colonial traditions of Portuguese, Dutch and British rule. This has resulted in the construction of ambivalent and hybrid identities (Bhaba, 1994). Moreover, many of the country's middle / upper classes are affected by the fragmented realities of globalisation. These include opportunities for global travel and communication, as well as education and employment (differing according to racial, economic and language factors). Consequently, it may be more relevant to think

in terms of 'multibridity', rather than hybridism. I use this term to imply the multiple influences defining a person's life – of being simultaneously informed of the indigenous, as well as the global (Western, Middle Eastern, Eastern and other cultures), knowledge traditions.

Class

My position as a middle-class academic who has married into the political class of the country poses further complications. There is no doubt that I occupy a position of class privilege though I believe that my training in multiple knowledge traditions has sensitised me to this and related issues of language, education and power. Because I have access to a certain degree of symbolic power and privilege associated with politics, I am in danger of being stereotyped due to these same factors. This is not a denial (Giddens cited in Maguire, 2005:4) or distraction in class awareness. My reluctant positioning within the public view as a politician's wife (despite a deliberately low media profile and firm emphasis on an independent identity) makes me vulnerable to certain assumptions in a context where women are still primarily seen as male appendages. These same assumptions have also been a factor of discrimination against me – given the politically charged atmosphere arising from divisive party politics. To narrate an instance, despite being invited to serve on a subcommittee associated with the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Services in my independent capacity as a feminist researcher, I was subsequently dropped due

to the political pressure that was brought to bear on the Secretary to the Ministry. This is because of the insistent attribution of my husband's politics to me, confusing and erasing my own identity / individuality. While this could be a case of the personal being the political[16] - where one's choice of partner is taken to reflect personal beliefs, values and politics; an unqualified understanding of this can negate the conflicts and complications within personal relations.

Politics

Within the women's movements and feminisms in Sri Lanka, my positioning is sometimes compromised, because of the fact that I occupy the simultaneous positioning of an insider / outsider, as conceptualised by Collins (1991). On the one hand, my academic and other feminist work as a writer legitimises my ideological, political and ethical standpoints - within professional and academic contexts. I also network with the different women's organisations within the country and have close friendships with other feminists. On the other hand, what is perceived as my privileged positioning provides me with access and the capacity to utilise information and mainstream political contacts for feminist activism. However, these apparent advantages disadvantage me, and may sometimes have the potential to dispossess me of my identity when it comes to articulating views that can be politically exploited - given the extreme polarities of race, religion, and mainstream politics within the country. For instance, I

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[16] This was pointed out by my supervisor Louise Morley.

have had to forgo participating in women's demonstrations against the North East conflict for strategic reasons. This was to ensure that such activities were not given a party link as a result of my presence – as many women's groups in the country chose to be apolitical and have no party affiliation.

Language

It is important to consider the contradictions of working in the English language in a context where the national languages are Sinhala and Tamil. Within the country, there is an assumption that English could function as a link language bridging the ethnic and cultural bipolarity of the indigenous languages and contemporary politics.

The multibridity of many Colombo-based NGOs / INGOs[17] gives rise to English as one of the working languages. WR research is done mostly in English for this reason and because global developments on women, gender and feminism that influence local discourse / discipline are accessed through the English language. However, consciousness-raising work as well as gender training amongst local communities at the grassroots is executed in either Sinhala or Tamil, depending on the locality. Thus it is possible to see / conceptualise three distinct linguistic dimensions to the discourses on women, gender and feminism. This results not only in a degree of compartmentalisation, but also the marginalisation and exclusion of some issues between the discourses in English and the endemic languages.

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[17] International Non-Governmental Organisations

Thus, there is a profusion of WR interests in English and a comparative absence in Sinhala and Tamil.

These are some of the pertinent issues that I have highlighted / composed when considering myself within the process of making meaning. I have emphasised the interrelationships between myself as the researcher, the intersects of my identity and experiences, the social political and cultural dimensions of researching, and the situatedness of the knowledge that I am generating / constructing within a particular time period. Yet, both in terms of postmodernism and in terms of the philosophy of Buddhism, I do not conceptualise myself as a stable, consistently coherent entity. Thus, it is possible that the research process itself has been dependent on aspects of my identity, knowledge and experiences that became conscious to me at the time of researching and writing. Identity here is a form of self-definition[18]; and this thesis, an expression of self-identity.

Ontological and Epistemological Bearings

At this stage, it is important for purposes of clarity, as well as overall researcher reflexivity, to consider my diverse assumptions – both explicit and implicit, about the nature of the world / reality, as well as the way in which it should be investigated. My ontological standpoint does not necessarily fall under the

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[18] This was pointed out by my supervisor Louise Morley.

stereotypical classifications of the nominalist (subjectivist) or realist (objectivist) paradigmatic divide as debated within the social sciences (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Cohen and Manion, 1997; Oakley, 2000). I have assumed that, on the one hand, there is an external material reality. There exists a corpus of WR research in published and unpublished forms; stacked in libraries and sold in bookshops; tangibly consulted by students, researchers, educationists, and policy-makers. This is a positivist conceptualisation of an *a priori* reality. On the other hand, there is also lodged in my mind a perception of such research. This is reliant entirely on the way that I conceptualise or cognise (unconsciously as well as through observation and reference) this corpus of research. It is more in line with postmodernist and social constructivist / constructionist[19] (Hepburn, 2006) perspectives which hold that:

> meaning is socially constructed; all knowledge is created from the action taken to obtain it (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995:3).

This obviously signifies that there are as many multiple conceptualisations of realities as there are people. The realities that are conceptualised at individual and collective levels could be seen as tangible, reliable, and uniform; or conversely, as conflicting, fluctuating and elusive.

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[19] Social Constructionism refers to the idea of the constructed rather than essential nature of realities whereas Social Constructivism hinges on the understanding of 'objective reality' as being contingent and rhetorical (Chapters 4 / 7).

According to this conceptualisation of ontology my research 'field' is constituted as a conceptual and material one, that of the discipline and discourses of WR research in Sri Lanka, since the United Nations International Year of Women in 1975. Its domain (Foucault, 1998) is constituted by opinions given by local researchers, feminist writings and research, in conjunction with my reading of global feminist theories and methodologies, as well as my own experiences as a feminist researcher. The interconnections between the local and the international in a globalised knowledge economy also need to be kept in mind.

The resultant / related epistemological field involves the consideration of textual conceptualisations and verbal opinions, defined methodologies and indeterminate practices. I am also aware that this field is temporal and constantly changing, that the research context and content from 1975 to 2007 has been continually developing, and that research ontologies themselves are continually evolving and in a state of flux.

Consequently, I investigated the topic of feminist research methodology by amalgamating a number of knowledge theories that can be viewed as both complementary and contradictory, depending on the knowledge paradigm the reader occupies. As Foucault (1998:263) puts it:

the human sciences that have appeared since the end of the 19th Century are caught, as it were, in a double obligation, a double and simultaneous postulation: that of hermeneutics, interpretation, or exegesis – one must understand a hidden meaning. And the other: one must formalise, discover the system, the structural invariant, the network of simultaneities.

My position is based on the rationale that a bipolar positioning reduces the complexities of both epistemologies in a way that constructs oppositions for each side (Naples, 2003). In fact, Butler (1999) argues that theorisations in terms of strict modernist or postmodernist formulations have changed drastically because of cultural appropriations and translations.

Modernism and Postmodernisms

Modernism has been a diverse and contested project dominating the 20th Century - spanning from Realism and Positivism to Postcolonialism, Marxism and Feminism. For feminists, it has involved traditional ways of rediscovering, re-visioning, re-interpreting as well as experimenting with material reality (Andermahr, Lovell and Wolkowitz, 1997). I myself do not see modernism and postmodernism as forming a strict dichotomy in making meaning[20] Thus, I propose an amalgamated theoretical positioning that incorporates not only modernist / positivist approaches, such as

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[20] There are many postmodernist characteristics in modernist ways of making meaning. Cross-disciplinary examples include efforts at 'representing reality' by 20th Century writers like Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, James Joyce and T. S. Eliot.

structuralism,[21] (Caws, 1995) but also an understanding of the conditions of postmodernism / poststructuralism.

I take as an example my conceptualisation of feminist research methodology as constituting method, ontology, epistemology, theory and politics / ethics. This is a conscious structuralist theoretical positioning that not only attributes relations amongst these five components, but also unifies them under the overarching conceptualisation of research methodology. It is my understanding that whether we like it or not, our unconscious ascribes structures to our apprehensions of subjective realities. Conversely, we are aware of the instability and arbitrariness of these same aspects of research methodology.

In this context, developing conceptual literacy (Hughes, 2002) in terms of being sensitive to pluralisms and contestations in meanings as an on-going process (without closure) is useful. This is because:

> arguments over meanings should be appraised as political acts that are designed to shape how we should know our social worlds. They are enacted from implicit or explicit theoretical positions based on implicit or explicit beliefs (Hughes, 2002:178).

I utilise this type of deconstruction to convey / construct how the attribution of relations / structures is subjective,

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[21] Structuralism was originally conceptualised as the subjective attribution of relations to objects found in reality so as to form a synthesis or unity; but later theorised to encompass subjects themselves in these structures.

unstable and arbitrary. I also use it to dismantle strict definitions and demarcations of meanings for an enhanced conceptualisation of our fragmented realities as researchers.

Derrida (1999) rejected the claims, for instance, by Spivak (1976) that deconstruction is a method. In fact, he even resisted a definition or translation of the term. Despite his antipathy to modernist theorising centred on definiteness, he ended up theorising as to exactly what deconstruction is not. He argues:

> I would not even dare to say, following a Heideggerian schema, that we are in an 'epoch' of being-in-deconstruction, of a being-in-deconstruction that would manifest or dissimulate itself at one and the same time in other 'epochs' (Derrida, 1999:285).

Yet, being-in-deconstruction or dismantling foundations and structures of thought; perceiving / composing differences, discontinuities, instabilities are, and have always been, part of the human processes of making meaning[22] (consciously and unconsciously). Derrida and other poststructuralists simply utilise it / theorise on it as a conscious form of analysis.

Thus, I have taken the prerogative of considering deconstruction as part of my methodology; more precisely and simply, as a form of analysis. In fact, it is a form of ontological analysis. Consequently, I feel that it is significant to note that the term 'deconstruct' is

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[22] Take the Hindu and Buddhist philosophies of life.

applied by me to indicate conceptual unraveling as opposed to the discursive. I have not relied on discourse deconstruction; rather, I have deconstructed concepts (Hughes, 2002).

Poststructuralists claim that:

> no directly knowable reality exists, because the very language that we use to discuss and describe the social world simultaneously inscribes and constructs it (Weedon, cited in Maynard, 1995: 269).

This is only part of the argument. Certainly, self-expression and knowledge construction are aspects of language while being constructed by language. While language is reliant on particular discourses (and *vice-versa*), do we really need language for assimilation and comprehension (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 1999)? I am now skirting the perennial debate as to whether we 'think' in words or images; or do understandings emerge from the senses (including the sixth sense)? 'Knowing reality' through language then, is perhaps one of many ways of knowing, even though the language in which the reality is written or spoken about is not the reality that is referred to (Skeggs, 1994). But it is a crucial means as far as my research topic is concerned.

The research methods of engaging with, constructing and framing these 'realities' involve the review and analysis of research texts and interviews with researchers. Yet, text and speech do not always or necessarily complement one another. Furthermore,

researchers did not always discuss the theoretical intricacies of their adopted methodology during interviews. Consequently, one of my intentions in making meaning was to open to debate the conventions, the variants and the contradictions of feminist research methodology.

I have envisioned my approaches to making knowledge and meaning as having elements of structuralism (Caws, 1995), social constructionism (Hepburn, 2006), conceptual analysis (Hughes, 2002) and deconstruction (Gillies and Alldred, 2002). Here, the complementarities, complexities, constraints and contradictions of these processes need to be conceptualised. Rejecting both the views - that neither texts nor transcripts (interviews) can comprehensively mirror reality, and the converse view that they are merely textual, (Holland and Ramazanoglu, 1994), may not necessarily invalidate my viewpoint that research possesses the capacity to reveal and expose. Consequently, I am situated within the middle way (Holland and Ramazanoglu, 1994), and I have come to understand that:

> there is some level of reality which can be accessed through people's accounts, but also to accept that there is no precise solution as to how exactly this can be done (1994:145).

In this context, rather than engaging further with the traditional dichotomy of what is considered true or false in knowledge within the social sciences (Burrell and Morgan, 1979), I wish to advance my viewpoint that

research knowledge constitutes elements of both truth and falsity. This is to the extent that what is experienced as a particular reality by the researched is framed by the research topic, and is interpreted, recontextualised (Bernstein, 1990) and constructed into research by researchers. In this understanding, I am moving away from the variations of positivism or the more structuralist readings of epistemology, towards an interpretive / constructivist / relativist position that is more inclined towards deconstruction (Gillies and Alldred, 2002).

To clarify, for me, research involves complex processes of framing and focusing, discovery and examination, shifting and analysing, as well as the constructing, composing and recontextualising of knowledge. As this knowledge is composed according to the framework of the very activity of researching, it requires selectivity and specificity. It therefore results only in positioned, partial and incomplete knowledge (Haraway, 1988; Bhavnani, 1993; Maynard and Purvis, 1994a; Charmaz, 2002; Maynard, 2004), whatever the methodology used in its composition. The standpoint of the researcher (Collins, 1991; Sandoval, 2004; Harding, 2004b) in all its multiple facets is necessarily reflected in the research, (both consciously and unconsciously), thereby situating that knowledge (Haraway, 1988). This is in addition to the other influences and variables within the research process (such as political and ethical intents and the ontological and epistemological issues of time-frames, funding, motivation, accessibility, types of research and

methods) which impact on meaning-making and the composition of knowledge.

Theoretical and Methodological Aspects

This thesis is built on the implicit assumption that research is generated and utilised for a number of purposes. It has the political, ethical and educative capacity to reveal and expose; include and mainstream; influence decisions and give rise to policy; and catalyse change for women (and men) in various sites and levels of society. Accordingly, my primary view of research is based on its transformative potentials through the empowerment of women at individual and societal levels. Admittedly the extent to which this is possible is highly debatable as has been problematised by feminist postmodernists. They have deconstructed the very theoretical foundations of such assumptions (Flax, 1987; Gross, 1987; Alcoff, 1988; Lather, 1991; Brah, 1993; Maynard, 1995; Oakley, 2000). Consequently, I am aware that we can no longer take concepts such as 'education' or 'change' or 'empowerment' or 'ethics' for granted.

The views posed by poststructuralist feminists urge the reconsideration of what are considered to be metatheoretical implications, synthesis, unifications, foundational beliefs, essentialist arguments and overarching conceptualisations. For example, this involves looking at gender relations, not as a universal

or homogeneous category, but rather as relational and context-bound (Flax, 1987). 'Woman' can no longer be a unitary category in conceptualising change, but a unifying one for purposes of 'strategic essentialism'; while women's alliances and solidarity need to be re-theorised in terms of a politics of identification, instead of a politics of identity (de Lauretis, 1989; Brah, 1993; Maynard, 1995). The Enlightenment philosophical tendencies towards metatheory and universalisations must be tempered with generalisations - what might be seen as patterns or middle-level theory that can sustain certain common meanings (Flax, 1987; Maynard, 1995).

To return to my theoretical assumptions, I am taking the fundamental position that research with the objectives of consciousness-raising, reflexivity, policy and structural interventions leads to some degree of social changes for some individuals. I am influenced here by the somewhat essentialist idea of education leading to social transformations - as articulated in many ancient cultures from the Chinese and Indian to Greek and Roman civilisations, as well as the European Renaissance and the Enlightenment movement (Morley, 1996; 1999; Morley and Walsh, 1996). The faith in the capacity of research interventions to engender change (in individual consciousness and actions, economic standards, politico-social structures, and cultural practices) can be associated with feminist internationalisms (Chapter 6) and gender mainstreaming. These are liberal feminist engagements with individual rights, equality, justice, and equal opportunities (Maynard, 1995; Bandarage,

1998). It is also linked to the emancipatory narratives of Marxism and the Left movements in Sri Lanka.

Of course, the concept of change needs to be defined; and evaluated both contextually and subjectively as to the situation before and after research / related interventions; and as to what ways change keeps occurring.

Induction

In my research proposal I had anticipated doing grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Charmaz, 2002) because I believed that as an exploratory study, my thesis could build theory from the data collected / composed. Yet this position assumed that the researcher is free of prior theoretical knowledge. Thus it became necessary to ask the question whether feminists can do grounded theory. Feminisms as a form of politics require that researchers approach research from an *a priori* political / ethical perspective or theoretical standing. In my case, I had read feminist literature for more than twenty years. This has undoubtedly influenced my thinking - consciously and otherwise. Therefore I could not claim the mental position of a clean slate (Morley, 1996).

Moreover, I realised that there are certain subconscious and intuitive politics / values that also influence researching. There are also implicit knowledges (Foucault, 1972) acquired through life experiences, uncritical readings, conversations and other interactions.

These may have surfaced in the thesis through my opinions, standpoints and arguments – sometimes without my critical perception.

Due to this theoretical dilemma, I came to the conclusion that grounded theory, in a pure sense, is not possible. Nonetheless, I practise induction (Hammersley, 2006) in the sense of drawing conceptualisations of feminist research methodology from the data - notwithstanding other preconceptions. However, my inductive process is a form of discovery as well as a form of social construction. The theory that I have created through this process is middle range theory - situated somewhere between grand theorisations and a working hypothesis. For instance, take my model guidelines for feminist research methodology in Sri Lanka (Conclusions).

Deduction

In conforming to an approach that combines deductive and inductive researching, it is important to consider the way in which I adopt / adapt theorisations in this thesis. I believe that theorisations are at the mercy of any reader once a particular theory enters public discourse, and thus becomes travelling theory (Said, 1983). Scholars are at liberty to apply the theory wholesale to a different context, amend it, employ it in parts, reformulate it or build on the seed of the theory. I am particularly resistant towards adhering to a complete theorisation or in subscribing indiscriminately to the thinking of a specific theorist - given my pluralistic standpoints and

the cultural context that I occupy. For instance, in Chapter 8 I have taken the conceptualisation of standpoint, intersects and situatedness from global feminists (Haraway, 1988; Collins, 1991; Harding, 2004) as a guideline, but elicited / composed local theory from the Sri Lankan researchers' discourses.

In this I have done exactly what writers such as Hey (2006), Scheurich and McKenzie (2005) advocate researchers should not do. They argue against 'cherry picking' (Scheurich and McKenzie, 2005: 859) or plucking individual theoretical concepts without engaging with the writer's overall epistemological position (in this instance, Foucault's). But for me, the research process is not one of inducting or applying theory wholesale; nor one of simply making theory or deducting. Rather, it is a complex process of constructing meaning through the incorporation of selective sources (whether it be theory or empirical data) in ways that coincide with my own thinking. Thus, we, as researchers, cite, re-cite, appropriate, misappropriate, translate, recontextualise, and debate to make meaning.

Another theoretical objective on my part as a researcher is that of countering certain pedestrian allegations that have been levelled against feminisms in Sri Lanka. For example, Jayawardena and de Alwis (2002) discuss how Sri Lankan feminist activism has been condemned as being imbued with Western concept(s), and therefore alien to the local cultures. While I will be dealing with the implications of this in Chapters 6 / 8 / 9, it signifies

here some of the theoretical issues of identity and location that became important when researching in the local context.

Mohanty (2003:461) argues that there cannot be a unified global perspective of women because 'a place on the map is also a place in history'. The particularities of the Sri Lankan historical and cultural context mean that global theorisations on methodology are not always appropriate to the local context (Chapters 3 and 6). In this instance, it is useful to consider Narayan's (2004) argument on how positivism has its uses in India, despite being condemned in Western feminist debates as not being able to portray the experience-based politics that are central to feminisms. Similarly, Sri Lankan researchers, Jayawardena and de Alwis (2002) try to situate their work not within the contours of epistemology, but rather, within local politics:

> Thus, our central concern here will be to highlight different kinds of political struggles in which Sri Lankan women have participated both collectively and publicly. It is the specificity of the struggle, we wish to argue, which informs activism and thus, rather than reading a particular response as either reactionary or progressive, essentialising or empowering, we wish to focus on its political efficacy and contingency (Jayawardena and de Alwis, 2002:247).

Posing the above issues as oppositions (as globalism *versus* localisms or Western *versus* Sri Lankan) clouds the intricacies / layers of meanings that are possible

within this debate. Consequently, my theoretical position is one that takes into consideration the country's colonial inheritance and contemporary currents of globalisation. This includes a consciousness of postcoloniality (Said, 1978; Bhaba, 1994) and the related concepts of neo-imperialism, hybridity, race, and nation.

Reflexivity

I now explore and justify using the methodological process of reflexivity in my research. Reflexivity has been conceptualised in a number of ways. Morley (1996) talks of reflexivity as involving emotional literacy. This is a method of being sensitive; in recording and analysing the motivations, beliefs, responses, influences, prejudices and values of the researcher within the research process. This is because:

> every choice made by the scholar, his / her theoretical background, methodological tools and resources of interpretation, is loaded with ideological and other cultural assumptions. The scholar him / herself is also a part of the research; another scholar working with the same research material is likely to arrive at different interpretations and research results. (Jarviluoma, Moisala and Vilkko, 2003:33)

Morley (1996:139) contends that reflexivity can also mean 'the hesitancy, uncertainty and caution' arising from researchers' understanding of the theoretical complexities of a particular topic. I have subscribed to the practice of reflexivity in my thesis according to the

above conceptualisations and based on the following assumptions. Firstly, I believe that exposing and theorising on the self strengthens the political and epistemological value of the research by preempting conceptual, theoretical, methodological critiques. Secondly, it is a key means of engaging with what may be perceived as the apparent complicities and contradictions of the research process.

In this context, it is important to note Adkins (2004), who cautions researchers against presuming that critical reflexivity will automatically lead to social transformation. In fact, she contends that reflexivity has increasingly become a habit of gender in late modernity.

Political and Ethical Concerns

It is my understanding that for research to be feminist it should have explicit or implicit political / ethical objectives to engender change, and should be sensitive to the different levels and dimensions of the research process. I have argued this in Chapter 9. The envisaged political / ethical (as well as epistemological and theoretical) contributions of my PhD are as follows. Firstly, in terms of politics, it will attempt to raise consciousness and educate fellow feminists / scholars on the methodological aspects of making meaning. Secondly, in terms of ethics, it will try to provide a methodological model that allows for research which is more holistic and sensitive while taking into account

specificities and uncertainties. Consequently, there are implicit and explicit pedagogic intentions directing my work.

My political and ethical stance is one of fusion rather than a singular positioning. It entails pluralism, as well as political and ethical pragmatism. Politically, *vis-à-vis* feminism, I do not necessarily associate myself with the customary political categorisations of Marxist, liberal or radical feminisms (Gross, 1987; Maynard, 1995) associated with the West. At times, I subscribe to certain foundational conceptualisations of Marxism such as adopting class perspectives. I also advocate gender mainstreaming or changes to existing institutional structures that are envisioned by liberal feminism. I support lesbian feminism and critique compulsory heterosexuality - part of the radical feminist agenda. I do not distinguish between equity and difference approaches to gender - but adopt both - sometimes simultaneously when it suits the occasion (Wickramasinghe and Jayatilaka, 2006).

One of the key politically fraught issues that needs to be highlighted / composed is that of 'good research' and 'bad research', or the quality of research literature in Sri Lanka. From my interviews with researchers I garnered some of the following criticisms against certain types of research. For instance, one of my respondents for this study, Dhamani (27/7/2005), a university lecturer, talked derogatorily of 'NGO research' - implying that such research was not scholarly because it is commissioned.

A further criticism was that research did not theorise 'it can just be empirical stuff - mostly descriptive' said Rasika (21/8/2005), an independent researcher. Zulfica (13/7/2005), who was involved primarily in action research, questioned the extent to which research promoted social change.

In my research, I have consciously avoided evaluating the quality, validity and achievements of research. In fact, I have altogether avoided rigorous criticism. Instead, I have valued the different types of research for their different objectives and promoted a fusion of approaches.

In researching, the following ethical issues had to be taken into consideration. One was the central issue of confidentiality *versus* representation with regard to my interviewees. With the first letter asking for an interview I gave my respondents a pledge of confidentiality, assuring them of anonymity. However, this imposed anonymity prevented me from acknowledging these respondents' individual contributions to my research. The only consolation is the fact that these respondents have the power in their own right to be able to represent themselves, and have opportunities and access to Women's Studies discourse and *fora* if desired / required.

Furthermore, I am an insider (Collins, 1991; Letherby, 2003) within the women's movements / the research circuit in the country. Friendships and acquaintances

with some of my respondents gave me access to prior information about their personal experiences and opinions. For this reason, I had to walk a tightrope so as not to reveal what was considered confidential in my work.

Assurances of confidentiality also resulted in a dilemma for me when it came to representing my interviewees. Given the familiarity amongst researchers within the circuit, and their specialisations / locations in specific disciplines, detailed references would have resulted in the identification of respondents. As a result, the representation of researchers in my work is minimalised. I focused more on the voices of the interviewees rather than their identities. I have alluded to facets of the researchers' identities, intersects, contexts and affiliations only when absolutely necessary. However, interested readers could refer to Table I (Chapter 2) for further information. Consequently, there is only partial representation of researchers in the thesis - not only in terms of subjectivity and bias, but also in terms of completeness or totality (Haraway, 1988).

Another related issue that needs consideration is the fact that I approached my respondents as experts in what I consider to be the amorphous and pluralistic domain of Women's Studies in Sri Lanka. My interviews were conceptualised as participatory consultations or collaborations (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995; Charmaz, 2002; Fontana, 2002), especially as some of the participant researchers were friends and colleagues. Yet,

such collaboration was not always possible, due to the power play within interviews and because the respondents' interests were different from mine. This will be discussed further in Chapter 2.

On the whole, this chapter engaged with the multiple and interlocking frameworks of my research project. I argued that the conceptual framework of the case study was the most appropriate approach in dealing with my exploratory research questions. I also discussed some of my personal interests and identity politics - arising from my subjective (and unstable) positioning in what I consider to be a personal framework. I then conceptualised the ontological and epistemological framework of my research. For instance, the amalgamated viewpoints of modernism and postmodernism form the basis for my theoretical and methodological frameworks of postcoloniality, theorising, deconstructing and reflexivity. Finally, I considered the political and ethical frameworks of the research process such as those of the quality of research, insider status, issues of confidentiality, and the representation of respondents. From my discussion, it becomes clear that these frameworks are interrelated to one another and thus, provide insights into the different dimensions of making meaning when taken singly and collectively.

CHAPTER TWO

MY RESEARCH METHODOLOGY II

The Processes of Making Meaning

This chapter will record and analyse the processes of making meaning - within the frameworks delineated in Chapter 1. I will explain my research methods and the rationale for selecting these particular ways of making meaning. I will also reflect on the problems and issues that arose during instances of data generation / composition, analysis, theorisation, deconstruction and writing up.

Methods of Data Generation / Composition

My data sources consist of people and literature. Not only are they repositories of knowledge and meaning, but, for me, they also construe knowledge and meaning. Here I subscribed to Mason's (2002) distinction between data sources and methods of generating data from these sources. My work relied predominantly on talk and text to illustrate / construct the particular concepts and practices pertaining to feminist research methodology. However, I did not utilise the traditional method of analysing data from texts and talk separately from one another. Rather, I took the approach of making meaning by weaving together interviewees' comments alongside

citations from texts. This is because I see / conceptualise both as aspects of discourse (Eagleton, 1983) within the domain / archeology of Sri Lankan Women's Studies (Foucault, 1972). Chapter 3 discusses this domain further.

For purposes of clarity, I have listed the following methods of generating qualitative data in this thesis.

- Literature Surveys

    o Literature survey of feminist research methodology in Sri Lanka

    o Overview of WR research literature in Sri Lanka

    o Background reading on Western feminist research methodology

- Textual analysis of selected research texts

- Interviews with researchers (including a pilot study)

- My analysis and theorisations

- The writing up process

Data are generated / composed through the usage of interviews, literature surveys and close readings of

research literature. Making meaning however is a synthesis of the outcome of data generation / composition and the inputs of the researcher as argued by Cain and Finch (2004). My multiple case studies, therefore rely on multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2003), as well as my subjective methodological interventions as a researcher.

Overall Sampling Frames

I have already defined the parameters of my research sample in the Introductions. My sample of research texts / researchers was multi-disciplinary for two reasons. Firstly, this was in response to my research question 6 as work on women, gender and feminisms covered many disciplines. Secondly, they frequently portrayed interdisciplinary perspectives. Therefore, my research inquiry engaged with research material / respondents from disciplines such as anthropology, law, sociology, English literature, and politics or what can be seen as interdisciplinary areas such as development studies, conflict studies, and gender studies.

The major decision to focus exclusively on work in the English language was because the bulk of WR research and writing since 1975 has been in English. However, some of the seminal activism and writing on women's oppression in the 1970s are found in Sinhala / Tamil grey literature (such as pamphlets and booklets[23]). During the last decade, writing in Sinhala has grown, as

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[23] Recently, Samuel (unpublished) has done some groundbreaking work on grey literature that emanated from women's activism amongst Sinhala-speaking groups.

evidenced by the increasing number of papers (Wanasundera, 2001; 2002; 2005) presented at the annual conventions of the Centre for Women's Research, (CENWOR), student writing and literature in journals. While I have made passing references to these, this thesis centres on work in English because it is my perception that the discipline, discourse and domain of Women's Studies operates mainly in English. This however does not preclude an understanding of Sri Lankan women's movements and research action as having many dimensions that span and intersect with all three languages (Chapter 1). My decision to exclude WR research and writing in Sinhala and Tamil was for the practical reasons of managing my research better. Further rationale includes the confines of the PhD timeframe, my lack of language skills in Tamil and my academic specialisation that comes from the disciplines of English Literature and Women's Studies. Moreover, this PhD has particular significance to my profession as a university lecturer of English.

The texts in my literature review on methodology and research sample include those of academics, independent researchers, state organisations, and NGOs. They are funded and non-funded; published in various forms and *fora*. These include books, research studies, research articles in journals and periodicals published locally and internationally. As background material and in the WR literature overview, I looked at evaluation studies, conference papers, newspapers, an unpublished dissertation and a published collection of feminist

newspaper columns. This was because they provided purposive examples that illustrated the contemporary debates taking place *vis-à-vis* feminism and women's activism in Sri Lanka during the periods concerned.

On the whole, unpublished work and grey literature (such as pamphlets / letters) were not included, due to logistical constraints of access, the timeframes and limitations of the PhD framework.

For my respondents, I drew the parameters of my research from Ball's (1990) idea of naturalistic sampling, which accounts for the importance of time, place and persons. I had originally selected the research site as Sri Lanka's capital Colombo due to the fact that most of the libraries and the research participants (Charmaz, 2002), or in this case, the participant researchers [24] to be interviewed were located there. During the research process, I expanded my site to include researchers from the city of Kandy[25] as well – to enlarge my sample of researchers from academia and to illustrate / construct more multidisciplinary interests.

The following Table introduces my respondents. The third column states the motivations for WR research as argued in Chapter 6. These are Feminist Internationalisms (FI), Structural Reformative Research (SRR), Feminist Localisms (FL), and Personal Politics (PP).

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[24] I conceived the term 'participant researchers' to acknowledge the roles and inputs of researchers in my work.
[25] Kandy is a city in the hill country of Sri Lanka.

Introducing Researchers (Table I)

No	Researcher	Impetus for Research	Ethnicity & Generation	Type of Research	Research Grounding	Research Methods	Date Interviewed	Disciplinary Training / Assignment
1	Deena	FI / FL / SRR	M Third	Policy / Action	INGO	QL	23/8/04	Humanities
2	Wasanthi	FI / FL	S Third	Policy Action	NGO INGO	QN/QL	25/8/04 18/10/04	Social Sciences
3	Sadia	FL / FI / PP	Mxd Third	Activist Consciousness-raising Policy	NGO INGO	QL/QN	29/10/04	Social Sciences
4	Jalani	FI / FL / PP / SRR	(S) Second	Policy Action	Academic NGO INGO	QN	21/10/04	Social Sciences
5	Anoja	FI / SRR	Mxd Fourth	Policy	Academic INGO	QL/QN	4/7/05	Social Sciences
6	Thamalini	FL / FI / PP / SRR	T Second	Policy Consciousness-raising Activist Action	NGO INGO Personal	QL/QN	6/7//05	Humanities / Social Sciences

Introducing Researchers (Table I)

(Contd.)

No	Researcher	Impetus for Research	Ethnicity & Generation	Type of Research	Research Grounding	Research Methods	Date Interviewed	Disciplinary Training / Assignment
7	Saumi	FI	S Second	Activist Consciousness-raising Policy	INGO Academic	QN	7/7/05	Sciences
8	Gauri	FI / PP / SRR	S Third	Activist Consciousness-raising Policy	Academic	QN/QL	8/7/05	Social Sciences
9	Jayani	PP	Mxd Second	Activist Consciousness-raising	Academic Personal	QL	9/7/05	Social Sciences
10	Zulfika	PP / FL / FI	M Third	Activist Policy Consciousness-raising	NGO INGO	QN/QL	13/7/05	Social Sciences
11	Kamani	PP / FL FI / SRR	S Third	Activist Policy	NGO INGO Personal	QL/QN	17/7/05	Social Sciences
12	Sakuntala	FI	T Third	Policy Action	NGO	QN	18/7/05	Social Sciences

Introducing Researchers (Table I)

(Contd.)

No	Researcher	Impetus for Research	Ethnicity & Generation	Type of Research	Research Grounding	Research Methods	Date Interviewed	Disciplinary Training / Assignment
13	Damayanthi	FL / FI	S Second	Policy Activist	NGO INGO	QN / QL	19/7/05	Social Sciences
14	Rasika	FL / FI	Mxd Third	Activist	INGO NGO	QL	21/7/05	Social Sciences
15	Gayathri	FL / FI / PP	S Second	Activist Consciousness-raising Policy	NGO INGO Personal Academic	QL	21/7/05	Law
16	Hanifa	FI / FL	M Third	Policy	INGO	QL / QN	26/7/05	Social Sciences
17	Deepa	FL / FI / PP	S Third	Activist Policy	NGO INGO Personal Academic	QL	26/7/05	Social Sciences
18	Dhamani	PP / FL	S Third	Consciousness-raising	Personal Academic INGO	QL	27/7/05	Humanities / Social Sciences
19	Kiyana	PP / FL	S Third	Consciousness-raising	Academic NGO Personal	QN/QL	5/8/05	Humanities
20	Vivian	FL / PP	S Third	Consciousness-raising Activist	Academic NGO Personal	QL/QN	5/8/05	Humanities / Social Sciences

Introducing Researchers (Table I)

(Contd.)

No	Researcher	Impetus for Research	Ethnicity & Generation	Type of Research	Research Grounding	Research Methods	Date Interviewed	Disciplinary Training / Assignment
21	Leelani	PP / FI	S Third	Activist	Academic Personal NGO	QN/QL	5/8/05	Social Sciences
22	Kumerini	FI / PP / FL	T Third	Policy Consciousness-raising Activist	INGO Academic	QL	19/8/05	Law
23	Wadhani	PP	S Fourth	Consciousness-raising Action Activist	Academic NGO INGO	QL	20/8/05	Humanities / Social Sciences
24	Aruni	FI / FL / SRR	S Third	Policy Action	INGO	QN/QL	22/8/05	Sciences / Social Sciences
25	Wishva	PP / FL / SRR / FI	S Third	Activist Policy Consciousness-raising	Academic NGO INGO Personal	QN/QL	25/8/05	Humanities / Social Sciences
26	Jaya	PP / FI / FL	S Fourth	Activist Consciousness-raising	INGO NGO	QL	19/10/05	Humanities / Social Sciences
27	Rajesh	SRR / FL	T Third	Activist Policy	INGO Academic NGO	QL/QN	23/10/05	Social Sciences

Source: my research data (2003 – 2007)

Table I conveys that the illustrative sample of researchers writing in English constituted the three main ethnic groups: Sinhalese (S), Tamil (T), and Muslim (M). Those of mixed ethnicity are also included (Mxd).

The generation refers to the amount of time spent by the researcher in the field of women's research and writing. First generation researchers have been researching from before 1975 (not applicable to this sample). Second generation researchers have been researching since the 1970s. Third generation researchers have been researching since the ͗ ͘1980s and fourth generation researchers since the late 1990s.

The type of research conveys whether the research is more activist-oriented (research is part of other feminist activities), designed to consciousness-raise (to educate), action-based (usually followed by a development or other intervention), or policy intended (used for lobbying to institute or transform legislation / policy).

Participant researchers are mainly from middle-class backgrounds working in academia, NGOs, and independently. Research grounding refers to researchers' singular or multiple affiliations to universities, NGOs or INGOs. It also points out the personal interests of the researchers (these do not always rely on an institutional base).

Research methods refer to whether the research is quantitative or qualitative or fusion. The researchers'

disciplinary training and assignment refer to the general disciplinary field to which they belong. In representing my researchers, precision has been sacrificed to maintain anonymity in a context where researchers know one another.

Making-meaning of / from Texts

Literature Surveys

Given my research questions, literature surveying played a key role in the research process. It provided the initial directions and data to identify the key theoretical concepts / frameworks / paradigms / approaches of WR research and how they operated in Sri Lanka. It indicated how research processes generated / constructed knowledge as well as the gaps in knowledge. Surveying guided me to consider the practical advantages, challenges and limitations of conceptualising / applying particular research methodologies. It also helped me to define 'feminist' research within the Sri Lankan research *fora*. Most importantly, it provided examples of the multiple issues and disciplines of WR research when constructing my case studies.

Thus, surveys are utilised as both primary and secondary data sources. This was because the character of my investigation necessitated exploratory as well as specific work. Along with interviews and textual analysis,

literature reviewing also constituted data for building theory.

During the first year of researching, I blindly read virtually anything on WR research (globally and locally). This was possibly due to the sheer confusion, panic and out-of-control sense of embarking on PhD research. It was later that I conceptualised my survey samples as being based on a combination of approaches. It is possible that this illustrates the intuitive aspects of researching (Chapter 1).

To begin with, I used a variation of strategic / theoretical or purposive sampling, (Cohen and Manion, 1997; Mason, 2002), so as to identify / compose the various aspects of research methodology applied in the local context. It is understood as:

> selecting groups or categories to study on the basis of their relevance to your research questions, your theoretical position and analytical framework, and most importantly the argument or explanation that you are developing (Mason, 2002:124).

I also practised illustrative sampling to evoke the relationship between the context, the phenomena sampled, and the wider reality (Mason, 2002).

Looking back, I can compartmentalise WR reading into three categories. Firstly, there was a review of literature on feminist research methodology in Sri Lanka. Secondly, there was an overview of the extensive

amounts of WR research in the country. And thirdly, I read literature on Western feminist research methodology.

The survey of feminist research methodology in Sri Lanka confirmed the relative scarcity of knowledge on the topic. This led to my decision to review WR research / writing, and analyse selected texts in order to extract / construct / deconstruct theories on feminist research methodology. Thus, the review of WR research literature was a form of sampling for the selection of research texts for analysis. Background reading on feminist research methodology from the Anglo-American circuit allowed for wider knowledge and relevant theoretical deductions to be made.

The limitation of accessible and comprehensive electronic databases within Sri Lanka resulted in my use of traditional methods of library searching. To begin my search I used bibliographies relating to Sri Lankan literature (Goonetileke, 1973a; 1973b; 1976; 1983; 1983a). I then looked at the bibliographies of women's literature in Sri Lanka (Wanasundera, 1986; 1990; 1997; 1998; 2001; 2002; 2005; Loganathan, 2001).[26] Further searching was done by browsing through library catalogues, bookshelves and researcher bibliographies and by interviewing a bibliographer (and researcher) who acted as a key informer (Ball, 1990).

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[26] I greatly appreciate the work of Leelangi Wanasundera and CENWOR in recording and updating work done by women writers and researchers in the country.

The texts from which data were generated / constructed were from my private collection, the libraries of the Centre for Women's Research (CENWOR), the Women's Education and Research Centre (WERC), the Social Scientists' Association (SSA), the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES), and the archives of Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd. (ANCL). The overview of WR research literature (and review of local WR research methodology) begins from 1975 and concludes in 2007 (when I completed the thesis). The time span is broad because of the exploratory nature of the research and the need to draw historical trajectories of contemporary literature despite the subjectivity of the exercise. I also consulted the libraries of the Institute of Education and Senate House of the University of London, and the libraries of Harvard University as well as Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in Boston for a wider grasp of Western feminist theory and methodology (through both electronic and conventional means).

1) Literature Review of Local Feminist Research Methodology

Chapter 5 of my thesis comprises the literature review of theorisations on feminist research methodology. In 2003, when I commenced the review, local interest on feminist research methodology was limited. This was changing by the time I completed my work in 2007[27].

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[27] My own research process has influenced Sri Lankan researchers to consider the significance of research methodology in their

The review addressed one of my implied research questions as to what constitutes feminist research methodology in Sri Lanka. Thus it took into consideration how researchers theorised (to a limited extent) and practised feminist research methodology in research / writing. This included the mechanical or operational issues of research methodology (Mason, 2002)[28]. By addressing some of the 'what' research questions, the review provided the foundation for the 'how' research questions that are dealt with through the other research methods of textual analysis and interviewing.

As argued by Hart (1998), the review (and the literature overview on WR research) gave me a basis to build my methodological arguments for this thesis. For instance, by analysing (and synthesising) the individual aspects of feminist research methodology that form local praxis, I was able to draw guidelines for a methodological framework (Conclusions). Further, it allowed me to enhance the discourse of research methodology within the local epistemic community (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002). In effect, it has made this thesis a forerunner in the field of feminist research methodology in Sri Lanka.

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research as evinced by discussions with Neloufer de Mel and Kumudini Samuel.

[28]According to Mason's framework of intellectual puzzles (comprising development, mechanical, comparative, and causal / predictive puzzles), my survey is a consideration of the mechanics of research methodology.

2) Literature Overview of WR Research and Writing

Given the extent of the time span and literature involved, this survey was an overview rather than a comprehensive literature review. I slid into this survey partly due to the frustration arising from the scarcity of Sri Lankan theorisation on feminist research methodology, and partly to get a sense of the content of WR research in the country. In particular, it responded to research question 6 as to the multiple disciplines of WR research. The overview was also useful in providing background data – especially relevant to Chapter 3 that contextualises my work.

However, the overview is not only a supportive review of literature that is secondary to the research at hand. It also provides primary data that is vital. This is because literature surveys of WR research are very sparse in Sri Lanka - except for Goonatilake (1985) and Wanasundera (1995). Thus, my overview represents / constructs an extension to a review of WR research concluded in 1995 by Wanasundera.

Since some of the research questions posed by me required descriptive answers, the literature overview tends more towards a depiction rather than an analysis of the local context. One outcome of the overview was an understanding / creation of the epistemological background of WR research and writing in the country (Chapters 3 / 7 / 8 / 9). It contributed towards the conceptualising of the multiple and unstable realities

(ontology) of researching (Chapter 6). It provided examples / illustrations of different aspects of feminist research methodology as practised in research as conveyed by my case study. One particular example is how the concept of gender is conceptualised / applied / evoked / deconstructed in local research (Chapter 7). On the whole, the literature overview provides a general indication of the types, directions, motivations, disciplinary span and methodological approaches of WR research in Sri Lanka.

3) Reading on Western Feminist Research Methodology

Embarking on the Phd project, I felt some initial resistance towards utilising Western theorisations in my work. This is because of the existing imbalance and injustice in the global knowledge economy, academic capital and publishing that favours the West. I did not want to further Western hegemony in globalised expertise through my work. Consequently, I did not conduct a comprehensive literature review of global (read UK / US) feminist work, especially as the focus of my research was Sri Lanka. However, I was later seduced into background reading so as to relate the methodological concerns of Sri Lankan researchers to the broader context of global Women's Studies. This was to widen the process of making meaning, and to supplement theory-making if and where necessary - for instance, with regard to theoretical notions of standpoint, situatedness and intersectionality (Chapter 8).

Consequently, I utilised these secondary sources in the way advocated by Strauss and Corbin (1998) - as a means of directing me towards concepts that have not been considered hitherto, and as substantiation / refutation of my evolving theoretical stands.

Reading on Western feminist methodology elucidated the current feminist epistemological standpoints, theoretical concepts, methodologies and techniques of feminist research within English-speaking discourses. It also indicated the contemporary debates, experiences, challenges, problems, and limitations, in the application of feminist research methodologies.

Thus, at times, background reading was able to draw / construct parallels and contrasts between the specific focus of Sri Lankan methodological concerns and Western theory on methodology. It provided clarity and definitions for theoretical concepts through the use of specialised dictionaries and glossaries. It also offered general methodological frameworks that could be adapted to the local context - keeping in mind the specificities of Sri Lanka. At times, background reading provided depth to the theory building that took place - as in many instances I referred, or was referred to related theoretical sources by my supervisor after having arrived at a theorisation.

Linkages between the Sri Lankan and Western methodological concerns are made as and when necessary throughout the thesis. In this context, global

writing that reflected early methodological concerns proved to be more useful - despite historical and culture-specific differences. For instance, particular references can be made to Stanley and Wise (1983a), Fonow and Cook (1991a), Reinharz (1992), and Maynard and Purvis' (1994) and their seminal concerns about feminist epistemology and methods. This does not necessarily mean that these were the concerns of the Sri Lankan researchers or that the local debate is dated. Rather, it means that because my research initiative was an exploratory one, I found it pertinent to frame the debate according to these concerns.

Selected Research Texts

I have already discussed the overall parameters and the general rationale for the two local literature surveys. They were the foundation for the sample of research texts analysed by me. I understand / use the term textual analysis as follows. On the one hand, it is rooted in the Hermeneutic[29] tradition of being from the viewpoint of the reader though originating in the frame of reference of the researcher (Scott, 2006). This assumes a certain degree of stability and coherence on the part of the researcher and reader. On the other hand, other poststructuralist writers, such as Derrida (1976) and de Man (1999) stress the instability and fragmentation of both the reader and the researcher. Their method of

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[29] It deals with the theories of interpretation not only of texts but also of the nature of reality and human understanding.

analysis incorporates the interpretive task of exposing / deconstructing the inconsistencies and incoherencies of the text. My method of textual analysis combines both these methods.

It was my assumption that these texts are examples and illustrations of local theorisations on and practices of feminist research methodology. However, they were not seen / conceptualised as representative samples of research methodology. Rather, as argued earlier, my sampling process was one of strategic or purposive or theoretical sampling (Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Mason, 2002). What is important here, is that the sample:

> is meaningful theoretically and empirically, because it builds in certain characteristics of criteria which help to develop and test your theory or your argument (Mason, 2002:124).

As my sample was cross disciplinary (and multidisciplinary), one of the additional advantages was that it was evocative of how aspects of feminist research methodology operate in different contexts. It composed a meaningful range:

> of experiences, characteristics, processes, types, categories and examples (Mason, 2002:124).

I chose texts that had examples or were illustrative of ontology, epistemology, theory, method and politics / ethics. Unlike Mason (*ibid.*) who conceives of the different intellectual puzzles that research seeks to address as disconnected from one another, I see some of

these puzzles as interconnected. For instance, mechanical and comparative objectives overlap one another in my thesis. Though my research questions did not directly engage with these objectives, they have nevertheless been outcomes of the final sampling range and analysis. Take Chapter 5 on the literature review of feminist research methodology or the connections made to Western theory throughout the thesis.

The exact number of texts analysed was decided in the course of the reading / coding / conceptual ordering process - in relation to the saturation of data (Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Charmaz, 2002). In other words, once I felt that further reading could not surface or enable me to construct further dimensions to the aspects of research methodology that I was interested in, I stopped sampling. In this context, my research is mainly illustrative.

Once I had conceived of a methodological framework pertaining to making-meaning sometime towards the completion of my thesis, I went back to texts to find additional examples and illustrations. For instance, I decided to add a chapter on literature reviewing as a method quite late in writing up. Consequently, I had to go back to some of the old texts and find new ones in order to reach what I felt was a saturation point. Thus, the interaction between data, theory and subjectivity was not one-directional (Saran, 1985; Deem and Brehony, 1994).

Making-meaning of / from Talk

The concept and materiality of feminist research methodology are not confined to what was expressed / practised in texts, but also encompass the opinions of participant researchers (my respondents). They are also constituted by my own interventions into the research process. The objective of the interviews was to seek responses to my research questions and implied sub-questions. These include researchers' interests within research; what they considered to be the key issues, attitudes, problems and methods with regard to knowledge generation. What they thought were the key theoretical and methodological frameworks / paradigms / approaches to research. What they thought was left out in researching.

Interviews with twenty-seven researchers afforded me the possibility of gaining / forming insights into these researchers' ontologies, epistemologies, theories, methods, politics and ethics. They provided key information / viewpoints that supplemented the literature surveys and textual analysis. They were particularly important for my work in two ways. Firstly, as Wengraf (2001:8) identifies, there are the overt 'objective referents' or the actual subjects that the respondents talked about. Secondly, there are the auxiliary outcomes of an interview process, such as 'the subjectivities and inter-subjectivities' of the interviewees and me, as well as the other 'discourses' within the interview (Wengraf, 2001:10). Thus the interviews were equally informative

of other dimensions of meaning-making, even though these have not been greatly emphasised in my work.

The Interviewing Process

In 2004, I field-tested a semi-structured interview schedule as a method of collating and construing researchers' voices. The schedule was divided into the following sections: the researcher's history in women's studies; conceptualisations and contextualisations of WR research; and the politics, epistemology and ethics of WR research (Appendix III).

A pilot study of four researchers gave direction to my subsequent research focus and interviewing. The experience made me aware of the practicalities of interviewing; gave me the technical competence to formulate interview schedules in this area of study; and gave me the requisite skills / experience in interviewing. This will be discussed later on.

I then interviewed twenty researchers over a period of three months. Each interview lasted about two hours, was tape-recorded and transcribed with the permission of the interviewees. I employed an assistant to transcribe data due to recurrent bouts of arthritis and back pain. However, I listened to the interview tapes many times to familiarise myself with my data. Since my interests did not lie in analysing or deconstructing the interview process for its psychological / discourse content, I edited

out what I considered to be irrelevant sections of the transcript to make the data more manageable.

The criteria for selecting respondents were not based on the principle of representation, but on the principle of understanding process (Mason, 2002) - the multiple dimensions of feminist research methodology.

Three more interviews were conducted during writing up because I felt that some of the particular features and politics of research methodology (such as the significance of intersectionality) had not been effectively illustrated / constructed in the original sample.

The interviewing process began with e-mails / letters, and was followed up with phone calls inquiring whether participant researchers would like to be interviewed on the topic of Sri Lankan WR research and methodology. Almost all the participants expressed reservations about possessing the requisite information, as this area of research was one that they had not reflected on. Perhaps there was a possibility of the gendered nature of self-doubt surfacing in these instances[30]. However, my strategic appeal to feminist interests as well as the tactical positioning of my work outside expert knowledge seemed to reassure the participant researchers. To me, this reflected one of the basic epistemological splits in paradigms, and the disparity in the value attributed to the variations and versions of

[30] This was highlighted by my supervisor Louise Morley.

knowledge (Oakley, 2000). In this instance, knowledge as being expertise (to be known scientifically and objectively) seemed to be attributed more value than knowledge that is known subjectively and experientially.[31]

Data from interviews composed and contextualised my case studies on aspects of research methodology. The sampling of interviews (as in the case of texts) was based on purposive, strategic or theoretical objectives (Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Mason, 2002). Here, it must be clarified that the researchers who were interviewed were not my units of analysis. Rather, the units of analysis were the content of the interviews; as illustrative samples of aspects of feminist research methodology. As noted above, the aim here was to encompass a relevant range of the methodological interests of the researchers, as I believed that it was not ontologically or epistemologically possible to represent their interests directly or authentically. One reason for this was that I, as the researcher, had the power of selecting which voices and opinions were heard; and which sections of interview content and standpoint were included (Letherby, 2006). This partiality - in terms of incomplete knowledge as well as bias – compromises (methodologically) the representation of the interviewees.

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[31] *Ibid.*

Practical Insights

From field-testing the schedule, I gleaned practical insights. The length of the original interview schedule and the diversity of the data offered by the interviewees resulted in long and intensive interview sessions. Further, the theoretical base of the subject matter (that warranted a high degree of concentration) and the lengthy interview stretch left the interviewee and me exhausted. This led me to reconsider the structure of the schedule; narrow my focus; and reformulate questions designed to access the requisite theoretical aspects (Appendix III).

Other pertinent factors, including the place and time of interviewing came into play during the pilot study. One participant was tired because it was after her first day in a new job, while another respondent's three-year-old son constantly interrupted the proceedings at her house, so much so that part of the interview had to be carried out in my car during torrential rains. Thus, in subsequent interviews I was much more sensitive to such practical concerns as the participants' gender responsibilities, time of day, location, and frame of mind to ensure a profitable interaction.

Assumptions

Even though the respondents had forewarned me that they had no prior expertise on feminist research methodology, I was determined to discuss what they knew. Notwithstanding my efforts at clarifying some of the methodological concepts after the pilot project, it

would seem that some of the respondents, like Vivian (despite being an academic) still found some of my questions somewhat daunting. She jokingly, but succinctly, reflected on the implications of my interview schedule:

> But questions can be intimidating in this respect, you suddenly think; you are suddenly made to think of what you don't know. Specially when you indicated that you wanted to talk about the various theories, concepts, methodologies, methods, challenges and problems of researching on women and gender... although having said it is intimidating, it is also intriguing and interesting. But I also felt a little nervous - because this morning the first thing I thought was - as soon as I opened my eyes – Oh no, Maithree is going to come and talk to me about these very complicated questions...and I don't know if you noticed but at the beginning I was sweating a little – because of your questions... (5/8/2005).

Not only does this quotation indicate the difficulty of simplifying such concepts as epistemology and ontology, but it also exemplifies the intricacy involved in actually articulating epistemological issues. These are primarily abstract conceptualisations that my research tries to transform into practice, on the one hand. On the other, it tries to translate the concrete practices of research into theoretical conceptualisations. This signifies the complexities of talking about theory as opposed to writing it; and doing theory collectively in contrast to doing it individually. Vivian (*ibid.*) despite being familiar with feminist theorisations disclosed the vulnerability of the interviewee in the face of what was

perceived as an intimidating interview topic. Consequently, it is possible that my respondents may have felt some degree of insecurity and anxiety about performing in the interview as women researchers (Butler, 1999). The interviews may thus have been perceived as assessments of performance[32]. Furthermore, it is possible that this type of theoretical questions may have resulted in further pressure to succeed in what may have been perceived as a test. Such feelings can also be associated with the view that theorisation requires substantiation through reading up on Western feminist theory.

The pilot study and the intervention of my supervisor (Morley) brought me face-to-face with some of my other assumptions regarding the respondents. As argued by de Groot and Maynard (1993), I was guilty of polarising judgments towards the researchers when they did not mirror my own ideas - especially on feminisms. Thus, I had to learn to consciously allow for and promote differences and 'otherness' (Said, 1978); and refrain from anticipating / interpreting some of the interviewees' responses according to my own standpoints.

I originally approached the participant researchers (peer respondents, as discussed by Platt in 1981), for their professional status and experiences, with an idea of inviting them to be involved in participatory processes of knowledge production and making meaning. Yet,

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[32] This was pointed out by my supervisor, Morley.

while these interviews were sites of new collaborative knowledge production (Riddell, 1989; Lather, 1991; Holstein and Gubrium, 1995), they were not necessarily participatory processes. This was because the respondents did not necessarily share my research interests (as discussed by Letherby, 2006); nor were the interviews reflexive interactions on the part of myself and the respondents (except rarely). Furthermore, whether the respondents possessed the required information in the required format; and to what extent they were able to engage with the methodological significance of the questions was debatable[33].

Interview Dynamics

As I had previous associations with almost all the researchers in the sample, access to participants and entry into the interview process were not problems. There was an easy establishment of rapport (Oakley, 1981) as we were 'members of a shared community' (Platt, 1981:77) – women researchers in the field of women's studies. I also had previous personal interactions and access to private confessions of some researchers (Finch, 1984) who were also friends. In this context, there were shared understandings (Platt, 1981) with some researchers, and emotional distancing (Warren, 2002) with regard to some others. These ethical implications of my interviews were discussed in Chapter 1.

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[33] This was indicated by my supervisor Morley.

One of my interviewees, Sadia (friend / activist), gave me the following certificate of faith:

> It's easier to do open-ended questions with somebody you know and someone you trust. I think that the issue of confidentiality coming right at the beginning - that was very important. I may not have been as frank with someone I did not know - if you were an unknown researcher (29/10/2004).

This is indicative of my positioning as an insider within the women's movements of the country, despite my simultaneous outsider status due to socio-political positioning (Chapter 1). Though I had expected this public identity to impinge negatively on interviews with some of the lesser-acquainted respondents, this was not so (at least, overtly). I was consistently treated with cordiality, respect and friendship which, I believe, emanated from my being a colleague, rather than an 'outsider'. The above quotation also emphasises the burden of trust that was placed upon me by my respondents. It makes me conscious of Stacey's (1991) argument that research inevitably involves elements of inequality, exploitation and betrayal; but the objective should be to minimise this.

While most researchers seemed genuinely at ease with me, I suspected a few interviewees of trying to establish their command over the interview by challenging the boundaries of the interview. This was done by discussing unrelated anecdotes during the interviewing sessions. It led to a certain degree of submerged tension

for me, as I began to lose control over the interviews *vis-à-vis* the semi-structured schedule.

The power dynamics of the research process became evident in these instances (Ribbons, 1989). Even though these respondents were researchers themselves, and technically my equals, the reasons for this could be attributed to the particularities of the Sri Lankan context. For instance, ageism is rampant in Sri Lankan culture and a couple of older researchers may perhaps have felt compelled to assert themselves. One researcher, who considered herself foremost as an activist, was self-conscious and insecure due to her lack of 'academic credentials'. Another researcher was somewhat condescending in her attitude - possibly due to the fact that she had already worked on feminist research methodology and was perhaps threatened by my entry into the field.

Thus the interviews also raised questions as to the distinction between research interviewing and social interaction. I addressed these interview dynamics, by repeatedly directing conversations back to the topic (through references to time and the span of the schedule). In the interests of reflexivity, I emphasised the artificiality of the interaction by dramatising the interview questions and intermittently satirising my role as the interviewer. This served to put the interview process into perspective.

I found the work of early feminist researchers (Oakley, 1981; Finch, 1984; Scott, 1984; Riddell, 1989) who discussed issues related to feminists interviewing women useful in thinking about my own work. In fact, Morley (1999) had experienced some of the issues that I faced during the course of my interviews. One issue being the implicit power of myself as the researcher – inevitable, due to my status and control over the parameters of interview (Giddens cited in Letherby, 2006:89). Moreover, the overall power within / over the entire process also rested with me as the interviewer (Ribbens, 1989) in terms of physical control, data selection and inclusion, and data interpretation and representation (Fontana, 2002; Reinharz and Chase, 2002).

Outcomes of Interviews

One positive outcome of my interview process has been the researchers expressing their growing consciousness of the need to reassess their work:

> We need to stand back and look at our research – to look at what we are doing. We have been embroiled in doing research without thinking of the implications of what we are doing... (Jalani, 21/10/2004)

Jalani is a second generation interviewee who is a leading researcher in a women's research organisation. The interviewing process is seen literally to evoke a degree of epistemological consciousness within the scope of the interview, and possibly, further interest in methodology. It may have thus enhanced reflexivity in

my respondents. However, the potential of my interviews to take on an element of action research, or active collaboration (Oakley, 1981; Mies, 1983; Lather, 1991) as originally conceptualised by me was exceedingly limited as discussed earlier.

Furthermore, to see this interaction between the interviewer and the participant researchers as simply one of a pre-existing false consciousness and a resultant conscientisation through the research intervention is both essentialist and reductive (Stanley and Wise, 1993). Here, one is not talking about false consciousness in the sense of being complicit in one's own oppression (Lather, 1991), but, more loosely as being unaware. Furthermore, from a postmodern perspective, there can be no totality of a true consciousness, as there can be no corresponding false consciousness; rather, there can only be multiple (complicit or conflicting) ideologies or consciousnesses (Lather, 1991).

Thus it was not possible to actively promote interviewee reflexivity in the discussions, apart from inviting comments on the interview schedule and interaction. However, being committed to WR researching and the sense of our shared community resulted in the participants 'asking back questions' (Oakley, 1981:42). There was reciprocity to some extent (Ribbens, 1989; Lather, 1991) as the researchers looked to me for information, for substantiation of shared knowledge, and for my opinion. I responded by expressing a range of alternative viewpoints where appropriate.

Here, I was called on to surrender control, gather my thoughts and express a response under the specific conditions of the research interview. These moments tangibly demonstrated to me the combined tensions of performative speech and the constraints of speaking under pressure. It showed me that the discourse of an individual is context-bound as well as audience-bound (Potter and Weatherell, 1987). Consequently, s/he has many discursive performances. There may be many constraints as well as releases (consciously / unconsciously apprehended) in discourse production; and all performances are both simultaneously valid and invalid (Wengraf, 2001). Knowledge-making within the interview process needs to be viewed in relation to the above understanding.

Processes of Data Analysis / Theorisation / Writing Up

As argued by Cain and Finch:

> patterns of thought are and have always been crucial objects of sociological analysis. What we deny is that the subjects of these thoughts and behaviours can provide in themselves validation of the sociological correctness or of the absolute correctness of their thoughts. The thoughts and accounts of those investigated have no ontological primacy. Patterns of thought, in order to be objects of sociological inquiry, must be converted into data. (2004:520)

In my study, I had examined patterns of thought contained in research texts and articulated in interviews. The process of giving validation to these patterns of thought is data analysis and organisation. Though I had originally designed the next stage of my work (after interviewing) as the analysis of texts and interview transcripts, the research process did not follow such a sanitised, compartmentalised process. For one thing, I now see this as epistemologically impossible. Furthermore, upgrading for the PhD involved partially analysing data and writing three chapters, thereby interrupting such an envisioned linear process.

Data Analysis

One of the main challenges in data analysis was the immensity and diversity of the data that were available, identified and generated for this study. Obviously I had some idea of the theoretical approaches that I was going to be using, but, how was I to sort the data? What would I include and reject? What would I represent and construct? What would I prioritise and ignore? On the one hand, in terms of my modernist objectives, what themes and conceptual frameworks was I going to use? On the other hand, according to postmodernist perspectives, how was I going to deconstruct the data that I had constructed?

Thus, I had (and still have) numerous conflicting emotions with regard to my work. At times, I was completely confident of my work and the evolving

theoretical frameworks; at other times, I was completely floored by the multiplicity and the enormity of the data generated / constructed. These were some of the feelings and questions of data analysis, theorisations and writing up that preoccupied me during the last 18 months.

During the initial processes of data analysis I sought to do the following: to identify and isolate specific methodological frameworks and aspects of methodology and to consider how they have been conceptualised and practised in multi-disciplinary / diverse ways. I also sought background reading on the ways in which research methodology was theorised as ontologies / epistemologies / theories / politics / methods / ethics (Martin, 1994; Morley, 1996; 1999; Olesen, 2000; Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002; Letherby, 2003). Furthermore, I wanted to consider the wider implications of such conceptual usage (Hughes, 2002), and to interpret how research processes construct knowledges - in their focus of interest, in what is left out, in structuring data and in writing up (Charmaz, 2002; MacLure, 2003). At the same time, I was interested in how I myself - as a researcher - participated in the processes of knowledge production and making meaning.

Consequently, I had an overview of the data that was, if not always literal, then predominantly interpretive and reflexive, as argued by Mason (2002). To me this means the extent to which I read the data in terms of my standpoint, and the extent to which I located myself in

the processes of knowledge production and making meaning.

The case study approach determined my primary method of data analysis and organisation. This involved what has been defined as a contextual and holistic method of data analysis (Mason, 2002). Earlier on, during my literature surveys, I had flirted with 'conceptual ordering' as defined by Strauss and Corbin (1998), as a method that organised the data into discrete properties and dimensions, different actors and activities, as well as headings and sub-headings. For instance, I coded the data according to recurring keywords / concepts (feminist / women / gender / NGOs / activist / academic / action / standpoint / intersectionality and so on). I then went on to make conceptual connections and 'disconnections', or highlight the commonalities and differences between the various categories.

Even though I had trained in the qualitative data analysis programme NVivo, I approached the data manually because long hours of repetitive work at the computer aggravated my arthritic condition. Furthermore, while software can certainly enhance (if used correctly) as well as minimise (if misused) qualitative data analysis (Coffrey, Beverley and Atkinson, 1996), it is my position that the research process is ultimately reliant on the individual experiential history and circumstances of the researcher during the moments of researching.

Midway into researching, I moved away from my earlier thinking on Sri Lankan feminist research methodology as constituting the three categories of women, feminism and gender. However, it was not always possible to capture / compose or isolate my new research understandings through conceptual ordering alone. For instance, the intricate interwoven elements and dimensions of such concepts as ontology, epistemology, theory, method, ethics / politics were not always accessible through this form of indexing. Moreover, the means of understanding feminist research methodology as a holistic process (though constituted of multiple elements) required attention to the particularities as well as the overall. Consequently, I tried to engage with the data chronologically as well as contextually; in terms of conceptual standpoints as well as intersects; in terms of commonalities and differences. This was done to arrive at particular examples and general inferences.

Throughout the research process, I recorded my conceptual evolution in an informal notebook. I noted issues arising from supervision, reading literature, interviews, conferences and seminars, analysing, processing and organising data. I also recorded brainwaves that occurred at unexpected moments, analogies that struck me as significant and so on. Thus, technically it is possible for me to trace the theoretical / methodological progress of my research. However, such a linear record does not reflect the more subconscious and instinctive processes of making meaning (Chapters 1 / 8). For instance, I cannot explain how I came to

focus on literature reviewing as an important epistemic process, even though in retrospect, I can rationalise assigning one chapter to it.

Theorisation

This leads me to the processes of theorisation within my study. As argued by Mason (2002), theorisation is not a stage in the research process; rather, research is based on different kinds of theoretical perspectives from the point of designing research. As argued in Chapter 1 the role of theorisation in my thesis is both deductive and inductive. It is a dialectical, deductive (abductive) process associated with the interpretive tradition; I move between everyday concepts and meanings, interviewees' accounts and feminist and other theories (Mason, 2002:180). It also involves an inductive (retroductive) process (Blaikie cited in Mason, 2002:180 - 181) where I theorise on a pattern that has emerged / I have constructed from the data. De Groot and Maynard (1993) call this a middle–order approach which they describe as providing:

> the empirical circumstances for examining and refining concepts and ideas derived from already existing theoretical frameworks (deductivism). It also encourages the generation of new ideas and concepts from the analysis of new empirical situations or the re-examination of old ones (inductivism) (1993:169).

Here, I am not concerned with the exact point where theory application or theory-making began, or as to which took place first. Suffice to say, theorising from

feminist and other perspectives was for purposes of providing validity and authority (from the Positivist paradigm); to provide depth by agreeing or disagreeing; to deconstruct and unmake assumptions (from a postmodernist perspectives), and to expand and give diverse dimensions to my standpoint. Thus another strategy for making meaning was that of conceptual deconstruction. For me, deconstruction involved reflexive references to the contingencies, historicities, fragmentations, interruptions, differences, variations, inconsistencies, instabilities and multiplicities of my research content and process.

Chapter 8 of my thesis consists of conscious attempts at making / unmaking theorisations as an aspect of research methodology. I made theory from subjective, interpersonal dialogues with interviewees. However, these did not always allow for the surfacing of theoretical complexities. This was because my respondents did not always possess the terminology of Western feminist research methodology (such as 'epistemology', or 'ontology'). Thus, theorisations were heavily reliant on my interpretation, experiences, subjectivity, reading interests and previous knowledge - as are any theorisations to some degree. Conceptual complexity for the study was attempted from this perspective.[34]

Overall, my theorisations take place within the given parameters of the PhD in terms of timeframes and word-

[34] This was discerned by Louise Morley.

counts and the resulting priorities of my overall conceptual framework. It needs to be kept in mind that on the one hand, large chunks of information and conceptualisations were left out in data organisation and analysis given the above constraints. On the other hand, there was a scarcity of published data on some aspects of the topic - despite the multiple data sources accessed. For example, the issues that interested me on the methodological aspect of theorisation were brought out / constructed only through research interviews (Chapter 8).

The final outcomes of my work are both particular to the specific as well as 'generalisable to theoretical propositions' (Yin, 2003:10). The ultimate aim of the thesis is not only conceptual unity, but also, conceptual contestation (Hughes, 2002). In other words, meaning-making here is a combination of medium or middle-level theorising (Flax, 1987; Frye, 1990; de Groot and Maynard, 1993; Maynard, 1995; Bryman, 2004), or strategic theorising as evinced by my proposed methodological framework.

The very act of researching implies processes of investigation / construction / recontextualisation / discovery / findings / conclusions / education / empowerment / action / dissemination. Not only is research methodology the subject matter of this thesis, the thesis is in itself an example of research methodology or research praxis (hence, the attribution of two chapters to my own methodology). Thus, there are

pedagogic intentions in my work that have been crystallised in my Conclusions.

Validity

Even though these multiple data sources (interview transcripts, research texts, theoretical texts, and personal notations), multiple methods (literature surveying, interviewing and textual analysis and theorisation), and multiple theoretical approaches were used, methodological triangulation[35] (Flick, 2006) was not an objective of my research. This is because my theoretical position does not appreciate the elements of truth and realism of validation[36] that triangulation purports to measure, explain and generalise. Thus my work gives rise to accidental triangulation rather than triangulation for purposes of strategic validation. In other words, the different theoretical perspectives, data sources and methods are not always:

> combined with one another in a targeted way, to complement the strong points and to illustrate their respective limitations (Flick, 2006:305 – 306).

As discussed in the previous chapter, reflexivity (Lather, 1991) is employed to provide a degree of internal validity to the research (alongside a degree of accidental triangulation). In fact, reflexivity illustrates the choices,

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[35] Triangulation can involve validation through the use of multiple approaches to a research issue (whether it is methods, data, researchers or theories).
[36] The extent to which research conclusions provides an accurate / correct description of what happened and why.

problems and challenges posed by the very processes of triangulation. By being reflexive (du Bois, 1983; Stanley and Wise, 1983a; Haraway, 1988; Ball, 1990; Morley, 1999; Doucet and Mauthner, 2002; Maynard 2004) about the research process, I am able to convey / construct the way in which I participated in my own research process. While Adkins (2004) has theorised that poststructuralism has made reflexivity commonplace in making sense of ourselves and our realities, it still does not necessarily remedy some of the methodological problems exposed by it.

This chapter was a discussion of the ways in which I made meaning for this thesis - through the amalgamation of multiple data sources. It justified my use of literature surveys - not only to explore existent feminist research methodology, but also to make research methodology. It discussed the methodological issues of using sample texts and interviews to provide different depths and dimensions of feminist research methodology as conceptualised and practised in Sri Lanka. This includes my decisions and processes pertaining to selections, sampling, rationales, analysis and theorisations. In this I attempted to uncover the conscious and unconscious aspects of my subjectivity that was bound up in the research process. Thus, I have established that the processes of making meaning, despite being hinged on my conceptual frameworks, are also contingent, pragmatic, accidental and unconscious.

PART TWO

Methodological Matters

Part Two has two objectives. Firstly, Chapter 3 will contextualise, situate and frame WR research in Sri Lanka. Considering the exploratory intent of my thesis, this will be done in order to provide the reader with an understanding of the development of WR research, of contemporary theoretical definitions and interests, as well as the politics of researching in the country. However, the complexity of doing so given postmodern doubts about grand narratives of knowledge and politics will also be kept in mind.

Secondly, Chapter 4 will focus on the content and theoretical assumptions of what is meant by women's research. The placement of this Chapter in Part Two hinges on my argument that WR research constitutes a paradigm in knowledge production and meaning-making. Thus, feminist research methodology, as I have case studied in Part Three, needs to be contextualised within this paradigm.

Chapter Three

Women's Research Activism[37] in Sri Lanka

This Chapter will construct / describe the historical background and evolution of women's studies and action in Sri Lanka because it is vital for an understanding of feminist research methodology in the country. I will trace brief descriptive and subjective trajectories of WR knowledge from before 1975 to 2007, alongside the country's socio-political developments[38]. The Chapter will respond to my research questions 1, 2, and 6. What are the key theoretical frameworks and contemporary debates relating to WR research? What are the disciplines engaged in WR research and what issues are covered in WR research? Sub-questions implied by my key questions such as what led to WR research will also be addressed. Furthermore, how did WR research emerge? What / who is left out in researching? Who undertakes WR research?

By providing an overview of WR writings / research and their linkages to historical developments, the first three sections will also delineate existing epistemological assumptions about WR research in Sri Lanka. The subsequent sections will profile researchers and their

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[37] Research activism is conceptualised as researching and related activities that forward the political objectives of feminism.
[38] This Chapter incorporates suggestions made by Diana Leonard and Penny Burke during my upgrading to PhD candidature.

engagement with the ground politics and economics of women's studies research and writing.

An Archaeology of Women's Studies?

In representing / constructing Women's Studies in Sri Lanka, I will refer selectively to Foucault's (1972) concept of 'archaeology' to provide a concurrent reading. Thus, the implications of Foucault's (1998) concepts of *savoir* and *connaissance* for WR knowledge and women's movements and action will be discussed. By archaeology, Foucault specifies:

> not exactly a discipline but the domain of research, which would be the following: in a society, different bodies of learning, philosophical ideas, everyday opinions, but also institutions, commercial practices and police activities, mores - all refer to a certain implicit knowledge (*savoir*) special to this society. This knowledge is profoundly different from the (formal) bodies of learning (*des connaissances*) that one can find in scientific books, philosophical theories, and religious justifications, but it (*savoir*) is what makes possible at a given moment the appearance of a theory, an opinion, a practice (1998:261).

Archaeology is important to how I conceive of the background, birth, and evolution of Women's Studies. However, I differ from Foucault's (1998) theorisations by periodising WR research, and by simultaneously appropriating modernist and postmodernist thought. In my understanding, *savoir* refers to implicit knowledge;

within the overall environment and discursive conditions that make the production of formal knowledge (*connaissance*) possible. This chapter deals with both *savoir* and *connaissance*.

Connaissance is conceptualised as the discourses of women's studies as found in the cannon or *oeuvre* of WR research and writing. However, I am suspicious of the idea of a disciplinary cannon; the originating point of a particular discipline, the singularity, stability and evenness of its evolution, and the rationality and reason of such a trajectory. Nevertheless, I argue that the essentialism of such a monolithic vision is vital in making meaning and conceiving of epistemology.

The Chapter encompasses *savoir* by constructing / focussing on the implications of the country's political and economic imperatives, knowledge-generating institutions and practices, theoretical assumptions, women's movements and activism. These relations (*savoir*) make *connaissance* possible. For instance, the sporadic bursts of Sri Lankan women's demands for education and universal franchise in the late 19th and early 20th centuries make possible the domain of Women's Studies in today's context. Consequently, *connaissance* needs to be studied not on its own terms but in conjunction with:

> institutions, laws, processes and procedures, common opinions, norms, rules, morality, commercial practices and so on (Scheurich and McKenzie, 2005:848).

In my application of archaeology, I would like to emphasise the relationship between *connaissance* and *savoir* as interdependent. Not only does *savoir* make *connaissance* possible; but *connaissance* also results in *savoir* – the two concepts counter-producing one another. What can be seen as formal knowledge (such as researching on gender) leads to commonplace practice (of gender as a consciousness)[39].

However, my application of archaeology is selective in this thesis - only to produce a more discerning perspective of the state / evolution of different forms of knowledge production and meaning-making in WR research activism.

A Glance at Women-Related Issues before 1975

In Sri Lanka, consciousness of discrimination against women and women's struggles for equal rights and social justice have been traced from the 19th Century onwards in various sections of the populace at various times (Jayawardena, 1985; 1986; 1995a; Cat's Eye, 2000b; de Alwis and Jayawardena, 2001; Jayawardena and de Alwis, 2002). I view women's writing on WR issues (*connaissance*) as an extension of this consciousness and struggle (Jayawardena and de Alwis,

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[39] This argument has also been framed in terms of ontology leading to epistemology and epistemology leading to ontology (Chapters 6 and 7).

2002) or *savoir*. It is with the problematic objective of establishing trajectories of women's writing that I glance at what was written about women before the United Nations International Year of Women (1975). I then, provide a more in-depth look at the subsequent growth of research in the country. However, tracing such trajectories of explicit knowledge (*connaissance*) can only be subjective and artificial projects that are illustrative of the power dynamics of knowledge production and meaning-making (*savoir*).

The earliest allusion to Sri Lankan women in the English language was Robert Knox's incidental references to women when describing aspects of Ceylon[40] and its inhabitants in the 17th Century (1966). In one of the first travel biographies ever written, Knox represents Cingalese[41] women purely in terms of their sexuality - as being primitive, polyandrous, unclean 'whores' (Knox, 1966:173).

As pointed out by Goonatilake (1985), a number of descriptive articles in journals and newspapers (predominantly by male writers) in the 19th Century alluded to women in relation to socio-cultural practices (marriage and divorce customs, puberty rites, social welfare efforts, healthcare and education). These dominant public portrayals of women situate them essentially in the private sphere of life where they are perceived as alien subjects who possess a different

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[40] Sri Lanka
[41] Sinhalese

biology and culture to that of men. Certain 'dark' areas of women such as puberty, childbirth, and marital customs are thus taken to need investigation and public perusal from the standpoint of male knowledge and authority.

De Mel and Samarakkody (2002) trace the earliest writing by women in English to travel narratives about Ceylon, and commentary on the Empire by British and American visitors to the island during the 19th Century. Other literature, by local women writers, from the 1860s onwards, took creative forms and genres - such as folklore, ghost stories, adventure narratives, historical fiction and social satire (*ibid.*). These found a space in public discourse (consisting of newspapers and supplements, journals and magazines). Of note in the content of these writings in the early 20th Century, is the notion of 'the new woman' (de Mel and Samarakkody, 2002:43) which was perhaps a result of the political and social undercurrents of the modernist movement in the West that conceptualised a 'modern role' for women. It is worth observing here that 'modernity' and 'westernisation' are recurrent themes (whether aspirational as in this instance, or as derogative or alien) when looking at feminism and women's activism in Sri Lanka. This has been discussed at length in Chapters 6 / 8 / 9.

Early research activism can be seen as writing that advocated social change for women (by men and

women) in magazines and newspapers during the latter part of the 19th Century. This was primarily in relation to the debate on the setting up, firstly, of Christian, and later, Buddhist schools for women (de Mel and Samarakkody, 2002). Jayawardena (1986) traces the reasons for this as the education of girls for missionary objectives and to pass the Cambridge examination so as to improve their marriage prospects. Other motives entailed becoming proficient in domestic / social skills required to be exemplary wives of men from the upper classes, and to:

> reach the highest ladder of fame, to regenerate their sex, and to distinguish themselves... (Buddhist Schools Magazine of 1895 quoted in Jayawardena, 1986:124).

This led to a new class of educated and professional women, who became politically active, who travelled, and who formed a number of women's organisations[42] (Cat's Eye, 2000c). Jayawardena (1993) records how through their lectures and public-speaking, these middle / upper class women were active in political and social life during this period. Though their activism did not last, and though they were not as militant as the suffragette groups in Britain, this first generation of

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[42] These include the Girls Friendly Society and the Ceylon Women's Union (1904), the *Lanka Mahila Samithi* (1929), and the Women's Franchise Union (1927). The latter attracted many women (from prominent political families to wives of labour and nationalist leaders of the 1920s). The Women's Political Union of the 1920s and later, the All Ceylon Women's Conference continued to champion women's rights, equal pay, and women's access to all professions.

women activists / organisations can be seen as the historical predecessors to the contemporary women's movements in the country. This was so particularly in terms of their role *vis-à-vis* the burning political, social and welfare needs / rights of women. For instance, the Women's Franchise Union of Ceylon (1928) headed the demand for the women's vote and political participation leading to the attainment of universal franchise in 1931. In this, it had to fend off attacks on women – charges that franchise rights were 'Western' and therefore not part of the indigenous culture or traditional feminine virtues, and that they were symbols of modernity and elitism (de Alwis and Jayawardena, 2001). Most of the debate on the issue took place in the Sinhala / Tamil press of the period, though some writing on the issue is also evident in the English press (*ibid.*). These developments can be seen as the antecedents to the continuing public discourse on women, which sees feminism as a Western import – still linked to modernity (Chapter 6).

In the late 1920s and 1930s, women were also active in Left political organisations such as the Ceylon Labour Union and Labour Party, the *Surya Mal Movement*, the *Lanka Sama Samaja Pakshaya* (LSSP), and the Communist Party[43]. Not only were these women advocates of radical social changes in society, but they also:

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[43] These were all prominent Left organisations of the period

> broke with tradition making cross-caste and cross-ethnic marriages, thereby defying both patriarchs and British rulers (Cat's Eye, 2000b:24).

By the 1940s, the women of the *Eksath Kantha Peramuna* (EKP or United Women's Front), a coalition of women political activists from the Left parties, wrote newspaper / magazine articles on the plight of working women. They focused on working and living conditions, and low wages, and forwarded a radical feminist agenda (Jayawardena and de Alwis, 2002). Although they attempted to integrate women's concerns into the larger socialist agenda (de Mel and Muttetuwegama, 1997), their position on women's liberation was, however subordinate to class concerns - given the central political interests of these women.

The Emergence of WR Writing and Research

In the earlier section, I illustrated the different origins and discontinuities of WR writing in the country. I have also tried to link the phenomenon to some of the historical developments of the period - despite the irrationalities of such an exercise (Foucault, 1972). In the 1970s, local women's activism (first as individuals and then as groups) and the influence of Western / global feminist consciousness resulted in the burgeoning of WR research in Sri Lanka. This can be related to the international agenda espoused by the United Nations

with regard to women's rights[44], issues[45] and gender interests[46].

The Liberal Agenda

The institution of the United Nations International Year of Women in 1975, the first UN Conference on Women (Mexico, 1975), and the subsequent United Nations Decade for Women (1975 – 1985) were publicly significant events on women's issues in Sri Lanka. Other international initiatives supported by Sri Lanka included the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights (1948), as well as the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (UNCEDAW) in 1979. These initiatives were designed to address problems that affected women, provide equal opportunities, and to integrate women as co-partners in national development (University of Colombo, 1979).

The National Committee appointed by the government to co-ordinate activities to celebrate the First UN Conference included radical left politicians such as Vivienne Goonewardene (LSSP) and others from the SLFP and CP. They, together with Manel Abeysekera from the Foreign Ministry of Sri Lanka and Swarna Jayaweera from the University of Colombo,

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[44] This is the right to equal opportunities in fields such as employment, education, and politics.
[45] These are areas in life which are of specific concern to women such as domestic violence, abortion, and sexual harassment.
[46] The interest in how gender impacts on any issue.

accompanied Sri Lanka's woman Prime Minister Sirimavo Banadaranaike to Mexico City[47].

At the time, the fact that Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike, (the first woman Prime Minister in the world), addressed the conference created further interest locally. However, in her speech, Bandaranaike (1975) reduced the goals of UNIYW to one overarching concept of equality. She made a distinction between what she saw as the negative aspects of equality such as 'militancy' 'protest' and 'revolt', and the positive aspects such as 'benefits' and 'integration'. Unfortunately, she did not address the urgent need for multiple strategies to achieve equality. However, she argued that the status of women could not be looked at in isolation from other aspects of development – and that development had to be a unified process. A valid point, which was later, reflected in global feminist perspectives, especially as advocated by the Gender and Development (GAD) movement (Overholt, Anderson, Cloud and Austin 1984; Moser, 1993) with its emphasis on gender relations.

Bandaranaike then made a case for an 'Asian' viewpoint – in what can perhaps be seen as one of the earliest attempts at a women's standpoint[48], when she promoted what she called a Buddhist concept of equality. This was primarily culture-based and conceptualised in

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[47] This was gathered from a conversation with Kumudhini Samuel.
[48] This is the particular standpoint of a collective identity or a perspective.

harmonious partnership with men. However, the exact nature of this model or its exact location in Buddhism is not clear. This polarisation between the East and West is characteristic of Bandaranaike's stand on international politics during her tenure (1970 – 1976). It attributes a homogeneity and immobility to all Asian women as well as to Western women that is detrimental to the diverse identities of women. Furthermore, her faith in the equality of women on the basis of Asian culture needs to be analysed as being centred more on women's (so-called) choice pertaining to motherhood; and a valourisation of its responsibilities as far as women are concerned. Though Bandaranaike's speech grapples critically with the implications of women's equality, development, and choice, it does not visualise women as individuals in their own right with specific needs, or conceptualise progressive social change for women.

As a result of the Sri Lankan State's commitments to the UN and local activism by women, the Women's Bureau of Sri Lanka (1979) was established by the Ministry of Plan and Implementation. Later, in 1983, the Ministry of Women's Affairs was instituted, initially in affiliation with other ministries. The Ministry was also bound to report each year to the UNCEDAW Committee on the status of women in Sri Lanka, while women's NGOs prepared their own shadow report (SLWNGOF, 1999; CENWOR, 2001), which provided an alternative perspective from the state.

At the individual level, the early 1970s saw a small group of women in Sri Lanka reading Western feminist writers de Beauvoir (1972)[49], and others such as Friedan (1963), Boserup (1970), Greer (1971), Millett (1971), Rowbotham (1973) and Rosaldo and Lamphere (1974)[50] of the second wave of feminism in America and England. Like the first generation of women activists in Sri Lanka, some of them had studied and travelled abroad; and were involved in an informal study group. These included researchers and activists like Kumari Jayawardena, Manori Muttetuwegama, Eva Ranweera, Bernadeen de Silva, Swarna Jayaweera and Hema Goonetillake. They had led the preparations for the UNIYW from 1974 (and on to the Decade for Women), through activism *via* newspapers, pamphlets, public lectures, networking, and organised visits from foreign feminists[51].

The critical point here is that with UN sponsorship, women's research and activism became concretised. They acquired tangible aspirations and resulted in state and other structures and mechanisms for women, as well as a specific discourse based on women, development and equality, within the particular framework of the UN standards for the UN Decade (1975-1985). At the same time, the evolving consciousness about women's issues triggered feminists and researchers to move beyond the continuing UN mandates, to other compelling areas of

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[49] *The Second Sex* was originally published in 1949 in French.
[50] This is based on conversations with Kumari Jayawardena, Eva Ranaweera and Bernadeen de Silva.
[51] Feminists like Nawal El-Saadhavi, Noeline Hayzer, Kamla Bhasin and Elizabeth Reid visited the country.

local, personal and institutional research interests such as development, historical and gender issues (Chapter 6). Thus, what can be identified as liberal feminist activism[52] in Sri Lanka though not unified or universalised, has over the years aspired towards a multiplicity of goals.

Marxist Feminism

Samuel (2006a) comments on parallel developments in the Sinhala-speaking context that supported women's activism based on Marxist principles:

> In 1976, the Marga Institute published *Kanthava Samajaya Vimukthiya* (Women, Society, Liberation) in two volumes which contained a series of articles translated by Sunila Abeysekera...Volume 2 however was truly a handbook for the Marxist. It made a case for socialism and feminism by including appropriate writings from across the spectrum of revolutionary founding fathers...that theorised on women and socialism. Included were Vladimir Lenin, Leon Trotsky, August Bebel, Mao Tse-tung and Fidel Castro. Also included were radical selections from Alexandra Kolontai, Sheila Rowbotham, Maria Mies and Della Costa which introduced a revolutionary perspective into a range of everyday women's concerns from labour to violence, abortion and housework. The Volume employed the inspired strategy of presenting a range of experiences that spanned the world from China to India, and Iran to Vietnam. (Samuel, 2006a:26)

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[52] This was founded on equal rights, development, legislative changes and justice.

Other Marxist writing that emanated from this era came in the form of pamphlets and booklets – for instance, a booklet in Sinhala entitled *Kantha Vimukthiya*[53] published by the Centre for Society and Religion (CSR) in 1975. Edited by Catholic priest and social justice advocate, Tissa Balasuriya, it promoted women's liberation and was notable for its analysis of the situation of women in Sri Lanka. Samuel points out that:

> it opened with a discussion on Women's Liberation by Balasuriya and included three other substantive articles on the 'Semi Slavery of Sri Lankan Women' (Tissa Balasuriya, CSR); 'Discrimination against Women' (Bernadeen de Silva, CSR) and 'The Participation of Women in the Social Reform, Political and Labour Movement of Ceylon' (Kumari Jayawardena). Another contribution... a collection of misogynist 'sayings on women' was further developed into a popular pamphlet with excerpts of oft-quoted verse from religious texts and folklore interspersed with critical comment, and distributed under the title '*Kantha Handa*' (Voice of Women) at May Day rallies in 1975 by Kumari Jayawardena, Sunila Abeysekera and Mala Dassanayake (LSSP) (Samuel, 2006a:30).

In English, the journal *Logos* published by CSR brought out an issue entitled *Women in Asia* edited by Bernadeen de Silva to mark UNIYW. It contained a pioneering article by Jayawardena on women's participation in socio-political reform and the Labour Movement in Sri Lanka (1975).

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[53] Women's Liberation

WR Research

Formal research activism that prioritised change for women (in English) involved women academics[54]. A forerunner in the area is a compendium of short articles in the *Economic Review* of September 1976 which situated women in the development initiatives of the period (Economic Review, 1976b). A more formal and comprehensive research study that was undertaken by the women scholars of the University of Colombo was the *Status of Women Survey* in 1979 (influenced by the Indian study of the times). It considered women as a specific category; and implicitly or explicitly highlighted the inequalities and inequities of their situation (Chapter 6). These women, as well as others researching at the time, can be considered the second generation of feminist writers / researchers. Since then, as will be illustrated by my work in the following chapters, WR research has diversified to cover a variety of topics and forms of dissemination - from visual records to television documentaries and the internet.

Yet, despite this expansion of research interests by the 2000s, there are still some areas which have not received adequate attention such as sexuality, the media, religions and the woman's body. Some of the research on sexuality, when attempted, is couched in the discourse of workers' and health rights - as in the case of two studies on sex workers (Miller, 2000; Abeysekera, 2005a). Wijewardene's (in press) work on

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[54] Some of these women were involved in UNIYW celebrations.

transgendering makes an interesting exception (Chapter 7). Abeysekere (2005a) touches on lesbian relations, but only in the context of sex workers. Tambiah (2004) looks at women's sexuality and the female body in relation to the Penal Code Amendment of 1995 that tried to liberalise abortion amongst other initiatives (Chapter 5).

The gap in research contradicts the existence of lesbian researchers in the WR domain, and gay / transgender activism in the country. Yet, this needs to be understood in the context of the backlash against these communities in recent times and the influence of market ideology (Maguire and Ball, 1994) which neglects certain WR topics due to economic interests.

Theoretical Issues of Research

Up to now, I have conceptualised *connaissance* in the practice of literature reviewing, fully aware that metanarrative can be a form of essentialising, and that tracing origins is not a stable undertaking. In this section, I consider the interface between *connaissance* and *savoir* by engaging with the theoretical aspects of WR research practice. Take the common perception (*savoir*) that research literature can be categorised into women's, gender and feminist research. Three of my respondents tried to define what they did as research practitioners (*connaisssance*).

Kiyana, a researcher in her sixties, discussed her interest in women's research as follows:

> I have got catapulted to do women's research over the years. By women's research, I mean, I look at women... in art and history... I focus on women – pre-modern representations, ancient women, how they have been represented, things like that - so I don't do gender research or feminist research (Kiyana, 5/8/2005).

For Kiyana, women's research was distinct from gender and feminist research because it focused on women. This meant discussing the ways in which women were represented in the historical data that she used. She particularly did not want to be identified as a gender or feminist researcher. Often, the rejection of gender in researching emanates from those who identify themselves as feminists - especially as they fear that expanding the focus to men depoliticises women's oppression (Chapter 7). Yet, Kiyana did not identify herself as a feminist researcher either. Researchers who disown the feminist label usually do so because they find the stereotypical notions associated with feminism to be radical. Chapter 8 refers to another such opinion - expressed by respondent Gayathri (21/7/2005). While it can be argued that women's research is both a standpoint, and a category of research, for me, women's research is a paradigm in knowledge - where the

epistemological focus is on women as argued in Chapter 4.

Gender research for researcher Aruni who has been working in grassroots development projects and research for an INGO involved the following:

> My work is in gender - gender relations. The conceptual standpoint I have been taking is that in any area men and women perform distinctly different roles in society, and because of that, their life experiences, expectations, needs, capabilities, their difficulties are different... within that framework I try to find out what are the differences, what are the capabilities, what are the difficulties, what are the strengths (Aruni, 22/8/2005).

Aruni saw gender as a conceptual framework (or frameworks) that relates to gender roles and relations as conceptualised by Moser (1993). For her, gender involved considering the differences between men and women, and incorporating them in her work. Due to her affiliation to development work, gender had practical implications for Aruni. However, as will be discussed in Chapter 7, gender can be conceptualised as more than a theoretical / practical framework; it is my argument that gender is an epistemology.

On the other hand, Zulfica proudly announced that she was a feminist:

I am a feminist; I am self-taught in feminist theory. One thing is, you have to look at the power dynamics in society - this involves looking at class, poverty, conflicts, race and so on. How this affects women. And the end result of research should be empowerment - of the individual and structures. Consciousness-raising and change in structures. Of course, I can't directly link this to our research but we seem to have conscientised the judges of the Quasi Appeal Courts. Now their judgments are more progressive - we have a woman lawyer from our organisation to represent clients. She argues the case so well that judgments are more favourable towards women. But these dynamic efforts need to be kept going constantly (Zulfica, 13/7/2005).

Her idea of feminism entailed a holistic view of various power-plays or intersects within society - in terms of how they affected women. She also advocated the use of multiple methods to empower individuals and social structures; and related an anecdote of structural change due to research activism by her organisation. Here the understanding of what is termed as feminist research has an indisputable link to the politics of power and a desire / action for social change. In this context, Zulfica echoed my own standpoint / reading of feminism as a form of ethical politics. The above example also conveys that formal knowledge of *connaissance* invariably impacts on *savoir* and *vice versa* in what can be seen as a cyclic relationship. The theoretical aspirations of formal

knowledge led to informal institutional knowledge and activism in this instance.

However, there are more tempered readings of feminist research activism. Another interviewee, Wasanthi articulated the following sentiments regarding women:

> And it becomes more comfortable to talk within that framework, and see that their conditions are improved - what I mean is that they have not been confrontational. But sort of a 'softly softly' approach, you know what I mean? Say... without challenging the status quo. Actually, we have not challenged the patriarchal structure forcefully enough. That is my feeling. Whether we can achieve what we want to achieve through the way we are doing without being confrontational, I don't know whether that is possible (25/8/2004).

Wasanthi (*ibid.*) conveyed her ambivalence about the liberal feminist approach of working within the existing *status-quo*. Yet, this is based on a stereotypical perception that feminism - particularly Western feminism - is symbolic of confrontation. In fact, I realised during the course of my research that I myself have been guilty of such unconscious bias[55]. Two other interviewees in my study also saw confrontation as 'radicalism'. Such views belie and negate Sri Lankan women's periodic protests and agitations - for instance, against the war. Having argued so, it must be conceded

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[55] This realisation came in a conversation with my supervisor Anne Gold.

that the bulk of activism has been attempted through strategic means: negotiation, lobbying, and action research. However, it is highly debatable whether this reflects the dominant Buddhist ethic of tolerance in Sri Lanka as has been generally presumed.

It is also worth mentioning here aspects of feminism which are more instinctive (Chapter 8). What my respondent, Sakunthala (18/7/2005), a quantitative researcher, identified as 'a gut feeling' with regard to her own commitment to women's research. This 'gut feeling' is the unconscious, instinctive factor propelling WR research activism which requires further investigation.

Conforming to modernist reasoning centred on dualisms, I now juxtapose this unconscious, even emotional partiality of feminisms (Jagger, 1989) with the contention that Sri Lankan WR research lacks theorisation by feminist researchers (Goonatilake, 1985; Wanasundera, 1995). This seems dated in the face of new research studies; for instance, work in anthropology, cultural studies, and social science explore the theoretical boundaries of contemporary Sri Lankan women in armed combat (Rajasingham-Senanayake, 2001), and nationalism (de Mel, 2001).

Furthermore, it is also possible that the criticism of Sri Lankan research as lacking theory is based on a

perception of the research not applying Western theorisations (as much of the empirical work is based on inductive methods of surveying and interviewing). Take the examples of Jayaweera (2005) or Wijayatilake (2002). Other studies employ a women's perspective or operate on arguments of women's rights or local conceptualisations of patriarchy (Millett, 1971)[56]. In fact, these studies 'begin theory', even if they do not 'theorise' through systematic arguments of synthesis or deconstruction (Chapters 5 and 8). Furthermore, it is possible that the focus on beginning theory as opposed to applying theory results from the location of a great number of WR studies in the NGO sector and not in academia, where the objectives of research may centre on pragmatism and a needs-base.

Research and the Women's Movements of Sri Lanka

From an understanding of the interface between *connaissance* and *savoir* relating to women, gender and feminisms, I move on to the consideration of *savoir* - or the historical conditions and developments that make the domain of Women's Studies possible.

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[56] I use this to mean an overarching system of male dominance.

In Sri Lanka, stagnation in economic growth during the 1970s (due to import and foreign exchange restrictions, high unemployment levels, and food shortages), led a new United National Party (UNP) government to initiate radical changes in economic policy from 1977. These involved the introduction of a Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) sponsored by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), according to the prevalent economic matrix. Successive programmes of structural adjustment since then resulted in extensive transformations to the Sri Lankan state and economy. The State became lethargic, and relinquished its involvement in public / welfare services as economic restructuring and privatisations took place. This resulted in private sector intervention in the service sectors especially in urban locales, and NGO initiatives (especially in micro-development) in rural quarters. The environment created by the availability of funding from international and bilateral agencies resulted in an increased INGO presence, and a boom in NGOs and CBOs[57]. Women too, began to be featured in the focus of these NGOs - amongst the development issues of the time such as infrastructure development, welfare assistance, healthcare, education and skills training, community development, income generation schemes and the environment (Fernando and de Mel, 1991; Wickramasinghe, 2000).

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[57] Community-based Organisations.

Women's groups and NGOs that were development-oriented, activist-oriented and research-oriented emerged (Jayaweera, 1995) as did federations of women's groups at grassroots and other levels. As consciousness strengthened amongst local women and the internationalisation of gender and women's issues grew, the mandates of these organisations addressed the diversity of women's needs[58]. These ranged from welfare assistance to rural women's skill training, from credit schemes to Women's Day activities, from peace initiatives to support for violence against women, from legal literacy to policy interventions, from gender training and research to media-monitoring.

The diversity of these activities and programmes shows the multi-faceted dynamism of women's activism in Sri Lanka. It has been argued that this constitutes women's movements rather than a singular movement (Jayawardena, 1985; Wickramasinghe, 2000; Jayawardena and de Alwis, 2002). This is because groups that are diverse and fragmented come together periodically to establish coalitions, protest, advocate, and lobby on contingent issues.

One of my respondents, Hanifa, argued that this fragmentation was because:

> the movement is quite scattered at the
> moment; it is scattered because the

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[58] These were funded by agencies such as the United Nations and its related bodies, the US, Norwegian, Dutch, Canadian and Swedish bi-lateral organisations.

movement has become 'projectified' over a period of time (Hanifa, 26/7/2005).

She attributed this fragmentation to INGO funding practices which support short-term projects rather than sustained interventions. This viewpoint is partially valid since the interests of some organisations are limited to the project. My own experiences as a feminist activist is that, despite their defined and focused interests, many women's organisations and individual feminists have coalesced frequently on anti-war protests, issues of violence against women and, of late, on the tsunami (Chapter 9).

This needs to be perceived as a feminist politics of unity and difference and not as a lack. Why should we, as feminists, expect or even impose a commonality of political interest on one another? I argue that what is strategically necessary is a politics of pragmatism, contingence and convergence. This is conceptualised in terms of feminists of many hues working strategically and pragmatically through mutual compromise towards common junctures, while at the same time working independently and consistently towards individual goals and objectives based on differences.

Research Activism

A related development of the institutionalisation of women's movements has been the prominence of research activism. By this, I mean the significance of

researching for feminist activism. Research activism[59] encompasses the following.

- Research for general purposes of consciousness-raising and education.
- Research designed to formulate, lobby or influence policy and legislation.
- Research that is done in preparation for / conjunction with a specific developmental intervention.
- Research that prepares institutions for gender mainstreaming and reformation.
- Research that evaluates gender mainstreaming / reformation.
- Research that is utilised for feminist protest.

My interviews with researchers for this study give scores of instances where research led to activism. For instance, the researcher has followed up the research study of displaced women by lobbying on behalf of the women concerned with the relevant authorities (Schrijvers, 1996). Research has led to policy revision (Wasanthi, 25/8/2004) and been the base for a subsequent development intervention at the community level (Deena, 23/8/2004).

Yet, WR research from academia (in the sense of being pursued, nourished and debated within academic

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[59] Research activism is distinguished from action research (Chapter 5) which leads to the empowerment / integration of the researched into the research process.

structures and in university fora) is limited[60] compared to research from the NGOs. The non-existence of a formal discipline of Women's Studies at undergraduate level, the relative lack of stress on research (as opposed to teaching within higher educational institutions), and a perceived lack of a university forum for WR research (especially in the early years) may have impacted on this. Often the production of and forum for WR research has been situated in NGO environs above and beyond the academy (Reuben, 1978), as is the case with Sri Lanka. This 'new' academia is seen to be flexible and unstructured; with surges of activity and the potential for continuing growth as long as funding sources are available. In contrast, due to the free education system in the country and a staunch resistance to the privatisation of universities, the impact of market ideology within higher education is limited: unlike in the UK, for instance (Maguire and Ball, 1994). However, higher education is in the process of being restructured.

Conversely, Women's Studies teaching[61] has been located primarily in the universities since 1988 except for a few initiatives by NGOs[62]. Today, several state universities have also integrated gender / women's perspectives into undergraduate, diploma and graduate

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[60] There are however, occasional initiatives such as the Gender Equity in Commonwealth Universities Project.

[61] Take the BA course on Women in Agriculture (University of Peradeniya); M. A. in Women's Studies (University of Colombo); BA Multi-disciplinary Gender Stream (University of Colombo).

[62] These have been by the Women and Media Collective and the Women's Education and Research Centre.

courses[63] of various disciplines, often promoting gender / WR topics and perspectives in dissertation writing. Here, the local debate has been centred on whether there should be a separate Women's Studies discipline or whether gender should be integrated into all subjects (Jayawardena, 1995a). Currently, both strategies are in operation.

Sadia, an interviewee whose origins are in NGO work, made a very pertinent point about the more subtle complexities of research activism:

> Most activists are too busy to write down about their work. Also, they are not trained. Academic research may not be accessible to the activists. They may not have the tools to understand it... It can be alien, have academic authority. Activists do a lot - it may not get written down, it may not be considered important. They'll only be oral histories. So, we have to think of what constitutes research – as other forms of research are not valued as official research (Sadia, 29/10/2004).

Speaking of her involvement in subaltern (Spivak, 1993) historical research, recording the lost voices of working-class women political activists, Sadia (*ibid.*) argued that for her, there was always a political intent in researching. In this instance, it involved making visible the invisible and thereby giving recognition and value to the activities of working-class women. She also raised the ethical problem of the authoritative standing given to

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[63] These are the Universities of Peradeniya, Colombo, and Kelaniya.

academic research as opposed to other forms of research.

The above quotation exemplifies the polarity between action and writing - where writing (*connaissance*) is perceived as an activity that is attributed more value by academia, and activism (*savoir*) neglected. Yet, this conceptualisation of *connaissance* and *savoir* as two distinct entities is problematic since the interfaces between the two are exceedingly blurred and unstable as exemplified by the following questions implied by Sadia. What constitutes research and whether is it only possible in written form? What about different knowledge possibilities in particular social / cultural contexts? How should such knowledge be indicated / evaluated?

Sadia also added:

> There are people who came to our organisation... they have taken some of our data, and they have published. Sometimes, five, six, seven things from the same data. They have never acknowledged us - but they get the credit, they become the authorities, but our work is not recognised... (29/10/2004)

The privileging of academic terminology, analytical frameworks and presentation tools have resulted in giving 'expertise' for researchers in Women's Studies. Sadia alleges that researchers gain such expertise on the back of the grassroots activists.

A critical issue is foregrounded here - that of intellectual property rights. Sadia explores the tensions within a research process such as the ownership and sharing of information, collective authorship, and expertise on feminist issues. These are areas that have not received attention in feminist scholarship in the country (Chapter 9). This poses several questions; who should do WR research? Should women activists undertake their own research? How should feminists disseminate data in unwritten form?

Profiling Researchers

While the individual conscious / unconscious subjectivities of researchers in knowledge and meaning-making are irrefutable, there is also a need to account for the collective knowledge bank within the epistemic community of Women's Studies:

> Some of the older women come from the Left movement to feminism but with a very strong socialist frame... Then ... in the 70s, you get women ... influenced by 1968, by Vietnam, revolutions in Nicaragua...Then... in the 80s ... yet another generation... for whom there is globalised influence, globalised knowledge, IT, exposure to international academia, Women's Studies abroad, postmodernism though one may not be necessarily grounded within progressive politics - of movement-oriented politics... And then the next generation like ... who

all have the luxury of being in academia to some extent as they grew up fairly cushioned. Some women are not in engaged politics...militarised politics - as it alienates a lot of English-speaking young academics (Sadia, 29/10/2004).

This quotation reflected Sadia's take on the numerous facets in the collective stock of WR knowledge. It traces the battery of issues regarding the political grounding, ideological standing, language, disciplinary positionings, external influences / events and personal interests of researchers (Chapter 8). Both global politics and local politics have figured in feminist consciousness / knowledge. However, Sadia's visual pertains to a particular section of Sri Lankan researchers who have openly identified themselves as feminist researchers, a number of whom have been educated abroad[64] (including myself) resulting in international academic experiences of Women's Studies since the 1980s and 1990s. I deal closely with some of these issues in Chapters 6 and 8.

Sadia (*ibid.*) also talked of an alienating split between the militarised politics in the country and some of the English-speaking academics. Yet such an understanding is essentialist and biased towards a particular view of politics and feminism, and denies interlinks between researchers and the diversity and degrees of feminist activisms.

[64] This includes the Institute of Social Studies (The Hague) and Institute for Development Studies (University of Sussex).

Nevertheless, it is worth noting the privileges associated with the English language as discussed by Wanasundera (1995):

> The ability to access financial resources required for research, especially external assistance, peer group interactions, participation in professional activities within and outside the country, their high visibility locally, and resources at their disposal were some of the factors that kept research activity confined to few and within urban areas (Wanasundera, 1995:348).

The international community is, in terms of agenda-setting, interaction, and funding opportunities, weighted towards those who are skilled in the English language. However, within the last few years INGOs such as CIDA[65] have started funding WR research in Sinhala / Tamil, and have sponsored translations. The last decade has seen an increase in the presentation of WR research in Sinhala by individual researchers.[66]

Given the unstable economic and political fortunes of the country, many researchers are aware of the opportunities available to them outside Sri Lanka. My interviewees spoke of a conscious decision to stay / work in the country, resisting decades of white-collar / blue-collar labour migration.

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[65] Canadian International Development Agency
[66] This is evident from CENWOR national conventions.

Within the country, many researchers have multiple roles in life; from professional roles to activist roles to gender roles. Often they are academics or professionals; members of women's NGOs and CBOs; they sit on local, governmental, national, regional and international bodies; they are involved in advocacy and lobbying amongst the government / the private sector / rural and urban communities; they are also involved in protests and demonstrations. This implies that, for many researchers, researching is merely one aspect of activism.

Ground Politics

However, this picture of dynamic WR research and activism is perhaps compromised by the influence of globalisation and what is generally seen as the commercialisation of research. There are allegations that certain researchers take advantage of the mastery of WR discourse (in terms of familiarity with theoretical frameworks / technical jargon) and academic qualifications actively to cultivate contacts within the INGO sector to exploit the funding sources available. Thus, these researchers' commitment to feminist politics has been questioned within the WR research domain. Research motives are seen to be tainted by interactions based on exploitation and self-aggrandisement, and the politics of the research process as being eroded by commercialism and the interests of market ideology (Maguire and Ball, 1994) or global capitalism.

While these allegations are disturbing, they also reflect early feminist assumptions that feminism is based on superior, higher ideals of sisterhood and unity. Furthermore, they assume that feminist politics should strive to be pure and uncoloured by negative characteristics of exploitation, competition, self-interest and personal dislikes (Mohanty, 2003). Postmodern feminism has exposed the misleading fallacies of such moral polarisations (that naturally assign 'goodness' to women and 'badness' to men), as being based on essentialism and biological determinism[67] / reductionism (de Lauretis, 1989; Martin, 1994). I myself deal with this at length in Chapter 9.

What is required in today's context is not misplaced idealism or rejection, but an approach to feminism that is inclusive and pragmatic. This should take into consideration the multiple facets and realities of the research context (such as funding concerns and other motivations), and build on what has been achieved. This is of significance in the context of complex and far-reaching global and other forces that are part of / intersect / impinge on the local scenario. For instance, universities (which should be the bedrock of research) are increasingly under financial pressure to adjust structurally to the demands of economic reforms and changing employment requirements through needs-based teaching rather than researching.

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[67] This is a norm of thinking that the destinies of people are solely guided by their biological make-up (Chapters 7 / 8).

When it comes to NGO research, the question always arises as to who decides the research agenda, topics and questions. As far back as 1985, Goonatilake saw the researcher as 'having to attune herself to criteria lain down externally' (1985:36). While the shifting nature of funders' research mandates according to globally identified interests cannot be denied, there is nonetheless, space for negotiation by researchers - as evidenced by the multiplicity of issues / directions of WR research literature.

Respondent Kamini, a feminist academic working in an activist organisation, articulated the following about the donor / NGO relationship:

> As an organisation...if you look at our annual plan there are studies that we want to do. You will find that some of them have never been done. They are pushed out. Because you just can't get funding for those things. Nowadays - you put in violence issues, some economic issues, peace or rehabilitation. Donors all have their own priorities...(Kamini,17/7/2005).

Dhamani, an ardent proponent of anti-positivism related her experience of how this divide manifested itself in research praxis:

> I wanted to trace a study of women from different ethnic groups in the north and east of the country, multiethnic groups, and look at how the war has shaped their responses to the tsunami. But this INGO was not interested in funding that. What

they wanted was a nine-month turnaround... give some kind of a preliminary report. They were more interested in things like the distribution of aid. Now, some part of my study would have looked at the distribution of aid because it is absolutely important. But I would have looked at it from its gendered aspect... we know how aid can get politicised, how women may not see any...and how women have been shaped by the war as well as the Tsunami. They just downgraded the whole proposal (Dhamani, 27/7/2005).

In this instance, what could have been a more insightful, comprehensive research study was redirected into having one primary objective - that of evaluating impact. This highlights the current *mantra* of institutional productivity and efficiency that is an influencing factor in the direction and content of research.

However, despite these constraints, researchers have managed to obtain funds for research proposals designed solely by them - according to their interests and priorities. This conveys the complex tensions between the autonomy of the research focus and global funding sources. Another trend seems to be the regional research projects of transnational women's NGO networks, which are initiated by research centres.[68] Here too, there has been room for negotiation; to make way for country issues or to design the research project according to the local environment. However, this may not always be the

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[68] Interviewees made references to studies on women's work and family strategies, subcontracting, the impact of macro-economic reforms, and poverty undertaken jointly with research centres from different countries.

case with research consultancies, where researchers are commissioned by organisations, and given specific Terms of Reference (TOR) for the research project. Yet, personal experience gives evidence to the fact that I have - as a consultant researcher - been able to formulate and even change the TOR.

I reiterate here that the multiplicity of issues / directions of WR research literature negate the argument that the research focus is solely dependent on funding priorities (Chapter 6). Certain research interests – such as the current focus on women's political participation – can be attributed to global prioritisation especially at the level of the United Nations, but research is equally situated in local imperatives, institutional impulses and personal politics (Chapter 6).

My depiction / construction of trajectories of WR research since the 19th Century has resulted in an understanding of the linkages between research and the multiple historical, political and socio-cultural realities in the country. It is a relationship that is contingent not only on women's activism over the years, but also on Sri Lanka's development processes, the conflict situation and other external factors. In view of the close alignment of research with women's movements, it is useful to think in terms of research activism. Yet the boundaries between women's research (*connaissance*) and the ontological conditions (*savoir*) producing research were conceptualised as blurred. Furthermore, the positivist binaries of WR research (theory *versus*

empiricism, academia *versus* activism, and scholar *versus* NGO, funding directives *versus* independent research) required revisioning so as to make multiple meanings of Sri Lankan Women's Studies archeology.

Chapter Four

Women - A New Paradigm in Knowledge Production

In this chapter I aim to argue that the topic of women in research heralded a revolution in research methodology - as a new paradigm in knowledge production. The consciousness of women (about women) is transformed not only into an epistemology, but also into a paradigm in knowledge through the acts of research and activism. As I argued in Chapter 3, hitherto, in Sri Lanka, women's research has been conceptualised as a type of research category alongside gender and feminist research. I have been particularly perturbed by this tendency to envisage feminist research as genuine political research; gender research as commercial research; or WR research as neutral research. Such assumptions are misleading due to the shared aims and assimilations of feminisms, gender and women. The common factor in the three types of research is, quite simply, its focus on women. In fact, the illusory category of women is the nexus of all women / feminist / gender-related research and methodology. Here, I will argue that this engagement with women represents a new paradigm that breaks away from the general established norms and principles of research and I will define what this paradigm of women means in the local context. However, due to the word limitations of the

PhD thesis, I will not be discussing the finer details of the argument but focusing only on the epistemological, theoretical and political implications of women / woman - concepts that are at the core of such a paradigm.

My research will thus focus on / compose the concepts of women / woman in terms of a political category for research and activism. Firstly, it will involve examining how research makes meaning through the composition and depiction of the absence / presence / construction / representation of women through particular theoretical frames. Secondly, in considering the presence of women in research, it will take into account the implications of the presence of women in the plural, as well as the biological and social construction of woman in the singular (through the discursive example of the Mother figure within the theoretical framework of patriarchy). Thirdly, it will engage with the conceptualisations of women as passive or active entities in research for the political project of feminism.

By arguing that women as a paradigm in research constitute an umbrella concept through which to consider all forms of WR research I will be grappling with the following research questions (1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 6). What are the key concepts, theoretical frameworks / paradigms / approaches / concepts in WR research adhered to within the Sri Lankan context? How are they conceptualised? How do they operate? How do research processes generate / construct knowledge *vis-à-vis* WR research? What are the practical advantages, challenges

and limitations of conceptualising / applying particular research methodologies? What are the 'disciplines' or multiple disciplines engaged in WR research and how are these issues covered in WR research?

Women as a Paradigm in Knowledge Production

The concept of a paradigm in knowledge is commonly held to originate with Thomas Kuhn and his idea of how scientifically unexplainable anomalies in scientific traditions and practices lead to the conceptualisation of new foundations for that scientific practice (Kuhn, 1970). These new methodological foundations are forwarded to explain and resolve the existing anomalies. Althusser is cited by Foucault (1998:281 - 282) as calling this phenomenon 'an epistemological break' with regard to the advent of Marxist economic analysis. Foucault (*ibid.*) himself disagrees, arguing that Marx modifies the economic analyses of Ricardo, but concedes a break only when it comes to the Marxist theory of society.

My understanding straddles both positions. A paradigm is not a distinctive action undertaken by a specific knowledge maker, but rather, an extended break – comprising new (multiple) knowledges and cross-fertilisations in epistemology. This for a time ignites the collective intellect of a particular epistemic community. From a postmodernist viewpoint, its origins may not

always be clear and its history and progress discontinuous and nonlinear. Yet, from a modernist position, it is possible to identify / construct the origins, continuities and linearity of a paradigm. I conceptualise this overarching concept as a symbolic moment in knowledge production for the strategic purpose of establishing the phenomenon of Women's Studies.

By the term paradigm, Stanley and Wise mean:

> not so much a theory, more a theoretically derived worldview which provides the categories and concepts through and by which we construct and understand the world (1993:153).

When applied to social science research:

> paradigms are not only produced from the doing of scientific work, they also play a key role in providing covert reference points; paradigms bind people together in a shared commitment to their discipline (Oakley, 2000:27).

In other words, a paradigm not only provides a knowledge base, framework and methods for researching, but also a sense of an epistemic community as conceptualised by Stanley and Wise (1993) and Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002). This is in the form of a socially produced community that takes upon itself the authority to speak for / from a specialised knowledge base. The focus, incorporation, compartmentalisation, mainstreaming, and construction of women in Sri Lankan research and writing led to the establishment of

Women's Studies, and thus constitute a critical swing of the knowledge paradigm. However, keeping in mind Lather's (1991) discussion of the various critiques of paradigms, it is conceptualised as a transitional moment of emerging, competing knowledges.

To reiterate, the birth of this new discipline needs to be conceptualised as involving Foucault's archaeology of both 'savoir' and 'connaissance' (Foucault, 1972). It is *connaissance* that is dynamic in the way it spans and straddles multiple disciplines, and appropriates / incorporates many knowledge-making models and diverse theoretical standpoints. It is *savoir* in the way it has revolutionised knowledge production and meaning-making through its appeal to experience, emotions, activism and networking.

As conceptualised by Kuhn (1970), I contend that this paradigm shift arose from a series of anomalies. Some of the researchers interviewed by me articulated these anomalies as follows. Wasanthi (18/10/2004) talked of 'an identified gap in existing knowledge with regard to women'. Anoja (4/7/2005), a young researcher argued for the necessity to 'make knowledge about women that is already there – formal'. Thamalini (6/7/2005) whose disciplinary interests include Tamil literature discussed the mismatch between the 'assumptions about women, the figurative representations of women and women's realities'. Sakunthala (18/7/2005), a quantitative researcher, acknowledged that 'women's perceptions and perspectives were not gauged in knowledge'. While

the researchers cited here come from diverse feminist standpoints, many see these anomalies as a particular aspect of patriarchy[69] (Wickramasinghe, 1997).

The revolution signified by women's studies becomes evident when considering the hitherto pre-eminence of men as knowledge and meaning-makers and the entry of women as producers of knowledge and meaning. Hitherto, the presentation and prevalence of men's standpoints have been the norm whereas the unique experiences and perspectives of women have been neglected and silenced. Women lacked the authority to delineate what constitutes legitimate knowledge in virtually all disciplines. However, the swing in paradigm led to the establishment of a veritable interdisciplinary bank of knowledge relating to women's interests, experiences and issues. Thus women were no longer confined to mere representations in research, but gained the capacity to mobilise and empower themselves, define themselves, and participate in knowledge-making processes. The existent epistemological gaps and cloudiness regarding women were filled; and theories and frameworks of analysis were developed to represent and construct themselves and their societies. Knowledge which had historically been confined to paper was now 'operationalised' to transform the realities of women at different levels of society. Women's Studies was thus formed as a discipline / domain within a relatively

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[69] This is a heavily contested overarching concept that attributes women's oppression to male domination through ideologies, social institutions and life practices.

nebulous epistemic community of researchers as argued
in Chapter 3.

Christine Delphy, as far back as 1981, expanded this
argument when she critiqued the existing knowledge
paradigm for its ignorance of social oppressions:

> All knowledge which does not recognise,
> which does not take social oppression as
> its premise, denies it, and as a
> consequence objectively serves it...
> Knowledge that would take as its point of
> departure the oppression of women would
> constitute an epistemological revolution
> (Delphy, 1981:73).

Delphy makes explicit the connections between
knowledge and power. Thus the power to critique /
deconstruct old knowledge claims, and the power to
make new knowledge claims from a women's standpoint
have been the means by which a paradigm based on
women was created / established.

Usually, discussions relating to a paradigm are done at
the expense of a contrasting paradigm - examples being
that of the qualitative *versus* quantitative paradigm or
the interpretive *versus* normative paradigms (Burrell and
Morgan, 1979; Cohen and Manion, 1997; Oakley,
2000). This reflects the oppositional or binary thinking
of modernism. I am temporarily conceptualising a
women's paradigm as forming a binary opposition to
established codes of knowledge, solely in order to
convey the departure or deviation from existing
knowledge. I am not arguing that the two paradigms

represent universally dissimilar ideals that are mutually and eternally in conflict. Rather, the contrast is offered simply to communicate the *status quo* that existed, and what was implied by the blossoming of local women's research as discussed in the previous chapter.

Furthermore, the paradigm of women is not offered uncritically as being able unanimously to research or resolve the methodological and epistemological problems provoked within the discipline of Women's Studies. Take the inherent dissonance of a collective women's reality as opposed to an individual woman's. Or take the structural limitations of social Constructivist frameworks such as patriarchy and gender relations. Or, for that matter, take the real-life limitations in actualising the political aspirations of feminist research.

Moreover, despite the attempts of such a paradigm to produce counter-knowledge and methodology that is true to those who are subjugated, these too can only be partial and situated (Haraway, 1988). Consequently, my conceptualisation of a women's paradigm in research and methodology is not based on assumptions of an ordered, coherent worldview. Rather it is based on the awareness of the non-linear, unstable, fragmented, disunity in such an overarching concept.

The Political Categories of Women / Woman

Contemporary interests in Western feminist debates have moved on to realms such as Third Wave feminism, postfeminisms, Queer theory, transgendering, and cyborgs. I am aware that focusing on women / woman may be seen as essentialist and *passé*. Yet while some facets of feminist internationalisms have imprinted significantly on the national policies of a majority of countries, there are still parts of the world where feminist consciousness conceptualised in Western terms may not be prevalent or be only partially prevalent.

As far as Sri Lanka is concerned, my argument originates in a reluctant desire to amalgamate local research literature with relevant readings of global research methodology. It is my contention that the illusory concepts of women / woman are critical and central principles in conceptualising women as a paradigm. In fact, they act as a fundamental nexus within women's, feminist and gender studies research. However, this is not an unproblematic theoretical position as will be discussed next.

Women

In Sri Lanka, the theoretical concept of women, in the plural, is largely a politicised category used for the aspirational objectives of feminisms (Chapter 9). It hinges on the possibility of linguistic and political representation even though the subjects of such representation are questionable and unstable (Haraway,

1990; Butler, 1999). Nonetheless, there is a worldview of a highly problematic illusory mass of women whom researchers engage with at various levels of interaction. It is this ontology of women that is transformed into an epistemological category by the act of researching.

Thus, within research literature, women are taken to represent an abstract concept - sometimes to signify universality, at others to denote specificity (Chapter 7). Yet, they are always at the core of feminist, gender, women's projects of social and individual change / empowerment. To illustrate the notion of universality within the Sri Lankan context, I refer to WR research texts. At its broadest, providing panoramic, statistical indications of the so-called situations or status of women are texts such as 'The Health and Nutritional Status of Women' (Soysa, 1985) or 'Women in Education and Employment' (Jayaweera, 2002). Women in these studies are abstractions, signifying entire populations of women - usually as homogeneous and inert.

At its particular, providing detailed, more qualitative portrayals of specific situations pertaining to women are texts such as *Sexual Harassment at Work – Plantation Sector* (Wijayatilake and Zackeriya, 2001) and *Casting Pearls – The Women's Franchise Movement in Sri Lanka* (de Alwis and Jayawardena, 2001). While these studies purport to examine more precise situations or phenomena, the very notion of the plurality of the term women excludes specificity - despite the intentions of meaning-making. In other words, specificity cannot be

achieved unless the research focus is on the singular both conceptually, literally and grammatically. Thus, as a theoretical concept, the universal category of women cannot be appropriated uncritically for feminist research.

The specificity of women's experiences and their sense of being / doing determine their needs, interests and aspirations (Chapter 7). This is starkly evident in Rajapakse's (1995) discussion about using the abstract of women - in research dealing with rich and poor women's consciousness of class relations in their village during drought:

> This linkage between class and gender was, I felt, necessary because when the illusory category 'women' becomes the focus of attention, it is all too easy to forget that rich and poor women face fundamentally different choices and constraints in organising their day-to-day lives (1995:32).

Here, the researcher is arguing that utilising a universal category like women can conceal individualism and disparities of class and economic status amongst women. She exposes how the environmental and structural limitations faced by individual women in daily living can be masked in conceptualisations and applications of the term 'women'. The article does not necessarily refer to the many other intricate crosscuts of women's lives (Chapter 8). Yet, it is useful in establishing what Rajapakse (*ibid.*) calls the 'interlocks of class and gender' made visible through subjective class consciousness and interests (as well as inter-class

and cross-class relations) of village women. Her analysis establishes the integral nature of the environment in terms of agricultural activities and day-to-day life; the dry and wet seasons for cultivation and harvesting, drought and debt, and related practices. It is also valuable in tracing women's engagement with development initiatives such as the *Mahaweli* development scheme[70] at a personal level in terms of the use of humour, rumour, and wit. Thus, it highlights the commonalties as well as differences of this particular stratum of the agricultural categorisation of 'peasant women'.

Aside from women's location in terms of poverty (perhaps a less political and critical standpoint than the Marxist norm of class struggle), there are other specificities of women as a category. Take women's positioning in terms of the development forces in the country, or their situatedness in conflict / disaster zones. Furthermore, take their other simultaneous allegiances in terms of religion, ethnicity and language. Thus women can no longer be a simple unqualified entity or totality (Chapter 8).

Woman

As a theoretical concept, the woman, in the singular, frequently enters local women's studies discourse in association with or opposition to man – often as a biologically and socially constructed notion - combining

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[70] This refers to one of the biggest hydro-power projects undertaken by the Sri Lankan government in the late 1970s involving several dams across the *Mahaweli* river.

sex and gender – (Chapter 7). In this sense, the woman is founded on notions of heterosexuality as argued by Wittig (1981) belying its mythical status as a 'natural' categorisation.

The woman is highlighted / constructed in two ways. Firstly, the differences associated with biology are highlighted through the concept of the woman (for instance, in Wijayatilake, 2001) so as to create consciousness about women and win / fulfill specific rights and needs. Secondly, the gendered or socially constructed aspects of the woman are underscored for the political reasons of drawing commonalities between the two sexes. This is done in order to precipitate social and individual change – especially in gender research. In her book on the way in which the woman is constructed within the private lives of the family over three generations, Wijayatilake (2001) writes that:

> gender is a word which is frequently used as an equivalent of sex. However, this is a misconceptualisation. Feminist writers use the term to refer to the division of the masculine and feminine roles and character attributes which have been established by society. Accordingly, sex is physiological, while gender is cultural. It is an important distinction which is unfortunately ignored by unreflective proponents of the gender regime who assume that masculinity and femininity are natural, and not influenced by cultural norms (Wijayatilake, 2001:11 - 12).

Here, Wijayatilake (2001) makes one of the foremost feminist arguments of distinguishing between sex and gender for the purpose of highlighting the social impositions of gender roles / character attributes of men and women. She identifies this as an aspect of patriarchy and is critical of those who do not perceive the culturally constructed aspects of gender. Consequently, her book represents how the woman is constructed through cultural and traditional practices of menarche, marriage, virginity, pregnancy and childbirth as well as the roles impressed upon / adopted by her within the patriarchal family. Thus, the dominant epistemological visual of the woman in Sri Lanka is in relation to the heterosexual framing of man against woman - aside from very few exceptions such as Wijewardena (in press).

In fact, for a long time, feminist research has been strongly influenced by the theorisation of sex as founded on biology and therefore natural, and of gender as a social cultural division and therefore artificial (Oakley, 1972). However, within international feminist literature, this distinction has changed with many perspectives arguing that both the biological and sexual divisions are socially constructed ideas (Wittig, 1981; Butler, 1999; Moi, 1999). Accordingly, both sex and gender are seen as partial to change. Yet, despite this acknowledgement, there are still certain physiological / genetic aspects of a woman (and a man, for that matter), that have resisted scientific innovations / challenges. Paradoxically, the

burden of the social constructionist[71] (Hepburn, 2006) argument of gender (and even sex) may serve to render the woman and man passive objects. This is because they may be compromised in terms of personal agency due to very rigid conceptualisations of social, structural and ideological forces (Jacobs, 2003). Furthermore, not all societies make the division between men and woman their primary form of social ordering. For instance, Oyewumi (1997) discusses social ordering according to age hierarchies.

As an analytical category, the woman is invaluable in providing a tangible, socially or textually located framework within which to promote the politics and ethics of feminisms (Chapter 9). Thus, local WR discourses of women's studies engage with the concept of the woman from many standpoints - political and sociological, epistemological and ethical. Researchers also approach it from the theoretical perspectives of social constructionism (Hepburn, 2006), biological determinism, and postmodernism. These span many perspectives from the woman's gendered identity and her roles in the private and public spheres to that of the woman as embodiment, or from discursive constructions of the 'modern woman' to that of the South Asian woman.

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[71] The axiom that social realities are constructed, but they vary across different times and locations, and are changeable through individual and collective political action (Chapters 1 / 7).

The Absence and Presence of Women

The Absence of Women

When Sri Lankan feminists started examining existing research from a women's perspective[72], a crucial lacuna in knowledge was identified, in that women's presence was not only minimal, it was also marginal: not only when it came to the construction of knowledge by women but also in the representation of women in knowledge.

Thus one conceptual framework pertaining to women relates to the absence and presence of women in life. The act of highlighting these gaps *vis-à-vis* women is a highly political one of compensatory history - in terms of correcting epistemological absences or silences, deficiencies or misrepresentations.

In the face of absence and misrepresentation, the work of feminist historians Jayawardena (1986) and Kiribamune (1990), in particular, has since strived to discover / construct women from earlier periods, not only for epistemological reasons, but also for the political reasons of consciousness-raising and education.

For instance, Jayawardena's (1986) work is based on contradictions within Sri Lanka that traditionally boast of women's emancipation, but which concurrently

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[72] This means how research conceptualised / represented women – how / what / when women were included; under what circumstances, with what assumptions and values, through what methodologies, and what research by women themselves was available.

allows for conditions of subordination. She reconstructs little-known women's activism towards emancipation in the 19th Century - against the backdrop of the nationalist struggle to achieve political independence from Britain and establish a modern nation state and identity. Her work focuses on what she distinguishes as feminism, women's emancipation and women's participation in the wider national and revolutionary struggles, and thus constructs a history of political struggle by / for women. She does so with a view towards to giving historical validity to women's political activism in the country.

Kiribamune has written on pre-modern women in Sri Lanka (1990), looking at nearly 2500 years of women's experiences in mainstream monarchical politics and in the institution and practice of Buddhism in the country. Kiribamune makes two vital methodological points in this text. One is an epistemological concern where she argues that:

> social change is a continuous phenomenon throughout human history and the idea of unchanging early Asian societies is a myth that has been set aside. Reference to ancient societies immediately raises the question 'which ancient'? Although people are willing to recognise a plurality of views in modern society and also concede to unevenness in social change among different groups, the past is conceptualised as a uniform whole. Many look for norms that do not often exist (Kiribamune, 1990:16).

Though not referring to particular theories, she raises postmodern issues by homing in on the errors of

conceptualising of history as a totality and of imposing analytical frameworks and standards that simply did not exist historically. In this context, Vimaladharma (2003) too argues against viewing women as homogenous and history as a continuity. Secondly, Kiribamune raises an ontological / theoretical argument:

> The familiar argument of feminists the world over is that tradition and cultural constraints militate against women's rights... There is, however another aspect of this culture syndrome, that of seeking legitimation in tradition. Certain protagonists of religion – Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims - have claimed that in their own religious traditions women have had an honoured place. An understanding of the antecedents of tradition in early Sri Lankan society thus provides a useful backdrop for the current issues concerning women (1990:15).

Once again, Kiribamune does not refer to specific feminist theorists in what may be a case of tacit knowledge. Going against the grain of arguments that usually identify the appeal to tradition as a strategy to reinforce women's oppression, she argues for the importance of utilising what may be considered progressive in historical / traditional standpoints and examples to justify women's rights. Like Jayawardena (1986), she engages with the cultural value attributed to history and traditions. Hers is a political strategy that looks for validity in the very arguments that are brought up against it.

There is no doubt that some of the most bigoted and repressive ideas and practices against women emanate from cultural traditions. Narayan (2004) has argued that it requires the values of liberalism and positivism in the European Enlightenment traditions to oppose the negative values prevalent in local Indian culture. The theoretical debate as to whether cultural traditions are positive or negative factors for feminisms need not necessarily be constructed as binary or as contradictory. Rather, to fulfill the political objectives of establishing women's presence within knowledge as a positive force, it is necessary to take pragmatic and strategic steps that can fuse perspectives. These involve accepting the conceptual contestation, difference and unity of meaning-making activities.

The Presence of the Woman as the Mother

One of the main debates in the conceptualisation of the woman relates to the theoretical combine of the woman and child (Chapter 8). So much so that, in Sinhalese common and formal parlance, women are frequently addressed as 'mothers' - ostensibly as a form of respect. Furthermore, research also emphasises the centrality of maternity to the conceptualisation of woman, as a positive illustration of how women are valourised in Sri Lanka society. Such an ideological standpoint emanates from the various cultural values prevalent in the country. Vimaladharma (2003:6) relates a series of cultural practices particularly relating to Buddhism that are

usually cited to establish the 'cultural superiority' of women:

> The few instances where laywomen were treated with more respect, even bordering on reverence, and the rituals in which only women participated, are adduced as counter to the feminist charge of subordination. The pregnancy ritual called *gab-perahera* (literally the worship of the womb) and the eagerness with which all persons including the husband and males, meet the pregnancy-craving (*doladuka*) of an expectant woman for special food preparations, the ideology of motherhood and associated powerful imagery which accords a high place to the woman, idolisation and deification of women and their worship as goddesses (i.e. *Pattini*), are instances quoted to indicate a high positive social evaluation placed on women in traditional society (Vimaladharma, 2003:6).

Aside from this influence of Buddhism and Hinduism as well as Catholicism in upholding the norm of the mother figure, a quasi-Gandhian notion of the mother as the educator in the family is also prevalent. This concept has also been embedded in international policy discourses on literacy and education (for instance, take the UNESCO[73] slogan 'Educate a Woman and You Educate a Whole Family'). I have discussed this and related notions of the moral superiority of women in Chapter 9.

Women are seen in relation to their family / community rather than in relation to their independent identities. 'Mothers cannot be separated from children in research

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[73] United Nations Educational, Scientific, Cultural Organisation

projects' articulated researcher Saumi (7/7/2005), a second generation researcher discussing her own work on domestic violence, health, and nutrition (Chapter 8). Researcher Gauri (8/7/2005) expressed similar sentiments when she says that 'women have a particular role in bringing up the family and the next generation'. Thus, the agency of the mother is conceptualised only in relation to her children. Not only is the mother figure seen as biologically pre-ordained; but she is also socially-constructed - the idea feeding into ideologies of deference, sacrifice, moral purity, and normality surrounding the culture of motherhood:

> There is no space for us women who are either single - of course, that has its own set of implications - but more so, if you are in a legal relationship and you don't have children (Dhamani, 27/7/2005).

So much so, that the option of being a non-mother (such as myself) was not an accepted possibility for a woman. In my own experience, my state of child-freeness has been interpreted as a state of childlessness or the biological inability to have children – and not one of choice. 'This lack' is seen as unnatural, and to be pitied.

On the other hand, there is staunch resistance to such bias from other feminists. For instance, de Mel's article critiques the discursive limitations of the woman in the war poetry of three Sri Lankan women writers:

> What insights can these poems offer to an understanding of the issues surrounding the construction of female, personal and

national identities that over-determine each other? For it is clear that being co-opted as a trope in a wide and complex nationalist discourse, gender does not figure in these works as a single issue. The women poets I have looked at have, in the main, internalised patriarchal notions of women in their use of the Mother figure. For even if they argue for the cultural and political independence of women, as Sita Ranjani has, or contest the construct of the Mother as a stoic and glad participant in war, as Arasanayagam does, they continue the practice of investing in the persona of the Mother, the totality of a woman's identity. In so doing, they have made use of its political emotiveness as a symbol in their explorations of contemporary Sri Lankan nationhood (1996:185).

Here too, the principal manifestation of the woman is in the form of the mother figure. De Mel discusses how various patriarchal ideas come into play, quite unconsciously, in the literary construction and usage of the mother figure in war poetry – even when the portrayals differ from the other mother stereotypes available in society. However, these variations too were not empowering from a feminist perspective. De Mel argues that the mother figure represents the totality of the possibilities open to the woman. By returning over and over again to this particularly evocative image of the woman as the mother, she shows how these writers contribute to the construction of Sri Lankan womanhood as motherhood - during historical moments of national conflict.

As in some of the Latin American countries (Argentina and the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo), the concept of reproductive power as political power or mother power has attained political mileage during national crises in Sri Lanka. During the 1980s stage of the ethnic conflict and State / JVP violence in the island[74], the Mothers' Front (two separate women's movements), one in the North of the country, and the other in the South, came into being (Chapter 6). The media promoted the activities of the Mother's Front as constituting a politicisation of women's culture. This has not been accepted by feminists. De Alwis (2004), points out that the mobilisation of motherhood through the rhetoric and cultural practice of popular religiosity was not a manifestation of a particular woman's culture. She argues that it was a political strategy to utilise an apparent non-political action of religious distress (manifested in rituals and cursing) through these 'mothers' as political action. While the arguments of Western cultural feminists such as Gilligan (1977) and Chodorow (1978) - though disparate – have conceptualised the gender differences of the two sexes, local feminists found the Mothers' Front particularly problematic in the way it portrayed motherhood politically – as either empowering or victimising concepts (de Alwis, 2004).

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[74] This refers to the second violent uprising by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), a political group, against the Sri Lankan state which was crushed with equal violence by the government in the 1980s.

The Passivism and Dynamism of Women

An epistemological problem in how women / woman are represented and constructed in research has been their bipolar positioning as passive objects / recipients / victims or as dynamic agents / subjects / actors. In the words of another respondent Rasika, who identified herself as an academic / professional rather than a feminist:

> You know, women are made out to be either victims or agents, I mean, having agency (21/7/2005).

Some of the development-oriented research focuses on the impact of development on women, or women as victims of violence or the effects of war and the tsunami on women (Samuel, 1999; Jayaweera, 2000; Jayaweera, 2005). Representing / constructing how women are subjugated and exploited by various structural forces and institutions establish an inflexible norm of women's oppression. Thus, there is one view of women being predominantly represented (not incorrectly) as victimised by intangible forces (from patriarchy within the family to the gender micropolitics of the workplace, from the oppressive practices of religion to the discriminatory forces of structural adjustment). However, such visuals may not inherently encompass or problematise some of the deviations and exceptions, counter-hegemonic action, or empowered responses to such forces.

I take the example of Jayaweera (2000) who focuses on identifying the micro implications of the State's structural adjustment programmes on women and their families - despite the lack of gender disaggregated macro data in the country. She charts the effects of governmental actions on women such as the liberalisation of trade and price controls; devaluation; promotion of export-oriented industrialisation; reduction of consumer and producer subsidies and social sector expenditure; privatisation and the overall reliance on market forces (Chapters 3 and 6). Her macro conclusions about women as an entity are primarily as passive performers, beneficiaries and victims. In a sense, they assume a monolithic account of modernisation, globalisation and westernisation as dominant forces that colonise 'third world countries' into submission – without necessarily taking into account counter-hegemonic action.

Furthermore, there seems to be a disturbing trend in South Asian feminist politics which is dogged and supercilious in its condemnation of neo-globalisation and its attendant evils[75]. Such a position is dangerous because of its incapacity to problematise the multiple ways in which women engage with forces of neo-imperialism and neo-globalisation. Take for instance, some of the gains, such as employment that women have managed to accrue from the process - even though this

[75] This was particularly evident at the Proceedings of South Asian Feminist Meet, 25th – 29th July 2006, Brown's Beach Hotel, Negombo, organised by South Asian Network of Gender Trainers (SANGAT) and Women and Media Collective.

may have been through compromise. Or take the counter-influence of 'third world' knowledge on the West.

Further, it has been implied and argued (*ibid.*) that women need special attention, protection, and interventions designed to empower them. While these arguments are critical, those representing / constructing women as dynamic agents who can counteract these global forces and institutions are equally important. This establishes the norms of women's activism and empowerment; especially since resisting is not always conceptualised as revolt - but as surviving, negotiating, strategising, and bargaining. For instance, in her work on women's roles in devising survival strategies in low-income households in urban Sri Lanka, Kottegoda (2004b) looks for the capabilities or real opportunities that women have in the lives they lead as being:

> primarily in the sphere of personal relationships and social contacts which they use and rely on to obtain work and resources...The crucial finding of this research is that they implement strategies not only for the economic survival of their households but also to fulfill their socially defined roles in reproductive and domestic service (Kottegoda citing Sen 2004b:239).

Their capabilities are put to multiple usages; from maintaining gender roles and gaining financial enumeration to providing emotional support. Their strategies involve neighbourhood reciprocity or gifts,

child care, migrant remittances, and the informal savings of the community amongst other factors. The complexities of these strategies challenge a singular interpretation.

Attempting readings of such research as passive victims or dynamic agents; or as reactionary or empowering; or as essentialising or progressive may be judgmental and counterproductive as argued by Jayawardena and de Alwis (2002) with regard to women's activism. They propose instead a reading that is based on contingency and efficacy given the significance of the social, political and economic determinants in the country (Chapters 3 / 6).

In the final analysis, it must be noted that both these portrayals of women are epistemological strategies utilised for the political purposes of educating and initiating attitudinal and structural changes. One objective is to propose empowering changes by authenticating that these structural and institutional, ideological and attitudinal forces prevail on women negatively. The other, by tracking the responses and standpoints of women positively, gives validity to differences and counter-normative positions. However, at times, the underlying assumptions of both these dominant frameworks overlook or minimise the opposing side of the binary in the meaning-making processes.

Further Methodological Arguments

Blend of Approaches

Of course, there are other approaches that try to blend these binaries together in their analytical frameworks. 'Agent or Victim? The Sri Lankan Woman Militant in the Interregnum' (de Mel, 2001) is a chapter that poses the question as to the degrees of women's empowerment and subjugation possible. This is in relation to women militants within the space of war, and women in the grip of the tyranny of violent groups like the LTTE and the JVP. De Mel poses a series of framing questions with which she establishes her standpoint in her work:

> Do women who participate in militant armed struggle enjoy full agency? Does their recruitment to the struggle spell autonomous, individual choice? If so, why and how has there been, historically, an instrumentality with which nationalist / militant patriarchies have enlisted women? How radically have women militants been able to transform their societies to ensure greater social justice and gender equality? And even if, as a result of patriarchal containment within their chosen militant groups, they enjoyed only agentive *moments* in an interregnum where normalcy is suspended and there is license to transform taboo and social convention, should these women not be held accountable for loss of life and destruction of livelihoods? (de Mel, 2001:205)

De Mel's questions raise the problems associated with conceptualisations that are based on binary oppositions, for instance, in concepts such as empowerment and

containment as well as totalities such as 'full agency'. She discusses how the discursive activities and daily life within movements (such as the LTTE and JVP) convey the way in which revolutionary struggles appropriate principles such as women's empowerment, and control women's right to self-determination. The way in which this is done, she argues, is not only through defining and fusing such key ideological concepts / social construct as motherhood and the woman militant into emulative images but also through imposing strict codes of chastity and discipline. At the same time, she shows the assumptions of feminist ethics and politics towards social justice and gender equality, as well as the dilemma for local feminists in engaging with female combatants. This is because militants, despite their own compromised status within militant movements, 'expropriate' agency in violence. Nonetheless, de Mel's (*ibid.*) problematisation illustrates the need to recognise / conceptualise the possibilities of the coexistence of both activism and passivity when it comes to applying the concept of women. In this context, Emmanuel (2006) discusses the interrelationships between violence and gendered identities. She recognises that:

> the fluidity of movement between gendered identities, and how women shift from being a militant, to a political actor, or from being a conventional Tamil girl to a soldier, helps to better understand women's activism within restrictive patriarchal nationalist projects (2006:68).

Thus, feminists have responded to the criticism of dominant, normative, positivist mode of meaning-making – through the creation / identification of binary oppositions and by fusing together such polarities. They have also recognised / composed the moments of merging and conflict as 'natural' and normative.

Essentialism

A key critique of overarching concepts such as women / woman has been based on essentialism – the attribution and highlighting of certain properties and elements to define something even if it does not necessarily possess these properties and elements (Shorter OED cited in Andermahr, Lovell and Wolkowitz, 1997: 67).

However, Spivak (1990) asserts that:

> it is not possible, within discourse, to escape essentialising somewhere. The moment of essentialism or essentialisation is irreducible. In deconstructive critical practice, you have to be aware that you are going to essentialise anyway. So then strategically you look at essentialisms, not as descriptions of the way things are, but as something that one must adopt to produce a critique of anything (1990: 51)

While there are many critical positions on essentialism (Weedon, 1987; Alcoff, 1988; Franklin and Stacey, 1988; de Lauretis, 1989), my epistemological position sees essentialism as another way of making meaning.

Woman / women, while claiming to establish specificity, aspire to universality in research; or

conversely, by claiming to represent universality, construct specificity. Assuming a certain universality or homogeneity masks the specificities and individualities of the terms. Yet it is practically and epistemologically impossible to capture or conceptualise all possible differences in the constructions of woman / women. One option is to resort to 'strategic essentialism' (Franklin and Stacey, 1988). I view this usage of essentialism as inevitable, if not essential (!) in meaning-making, with the simultaneous usage of deconstruction to balance its negative implications. However, in the long run, woman / women as theoretical concepts, despite their abstractness, have been partially successful in promoting concrete, historically-located, social and psychological understandings of the experience of being a woman / women. They have also provided simultaneous understandings of the commonalities and universalisations of overarching worldviews, again for strategic purposes. Women / woman are a paradigm that facilitate epistemologies incorporating women-centredness, gender relations and feminist politics / ethics (Chapters 7, 8 and 9).

Compartmentalisation and Marginalisation

Another critical issue that arises within the paradigm of women is that of the compartmentalisation of women, gender and feminist issues. Activist / researcher Sadia's interview for this study made a crucial connection between compartmentalisation and marginality:

> First the question is, when you say research on women, we work on women

right? We work as feminists, right? We
ourselves, sometimes, I think marginalise
ourselves, because we don't look at the
general. For example, if you look at the
whole of the peace process – women don't
get into it to define it and reframe it. We
enter into it as a marginalised category.
Saying that we are not there as women or
that gender concerns are not there. So
we're really not reforming (29/10/2004).

She argued that feminist researchers have a tendency to
concentrate wholesale and exclusively on women-
related issues or women's participation or gender
mainstreaming. They are not inclined to provide a take
on general issues. Consequently, even though
frameworks of women and gender are utilised, the end-
result is that feminist interventions do not go beyond the
compartmentalisation of women or the integration of
gender issues. Furthermore, in doing so, feminists
identify and locate themselves in a marginal position. To
some extent, this is because, as argued before,
historically, the germination of feminisms lies in ideas
of oppression, suppression, repression, powerlessness,
and inequality. After all, feminist ideologies are
emancipatory ideologies. But in entering discourses and
debates from this site of disparity and deficiency,
powerlessness and poverty (despite its relevance and
validity to women's realities), feminisms get
marginalised to those concerns alone. Paradoxically, it is
possible that when feminists do take up general issues
sans a women's perspective, they may be condemned

for not 'bringing women or gender or feminism into the debate'[76].

Either way, for feminist research to overcome these simplistic cages of self-definition and imposition, of marginality and centrality, of powerlessness and equity, there is a need to adopt an approach that incorporates not only theoretical / epistemological unification but also diversity. Here, there is a necessity to reorient the argument, not in terms of modernist polarities, but in terms of strategy as argued in the earlier section. It is imperative that feminists become strategic in terms of when and where and how they enter and advocate a particular discourse, subject, and standpoint. That is if the paradigm of women in Sri Lankan meaning-making is to be more functional in terms of its politics (Chapter 9).

In this chapter, I established that ontologies of women are transformed into a knowledge paradigm in women's studies through the act of researching. A paradigm is an extended twist in the existing knowledge; and is conceptualised as stable as well as unstable; continuous as well as discontinuous; traceable as well as untraceable. The political category of women / woman as a universal or as a specificity is simultaneously at the centre and decentred within the paradigm of women. The construction of women's history, the woman as mother, women as victims in development and agents in the ethnic conflict are totalitarian and bipolar examples

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[76] *Ibid.*

that illustrated methodologies of absence and presence /
passivity and dynamism used to fill the knowledge gap
on women.

PART THREE

A Case Study of Feminist Research Methodology

In Part III, I will focus on constructing / representing feminist research methodology in Sri Lanka as an overarching case study. Originally, I meant to engage with the methodological implications of the three research typologies in the local context; women, gender and feminism as constituent case studies of feminist research methodology. However, the more embroiled I became in the research process, the more my interviews, texts and theoretical reading persuaded me to broaden my umbrella case study to include other dimensions of research methodology that I had conceived of / identified.

Each of the next five chapters will deal with an aspect of feminist research methodology as case studies. They are research method, ontology, epistemology, theory and politics / ethics. In this, my thinking coincides with that of Dunne, Pryor and Yates (2005). The specific emphasis / argument within each case study were determined by the particularities, gaps and possibilities of the Sri Lankan context. For instance, the chapter on epistemology will focus on gender because of its critical importance to researching in the local context. Likewise, the chapter on method will concentrate on literature

reviewing because of a distinctive gap in this activity locally.

Thus, Chapter 5 will case study the research method of literature reviewing as an important epistemic project for researching. Chapter 6 will concentrate on case studying ontology. This takes the form of ontological currents (conceptualised as a matrix) that direct research epistemologies. In Chapter 7, my interest lies in case-studying epistemology; the significance of gender as an epistemology that originates in one's sense of being / doing (ontology) and knowing (epistemology). A case study of theory - specifically theory-making about knowledge (epistemology) will focus on the standpoints, intersections and situatedness of knowledge in Chapter 8. Finally, in Chapter 9, I will highlight feminist politics and ethics as a case study by focusing on the synergy between these two motivations for WR research in the country.

I do not propose these aspects of research methodology as closed categories that are (conceptually and in practice) distinct from one another. In fact, it becomes clear within my argument that these aspects of research methodology are invariably interlinked and sometimes conflated with one another as pointed out by Dunne, Pryor and Yates (2005). The following Diagram illustrates this point.
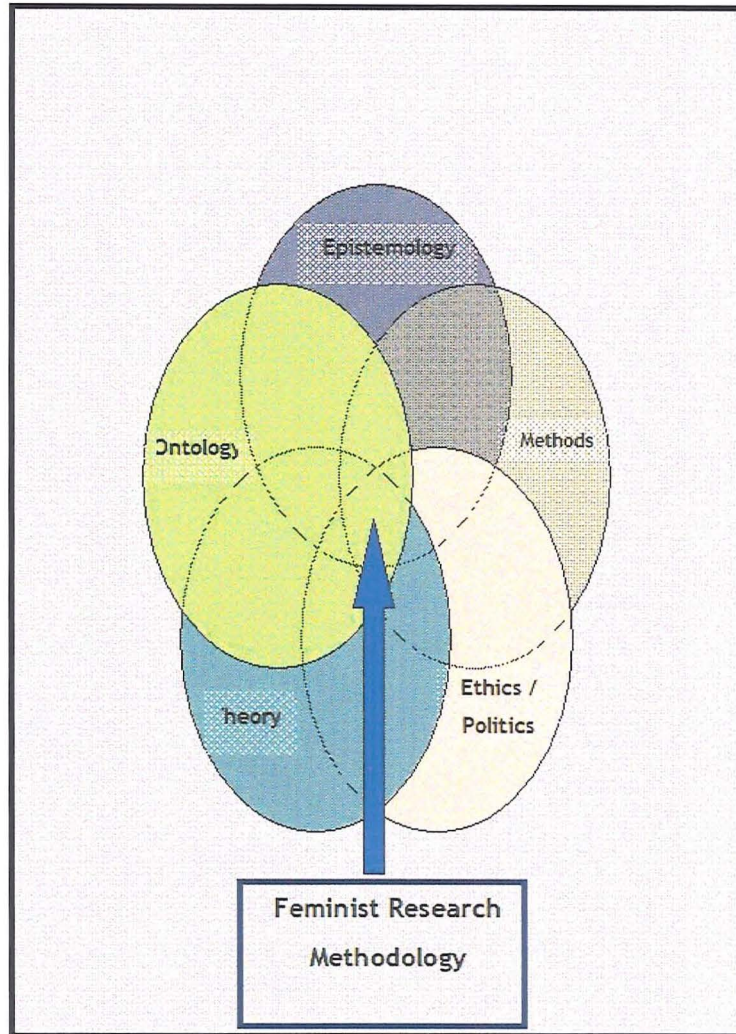
Diagram I – Feminist Research Methodology

Chapter Five

Method

Meaning-making - The Epistemic[77] Project of the Literature Review

The method of literature reviewing is an aspect of feminist research methodology that is integral to any research study, because it is part of the project of making-meaning. As argued by Mason (2002:52), method in qualitative research is:

> more than a practical technique or procedure for gaining data. It also implies a data generation process involving activities that are intellectual, analytical and interpretive.

I chose literature reviewing over other available methods of data generation / construction in Sri Lanka (such as interviewing, observation, textual analysis and surveys) for two reasons. Firstly, its relative neglect in many books on feminist research methodology. Secondly, the lack of emphasis given to the practice of reviewing local literature in WR research in Sri Lanka[78]. So much so, that Deepa, one of the interviewees in my study, observed that:

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[77] This signifies a discursive project of identifying / constructing a body of previous textual knowledge or *connaissance* on a research topic.
[78] This does not always apply to academic work presented for examination.

frequently many do research without exploring the existing local research on the topic and also without considering the methodologies that could be used - so in a way - you end up reinventing the wheel (26/7/2005).

As an example of reviewing, I will focus on one of my own reviews[79] - on feminist research methodology in Sri Lanka spanning from 1975 to 2007. This refers to work that explicitly concentrate on WR research methodology as well as work that discuss methodological concerns as an auxiliary issue in research. Thus, as an epistemic project, this literature review identifies / constructs a *corpus* of local literature on research methodology. It is based on my subjective selection of texts and my application / deconstruction of theoretical approaches.

This Chapter[80] responds to the following research questions (1 / 2 / 3 / 4). What are the key theoretical frameworks / paradigms / approaches to WR research adhered to within the Sri Lankan context and how do they operate? This is done by considering the notions / classifications and methodological interests of WR literature. How do research processes generate / construct knowledge *vis-à-vis* WR research? What are the practical advantages, challenges and limitations of conceptualising / applying particular research methodologies within various disciplines? These questions are addressed not only through discussions of

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[79] My thesis also reviews and analyses texts of WR research and surveys global feminist work on research methodology.
[80] It incorporates suggestions made by Diana Leonard and Penny Burke during my upgrading to PhD candidature.

literary reviewing but also by conceiving / constructing the praxis of feminist empiricism, fusion and action research and the implications of historical and cultural factors in researching.

Here, I return to Foucault's (1998) concept of *connaissance* or formal knowledge in conceptualising the literature review as an aspect of *connaissance*. Formal knowledge involves an element of theorising. As Letherby argues:

> historically, legitimate theory has been bound up with legitimate beliefs and secular and sacred knowledge has often been difficult to disentangle. There has been constant tension between theory based on experience and / or observation and abstract or universal theory (2003:24).

She points to the difficulties of distinguishing between theories arising from universalised beliefs, everyday beliefs, and religious beliefs. Literature reviewing is a problematic attempt at theorisation (or epistemology) and the establishment of academic credence. Here my review incorporates both discursive practices and experiential practices. In other words, textual discussions of research praxis are highlighted alongside instances of 'actual' research praxis in texts.

My thesis constructs / captures *savoir* in other chapters where I rely on experiential, everyday, theory and practice for research evidence and authority. If my thesis is taken in its entirety, then, it would perhaps constitute

an attempt at pursuing Foucault's (1972) conceptualisation of archaeology - not as a methodology but as a concept. However, because of my theoretical approach of combining modernist and postmodernist approaches, archaeology is not the most epistemologically appropriate framework for my thesis. For instance, in literature reviewing, I represent and construct the epistemic evolution of feminist research methodology by charting the origins, classifications, definitions and typologies. I also make meaning simultaneously and differently - by focusing on the problematic of origins and discontinuities, as well as the contradictions and conflations of such a project.

The Method of Literature Reviewing

Hart (1998) identifies the literature review as the methodological starting point for a research project as it gives an idea of the methodological traditions, assumptions and research strategies of previous research, which undoubtedly influence a researcher. He defines methodology as:

> a system of methods and tools to facilitate the collection and analysis of data. It provides a starting point for choosing an approach made up of theories, ideas, concepts and definitions of the topic; therefore the basis of a critical activity consisting of making choices about the nature and character of the social world (assumptions) (Hart, 1998:28).

Keeping in mind that origins are highly arbitrary, unstable and largely subjective, methodology is not only a starting point in terms of choice as pointed out by Hart (*ibid.*). In fact, it permeates the entire research process. This is because the partialities, directions, rejections and selections continuously made within the research process are based on a methodological standpoint. Thus, it involves not only preliminary questions like why the researcher chooses to focus on a particular aspect of the research topic or why the researcher argues that a particular method/s is the best in data generation as opposed to other methods. But also, progressive questions in research like which theoretical frameworks should be applied, or what type of theory can be generated from the research data collected / composed.

Studies on literature reviewing have hitherto emphasised the practical advantages of the exercise such as clarifying research questions, improving researchers' methodologies, and providing a grasp of the issues relating to the topic (Hart, 1998; Barron, 2006). Aside from which, I reiterate that reviewing is a distinctive epistemic project. It makes meaning by relying on knowledge established through the privilege of *a priori* publications. It therefore does not take into consideration the analogous existence of other forms of knowledge and meaning-making (*savoir*) that are imperative for a holistic view / conceptualisation.

Furthermore, literature reviewing is a subjective process of knowledge production and meaning-making (as is any

other method of data generation in the final analysis). It is based on selective reading and understanding and is reliant on the researcher's subjectivity and standpoint of the moment. In this context, the systematic review has been proposed (Oakley, 2002) as a method that can circumvent the failings of the individual literature review - by democratising the process and refining the central objectives / design of a review. Yet, aside from formalising the research process through a strict adherence to method, systematic reviews do not address the central assumptions of positivism such as the capacity of textual evidence to reflect reality. Moreover, it too overlooks tacit / implicit knowledge (*savoir*) that is apprehended and disseminated in different ways.

Undertaking a historical review of WR research methodology in Sri Lanka has not been easy - for empirical reasons aside from the theoretical issues. For, as noted in the Introduction, literature focusing exclusively on research and methodology is sparse in Sri Lanka. It is my contention that research is widely influenced by researchers' intuition; and is sometimes an intuitive rather than a formal, theorised, methodological process (Chapters 3 and 8). Due to these empirical and epistemological constraints on constructing / generating formal knowledge on feminist research methodology, this literature review is partial, provisional and contingent. It is partial in its subjectivity and inherent incapacity to encompass all knowledge; provisional until more knowledge on the matter is generated /

constructed; and contingent above all on texts and the written word, not on other forms of discourse.

Within international Women's Studies research, methodology has now become an area of feminist specialisation, with its own academic specialists, focal points and lineages. For instance, take diverse feminists who write on the multiple facets of methodology, such as Sandra Harding (2004b) on the implications of feminist standpoints, Anne Oakley (1981) on interviewing women, or Maria Mies (1983) on the politics of action research. Consider also researchers like Mary Margaret Fonow and Judith Cook (2005), or Louise Morley (1996) who have used literature reviews to survey the diverse implications of feminist research methodology globally.

In accumulating / composing a similar epistemic bank on feminist methodology in Sri Lanka, there is an expectation that cross-references be made to developments in international research. This has been done in other parts of this thesis – albeit with some resistance on my part - as it is my argument that Sri Lankan research and writing on methodology needs to be contextualised on its own terms. As a result, references to global feminist research methodology are made only when it is absolutely necessary - for instance when such influences can be directly traced. Despite the richness implied by the cross-fertilisation of the local with global banks of knowledge, it signifies, for me, hegemony within knowledge and meaning-making. This

is because international academia serves to reinforce Western research as the norm against which local research is constantly measured. Yet, because this thesis will be the subject of examination, and because of the expectations of contributing to such knowledge hegemonies, I have made my work conform by engaging with some of the international discourses on feminist research methodology.

Classifications / Notions of Sri Lankan WR Research

Classification of WR research in Sri Lanka is found in Goonatilake's (1985) and Wanasundera's (1995) brief overviews of local research. While there are references to women's research in several genealogies of women's activism (Jayawardena, 1985; Jayawardena, 1995a; Jayawardena and de Alwis, 2002), these do not make a comprehensive attempt to define, categorise, and situate the various types of WR research in Sri Lanka.

Classification according to a particular schema or pattern leads to theory at a simplistic level - as called for by positivism. Stanley and Wise (1993) talk of this as a form of inevitable caricaturing of typologies of research based on differences.

Trajectories and Issues

Goonatilake's (1985) article 'Research and Information on Women', sketches a historical trajectory of women's research, and reviews research activities and demographic data in Sri Lanka up to 1985. She makes a distinction between research and information; and discusses the influence of the UN International Women's Year (1975) in providing the crucial boost for research on women. Wanasundera's (1995) paper of the same title 'Research and Information' is a literature review that continues to look at the growth of research literature from 1986 to 1995. It considers the institutional contribution to the growth of research, as well as efforts to improve gender-specific data and disseminate research findings.

She (*ibid.*) identifies the social changes of development and globalisation as leading to three distinct areas of research activity during this period. Research that deals with women and work; research that argues for the need to promote legislative changes for women; and finally, research that supports ideological change by highlighting the social construct of gender.

In her section on women and work, Wanasundera (*ibid.*) deals with literature that critiqued the gender blindness of development policies, and which promoted the integration of women's issues into national planning processes. She refers particularly to research dealing with women's access, participation, and staying power in different and shifting fields of employment (due to the

dominant economic liberalisation and modernisation policies of the period). Similarly, her section on law traces the various currents in legal research that highlighted women's failure to challenge discriminatory laws and to further women's rights through legal precedents.

Wanasundera then goes on to look at the trend in research that specifically identifies the structural causes of subordination (1995:344), under the heading 'Social construction of gender'. Though not expressly argued out, Wanasundera's selection of research studies indicates the historical social construction of gender as taking various faces. These include feminist appropriation of Marxist ideological superstructures to convey women's subordination as cheap labour, and the identification of 'social backwardness' or traditional ideologies such as patriarchy as forces that oppress women. Research that illustrated how patriarchal concepts (such as evil and shame) as well as intersects of ethnicity, colonialism, feudalism, and capitalism constructed gender were also classified by Wanasundera under this heading.

I see Wanasundera's (1995) overview as a very promising start to the consideration of WR research. Her categorisations of the first two groups of WR policy research on the economy and legislative frameworks are founded on their subject matter, while the social construction of gender is not only a topic of research but also construes a theoretical framework. I myself argue in

this thesis that gender is also a method of analysis, a political objective and a methodology (Chapter 7), and therefore constitutes an epistemology. Wanasundera (*ibid.*) identifies her categorisations of research as arising from the UN agenda at an international level as well as from the local socio-political imperatives of globalisation as they manifested themselves in Sri Lanka. My thesis extends some of Wanasundera's arguments by identifying / constructing other impetus for researching (Chapter 6).

On a different note, my work (Wickramasinghe, 2002) discusses the usage of feminist literary theory *vis-à-vis* Sri Lankan women's creative literature. I identified some of the dominant feminist critical practices in the local context. These include the images of women approach, language and discourse analysis, resurrection of lost texts, gynocriticism, the gender politics of writing and reading, and critical literary initiatives centred on Structuralism, deconstruction, and postcolonialism. It is a modest attempt at classifying the critical methodological practices in literature and gives testimony to my germinal interest in feminist methodology.

Feminist Politics of Researching

The first written foray into the topic of feminist research methodology in Sri Lanka was by Hema Goonatilake (1985). One of Goonatilake's initial interests was to outline briefly what feminist research should be in terms of focus and approach. In this, she did not make a

distinction between women's research and feminist research; in fact, she sees women's research as feminist research and as 'research with a difference' (1985:37). She is one of the first Sri Lankan writers to postulate an emancipatory (Lather, 1991; Letherby, 2006) research agenda when she uncompromisingly notes that the aim of research is 'not to maintain social order but to question it and to change it for the better' (*ibid.*). Goonetilake's seminal article situates women's / feminist research within a Marxist political framework - where research is linked to social change. She proposes that this means:

> not only to fill the research gaps but also to adopt a 'feminist perspective, to view society through the eyes of women and understand the historical process in the light of their experience as women (Goonatilake, 1985:37).

Here, Goonetilake is, with reference to Smith (1974), promoting a women's standpoint based on the historically different experience of women as a whole (Chapter 8).

Similarly, for Wanasundera (1995) writing on the same topic, there is a driving political motivation for women's research. There are studies that:

> attempt to analyse the position and role of women in society, focusing on women's experience, problems, perceptions, and needs, as well as those that attempt to create a body of knowledge from a female perspective (Wanasundera, 1995:335).

And where there is:

> the need to build a knowledge base on the
> realities of women's lives which could be
> utilised to bring about attitudinal shifts,
> policy changes, and action that could
> remove gender equities (*ibid.*).

Wanasundera argues that research does not automatically lead to social or attitudinal change; rather, it requires further interventions to be effective. This can be through supportive lobbying, consciousness-raising, policy and programmatic changes (what I have argued as research activism in Chapter 3).

This standpoint assumes that there is some element of commonality in women's experiences that leads to shared needs and interests. Such a worldview is founded on aspirations of unity, and notions of optimism, purity and sisterhood surrounding the political project of feminism during the early stages. Today, consciousness of the diversity of women's identities, needs and standpoints - including those of race (Collins, 1990), class (Harstock, 2004), lesbian (Rich, 1980) and non-Western feminism (Narayan, 2004) complicate notions of homogeneity – despite understandings of universality and commonality in some experiences.

Methodological Interests

I will now deal with Sri Lankan researchers' discourses and practice of feminist research methodology as found in WR literature. De Alwis (2004), for instance, reviews what can be seen as a certain contradictory relationship

between the disciplinary practice of anthropology and the politics of feminism. She argues that certain rules and protocols of anthropology are thought to be analytically prior to political practice, and poses these questions:

> So where does this leave those feminists who wish to pursue the discipline of anthropology? Can we speak from within the domain of feminist politics rather than about it? Is such a disciplinary positioning possible if politics marks the limit of anthropology? How can anthropologists who are also feminists frame research questions about political struggles in which they are actively participating and intervening? (2004:123)

In this article, de Alwis provides readings of The Mothers' Front - a women's protest movement of the late 1980s in Sri Lanka (Chapters 4 / 6). At one level, she interprets the self-proclaimed non-political role carved out by the Front as calling the political into question and creating new political spaces. She describes how the Front does this by adopting religious distress (through the use of religious rituals) as a form of public protest against the disappearances of family members. This space of religiosity and motherhood that was politically mobilised led to a dilemma amongst feminists as it made local feminists question the meanings of feminisms, differences, women's culture and motherhood. De Alwis (*ibid.*) herself participates in the debate by speaking from within the domain of feminist politics and engaging with this robust activism of non-feminists and the politicisation of so-called

women's spaces. She provides a contingent reading of the efficacy of such politics, rather than binary readings.

Jayatilaka (1998) moves the discussion from women / feminism to gender as far as sociological research is concerned. Her paper on research studies of inequality in Sri Lankan society recognises that sociological and anthropological studies have hitherto been blind towards the implications of gender inequality in research. She argues that this may have been because gender inequality was generally seen as 'natural' and the norm. She discusses further how sociologists have only been concerned with such factors as income, occupations, ethnicity, land ownership, political connections and caste as social facts. Jayatilake (*ibid.*) contends that Sri Lankan women's access and positioning in education, employment and land as well as their exposure to violence should be vital factors for stratification studies (alongside other variables). Her interest in gender seems to arise more from the standpoint of the discipline of sociology / anthropology and her method is based on surveying sociological studies. I will be discussing what can be termed a disciplinary standpoint in Chapter 8.

Kottegoda (1994) in a brief examination of the concept gender as it is utilised in social and economic studies in Sri Lanka, discusses the common pitfalls of the term in research. She shows how abstract definitions of gender have primarily regarded gender as an asymmetrical social relationship founded on difference, power and silence, and inequality of access to social resources. She

spotlights some common areas of ambiguity in applying gender - such as the unconscious conflation of sex and gender (without problematising the difficulties of separating the two). She further discusses how research focuses on the social relationships between men and women (without calling them gender); and conversely, on women, or family-based households, while calling them gender studies. Kottegoda (*ibid.*) advocates keeping in mind that gender is a relational concept which includes the examination of men in the distribution of resources / power as well as other contributor factors such as race, ethnicity and class. She further cautions that in relying too much on women, gender can easily normalise conceptualisations of the characteristics or attributes of gendered behaviour as feminine. She also discusses how Sri Lankan research has not engaged sufficiently in problematising gender - particularly with regard to sexuality as well as naturally and socially-constructed differences and implications (Chapter 7).

The above identification and construction of methodological issues in WR research texts corroborate what was articulated by my interviewees about women's, feminist and gender research as being types of WR research (Chapter 3). Yet, such a classification tends to reduce WR work to equal blocs of research. Thus, if meaning is to be made through typologies then there is need to account for the overlaps and indefinable features within these typologies. Instead, my thesis attributes /

constructs methodological meanings for these elements of women, feminism and gender (Chapters 4 / 7 / 9).

Feminist Empiricism in Sri Lanka

One of the predominant epistemologies within Sri Lankan WR research can be identified / constructed as being feminist empiricism (Harding, 1990; Haraway, 1988; Harding, 2004a). The founding assumption of empiricism is that social realities can be represented in research through empirical data collection - based on scientific, and through implication, value-free, objective methods.

Feminist empiricism in Sri Lanka involves meta-narratives of social realities that are composed / represented through surveys and interviews. These relate to women and abstract social structures - such as women in education, or women in the media or women and work (CENWOR, 1985; 1995a; 2000), or women and meta-narratives of issues such as violence against women by Samuel (1999). Research converges on women and evinces a partiality towards women – even though the opinions, standpoints and collaboration of the researched women may not be part of the research process.

Many of the epistemological / methodological assumptions shadowing early research texts were simply that of filling a gap or re-integrating women under a non-male norm (Chapter 4). In this effort, researchers

construct panoramic pictures of the research subject through quantitative data; however the researchers do not consciously express their standpoints or situatedness. Haraway (1988) considers such research a view from everywhere. Yet, as conceded by Harding (1990) one of the main critics of feminist empiricism, the researcher needs to be conceptualised as 'a knowing mind' located 'in the environment of the present women's movement' (1990:93), and the everyday experiences of individual oppression. Consequently, the so-called 'objectivity' of the researcher is questionable; thus even feminist empiricism has political / ethical motivations.

The quantitative sources and methods (of macro / micro-surveys, census data and statistical analysis) form the bulwark of feminist empiricism. Both Wanasundera (1995) and Goonatilake (1985) focus on statistical information in their work and call for adequate sex disaggregated data, as well as data compatibility and timeliness in order to maximise on the needs of women. In this context, both writers assume a linkage between data and its usage. Goonatilake (1985:38) identifies bibliographic and statistical data as information which is:

> a resource, a production factor, which forms the basis of research while research is the process of converting information, which starts at a given level, by processing, organising and analyzing it to generate new information as its output, to be utilised for a variety of purposes (*ibid.*).

She makes a distinction between research and information, by identifying information as the basis of research while research is the process of converting information to generate new information. This was perhaps an important point to make during the relatively early stages of WR research when there was a tendency to present statistics without a thorough accompanying analysis. Goonatilake (1985) goes on to list the types of data, surveys and statistical reports, and their parent institutions that would be relevant to women's research and for what purpose it could be used. She establishes that information does not necessarily reflect the differences between women, their work and changing roles, the hidden areas of women's participation and their needs. She critiques dominant classifications and methods of data collection practised by governmental and demographic institutions, and argue for attitudinal, policy and methodological changes that accept the centrality of women's role in society. This establishes further that even feminist empiricism is fuelled by some form of a feminist standpoint.

Vidayratne (2004) concentrates on how to make statistically visible the full extent of the work done by women, and their contribution to the national economy. She attempts to disaggregate national accounts by gender in order to identify and value non-market work. She uses a time-survey of two villagers as a case study to show how the percentage share of women's contribution to the national economy increases when

work in the domestic sectors such as household maintenance and caring activities are included.

From a positivist perspective, Goonatilake's (1985) article and Wanasundera's brief reference to gender statistics are useful in indicating the progress made in data collection and dissemination until 1995. Today, the situation has improved marginally as there are occasional statistical visuals of women's roles and status portrayed by government agencies under special projects (Department of Census and Statistics, 1995; Department of Census and Statistics, 1997; Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2003).

However, as pointed out by international feminists (Harding, 1990; 1991; 2004a), as well as Goonatilake (1985), the objectives of feminist empiricism are limited. Despite advocating changes for women, it does not conceptualise the required changes in epistemology and methodology to incorporate research subjects as actors in the research process (so that they could initiate and direct changes for themselves). Indian feminist Narayan (2004) differs from this position when she points out the capacity / authority of empiricism to challenge forms of cultural hegemony.

In Sri Lanka too, the value of feminist empiricism within the local context lies in its ability to provide justification for the political project of feminism. The bulk of research, lobbying and activism directing national legislation, governmental and other policy

changes are firmly founded on Enlightenment and liberal aspirations. This is argued in Chapters 3 / 6 / 9. There are examples of research activism on violence against women leading to legislation on domestic violence; and of research and lobbying on / against government land allocation schemes that discriminated against women in the allotment of state lands leading to administrative changes in the public sector.[81] However, further research is necessary to track / establish these changes.

Fusion Methodology

While there is a considerable bulk of Feminist Empiricist literature, an important development in WR writing has been the fusion of methods. In fact, Goonetilake in 1985 argued for the necessity of quantitative data such as bibliographic data and statistical data, along with qualitative studies to promote social change for women. She critiqued (though unsubstantiated by reference to specific research) that hitherto many studies were general in nature, and did not account for the complex variations of:

> regional, religious and age distinctions, education, employment, income, decision-making, within the household and outside, social relations, political consciousness and participation (Goonatilake, 1985:36).

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[81] This was confirmed by respondents Jaya (19/10/05) and Gayathri (21/7/05).

I would add transgender status and sexual orientation, as well as language and caste differences to this list. Yet, while it is important to account for these differences (Chapter 8), it is imperative not to be bound by them. It is my position that there needs to be a fusion of methods to incorporate both the general and the particular simultaneously. Making meaning requires constructing / highlighting the commonalities and the disparities.

One stated reason for modifying research designs to include quantitative data (from national level surveys as well as official statistics) and qualitative data (in the form of field investigations and case studies) was the inadequacy of existing data to provide 'insights' (University of Colombo, 1979). The methodology of the first *Status of Women* survey (1979), in particular, reflected mixed methods of data collection (discussions, structured questionnaires, interviews, observations, and field living). It contained urban as well as village perspectives, and incorporated eight individual case studies reflecting the views of the writers. The adoption of mixed modes in research such as those by CENWOR (1995a), Jayaweera and Sanmugam (2001), Wickramasinghe and Jayatilaka (2006), resulted in the ontological construction / representation of a broad panorama as well as a specific selective picture. Of course, this may not always ensure a heterogeneous analysis. Nor would it presume to offer 'authentic' representations of reality – if indeed it were possible to do so.

Moreover, combining inductive methods of a research hypothesis with the deductive methods of research questions provide further justificatory grounds for social change. Thus, within the local context, fused or mixed methodology possesses pragmatic value – for consciousness-raising, lobbying, legislative policy and administrative change, attitudinal and action transformations.

Action Research

There are uncritical assumptions in Sri Lankan WR research about the approach / objectives / outcomes of research. Action research is one area that requires attention[82]. Many controversial issues have been raised internationally about action research; as recorded by instance by Reinharz (1992). These include the capacity of action or emancipatory research to empower the researched, vagueness of research objectives, and the extent of participation / collaboration between the researcher and researched (Lather, 1986; Stanley, 1990; Letherby, 2006).

A fleeting reference to action research was made in an article on the rural economy in 1976 (Economic Review, 1976a). It conceptualised action research as a top-down approach by the researcher identifying opportunities for a developmental intervention (*via* new skills and

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[82] As noted in Chapter 3, action research refers to research that empowers and integrates the researched into the research process.

training, infrastructure changes), based on an analysis of the division of labour in farm households. Here, social change meant economic empowerment.

Citing Mies on the necessity of 'research objects to be viewed from below', Goonatilake (1985:37) argues for a version of action-research that places the researcher on a plane of equality with those studied; though for her researchers are 'technicians at the service of others, not far removed from the masses' (*ibid*). Goonatilake conceptualises research as a service to the community under study; a Marxist standpoint, but one which could equally cover other stances including those of Welfare, Christian and Muslim charity, Buddhist altruism, class condescension, or gender inequity (Chapter 9). In this context, Schrijvers (1993) strikes a cautionary note by arguing that simply using a bottom-up approach does not guarantee that the interests of those at the bottom are incorporated into the analysis. There also needs to be a moral stand on the part of the researcher – perhaps 'a conscious partiality' – as advocated by Mies (1983:68) and others (Smith, 1974; Stanley and Wise, 1983a; Jagger, 2004) using different terminology, and other discerning arguments.

Though not cohesively argued, Goonatilake (1985) makes a case for the researcher as being mandated to create consciousness of women's oppression from a theoretical perspective – thereby, stimulating the researched into action. While she does not make references to global theorisations (Mies, 1983; Stanley

and Wise, 1983) on the consciousness-raising aim of feminist research, she nevertheless sees research as being both theory and action based. An interactive methodology is advocated; where the women being studied would decide on the object and procedures of research. Though she makes the point that women are not a homogeneous group, the possible power dynamics of the researched within their social context is not addressed in her conceptualisation.

Schrijvers (1996) refers to a research experience with refugees[83] (Tamil and Muslim women), that is similar to the model promoted by Goonatilake. Schrijvers explicates a 'feminist-inspired transformative' (1996:19) research approach, where the research agenda was determined by the researched women themselves. It involved a bottom-up movement for change - through advocacy about the situation of displaced people among the relevant authorities so as to influence the decision-making process from the viewpoint of the affected. Schrijvers' compact and essentially descriptive article does not indicate the methods used in either her interaction with the displaced women or with the authorities, although she refers to the power play experienced in a situation of displacement and civilian interaction. However, her insights from this research show that the above methodology was able to benefit from:

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[83] Sporadic waves of warfare periodically displace all three communities due to Sri Lanka's ongoing ethnic conflict in the North and East of the country.

feminism's appreciation of the heterogeneity of experience of people in particular categories, yet their shared positioning in systems of domination. And to provide 'a perspective on systems of domination which is relevant in studies not just confined to women (Schrijvers, 1996:20).

At the same time, Schrijvers (1993) wants to develop a research methodology that can analyse the interflow of power (top-down and bottom-up) within the research situation.

However, neither Goonatilake nor Schrijvers elucidate the exact means by which, and the exact extent to which the activist / researcher can collaborate with the women researched to determine the research process, or the different aspects and levels of action possible. Further, they do not indicate whether the action involved is feminist consciousness-raising, or educational interventions; or whether other forms of activism such as policy-making or lobbying, demonstrations, community-based welfare projects, or grassroots development schemes are conceptualised. It also assumes that the researcher is equally trained in such areas as facilitation, to be able to ensure that there is constructive and equal participation of the women concerned, especially if these are instances where communities are handicapped by illiteracy.

Further, in Schrijvers' (1995) approach, the researcher also needs skills and strategies of advocacy that expand the role of the researcher into an activist. Action

research is thus assumed to have linear aspirations that are based on a rational theory of change[84]; where the researcher may intervene, create consciousness, catalyse social action and change, and in most instances withdraw. This process may underestimate the irrational, multiple, recurring cycles, interlocks and complexities of such phenomena as sexism, racism, and of conditions such as poverty, war and natural disasters.

The Importance of History

So far, I have discussed the methodological praxis of researchers, not as typologies, but as aspects of research represented / constructed through my literature review. I now consider two other ontological concerns affecting feminist research - those of positive and negative assumptions pertaining to history and culture.

In 1985, Goonatilake posited an implied comparison between action and historical research by advocating historical research as a means by which to identify the base of women's oppression. She advocated looking at the changing roles and status of women in society during the course of social evolution. This is a classic Marxist / Feminist point of view (Maynard, 1995; Harstock, 2004) that focuses on property relations, changing modes of production and the extent of women's control over the means of production. She sees historical research as a methodology of understanding

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[84] This was pointed out by my supervisor Louise Morley.

the present structures and ideologies of women's oppression. While the article did not discuss such a proposal beyond bare statements, nevertheless it was an attempt to outline the potential of feminist research.

In comparison, Wickramasinghe (2001:33) talks of women's history as a means of restoring women to history and restoring history to women:

> The aim of women's history is to make women a focus of inquiry, a subject of the story, an agent of the narrative. In other words it is to construct women as a historical subject (*ibid.*).

This task of restoration has already begun in Sri Lanka. Unfortunately, Wickramasinghe's (*ibid.*) work on new trends and methodologies in writing history does not explicate the exact ways and means by which researchers could integrate these methodologies for women's history.

Vimaladharma (2003) in his work uses gender theory in historical analysis.[85] He warns feminists doing historical research about the need to engage with several overriding assumptions and standpoints within the local context. Firstly, he discusses the need to account for traditionalists who try to construct a golden era which accorded equal or high position to Sri Lankan women despite the ambiguity of historical evidence

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[85] My literature review does not include research done by men. However, I am making an exception in the case of Vimaladharma because of the capacity of his work to exemplify some of my thinking on research methodology in Sri Lanka.

(Kiribamune, 1990; Vimaladharma, 2003). As a result, issues of discrimination are seen as irrelevant and invalid *vis-à-vis* the local context. In particular, Vimaladharma (*ibid.*) refers to assumptions of social and cultural continuity through two millennia of Sri Lankan history. He critiques dismissals of male dominance in preference to instances which are contrary. He also points out how romanticising the past prevents engagement with the gender issues of contemporary times.

Secondly, he argues for the necessity of engaging with modernists who see patriarchy and male dominance breaking down under colonial rule, and resulting in opportunities for women to organise and struggle for emancipation. This thinking, according to Vimaladharma, overlooks the fact that colonial interventions eroded some of the rights to property and status within the family which women enjoyed under indigenous systems. While further research is necessary, I contend that it also ignores some of the oppressive moral impositions of Christianity and Victorian times such as legalised marriages. Vimaladharma proposes that:

> the romanticism of the traditionalist and
> the idealism of the modernist have both to
> be critically examined using objective
> analytical criteria (Vimaladharma,
> 2003:3).

Interestingly, he (*ibid.*) promotes the concept of patriarchy as being able to provide the relevant analytical criteria to do so.

For me, the two oppositional standpoints of traditionalism and modernism both have strategic value in historical research. My epistemological standpoint is such that I see / construct / appropriate the co-existence of commonalities and contrarieties in history for the political and ethical projects of feminisms.

The Cultural Factor

In Sri Lanka, a cultural approach (founded on literature, the liberal arts and humanities as well as anthropology and social sciences) has become politically important for feminist research for a number of reasons. Firstly, the collective national consciousness is fixated on the country's 2500 years of recorded (Buddhist) history and culture[86]. Secondly, the protracted ethnic conflict in the country has heightened and polarised the cultural / ethnic identities of the Tamils, Sinhalese and Muslims. Global developments pertaining to US / UK / *Al Qaeda* and Muslim countries have further exacerbated communal feelings amongst the country's Muslim community. Thirdly, various reactionary forces in the country since Independence (in 1948) have sporadically espoused and distorted culture as a political ideal - if not

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[86] It either ignores the colonial interventions of the Portuguese, Dutch and British since the 16th Century or treats them as historical aberrations.

practice - against the colonial past and against present currents of globalisation. Fourthly, culture (based on Victorian ideologies as well as various ethnic morals) is manipulated as a powerful force to constrain people's sexualities and gender status. Researchers' emphasis on culture has been for these reasons as well as to combat the backlash against feminism as alien to the indigenous cultures (Chapters 3 / 6).

Maunaguru (1995) aligning herself to Althussar (2000), argues the following in regard to Tamil literature:

> The study of literature is an important aspect of feminist studies since literature is part of cultural practice. Social construction of gender takes place through the working of ideology and the ideology of gender is inscribed in everyday discourse and is produced and reproduced in cultural practices (Maunaguru, 1995:30).

Thus, gender ideologies (and I would argue, structures, performances and identities) are partially constituted and signified by the dominant cultural myths, perceptions, impulses and practices of each community and the nation at large. Maunaguru (*ibid.*) argues that because expressive realism is still popular among Tamil literary critics as an approach, they assume that the literary text expresses the truth about the author's experience and world, and, by implication, the universal aspects of human nature. However, she sees the text not as a 'transparent media which reflects reality' but rather, as a

signifying system that inscribes ideology which is constitutive of reality (Maunaguru, 1995:32).

In examining / constructing the cultural organisation of sexuality and the meanings assigned to the female body, Tambiah (2004) uses as her base the parliamentary discourse surrounding the changes proposed to the Penal Code in 1995. The changes would have tightened the laws on sexual offences (including marital rape), and liberalised abortion and homosexuality had they been passed. Tambiah (*ibid.*) discusses how the entire parliamentary debate was founded on repressive ideologies of gender and the female body, notions of Sri Lankan cultural purity (against the West), and on various ethnic and cultural practices. Thus, the focus of research on cultural praxis illustrates / constructs the intangible yet oppressive forces in Sri Lankan society.

Through literature reviewing I have collated / constructed the methodological issues of WR research texts in this chapter. They are not presented as isolated textual categories, but as descriptions, concerns, aspirations and prescriptions of feminist research methodology. I have thus partially-constructed, contextualised, framed and contributed towards legitimising explicit WR knowledges in Sri Lanka (*connaissance*). While attempts to define WR literature are dated due to the scarcity of texts, it is nonetheless possible to summarise the following findings.

My review confirms local conceptualisations of WR research as forming three categories; women's, feminist and gender research. There were other implied classifications of research based on research outcomes of consciousness-raising, action and policy work. The bulk of feminist empiricist research is conceptualised as research activism – that aspires to social change through the above means – though not necessarily from the perspective of the researched. However, attempts are made to rectify this through fusion methodology and action research. Given the ontological specificities / politics of the local context, history and culture are key factors that need methodological accounting. Both the traditionalist and modernist approaches of historical research are of strategic use for feminism in establishing legitimacy. A cultural approach can respond to the backlash against feminism and the heightened fundamentalist and reactionary forces in the country.

CHAPTER SIX

Ontology

Making Meaning of the Multiple Realities of Researching

Ontology[87] as an aspect of feminist research methodology refers to the external influences that impact on and are part of the research process. Thus in this chapter I will make meaning of the multiple 'realities'of researching. In doing so, I will respond to all my research questions but in particular questions 3 and 4. How and why and who within research processes generate / construct the various types of WR knowledges? What are the practical advantages, challenges and limitations of conceptualising / applying particular research methodologies? I also address the sub-question as to what drives WR research and writing in Sri Lanka.

These questions of ontology constitute an aspect of feminist research methodology, and are imperative due to recurrent allegations against feminisms in the island as being fuelled by Western ideologies and funded by foreign interests (Chapters 3 / 8). It is my intention to address these stale and sour denouncements of

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[87] This refers to the forms, nature or aspects of reality that impinge on and are part of research processes (Introduction 1).

feminisms by focusing on the ontological aspects of the issue. These include the politics of imported and indigenous knowledges, the multiple drivers of feminisms, ideology that masquerades as methodology, as well as interest representation and application.

Ontology and Epistemology

By theorising ontology in this way I am striving to create epistemology[88]. Epistemology tends to become important in any era when new paradigms emerge, in justifying new knowledge claims against existent ways of understanding realities (Alcoff and Potter, 1993). This is pertinent to the situation at hand when you consider women as a new paradigm in research (Chapter 4). Harding (1990) expands on this crucial point:

> Once we note that epistemologies are justificatory strategies, and then we are led to ask questions about the hostile environment that creates the perception that one needs a theory of knowledge at all. Perhaps epistemologies are created only under pressure from a hostile environment. After all, why would anyone bother to articulate a theory of knowledge if her beliefs and the grounds for those beliefs were not challenged? (1990:87)

The denigration of feminisms in Sri Lanka has often been based on the question as to where knowledge comes from. This is why it is important for us, as

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[88] Epistemology theorises on what constitutes knowledge and how much confidence we can have in it (Introduction).

feminists, to consider what knowledge is in specific contexts; who knows it and under what circumstances (Harding, 1987a; Stanley, 1990; Letherby, 2003).

Yet, envisioning concepts such as ontology and epistemology are notoriously slippery and complex exercises at the best of times - particularly in an abstract sense. In my thesis these concepts are conceived of / linked / seen as emanating from research data as well as global theorisations. This however does not detract from the fact that contemplations on ontology and epistemology are also feats of reflexivity - for both the writer and the reader. It requires one to distance oneself from considerations of the regular, familiar, experiences of life and from positivist processes of knowledge and meaning-making. Furthermore it requires one to reconsider, in turn, how reality is conceptualised instinctively and normatively by an individual - metacognition[89] (Otani and Widner, 2005) as pointed out by Morley in supervision. Even then, there are inherent difficulties in distinguishing, constructing or deconstructing the overlaps and overlays between being and knowing (Chapter 7).

It is my key argument here and elsewhere that ontology *vis-à-vis* the research process is a crucial factor in research epistemology and methodology. This is based on an understanding of ontological politics that is defined as follows:

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[89] Metacognitive knowledge pertains to one's knowledge about how one's cognition operates.

> If realities are enacted, then reality is not in principle fixed or singular, and truth is no longer the only ground for accepting or rejecting a representation. The implication is that there are various possible reasons, including the political, for enacting one kind of reality rather than another, and that these grounds can in some measure be debated (Law, 2004:162).

Whitbeck (1989) conceives of ontology as oppositional or dyadic conceptualisations of the self and the other. Yet, ontology for me is not founded solely on the self; rather, my notion of ontology is from a psycho-sociological perspective. It refers to the external as well as internal enactments of competing and complementary realities within the research context. These are conceptualised as multiple competing smaller realities; such as the nexus of various global movements, institutional or structural realities, social / political interests and personal currents. These are understood to be symbiotically linked to the research processes that the researcher is engaged in - consciously and unconsciously. Here, ontology is conceptualised not as grand all-encompassing structures[90], but as smaller concurrent ontologies or enactments of realities that impact on WR knowledge and meaning-making. Likewise, these meaning-making processes or epistemologies are seen as / conceptualised as influencing research ontologies in a cyclic relationship.

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[90] Grand metaphysical ontologies include conceptions of time / space, while theoretical ontologies include postmodernisms.

A consideration of the ontological and epistemological politics of research deconstructs the innate tendency to sanitise the ideology that one believes in as being above ground politics. It exposes / reconstructs the divergent political pursuits of research, and thereby, prevents existing social inequities and injustices from being reproduced.

The Attacks and Responses

It has long been the practice of intellectual debate and criticism to question the methodology of research in order to undermine research conclusions. Usually, there are hegemonic assumptions about what constitutes an appropriate methodology - particularly from modernist perspectives (Collins, 1990). The findings of counter-hegemonic research can get dismissed on the basis of its methodologies. For instance, researchers' ontologies, assumptions about knowledge, theoretical standpoints, conceptual frameworks, and data generation methods are critiqued.

In Sri Lanka, the attacks / backlash against local feminisms target the origins or the impetus for feminist research as alien (Chapter 3 / 8 / 9). The detractors of feminisms have implied that the ideological / political impetus of feminisms renders feminist research flawed and invalid. This is based on the assumption that a problematic methodology (one can read problematic according to positivist paradigms) results in illogical,

unstable, subjective and politicised research conclusions. This is because traditional science and social science research methodologies value the seemingly empiricist and objective; since scientific research is understood to have severed its connections with local and historical interests, values, and agendas (Haraway, 1988; Smith, 2004; Harding, 2004a).

Attacks on feminisms attribute feminist ideologies / research / activism to the West, and condemn them as being culturally alien or decadent; reflecting homophobic, racially purist values (Chapter 3 / 8). For instance, de Alwis (2004a) discusses how feminism is not only portrayed as Western, bourgeoisie, anti-traditional, and anti-cultural, but also, as treacherous and anti-nationalist. One of the researchers interviewed for my research, Vivian exemplified this point:

> There is a sort of inherent anti-Western bent in Sri Lanka. I mean feminism is perceived that way. Even by the newspapers on March 8 - while celebrating Women's Day there is also the anti-feminist stuff, right? A couple of years ago they were talking about feminism in Sri Lanka being - what, cigarette smoking, alcohol guzzling, lesbians. So that is the kind of image... (5/8/2005).

As much as it is important to engage with these attacks for political reasons, it is equally significant to consider why and how and on what basis these attacks are mounted. Especially when other ideologies from Western countries such as those of Marx and Engles

have been appropriated wholesale, and are not subjected to the same allegations. Furthermore, there is an implicit denial or condemnation of the effects of certain ontological developments such as postcolonialism, globalisation, transnational migration, transglobal media and communication in these accounts. Conversely, there is a more selective appropriation of other developments such as modernisation and technological advancements. On the whole, despite the unstable and conflicting standpoints of these attacks, their legitimacy is reliant on their supposed indigenousness. Thus these nationalist discourses have the power and evocativeness to be a serious threat to feminisms.

They persist, for example, in seeing feminisms in the singular - in terms of a singular political motivation – despite the many strands of women's research and activism in the country spanning from feminist protest to women's advocacy and empowerment programmes. They imply that the espousal of feminism is both a personal / political choice influenced by such identity crosscuts as class, language, globalisation and sexuality; and is, therefore not a legitimate choice.

Feminist responses to the condemnations of feminisms have usually been strategic. We have, as feminists, engaged with such allegations at face value or at a literal, political level as will be argued later on. This is because feminist research is unashamedly political and ethical research (Chapter 9), and is inexorably part of epistemology. Thus as far as activism is concerned, we

have had to negotiate our way through the hegemonic ideologies and dominant discourses of nationalism, parochialism, sexism, heteronormativity, classism and anti-globalism (ideologies that have a strong moral tinge which uncritically valourises the indigenous and rejects the foreign). Since the foreign is imbued with negative notions of the other, alienness, illegitimacy, shame, and threat, Sri Lankan feminist research (and more so activism) has had to strategise to be seen as 'authentic' to reach a particular women's constituency — for instance, by appealing to historical examples (Chapter 5). If feminists were to propound a political message, then it has to be seen as legitimate in terms of what we expect the women's constituency to perceive as being legitimate - both politically and epistemologically.

However, there is a need for us as feminists to combine the apparent political and ideological aspects of the attack with methodological approaches in our responses (Flax, 1987; Harding, 1987a; Alcoff, 1988; Butler, 1999) perhaps with the use of postmodernism. Such a methodological approach (Letherby, 2003) can not only expose the superficiality of the attack, but it can also through implication, expose the ontological and epistemological foundations of the attack itself.

Ontological Politics

Local ontological dynamics are highlighted below not only as the impetus for feminist research in the country

(ontology); but also as having a symbiotic link to epistemological / methodological aspects of research (in terms of research focus, designs and objectives). They consist of:

a) Feminist Internationalisms (FI) - the impetus of international influences / standards and resulting epistemologies;

b) Structural Reformative Intents (SRI) – the institutional reforms and the epistemologies of gender mainstreaming of disciplines and institutions;

c) Feminist Localisms (FL) – the contemporaneous socio-political developments that provide local imperatives for research epistemologies;

d) Feminist Personal Political Interests (FPPI) - The internal personal political drive of the researchers and the epistemologies that arise therein.

In conceptualising / considering these multiple and competing realities (ontological politics) that affect / are part of WR researching in the country, it is not my intention to simply situate knowledge in the context of its production. Nor, to propose a categorisation of the ontological enactments of research processes, though it would not be wrong to say that social science research has traditionally striven to assign categories to and provide causal theories for the phenomena, group, and relations being researched (Harding and Norberg, 2005).

I conceptualise the ontological politics within the research process as a matrix[91]. This is because it is not possible to isolate and compartmentalise these enactments due to considerable overlaps and discontinuities, despite the perceived exclusions and singularities. The following Diagram illustrates this point.
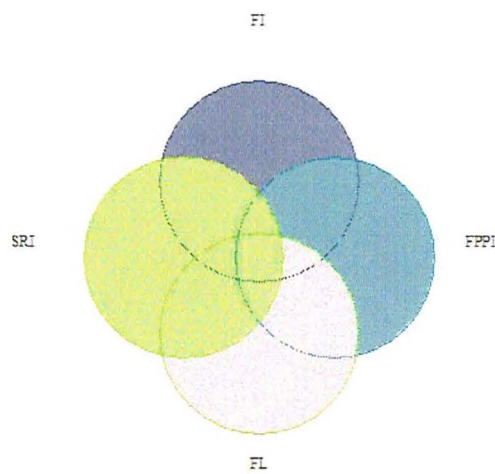
Diagram II – Feminist Ontological Politics

FI = Feminist Internationalisms (Epistemology / Ontology)
SRI = Structural Reformative Intents
FPPI = Feminist Personal Political Interests
FL = Feminist Localisms

Furthermore, they are seen as a form of politics because of the tensions that exist between these various strands

of feminisms: relating to the international and the local, the structural and the personal.

The political intent signified serves to define this research as feminist. This is principally because of its impetus and commitment to the identification and transformation of power differentials between men and women (and less explicitly, women and women). However, this may be in spite of the fact that these studies may up to now have been categorised unequivocally as research on women; or, that their authors may have rejected the claim of being feminist writers.

Accounting for the ontological / epistemological politics in researching should not be seen as running counter to standpoint theory and intersectionality which marries the text securely to the author (where the author's conscious identity, interest and intention are seen as marking the text – Chapter 8 / 9). For instance, it could be seen in terms of the universal of a woman's perspective (Smith, 2004); or difference in terms of race / colour (Collins, 1991); or differential Third World concerns (Narayan, 2004); or gender and class intersects (Harstock, 2004), or their epistemological standing (Harding, 2004b); or methodological insights of situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988).

In fact, perhaps, it is possible to conceptualise the dynamics of research realities as an extension of standpoint theory. Researchers are called upon to

position themselves *vis-à-vis* the ontological / epistemological enactments of research processes and thus situate their knowledges (Haraway, 1988). This is critical in a context where there is more subscription to elements of feminist empiricism (Chapter 5) that thrive on the use of scientific methods, than to standpoint practices (Chapters 4 / 8 / 9).

Thus ontological politics are not a continuation of the attempt to ignore or erase the standpoint of the writer, but an attempt to amalgamate into epistemological consideration other factors within the research process as well – so as to situate research / researcher within the wider social / political / ontological climate of its production. This view of ontological politics extends the parameters not only of standpoint theory but also of the concept of situatedness (Haraway, 1988; Engelstad and Gerrard, 2005). Knowledge is not only situated in reality but is also part of that reality.

I am aware that positioning research / writing into any kind of framework / matrix can easily become an essentialist / structuralist exercise founded on a false sense of totalism. Further, definitions provide closure, certainty and an exhaustiveness that shut down other possibilities. Especially in view of arguments in the context of postmodernism that highlight the elements of uncertainty, multiplicity, discontinuity and diversity involving the research act. Conversely, a lack of definitions can provoke allegations of imprecision and

superficiality.[92] This is why I need to clarify my position; that this matrix is not to be seen as watertight, nor conceptualised as having equal or monolithic influences on the research process. Rather, researchers are part of / forced to engage with these multiple realities and motivations of making meaning - resulting in what Stanley and Wise (1993) call feminist fractured foundationalist epistemologies. The ontological dynamics highlighted should not be perceived as homogenous, but as diverse and fragmented; nor as metatheoretical groupings, but as plural and multi-disciplinary. Thus, this matrix is advanced wholly as a project not only to identify / construct the individual ontological and epistemological commonalities and disparities, but also, the political / ethical projects of feminist research / writing (Chapter 9).

Feminist Internationalisms

By feminist internationalisms (de Mel, 2001; Basu, 2003), I refer to Sri Lankan WR research and activism that have global / regional linkages, priorities, and patronage (Chapter 3). This ontological strand of feminisms has impinged greatly on the public consciousness due to State, INGO and NGO espousal and correspondingly high visibility in the media. Hence, perhaps it contributes to the allegation of feminisms being imported. For instance, take the attacks (in newspapers) on the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against

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[92] These arguments on definitions were insights from my supervisor Louise Morley.

Women (CEDAW) in 2004 - 2006[93] for being against Sri Lankan culture.

Feminist internationalisms are conceptualised as how - on the one hand, international women's agendas are defined by local women's[94] intercessions across nations to global bodies. Conversely, individual women, women's organisations and the State (to some degree) adhere to the standards and aspirations set by these international bodies. For the detractors of feminisms, who see this solely as an imposition, the symbiosis in the interaction must be emphasised.

While not mutually exclusive, there are also transnational women's movements [95] (Basu, 2003) of NGOs that also form independent coalitions and influence women's mandates, and undertake research.

These international and regional initiatives are significant since a considerable section of the research corpus intersects with UN international goals as well as those promoted by other agencies. However, further research is required to distinguish between the varying

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[93] This was in relation to a proposed Bill on Women's Rights, which had a provision guaranteeing women's rights to the body, and which has been interpreted as the right to abortion.

[94] I cite two examples - Radhika Coomaraswamy (UN Special Rappateur on Violence Against Women 1994 – 2004) and Savithri Goonesekere (Expert Committee to the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women 1999 – 2001).

[95] These include Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), Women' Living Under Muslim Law (WLUML), and Association of African Women for Research and Development (AAWORD).

research mandates and epistemologies of state-related multi-lateral networks, research undertaken by transnational coalitions and comparative regional studies. For the moment, I refer to the bodies of research literature associated with the celebration of the UN initiatives by the University of Colombo and the institution of women's research centres and coalitions such as CENWOR[96] and SLWNGOF[97]. These form an unbroken epistemological record and an evolving discourse since 1975 on general issues relating to women (University of Colombo, 1979; CENWOR, 1985; CENWOR, 1995a; SLWNGOF, 1999; CENWOR, 2000; 2001). A researcher from academia interviewed for this thesis discussed it as follows:

> The legal issues pertaining to women, general overviews of education, employment, political participation, media, health - again with regard to women are what are dictated by the global agenda. Or they may prioritise areas like civil society and governance and violence against women. These may also be related to donor funding. What we can research on has to be funded by donors. Donors are very much dictating research priorities... (Dhamani, 27/7/2005).

Dhamani's comment underscores two important issues pertaining to Feminist Internationalisms. Firstly, epistemologies of these writings centre on empirical data (including first-hand surveys and existing statistics), and were highly influential in depicting general overviews of

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[96] Centre for Women's Research
[97] Sri Lanka Women's Non-Governmental Organisations Forum

the status of women *vis-à-vis* these sectors. In many of the studies, women were conceptualised as homogenous and largely in statistics. There is a linear meta-narrative in the research studies, which span the overriding issues in a chosen sector. They depict compartmentalised and totalised pictures of women (Oakley, 2000; Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002), which ignore differences amongst women as well as the strategic importance of incorporating men in such analysis (although this is changing). However, they have served the political purposes of recognising and generalising on women's conditions - especially in lobbying for policy change and in creating public awareness. Over the years, some of these publications have also begun to reflect a stronger consciousness of women's oppression or gender inequities; and portray a growing awareness of how other socio-political developments in the country (Feminist Localisms) affect women as a whole (University of Colombo, 1979; CENWOR, 1985; CENWOR, 1995a; SLWNGOF, 1999; CENWOR, 2000).

The second issue is ontological. Dhamani (27/7/2005) asserts that her non-academic research has been constrained by a lack of funding due to contemporary research priorities. However, this is refuted by Wasanthi (25/8/2004 & 18/10/2004), an NGO researcher. She contends that her organisation is able to draw up proposals according to their own interests and access funding accordingly. As argued in Chapter 3, given the diversity of WR research and writing in the country, it is

doubtful that funders have sole control over the determination of research interests. However, it is possible that more funding is available for particular research subjects depending on what is prioritised by the international research agenda.

On the whole, Feminist Internationalisms (particularly those that have a UN compass) are influenced by liberal feminist leanings as conceptualised by Maynard (1995) which rely heavily on the State. They hold the State accountable for its women citizens and tend to work within existing structures, similar to *elite* research in educational policy that is discussed by Maguire and Ball (1994). Frameworks of women's rights that centre on policy change are predominantly emphasised. The central objectives of these publications (University of Colombo, 1979; CENWOR, 1985; Ministry of Health and Women's Affairs, 1993; SLWNGOF, 1999; CENWOR, 2001) is to keep the research focus firmly centred on State commitments at the UN Conferences, and to periodically assess the progress and lapses made in relation to the various sectors identified (UNIFEM / CENWOR, 2004)). There are also official practices of submitting government reports and NGO shadow reports (on the status of women) to the UN Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee). In this sense, UN-related studies are retrospective; however they are also aimed at providing inputs regarding women into the future national plans of the country. Aside from exposing the lapses of state action (Soysa, 1985;

Jayaweera, 1985b; Amarasuriya, 1995; Goonesekere, 2000), the emphasis falls on legislative reform (Goonesekere, 1995), and sectoral reform (Abeyesekera, 2000) as well as on increased women's participation in all spheres (Dias, 1985; Jayaweera, 1985a; de Silva, 1995; Peiris, 1995).

As noted in Chapter 3, women's research / activism in Sri Lanka became concretised through UN sponsorship. However, evolving consciousness about women's issues soon triggered researchers to move beyond the continuing UN mandates to other ontological compulsions - institutional reform, local imperatives and personal research interests.

Structural Reformative Intents (Gender Mainstreaming)[98]

Research emanating from the ontological currents of structural reformation can be conceptualised into two categories. I make a distinction between gender epistemologies that seek institutional reformation of organisations, and those that envision sectoral or subject reformation through projects. The latter also embraces research-based action projects that carry out gender reforms at grassroots levels.

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[98] I will be engaging more comprehensively with what I construct as general ontology of gender and gender epistemology in Chapter 7.

1) Institutional Reforms

These are bodies of research that aim for institutional reform through gender mainstreaming (GM) as identified with and promoted by the international Gender and Development (GAD) movement (Moser, 1993; Wickramasinghe, 2000). One objective of GM is to expose the artificial and misleading 'reality' of objectivity and impersonality within organisations and interpersonal interactions by highlighting the gendered hierarchies and gender biases of institutional structures, mechanisms, and practices as well as of the overall work environment and culture (Miller and Razavi, 1998).

The second objective is to sponsor institutional gender reformation through the process of gender mainstreaming. Interestingly, this exercise is geared towards creating a new ontology or reality to replace the existing one within organisations. This is done through the provision of manuals and guidelines for organisational policy or strategy formulation to mainstream gender into work structures and practices. It is also attempted through evaluation research on gender mainstreaming of organisations and projects; and through gender-based technical research such as 'gender auditing'. Carried out by gender 'professionals' (including myself), much of this research has a practical orientation and is specific to the objectives of the institutional context for which it is undertaken, and retained within those institutions for internal usage.

Having identified that institutional structures / practices / micropolitics are unequal and unjust to women, GM attempts to change these ontologies. Particular procedures and instruments are devised for this purpose; such as gender theoretical frameworks[99], or specific gender-related tools[100] to provide a strong methodological base to de-institutionalise gender bias in the public sphere of work organisations or subject areas. The overall aim here is to promote the 'consciousness' of gender disparities, women's access to decision-making levels, gender-sensitive mechanisms and practices, and the increase in both men's and women's participation in non-traditional fields. It is assumed that this leads to the overall redefinition and reorganisation of gender relations and the existing division of labour in the workplace.

2) Project Reforms

The second category of feminist reformative research refers to research projects that mainstream gender into the realities of disciplines and subjects that have been identified as androgynous or which have taken the male as the norm. Examples include education and training (Jayaweera, 2000; Mendis, 2002; Gunewardena, 2005) or disaster management (Ariyabandu and Wickramasinghe, 2003), or the private sector (Wickramasinghe and Jayatilaka, 2006). Apart from which, there are gender research projects that are

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[99] These include the Framework for Gender Livelihood Analysis in Disasters or the Harvard Gender Roles Framework of Analysis, and the Gender Analysis Matrix.

[100] Examples include gender diagnosis or gender-related planning.

undertaken (particularly at grassroots) as background studies, which are then followed up by action interventions. One of my interviewees described such an intervention:

> Our organisation went in to do a project with the women but realised that the main problem in the community was alcoholism - this led to family disharmony, violence against women. After the Needs Assessment, we got in another organisation to reduce alcoholism - they are not only working with the men and women but also the children to create consciousness, closing the taverns... (Jalani, 21/10/2004).

Jalani, who works for an independent research organisation, referred to a research epistemology that involved action (that of researching to assess women's and men's gender-based needs and designing interventions to address a specific community). The action component of this developmental intervention was part of an overall project aimed at gender reformation.

There are many perceptions pertaining to structural reformative research or GM at both institutional and project levels. The fundamental objections are ideological. Research is seen as imported from the West and sponsored by foreign funding. As it is an approach that is centred on compromise, mutuality and joint gender responsibilities (necessarily dependent on the

goodwill of power-holders in the institution / discipline / community). Thus, it becomes questionable whether GM research has the power to effect realistic social transformations and to what extent. It is acknowledged that the 'professionalised' terminology of GM legitimises women's knowledge and experience, and clinches it within the mainstreams of research epistemologies and institutional practice. However, it conceptualises one overarching institutional reality for all women, and thereby fundamentally undermines the very notion of women's different ontologies. Furthermore, GM can interpret women's realities in male terms. Thus, mainstreaming women's experiences in any form other than on women's terms can defeat the purpose of gender mainstreaming.

There is criticism of GM that it is not informed by feminist theory and that it presents gender as a methodology, rather than an ideology. Thus gender-mainstreaming epistemologies are problematic in some researchers' conceptualisations. Researcher Wishva (25/8/2005) described it as 'an instrumentalised process' or 'a methodology'. This is because specific formulas or theoretical frameworks and methodological tools are applied to an organisation / project for a predetermined purpose. Consequently, the research process and outcomes may become instrumentalised – perhaps to the detriment of research objectives. Equally, strategic linking of gender equity with development and other goals such as efficiency, peace, environmental sustainability, and poverty alleviation may dilute the

political implications of the process, resulting only in superficial changes (Wickramasinghe, 2000).

Further, proficiency in the instruments of gender mainstreaming and the associated jargon of the related gender discourse could result in those who do not have a commitment to feminisms undertaking such research. The concern of feminists with regard to who should undertake feminist research comes to the fore, especially due to this perception of commercialisation associated with GM research (Chapter 3). This is critical because emancipatory research needs to engage with the wider ontologies of organisations - beyond the research circuit and women's movements. Consequently, GM may not always have the specific political purpose / outcome of empowering women.

Furthermore, as far as organisational research is concerned, the research is 'owned', and remains within the institution for which research is carried out; and does not enter the public realm for discussion or debate. Consequently, the exercise can halt at different ontological levels; for instance, at the stage of policy, becoming a form of 'lip service' paid by the organisation concerned. Furthermore, it may not necessarily address the micropolitics within organisations. Because research and its outcomes are confined to the organisation, they may not have the ability to activate structural changes or changes in the

private sphere that go beyond an institution / developmental intervention.

My experience of doing reformative research or GM has involved extensive negotiations and interactions between myself (the researcher) and those in the particular organisation / sector / community. Sometimes, I have been successful in converting organisations to adopt wholesale GM. At other times, I have had to balance my commitments towards gender equality / equity according to the extents to which the organisation / participants were willing to adopt / adapt gender mainstreaming. In this, I have had to negotiate as to what extent they would realistically take on gender concerns or activate a gender mainstreaming policy. This has been with the strategic and pragmatic objective of making some headway in instituting gender concerns in the short-term, with a more long-term plan in mind. Here, a great deal was dependent on the capabilities of individual women and men to drive the policy into practice within an organisation / sector / community.

Yet, in spite of these drawbacks, gender reformative research has been successful - at the least - in creating 'organised consciousness' of gender ontologies within communities, and - at the most - in institutionalising gender concerns within organisational and wider structural policy and practice. The ontological possibilities of feminist reformative research in Sri Lankan are thus evident; what is required is the

continuing development and refinement of its epistemologies to overcome the shortcomings.

Feminist Localisms

As argued by Wanasundera (1995), another determinant of what is researched / written is the overriding imperatives of the times. These can be configured as the war and natural disasters, development processes, economic factors and social currents. This contingent characteristic of local feminist literature can be traced back to sporadic inputs during the debates on women's education during the latter half of the 19th Century, and the lead up to universal franchise in 1931 (Jayawardena, 1986; Jayawardena, 1995a; de Alwis and Jayawardena, 2001; Jayawardena and de Alwis, 2002). Tracing and conceiving such a history (Chapter 3) contradicts the assertion that feminist research is alien - even though researchers use theoretical approaches associated with development / gender / UN standards and socialist frameworks.

One objective of Feminist Localisms is to highlight the many facets, specificities and complexities of women's material ontologies. This is not only in terms of these women's engagement with local socio-political and cultural imperatives, but also in terms of their experiences of oppression relating to structures and the micropolitics of day-to-day interactions (Morley, 1999).

The liberalisation of the economy in 1977 as part of Sri Lanka's original Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) involved the relaxation of restrictions on imports, the promotion of large-scale foreign investment in the private sector within and outside the newly established Free Trade Zones, the privatisation of state-owned enterprises, expansion in the service sectors such as Tourism, the institution of large-scale hydro-power schemes in the form of the *Mahaweli* project, and the export of labour. This resulted in women entering the factories in the Free Trade Zones (FTZs) and being exported as labour to the Middle East, and later to other countries as well.

However, these new women-specific economic opportunities were problematic. Research and writing illustrated how women were underemployed in relation to their educational qualifications and how their employment / wage expectations were not met. In fact, there was a conflict between the degree of liberation and economic empowerment usually associated with wage work and the new forms of oppression faced by women within these employment structures. These included poor working conditions, barriers to unionisation, sexual harassment within the Zones as well as the low moral standing attributed to these women workers (de Silva, 1981; Jayasinghe, 1981; Rupesinghe, 1981; Dias, 1983; Goonatilake, 1986; Kottegoda, 2004b).

Another objective of Feminist Localisms is that of filling the gaps in knowledge about women when it comes to specific areas of interest and categories of women. This dispels the so-called neutrality and objectivity of hegemonic knowledge banks - especially at national policy levels. Like Feminist Internationalisms, these studies grappled with the authority / outcomes of state action, and tried to pose alternative visuals centred on women. Spurred on by the international focus on development, these texts looked at the various developmental programmes *vis-à-vis* their impact on women. Studies identified the gender blindness of development planning and the need to take women into consideration in the planning process (Jayaweera, 1979; Jayawardena and Jayaweera, 1985; International Labour Organisation, 2000). Others concentrated on how development projects either completely ignored women, or conceptualised of women as dependent housewives despite their economic contributions (Ulluwishewa, 1991; Schrijvers, 1993).

Bandarage (1988) presented an overview of how the capitalist development model since 1977 both incorporates and subordinates women. Researchers also looked at the impact on women of specific development programmes such as the *Mahaweli* Development Scheme and the District Integrated Rural Development Schemes (Lund, 1989). For instance, women have lost their land rights during re-settlement programmes (de Zoysa, 1995). Since the 1980s the overall focus in the country has turned to poverty and this is evinced in WR

research as well (Kottegoda, 1999; Kottegoda, 2003; Kottegoda, 2004a; 2004b; Runwapura, 2006). The main insight is that poverty alleviation schemes still tend to relate to women as secondary earners or as dependent on men - despite the increased burdens placed on poor women due to social, political and economic developments. This embraces the phenomena of female single-parent families and heads-of-households and their negotiations with poverty. The assumption here is that these research interventions will eventually lead to ontological changes - especially, as some of these studies are utilised for lobbying purposes[101] (Chapter 9).

Another crucial ontological factor prompting research is the violence that engulfed the country. The protracted ethnic conflict has affected the capital Colombo and the North / East of the country for almost twenty five years. In addition, the late 1980s saw the island-wide terror of the JVP[102] uprising and its suppression by the State. Some of the first oppositional action against terror, violence and militarisation was from women's movements both in the North and the South. Women for Peace was a women's organisation that campaigned against war from the 1980s onwards, particularly in a hostile ideological environment that promoted militarism as a solution to the ethnic conflict in the country. Another response was the political mobilisation of motherhood (Jayawardena and de Alwis, 2002)

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[101] Take the example of the Domestic Violence Bill of 2005.
[102] Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna – a 'nationalist' fundamentalist political party.

through the Mother's Front movements (of the late 1980s early 1990s) led by women (Chapter 4). The Northern movement was protesting against the arrest of their sons and the Southern movement marching against the disappearances of theirs. Later, the Northern front was made to conform to the LTTE[103], while the Southern was co-opted by a dominant political party[104]. The activities (opposition to war and the demand for accountability) of both these groups, Women for Peace and the Mother's Fronts were based on women's apparently normative role of caring and nurturing. Against this, there was the militarisation of women in the LTTE who not only fought in armed combat, but who also pioneered and perfected the gruesome concept / act of martyrdom of female suicide-bombers. Yet, belying these extreme positions, during the negotiations between the LTTE and the Government in 2002, a Joint Gender Committee comprising state and LTTE nominees was established to look into gender and women's issues.

The research frame expanded accordingly in the 1990s to include concerns that emerged from women's experience of civil war and revolt – war victims, women militants, psychological trauma, displacement, refugees, war widows and female-headed households. Furthermore, after the Asian Tsunami of December 2004, similar concerns of gender in disaster relief, mitigation and rebuilding came to the fore (Abeysekera,

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[103] Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam
[104] Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP)

2005; Ms., 2005a; Ms., 2005b). The practical concerns of war in relation to women's livelihoods and displacement were seen as processes which may blur traditional distinctions between the private and the public, but at the same time expose women to alternative conditions and forces of oppression (Rajasingham-Senanayake, 2001; Zackeriya and Shanmugaratnam, 2001). In analysing war protest, de Alwis (2001; de Alwis and Jayawardena, 2001) posed that the Mother's Front, though creating a space to protest against an oppressive regime, defies a simple categorisation either as victimised mothers or as idealised mothers. The complexities and paradoxes of women's involvement in conflict resolution were considered by Samuel (2001).

Thus it is important to note how material alternatives or marginal activities of women are given epistemological value in Sri Lankan research. On the one hand, they are posited as an implied binary opposite to the dominant male action (for instance, male fighters against women victims). However, they are not essentialised despite being brought forward as opposites. In fact, women's activism and engagement with socio-political currents are represented in all their complexity and contradictions through a number of theoretical concepts; such as women's victimisation; agency; embodiment; capacity, gender identities and relations, and the public / private divide (Chapter 4).

The research epistemologies of Feminist Localisms centre largely on empirical data. However, there is a strong qualitative aspect to many studies which tries to illustrate how a particular group of women were part of a particular ontological enactment. This epistemological perspective involves the construction of the realities of women's oppression, the filling of knowledge gaps and the provision of alternatives about women for the country's collective knowledge base. Here too the political objective of promoting social change is a given. Women's voices are represented in research / writing to some degree, though issues of representation argued by feminist researchers (Stanley and Wise, 1983a; Fine, 1994; Maynard and Purvis, 1994; Skeggs, 1994) are not extensively contested or theorised.

As in the case of feminist internationalisms, there is a dearth of theorisation on the personal standpoint of the researcher though some studies 'begin theorisation' (Chapter 8). However, women are not conceptualised as a universal as in feminist internationalisms. Rather, women become segmented into specific ontological / epistemological categories of a lesser universality: 'estate women', 'migrant women', 'low-income settlements', 'conflict women', and of late, 'tsunami women'. Though the implied homogeneity within these segments remains, the experiential realities of these women are recorded for the purpose of consciousness-raising, grassroots developmental interventions and policy change. But feminist localisms also clearly incorporate a degree of personal political interest.

Feminist Personal / Political Interests

> I sort of came into feminism I think is a very personal thing from me. I think I was unconsciously a feminist even before I encountered the discourses of feminism and to this day that is what motivates me...I write on the things that pertinently interest me so I think I do have a very personal politics and also in general I see a lot of injustices basically against women in Sri Lanka and some of these injustices against women are things that I see in my own life and in the lives of people around me and I've seen the suffering as a result and I think that I want to make life better for women (Vivian, 05/8/2005).

This quotation from Vivian - an academic / NGO researcher encapsulates and conceives of another factor that directs research - the personal and political interests of individual researchers[105]. Here, she was unable to pinpoint what made her a feminist, but her experiences seemed to have confirmed her ideological standpoint (I discuss researcher standpoints and intersects further in Chapter 8).

On the other hand, researcher Jayani talked of the tensions between her commitments to feminism and class struggle – from the perspective of her colleagues:

> There is the class struggle which I am always conscious of in women's work. Coming from the Marxist tradition...when I started writing feminist stuff there was this thing – the comrades and others used

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[105] I identify the combination of personal politics of researching and research ethics as construing research feminisms in Sri Lanka.

to say - what happened to her, you know, she had potential - she used write about labour — she was going in the right direction politically and she could have been a professor, but then she dumped it for feminism - like you went on drugs or something (9/7/2005)

At the ground level, Jayani's colleagues demand an overriding commitment to labour politics. They see her passion for feminist research as compromising her Marxist stand. This conveys the antipathy and contradictions between what has traditionally been perceived as progressive labour politics, and women's politics.

Thus feminist personal politics relate to research undertaken for the politically specific and strategic purpose of presenting ideologically and politically feminist viewpoints. This is:

a) For the purposes of resisting the ontologies of oppression (whether patriarchal ideology, inequitable gender relations, structural biases, absence of rights, politics of embodiment, the Marxist concept of the oppression of women or personal self-censorship).

b) To pose contentious alternatives.

c) To counter the attacks and the backlash against feminisms.

It is assumed that these personal / political interests arise from the researchers' internal ontologies: in terms of the multiple aspects of their identities and personal experiences, their professional / academic training and discipline, as well as their exposure to feminisms and women's studies and action locally and internationally (Chapter 8).

It is quite possibly the epistemologies arising from personal politics that irks and provokes many detractors of feminism. This is not only because their compass goes beyond the socio-political to the more contentious reaches of history, culture, psyche and sexuality; but also because of the ethically / politically assertive tenor of these writings (Chapter 9). Thus, the primary motivation for research is political.

My overview of WR research conveyed that the personal politics of research is especially evident in historical research, research on Sinhalese / Tamil / English literatures, sexualities, and cultural topics of individual and multidisciplinary interests (spanning the Humanities, Liberal Arts and Social Sciences).

One epistemological aim of Personal Politics as indicated earlier, is to present a feminist viewpoint or gender perspective. This is evident in the work of such writers as Wijayatilake (2001), Thiruchandran (2001) and the edited collection of writing by de Alwis (2000) that address a range of predominantly cultural and other issues of day-to-day existence (micropolitics).

Another strategy, as discussed earlier, is to fill the knowledge gaps *vis-à-vis* women by submitting alternative trajectories of women's activism. For instance, researchers put forward feminist epistemological trajectories in mainstream political activism, in literature written in English, and in history. (Jayawardena, 1986; Ranaweera, 1992; Jayawardena, 1993; Jayawardena, 1995b; de Alwis and Jayawardena, 2001; de Mel, 2001; de Mel and Samarakkody, 2002; Vimaladharma, 2003; Feminist Study Circle, undated). These are different from some existent nationalistic as well as religious contentions that portray a high status for Sri Lankan women – largely based on wifehood and motherhood (Dias, 1979); or others which value women as cultural signifiers / guardians (de Mel, 2001); or as moral custodians of the family.

In this context, I am focusing on formal epistemological projects aimed at constructing / resurrecting women's history (Chapter 5). My respondent, Sadia, primarily an activist, talked of the critical importance of constructing lost history:

> I wanted to record women's histories - of our grandmothers - in the women's movement. These were working-class women and some of them came from the left parties. And they have been working throughout... for women. In the forefront of mainstream political agitation (sometimes providing fodder for the boys' circuit), but also, they had been protesting against the war, the cost of living, been in the Zones... (Sadia, 29/10/2004).

Research has established waves of women's activism during the 19th and early 20th centuries (Chapter 3). It has, over the years, successfully counteracted some of the attacks against feminism as being a 'Western import'. It has also engaged with global perceptions, remnants of colonial assumptions, as well as some Western feminist perceptions of non-Western women. For instance, research has challenged the stereotyped images of passive Asian women bowed under such economic, patriarchal and cultural burdens as *sati*, *purdah*, dowry, poverty, and endless suffering, and in need of liberation (Jayawardena, 1995b).

A third epistemological aspect of feminist political and personal interests has been its response to the local backlash against feminisms that tends to portray feminism as a foreign ideology (Jayawardena, 1995a), or as a 'modern concept' and therefore alien to local women. While there are similar fundamentalist currents in the country against other 'foreign imports' such as foreign-funded NGOs, the new Christian Churches, and the World Bank - depending on political expediency, feminism has been derided and discredited throughout recent history. As indicated earlier, the backlash consists of accusations that feminists are 'fast and loose', 'smokers and drinkers', 'English-speaking' 'Westernised', 'urban', 'upper-class' and 'elitist', 'home wreckers', 'male bashers', 'anti-nationalist', 'treacherous', 'prostitutes and lesbians' 'who lead village women astray', that have been made by members of the public, and by editors of newspapers

(Abeyesekera, 1995:375; 2000:158; Cat's Eye, 2000a:291 - 292; Jayawardena and de Alwis, 2002; de Alwis, 2004a).

The above status, orientations, and activities attributed to feminists are, of course, intended as a form of derogation. In fact, these charges echo some of the indictments made against women during the lead up to obtaining universal franchise (de Alwis and Jayawardena, 2001; de Mel, 2001) as discussed in Chapter 3. The contemporaneous attacks on feminism are imbued with the same ideological strands of nationalism, distorted Marxism, homophobia, parochialism, and patriarchy that seek to contain women within a normative framework. What is particularly striking here is the appeal to a shame factor in the demonising of feminists. This is done by highlighting either women's heterosexuality or homosexuality in a context where women's sexuality is kept concealed and heteronormativity valued; or by attacking the privileges associated with urbanity, class and language; or by portraying a 'deviancy' in behaviour, in order to make women conform. 'Normalcy' on the other hand, is presumably founded on the myth of womanhood that is heterosexual, chaste, Sinhala-speaking, living in the village! This tendency to polarise feminists against normal women, and to portray feminists as the other (in opposition to local cultures and in juxtaposition to ideologies of nationalisms) has been a continuing and common feature of the challenge faced by feminism (de Mel, 2001; Jayawardena and de Alwis, 2002).

On the whole, we feminists have responded to this anti-feminist backlash by highlighting it (Abeyesekera, 1995; 2000), counter-attacking in feminist columns (Cat's Eye, 2000a), enlightening detractors by tracing feminist historical trajectories (Jayawardena, 1986), and rationalising feminisms by linking women's rights to human rights (Gomez and Gomez, 1999; 2001; Goonesekere, 2000). However, a lot more needs to be done - especially in responding to attacks on the class and sexual orientation of feminists. In particular, feminists need to use as many political stands and tactics as possible - and as has been argued, methodological angles. For instance, there is a necessity to meet some of the attacks head-on – not only through strategic means but by engaging with the ontological and epistemological concerns of research - if feminisms are to attain legitimacy in the long run.

Of note here is how WR researchers have also looked at and critically evaluated WR research activism / outputs. Examples include Emmanuel (2006) who analysed the representation of women's militancy in feminist discourses and Bandarage (1998) who established a theoretical framework to legitimise WR research in the country. My own thesis is an example of such an epistemological exercise.

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Ontological politics are summarised in the following Table II for further clarity.

Ontological Politics (Table II)

Ontology	Epistemology	Impetus for Research	Research Literature
Feminist Internatio nalisms (FI)	Feminist Internationalism s	UN initiatives Multi-lateral alliances Local women's representa tion in global bodies NGO regional co-operation	UN compass Liberal Feminism Mainly women-centered analysis
Structura l Reformati ve Intents (SRI)	**Feminist Structural Reformative Research** (Gender Mainstreaming) Institutional Reforms Project Reforms	INGO inputs Local interests Gender experts	Gender Policies / Frameworks of analysis / Methodologies / evaluations Action interventions Instrumentalis ation of research?
Feminist Localisms (FL)	Feminist Localisms	Impact of Developm ent Poverty Ethnic Conflict Tsunami	Policy / action research Based on empirical data Dearth of theorisation Addresses specific categories of women

Ontology	Epistemology	Impetus for Research	Research Literature
Feminist Personal Political Interests	Feminist Personal Politics	To present a feminist viewpoint To establish local histories for feminisms To counter the backlash against feminisms	Multidisciplinary Consciousness-raising Includes contentious issues

Source: my research data (2003 – 2007)

The competing enactments of some of the dominant realities outlined above (FI, SRI, LI and PPI) were seen / conceptualised as giving rise to related epistemologies. In fact, the interface between epistemological and ontological politics was hard to distinguish / conceive of and was thus conceptualised in an abstract sense.

See the following Diagram that illustrates this relationship.

Epistemology
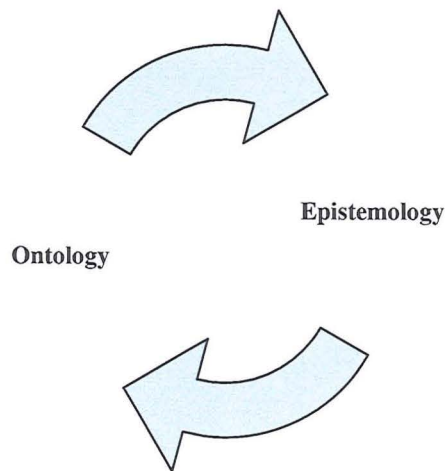
Ontology

Diagram III - Ontology / Epistemology

At the same time, these local epistemologies were seen / conceived as arising from and spanning a number of ontologies simultaneously. Take the work on violence against women that is part of the international agenda and local imperatives. Conversely, there were epistemologies that impacted on multiple ontologies. Take the epistemology of gender mainstreaming that has the opportunity to influence and reproduce the ontological perceptions of researchers.

The symbiotic relationship between ontology and epistemology is part of my overall thesis that aspects of research methodology are interlocked and cannot be conceptualised as detached categories. This modernist and postmodernist understanding is vital for research praxis not only in terms of feminist politics but also for feminist methodology.

Chapter Seven

Epistemology

Gender – A Way of Making Meaning that is an Aspect of Being / Doing

> Gender is an important criterion in identifying ourselves and is central to the way we perceive and structure the world and events in which we participate (Jarviluoma, Moisala and Vilkko, 2003:1).

In this Chapter, I will be examining gender as conceptualised and applied in Sri Lankan women's studies discourses, and arguing that gender is, in effect, an epistemology. In doing so, I will be responding to the following research questions (1 / 2 / 3 / 4). What are the key theoretical frameworks / paradigms / approaches / concepts adhered to in WR research? How are they conceptualised and how do they operate? Further, how do research processes generate / construct knowledge *vis-à-vis* WR research? Finally, what are the practical advantages, challenges and limitations of conceptualising / applying particular research methodologies?

I will answer these questions in terms of how gender generates / constructs / deconstructs knowledge; and how gender operates in research praxis. Through this exercise, I hope to uncover, compose and problematise

epistemologically what it means 'to do' gender research in the local context.

Yet, it was with an element of trepidation that I wrote this chapter on gender. This is because gender has become one of the most incessantly theorised concepts in global Women's Studies discourse. Feminist theorists and methodologists have broached the concept of gender from numerous disciplinary lenses and theoretical angles. As far back as in 1953, de Beauvoir conceived of the idea that one is not born, but rather, becomes a woman (de Beauvoir, 1972). Oakley (1972) was one of the first feminists of the second wave in the West to make a distinction between sex as a biological term, and gender as a psychological / cultural term. This was a strategic move towards the demand for political equality by minimising gender differences - by separating sex from gender (thereby, distancing gender roles and responsibilities, gender characteristics and behaviour patterns from biological determinism)[106].

Since then, the meanings, counter-meanings and debates attached to gender have gained multifarious political and theoretical significances. For instance, gender has been aligned with the human psyche, corporeality, and sexuality. Social constructionist theories[107] (Hepburn, 2006) have argued that gender is not a noun, but a verb

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[106] A line of thinking that sees the destinies of human beings as biologically decided; and not as individually and socially determined (Chapters 3 / 8).

[107] Theories that see people as produced (constructed) through social interaction rather than through genetic programming and biological maturation (Chapters 1 / 4).

(gendering). Thus, the gender we are / think / do requires an understanding of gender as a process and not as a static entity (Adkins, 1995). On the other hand, Stanley and Wise (1993) have argued that a feminist consciousness is both a state and a process. Likewise, I would argue, gender.

Yet, the prioritising of gender to the exclusion of the other facets of identity such as race, class, and sexuality has also been questioned (Rich, 1980; Mohanty, 1988; Skeggs, 1997; Reay, 1998). Moreover, the notion of gender as a materialisation involving anticipatory, repetitive and ritualistic performances of individuals (Butler, 1993) has surmounted the hitherto constrictions of gender as restrictive, and exclusive to biologically defined men and women. However, it is not my intention here to provide a comprehensive review of the directions and debates *vis-à-vis* the concept of gender within international feminist discourses. Rather, my focus lies in its application / epistemological construction in the Sri Lankan context.

Suffice to say, theorisations of gender have been gravely problematised and destabilised by the view of biology also as a social / cultural construction (Oyewumi, 1997; Moi, 1999), and the naturalisation, as Wittig (1981) exposes, of corporeal / physiological differences. In a sense, the earlier theoretical debates on gender that swayed between seeing gender as being primarily biologically defined or socio-culturally and psychologically constructed now need further re-visioning. This is why in my response to gender I wish

to move the direction of the debate from ontology to epistemology (notwithstanding the sophistication of some of the current theorisations on gender and the deconstruction of others). I argue that this is the most appropriate way to frame the concept of gender despite its predominantly unreflexive usage in Sri Lankan discourses.

Gender as a Way of Making Meaning (Epistemology)

> Who knows what about whom and how is this knowledge legitimised? (Maynard, 2004:467)

In Chapter 6, I discussed gender as one form of the ontological politics that directs epistemology within Sri Lankan women's studies research. Here, I take this argument further and discuss in depth the exact ways in which researchers' perceptions / apprehensions of gender as an aspect of reality forms the basis for knowledge / meaning-making.

Epistemology involves such considerations as to whose knowledge is represented / constructed and how; and what gives confidence / authority for that knowledge. It has been conceived of as an explanation of ontology, or as providing a theory or justificatory strategy (Harding, 1989) or evidence for knowing. It is my basic contention that gender epistemology originates from gender ontology. By epistemology, I refer to a premise of what

constitutes knowledge and how much confidence we can have in it. Mason (2002) puts it more tellingly - as follows:

> A theory of knowledge should therefore concern the principles and rules by which you decide whether and how social phenomena can be known, and how knowledge can be demonstrated (2002:16).

Thus in the final analysis, my definition of gender epistemology encompasses the following. Knowledge theories and practices, the origins of the conscious and unconscious worldviews of researchers, the political objectives and justificatory strategies that go into the construction / generation / deconstruction of knowledge.

Immanuel Kant was one of the leading 18th Century philosophers to theorise that ontology is epistemology, and situated such thinking in the Enlightenment movement in Europe. Likewise, for feminists, adopting an aspect of being / doing into a way of knowing or meaning-making has been a foundational theorisation (Chapter 4). It is being / doing women, which gives women privileged knowledge about gender as a construct / concept. Thus, if one constructs a history of feminist research worldwide, there are many testimonies as to how aspects of women's experiences and interpretations of realities (though often contested), form the foundations for feminisms, feminist knowledge and meaning-making. This is because feminist research, by its very nature, aspires to political and social change

(Mies, 1991). In fact, to use the erstwhile feminist maxim, 'the personal is the political and the political is the personal'. The political authority and validity of research, for feminists, often lay in a prioritisation of such aspects of knowledges - as personal lived experiences, notions of women's experience as universal, woman-specific standpoints, and researcher reflexivity. This is why feminists (Stanley and Wise, 1983a; Smith, 2004; Harding, 2004a) have argued for the legitimisation of such multiple, unacknowledged knowledges; or what has been called 'subjugated knowledges' by Foucault (Gordon, 1980:81 - 82) in the face of challenges posed by positivist / empiricist paradigms.

Justification for Gender Epistemology

The justification for an epistemology of gender is situated in its ontological perceptions - quite apart from its theoretical constructions, political aspirations, methodologies, analytical categories or variables. While from the modernist structuralist[108] perspective it is possible to isolate these aspects of gender epistemology, from a postmodernist perspective these components are diffused and often not distinguishable from one another. Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 6, pinning down conceptualisations of ontology and epistemology are exceedingly difficult at the best of times.

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[108] Selective and subjective thinking that constructs relationships between things, on the basis of unification and order.

Realities that are represented / composed into research are always filtered and mediated in one way or another (Kuhn, 1970) according to the writers' ontological perceptions. Gender ontology is conceptualised as a sense of being / doing – internally - in terms of self-presence, self-awareness and self-performance of one's identity; and externally - in terms of one's perceptions and relationships with the outside world. It is both an external and internal operation. Thus, a sense of being doing is part of one's personal ontology or how one conceptualises / engages with the forms, nature or aspects of reality. However, one's ontology is not always completely apprehended; neither are ways of making sense of such ontology always clear to the individual. This is because the individual is part of onotology. Thus, I contend that the way in which ontology is conceptualised is a simultaneously unconscious and conscious process. Furthermore, one's sense of ontology (and identity) incorporates many aspects of being / doing - such as sexual divisions, class, status and sexual orientations, gendering, racial and ethnic classifications, religious and language factors, bodily incorporations, age and physical ability / disability (Chapter 8).

Butler's ontology of gender decentres the agency of the subject in favour of *a priori*, performative acts that are discursive, social, cultural and psychical (Hey, 2006). Though not disagreeing with this, I seek to rehabilitate the emphasis on the agency of subjectivity in my inclusivist approach because change is reliant on

conscious individuation. My ontology of gender takes off from Scott's (1991) analysis of gender and refers to a vision of the self and the world which has also been sharpened due to political, ideological and ethical sensitivities. Attempts at conceptualising ontology are attempts at clarifying and making meanings of the ways in which the world is perceived or conceived.

Knowing can be conceptualised somewhat broadly in terms of embodiment, emotionality or apprehension, deliberate imprecision and situated inquiry (Law, 2004). In this thesis, the state of knowing refers predominantly to the more formal process of researching or meaning-making. Thus, I make linkages between the formal processes of researching and the perceptions / assimilations of the self and realities to argue that being / doing is knowing. I have formulated the following Diagram to clarify this argument with regard to gender.

Gender Ontology

Sexual Differences
(Heterosexual /
Transgender /
Homosexual)

Abstract collective as women

Differentiation as a woman

Gendering of inanimate objects
or personification

Gender prototypes for change

Theoretical concepts / frameworks, analysis, political aspirations, methodologies of **Gender Epistemology**
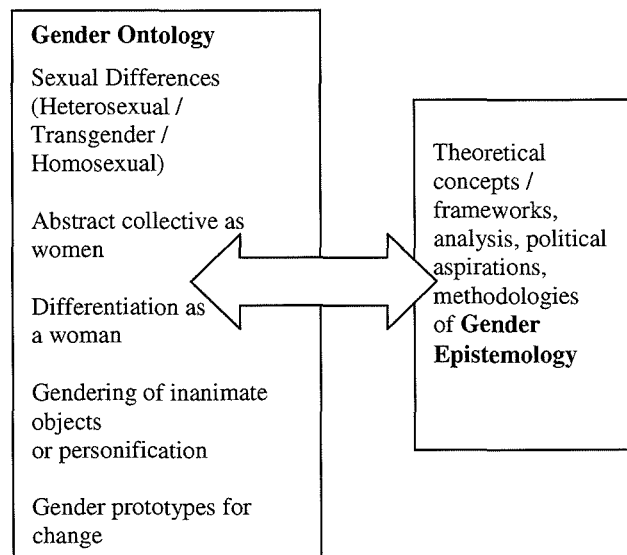
Diagram IV - Gender Ontology / Epistemology

Gender as an Aspect of Being / Doing (Ontology)

My research into WR discourses surfaced / resulted in some of the following states of being / doing gender.

Or rather, I have identified / composed the following ontological uses of the concept of gender. Here, I am conscious of the likelihood that I have extracted or construed these particular aspects of the realities of gender from amongst other possibilities that may not have struck me as pertinent at this point of researching.

1) The dominant underlying assumption of gender amongst researchers is as a heterosexual distinction between men and women - as identified by Wittig (1981). De Alwis (19940) argues (with regard to film criticism) that:

> what is required... today is an understanding of the articulation of gender, of feminine as well as masculine subject positions that are on offer...(1994:23 – 24).

Yet, an understanding of gender as relational constructs / performances of masculinity and femininity dependent on one another is undermined by the challenges posed by gender processes such as transgendering and lesbianism. This is exemplified in the work of Wijewardene (in press) and Abeysekera (2005b).

2) Gender is also insentiently conceptualised as the universalised state of women (Chapter 4). Studies that purport to examine gender often end up with a homogenous worldview about women; and gender becomes simply a synonym for women. These unconscious and conscious contradictions in researcher worldviews may be described as 'ontological slippages' in writing. Focusing only on women not only compartmentalises women but also leaves men and their situation unquestioned. They are assumed to be homogenous; their gender and accompanying institutional power positions are left unquestioned (Collins, 1991).

3) Alongside this process of identification with women, is the process of differentiation as a woman; for instance, *vis-à-vis* the intersections of class, sexuality, ethnicity and language (Chapter 8). The action of differentiation is designed to establish subjectivity for the feminist cause. From an ontological perspective, then, gender, is seen as a process of collective identification (earlier point) or individual differentiation.

4) Other forms of ontological abstraction also occur. Often concepts, objects, institutions, and processes are personified into either male or female. For instance, take the notions of 'gendering the nation' or 'feminising poverty'. This inherent practice of attributing what are considered to be male or female characteristics to concepts and inanimate objects is another conceptualisation of gender. Such ontological

perspectives serve to stereotype, naturalise and normalise gender (because gender characteristics, roles, responsibilities, behaviour and performances then become solidified as male or female).

5) There are ontologies of gender that are aspirational; for instance, gender as a prototype for future change (Chapter 6). Take the assumed outcome of incorporating, integrating or mainstreaming women into conceptualisations of realities - gender mainstreaming. Researcher Rasika, from her vantage as a social scientist subscribes to the view that:

> Gender issues are part of the larger social makeup. One cannot simply address women – you have to look at the larger picture (21/7/2005).

Unlike other gender worldviews, the ontology of gender as a prototype is founded on the realisation of certain political objectives. Examples of these include women's rights, gender equity / equality or justice.

I have conceptualised / mapped the dominant gender ontologies pertaining to the self and the world as being at the root of a gender epistemology. However, these representations / constructions of gender realities (or their assumed objectives) are not posited as mutually exclusive of one another. My thinking is founded on my experiences as a researcher on development work, women's literature, disaster management, workplaces and gender mainstreaming. It also incorporates the

opinions of my respondents, their research as well as my reading on feminist research methodology.

Gender ontology is conceptualised as a foundational concept and therefore justification for gender epistemology. I do not - in considering these gender states of being - foreclose on the possibility of gender as a constant process (of becoming). For this reason I express gender realities as being / doing gender – to demonstrate the inconclusiveness and agency in the condition / act. As noted earlier, this aspect of being or existence or enactment is seen as concurrent to other states of being such as race, class, age, religion, sexuality and language. Thus, gender as identification, difference, comparison, abstraction, personification and prototypes are identified / constructed as ways of defining gender ontology. Here, not only is gender conceptualised as a particular form / aspect of existence, but each aspect of reality can also be conceptualised as gendered (Sangari and Vaid, 1989).

It is possible that one is conscious of this at some level - though not necessarily in terms of being able to articulate a comprehensive personal ontology *vis-à-vis* gender. While a lack of such an awareness of gender has been argued as a capacity to transcend gender (Meerachakravorthy, 1998), I contend that for feminism, what is important is not whether one is conscious of the state of gender, but whether this state of being is politicised or not. Similarly, Harding (1987) contends that feminist research arises not simply from women's

experiences, but from women's political struggles from the bedroom to the boardroom. Because gender is usually conceptualised in relation to the accumulation, deprivation and negotiation of power between and among the sexes, it becomes a powerful ontology in the demand for change by feminists, across a spectrum of ideological and political interests. Gender is then a conceptualisation of ontology apprehended / created for political and methodological purposes.

Postmodern contributions to discussions of ontology and epistemology unlocked the false sense of stability, totalism, essentialism and universality that imbued the early theoretical / ontological debates of feminism (Flax, 1987; Weedon, 1987; Fraser and Nicholson, 1990; Maynard, 1993). They also revealed that conceptualisations of ontology were highly dependent on numerous variables such as time, age, location, class, race, sexual orientation, transgender status, external conditions and events. Thus, when it comes to conceptualising of gender as ontology, postmodernist tendencies do not emphasise universality or commonality, but concentrate on differences and discontinuities. Thus in conceptualising gender as ontology, one has to take into account the varied aspects of being gender as well as the gendered aspects of being - as noted above. Consequently, gender as ontology must be envisaged as fundamentally relative, fluid and in a state of flux.

Epistemology of Gender

I will now focus on how the above ontological assumptions operate within an epistemology of gender. Consequently, my thesis at this point conceives / spotlights what constitutes an epistemology of gender.

Gender Theoretical Concepts / Frameworks

To begin with, my interest lies with the theoretical concepts and frameworks of gender in knowledge and meaning-making. These can be seen as foundational conceptualisations of gender. They embrace concepts such as gender identities, roles and responsibilities; gender relations and subject positions; gender hegemonies and ideological systems such as patriarchy; structural interactions such as gender micropolitics and gender-based violence. Some of these conceptualisations illustrate my central argument of how gender epistemology becomes gender ontology. To be reflexive *vis-à-vis* this exercise: what I classify as gender ontology or gender theoretical concepts, are, in the final analysis, themselves theoretical constructs, based on my conceptualisations of gender.

The gender-related concept of patriarchy is one that occurs frequently in WR research and writing. De Mel (1994) conceptualises / exhibits exactly how women writers are situated as gendered subjects within the literary tradition in Sri Lanka:

> Just as the West imposed an identity for the Orient, patriarchy constructs woman as the gendered subject, and within the hegemony of a patriarchal literary establishment and tradition, women writers have been given a particular space - that of autobiography and domestic life...the autobiographical nature of women's writing resulted in its marginalisation by a literary critical establishment dominated by males, for its perceived inconsequentiality in terms of public-world affairs and its inability to contribute to great debates on culture and morality (de Mel, 1994:117).

De Mel argues that the patriarchal structures / ideology of the literary establishment, has demoted, marginalised and compartmentalised women's writing. This argument is founded on the following ontology. Gender in this instance, is assumed to be a collective of women in the form of women writers. Gender is also implied to be a comparison and contrast between men and women writers. Yet, in this comparison, male writers are the norm while women are visualised as the other[109] (Said, 1978) which occupies a different space.

Similarly, Wijayatilake (2001) discusses the construction of gender ideology / practices - especially as a form of social control over women's subjectivities in a three generational study of women:

> In other words, it refers to beliefs, behaviour, language or other actions of the sexes which projects the exhaustive, established, and

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[109] This refers to the denial of selfhood of others in order to secure the self of the centred subject.

institutionalised view that women are inferior...
(2001:26)

She identifies some of the cultural practices relating to menarche, marriage, dowry, virginity, pregnancy and childbirth as being instrumental in limiting / liberating women's identities. Gender ideology is conceptualised as sexism and patriarchy. And thus it:

> needs to be viewed in relation to other forms of oppression such as class, race, sexual orientation and caste (2001:26).

Wijayatilake's (*ibid.*) central argument is that gender ideology exerts social control through social institutions such as the family, religion, culture and tradition, media, state policy, laws and regulations, education and the economy. She further conceptualises of the way in which gender ideology operates in societies - not necessarily through external forces but through internalised censorship. Thus, gender ideology is a foundational theoretical concept for many research studies to explain issues of gender inequality and women's oppression.

Another generalised concept - gender identity is seen as constructed with reference to the norm and exceptions in gender roles, responsibilities, skills, occupations and relationships, gendered characteristics, behavioural patterns, and sexual orientations (Wickramasinghe, 2002a). One of the interviewees in my study – Gauri - made the point (from her own work on socialisation processes within the family) that gender identities are a

result of 'socialisation through the lived experiences of gender' (8/7/2005). This is perhaps broadened by the comment made by Sakunthala, another respondent when she asserted that there was a:

> lack of female surveyors and engineers as a result of the dearth of role models in the field, as well as the perception of these occupations as male (18/7/2005).

While the idea of socialisation[110] is seen as crucial in the fashioning of gender identities, it would be dangerous to conceive of the effects of socialisation as a homogeneous model (that precludes exceptions and change) or, to ignore the roles of the human unconscious or the play of free will on gender identities.

Alongside the commonality implied in the construction of identity come the differentiations - *vis-à-vis* identity in terms of class, race, sexual orientation, language, caste and transgender. Respondent Rasika (21/7/2005), a product of an interracial marriage made the observation that 'one's cultural or national identity may prompt one's gender identity'. The interplay of the various socio-political, cultural and ideological facets of identity politics was highlighted by her.

An example of collective identity politics is found in Jayawardena (1994) who focuses on the popular ideological construction of Sinhala Buddhist womanhood as an identity marker in the Buddhist

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[110] The acquisition of gender identities is conceptualised as socialisation.

revivalist discourse of the late 19th Century. She argues that such a construction was dedicated to the maintenance of Sinhala Buddhist hegemony over other ethnic groups (especially Christian and Burgher women):

> The construction, within this framework, of a specifically Aryan Sinhala Buddhist woman pervades ... the early nationalist discourse on the writings of Sinhala novelists and poets. The correct way a Sinhala Buddhist wife / mother should behave, dress and conduct herself in society was categorically defined. Women followers of the Buddha and the queens and heroines of early Sri Lankan history were projected in the nationalist press as role models. While being exhorted to follow the patterns of conduct laid down in the discourses of the Buddha, women were given the added roles of guardians of the Aryan Sinhala race and inspirers of their men - dissuading them from alcohol, meat-eating, immorality and imitation of the despised foreigners (Jayawardena, 1994:116).

In a similar study on identity and implied difference, Thiruchandran (1997) considers the gendered constructions of Tamil women within the status quo and modernising forces of colonial Jaffna[111]. In both cases, gender is a collective of women, generalised in terms of race / religion. The two researchers emphasise how the differences within gender centre on the prevailing notions of mythology, history, racial and religious ideals, cultural and social practices to create differences.

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[111] This is a city in the north of the island. The northern area of Sri Lanka is home to a majority of Tamil people.

Theoretically, gender as espousing the normative female has been largely destabilised by the dynamic international debates on transgendering and queer theorisations. Butler (1999) for instance, deconstructs the idea of gender as a normative heterosexual polarity between male and female, and conceptualises of gender as performitivity. My interest however is not on the global directions and concerns of gender transformations or 'passing', but rather, on the issue as it is raised within the Sri Lankan context. How such research contributes to the construction of differentiation, through a formation of transgender ontology.

Wijewardene (in press) documents the psychological crisis of transgender people within the Sri Lankan context where there are limited points of references for such identities within the community. She argues that creative self-assemblage is a strategic means of understanding transgender realities by individuals. However, she points out that this exercise is limited by the possibilities for trans-expression within a particular culture as well as the specific trans-performance of the individual. The complexity of transgender ontology within this context is evident in the lack of:

> resonance for the transgender individual in the culture he / she is situated; and the continuous pressure and striving to define and control the gendered state of being in a situation where gender is constantly checked and rechecked by society (Wadhani, 20/8/2005).

What can be seen as slippages in being transgender is illustrated by de Mel (2001) when she argues for the undecidability of gender signification when looking at the convention of female impersonation in Sri Lankan theatre. These theatrical enactments of women as imagined by men, played by men, for the primarily male-dominated audiences of the times - did not pose a challenge to existing social cultural norms of femininity contends de Mel. In effect, these exaggerated and voluptuous performances of on-stage femininity were fetishised; and de Mel illustrates how they influenced the construction of a particular type of femininity amongst women spectators and within popular culture at a later time.

In both the above representations, gender is conceptualised as androgynous individual constructions of the self – that combine the existent sexual identity with what can be seen as conscious performances of either femininity or masculinity in becoming new selves. The individual's sense of agency is uncompromised in these constructions despite the fluid and irresolute nature of the gender identities enacted – one for theatre and the other for 'real'. Transgendering of women to men is posed as not having any reference points in contemporary Sri Lankan society; it is a challenge to the existing expectations of gendering. On the other hand, cross-dressing in terms of female impersonation is seen as possessing the capacity to institute new role models, not only for theatrical traditions, but also in terms of an image for women to emulate in general.

In this instance, the ontology of transgender is essentially a process of differentiation, or even internalised homophobia. When composed in research, it not only strives to fulfil feminist objectives of consciousness-raising, but also to give epistemic legitimacy to the process of transgendering and transgender identities. Yet, despite these efforts, transgendering still remains an auxiliary concept to gender which is constructed as the normative.

Gender Analysis

Epistemology involves the consideration not only of the theoretical tools of meaning-making but also its practices. Accordingly, I will discuss the practice of gender analysis as an epistemological issue. The practical use of the conceptualisation of gender as a form of investigative method in research can be seen in gender analysis. It is believed to lay bare or compose the vicissitudes and variations of gender realities – even though the perceptions of these realities themselves determine the types of analysis utilised by researchers / writers. In fact, ontologies of gender can be constructed and deconstructed through gender analysis; and in this sense it forms a principle and tool of knowledge and meaning-making.

I turn to studies on local development efforts for common examples of gender specific concepts, discourses and methods of analysis. Work by Schrijvers (1993; 1998) and Rajapakse (1995) for instance,

included critiques of policy hegemony *via* the *exposé* of gender inequality in developmental concepts like 'Heads-of-household', 'Breadwinners' and 'Secondary Earners'. Other studies included the usage of lately constructed gender concepts such as 'Doubleday', 'Gender Segregation', and 'Female-Headed Households' as well as the incorporation of gender prescribed methods of analysis such as 'Time Use Research and Social Relations Framework'. These serve as new ways of analysing the world - according to gender analysis – through concepts as well as methods.

Gender as analysis in local research captures / constructs epistemologically the facets of gender as a state of being / doing. One particular success of gender as a quantitative and qualitative analysis needs to be cited here. This is Jayaweera and Sanmugam's (2001) study researching the impact of macroeconomic reforms on formal and informal sector women workers in the garment and textile industries. It does this from a theoretical lens of gender roles and relations:

> Even though it is not possible to establish a clear association between changes in employment and the less tangible changes in gender roles and relations, the study documents facets of change and resistance that take place in the context of macroeconomic policies and social construction of gender (Jayaweera and Sanmugam, 2001:501).

Interestingly, the researchers combine survey techniques with case studies in delineating gender roles and

responsibilities, the gender division of labour and gender relations within lived experiences. What are usually considered to be numerically invisible concepts such as gender roles and relations are statistically analysed. The researchers attempt this by numerically deconstructing such ontological indicators as: the control of labour; control of economic resources and the allocation of other resources pertaining to education and health; gender division of labour within the household; gender relations in terms of marriage, reproduction and sexuality; household decision-making and violence in the family. Thus, the state of gender reality is analysed according to a conceptualisation of gender ontology that focuses on gender roles and relations as an abstract collective identification of all women workers. By claiming qualitatively and quantitatively to construct and represent the breadth and depth of gender roles and relations, this study makes wider claims of prevalence for policy purposes that have the potential to impact on these women workers themselves in the long-term.

Researchers also utilise formal gender frameworks. For instance, we, (Ariyabandu and Wickramasinghe, 2003) applied a Gender Vulnerabilities and Capacities framework in our work. Natural disasters, management practices and the micropolitics of development initiatives in several South Asian countries were examined by us (the writers) from this perspective of gender vulnerabilities and capacities. Gender analysis hinges on an *a priori* understanding of gender in the particular context of disaster management. Through the

application of a common gender framework, it became possible not only to compare and contrast common perceptions of gender differences but also to analyse comparatively the commonalities and differences in gender across countries. This belies the conventional criticism of policy research as being too overarching and generalised to engage with the specificities of individual contexts. Consequently, the last section of the book provided ontological guidelines on what should be strived for in terms of gender mainstreaming. This was a prototype of gender founded on the realisation of certain objectives of women's rights, and gender equality / equity and justice.

Other informal forms of analysis are based on the personification of gender for political reasons. In many instances, gender could simply refer to the dominant presence or participation of either men or women. Take as an example the expression from the discipline of Economics - 'feminisation of poverty' which has captured the popular feminist imagination to denote the predominance of women in poverty statistics, especially after economic restructuring in Sri Lanka.

In another example, Jayaweera writes that:

> the most significant of these was the handloom industry, which was **virtually feminised** [my highlighting] in the mid-1960s by the distribution of a large number of looms to women producers and the establishment of handloom training

and production centres in villages (Jayaweera, 2002:109).

Conceptualisations of gender as personification in research also relate to the characteristics and embodiments of masculinity and femininity. De Mel's (2001) conceptualisation of 'gendering' as a personification means feminising. She constructs a comprehensive embodiment of gender when she writes of 'setting the stage, gendering the nation', *vis-à-vis* Sri Lankan theatre. Firstly, she refers to the entrance or peopling of the theatre with women - in terms of actresses, audiences, and the representation of women in drama. Secondly, she talks of the enactment of gender, denoting not only the presence of female impersonators, but also their gender performances, as well as the construction of particular forms of desired femininities for the nationalist project. Thirdly, there is the specific construction of the image of the *Arya Sinhala*[112] woman as a dramatic persona (and preferred normative image) as well as the popular ideal of the first Sinhala actress. For de Mel (*ibid.*) the gendering of theatre is significant in the larger equation of gendering the nation through the crucial role of the theatre in forging a sense of community and a shared national consciousness.

I see gendering as an ontological / epistemological / methodological exercise deliberately carried out by feminists to highlight the forms of structural hegemony found in societies, or to expound an alternative world vision. The danger here is that such personification

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[112] The Sinhalese claim their racial roots to the Aryans.

further fuels the schism in gender as being a heterosexual male and female one leading to further stereotyping of men and women. This can, paradoxically, lead to inertia that precludes conceptualisations of social changes within gender epistemology.

Gender Political Aspirations

My personal experience as a researcher provides testimony to the fact that an epistemology of gender has political objectives. I have worked on gender research pertaining to institutional mainstreaming, devised gender frameworks for developmental contexts and formulated gender policies for the Sri Lankan private sector and for disaster management. The political intent of such work drives the epistemology of gender research; whether in the ultimate interest of consciousness-raising, action researching, policy change, institutional change, attitudinal change or far-reaching social change (Chapter 9). These goals are sometimes clearly articulated and striven for - in terms of overarching objectives of gender equity, equality or justice or in terms of equal representation, women's participation, women's rights, or fair work cultures.

At an individual level of redressing women's oppression, empirical research highlights and recommends possibilities and strategies. For instance, Wijayatilake and Zackariya (2001a) write the following after recording the responses of women workers, trade unionists, activists, development workers, employers

and state officials on addressing the problem of sexual harassment in the plantation sector:

> Actions for dealing with sexual harassment cases still remain weak. Much needs to be done for evolving proper policies and procedures to raising awareness and creating 'a safe enabling environment' for women victims to talk about it. Trade unions need to rethink their role and rights of women members so that issues could be addressed within their normal mandate using precedents already in place. Management companies could formulate a code of ethics incorporating specific policy guidelines and orient staff on actions violating such standards (Wijayatilake and Zackeriya, 2001:24).

These researchers aspire towards policy changes, the institutionalisation of a safe and enabling environment, and the integration of women's rights in trade union activism as well as the formulation of a code of ethics. It is assumed that the collective of women workers / victims in the plantation sector can be addressed through this intended prototype. Yet, as proposed here, these aspirational ontologies need to be operationalised through decisive gender methodologies as will be argued in the next section.

In conceptualising gender equity / equality in Sri Lankan private sector workplaces (Wickramasinghe and Jayatilaka, 2006), we, the authors, designed concrete policy measures to change existing work cultures and practices on the basis that:

the concept of **gender equality** means that women and men should have equal opportunities and conditions for realising their full human rights and potential to contribute to the work organisation (especially at management levels) and to benefit from the results. On the other hand, the concept of **gender equity** means the recognition and equitable valuing by the work organisation of the differences between women and men, as well as the social expectation of the varying roles / responsibilities / status / relationships of men and women. Instead of demanding that women be similar to men, gender equity requires women's empowerment through specific measures designed to eliminate barriers to gender inequalities and actively promotes the recognition and participation of women - resulting in gender justice (Wickramasinghe and Jayatilaka, 2006:xiv).

We distinguished the differences between the aspirations of gender equity and equality, the fulfilment of which would eventually lead to gender justice in the workplace. Our ontological vision at this juncture was of gender as something to be achieved through interventions in people's attitudes, institutions, practices and processes. Of course we were cautious as to the extent that this was possible.

The incorporation of gender aspirations and ideals into institutions, processes and social practices is usually termed gendering or engendering. Take the example of Coomaraswamy (2004), who refers to gendering and engendering intermittently in her piece 'Engendering the

constitution-making process'. Her concluding remarks are as follows in conceptualising of gender as a model:

> Throughout history, constitutions have been a male preserve. Men struggled with the issues, wrote the constitutions and interpreted its provisions. Women operated within the structures determined by male attitudes and concerns. Today, there is recognition that women's voices must be heard in constitution making, constitution drafting and constitutional interpretation. Women appear to have different visions of the state though even within the category of 'women' there is diversity. There appears to be more emphasis on security in everyday life, social and economic rights and the need for equality. Women's participation in political life of the country also needs to be encouraged and actively supported. Unless this is done, women's alternative formulations for the State and their demands on State structures will not be met with adequate response. These different visions must now find expression and the constitutional life of any given society can no longer ignore their concerns... (Coomaraswamy, 2004:204-205).

Here too, engendering is visualised as a comprehensive process. Firstly it involves increased political participation by women. Secondly, it requires gender sensitivity in law enforcement so as to recognise everyday criminality as opposed to the greater emphasis given to national security. Aside from which, equality, through affirmative action and other legal standards and mechanisms is also referred to along with economic and social rights. Moreover, considering the ongoing conflict

in the island, the need for the recognition of diversity amongst women is also accentuated.

The ontology of gender as a prototype aims towards social transformation through adherence to specific policies and measures. The world is perceived as socially constructed; capable of being transformed through specific interventions. In fact, 'gender can be institutionalised' argued my interviewee Rasika (21/7/2005) through such institutional interventions as gender mainstreaming.

Gender Methodologies

When the theoretical frameworks, political aspirations, and analysis of gender are accompanied by concrete measures of redress, then epistemology turns into methodology (Chapter 6). Granted, these aspirations are generated from gender ontologies that are based on lack, disadvantages, biases and gaps pertaining to women:

> One can't simply address women – one has to look at the larger picture (Rasika, 21/72005).

Thus, gender is not confined to identity politics but expanded to an institutional or social context. The most tangible method of realising the political aspirations of gender is through gender mainstreaming (Schalkwyak, Thomas and Woroniuk, 1996; Miller and Razavi, 1998; Kabeer, 2003) as discussed in Chapter 6. Gender mainstreaming can be defined as a practical

methodology for institutionalising structural change in social configurations, policies, organisations, disciplines, and programmes through attitudinal changes. When it comes to research praxis[113] (Stanley, 1990) in Sri Lankan writing, gender has utility value. Thus gender mainstreaming can be seen as extending knowledge-making or epistemology into institutional / individual practices (Chapter 6).

Efforts at gender mainstreaming include methodologies such as a *Code of Ethics on Gender Representation for the Electronic Media* (Women's Education and Research Centre, 1998) and *Guidelines on Company Policy for Gender Equity / Equality* (International Labour Organisation and Employers' Federation of Ceylon, 2005) as well as a *Guide for a Code on Sexual Harassment* for private sector companies (Employers' Federation of Ceylon, 2003).

As I have reviewed the pros and cons of gender mainstreaming as a feminist reformative ontology / epistemology in the previous Chapter I will limit my discussion here. Suffice to say that gender methodologies aspire to institutionalise the political aspirations of gender into organisational policy and practice.

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[113] This is the concept of practice being illuminated by *a priori* theory, and simultaneously, theory being illuminated by practice.

Gender Ontology as Epistemology is Gender Epistemology as Ontology

To recap, gender epistemology constitutes of theoretical constructs that have the capacity to encapsulate, reconstruct or deconstruct gender within research discourses, ideologies, disciplines, institutions and social structures. As an analytical category or variable, it has clarified and defined the ways in which the state of being gendered was 'taken up, regularised, resisted, contested and transformed' (Jarviluoma, Moisala and Vilkko, 2003:7). As a political aspiration it has the potential for promoting individual and social change in the state of gender. Finally, as a methodology that is not only confined to research, it has the capacity to provide concrete approaches for the transformation of institutional states of gender (though it may not guarantee attitudinal changes).

These facets of an epistemology are not conceptualised as in any way providing a sense of closure or boundaries. Nor are these understandings of gender epistemology mutually exclusive. In fact, as argued before, it is possible that for many feminists, the political intent or aspiration of gender *vis-à-vis* individual and social transformation underpins all epistemological usages of the term - irrespective of the other strategies undertaken to create knowledge.

Moreover, these ways of knowing (gender epistemology) also influence the ways in which one

experiences or apprehends life (gender ontology). For instance, gender as a methodology is an aspect of epistemology that can reproduce gender ontologies. Gender analysis that is a key tool in empirically portraying gender concepts is also part of ontological assimilation. This clarifies the argument that theories and justifications of gender-based knowledge making gives rise to the conceptualisations of gender realities themselves. Thus, to reiterate, gender as epistemology is also gender as ontology. Gender as ontology is also gender as epistemology.

This is essentially a circular explanation of gender; gender as ontology is gender as epistemology is gender as ontology. Perhaps, it is necessary to refer to a hypothetical example to further clarify this conclusion. Because we (as researchers) conceive of women as an abstraction (ontology) in the national context, we undertake research on, for instance, the status of women. The conclusions in such research reports (epistemology) with regard to the status of women's health or education affect the way we conceive of women's health concerns or access to education (ontology). Or, to further simplify the issue, research findings on the social construction of men and women within the urban nuclear family in Colombo (epistemology) may influence the way we conceptualise gender relations in general (ontology); which may in turn lead us to research on gender in low-income families of Colombo (epistemology).

The conceptual slippages, ambiguities, inconsistencies and contradictions pertaining to the discussion of abstract concepts such as ontology and epistemology have made this chapter one of the most difficult to write. It is possible that the conceptual difficulties and murkiness in articulating my arguments arise from the fact that both ontology and epistemology are, after all, abstract academic concepts from modernist perspectives. I have tried to deconstruct these social constructs of research and writing processes from postmodernist standpoints by contextualising them. However, I have kept in mind that contexts too are unstable (Butler, 1999), and open to forms of change.

Chapter Eight

Theory

Making and Unmaking Theory

The specific objective of this chapter will be to theorise some of the critical issues pertaining to feminist research methodology in Sri Lanka. In doing so, it will respond to the following research questions (1 and 2). What are the key theoretical frameworks / concepts adhered to in local research? How are they conceptualised and how do they operate? I will thus examine / compose how Sri Lankan researchers and writers conceptualise the researcher and research processes. This involves the following sub-question. In what ways do researchers theorise on the subjectivity of the researcher and the situatedness of knowledge?

I will also engage with my research question (4) as to the practical advantages, challenges and limitations of conceptualising / applying particular research methodologies. This will be done by theoretically framing local debates on methodology, identifying the silences and presences; and by appropriating, recontextualising and contrasting them with global developments in theory. This will also involve the epistemological process of analysing, attributing / constructing meanings to specific phenomena,

constructing relevance, applying and deconstructing methodologies, and doing so reflexively.

I will also engage with my question (3) as to how research processes generate / construct knowledge *vis-à-vis* WR research. Here, I will reflect on the sub-questions as to how I myself make and unmake theoretical meaning of my own research process. To what extent can I attempt theorisation on research methodology from researchers' interviews? In what ways can I make meaning of meaning-making? Of course, such an exercise of constructing and deconstructing theory is not confined to this chapter alone; it is a process that runs through the entire thesis – though it may not be done elsewhere as reflexively as in this chapter.

My decision to focus on theory in this chapter is because theory, as argued earlier, is an aspect of research methodology. At the same time:

> methodology is itself theory. It is a theory of methods which informs a range of issues from who to study, how to study, which institutional practices to adopt (such as interpretive practices), how to write and which knowledge to use (Skeggs, 1997:17).

As argued in Chapter 5, it is methodology as theory that is not so apparent in Sri Lanka. Methodology has been more an application of methods rather than a theoretical, reflexive or integrated argument for researching. This

was understood / confirmed by my interviews with researchers – some of whom had difficulty discussing methodological issues (such as epistemology and ontology). This was because they had not always defined, recontextualised or theorised these issues in those terms. Rather, methodology seemed to have been instinctively apprehended / applied[114]. While this is not to be undervalued, my interest leads me to make and unmake theory on research methodology. This will be done with reference to the written words and vocalised speech of researchers. I thus believe that this thesis will serve to legitimise the critical interests of local researchers within the discourse of women's studies and construct / establish a theoretical debate.

In making and unmaking theory, my interest lies not in engaging comparatively with global theory, or in ambitious attempts at developing local theory on methodology (although my thesis may in the long run contribute towards such aims). Rather, I wish to engage critically with some issues of feminist research methodology in Sri Lanka by theorising my own personal practice; in other words, in terms of praxis (Lather, 1986). Nonetheless, in order to anticipate and fulfill some of the possible expectations of this thesis under examination, I will continue to establish my familiarity with global feminist theory on methodology.

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[114] Further research is required in this area as argued before Chapters 1 / 2 / 3.

Local Methodological Debates on Theory

The following section deals with local theoretical debates on methodology. If global feminisms[115] can be conceptualised as having theoretical traditions, then feminist theory on research methodology has come of age. Early feminist interests exposed the bias in positivism (Haraway, 1988) leading to the adoption of alternative ontological / epistemological methodologies (Collins, 1990; Harding, 2004a; Smith, 2004). These included a concentration on qualitative methods though there was also a move towards the rehabilitation of quantitative methods and fusion approaches (Jayaratne, 1983). Feminist concerns with subjectivity, identity politics and personal experience have now become crystallised as epistemological theory on standpoint (Harding, 2004b). Other seminal concerns of collective feminist politics and researcher ethics have shifted to include theoretical issues of differences and intersectionality (Fonow and Cook, 1991a; 2005; Mauthner, Birch, Jessop, and Miller, 2002; Hesse-Biber and Yaiser, 2004a). Original feminist objectives in research, whether they be liberatory or change-oriented have developed methodologies (of precise formulas and measurements of change) such as gender mainstreaming frameworks, strategies and indicators (Moser, 1993; Kabeer, 2003). Issues of meaning-making such as essentialism (de Lauretis, 1989) are of primary concern. Furthermore the full participation of the researched and

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[115] This refers primarily to work located in the West - the UK, US and Europe with a smattering of writing from other countries.

the representation of their voices are theorised on as being impossible to achieve (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998; Birch and Miller, 2002). All in all, considerable attention is paid to the internal workings of methodology - such as reflexivity.

In this context, if local Sri Lankan theory on research methodology is under-theorised (Chapter 5), there could be a distinct possibility that global theory on research methodology is over-theorised. I am questioning whether the focus on the more abstract theoretical issues of methodology (despite their crucial importance) has detracted from the more mundane, hands-on issues of feminist research activism. In other words, has the turn to epistemology in international research led to a dilution of feminist emancipatory objectives at ground level? And is this turn to epistemology a reflection of a certain element of disillusionment and reluctance within international research to engage with and fulfill its wider transformatory goals? This may not be the case in relation to research praxis, but perhaps in relation to broader social changes.

In Sri Lanka, the theoretical debates are similar as articulated by researchers; yet, different as practised in research texts. Despite the dearth of documented theorisation, there are many strands of feminisms 'applied' in Sri Lanka. These conceptualisations and frameworks include those of patriarchy, gender, empowerment, women in development, gender and

development, women's rights, and UN international standards.

For instance, my first encounter with feminist theory was with the foundational concept of patriarchy - as an undergraduate in English Literature. I remember coming across the idea of an overarching system of male dominance in Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1971). Within Sri Lankan women's studies discourses, patriarchy has been deployed as encompassing both structural and ideological aspects of women's oppression (Wickramasinghe, 1997). It is a particular conceptualisation of reality that governs many local research studies and activist projects as pointed out by interviewee Wishva (25/8/2005).

The Pros and Cons of Theorisation

One debate within Sri Lankan women's studies discourses centres on the relevance and function of theorisation. On the side of theoretical inconsequence, researchers see theorisation as an imposition on the researched and the research context. This point of view can be traced to the idea of an objective reality and to a political / ethical commitment towards its authentic representation. Theorisation is rejected in favour of what can be seen as methodological authenticity and accuracy. Schrijvers (1993:59) who stands vehemently against what she calls a de-personalised (structural) approach to theory argues that theorisation with the use of models and statistics is highly problematic in representing the voices of the researched:

> In the first place, 'structures', 'models', 'systems' and 'statistics' are impersonal and all too often static conceptualisations of social reality, that usually reflect the outsider. They can never capture the complex dialectics shaped by living people, who all exert certain types of influence and power (Schrijvers, 1993:59).

She critiques theorisations that are founded on quantitative analysis and a scientific approach to research and argues that theorisation imposes rigid, alien and stereotypical frameworks that are conceptualisations of the researcher - who is not part of the researched community.[116] Stanley and Wise (1983; 1993) make a similar point when they argue against typologies as part of theory making, adding that they can only be caricatures. Schrijvers (1993) argues further that these frameworks are unable to capture / compose the complex and intricate workings of power amongst the researched.

On the side of theoretical consequence, there is the dominant argument amongst researchers that theory should emanate directly from the experiences of the researcher / researched (Stanley and Wise, 1993). Yet this does not occur as a one-directional, inductive process. Invariably, researchers and writers tend to appropriate / recontextualise / utilise key concepts, frameworks, theorisations from global feminisms instinctively and tacitly; according to their reading,

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[116] She however, proposes a transformative methodological framework based on experiences of working amongst Sri Lankan refugees (See Chapter 5).

conditioning and experiences of women's issues. Consequently, not only theory, but:

> research interests and questions arise out of (global) theoretical debates as well as the local debates such as the 'Mother's Front' (Deepa - 26/7/2005).

This is because some degree of *a priori* conditioning on the part of the researcher is unavoidable (Morley, 1999). Respondent Dhamani, an academic, considered her work:

> I think I would classify my work as doing ... it is taking some of these theoretical insights and applying them to the Sri Lankan case – nuancing that theory (27/7/2005).

In other words, she promoted adopting global theory and adapting it to the local according to its ontological landscape. Thus, the epistemological act of nuancing theory is significant when considering theory within the Sri Lankan context. This can be conceptualised in relation to Said's travelling theory:

> Like people and schools of criticism, ideas and theories travel - from person to person, from situation to situation, from one period to another...(and is) transformed by its new uses, its new position in a new time and place (Said, 1983:226 - 7).

Clearly then, theory will only have utility value as long as it is perceived / constructed as relevant to the particular and the local. This may involve

recontextualising, applying bits of theory or beginning theory (Chapter 2).

Local Research Frameworks

While Schrijvers (1993) does not favour deductive theorisation in 1995 she nevertheless develops an inductive methodological / theoretical framework from the particular reaches of the Sri Lankan situation. She delineates what she calls a 'transformative research ideal'. This consists of five characteristics of 'dialogical' communication: 1) a dynamic focus on change, 2) the exchange of the researcher and researched positions as subjects and objects, 3) the ideal of egalitarian relations, 4) shared objectives and 5) the shared power to define the image of reality produced by the research (Schrijvers, 1995:14 – 15). Based on her experiences of researching with Sri Lankan internal refugees, this methodology strives to establish a collaborative and dialogical effort between the researched and the researcher to represent the interests of the researched in an egalitarian way. She contends that theory should not only emanate from the specific ground situation or *via* an inductive process on the part of the researcher, but that theorisations should originate from the researched. The problems experienced in applying such a methodology included that of the time required for such an intervention.

> How to develop a methodology that brings to the fore the complexities of change as experienced and influenced by people of

different gender, ethnicity, class, culture, and age? (Schrijvers, 1993:59).

This is a key question that preoccupies Schrijvers (1993). Moreover, the importance of capturing / constructing the constant flux and flow of time, the continuous impact of change on individuals and their own engagement with change cannot be underestimated. Take the disruptions of war, the mobility of migrant women, and the changing research mandates of INGOS. These are some of the ontological issues that need accounting for in theorisations (Chapter 6).

Developing such an argument, feminist writer, Bandarage (1998) draws a unified theoretical framework for feminism that takes into account the specificities of the local context, including the violence engulfing the country; the dialectics of gender, race / ethnicity and class; and the overwhelming effects of capitalism and westernisation:

> At the theoretical level, the analysis of women and social change in Sri Lanka needs to move beyond the narrow, WID focus on gender, the abstract ahistorical approach of cultural studies, as well as the individualistic human rights approach. Rather, gender issues need to be approached within a broad global political-economic perspective and gender, race / ethnic and class analysis. In other words, the approach to women's liberation in the country has to be placed within overall social transformation or a paradigm shift from domination to partnership at the local and international levels (Bandarage 1998:26).

In her theorisation, Bandarage argues for the movement away from the abstract grand theories of feminisms to encompass / compose the specificities of local context. I take this to mean grand causal theories of feminism as articulated by Stanley and Wise (1993), which try to provide reasons for women's oppression and inequalities, as well as grand methodologies of redress such as women's rights frameworks, Women in Development (WID), and Gender and Development (GAD).

Bandarage also argues for the necessity of ethical partnerships in the research endeavour. These are seen as requiring solidarity within the various factions of the women's movements. Furthermore, she advocates the mobilisation of women within alternative cultural milieu, combining theory with activism, experiential learning, open dialogue, and participatory approaches in her framework. Moreover:

> local languages - Sinhala and Tamil - and local cultural forms such as theatre and music need also be more extensively used in making the feminist discourse and activism more appealing and joyful endeavours (Bandarage, 1998; 27).

Thus, Bandarage conceptualises dialogue as the primary means through which differences in ethnicity, religion, and cultural values can be recognised and reconciled as a basis for peace and social reformation. Her theoretical framework is interesting in the way it is rooted in and

strives to unify, the multiple facets of the local context. Furthermore, feminism is approached as:

> an ongoing process of growth and empowerment rather than the *fait accompli* (Bandarage 1998; 27).

Bandarage's framework (*ibid.*) becomes problematic when it begins to posit dichotomies and binaries (between academia and struggle, middle-class and 'poorer classes', and theory and activism). It thus fails to take into account the unifications and alliances within the women's movements already taking place. It also fails to take into account the possibilities inherent in the paradoxes, complexities, and complicities already in existence. Furthermore, it is my firm belief that rather than posing either / or options, feminisms require the strategies of all forms of theorisation: grand theory (Stanley and Wise, 1993), middle-order theory (de Groot and Maynard, 1993) and grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

Hitherto I have dealt with the scanty debate on feminist theorisations on methodology in local women's studies discourse primarily through analysis of texts. In the next section I will construct / deconstruct theory on methodology / epistemology mainly through researchers' interviews.

Situatedness, Standpoints and Intersects of Knowledge

The realities that the researchers are engaged in and are part of are closely linked to how knowledge is conceptualised / produced. In other words, ontology is symbiotic with epistemology (Chapters 6 / 7). This is irrespective of whether they are grand ontologies or minor ones[117] and despite their instability and multiplicity. At this juncture, I consider / construct how Sri Lankan researchers conceptualise their subjective ontological positionings *vis-à-vis* their work.

As noted by Cain and Finch:

> the verbal signs with which people represent their thoughts are thus inert entities to the sociologist until he or she converts them into data by constituting the speakers as relevant subjects, or the remarks as part of a relevant discourse, and providing a theoretical context which these remarks can be deemed to have a bearing on and, when theorised, a place within... (2004:520).

Not only do I appropriate the following fragments of conversational discourse as 'inert entities' and assemble them as data, but I also pose them as examples / foundations on which I construct modernist / postmodernist theory.

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[117] This refers to my conceptualisation of grand ontologies of postmodernism or modernism; and minor ontologies of feminist internationalism or personal politics (Chapter 6).

I use Vivian, one of my respondents, to open the discussion on the situatedness of knowledge (Haraway's 1988) with regard to theorisation:

> I'm beginning to believe more and more in the idea of location. Location of - the national, cultural, social, economic location and I think whatever feminist theory or ideology that we use or apply, it is likely to be modified by the location in which we operate, and that location does put certain constraints on us (Vivian, 5/8/2005).

In fact, Vivian expanded on the crucial point made by Dhamani earlier in this section about adapting theoretical perspectives to suit the local ontological context. In other words, there may be factors in one's location that require more strategic research interventions (Chapter 9). Skeggs (1997) explicates this point further:

> I have learnt what it means to be a feminist researcher and position myself accordingly. This positioning process is not without contradiction. Researchers are positioned within institutions, by history, by disciplinary practices, by dominant paradigms, in theoretical fashions, in genre style, by funding arrangements, and so on (Skeggs, 1997:18).

Thus, the situatedness of knowledge refers to a more contextual positioning amongst diverse ontological factors. These could be external metaphysical realities such as perceptions of time, geography location, and historicism (Engelstad and Gerrard, 2005). They could

also be the internal specific standpoints adopted by the researcher (Harding, 2004).

Sri Lankan standpoints are founded on the researcher's stated location, experience, focus or ideological discourse. These are based on the conscious subjectivity and intersects of the researcher; but could well include the writer's unconscious perspective (Stanley and Wise, 1993). Harding contends that standpoint theory is about the:

> relations between the production of knowledge and practices of power (2004:1).

The following sections will engage with the multiple standpoints / intersects / situatedness of local researchers as illustrated by the following list.

- Women's standpoints
- Disciplinary perspectives
- Mother's viewpoints
- Class perceptions
- Counter-nationalist stands
- Asian / South-Asian positions
- Ideological self-definitions

'A Women's Perspective'

As argued in Chapter 4 the overarching inference from WR research is that of a women's paradigm. However, as pointed out in Chapter 3 this does not mean that researchers were unaware of the political, ideological

and ethical complicities and complexities of researching from a women's perspective. For instance, such a perspective is based on conservative, long-standing assumptions that posit women against feminists. Some of my interviewees considered themselves working 'long-term to improve the status of women' as put by Kiyana (5/8/2005). Accordingly, there is a sense of aversion towards being identified as a feminist (Chapter 3). Gayathri, a second generation researcher articulated this oppositional standpoint (to feminism):

> Generally I don't like being called a feminist and I have never been a radical feminist. If I work with feminists my work can be described as feminist but I don't like specially to be called feminist because I think I'm into women's rights and the equality of women from a broad perspective of equality of opportunity, non-discrimination and fairness. So I might be interested in aspects of research which relate to persons other than women. Like I would be interested for example in health and education as rights of both men and women...Feminists whether you call them radical or liberal, are basically interested in feminist research (21/7/2005).

Gayathri associated limitations and compartmentalisations with the concept of feminism because she did not see feminism as encompassing general issues or men. She also implied that she is against the 'radicalism' of feminism. Radicalism may be seen as 'extremist', 'anti-male', 'separatist', 'bra-burning', and 'anti-family'. While these researchers did not go so far as to reflect the stereotyped, homophobic, and derogatory condemnations of feminisms found in

the mainstream media of the country (Chapters 3 / 6), it is possible that the almost defensive stress on anti-feminism may have been a reaction to these evocative images of feminisms. Further, it could also have been a reaction to their perception of me as a feminist.

'I Consider Myself as a Social Scientist'

A common identification amongst researchers is with their disciplinary alliances and / or related theoretical approaches. For instance, whether a legal analyst, anthropologist, literary critic, educationist, or statistician, the analytical training of the researcher is crucial to conceptualisations of these researchers' standpoints:

> I'm a cultural anthropologist and that is part of my identity. I am also interested in gender analysis...I don't consider myself necessarily as a feminist or Women's Studies person. I consider myself a social scientist" (Rasika, 21/7/2005).

This was possibly because Rasika perceived her positioning as a feminist or women's studies researcher as a limiting framework – in comparison to a 'professional' standpoint. In this context, feminist, gender or women's perspective were seen as methods to be applied in research – as opposed to methodology. The respondent's identification as a particular kind of academic was the dominant positioning.

Considering the marginal status of Women's Studies in the country *vis-à-vis* other research, and considering the

allegations levelled against prioritising women (Chapters 3 / 6), it is possible that this standpoint of discipline is consciously or even unconsciously adopted so as to provide legitimacy to ensuing research. The rigour of the specific disciplinary practice and the adherence to related methodologies / methods is emphasised. On the other hand, it could be that the researchers are also striving to establish a grounding or history for their research activities by linking their feminist positioning to their original disciplinary training. Be that as it may, the conscious adoption of an academic or professional identity cannot be ignored, but needs to be conceptualised as a factor of researcher identification as well as a difference.

Nevertheless, there are occasions when researchers take a disciplinary standpoint from a feminist perspective. For instance, de Alwis (2004) makes an effort to combine feminist politics with anthropological field research. In the study referred to in Chapters 3 / 5 and 6, she speaks from within feminist political practice about the Mothers Front in Sri Lanka. This standpoint challenges knowledge produced in the discipline of anthropology which is generally perceived as *a priori*, and as not engaging in politics. De Alwis (2004) performs:

> a contingent reading of the political efficacy of the Mothers Front in an attempt to circumvent unproductive binary readings of such movements as either essentialising or empowering, victimised or agentive (2004:133).

De Alwis (*ibid.*) thus goes beyond a singular, all-encompassing and essentialising positioning. In her article, she repeatedly intersects the discipline / praxis of anthropology with the discipline and praxis of feminism. It is both a methodological approach and a standpoint.

'As a Mother.........'

As has been hitherto pointed out (Chapter 4) a common gender stereotype in Sri Lankan society is that of the mother. Interviewee Saumi (07/7/2005) expressed her views very strongly:

> I don't think mothers can be separated
> from children, biologically or in any sense
> of the word...this really could be because
> of my profession as..."[118]

She went on to focus on the phenomenon of 'female headed-households' in the country, stressing the almost exclusive importance of the mother for a family. Quite obviously, such a positioning continues to isolate women and burden them with the sole responsibilities of parenting.

For other researchers, the state of motherhood was much more complicated. Vivian constantly brought up her consciousness as a mother:

> But as I said, I have two young children,
> you know, newly discovered the joys as

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[118] Saumi works in a profession related to children.

well as pains of motherhood, right? ...
(05/8/2005)

Her work as a researcher was made possible by the presence of a domestic aide to take on her 'so-called duties as a mother'. Despite the fact that Vivian satirised her maternal obligations, her standpoint was ambivalent; perhaps indicating her internal conflict stemming from feminist / Marxist ethics and politics and the day-to-day business of living. Understandably, her strong sense of personal responsibility to the children kept surfacing throughout the interview.

Very frequently in the local context, the identity of the mother was synonymous with that of the woman. Single women, lesbian women and transgender persons were not considered to be possibilities. A couple of times, I myself have been asked to express opinions 'as a mother' in public forums despite it being common knowledge that I am childfree. As discussed in Chapter 4 the state of 'childlessness' is not considered to be the norm; it is not a natural state. It is an exception to the rule – a deviation from the normal. The state is rarely assumed to be a considered decision on the part of the couple; but rather, an unfortunate deficit in the woman. Kamalini Wijayatilake's research on the diverse experiences of women *vis-à-vis* cultural practices elaborates on this point:

> A childless couple is considered unfortunate. More so a woman who has not conceived or not given birth to a child, and is considered barren and an ill omen.

She is thought of as inauspicious (Wijayatilake, 2001:147).

Furthermore, it is assumed that all women are compelled by a maternal urge and any exception is 'unnatural'. Moreover, childless / childfree women are conceptualised as being in a state of constant desire to fulfill this lack:

> They're not seen as thanking their bloody stars for not having kids!! Wishva (25/8/2005).

Thus, it is considered common and possible for all women to possess this inherent capacity to express 'a mother's' viewpoint. Consequently, women are expected to perform this gender role, or to express this so-called maternal urge at a social level: for instance, in the presence of children – especially infants. The inherent biological determinism[119] of such thinking is often missed. This was Wishva's perception of a mother's standpoint:

> Okay, because there isn't that much adherence to standpoint theory by researchers, obviously people don't come out and say – okay as a mother I am such and such...as a mother I feel such and such...but you know that is what is there – that is the assumption. You can relate that to this whole thing about 'mother and children'. There is this grouping together of women and children for purposes of

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[119] The line of thinking that the physiological differences between men and women is the sole determinant of their different social roles, characteristics and relations (Chapters 3 / 7).

research...the inclusion of children into the women's perspective (25/8/2005).

The standpoint of motherhood that is sometimes assumed, and at other times articulated, is a complex stance that researchers need to be conscious about and work out theoretically. In fact, it needs to be theorised as an intersect amongst other intersects - rather than a singular essentialised positioning. This is especially so because there are sharp divides between those who feel inherently maternal towards children; and others (including myself) who do not, and violently resist this so-called natural tagging of the maternal with women.

'Intersecting Class...'

The consciousness of class, or a formal critique from a Marxist standpoint, lays bare the interactions of power between or amongst specific social classes. Respondent Jayani was very clear that a Marxist standpoint was an adopted perspective. It is the class identified with, as opposed to the class that the researcher comes from:

> And here, it is not the class that you were coming from that matter but the class that you are working for that counts - to change society (9/7/2005).

At a personal level, another interviewee Vivian discussed the upper / middle / professional class practice of employing domestic aides. She expressed gratitude to the women domestic aides who enabled the privileges that she enjoyed as a researcher and lecturer:

> I am always thinking that I am able to do all these things (teaching and researching) because of someone who has taken over my so-called duties as a mother. So that that is one responsibility that I very firmly believe in – and I don't think that I can divorce myself from...somebody will make the bed, someone will clean the toilets - all those liberties and things that we take for granted around the house will be done (05/8/2005).

The traditional roles and responsibilities of a mother and wife that she has accepted need to be assigned to a paid worker so that she can earn the salary befitting her academic skills and training. Vivian (*ibid.*) did not seriously question her duties as a mother. A more developed Marxist feminist critique[120] here would call for a further exploration of the issues of unpaid reproductive labour performed by the wife / mother within the family, the financial valuing of manual labour *versus* intellectual labour, and the implications of the feminisation of work-categories related to caring.

A number of research studies that adopt a class perspective (whether it is a particular theoretical framework or an unconscious leaning) see economic empowerment as the main obstacle for many women, particularly at grassroots. This is especially so in research studies that focus on class and labour-related issues. For instance, take the literature on women migrant workers to the Middle East (de Silva, 1981; Dias and Weerakoon, 1995; Weerakoon, 1998), women workers in the garment industries (Jayaweera and

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[120] This was discussed by my supervisor Louise Morley.

Sanmugam, 2001), and women labourers and casual workers (Rajapakse, 1995; Kottegoda, 2004b). The emphasis here falls more on what can be termed as gender, development and poverty alleviation approaches[121] (Wickramasinghe 2000), as opposed to traditional feminist Marxist / socialist theorisations. Furthermore, as is to be expected within the historical, sociocultural, and political positioning of Sri Lanka, the concept of class has compounded meanings. It is associated primarily with poverty and with the urban and rural divide - since a majority of the poor in Sri Lanka are situated in the rural areas. Underdevelopment in the form of a lack of basic needs and amenities, few opportunities, limited access to credit and training are key features of the poor. Furthermore, poverty can be linked to other intersects of gender, ethnicity, language, and lack of education (Chapter 1).

Instead of seeing development theorisations and socialist theorisations pertaining to women / gender as conflicting, it is important to combine them. While this may be a simplistic analysis, I would contend that the adoption of other standpoints *sans* an economic perspective will undermine the experiences and realities of a majority of women in Sri Lanka.

Thamalini, another one of my respondents, combined not only the intersections of class and gender, but also her disciplinary training:

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[121] This involves Women in Development (WID) and Gender and Development (GAD) approaches.

> Basically I, you see, identify with the oppressed group whether it is caste, class or gender and I have a kind of self-trained discipline in Marxism or Left ideology. Some of the phrases and phraseologies I use unconsciously fall into that frame. But of course class doesn't get framed by gender, so you have to sort of intersect gender – not in isolation can you talk about gender deprivations or class deprivations (06/7/2005).

Thamalini also highlighted the fact that standpoint and intersects need not necessarily be consciously articulated. Further, neither standpoint nor intersectionality are stable, consistent states of being - whether it be women, motherhood, ethnicity, nationality, regionality or a discipline. Moreover, standpoints and particular intersects can be stressed during specific historical moments as will be argued in the next section.

'Counter-nationalism'

During the sporadic ignition of communal violence in Sri Lanka since Independence in 1948, and the slow burn of war since 1983, there have been periods of heightened communal[122] consciousness amongst all ethnic groups. Yet, these politics go beyond the issues of ethnocentrism, pluralism or multiculturalism. Within Sri Lanka, they are invariably linked to projects of self-determination, separatism, state and counter-state militancy and defense. In comparison, nationalisms that

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[122] The word 'communal' has been used since colonial times to describe violence amongst ethnic groups in Sri Lanka. Today there is a shift towards the use the word 'ethnic' possibly due to an understanding of identity politics as opposed community strife.

arose from colonialism and the modernist project at the turn of the 20th Century prior to Independence in 1948 led to the acquisition of certain liberal rights and opportunities for women politically and economically (Chapter 3).

Today however a majority of feminists in Sri Lanka are compelled to engage with / fight against the fundamentalist, ethnocentric ideologies of Sri Lankan Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim nationalisms. These fundamentalist standpoints espouse racial superiority, bigotry, intolerance, militancy and the oppression / objectification / radicalisation of women. Researching, knowledge and meaning-making are thus located in moments that are heightened with such tensions (Chapter 5). Consequently, such knowledge is situated in time:

> I think there is a whole debate on cultural relativism, issues of identity, and one approach is nationalism. I am interested in looking at Tamil nationalism - being Tamils in a different way. The nationalism that was provided was safe and had some positive movement in its early stages. But what renders it into an oppressive movement? (Kumerini, 19/8/2005).

A keen reading of the interview with Kumerini conveys the significance of the multiple intersects of identity and standpoint - especially in crisis. Consequently, standpoint theory is not ethnocentric; but rather, contains an ethnic or racial perspective that is a counter to dominant fundamentalist ones:

As I was saying, on the one hand my
training, and on the other, my personality -
maybe because I come from a particular
class I am not so concerned with social
and economic issues. But being a Sri
Lankan Tamil the identity of a woman
becomes very important an issue. At one
stage, though I am not particularly plugged
into the nation or the ethnic group... but
most of the people that I come across are
disturbed identities, you know, people who
are have either mixed parentage or people
who are visibly against the current of their
ethnic groups or at odds with the Sinhalese
community... so identity has become a
main focus (Kumerini, 19/8/2005).

Kumerini focused on the important intersects of her
experiences, personality, privileged-class background,
and ethnicity in opposition to the more dominant
viewpoint that fuels Tamil nationalism. Given the
crisscross of fundamentalist notions and actions of
patriotism, allegations of betrayal and treachery, as well
as various reprisals[123] that are common in the country,
this oppositional political positioning is a highly
dangerous one.

'As a South Asian or Asian'

While Sri Lankan researchers' identification with local
ethnic nationalisms may be at best compounded, and at
worst oppositional, it is another matter when it comes to
a regional standpoint. Especially in the form of:

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[123] There include reprisals by the state, the LTTE, fundamentalist
political parties like the JVP and JHU, the media as well as society at
large.

theory coming out of India and South Asia
because we know it is rooted in a context
that is familiar and common to us
(Kamani, 17/7/2005).

Even otherwise, regional associations and affiliations have been made on the basis of presumed commonalities *vis-à-vis* a shared history of colonialism, religious linkages and geographical proximity. But such positionings are complicated as pointed out by Dhamani, one of my interviewees:

> South Asia is my field of research I think it is just because I live here. South Asian is also a kind of categorisation that is given to me and I've reconciled myself to living here and this is my field. And also I suppose from the outside because I'm quite often invited as a South Asian Feminist, right, I guess in a way it is an internalisation of some of the ways that outsiders look at me, inviting me to various things or how they really introduce me at talks particularly in the international scene (27/7/2005).

For Dhamani, the adoption of a South Asian focus and standpoint was a naming and categorisation that was imposed on her (the researcher) from outside. Her knowledge was distinctly perceived as being situated within a South Asian context. As such, her standpoint seems to have been appropriated as a defense mechanism in a situation where the option of identities for the researcher seems limited. There are postcolonial politics at play here. The power to name has been requisitioned by powerful and established knowledge authorities and banks as conceptualised by Said (1976).

The assumed commonality of geographical regions coming together is deconstructed by another respondent Kamani:

> I had been more and more preoccupied by the question - what is an Asian woman? Actually, if you look at the Time magazine or The Economist or whatever, most of the time, by an Asian they mean East Asian. Asia has been defined by the Western world - one identity for the whole of Asia. But it is such a vast region. And how can you compare a country like Japan with one like Afghanistan or even South Asia. If you look at it politically, then some women of some Asian countries have come together on some socio-political issues - but others have not... There are some regional and sub regional alliances like SAARC, ASIEAN, or Asia Pacific Women's Watch, SANGATH.... But the whole of identity politics, I see, as relating to a particular stage in capitalism and now globalisation... (17/7/2005)

Kamani argued that the differences between Asian countries far outweigh the commonalities that have been selectively (and perhaps temporarily) established for political and strategic reasons. One of the key points that she made was to link the focus on identity with that of the global currents of capitalism. This was done by arguing that the significance of identity is a reaction to the vast overreaching and unifying aspects of globalisation. Of course, if applying a postmodern perspective, then identity politics are indicative of what can be seen as the whole postmodern condition of fragmentation and divergence. Whether it is Asian or

South Asian identities / standpoints that were aspired to, they need to be recognised as a strategic means of making-meaning by focusing on commonalities. This is in opposition to counter-ways of making-meaning – for instance, by focusing on differences.

'Self-defining Politics'

From the sample of respondents interviewed for this study, another key standpoint that intersects with other standpoints is that of a self-defining political, ideological, theoretical positioning. This is sometimes linked to the discipline of the researcher and the methodological training influencing the researcher:

> In a sense I think I'm basically a social democrat. I think I have now defined my political ideas. So basically not what I am - as far as I know – but what I am not - which is a Marxist - as I tell my friends now - we have all been through the phases of Marxism in our lives. So in that sense my framework is to basically to use feminism as a critique of existing structures and move towards reform and what it means is basically building my life around international instruments of human rights - including economic, social and cultural rights which is why I call myself a social democrat - I tend to have rights-oriented frameworks (Kumerini, 19/8/2005).

Kumerini saw her feminist politics as stemming from a strong sense of social democracy and a methodology oriented to women's' rights. Her standard lay with the international instruments of the UN and the ontological currents of Feminist Internationalisms (Chapter 6). She

categorised Marxism as a defining phase that many researchers go through. She and Dhamani (below) provided indications of how self-defining politics can be stated, fused or intersected, unconscious, shifting, and constantly developing in regard to standpoint and methodologies:

> Very often my work has been referred to by people as postmodernist, and you know, their term, it is usually complicated and has pejorative meaning, so that something in me, whenever I get this, I want to say, no no I don't think it's postmodernist. But it has some postmodern aspects as well. So I have now kind of got more reconciled to the fact that I'm actually trying to validate postmodernism - not all of it but I think it is still useful to think of in terms of postmodernism... there is a reaction to postmodernism as not political and that all it does is celebrating the fragmentary and therefore not really tied to social reality and processes.... But obviously, we have all been influenced by socialist feminism these are stands that we unconsciously adopt. Though I have not actually read literature that belongs to the socialist feminist movement, there is stuff that I have definitely internalised and used in my work (Dhamani, 27/72005).

In the earlier section Dhamani discussed how she has been categorised as a South Asian. Now she problematised taking on a postmodernist perspective - especially as researchers have already been influenced by socialist feminism and social democracy (Chapter 9).

The above sections convey how for many of us researchers, the multiple standpoints and intersects of identity based on gender, ethnicity, class, geographical location, politics, discipline and theoretical standpoints are features that have been both consciously and unconsciously appropriated.

Making and Unmaking Theory on Methodology

In this chapter I have made / unmade methodological theory (epistemology) pertaining to some of the sentient interplays of researchers' standpoints, intersects and situatedness within the specific Sri Lankan contexts. No doubt, given the crucial capacity of standpoint theory to express the perspectives of the oppressed (Harding, 2004a), other local politics would also provide fodder for more perspectives and intersects as well. These could include the politics regarding language use (whether one is primarily proficient in Tamil, Sinhala or English), rural / urban affiliations that are also class indicators, educational status, as well as caste, lesbian and transgender perspectives.

Whether a researcher subscribed to a particular standpoint / intersectionality or specific situatedness depended on specific historical events, structural forces, external / internal currents and particular ontological priorities of the times. A women's perspective, a disciplinary positioning, and a mother's standpoint were

some of the internal identity politics played out in my interviews. In addition, class, ethnic, regional and political intersects were conceptualised by researchers and myself as critical in researching. This is because these dimensions of internal and external realities are part of research processes.

The situatedness of meaning-making amongst the combines of history / time, geography, and other external ontologies determined whether researcher's standpoints would be oppositional. Historically, most dynamic standpoints such as Marxism, the liberal agenda of Suffragettes Movement, and the second wave of feminism worldwide have been oppositional standpoints. Though the very concept of standpoint implies a positioning against the norm, this oppositional status need not necessarily define the particular standpoint - as doing so would restrict its development.

The use of standpoint, intersectionality and situatedness as theoretical concepts 'outs' the researcher in the process of knowledge and meaning-making to the utmost possible degree. Structural affiliations, interactions and influences, personal powers, privileges, biases and insecurities as well as the complexities, junctures and sutures of researching are self-exposed / confessed to the extent that is consciously possible for the writer.

These multiple features of standpoint / identification noted above convey that a one-dimensional approach

towards identity is problematic (Maguire, Wooldridge and Pratt, 2006). Grillo (2006) argues that intersectionality in particular, is indicative of the multiplicities that constitute the researchers' fragmented selves as a complex web of interests, identifications and impositions that are related to one another. It thus blends together the different aspects of a person's identity or standpoint and is a counterbalance to the essentialism of a singular standpoint. However, there will always be contradictions and complicities in identity intersects and positionings (Skeggs, 1997).

Overall, this chapter discussed how Sri Lankan feminist theory on methodology is influenced by the clash of paradigms (Oakley, 2000) as well as postcolonial and identity politics. This was reflected in the debates that questioned the need for / relevance of theorising. The need to recontextualise and nuance theories according to local ontological conditions was seen / constructed as crucial. I see such theoretical interests, as well as my own work here, as attempts towards 'beginning theory' on methodology. Its end result is not the presumptions of grand theory; nor is it the fragmented instability of deconstruction. Rather, it institutes middle-range theory (Flax, 1987; Frye, 1990; de Groot and Maynard, 1993; Maynard, 1995; Bryman, 2004), and methodological issues that we, as researchers, pose as relevant to the local context. In fact, it tempers the unity of middle-range theory with the diversity of deconstruction.

Here, the question arises as to whether taking a postmodern perspective necessarily nullifies the political aspects of the work. Is not the convergence of differences and the fragmentary indicative of 'social realities' in a modernist[124] as well as postmodernist sense? This is because they are more reflective (as well as constructive) of the specificities of the ground situation. Therefore, could not my own attempt to combine modernist and postmodernist perspectives be perceived, in the final analysis, as a modernist exercise and concurrently, as a postmodernist one?

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[124] Modernism is a vast and diverse project not only confined to positivist methods of meaning-making.

Chapter Nine

Ethics / Politics

Feminisms – The Political and Ethical Dimensions of Meaning-making

In this final Chapter, I will reflect on feminisms; but not as political assignments of representation and participation, or accessing power and resources, or fulfilling needs and empowerment. Instead, I will be taking into account the ethical / political impulses of WR research. While such impulses cannot be conceptualised as independent or uniform categories, I argue that they are nevertheless what methodologically constitute feminisms in Sri Lanka.

In doing so, I will be responding to the research questions 1 and 2. What are the key theoretical frameworks / paradigms / approaches / concepts of WR research adhered to within the Sri Lankan context? How are they conceptualised and how do they operate? I will discuss how key concepts / frameworks / approaches of feminist politics and ethics such as altruism, democracy and Marxism are engaged with in local research. I will also address question 3, how research processes generate / construct knowledge *vis-à-vis* WR research by considering the theoretical motivations and assumptions relating to the politics and ethics within the research

process. Question 4 (what are the practical advantages, challenges and limitations of feminist research methodology?), will direct me to focus on the social and personal transformations related to the politics and ethics of researching. What constitutes 'feminist' research within the Sri Lankan research *fora* and how can it be defined? The response to this question (5) will focus on how feminisms in Sri Lanka are constituted through ethical and political programmes. Also in this Chapter, through the disciplinary range cited as examples, I will indirectly address question 6 - what are the multiple disciplines engaged in Womens' Studies?

The implicit as well as explicit tendency to conceptualise WR research / writing in Sri Lanka as categories of research has so far been undermined by my thesis (Chapters 4 / 7). This Chapter will argue that 'feminisms' constitutes an ethical / political agenda and is therefore an aspect of feminist research methodology.

Feminisms as Ethics and Politics

Feminisms in Sri Lanka have packed and multiple meanings. There are negative connotations of colonialism, globalisation, anti-nationalism, elitism and deviancy attributed to the concept (Chapters 3 / 6 / 8). There are positive understandings based on Marxist / socialist frameworks, liberal democratic ideals, lesbian feminism, patriarchy and gender concepts. Here I do not attempt to distinguish between these varying theoretical

frameworks of feminism. I am inclined towards considering them all as forms of 'feminisms' (Warhol and Herndl, 1997b; Hesse-Biber, Leavy and Yaiser, 2004) perhaps as part of a continuum (Beasley, 1999). This is an inclusivist approach that sees the commonality of the political / ethical impulses of WR research as feminist.

Within the Sri Lankan context, feminist research / writing, if defined on political terms, is the following. It is a consciousness, analysis, critique, recommendation or activism:

a) Against psychological, ideological and micro / macro and structural forces of power and its transmissions that impact negatively on women;

b) And for the continuing ethical promotion of alternative choices and commitments towards various degrees of transformation for women (and men) *via* personal identities, divergent ideologies / discourses, socio-political and cultural policies, structures and practices, micropolitics and personal enactments - locally and internationally.

The term feminist is thus utilised in WR literature for the following reasons. 1) Its capacity to expose the inequalities and power differentials between men and women (and amongst women). 2) Its commitment towards progressive structural and individual transformation for women. 3) The ethical means by

which researchers aim to do the above. Consequently, the correlations between power, the goal of social change for the better, and ethical methods are the foremost considerations in conceptualising feminist ethics / politics.

Historically, a focus on morality and ethics has guided 'good' or emulative speech, behaviour, knowledge, social interactions, politics and practices - not only in everyday family life, but also with regard to people's religions, professions and wider social relations. Research ethics have traditionally been concerned with the goals, processes and outcomes of research. Western feminists have had mixed feelings about ethics in general, seeing ethical principles as patriarchally constituted and religiously aligned, as yet another way of controlling women and men (Gilman cited in Kramarae and Treichler, 1985:143). Today, ethics increasingly encompass a concern with the politics of researchers' engagement and negotiation - with respondents on the one side and with research funders on the other (Oakley, 1981; Finch, 1984). Research ethics and politics initiating social change in individuals, structures and practices (Fonow and Cook, 1991) have become epistemologically intertwined with the representation and construction of knowledge (Maynard, 2004; Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002).

In this context, Birch, Miller, Mauthner, and Jessop (2002a) propose a wide-ranging and integrated, holistic approach to ethics, which amalgamates the empirical

and the theoretical. They argue that feminists have not always responded ethically to the many issues that arise in researching, and thus promote the need for continuous ethical thinking. This involves, for instance, the complex political / ethical issues of inclusion / exclusions, funding, consent, participation, representation, confidentiality, dissemination, outcomes, and follow-up. Furthermore, Doucet and Mauthner (2002) have made a case for an integrated approach of combining these ethical issues of feminist research practice with those of the ethics of epistemology.

As far as Sri Lanka is concerned, this needs to be related to a context where ethics in politics, governance, social and work institutions, and daily living are continually compromised. The country has been in a state of brutal civil war for the greater part of 25 years. Even as I write sporadic violence and paramilitary activities including abductions take place with no great accountability or civic concern. Political greed and instability, rather than democracy, leads to frequent legislative elections and political horse-trading. Extreme positions of ethnic and religious fragmentations and fundamentalisms are common; furthermore, morality and ethics are perverted and politicised for populist reasons. Law and order in day-to-day activities and personal interactions are breaking down. The need, then, to inspire ethical thinking and action in the country, despite being a naïve objective, does not lessen in its urgency. It is relevant not only in feminist research, but in all spheres of activity and at all levels of life. Yet, it is not a goal that

is theoretically unproblematic; nor does it not have methodological friction.

As far as my research is concerned, the integration of feminist politics and ethics can be conceptualised at three levels as illustrated by the following Diagram
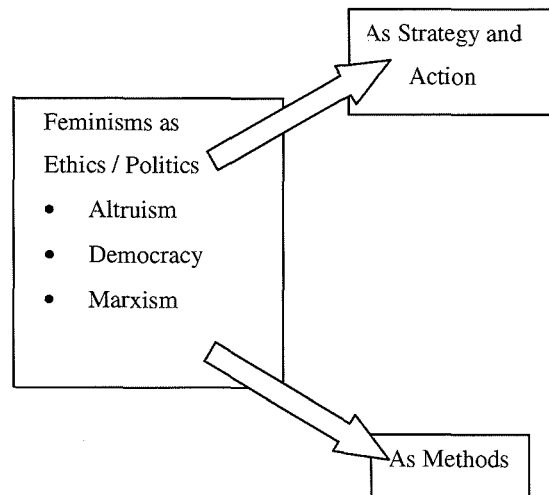
Diagram V – Levels of Feminist Politics / Ethics

In a larger sense, feminisms can be seen as an aspiration of political and ethical principles towards doing good / better - as identified by Edwards and Mauthner citing Kvale (2002:20). This may provoke some methodological problems as will be discussed. Next, feminisms can be seen as strategising / action in terms of translating political and ethical aspirations into practicable action. In other words, I am referring to the 'utilitarian ethics of consequences' (*ibid.*). Of course, here, questions of possibility and effectiveness need to be addressed. Finally, within the research project,

feminisms can be seen as a method of striving to eliminate or to clarify process-related political and ethical concerns of the researcher. Here again, there are questions as to what extent it is possible to do so; and what the overall objectives of epistemologically verifying ethical and political concerns would entail. I see the above not as isolated, abstruse models; rather, as interrelated features of feminist ethical politics. They are also not confined to ethical principles and standpoints, but are concerns of feminist political action and methods.

Women's Lesser Morality *versus* Higher Social Expectations

Many religious notions and practices often imply that women's spiritual, moral and mental integrity is lesser than men's (Christ, 1992). In Sri Lanka, dominant ontologies pertaining to women's spirituality, morality and character have been rooted in the moral precepts relating to Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. These have, on the whole, resulted in conflicting and sometimes contrasting moral claims, explanations and practices relating to women. This can be evinced from the minor status attributed to Buddhist nuns; the practice of barring women from the Mosque; the fall from grace of Eve; and the Hindu notion of being born a woman due to less merit (as opposed to being born a man). Through a negative ontological construction of women, these theological and spiritual norms and religious /

cultural practices impose tremendous pressure on women to be good - as theorised by feminist psychologists and other writers (Gilligan, 1977; Hughes, 2002).

This social standard (of a superior morality) that women are made to aspire to is partly a consequence of the subordinated sexuality of women and their assignment to care and servicing roles[125]. Furthermore, social and individual control of women is consolidated through intangible Asian myths of the long-suffering woman, the sacrificing mother, the dutiful wife, and the obedient daughter. These may be further complicated by the colonial remnants of anglicised Victorian moral codes of character, behaviour and chastity.

At the same time, feminists themselves have politicised ideals of moral superiority. Allegations of essentialism can be made against such ideas as women being naturally inclined towards peace and non-violence by Ruddick (1992), or of women having a special relationship with the environment and Mother Earth (Nesiah, 1996). Gilligan (1977) in particular, talks of the different forms of moral reasoning between girls and boys - based on care and responsibility on the part of girls as opposed to justice and rights by boys. These arguments take the notion of difference (between men and women) to an extreme of polarised thinking - as universal, homogenous and static. This is despite the influence of postmodernism and poststructuralism in

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[125] This was pointed out during supervision by Morley.

dismantling the essentialism of such standpoints. Consequently, there seem to be higher moral expectations of women as opposed to men in some areas; and even higher expectations of feminists as opposed to non-feminists. Women are condemned as morally inferior if they step outside the socially prescribed roles (for instance, as single mothers, lesbians, older mothers). Consequently, any such perceived indiscretions or deviations from the prescribed moral and ethical norms are staunchly condemned, and sometimes punished. This is done not only through structural mechanisms and socio-cultural practices, but also through such means as social ridicule and notions of fear and shame (Wickramasinghe, 2002a).

The Ethical Problematic of a Politics of Good

Within the Sri Lankan context, an interviewee for my study expressed this viewpoint:

> As a feminist she says she stands for certain ideals about women, we did not expect her to go out and have an affair with another woman's husband. She didn't care at all (Vivian, 5/8/2005).

Here, the disparity between political aspirations and personal action is readily condemned. In many ways, feminists are expected to be morally and ethically superior to other women. It is possible that this is because feminists are perceived as openly espousing certain political / ethical ideas pertaining to 'oppression'

and 'empowerment', 'iniquity' and 'equality', 'economic subjugation' and 'upliftment' or 'good' of all women. Furthermore, there is an association between feminisms and sisterhood, collective activism, and caring for one another. Thus, any transgression of these stated principles are prone to double censure. After all, for feminists the personal is political and *vice versa*. As with any other political ideology and movement, the political and ethical aspirations of feminisms render it vulnerable to condemnation when there is a perceived contradiction between these aspirations and individual actions.

Hanifa, another respondent, referred to the political / ethical assumptions of WR research as having:

> the objective of righting the wrongs and making things better for women (Hanifa, 26/7/2005).

Thus, the very same impulses within feminisms of doing 'good' for women (whether aspirational or actional) serve to define it. This raises unrealistic expectations from feminisms as ethics / politics. Furthermore, Mauthner (2000) cautions that it would be misleading for feminism or feminist perspectives to be seen as tantamount to ethical ways of working; as this can offer more than it can deliver. Nonetheless, irrespective of what is expected / achieved, I see the combination of ethical and political aspirations / action / methods as key to aspects of feminist research methodology. Moreover, I will argue that ethics in research cannot be

conceptualised in the abstract, divorced from its big sister of politics, or isolated from its parents of epistemology and ontology.

Despite myths and ideals about women's moral / ethical standing being interwoven into research and action in conflicting and complementary ways, there is a tendency in research to ignore the ethical intentions of research in favour of political goals and recommendations. Edwards and Mauthner (2002) combine the political approaches to theories of ethics and morality and concentrate on the values of a feminist ethic of care. In the same vein, Gillies and Alldred (2002) write of:

> the need to broaden our conception of ethics to include the political objectives or interventions for research, as well as such questions about the ethics of knowledge relations (2002:32).

While these writers are interested in incorporating a political argument into what has been identified as ethical concerns by feminists, my interest is somewhat different. My attention falls on integrating ethics into what has been identified as the political projects of feminisms. In the next sections my concern is more with what can be identified / conceptualised as a feminist ethics of political intention (*ibid.*) in Sri Lanka.
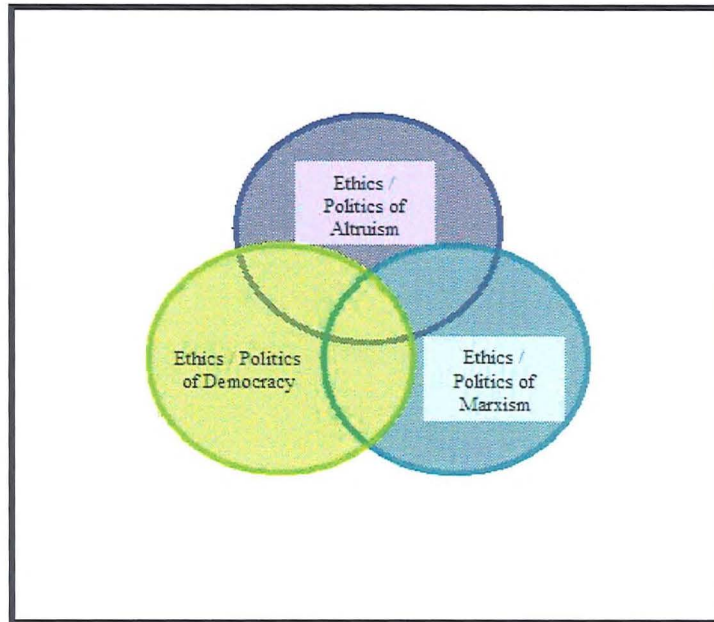
Diagram VI - Feminist Politics / Ethics

In the above Diagram, I portray a trio of political / ethical aspirations of feminist research and argue that they are integral to feminist politics.

However, I am not suggesting that the following are the only political / ethical impulses of feminisms in the country. Nor am I suggesting that they should be conceptualised as distinct from one another. Rather, I am posing the following ethical / political aspirations within feminisms as those that struck me as significant within the specific parameters of my research during the stages of analysing / writing up my work.

Ethics of Altruism

Take the sentiments of altruism as an ethical / political aspiration. In my study, respondent researcher Kiyana

responded thus to rural women and the conditions of poverty facing them:

> Sometimes you feel you walk into the field
> with these altruistic views - you know -
> wanting to do something for these women
> (Kiyana, 5/8/2005).

Here, the researcher identified her own altruistic intentions towards the women concerned. The women's standpoint adopted by her required the fusion of research with some form of a welfare intervention. The political intent of such an outlook is generally blended with ideologies of compassion and charity related to the Buddhist and Hindu practices of giving alms, as well as Christian and Islamic concepts of charity. It can also be associated with welfare and development approaches that see women as the passive beneficiaries of development (Buvinic, 1983; Moser, 1993; Wickramasinghe, 2000). The 'benevolence' of such a view is both politically and ethically oppressive and disabling as it denies the women concerned the full status of both intelligence and agency. The impression of the researched women is as inactive and perhaps even helpless (Chapter 6).

However, this reaction was actively resisted by another of my research informants:

> I don't want to place them (women
> concerned) in that marginal position
> because when you talk to them you find
> that they are very articulate, very
> conscious and very alert to the

> surroundings – both politically and
> otherwise. (Thamalini, 6/7/2005).

Thamalini was very conscious of the fact that the placement of the researched women in a marginal position was an imposition on the researched by the researcher. Marginality in this context was that of being positioned outside mainstream development interactions. Such a positioning contradicts and often hides the options and possibilities; agency and action open to the women concerned. Furthermore:

> giving away money reinforces the power
> balance between researchers and the
> respondents which is a big dilemma for all
> of us working in the field. It is a defensive
> act that distances them professionally
> (Deepa, 26/7/2005).

Deepa (*ibid.*) considered the implications of monetary and other donations within the researcher / respondent relationship. It reinforced power gaps and led to a ground culture of expectations from other researchers as well - apart from the possibility of data corruption.

However, there is an ethical dilemma in altruism. It is related to the level of abject poverty and suffering encountered by researchers in some situations. Take the example of a situation where existing conditions of economic poverty and the burden of multiple roles and domestic violence are compounded by the political forces of civil conflict and further exacerbated by an environmental disaster like the tsunami. There is no doubt about the myriad issues faced by women in such a

context. Here, I draw on my own experiences of researching; of how I faced highly complex emotions of compassion, guilt, helplessness and defensiveness when faced with such realities. In such an instance, the act of researching seems superfluous when confronted with the depths and dimensions of human suffering. While the women concerned faced multiple layers and intersects of oppression, their pressing needs however were material and welfare-oriented. Here, there is tremendous pressure on the researcher (implicitly and explicitly) to justify a research intervention that does not guarantee immediate (or if at all) any dividends for the researched.

Conversely, altruism is equally criticised for evoking inertia and dependency. Again, in the case of the tsunami-affected in Sri Lanka, as time went by, temporary welfare relief and recovery measures led to a culture of demand and dependency amongst the affected communities. This was especially so in situations which did not always offer long-term livelihood and other holistic options. However, here it is important to consider the ways in which welfare recipients are constructed in the public consciousness as psychologically defective (Fraser and Gordon, 1994)[126].

In view of our responsibilities to researched communities as feminists, sentiments of altruism, welfare and charity cannot be dismissed. Nor can

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[126] In fact, Fraser provides a genealogy of the term dependency in US welfare interventions highlighting the political and economic implications, and psychological stigma - especially for single black mothers.

interventions afford to ignore the burning material needs of women. On the other hand, research interventions that do not encourage self-reliance and long-term holistic empowerment (Sen and Grown, 1987; Batliwala, 1993; Wickramasinghe, 2000) of women[127] are also ethically / politically problematic. I will be discussing how researchers try to balance and resolve these ethical quandaries, and the expectations of the researched through methodological means (which in turn, may result in ethical compromise) later on in this chapter.

Ethics of Democracy

Another ethical / political factor that motivates feminist research is the goal of democracy. While democratic values in the country are rooted in the Buddhist philosophy of the sanctity of life, individual rights, equality, meritocracy, convergence and tolerance, modern democracy in Sri Lanka originated in some of the colonial interventions – specifically by the British from the 19th Century onwards. What are considered foremost as political principles are also ethical values that promote standards according to how life should be lived:

> If you think that 51% of any given population, (in Sri Lanka) is the population of women, and you see that they suffer more difficulties, more problems as human beings, then ... the

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[127] Admittedly, empowerment is a contested term. I use it here to indicate women's control over gender divisions, resources, sexuality, body and fertility, education and training, information and knowledge, mobility, governance and decision-making as well as the spirit and psyche.

research study has to be a vehicle for effective change (Gayathri, 21/7/2005).

In the above quotation, Gayathri discussed the wider feminist research project as that of fulfilling the rights of the majority of the population in Sri Lanka - women. Here, it is not only the issue of women's majority representation in the country, but also the issue of women's compounded difficulties, problems and suffering that comes to the fore. It is possible that the recurring idea of women as 'suffering' - physically and mentally - takes its origins from the Buddhist conceptualisation of karma, and life as suffering. Consequently, research is perceived as having a moral obligation to promote 'democratic and effective change' – to make things better. At the ground level of feminist research activism some of these democratic goals are visible in the anti-war and peace movements, free-trade zone activism, campaigns against violence against women, UN initiatives, and the lobby for women's political representation. Politically, the perspective reflected here and elsewhere in research involves conceptual frameworks pertaining to human rights, women's rights, empowerment, gender equity / equality, and justice.

While these have commonly been utilised as political / theoretical frameworks, I argue that they can also be seen and construed as the ethical aspirations of democracy. Kiribamune (1999) citing Lisewood argues for women's political participation:

> Democratic principles should ensure for everyone competitiveness in the political sphere and that elementary fairness should put women in some proportion to their numbers in the population (Kiribamune 1999:3).

In this case, democracy is seen as an ideal which if applied, can ensure women's equitable participation in politics. It assumes that competitiveness is inevitably fair. Unfortunately, democracy as an abstract ethical aspiration does not necessarily engage with the larger environment of political instability, harassment and violence that does not allow a level playing field for local women's political participation. Associated research on the subject by Kiribamune (1999) throws light on the structure and psychological deterrents discouraging women's access to politics.

Consequently, the ethical politics of democracy within feminisms are sometimes confined to abstract ideals that are only utopian possibilities. In other words, they may be impossible political / ethical ideals that cannot always be realised in the way that they have been conceptualised. Nevertheless, they form accepted ethical and political frameworks for research.

Ethics of Marxism

The politics of Marxism have been part of Sri Lankan women's movements from time to time - from women in the Labour movement of the mid-20th Century onwards to more contemporary agitations for better working conditions in the Free Trade Zones (Chapter 3).

However, such activities have not been confined to labour rights but have encompassed some of the same issues as the democratic agenda; the repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, the release of the first Tamil woman political prisoner and a peaceful solution to the ethnic conflict (Samuel, 2006; Samuel, 2006a).

Usually, the ethics of Marxist action are subsumed within its political objectives. Furthermore, much of Marxist action is in activism rather than research. Respondent Jayani (9/7/2005) made the point that the concept of feminist forms of activism is relative. For instance, it is possible to identify feminisms even when the language of feminisms was not available (Nesiah, 1996). Jayani argued (9/7/2005) that 'virtually anyone could be argued as being feminist'.

She (*ibid.*) qualified feminism in her understanding as being:

> based on the Marxist theorem that it is not enough to understand society, you had to change it. In applying that feminist consciousness you have to do something through the women's movements and never give up on the action - which has been there before - even before research started. So it is action research, and continuous action mixed with research (Jayani, 9/7/2005).

For Jayani, there was an ethical obligation in feminist research and activism to be contingent. On the other hand, Thamalini who works in a women's research NGO

talked of the ethical problem of such emancipatory research:

> We used to interact with the women at an ideological level – class is vital. But there are so many structures of oppression that we are not able to handle at the level of a researcher. So we stopped raising consciousness, alongside the research project. Because, what happens after you raise consciousness? (Thamalini, 6/7/2005)

Here, Thamalini problematised the Marxist concept of consciousness-raising that is seen as leading to emancipatory action. She made the point that consciousness-raising alone is insufficient to deal with the multiple forms of oppression faced by the women concerned. There is an ethical and political dilemma implied in concluding a research intervention in consciousness-raising when an NGO is not involved in community mobilisation. Thamalini's activism was not in organising these communities, but in gender training and lobbying at the different levels and institutions in society. While her organisation's interventions spanned from the individual to the structural, they did not always strengthen the capacity of the researched to direct their own futures (since this requires a more sustained effort on the part of a NGO).

I have argued so far that the apparent political agenda of feminisms - whether it is altruism, democracy or Marxism - has very strong ethical connotations that are founded on social reform. Researchers have strived to

fulfill these abstract political / ethical principles through strategic-thinking and tactical interventions. It is precisely the issue of the ethics of political strategising and action that I will be dealing with in the next section.

Feminist Ethics as Political Strategy and Action[128]

> Feminism begins with a reformist, I think it is more of a revolutionary impulse - like to change the world for the better for women specifically, and for everybody else in general - I suppose (Vivian, 5/8/2005).

Vivian talked about the 'transformative' element of feminist research (Harding, 1987a). She looked at it in a larger sense, as not only encompassing change for women, or for that matter, the individual woman, but also in wider social structures. In order to transform the political and ethical goals of research and writing, Sri Lankan researchers use various types of political strategies / action that can be conceptualised as the operationalisation of feminist political ethics.

For instance, respondent Vivian discussed the need for strategy in addressing the issue of feminism as a foreign concept quite humorously:

> I think that feminists and women's activists in Sri Lanka have realised that

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[128] Action here refers to political action.

feminism or any other women's activism is all perceived as a Western import and, therefore as I always say, along with ham, butter, cheese and bacon and sausage which are all seen as Western imports is not good for the local body, does not digest. Feminism too does not digest. So, therefore one has to find a way of introducing the topic of women and women's rights without resorting to a vocabulary perceived as that (5/8/2005).

Here, Vivian referred to the ultranationalist and populist sentiments floating around the country against westernisation / globalisation (Chapters 3 / 6) and how the indigenous is valued almost in physical terms. Accordingly, stereotyped notions of feminisms are decried as being from the West. In the face of such antagonism, she argues that it is necessary for feminists in the country to be strategic in raising feminist issues - for pragmatic reasons. This may entail not using the term feminist, constructing / representing indigenous histories of women's agitation, and including women in development / poverty frameworks. Such strategic action is deemed necessary so as not to alienate the women's constituency that may, in fact, harbour the same anti-western opinions (Chapter 6).

These political stratagems raise a number of potentially ethical issues. The de-linking from Western feminisms is designed for social acceptance; to slip in a feminist agenda without attracting undue attention from women and their communities. This raises questions about the honesty and credibility of the strategy. Though emphasising one strand of WR activism amongst many

(Chapter 6) is a pragmatic option, it is done as a political measure oppositional to 'Western feminisms'. This is because debunking fundamentalist and prejudiced worldviews of feminisms may not always be viable if the objective is to reach as many women as possible.

Thus the symbiosis of ethics and politics of feminisms is not unproblematic. A pragmatic approach weighs the pros of the political / ethical premise that feminisms are good or appropriate for the women concerned against that of the cons of strategic action and methods. Consequently, research impact comes under consideration.

Dhamani (27/7/2005) was in favour of 'academic research' as opposed to commissioned or action research which she saw as being restricted by timeframes, reportage and finances. Thamalini (6/72005) questioned the extent to which emancipatory knowledge can lead to individual awareness, and actual 'oppositional consciousness' or collective empathy and action (earlier section). Kiyana (5/8/2005) referred to an instance where a Muslim survivor of domestic violence actually left her husband and got a divorce after consciousness-raising sessions on violence against women. However, the subsequent ostracisation of this woman by her family and community raised different ethical issues - especially in a context where a woman's family and community play vital roles in her life. Where does the researcher's responsibility for raising-consciousness begin and end, given the different levels of oppression

and intersects of gender and other inequalities? While Maynard and Purvis (1994) refer to issues of social responsibility, ongoing support and boundaries between therapy and research, given the lack of capacity within the Sri Lankan context such follow-up interventions are not always possible.

Researcher Gayathri raised another point about the ethics of consequences – in terms of researching and lobbying based on the experiences of individuals:

> The fact is that you don't follow up on the person. You may end up getting something at a different level - for instance at the level of policy, but what about the individual? We don't have among women a support network where we are really able to follow these people's lives through and ensure that we have made a difference. I have the same feeling even for the tsunami when we go to these communities (21/7/2005).

She pointed out that despite the fact that there were policy achievements, the individual, whose experiences were used for research, lobbying, and campaigning was not systematically supported, especially in the long-term. The aim of political action may have been fulfilled, but what of the ethical?

Strategic Pragmatism

While researchers need to answer these critical questions, it does not detract from the fact that politics / ethics of consequences maintain the notion of the goodness of the research impact. Yet as illustrated by

the reservations of my respondents, the ethical goodness and political effectiveness of the research / action intervention cannot be guaranteed. In view of these difficulties, the ethics of consequences model is observed to be 'underlain by universalist cost-benefit result pragmatism' (Edwards and Mauthner, 2002: 20). I take this to mean that there is a practical rationale in feminist action that weighs the pros and cons of the political / ethical dimensions of the research intervention. I applied such a rationale to the ethical aspirations of research in the earlier section.

Thus, I take the position that both the ethical aspirations and actualisations of research do not take place in a vacuum. Wishva (25/8/2005) articulated that:

> as feminists, we have to use strategy, and
> we have to be pragmatic about it.

Therefore, a pragmatic approach is vital if research is to be relevant, useful and inspire change. In fact, I would go on to term this 'strategic pragmatism', due to the strategic nature of such a stance and action.

The institution of the Domestic Violence Bill (2005) into legislation in Sri Lanka exemplifies the point. The Women and Media Collective (WMC), a self-identified feminist organisation, had over the years, done a number of studies on violence against women. In the late 1990s, they, with the inputs of lawyers, drafted a Bill on Domestic Violence. This document was used to raise consciousness and lobby for legislation against domestic

violence at government, legislative, public and women's forums. Due to sustained activism by WMC as well as other women's organisations (such as CENWOR and WERC) and individual activists, the State was prevailed upon to draft its own Domestic Violence Bill. Though there were many theoretical and attitudinal differences between the two Bills (a key issue being the emphasis on children in the State version), in the end, women's groups supported the State version on the pragmatic grounds that any Bill on Domestic Violence sponsored by the State had a number of advantages. It recognised domestic violence as a legislative issue. It thus raised a degree of public consciousness about the practice. It possessed the capacity to provide women with some level of protection. Women's groups saw it as:

> a strategic battle that had not been finalised but that needed to be fought on many fronts, on many grounds, over a period of time, until we get what we want (Wishva, 25/8/2005).

Such rationalisation exemplifies the position of strategic pragmatism. On the other hand, strategic pragmatism has its own problematics. Some of the dominant women's groups and activists are politically and strategically selective in the causes that they espouse. While feminists have come out strongly on the more pervasive issues such as peace, political participation and domestic violence against women, the more tangible developments in the country have not always been taken up. For instance:

there is a lapse when it comes to collective
mobilisation on some of the issues we
have been working on – example is the
violence against women in politics.
Remember some years ago, the woman
who was stripped when she went
canvassing for a mainstream political
party. You know, we didn't take a stand
on that. Because we have steered clear of
party politics (Gayathri, 21/7/2005).

Here Gayathri, a leading women's rights researcher,
talked of the problems of bringing together women
when it came to a contentious political issue that
involved critiquing a political party. Because party
politics in the country is perceived as being highly
politicised, dirty, corrupt and violent, it has been
politically expedient for feminists to steer clear of taking
a stand on some of the local political issues. This has
been a strategic decision and a number of feminists
justify this stand on the basis that, if they are seen as
politically 'neutral' and independent on mainstream
political divisions, other concerns that are espoused by
feminists would acquire legitimacy. This is one instance
where strategic pragmatism becomes highly
problematic. In one sense, feminist ethics have been
compromised for the pragmatic purpose of maintaining
feminisms as disengaged from party politics in the
country. Yet, given the overall abject lack of integrity
within the Sri Lankan political scenario, the very
complicated stand of political neutrality while being a
myth from a feminist perspective, is very frequently
perceived as a position of opposition. Thus it is my
contention that as feminists we clearly need to rethink

our position in terms of how we engage in / with the mainstream politics in the country. Thus, strategic pragmatism is not a positioning that is without problems; nor is it a positioning without advantages.

Feminist Politics / Ethics as Methods

> We need to think of concrete methods to safeguard ethics (Dhamani, 27/7/2005).

Hitherto, I dealt with the ethical / political implications of conceptualising and operationalising feminist politics in research / action at a macro level. I now engage with ethics and politics at the micro-level – in research methods.

Responsibilities and Accountability

Here I do not separate concerns of epistemology from those of research practice. Following Mauthner, Birch, Jessop, and Miller (2002), I too argue for the ethical responsibility and accountability of a researcher for the feminist politics that she propounds and activates. Accordingly, I conceptualise such responsibility and accountability as directed towards the entire research process – from the moments of conceptual designing to data analysis, and from writing up to dissemination (Doucet and Mauthner, 2002). Yet, in this Chapter, I concentrate only on the following areas: the researcher and her family; the funders of research and research

participants; the discipline of Women's Studies and its epistemic community.

My interviews conveyed that being responsible and accountable for research processes began with the researcher and her family. After all, from a modernist perspective, the researcher needs to be true to herself in researching. This involves her clarity and honesty towards the various choices and decisions she makes; the ontological, ideological, epistemological and theoretical positions that she occupies; as well as her relations with those who come in contact with the research process. This further requires honesty in regard to research motivations, and responsibilities towards the consequences of research at the societal, institutional, epistemological and personal levels. Yet, such honesty is conceptualised according to postmodernist terms - not as an abstract principle but reliant on pragmatism, contingency and conscious subjectivity.

Externally, the researcher is responsible to the people and forces that allow for the opportunity and the freedom to pursue research. This includes the researcher's immediate family, funders, colleagues, and support staff. In Chapter 8, I discussed informant Vivian's (5/8/2005), Marxist interpretation of the two intersects of her responsibilities towards her children and the contributions of her domestic staff towards the production of her research. Thus the researcher needs to acknowledge and account to the people who provide

indirect as well as direct support for the research process.

Moreover, the personal advantages and benefits of the research for the researcher need to be made explicit. Researcher Sadia spoke of the ethical considerations of funded research and the:

> need to take into account the monetary aspect of research and personal economic imperatives that can drive research (29/10/2004).

This is because of the many political and economic forces as well as ontological politics in operation (Chapters 3 / 6). Other personal benefits such as the conferment of educational qualifications and promotions and the creation of academic or intellectual stature are considerations that require ethical analysis and explication.

Researcher honesty and critical assessment are also necessary regarding funding sources. Currently, some research organisations work according to unofficial internal criteria that arise from global politics. For instance, since the invasion of Iraq by the US in 2003, a number of researchers and research organisations have spurned funding from US state donor organisations.

Furthermore, the implications of the political and economic as well as ideological challenges faced by researchers and writers due to unfair research practices

need to be considered. These include global cutbacks in research funding, the imposition of donor interests, the disparity in payment for local and foreign researchers, and the politics of consultancies.

Sensitivity to Respondents

Concern about the relationship between researchers and respondents was also raised in my interviews. Take the ethical implications of interviewing women who were affected by war and (sometimes concurrently) the tsunami. Thus, researcher sensitivity and assurances of confidentiality in engaging with and representing those affected by psychological trauma were key issues. Researchers have to ensure that survivors / victims were not re-victimised through the interview / representation processes. My respondents highlighted the many aspects of interviewing such experiences of pain and suffering, loss and grief, abuse and humiliation, helplessness and despair:

> In writing up cases of violence against women I try to keep to strict human rights methodology and just stick to facts and try to minimise the salacious aspects of that and secondly, I try to give her voice, the voice of the person, than say, my own analysis of it. But you see in her own articulation of it, there is the first-hand experience of violence. You know the moment she reflects on it she sees herself as a victim... Kumerini (19/8/2005).

Kumerini (*ibid.*) raised two issues pertaining to representation. One is that of balancing facts with methodology so as to eliminate the sensationalist and

stimulating aspects of violence reportage. The voice of the respondent has to be recorded without being diluted. The other issue is one of compassion. She is highly sensitive to the fact that in the remembrance and articulation of violence the respondent is reliving her experiences for the research process. But of course, such retelling may also be 'a cathartic process for the women victims and survivors' as suggested by Wishva (25/8/2005) and there may be a deep psychological need to do so.

Sensitivity also includes ensuring that respondents are not exposed to political retaliation by organisations such as the LTTE, JVP or the government of Sri Lanka. Dhamani pointed out the importance of:

> dealing with women who are politically vulnerable, issues relating to what kind of reprisals can take place - changing names but presenting them in a way that they are not completely alienated from the context (27/7/2005).

She related an incident where the epistemic value of a particular respondent's narrative of LTTE atrocities was such that exposure in research would have jeopardised the respondent. Changing her name was not an option as she was highly recognisable in the village through her experience of victimisation. Consequently, this woman's account of violence had to be excluded from the research. Several issues come to the fore here - not only that of the grave risk of retaliation for the research respondent, but also those of exclusion in research,

authenticity in the representation of the respondent, validity in the representation of the respondent's experience as well as the researcher's decisive responsibility to the respondent and the research. The political ethics of research require prioritising and balancing the ethical implications of each issue not only *vis-à-vis* the research processes but also in regard to the larger reality. Thus, choice becomes crucial in the process of making meaning.

My own experiences of researching noted that sensitivity includes toning down or eliminating the overt display of indicators relating to the researcher's identity - in terms of class, race, and language – including dress and modes of transport. For example, I would not go into drought-stricken, poor villages of *Hambantota*[129] in the luxurious air-conditioned comfort of a *Prado* four-wheel drive, dressed in jeans. This would not only flaunt the class, power and privilege of the researcher, but it would also jeopardise rapport with respondents.

Stacey (1991) discusses some of the problematic issues of how researchers, in effect, manipulate respondents for the purpose of collecting / constructing data. Though an element of dishonesty towards respondents cannot be denied, it is important to question whether we are, as individuals, equally honest in all our professional relationships? Are there not particular aspects of identity that we highlight and mask (both consciously and subconsciously) in all relationships? Researchers need,

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[129] Hambantota is a town in the rural south of Sri Lanka.

however to achieve a balance between pragmatism and sensitivity in respondent relationships. While there is no necessity to hide one's identity, it may be required to soften identity markers to ensure that the interaction is as equitable as possible - to prevent cultural alienation. From a postmodernist perspective, it could be argued that no interaction is completely honest; nor is it possible or necessary to reveal oneself completely to others all of the time.

I have already indicated the politics of give-and-take at the village level when I discussed the ethics of altruism. The fulfilling of respondent expectations by researchers and activists is not limited to welfare interventions, but may also include such interactions as the filling out of application forms for jobs / relief, or formulating human rights petitions as indicated by Deepa (26/7/2005). It also involved constantly conveying the objectives of research to the communities, so as to prevent any misunderstandings.

One more point of interest pertaining to the representation of respondents is how researchers impose their own ideological standpoints and epistemological frameworks upon the respondents (take my own lapse – Chapter 2). For instance, take the contentious issue of domestic violence which some respondents view as the norm and not necessarily to be resisted. Simply, writing off such a perspective as false consciousness (Stanley and Wise, 1993) is problematic. An ethical dilemma arises when conceptualising of the horrendous action of

violence set against the needs of the woman in terms of economic support and family strength, and protection required from her husband. Furthermore, Dhamani pointed out:

> you may be reading into it a story of tremendous social survival but this may be not what the respondent experiences herself (27/7/2005).

Conversely, what the researcher portrays in terms of victimisation may well be perceived by the respondent as a story of survival. The necessity to temper interpretations by allowing or prioritising the respondents' narratives, perhaps using reflexivity in researcher intervention and inconclusive commentary are vital in this context. Moreover, the language politics of interviewing in either Sinhala or Tamil and then representing the respondents in English also poses a question about being as 'true' as possible to the respondents.

Epistemic Community

The researcher's responsibility and accountability to the discipline of Women's Studies and the concept of a feminist epistemic community (Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002), are other issues that concern Sri Lankan ethical politics. This imagined community, though not homogeneous, implies 'the negotiation of commonalities across differences' (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002:139) as well as some degree of empathy and loyalty. Yet, given the fact that ethics have not received

too much attention in local research texts, it is important to highlight the following issues.

One issue is that of the disregard of many researchers for preceding research done by local feminists (Chapter 5). Admittedly, there is a paucity of local theorisations on the whole. However, researchers do not always convey an awareness even of the many empirical studies done on such issues as domestic violence or women in conflict zones; nor do they offer extensive literature surveys. While Sri Lankan feminists of international standing are cited, there is indeed an overall sense that feminist research on certain topics is constantly being reinvented (Chapter 5). The lack of comprehensive surveying of local women's studies literature is a highly problematic ethical issue when considering the thirty years of women's research in the country. On the one hand, it is an insult to previous research, while on the other it prevents the institution of continuity, engagement and tradition in Sri Lankan Women's Studies. The scarcity of engagement with one another within Women's Studies, and the consequent dearth of lively discussion and debate is detrimental to the robustness of the discipline. While this thesis is one attempt to provide academic credibility to Sri Lankan Women's Studies, much more needs to be done in terms of researcher / writer interactions, literature searching, and theorising.

Arising from this is the related issue of plagiarism. Perhaps, this is due to the lack of formal training on

ethics and methodology, or perhaps, it is an issue of academic tardiness. Researchers talked of a number of instances where colleagues have plagiarised from their work with impunity. It is very much the notion of an epistemic community of feminists, of contributing towards collective knowledge-making that prevented Dhamani (27/7/2005) and Gayathri (21/7/2005) from taking action against plagiarism. Similarly, I too did not raise the issue when a friend did not acknowledge my verbal inputs into her work on many occasions. Of course, this is to be counterpoised with issues of academic practice such as the complex issues of intellectual honesty and the value of intellectual properties and copyright which need to be resolved. Another researcher, Sadia, brought up the crucial issue of feminists researching other feminists – in terms of the women's movement (discussed in Chapter 3). The researcher becomes the authority on the women's movement as a result of the research. The collective aspect of women's activism is diluted due to the lack of acknowledgements and the method of representation.

Given some of the ethical / political issues that researchers and I have raised within the Sri Lankan context, such as funding concerns and plagiarism, it is quite imperative that women's researchers, activists, and research organisations collectively formulate ethical guidelines for women's studies research.

In this chapter, I blended the political and ethical concerns of epistemology with those of research

practice. My macro-analysis of the politics / ethics in feminist research served to debunk the epistemological notion of ethics as values that are purely inspirational or motivational, and therefore not operable. However, the transition of politics / ethics from aspirations to on-ground action has not been without problems. Here, I have discussed the notion of pragmatic strategising to resolve some of the internal conflicts in combining politics and ethics. At the micro level, researchers are strongest in their consciousness of politics / ethics as research methods. But, apart from the research action of reflexivity, where do politics / ethics take the researcher in terms of concrete action and research methods? While some political / ethical issues in research can only be confined to their expression, others can be addressed through procedural codes of ethics and guidelines.

CONCLUSIONS

Making Meaning of Meaning-Making

A conclusion is a formal ending, an expression of prescriptive findings or a summary of an epistemic construction; a final judgment / deduction based on positivist reasoning or postmodern deconstructions. There are also expectations of recommendatory solutions that can be perceived as 'hegemonic arrogance' (Morley, 1999:185) from a conclusion. My conclusions are all of the above and more, in that they also conform to the anticipated arguments expected from a PhD thesis. They thus respond to the objectives of the research process.

As evinced by my research questions, my work has been an exploratory investigation / composition of feminist research methodology in Sri Lanka - given the dearth of literature on the subject. In all probability it is a comprehensive forerunner on the topic. Its originality has not only been in its research design / methodology and selection of subject, but also in its comprehensive construction / establishment / extension of the literature surveys of WR research in the country - given the limited work of Goonatilake (1985) and Wanasundera (1995).

This thesis has also provided the first exploratory literature survey of feminist research methodology in the country. Directed by my research question 6 as to the disciplines / multidisciplines of women's studies, my research has drawn illustrations from texts and researchers from development and English literature, anthropology and gender evaluations, disaster management and transgender research. Furthermore, it has recorded / composed some of the voices of researchers with regard to research methodology – even though for ethical reasons their subjectivity has not been fully constructed / represented. I believe that my work will provide a definitive foundational text and a launching pad for further research on feminist research methodology.

Thirty years of WR research in Sri Lankan have attempted to make meaning of the multiple dimensions and overlaps of women's realities in the country. It is this preliminary conclusion that informed the writing of this thesis. Researching research from the perspective of methodology, then, has been a process of making meaning of meaning-making.

Accordingly, Chapter 3 introduced and situated Sri Lankan Women's Studies in regard to Foucault's (1972) conceptualisations of *connaissance* and *savoir*. In response to all my research questions, this chapter found / discussed Women's Studies in the country as a form of research activism that combines the two concepts. It thus delineates both the epistemological / theoretical issues of

researching as well as the ground politics that are part of the research process.

My research questions 1 and 2 as to the theoretical frameworks and concepts of WR research directed me to researchers' theoretical assumptions pertaining to research as women's, gender and feminist research. Engagement with my respondents, textual data, reading and conceptual analysis established that women constituted a new paradigm in knowledge production and meaning-making - rather than a category of research. Thus in Chapter 4, I recorded how the paradigm of women involved the politicisation of the two concepts of women / woman. I concluded that the homogeneity and generalisations as well as the particularities, differences and essentialisms implied by the focus on women / woman were primarily forms of modernist / postmodernist meaning-making. This partially answered my research questions 3, 4 and 5 as to how knowledge is constructed, the practicalities, limitations and challenges of applying WR methodologies and what constitutes feminism.

Women as a paradigm served the political aims of WR research (such as consciousness-raising, action and policy objectives) through the constructions of absence and presence or passivity and dynamism. Thus, despite the theoretical criticisms, contradictions and complexities associated with such concepts globally, they had strategic value locally.

Sri Lankan WR research was done on the basis of prevailing ontologies and dominant epistemologies, utilising specific theoretical frameworks and research methods, directed by a sense of politics and ethics. In response to question 3 (of how research processes construct knowledge), I amalgamated / conceived of these specific aspects of research methodology into an epistemological structure of a case study. This was because pioneering work in the area required a holistic construction of feminist research methodology as opposed to a specific focus on one aspect of methodology. This innovative methodology of simultaneously case studying a theoretical concept and materiality was done according to the specificities of the Sri Lankan situation which struck me as being significant from a methodological perspective during the time of researching. It automatically resulted in the formation of a framework for feminist research methodology centred on intersects of ontology, epistemology, method, theory and politics / ethics. Thus, my conclusions have already been partially worked into the frame and body of the thesis.

This methodological framework (with all its modernist / structural connotations) that has been proposed by me is one that can be applied when researching in any context. However, its objective is not only to unify the various aspects of research methodology, but also to engage with the differences, conceptual complexities, intersects and commonalities of research methodology. Furthermore, it is a contingent framework – since

aspects of what I have considered as research methodology (ontology, epistemology, methods, theory and political ethics) are dependent on the possibilities, certainties, pragmatism and contingencies of each research situation:

> Tracing contingencies means uncovering particular complexes of determinations which contribute to a given outcome (Andermahr, Lovell and Wolkowitz, 1997:47).

My framework of feminist research methodology discerned / accounted for the intersections and overlaps of the different aspects of research methodology in Sri Lanka. These interactions were found / conceived as unequal / overlapping / subjective and time / context-based.

For instance, the politics and ethics concerning the representation of women affected by war were also seen / conceptualised as a method. Epistemology involving gender mainstreaming was perceived / thought of as ontology since the outcome of such epistemology impacted on women's realities within institutions. Such ontology was argued to have resulted in generating further epistemology in terms of gender analysis and training. Given the focus of my thesis on theories of knowledge making, theory became epistemology (such as standpoint). Method was epistemology in literature reviewing; I also found / constructed literature reviewing as an epistemic project. For me, these aspects of research methodology were not to be compartmentalised

into single categories. Rather, the recurrences / overlaps of these aspects were to be accounted for and unified within a meta-framework on feminist research methodology.

The methodological framework for feminist researching is illustrated in the following pages.

Framework for Making Meaning (Table III)

Aspects of Methodology	Need to account for	Conclusions	Modernist Significance	Postmodernist Significance
Methods	**The Literature Review as an epistemic project in researching**	Many literature reviews ignore extensive local research Gaps in local discursive knowledge Primacy of Feminist empiricism in research activism Literature reviewing is epistemology	Establishes local research cannons / knowledge Provides definitions / classifications Gives legitimacy / authority in the field Confined to *Connaissance*	Other influencing factors of history / culture (*savoir*) can be ignored Subjective process of selecting and rejecting of research texts
Ontology	**Ontology is conceived not only as grand conceptualisations, but also as minor ontological politics** Feminist Internationalisms Feminist Localisms Feminist Reformative Intents Feminist Personal Political Interests	These minor / multiple ontologies direct research epistemologies Epistemologies also direct ontologies Ontologies and epistemologies overlap one another.	These ontologies can be seen as a form of competing politics. Ontology is *savoir* Epistemology is *connaissance*	Matrix of multiple ontologies that are concurrent and unequal in the way they influence research. Epistemologies also impacts on ontologies

Framework for Making Meaning (Table III)

(contd.)

Aspects of Methodology	Need to account for	Conclusions	Modernist Significance	Postmodernist Significance
Epistemology	**Gender as a way of meaning-making that is an aspect of being / doing** **Gender as ontology** Heterosexual / homosexual distinctions Specific gender identity based on differences Universalised state of women Gender as abstractions / personifications Gender as prototypes **Gender as Epistemology** Gender theoretical concepts and frameworks Gender analysis Gender political aspirations Gender methodologies	Gender -- not a category of research, but an epistemology Epistemology directs ontology And ontology directs epistemology Gender as epistemology is gender as ontology and *vice versa*	Structural analysis of gender Meta conceptualisations	Modernist conceptualisations of gender undermined by differences / fragmentations / discontinuities / instability Subjective / indefinite / incomplete conceptualisations of gender ontology and epistemology Cyclic relationship between gender ontology and gender epistemology

Framework for Making Meaning (Table III)

(contd.)

Aspects of Methodology	Need to account for	Conclusions	Modernist Significance	Postmodernist Significance
Theory	**The pros and cons of theorisation** **Intersects and standpoints of knowledge** Gender Ethnicity Class Language Sexuality Discipline Region Ideology / Politics Counter-nationalism **Situatedness in time / in the face of change**	Need to simultaneously build on commonality while accounting for difference There are possibilities of meta-theory, middle-order theory, travelling / nuancing theory, beginning theory and grounded theory for WR research. Theory on knowledge is epistemology	Meta theorisations on local methodological debates Theorisations / typologies of standpoint based on unity	Multiple intersects of categorisations Unstable personalised selections and rejections of researchers' discourses Deconstructions / contestations
Politics / Ethics	**Ethics / Politics based on aspirations of goodness** Altruism Democracy Marxism **Ethics as an operational strategy and action** **Ethics / politics as methods in researching**	Feminisms not a category of research but is defined by ethics and politics Politics and ethics symbiotic Politics / ethics is ontology and epistemology Necessity for strategic pragmatism	Politics based on assumptions of the goodness of the research intervention Categorisations of goodness based on commonalities	Goodness undermined by strategic pragmatism / contingencies / practicalities Overlaps and intersects of the catgorisations of politics / ethics

Source: my research data (2003-2007)

Despite the dangers of the certainties of research conclusions (Morley, 1999), I firmly believe that researching needs to have a practical outcome that is useful (at the specific level, or at a wider social level or at the level of the academic discipline of Women's Studies or all three). It is on the basis of such an understanding that I have proposed the above methodological framework / process for Sri Lankan feminist research methodology[130]. However, it is not a fixed or stable or hegemonic conceptualisation but a fluid potential that is applicable in a pragmatic way. The objective of such an exercise has been to infuse / combine better the abstract methodological concerns of researching not only with the specificities of a particular research project but also with larger social concerns and *vice versa*. To reflect the specific interests and possible policy concerns in the processes of researching. This would not only highlight the political relevance of feminist research but also make the research process more transparent, efficient, useful and methodologically rigorous.

As implied by all my research questions, I saw the need to account for the ontological forces that impact on a research process. In fact, I saw / constructed researching as a form of activism that was fuelled by what was seen / conceived of as feminist internationalisms, feminist localisms, feminist personal political interests and the impetus of feminist reformative impulses (Chapter 6). Feminist localisms, for instance, related to

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[130] This was prompted by my supervisor Anne Gold.

the issues arising from Sri Lanka's development processes, the protracted conflict and periodic ceasefires, the natural disaster of the tsunami and the generally unstable political situations in the country. Other concurrent and competing realities that intermittently fashioned research processes in Sri Lanka included the influences of the UN agendas over the years as well as the engagement of local feminists with women's issues at transnational and regional levels. These, as well as gender mainstreaming intents within institutions / disciplines / projects provided further ontological impetus for research. Lastly and undeniably, the internal personal standpoints and politics of the researcher affected the type, theme, and methodology of research, and were also strategic responses to the backlash against feminisms. The research / writing produced epistemologies, which I found / conceptualised as symbiotic with these ontological politics. This conveyed the interlinks not only between the competing politics of the nature of realities and assumptions about knowledge, but also the other aspects of this methodological framework such as feminist ethics, theories and methods.

Theories about knowledge or epistemologies were crucial factors in the consideration of research methodology. In elaborating on research questions 1, 2, 3, and 4 (as to the theoretical concepts / frameworks, how knowledge / meaning is generated as well as the practicalities, challenges and limitations of research methodology), I explored one particular epistemology -

that of gender – as one that is based on a person's sense of being / doing or perceptions of reality (Chapter 7). I found / conceived how gender ontology can be considered gender epistemology, or a foundation for knowledge in multiple and differing ways. I also theorised on how epistemology became / could be constructed as ontology even though this was not a continuous / stable process.

Gender ontology was found to occur / was conceived in conjunction with other aspects of being / doing like class, race, religion, language, sexuality, and religion. It involved gender identification or differentiation (such as Sinhala or Tamil womanhood, or transgendering); and gender as an abstract (as encompassing a universal category of women or the specificity of one abstract woman). It conceived of gender - being men and women as relational constructs (especially within the traditional heterosexual household unit). Gender was also personified as objects and concepts through a more conventional linguistic take. And finally, there was the end result of gender as a prototype in terms of gender mainstreaming for programmes, organisations, and disciplines.

These conceptualisations of gender as ontology led to gender epistemology. Gender epistemology was seen / thought of as consisting of: firstly, theoretical concepts and frameworks (such as patriarchy, gender constructions, gender ideology, social backwardness and social control). Secondly, epistemology also constituted

of gender analysis through formal frameworks and informal practices. Thirdly, there were the stated political aspirations of gender and fourthly, the related gender methodologies that have been developed to transform gender ontologies at institutional levels. My broader theoretical point here was that gender epistemology within the Sri Lankan context reiterated the cyclic link between research ontology and epistemology.

Another methodological aspect that required attention was that of the multiple research methods that were employed for data generation, analysis and writing up. My research questions 3 (on how knowledge / meaning is generated), and 4 (on the advantages / limitations / challenges of methodology) led to the identification that the reviewing of local literature was a particular lapse in many Sri Lankan research studies (Chapter 5). The fact that research looked solely to international studies to establish epistemic genealogies and ignored some of the Sri Lankan works resulted in the reinvention of the wheel in many instances. By concentrating on my own literature review of Sri Lankan feminist research methodology, I highlighted the importance of the method of literature reviewing as an epistemic project that established an indigenous bank of knowledge.

Within Sri Lanka research involved empirical studies, action research, fusion methodology and a consideration of history and cultural factors for researching. Of course it was kept in mind that the act of reviewing was a

socially constructed and individually interpreted action that had certain ontological limitations. But its value as an epistemological project cannot be underestimated; consequently, literature reviewing was not simply a method, but also part of the epistemology of a research project.

Theory on methodology was another area in Sri Lankan research that required attention - as certain types of research had avoided deeper and broader analysis of the research methodologies being applied. The focus of all my research questions made me realise that my work needed to be grounded in some of the polarising political and methodological concerns and debates in Sri Lanka (such as the allegations that feminism is a foreign import or assumptions about women's, feminist and gender research as discussed in Chapters 3 / 6 / 8 /9). Furthermore, research needed to have a feminist methodological positioning that took into account the diversity and intersects of feminist theory, standpoints, intersects and situatedness of Sri Lankan researchers (Chapter 8). These involved identity standpoints of a women's perspective, a mother, South Asia or Asian; disciplinary and class situatedness, as well as the theoretical positioning of counter-nationalism and ideological politics.

On the one hand, researchers' interactions with theory involved a wholesale resistance to theorisations. On the other hand, theorisations were nuanced: in terms of meta-theorisations, middle-order theory, gounded theory

as well as the possibilities of research 'beginning' theory, and 'traveling' theory (Said, 1983).

In Chapter 9, I argued that feminisms were not a category of research; but rather, that feminisms involved the synthesis of the politics / ethics of research activism. Again, as directed by research questions 1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5 / 6, I saw / conceived of the ethical political dimensions of feminisms as constituting of three levels. Firstly, ethics and politics were aspirational - inspired by goals of altruism, democracy and Marxism though they were not always exclusive of one another. Secondly, they were related to strategy and action, in terms of their relevance to social change through consciousness-raising, policy reform and action research. Here feminist politics / ethics were seen as strategically pragmatic. Thirdly, the politics / ethics of feminisms involved the application of methods relating to the honesty, accountability, responsibilities and sensitivity of the researcher.

There is no doubt that generalising through meta-frameworks and making 'grand theory' was problematic in a postmodernist sense. Yet, deconstruction on its own terms could have resulted in a nihilistic project – in practical terms. Thus it was my theoretical position that a synthesis of postmodernism and modernism as a dual and concurrent process makes for more acute knowledge production and meaning-making. Making meaning required a simultaneous process of both theorising and deconstructing in different ways. For instance,

theorising involved analysing to find / construct commonalities / classifications / unifications / generalisations. At the same time, deconstructing entailed looking for differences and composing fragmentations / multiple meanings / instabilities / contradictions. Rather than seeing / conceptualising these two approaches as contradictory and in conflict, I saw / conceptualised the two approaches as complementing one another. The fusion of these two ways of making meaning made for a critical understanding of the research topic. Here, I strongly rejected the requirement to conform to a singular viewpoint. Thus, I have further contributed a theoretical approach to the field of Women's Studies that blends together facets of modernism and postmodernism.

Furthermore, it was my unstated position that dominant academic epistemology and methodology which demanded definitive and critical inputs / perspectives and rejections were, in the final analysis, a negative and devastating exercise. My work was thus not founded on the critique of feminist research or research methodology in Sri Lanka. In promoting a more inclusive and accepting approach, I did not intend to establish another binary opposition of inclusivity *versus* rejection. Rather, my specific outlook was based on the fusion of available methodological approaches for strategic purposes that took into account the underlying conflicting and complementary 'realities' of the ground situation and individual experiences. It was a pragmatic

approach that was concerned with inclusivity of multiple approaches – though not necessarily on an equal basis.

As noted earlier, my work construes a beginning on feminist research methodology in Sri Lanka. It is based on the assumptions that the consciousness of research methodology (reflexivity) and studying feminist research methodology are useful not only for the political / ethical objectives of research, but also for methodological rigour and credibility.

Interestingly, my actual process of researching has had some impact on the feminist circuit and discourse within the country. Firstly, I have already contributed substantially towards creating consciousness about the importance of considering research methodology in conducting research. This has been due to my interviews with researchers and informal discussions about my work. The interactive interviews, selected presentations at conferences and seminars and partial publication of my ongoing work have served to create interest in methodology amongst the small but influential feminist circuit in the island. Researchers have started to delve into the implications of their own work, and are thereby, becoming more reflexive.

Publication of this thesis in the form of a book is foreseen internationally for purposes of scholarly legitimacy given the bias towards international publications in the country. In Sri Lanka, I will be presenting my work in women's studies / other *fora* in

order to create consciousness and excite academic debates on research methodology. This will serve to rectify the dearth not only of feminist research methodology but also of research methodology *per se*. The universities (of Kelaniya, Colombo and Peradeniya and the Open University) as well as the research institutions of the NGO sector (such as CENWOR, SSA and WERC) will be targeted by me for training workshops on feminist research methodology to give my work practical / operational value. *I* also intend instituting a course on feminist research methodology at my university.

I am grateful to and feel that I have an obligation towards the interviewees who contributed their time and knowledge to this meaning-making process and to the Gender Equity in Commonwealth Higher Education Project. Consequently, I intend sending those concerned copies of the thesis once it has been published.

In the wider context of the global epistemic community of Women's Studies, I believe that the publication of my work will encourage scholars to reconsider some of the following methodological issues. This involves the adaptation of my framework on feminist research methodology in researching for social transformation in a country like Sri Lanka - given the various political ontologies. It also involves the possibilities of case-studying praxis and of utilising the fusion of positivist and postmodernist approaches in research. It further involves valuing the conceptual notion of 'beginning

theory' through research - rather than conforming to full-blown theorisations that have hegemonic legitimacy within Western research.

The limitations of my work were centred on my research focus. I provided a panoramic visual of feminist research methodology as opposed to a more in-depth study. This may have necessarily resulted in a lack of deeper engagement with the issues raised. Furthermore, other areas of methodological importance (such as intuitive research methodology, the application / construction of the concept of patriarchy and women's rights frameworks, case studies of the ways in which ethics / politics were operationalised) can be identified as requiring further research inputs.

In any case, given the fact that researching is a process founded not only on ground data, but also on subjectivity and global disciplinary developments, there are boundless possibilities for further study in terms of specific subject areas and approaches on research methodology in Sri Lanka.

If I were to repeat this study, it would still be reliant on the specific experiences that I would undergo during the period of researching. I believe that these enhance or diminish a researcher's sensitivities towards particular perspectives and aspects of research. Methodologically, it is my position that research would always be partial and incomplete and therefore needs to be accepted and engaged with on those terms. Thus, even if I had

redrawn my interview schedule to encourage more anecdotal responses, I have no doubt that there would still be other perceived lapses.

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APPENDIX I

Sample Email

Dear ......,

As I told you, I am pursuing my PhD at the Institute of Education, University of London. I am looking at women-related research methodologies and am currently engaged in interviewing 'women-related' researchers in Sri Lanka. I am looking at 'research methodology' in the broadest sense possible (at the moment) to include assumptions regarding women-related research, research motivations, methodological approaches to research, and ethical issues. Consequently, I am interested in the following –

1) Your opinions / experiences of researching on women, gender, and feminist issues in Sri Lanka,
2) Your usage of various methodologies (including theories, standpoints, concepts, methods, ethics etc.) in your research studies and,
3) The challenges and problems of researching on women's, gender and feminist issues in the local context.

As an experienced researcher in the field, I was wondering whether you would be willing to share your views and experiences of researching in Sri Lanka. This will involve a face to face interview of approximately one hour, at a time and place convenient to you - preferably during the next two weeks. Please be assured, that I will maintain confidentiality vis-à-vis the interview - as all respondents will be anonymised for the study. I would be very grateful if you could spare the time for this, and look forward to your response.

Many thanks and best wishes,
Maithree

APPENDIX II

Sample Mail
Maithree Wickramasinghe
115 Fifth Lane
Colombo 3
257-3974 / 257-3308
maithreeuk@yahoo.co.uk

....

C/o The International Centre for Ethnic Studies
No 8 Kynsey Terrace
Colombo 7

2nd July 2005

Dear ....,
Interview on Experiences in Researching

As you may be aware, I am currently pursuing my PhD at the
Institute of Education, University of London. I am looking
at women-related research methodologies and am currently engaged
in interviewing women-related researchers in Sri Lanka. I am
interested in the following -
1) Researchers' experiences of researching on women, gender, and
feminist issues in Sri Lanka,
2) Their usage of various theories, concepts, methodologies,
methods, etc. in research,
3) And the challenges and problems of researching on women's,
gender and feminist issues
As a prominent researcher in the field, I was wondering whether
you would be willing to share your views and experiences of
researching on the topic in Sri Lanka. This will involve an initial
face to face interview of approximately one hour, at a time and
place convenient to you - preferably from the week starting 11th
July or the week starting 1st August. Please be assured, that I will
maintain confidentiality *vis-à-vis* the interview - as all respondents
will be anonymised for the study. I would be very grateful if you
could spare the time for this, and look forward to your response.

Many thanks and best wishes,
Yours truly,

Maithree

APPENDIX III

Interview Schedule Researchers

Thank you for your time and for agreeing to share your researching experiences with me. I do appreciate your intellectual contribution.

I would also like to assure you that I will maintain confidentiality with regard to what you say – as all researchers are anonymised in the study.

I am looking at women-related research methodologies - for instance I'm looking at researchers' assumptions about research, their research methods, theoretical frameworks and concepts, research problems and challenges as well as ethics. In fact, at how they make meaning through the research process.

1. Just for the record, in what areas or types of women-related research have you been involved in up to now? (Examples)

2. You are a researcher researching women. Do you identify with any particular school of thought?

3. Why did you decide to get involved in researching women?

4. Have you ever used any feminist theories / methods methodologies? Such as? Why? Why not?

5. What type of aims and objectives did you hope to achieve through your WR studies? What are your short / long term goals?

6. What made you select these particular research areas / topics / issues on women?

7. How are your studies funded?

8. What challenges have you faced, if any, in executing your research? How did you overcome the challenges?

- Methodological approach to a research question / problem?
- Conceptualising or designing a research study?
- Methods?
- Particular theoretical frameworks / concepts? From? Examples (If yes, Why? How? / If no, why not?)
- Theoretical challenges in researching on women / gender?
- Empirical work in the field / data collection?
- Literature and documentary searching? Or literature reviews?
- Data analysis or writing up?
- Experienced any ethical issues?

9. From your experience, what kind of discoveries have you made about researching women?
(Gaps / left out / strategies / difference / contrary to expectation / positive images / progressive action etc.)

10. Have you made recommendations or advocated any course of action through your research? (Examples) For whom? At what levels?
(Women's participation / institutional gender mainstreaming / policy changes / etc.)

11. Has your research ever been tied up to any other interventions or outcomes? (Policy / development projects / other action) (Examples)

12. Have you ever felt that there are some women's problems / issues that contemporary research methodologies cannot address? Examples? Why?

13. Were your research studies published? By? Funding?

14. Aside from other forms of activism, do you know if there were ever any wider outcomes / societal / legislative developments that could perhaps be linked to your research?

15. When you look at WR in SL as a whole, what do you see as producing research priorities in Sri Lanka?

- What should be the current research priorities?
- What do you see as being left out?

Is there anything about WR research methodology that I have not covered and that you would like to mention?

Do you have any comments regarding this Interview Schedule, my interviewing style and the interviewing process that you would like to share?

Thank you