Sri Lanka’s ‘Widows of War Heroes’ and the Governmentality of Empowerment

by

Laura Callaghan

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for a Degree of:

Honours Bachelor of Arts in International Development Studies

University of Toronto at Scarborough

2015
This thesis explores the role of a women’s empowerment program in sanctioning and reinforcing gendered discourses of neoliberalism and militarization. I apply a governmentality lens to analyze how the program’s structure, implementation, and omissions both reflect and reproduce neoliberal and militarized rationalities. Through the narratives of those involved, I explore the processes by which these rationalities came to exert themselves through the program, and how they were adapted and resisted by participants.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REGIONAL MAP</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Outline</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governmentality</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governmentality and Development</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Review of the Literature</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neoliberalism</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Militarization</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positioning the Researcher</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of the Data</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Impacts of Interruption</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. SITUATING SRI LANKA</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographics</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonial History and Ethnic Tensions</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil War</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Meanings of Widowhood</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ‘War Widows’</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Militarization in Sri Lanka</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Neoliberal-Military Nexus</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. THE RVSA-SEEDS WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM (WEP)</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profile of the WEP Participants</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of the WEP</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. ANALYSIS</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESD</td>
<td>Enterprise Services Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FTZ</td>
<td>Free Trade Zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GoSL</td>
<td>Government of Sri Lanka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JVP</td>
<td>Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LTTE</td>
<td>Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Mahila Samakhya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rs</td>
<td>Rupees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RVSA</td>
<td>Rana Viru Seva Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEEDS</td>
<td>Sarvodaya Economic Enterprise Development Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNP</td>
<td>United National Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEP</td>
<td>Women’s Empowerment Program</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1.0: Study Area: Participants Resided in villages located within the outlined area (CIA 2000).
1.0 INTRODUCTION:

Development literature is rife with research investigating how and why projects fail to meet their intended goals. Yet as James Ferguson suggests, development initiatives have impacts beyond their stated objectives, whether they meet those objectives or not:

...it may be said that what is most important about a 'development' project is not so much what it fails to do but what it achieves through its 'side effects’. Rather than repeatedly asking the politically naive question 'Can aid programs ever be made really to help poor people?', perhaps we should investigate the more searching question, 'What do aid programmes do besides fail to help poor people? (Ferguson, 1994, p. 180)

The unintended (or merely unacknowledged) effects of development interventions are revealing and important to examine. Thus I have crafted this thesis to attempt to illuminate some of the ‘side effects’ of a women’s empowerment program for the widows of armed forces servicemen in the Western Province of Sri Lanka.

This study does not seek to determine whether the program met its targets, nor does it scrutinize the reasons why it succeeded or failed in doing so. Rather, this thesis explores the program’s role in sanctioning and reinforcing gendered discourses of neoliberalism and militarization. I apply a governmentality lens to analyze how the program’s structure, implementation, and omissions both reflect and reproduce neoliberal and militarized rationalities. Through the narratives of those involved, I explore the processes by which these rationalities came to exert themselves through the program, and how they were adapted and resisted by participants.
The following sections of this chapter provide a background for the study and give an outline of the structure of the thesis.

1.1 BACKGROUND:

From July 2005 to May 2006 I had the great privilege to work as an intern for Sarvodaya, the largest local Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) in Sri Lanka (Clark, 2005). Sarvodaya was founded by Dr. A.T. Ariyaratne in 1958, based on a Buddhist-Gandhian philosophy of promoting self-help, collective support, non-violence, and peace to achieve the sustainable empowerment of all people, regardless of their ethnic or religious identity (Sarvodaya, 2006). I was stationed at the headquarters of the economic arm of the organization, which was located in a town called Moratuwa in the Western Province of Sri Lanka. This branch of Sarvodaya was named ‘Sarvodaya Economic Enterprise Development Services’ (SEEDS), and it was responsible for providing savings, loans, business development services, and technical training to members of Sarvodaya to promote their economic wellbeing.

My primary task at SEEDS was to help in assessing the potential of a microinsurance scheme; the provision of insurance products with very low premiums to help poor households lacking access to formal insurance to protect themselves against risks including the death of the family breadwinner, severe or chronic illness in the family, or the loss of assets such as livestock and housing. While I thoroughly enjoyed working on this project, my favorite part of the workday was the twice daily teatime when the women of this predominantly male division would gather in the large office area I shared with the Managing Director’s administrative staff. Most of the women could speak English, so we would talk and gossip over Maliban biscuits and cups of sweet milky tea.
It is during teatime that I met Thiru, an extremely intelligent and charismatic woman who worked as a consultant for Sarvodaya’s Tamil outreach initiatives. Thiru was Tamil, but she spoke fluent Sinhala because her husband was Sinhalese. He had passed away years before I met her, but Thiru spoke of him often and how much she missed him. She was the first person to draw my attention to the constraints placed on widowed women in Sri Lanka. She recounted the scoldings she had received from family members and neighbors for her refusal to remove her pottu (a dot of vermillion frequently applied by Tamil women to their foreheads after marriage). For Thiru, the pottu was a visible sign of her religion and ethnicity, a practice that many Tamil women felt forced to abandon during times of heightened conflict in order to avoid singling themselves out from the Sinhalese majority. Thiru considered her pottu to be a marker of her identity, and she was not willing to give it up after the death of her husband.

Her decision created tensions between herself and others, as Tamil widows are commonly expected to eschew the pottu, flowers, and other decorations in favour of conservative clothing and hairstyles to signify of their widowed status. However, according to Thiru herself, she is “stubborn as a mule” and extremely headstrong in her opinions. She refused to conform to the dress and behavioural codes of widowhood. In fact she began to wear more daring clothing than ever before and chopped off her hair in a “modern cut”. She used her shock of short silver hair and colourful wardrobe to visibly resist the notion that a widow must maintain an austere appearance.

Thiru acknowledged that her ability to refuse to act and dress like a widow rested on her privilege as a middle class woman. She was not financially dependent on others, so although her family and some of her neighbors objected to her mode of dress she could choose to ignore them. She noted that women who are more reliant on family and community ties do not have the same

5
luxury; they frequently must toe the line or risk being shunned by community members and cast out by their family members without the means to provide for themselves.

Thiru and I had many conversations about feminism, women’s rights, and widowhood in Sri Lanka, and she informed me that SEEDS had run a program from the year 2002 to 2005 to empower the widows of the (predominantly Sinhalese) members of the Sri Lanka Army who had died in the war, but that it had ended due to “lack of interest”. I decided to gather as much information as I could about this program, to learn what it consisted of, why it ended, and what its impacts were. The program was called the RVSA-SEEDS Women’s Empowerment Program (WEP), and my curiosity about it led to this thesis.

1.2 RESEARCH OUTLINE:

This thesis is organized into seven chapters which comprise my analysis, the first being this introduction. Chapter two discusses the history and contemporary usage of the concept of governmentality and how other researchers have applied it within the field of development. Chapter two also provides conceptualizations of militarization and neoliberalism.

Chapter three outlines my methodology, locating my positionality as a researcher, and then giving an overview of the research process. I discuss my methods of data collection, my analytical approach, and some concerns and limitations regarding my research.

Chapter four is devoted to situating Sri Lanka, first laying out its demographics and providing a brief history its colonization, ethnic relations, and the Sri Lanka Civil War. I then explore local meanings of widowhood, and attempt to contextualize the notions of militarization and neoliberalism by discussing their forms, functions, and significance in Sri Lanka.
Chapter five contains an introduction to the RVSA-SEEDS Women’s Empowerment Program (WEP). It gives a profile of the participants and a detailed overview of the activities of the WEP and the different actors involved in its implementation.

Chapter six contains my analysis of how militarization and neoliberal governmentality operated through the structure and implementation of the WEP, and the forms of compliance, violence, ambivalence, and resistance expressed by the program coordinators and participants.

Chapter seven offers some tentative conclusions and discussion of the findings of the study.
2.0 THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK:

The following chapter outlines the theories, perspective and concepts that guide my analytical approach, beginning with an overview of the history of the concept of governmentality, its contemporary usage, some criticisms and limitations of the term, and its applications within the field of development. I then discuss the conceptualizations of neoliberalism and militarization that will be applied in this thesis.

2.1 GOVERNMENTALITY:

Michel Foucault’s concept of governmentality forms the core of the analytical approach I take in this study. The term governmentality is a neologism that semantically links the concept of governing (“gouverner”) with modes of thought or rationality (“mentalité”) to signal that an analysis of technologies of power requires an examination of the political rationalities underpinning them (Lemke, 2011). Foucault had in mind a more comprehensive meaning of ‘government’ than is commonly understood today, encompassing not just management by the state but also the management of communities, households, the self, and even the direction of the soul:

This word [government] must be allowed the very broad meaning which it had in the sixteenth century. ‘Government’ did not refer only to political structures or to the management of states; rather, it designated the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed: the government of children, of souls, of communities, of families, of the sick. It did not only cover the legitimately constituted forms of political or economic subjection but also modes of action, more or less considered or calculated, which were destined to act upon the possibilities of action of other people. To govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of action of others. (Foucault, 1982, p. 789-780)
Foucault described government as “the conduct of the conduct” (2003, p. 138), and he employed the concept of governmentality to demonstrate how the autonomous individual and the sovereign state shape each other’s emergence (Lemke, 2011).

The term governmentality has since been defined and used broadly to examine “the ‘how’ of governing” (McKee, 2009, p. 466). That is, how governable subjects are produced and discursively constituted through particular techniques, programs and strategies. This is achieved through analysis of both the discursive field in which the exercise of power is rationalized, and the corresponding interventionist practices in which individuals and groups are governed (McKee, 2009). A governmentality perspective is useful in an analysis of power relations because it illuminates the process by which certain mentalities of rule are made technical and practical within organized practices for directing human conduct. This approach does not seek to determine the truth or merit of political rationalities, but rather how they are constructed as objective knowledge and used to shape human behaviour towards particular ends (Rose, 1999).

Governmentality addresses the role of individual acts of self-governance in the regulation of populations, rather than restricting its analysis to the functions of the state. It emphasizes that individuals are not merely dominated by external factors, but they also exercise power upon themselves and shape their own subjectivities. Governmentality reveals the government present in the most mundane daily activities, and in every social relationship, yet it also recognizes the importance of state in both conceptualizing ‘problems’ and constructing their proposed ‘solutions’ (Joseph, 2010; McKee, 2009).

Governmentality perceives power to be productive and creative, rather than repressive. As Foucault himself remarked (2003):
If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn’t only weigh on us a force that says no; it also traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network that runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression. (p. 307)

A governmentality perspective understands power not as an external thing that acts on individuals from a distance, but as something that acts on the interior, through the self, via the construction of knowledge and the “management of possibilities” of the actions one might take (Foucault, 2003, p. 138). This view of power does not deny the agency of individuals, but in fact depends upon their ability to react to and resist attempts to regulate their conduct (McKee, 2009).

Scholars including Stenson (1998/2005) and O’Malley, Weir, and Shearing (1997) have criticized governmentality for being a theoretical position with a disregard for empirical reality, because its focus is so often on discursive rather than material practice. Other criticisms include governmentality’s inattention to how the exercise of power is linked to social difference and the inequalities of race, gender, and class (Ove, 2013), its abstract view of governing that constructs power as totalizing (Clarke et al., 2007), and its rejection of transformative agency—one can never step outside of or ‘opt out’ of the influences of governmentality (McDonald & Marston, 2005). However, McKee (2009) contends that some of these limitations stem from the misapplication of the concept. Foucault pursued governmentality to avoid totalizing and institutional accounts of power (Nadesan, 2008), but it has become a catch-all category that has been applied too generally without accounting for differences in social contexts, and with too much focus on the mentality aspect and not enough attention to its real manifestations on a
micro-level (Joseph, 2010; McKee, 2009). To address these limitations, researchers including Clarke (2008), Stenson (2008), and McKee (2009) argue that governmentality should be examined through situated analysis of its particular local configurations rather than through “relatively abstract and text-centred studies of changing mentalities and rationalities of rule” (Clarke, 2008 p. 15). Stenson calls this more grounded approach ‘Realist Governmentality’:

This Realist Governmentality perspective emphasizes the role of politics, local culture, and habitus—including shared emotional and cognitive dispositions—in restructuring governance. These operate in everyday thinking and form part of shared oral cultures at every social level… This approach escapes over-reliance on archives and policy texts as evidence of the existence and effects of liberal mentalities. (Stenson, 2008, p. 5)

Realist governmentality addresses the criticisms that have been levelled against traditional ‘discursive’ governmentality by redirecting the focus from the abstract to the real, shedding light on the messiness, complexity, and heterogeneity that characterizes struggles over subjectivity.

I have sought to apply a realist governmentality analysis in this study by exploring the experiences, perceptions, emotions, memories, and reasoning of individuals, as well as the dominant discourses and political rationalities that these individuals use to define their realities and possibilities.

2.2 GOVERNMENTALITY AND DEVELOPMENT:

Governmentality has attracted a large amount of scholarly attention and has been adapted to study how governmental power operates in diverse fields including education, crime, social welfare, housing, public service reform, social work, human rights, and even computer gaming (McKee, 2009; Ove, 2013). Governmentality has also been applied in the analysis of development projects and humanitarian aid, and Peter Ove (2013) coined the term
‘developmentality’ in order to distinguish this adaptation from the analytics of governmentality in general. Ove suggests that developmentality is a useful distinction because it concentrates on modes of improvement rather than management of individuals and groups, which he claims injects an ethical component into the discursive narrowing of legitimate fields of action (2013). For Ove, development differs from other fields in terms of governmentality because it focuses on progress—the increase of wealth, health, education, wellbeing, etc.—and appeals to one’s moral obligations to others, thus “bring(ing) into greater focus the productive nature of power and the ethical dimensions of liberalism” (2013, p. 321).

However, Ove’s conception of ‘developmentality’ overlaps significantly with Stenson’s ‘realist governmentality’, as Ove describes developmentality as being “more about locating and analyzing particular articulations and their significance than it is about justifying the overarching impact of the development metaphor” (2013, p. 321). Developmentality’s focus on the particular mirrors realist governmentality’s grounding in the empirical and local. Ove himself concedes that “the necessity of new terminology in this field is debatable” (2013, p. 311).

For these reasons I employ the term governmentality rather than developmentality in this thesis, despite my focus on a development program. I believe a realist governmentality approach sufficiently grounds my research in the situated and real. Furthermore, I do not wish to semantically set apart development as a unique field of governmentality because I seek to trace its intersections with the governmentalties of neoliberalism and militarization.

2.3 A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE:

There have been a number of applications of governmentality to development contexts. Perhaps one of the most well known is James Ferguson’s study of the Thaba Tseka Project in Lesotho, in which he utilizes a governmentality framework to explore how the language and
practices of development specialists shape the way development is delivered. Ferguson labels development an ‘anti-politics machine’, because development initiatives frequently construct political issues such as land use or resource allocation as technical problems devoid of local historical context. According to Ferguson, development initiatives so often fail because they attempt to “provide technical solutions to ‘problems’ which (a)re not technical in nature” (1990), p. 87). While the Thaba Tseka Project failed to solve the ‘problems’ it was established to fix, it did succeed in perpetuating migrant labour to South Africa and strengthening the presence of a repressive government in a region that had hitherto been resistant. Ferguson stresses that the true failure of development has not been the failure to meet its defined objectives but the failure to recognize its unintended consequences.

Another study that uses a governmentality approach is Faranak Miraftab’s analysis of the community-based waste collection strategies of the municipal government in Cape Town, South Africa during the period 1997-2001. She demonstrates how the government employed the discourses of black and gender empowerment to justify their use of unpaid or underpaid labour to serve the state’s cost-cutting agenda (2004). Miraftab illuminates the process by which the government embraced depoliticized notions of participation and empowerment, and mobilized “certain symbolic values, rationalities, reasons, programs, techniques and devices to achieve its end” (2004, p. 245). However, Miraftab’s primary focus is on the neoliberal governmentality guiding the government’s ideas and actions, rather than the forms of self-governance being applied by the participants. The waste collection schemes could not have existed without the labourers and volunteers who agreed to participate, and the rationalities they employed in deciding to do so are an essential part of the governmental equation, and equally deserving of exploration.
Aradhana Sharma examines the governmental workings of empowerment in a way that looks more closely at self-governance and politics at the micro-level. Through an analysis of the structure, practices, and effects of the part-NGO, part-state run Mahila Samakhya (MS) women’s empowerment project in India, Sharma offers a situated understanding of how neoliberal development discourses like ‘empowerment’ “articulate and jostle with histories of state and subject formation and of popular movements in India” (2008, p. 17-18). Sharma demonstrates that the tidy dichotomies of civil society and state, neoliberal and leftist ideologies, and empowered and the subaltern, are illusory. She finds there are intricate and complex relationships between subaltern actors and the state, and that each work to “discursively materialize” the other (2008, p. 198). Sharma suggests that as neoliberal governmentality blurs the boundaries between state and non-state realms, one must embrace the messiness of these paradoxical relationships while maintaining a critical and reflexive eye, never losing sight of the goal of substantive democracy and equal rights.

Hasso’s work follows Sharma’s in acknowledging divergence and examining the ways in which subaltern actors negotiate, resist, and reshape dominant discourses. She reveals how “actual women and men act in a range of ways and make demands sometimes unrecognizable within, or even contrary to, hegemonic development and global feminist frameworks” (Hasso, 2009, p. 78). This necessitates a reading of neoliberal governmentality as not totalizing, but fluid; it shapes institutions, practices, identities, and relationships, but is also shaped by them.

My research, like Hasso’s and Sharma’s, attempts to illustrate how empowerment functions as a governmental strategy, and to monitor its effects on the ground in a way that does not erase the complexity and struggle involved in defining subjectivities.
Within the context of Sri Lanka there are several studies that address the topics of militarization and neoliberalism in a development setting. Sandya Hewamanne (2009) examines how militarization has opened new spaces of violence for women working in Sri Lanka’s Free Trade Zones (FTZs). Darini Rajasingham-Senanyake (2004) explores the effects of conflict on women’s agency and political empowerment in Sri Lanka. Neloufer de Mel gives a comprehensive analysis of how militarization functions as governmentality in a Sri Lankan context, “entrench(ing) itself as ideology, discourse and praxis” (2007, p. 48). Jennifer Hyndman and Amarnath Amarasingam (2014) investigate the effects of militarization on tourism in Sri Lanka and the construction of particular rememberances of the war, and Hyndman collaborates with Malathi de Alwis (2004) to explore how gender, caste, class, and religious identities in Sri Lanka are performed and subverted through constructions of militarized nationalisms.

In this thesis I seek to contribute to this body of work by focusing on how militarization and neoliberalism function as forms of governmentality through a development initiative in Sri Lanka. Specifically, I aim to provide insight into how, after decades of civil war, the process of militarization in Sri Lanka operates in tangent with neoliberalism to shape the discourse, structure, and practice of a local women’s empowerment program, as well as participants’ responses to it.

2.4 NEOLIBERALISM:

In order to examine the governmentalizing effects of neoliberalism, one must first define the meaning of this concept. Neoliberalism is a term so often used and ill-defined that it is deemed at risk of “becoming a kind of conceptual trash-can, into which anything and everything can be dumped” (Flew, 2014, p. 67). To avoid treating neoliberalism as a catch-all ‘trash-can’
within this thesis, I will give a brief history of the roots of the term, and define the specific contemporary interpretation of the concept that I engage.

An investigation of the history of neoliberalism reveals its fluidity over time.

Neoliberalism was originally an economic philosophy developed in the 1930s in response to the declining popularity of liberalism (Coleman, 2013). The economic failures of the Great Depression were largely attributed to the economic policies of liberalism, so European scholars developed neoliberalism as a ‘middle way’ between classical liberalism and collectivist central planning (Mirowski & Plehwe, 2009). This nascent form of neoliberalism promoted market economy under the guidance of a strong state, in contrast to the laissez-faire doctrine of classical liberalism.

Into the 1950s and 1960s most scholars understood neoliberalism as referring to a form of social market economy, involving state intervention and social insurance (Davies, 2014). As the Cold War began to ‘heat up’ through the 1960s, along with anti-socialist sentiment in the United States, the use of the term neoliberalism dropped off (Dean, 2014). It surged in popularity again during the military rule of Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990) as a term to describe the economic reforms he implemented under the influence of economists educated in the United States (Boas & Gans-Morse, 2009). These reforms included the privatization of public land and industries, the abolition of price controls, the suppression of labour unions, the liberalization of imports, the reduction of direct and progressive taxes, and the deregulation of the financial market and capital flows (Harvey, 2007). Thus the meaning of neoliberalism was shifted towards market fundamentalism and away from social market economy (Boas & Gans-Morse, 2009).

Presently, in its strictest sense, neoliberalism refers to the promotion of private enterprise, free markets, currency deregulation, and tariff elimination, as well as the restructuring of the
state itself into a business-like enterprise (Ferguson, 2010). However, the large variance in the way the term is used in contemporary scholarship has led some scholars to claim that neoliberalism is too nebulous a concept to define (McCarthy & Prudham, 2004), or that neoliberalism does not in fact exist (Barnett, 2005). However, Ward and England (2007) and Springer (2012) agree that most existing literature on neoliberalism adopts one or more of the following four understandings of neoliberalism:

1. **Neoliberalism as an ideological hegemonic project:** Whereby dominant groups and actors organized around class-based transnational alliances have the power to impose their agenda and particular interpretations of the world onto others (see Cox, 2002; Duménil & Lévy, 2004; Harvey, 2007; Peet, 2002; Plehwe et al., 2006).

2. **Neoliberalism as policy and program:** Which focuses on the transfer of public responsibilities and resources to the private sector under the assumption that the latter is more efficient (see Brenner & Theodore, 2002; Klepeis & Vance, 2003).

3. **Neoliberalism as state form:** Which understands neoliberalism as a transformation that states willingly undergo in order to remain economically competitive among similarly minded states in a transnational playing field (see Peck, 2001; Peck & Tickell, 2002).

4. **Neoliberalism as governmentality:** Whereby neoliberalism is an articulation “between peoples and their socially constructed realities as they are (re)imagined, (re)interpreted, and (re)assembled to influence forms of knowledge through ‘the conduct of conduct’” (Springer, 2012, p. 137). This conceptualization of neoliberalism understands the de-centering of government as something made possible through rationalities and technologies that produce knowledge and encourage self-governance (see Barry, 1996; Brown, 2003; Ferguson & Gupta, 2002; Larner, 2003; Lemke, 2002).
It can be unwieldy to work with broad and ambiguous concepts like neoliberalism. However, as Ferguson (2010) asserts, there is utility in using words that bring together more than one meaning, because they can allow us to reflect on how these different meanings may be related.

Governmentality is the nucleus of the theoretical framework of this thesis, thus it informs my conceptualization of neoliberalism. For the purposes of this study I concentrate on neoliberalism as a form of governmentality that involves “extending and disseminating market values to all institutions and social action” (Brown, 2003, p. 3).

2.5 MILITARIZATION:

Militarization is another concept I apply frequently throughout this thesis and must therefore attempt to delineate. The meaning and value of this term has been debated in the literature, with some scholars asserting that the term ontologically promotes a false binary between civilian and military spheres, because it implies processes that take the ‘civilian’ and make it ‘militarized’, when the military does not exist apart from society. Bernazzoli and Flint (2009) suggest that the term ‘securitization’ is more useful because it does not explicitly refer to the military. Others have argued that the concept of militarization need not implicate the formal institution of the military at all, but can be applied to multiple forms of violence including the use of force, institutions, laws, and behavioural norms (Adelman, 2003; Enloe, 2000; Enloe, 2004; Monahan, 2006). Rachel Woodward (2005) uses the term militarization to refer to the process by which the military apparatus reconfigures geographical and social spaces.

For the purposes of this study I will use the term ‘militarization’ rather than ‘securitization’ because I believe there is an important semantic difference between the two terms. ‘Security’ is defined as “the state of being protected or safe from harm” or alternately as
“things done to make people or places safe” (“Security”, 2015). Thus, ‘securitization’ carries an association with safety and freedom from harm that seems inappropriate for the phenomenon I seek to describe, for militarization relies on institutionalizing violence, fear, and profound insecurity at all levels of society, especially for women (Mohanty, 2011). Militarism, which Naidu describes as the psychological force behind militarization (1985), has “generated more insecurity than security, often terrorising rather than protecting local populations” (Mama & Okazawa-Rey, 2012, p. 99). In fact, the substitution of the term ‘securitization’ for ‘militarization’ can be viewed as a function of militarization itself—a manoeuvre to mask its true functions and aspirations.

Cynthia Enloe’s definition of militarization is the one that guides this study because it fits well with its governmentality approach:

Militarization is a step-by-step process by which a person or thing gradually comes to be controlled by the military or comes to depend for its well-being on militaristic ideas. The more militarization transforms an individual or a society, the more that individual or society comes to imagine military needs and militaristic presumptions to be not only valuable but also normal. Militarization, that is, involves cultural as well as institutional, ideological, and economic transformations. To chart the spread of militarization, then, requires a host of skills: the ability to read budgets and interpret bureaucratic euphemisms, of course, but also the ability to understand the dynamics of memory, marriage, hero-worship, cinematic imagery, and the economies of commercialized sex… Militarization, on the other hand, doesn’t shape everything all the time. If it did, it would be impossible to distinguish. For instance, even a gun can be militarized or unmilitarized. (Enloe, 2000, p. 3)
Manifestations of militarization are complicated, shifting, and contextually dependent. Enloe’s definition of militarization captures this fluidity and makes clear that one must look well beyond the spaces traditionally regarded as militaristic in order to uncover its effects. This view of militarization facilitates the consideration of its governmentalizing roles, thus it will be the conceptualization I refer to throughout this study.
3.0 METHODOLOGY:

Collecting an archive of oral testimonies from victims of violence, from women, from people of colour, from the poor, albeit beset by a host of thorny methodological issues, enables a more holistic perspective on events, foregrounds those hidden from history and changes the focus of how we analyse and present history itself. (de Mel, 2002, p.100)

Women in Sri Lanka who became widowed as a result of the civil war can be seen as an especially ‘muted group’ because they face multiple sources of oppression; as women, as widows, as ‘victims’ of conflict, and often as young, single mothers. ‘War widows’ are frequently depicted in the Sri Lankan media as the true victims of the war, as terrorized and helpless martyrs (Hettiarachchi, 2003). Due to their social and political marginalization, the agency and subjective realities of widows in Sri Lanka are often ignored or misread. As Chambers affirms, “the challenge is how to give voice to those who are left out and to make their reality count” (1997, p. 1747). I designed this study to be a space for widowed women in Western Sri Lanka to articulate their subjectivities.

Although ‘war widows’ in Sri Lanka are often Tamil or Moor (Tambiah, 2004), those who are Sinhalese have the greatest access to programs like the one I analyze in this study. Members of the Sri Lankan military are overwhelmingly Sinhalese and Buddhist, and most often their spouses are as well (de Mel, 2007), so any initiative targeting the widows of military personnel automatically centres on women who are members of the dominant ethnic and religious groups of the country. The participants I interviewed all identified as Sinhalese and Buddhist, and as a result this thesis fails to capture the experiences of ‘war widows’ who face further oppression due to their ethnicity and religion. The lived experiences of widows who identify as members of minority ethnic and religious populations is pursued elsewhere but
remains an important avenue for further research (see, for example, Ruwanpura & Humphries, 2004; Rajasingham-Senanayake, 2004; and Blackburn, 2010).

As much as I want this thesis to be a space for others to speak, it can ultimately only reflect the voices and stories I found pertinent for my analysis. As researcher I am interpreter and curator of the stories of others, and my own perspectives inevitably shape this work. Furthermore, as I attempt to analyze governmental rationalities I am not immune to them myself, and every appeal to perspective is a non-innocent participation in what it helps to produce (Hinton, 2014). I cannot pretend that I am capable of seeing the world from an objective point of view—what Haraway calls “the god trick of seeing everything from nowhere” (1988, p. 581). Nor am I capable of fully representing the research participants and the complexity of their experiences. I carry with me my own assumptions, biases, and blind spots, and these have inevitably coloured the interpretations I make in this research. In an attempt to build reflexivity into my research process, I have tried to be aware of my own particular ways of seeing and being in the world, and I have attempted to structure my research in a way that acknowledges rather than ignores their impact.

3.1 POSITIONING THE RESEARCHER:

I engaged with the participants and conducted this research from a position of privilege. I am a white, straight, able-bodied, educated Canadian woman from a middle-class background. My presence in Sri Lanka was the result of my enrolment in a cooperative university program that costs thousands of dollars a year. I speak English as a first language, and although my inability to fluently speak or understand Sinhala restricted my ability to directly communicate with many of the research participants, I was able to afford to hire a translator to help me overcome this barrier. Furthermore, my abilities in English allowed me to easily access a wealth
of scholarly journals and knowledge resources in order to conduct this research.

As a white foreign woman I often found myself in the role of an 'honorary male', with access to spaces that were normally restricted to women. At SEEDS I was regularly invited to meetings of the senior staff while most of my female colleagues were not. I was occasionally invited to lunch with the Managing Director and the Chairman, when it would have been considered improper for most of the other women in the organization to eat with them due to their lower rank/caste and gender. I enjoyed more mobility than most of my female colleagues at SEEDS because I was granted the use of the organization's vehicles to conduct my research, and normally only the directors have access to the vehicles.

My privilege exempted me from the forms of marginalization faced by the research participants and positioned me firmly as an outsider. Throughout the research process I attempted to be mindful of the ways in which my privileges, experiences, and worldview guided the issues I examined, the questions I asked, and the interpretations I made. I tried to make the research process as non-manipulative and non-hierarchical as possible by making it an interactive experience; I encouraged the participants to ask me questions about my life and I employed qualitative research methods meant to allow them to shape the focus of this study. I can only hope that my outsider status was in some ways useful in allowing me to have a different perspective than an insider would, and 'fresh eyes' capable of noticing things that an insider would not think to question.

3.2 DATA COLLECTION:

I conducted qualitative interviews over a period of fourteen weeks between February and May, 2006. During this time, I conducted 22 in-depth interviews with 17 ‘widow of war heroes’ who were former WEP participants, as well as five key informants. The majority of the
interviews with the WEP participants were held at their places of residence, with the exception of two participants whose interviews took place in a garden belonging to another participant because they felt they did not have sufficient privacy in their own homes. The interviews with key informants occurred primarily in their places of employment although one was held at the informant’s place of residence.

The interviews were semi-structured. They ranged in length from 24 minutes to nearly three hours depending on how much information each participant chose to share. I used a set of open-ended questions to guide each interview, but I allowed the interviewees considerable time and freedom to take the conversation in whichever direction they chose.

Most of these interviews were conducted through my translator, Sumana, who is a professional Sinhala-English translator who works for the Sri Lankan Parliament. I was concerned about attempting to do in-depth interviews through a translator, because I am aware that when people are speaking about personal and emotionally charged topics, the wording and nuances of speech they use can be very meaningful and also very easily misinterpreted. However, my poor grasp of Sinhala prevented me from conducting the interviews without the assistance of a translator. To minimize the possibility that the widowed participants would be uncomfortable with the presence of my translator, I chose a female translator who was also a widow.

I digitally recorded a majority of the interviews, and each participant was asked if they felt comfortable being recorded before the interview began. Every interviewee agreed to let me record the interview, but in three instances I decided to stop the recorder because I sensed it was making the participant uncomfortable. On these occasions I had to rely on the notes I took during and immediately following the interviews.
I tried to keep the interviews as private as possible so that the participants could feel comfortable speaking freely. However, my translator was present for all but two of the interviews (my interviews with Dr. K. and Mr. W. were conducted in English). In four cases the participant’s child or children were present for the interview because they were too young to be left alone, or because it was apparent that the participant would be more comfortable with her children present. In one case a participant’s mother listened in to the interview because there were no other rooms in the house. I offered to take the participant offsite for the interview, but she insisted that she was comfortable with her mother’s presence. I cannot be sure if, or how, the presence of these family members affected the interviews, but privacy was seldom a possibility for some of the participants.

I also facilitated two focus group discussions with the WEP participants. These discussions were held at the Kalutara Children’s Library, a central location, on dates and at times that were voted most convenient for the majority of the participants. I provided money for transportation to and from the library, as well as lunch and tea for participants in each group discussion. At these discussions I began as a moderator, asking questions to stimulate discussion. However, by the end of both group discussions I was mainly an observer, and the participants were controlling the direction of the discussion.

After the first individual interview with each WEP participant I offered them a diary in which to write down anything else they wished to tell me; thoughts that occurred to them following the interview that they wanted to share, things they felt uncomfortable saying to me in person, or anything at all that they felt like writing down (the participants were all educated and literacy was not a constraint for this exercise). I assured them that they did not have to take a diary, and that if they did take one, they could write anything or nothing in it, and they could
choose whether or not to return it to me at the end of April when I met with them for the final group discussion.

Fifteen participants chose to take a diary, and 12 of the participants submitted them back to me with written content. Sumana translated the text of the 12 diaries from Sinhala into English for me. It was in these diary entries that some of the participants told me their most sensitive and personal stories. Others provided me with a day-by-day account of the events in their lives, and many wrote about their thoughts, feelings, and hopes for the future. I found the diary exercise to be a particularly powerful tool for sharing, as many participants commented that it gave them more time to consider what they wanted to say, and some said they enjoyed having a creative way to express themselves.

I tried to make the research process as fair and participatory as I could. I made sure the participants were as informed as possible about the nature and purpose of my research and the types of questions I might ask them. I emphasized that they could choose to disregard a particular question or end the interview whenever they wished. I used open-ended questions and tried to avoid directing answers at all times. I sought to facilitate a mutual exchange of information by inviting the participants to question me, and at times narrating my experiences in Canada. There is much debate about whether research can ever be empowering (Cornwall & Sardenberg, 2014; Mohan & Stokke, 2000; Nkoane, 2012; Opie, 1992; Riger, 1993; Scheyvens & Leslie, 2000), and my largest fear going into this project was that research as an outsider might be inherently exploitive and oppressive. However, many of the participants expressed that they enjoyed speaking to me about their lives, and that sharing their stories made them feel “relieved” and “happy”. I hope this signals that the research process was a positive experience for some of the participants despite its problematic power dynamics.
3.3 ANALYSIS OF THE DATA:

The overarching approach I used to analyze my data is best described as narrative thematic analysis, however I also employed discourse analysis and visual analysis when considering family portraits, sketches in participants’ journals, and images, captions, and descriptions in organizational literature and websites. It is difficult for me to isolate my process of analysis from my data collection or indeed the writing phase of this thesis, for as O’Reilly notes; “analysis is so tangled with every stage of the research process that it is difficult to talk of an analysis phase” (2005, p. 176). I began analyzing data the moment I began collecting it, using a number of intentional and unintentional techniques. This process of analysis has continued to the present moment, as I type these words.

While I was conducting interviews I kept a research journal where I recorded my thoughts and ideas, questions I wanted to ask, themes I found emerging, frustrations I experienced, and concerns I had about the research process. In contrast to the notes I took immediately following interviews, which were meant to capture as many details of the exchange as possible, my research journal was a space for creativity—somewhere ‘off the record’ where I could organize my thoughts and experiment with ways to frame the information I was collecting.

I was not aware of it at the time but I was using an analytical technique employed by many researchers to create a “second dialogue” to “rediscover what was said or observed” (Robinson, 2014, p. 208). This form of free writing also helped relieve the weight of my awareness that “every description is a conclusion” and that as a researcher I have to take responsibility for everything I notice, analyze, and write down (Kleinman, Copp, & Henderson, 1997, p. 478). Since my journal was private, I felt less reluctant to commit my thoughts to paper. It allowed me to write ‘from the gut’, with my emotions and uncertainties included, so there was a record of not
just what I observed but what I felt. Emotions inevitably have a hand in shaping one’s research, so it is important to be aware of them (Kleinman et al., 1997; Sangasubana, 2011). The journal also enabled me to revisit what I wrote with added insights or different perspectives, and to chart how my understandings shifted and deepened throughout the course of my research. It was in this journal that I first began to map out common themes within my data.

Narrative analysis was a natural analytical approach for me to use because my research process had resulted in a large collection of personal narratives. The semi-structured format and open-ended questions I used enabled the research participants to answer without interruption, and to steer the discussion in unanticipated directions. I often found myself listening to intimate stories that were only tangentially related to my original prompt. I did not reassert questions that were only partially addressed or sidestepped because I wanted to learn what the participants preferred to discuss, the topics they thought were important, and the ways they framed their experiences.

People cast their experiences into narrative form, not always consciously, to make sense of them, and to communicate essential ideas and observations about their lives, their personal and communal pasts, and social and historical contexts (de Caro, 2012). Narratives are “essential meaning-making structures” (Riessman, 1993, p. 4), and narration “appears to yield a form of understanding of human experience… that is not directly amenable to other forms of exposition or analysis” (Kerby, 1991, p. 3). I therefore sought to preserve the richness and complexity the participants’ accounts by organizing my data thematically while interpreting each experience, idea, emotion, phrase, and word hermeneutically by the narrative context that surrounded them. (Ross & Green, 2011).

I analyzed each case in-depth by replaying interview recordings, transcribing them, re-
reading notes, re-reading journals, and writing descriptions of each participants’ experiences until I felt familiar with every story. Through poring over the participants’ narratives I was able to notice patterns, shared experiences, incongruencies, and gaps in the data. I collected these layered, connected, and conflicting narratives into themes through a loose process of coding. Rather than categorizing the data according to specific words or phrases, I chose broad themes such as ‘resistance’, ‘violence’, ‘ambivalence’, ‘pride’, and ‘loneliness’, which could accommodate many different narrative contexts and nuances. I then analyzed how militarization and neoliberalism were woven through these various narrative themes, at times using secondary sources to triangulate my findings. I grounded this analysis in an awareness of the local context gleaned through narrative accounts, secondary sources, and ethnographic observation.

As a researcher I inescapably leave my imprint on the participants’ stories through my interpretation and analysis of their meanings, and through the participants’ self-censorship and other forms of reactivity caused my presence. However, throughout my analysis I tried to avoid breaking up narratives or removing them from the contexts in which they were embedded because “narratives must be preserved, not fractured, by investigators, who must respect respondents ways of constructing meaning and analyze how it is accomplished” (Riessman, 1993, p. 4).

3.4 THE IMPACTS OF INTERRUPTION:

My case is somewhat unique because my research was interrupted after I had finished collecting my primary data. Upon my return to Canada my circumstances had changed and I was not able to resume my studies as anticipated. I ended up working fulltime in an unrelated field for years before returning to university to begin the process of writing this thesis. As a result there is almost a nine-year gap between the conclusion of my interviews and the completion of
In some ways this interruption has been a hindrance, because I am removed from the process of data collection by many years, and my memories of encounters with the participants have grown hazy over time. Fortunately my notes of these encounters were detailed, and through the process of re-reading them and listening to recordings of the interviews, many recollections were recovered. It heartens me to realize that memory “is both fallible (foolable?) and part of a creative process” (de Caro, 2012, p. 263). Even the clearest recollections of recent events pass through filters of subjectivity.

I found there were some advantages to the delay in my analysis. It offered me the opportunity to rediscover my data almost with fresh eyes. When I reopened my research I was struck by certain details that I might have overlooked years earlier because they were so familiar to me at that time. For example, while I was conducting interviews it did not occur to me focus my analysis on militarization, even though I was interviewing women labeled ‘the widows of war heroes’. At the time Sri Lanka was still at war, and the ceasefire had ended. Newspapers were filled with accounts of Claymore mine attacks, naval battles, and the bombings of civilian commuter buses and trains across the country. The government had declared a state of emergency and imposed a curfew. Roadblocks and road closures were common, and I grew used to having to show my identification and justify my presence to soldiers while travelling. In short, my surroundings were highly militarized, and eventually this level of militarization became routine. So when I began collecting my data and determining how to analyze it, it did not register that militarization might be an important subject of analysis. This oversight was immediately apparent when I returned to the data years later.

Our present understandings shape how we remember and interpret the past, so it is
interesting that I am writing this thesis after the Sri Lanka Civil War has ended. I believe my post-war perspective has heightened my awareness of how militarization is not merely a response to political instability, but a discourse that rationalizes and normalizes its own existence. Sri Lanka has remained militarized even in peacetime, despite the decisive end of the conflict in 2009 (Hyndman & Amarasingam, 2014). The new forms of militarization emerging in post-war Sri Lanka have compelled me to look more closely at the rationalities that drive it.

The interruption that occurred during my research has thus impacted my interpretation of the data. It is my hope that any drawbacks of this time lag have been counter-balanced by the insights I have gained through retrospection.
4.0 SITUATING SRI LANKA:

In order to conduct a governmental analysis of the WEP in a way that is not abstract or overly discursive, this thesis first seeks to examine the particularities of the local context, including its demographics, its history of colonialism and ethnic tension, and the Sri Lanka Civil War. I then provide an overview of local understandings of militarization and neoliberalism.

4.1 DEMOGRAPHICS:

Sri Lanka is a small island nation to the South of India with a population of approximately 21 million (Department of Census and Statistics, 2011). The population is ethnically divided, with Sinhalese currently comprising approximately 75 percent of the population, and Sri Lankan and Indian Tamils making up 11.2 percent and 4.2 percent respectively. Sri Lankan Moors, who trace their ancestry to Arab traders, are the third largest ethnic group in the country, comprising 9.2 percent of the population (Department of Census and Statistics, 2011).

In terms of religion, Buddhists make up 70.1 percent of the population, while 12.6 are Hindu, 9.7 percent Muslim, and 7.6 percent Christian. A majority of Sinhalese identify as Buddhist, while most Tamils identify as Hindu, and Moors as Muslim (Department of Census and Statistics, 2011).

4.2 COLONIAL HISTORY AND ETHNIC TENSIONS:

Sri Lanka was divided into seven warring kingdoms when the Portuguese landed on the island in 1505. The Portuguese gradually extended their occupation of Sri Lanka (then called Ceylon) 1658, until control of the country fell to the Dutch (de Silva, 2005). The Dutch colonized the entire island except for the Kingdom of Kandy, a monarchy in the central region of the country (de Silva, 2005). The Dutch ceded control of Sri Lanka to Britain in 1802, and
British forces invaded Kandy in 1803 in the first Kandyan War. The British were resisted until 1815 when they finally managed to occupy the kingdom (Peebles, 2006).

In the mid 1830s the British started cultivating coffee on a broad scale. This began the process of shifting Sri Lanka from reliance on subsistence crops to plantation agriculture, fundamentally reshaping the country’s economy (Spencer, 1990). Coffee, and later tea and rubber, were in high demand abroad, and the success of these crops drove the appropriation of peasant land and the development of roads, railways, banks, and other physical and financial infrastructure by the British (de Silva, 2005).

The legacy of British colonialism in Sri Lanka is not limited to roads and trains, it also left its mark on ethnic relationships in the country. There was initially little tension between the Sinhalese and Tamil ethnic groups (DeVotta, 2005). However, the British colonialists favoured Tamils for jobs in their administration because many Tamils were able to speak English. This was the result of their access to missionary schools, which were primarily located in the northern and eastern regions of the country where the Tamil population was concentrated (de Silva, 2005). Tamils were also initially given equal representation with the Sinhalese in parliament despite their minority share of the population (Spencer, 1990). This had the effect of stoking resentment and polarizing Sinhalese and Tamil populations.

Upon its independence in 1948 Sri Lanka was ranked one of the most developed countries in Asia, with per capita income and other development indicators placing it ahead of countries such as India, Thailand, and (South) Korea (Athukorala & Jayasuriya, 2013). Sri Lanka was a democratic nation with solid governance structures, strong commodity exports including tea, rubber and coconut products, high levels of health and education, and low levels of inequality and extreme poverty (de Silva, 2005). However, when the British handed over control
to the Sri Lankan government, it effectively became a majoritarian state. The government immediately passed the Ceylon Citizenship Act of 1948, which denied citizenship to Tamils of Indian origin (DeVotta, 2005). In 1956 the government replaced English with Sinhala as the official language of Sri Lanka with the passing of the Sinhala Only Act, thereby restricting government positions to Sinhala-speakers and putting Tamils at a disadvantage (DeVotta, 2005).

In 1973 the government implemented the Policy of Standardization, which applied district and language quotas to university enrollment. This had the effect of restricting Tamil students’ access to tertiary education (Jayasuriya, 1981). Each of these acts contributed to rising tensions between the Sinhalese and Tamil populations, which ultimately culminated in civil war (DeVotta, 2005).

4.3 CIVIL WAR:

Rising Sinhalese nationalism and a growing push for Tamil self-rule eventually led to the outbreak of armed conflict in July 1983 which did not end until May 2009, making it one of the longest running conflicts in recent history (Samarasinghe, 2012). The two main protagonists were the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL), and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The LTTE fought to form a separate Tamil state in the northern and eastern regions of the country, while the government resisted this attempt to separate (Peebles, 2006). In December 2001 a ceasefire was declared, however renewed hostilities broke out in 2005 (de Silva, 2007).

Although the arena of active conflict was largely confined to the northern and eastern provinces of Sri Lanka, violence including suicide bombings, riots, and raids took place in other areas, including the capital city, Colombo. Human rights violations by government troops, police, and pro-government paramilitaries against Tamil non-combatants were widespread, both within and outside the areas of direct conflict. These included extensive bombing and shelling of civilian inhabited areas and retaliatory attacks on unarmed civilians, as well as harassment,
torture, and custodial rape under the pretext of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (Amnesty International, 2005; ICG, 2010; Perera, 1999). The LTTE also committed extensive human rights violations by murdering Tamil dissidents and members of rivaling Tamil political parties and militant groups, harassing, torturing, raping, and killing Sinhalese and Muslim civilians, and engaging in 'ethnic cleansing' by driving Sinhalese and Muslims out of the northern province where they are the minority (Ruwanpura & Humphries, 2004; Tambiah, 2004).

The decades of war resulted in the deaths of up to 100,000 people, and left 300,000 Tamils internally displaced (Hyndman & Amarasingam, 2014). In May 2009 the war came to a decisive end, with a huge cost to civilian life in the northern part of the country. The United Nations estimates that tens of thousands of people were killed, and there is evidence that in the final stages of the war government troops took aim at civilian targets, and the LTTE held civilians hostage to use them as human shields (ICG, 2010; Weiss, 2010).

The death, injury, displacement, damage to infrastructure, loss of investment, and reductions in non-military spending that resulted from the conflict have taken a toll on the country’s development indicators (Arunatilake, Jayasuriya, & Kelegama, 2001). The war has also reshaped Sri Lanka’s demographics, causing a marked increase in the number of female-headed households, which have a higher risk of being impoverished.

4.4 LOCAL MEANINGS OF WIDOWHOOD:

In 1960 Sirimavo Bandaranaike, a widow, became simultaneously the first female Prime Minister of Sri Lanka and the first female Prime Minister of a modern nation. In 1994 Bandaranaike’s daughter Chandrika Kumaratunga, also a widow, was elected Sri Lanka’s first female president, and won a second term in office in December 1999 (Rajasingham-Senanayake, 2004). However, this impressive history of widowed women in positions of
political leadership is misleading. Both of these women rose to power after the assassinations of their high profile politician husbands. The experience and status of most Sri Lankan widows is very different from that of these two iconic female leaders (Blackburn, 2010; de Silva & Tribe, 1999; Rajasingham-Senanayake, 2004).

Across ethnic and class lines, Sri Lankan society constructs female respectability and morality in terms of pre-marital virginity, marriage, motherhood, and sexual chastity (Tambiah, 2004). Women’s traditional role has been to have children, to look after the home and the family, and to stay in the house (Perera, 1999). Women’s identities are generally defined in relation to the men in their family; women are wives, mothers, and daughters, but not full people on their own (Perera, 1999). Among all ethnic and religious groups in Sri Lanka there is a strong patriarchal disapproval of single women, be they unmarried, divorced, or widowed (Blackburn, 2010).

The death of her husband marks a widow as inauspicious, possibly responsible for his death, as well as potentially sexually transgressive, because she no longer has a husband to control her (Tambiah, 2004). Tamil widows in Sri Lanka traditionally cease to wear flowers in their hair or red clothing, and they remove the pottu from their forehead after the death of their husbands. Sinhalese women do not wear the pottu, so although they are typically expected to dress plainly after the deaths of their husbands, their status as a widow is not as visually apparent and they may ‘pass’ as married women in urban areas (Hettiarachchi, 2003; Tambiah, 2004).

The term ‘widow’ denotes socio-cultural stigma for both Sinhalese and Tamil women in Sri Lanka. Anati in Tamil can mean both ‘widow’ and ‘a poor destitute person’ (Fabricius, 1972). Withawi means widow in Sinhala, and it suggests a deplorable and pitiable condition (de Soysa, 2000). Widows are considered by many people in Sri Lanka to be bad omens, and in
some cases they are accused of cursing their late husband and ultimately causing his death (Hettiarachchi, 2003). They may be avoided and ignored by community members and neighbors, and excluded from village and family gatherings (Blackburn, 2010). The attention they do get is often negative; widows are sometimes regarded by men to be ‘sexually available’ because they lack a male guardian, so widows are frequently the targets of sexual harassment, assault, and rape (Kangaraarachchi, 2003; Tambiah, 2004).

Widows also often face a multitude of socioeconomic difficulties. Typically a widow’s husband was the breadwinner of the household prior to his death, and this enormous responsibility then falls on the widow’s shoulders. Many of these women have never worked outside the home, and they suddenly need to acquire the skills to support their families. Due to a lack of employment opportunities for women in villages, often the only means of survival for widows is through daily casual work, which is low-paid and unreliable (de Mel, 2009; Perera, 1999; Tambiah, 2004). Other widows migrate to tea and rubber plantations to work as agricultural labourers, or they move to the Free Trade Zones (FTZs) to work in garment factories. Male workers predominate at the management and supervisory levels in these sectors, while the majority of the ‘unskilled’ labourers are women who must often endure exploitative terms of employment, hazardous working conditions, and sexual harassment (Arunatilake, 2012; de Mel, 2009; Hewamanne, 2006). Widows can be more at risk of sexual harassment by their supervisors because they do not have a husband to ‘defend their honour’ (Tambiah, 2004).

Widows with young children must learn to balance the role of caregiver and breadwinner, often without assistance from relatives or in-laws. It is customary for young married couples to live in the household of the groom’s parents, but after their husband’s death, widows frequently face pressure or open hostility from their dead husband’s kin. This can include attempts to
acquire his source of income, eviction from the shared family home, and deprivation of property. The family of the deceased all too often views their son’s widow and children as burdens that they are no longer obliged to deal with (Hettiarachchi, 2003). A widow and her children may face homelessness if her parents refuse to take her back into the natal home (Perera, 1999).

Although many of the country’s Hindu Tamil population frown upon widow remarriage, the majority of Sri Lankans identify as Buddhist, and there is no barrier to widow remarriage in Buddhism (Dewaraja, 1981). Widow remarriage is legal in Sri Lanka and generally a socially accepted practice, however many widows do not remarry. It can be difficult for a widow to find a new husband because virginity is considered an important quality in a bride—it is common for a new bride’s blood-stained bed sheets to be displayed for the groom’s family after the honeymoon as proof of her chastity prior to marriage (Jayaweera, 2004). The dowry that women must customarily provide in order to remarry can also pose as a barrier to remarriage, and widows often express concern that a new husband might mistreat her children if they are not his own, and avoid remarriage on this account (Hyndman, 2008; Perera, 1999). Meanwhile, the majority of male widowers, both Buddhist and Hindu, remarry within five years of the death of their wives (de Silva & Tribe, 1999).

4.5 THE ‘WAR WIDOWS’

The Sri Lanka Civil War has led to an increase in the number of widows in Sri Lanka. There was an estimated 40,000 widows whose husbands were killed as a result of the conflict by the time the WEP had started (Kangaraarachchi, 2003). Many war widows are young, recently married at the time of their husband’s death, and have young children to care for. Thousands of these women have become the primary breadwinners for their households, and their presence in the public realm and in the workforce has become commonplace. This has worked to reshape
social perceptions of widowhood and reduce the stigma they face (Blackburn, 2010). However, the deaths of their husbands were often unexpected and violent, making war widows particularly psychologically vulnerable (de Silva & Tribe, 1999), and many were not able to see the body of their husband after his death or perform last rites for him, making it difficult to achieve emotional closure (de Mel, 2002; Hettiarachchi, 2003).

War widows whose husbands were members of the armed forces are commonly referred to as Rana Viru widows, or ‘widows of war heroes’ (Hettiarachchi, 2003). Rana Viru widows receive compensation from the military for their husbands’ deaths, but until recently this monthly pension was stopped if the widow remarried. As of 2010 Rana Viru widows are entitled to half of this pension in the event of their remarriage (Ministry of Defence, 2010). Rana Viru widows are also eligible for other forms of assistance offered by the armed forces, including housing loan programs and psychological counseling (Rana Viru Seva Authority, n.d.).

The Government of Sri Lanka and several NGOs have developed initiatives to assist war widows in meeting the challenges they face, and there is a strong emphasis on economic empowerment and psychological rehabilitation. However, there has been less effort spent on monitoring the outcomes of these initiatives (Rajasingham-Senanayake, 2004). I hope this thesis can function as a contribution to a growing body of research along these lines.

4.6 MILITARIZATION IN SRI LANKA:

Despite the popular narrative that the Sri Lankan military was largely a ceremonial institution until the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) insurrection in 1971 or even the 1983 separatist war, history reveals that this is decidedly not the case. Following Sri Lanka’s independence in 1948, the military was employed repeatedly; in 1952 to prevent an influx of ‘illicit’ immigrants from India, in 1953 to contain anti-state dissent, in 1956 for the agitation at
Gal Oya, during the Emergency of 1958 when the military was given orders by the state to “shoot and shoot to kill”, and on through the 1960s (de Mel, 2009, p. 37). Not only was the Sri Lankan military active almost from its inception, it has also become “both central and auxiliary to the purposes of governments” (de Mel, 2007 p. 37). During the Sinhala-Tamil clashes that precipitated the Emergency, military officers were gazetted as coordinating officers of provinces, outranking the government agents in charge of those regions (de Mel, 2009; Sri Lanka Army Committee, 1999). However, the military demonstrated deference to civilian power during the Emergency despite the powers it had been granted. For example, an army commander sought permission from the government before opening fire on a mob of 3000 Sinhalese attacking Tamil labourers in Pollonnaruwa (Vittachi, 1958).

Over time the dynamic between the military and the state has shifted, and by the end of the civil conflict the military enjoyed automatic superiority over civilian authority (David, 2005; de Mel, 2007). Although Sri Lanka has never officially been governed under a military regime, the military has nonetheless been able to insert itself into modes of civilian rule. This is how, after the victory for government forces at Thoppigala in 2007, the army was empowered to act for the state although martial law had not been declared, and how the military later assumed control over which humanitarian and development NGOs were permitted to work in the regions taken from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) (de Mel, 2009; ICG, 2008). Even after the war ended, militarization remained evident throughout Sri Lanka in the prevalence of checkpoints, high security zones, and armed military personnel patrolling the streets (Hyndman & Amarasingam, 2014).

The military has adopted a development and humanitarian function that has become normalized in Sri Lankan society. For example, the Rana Viru Seva Authority (RVSA), which
helped to coordinate the empowerment program being analyzed in this research, was established in 1999 following Parliamentary Act Number 45 to provide social, psychological, and financial assistance to soldiers and their families (de Mel, 2007). The services that the RVSA provides include; liaising with the Pay and Records Division of the Tri Forces, Pension Department, and the Sri Lankan Insurance Company to ensure that families receive payment of the death benefits owed to them; working with the National Housing Development Authority to enable the families of soldiers to purchase land, housing, and construction materials with loan and payment schemes; supplying legal officers to provide legal advice; providing financial assistance for education through the RVSA scholarship fund; and directing requests for financial assistance for medical operations to donors (Rana Viru Seva Authority, n.d.). Thus the military extends a caring hand to those who are loyal to it and constructs itself as benevolent and protective. This obscures the notion that the military itself has caused death, disability, and poverty.

The military’s intrusion into civilian life is also evident in the construction of official memories. Public holidays, memorial parks, war museums, ceremonies, statues, monuments, commemorative plaques, and even postage stamps are among the instruments used to celebrate, glorify, and solidify the presence of the military in public life (Hyndman & Amarasingam, 2014). These performances of memory promote martial ideals while they sanitize Sri Lanka’s military history. The RVSA has an ‘Honour and Pride Division’ that conducts commemoration ceremonies, oversees memorials, provides maintenance of the National War Memorial in Kandy, and “monitor(s) slanderous activities which try to tarnish the image of valiant War Heroes and take necessary actions” (Rana Viru Seva Authority, n.d.). They conduct ‘Uttama Pooja’ (medal awarding ceremonies) “to pay tribute to the families of the brave men and women of the Sri Lanka armed forces who made the ultimate sacrifice in the safe guarding of the motherland”
(Rana Viru Seva Authority, n.d.). The RVSA’s use of war hero rhetoric nurtures nostalgia for the war that operates as a counter-memory to its brutal reality. The RVSA does not just suggest reverence for soldiers, it demands it, and it monitors the public for expressions of resistance to this idea (de Mel, 2007).

Militarization also features in the realm of popular culture. For example, the songs of Nanda Malini, Sunil Edirisinghe, and Elle Gunawansa, among others, extol martial virtue as a solemn duty of the Sinhalese people. Militarization advances its ideals through movies, television, literature, and other forms of popular culture (de Mel, 2007). However collective memory and popular culture are contested landscapes. There exists resistance to militarization in the form of street theatre, graffiti, poetry readings, comedic acts, literature, and independent films that confront militarized rationalities and narratives of martial virtue. Even the state consists of multiple actors and voices that produce conflicting narratives on the subject of militarization. (de Mel, 2007; Hyndman & Amarasingam, 2014).

4.7 THE NEOLIBERAL-MILITARY NEXUS:

While the literature recognizing the intersections of neoliberalism and militarization in Sri Lanka is scant, de Mel (2009) charts how the two discourses operate as “twin rationalities” to legitimize a particular social imaginary in Sri Lanka (p. 40). She notes how military men enjoy a great deal of economic capital, despite the shrinking of the public sector. The salary received by privates is very high for those from rural backgrounds, and even in the event of his disability or death, a soldier’s family will continue to receive steady income. For many young men from low-income backgrounds, the promise of financial security becomes attainable through military service, forming a strong link between capitalist ideas of ‘the good life’ and loyalty to the military (de Mel, 2009). Members of the armed forces also draw a high level of social capital and
prestige; they are touted as brave and noble heroes, and even impersonated by civilian men in order to impress women (de Mel, 2009). In contrast to this, women labouring in the country’s FTZs are paid significantly less than military personnel, without the job security, benefits, and pension that members of the armed forces enjoy, and are widely regarded as deviant and degraded (de Mel, 2009; Hewamanne, 2009). Thus the linkages between militarization and neoliberalism are highly gendered.

Siri Gamage (2009) believes there are connections between the economic reforms enacted in the 1970s by the United National Party (UNP) Government and the development of Sri Lanka’s Civil War. The neoliberal policies put in place in the 1970s included the reduction of subsidies and cuts to social spending. These policies worked to put pressure on the already marginalized Tamil minority and possibly added fuel to the fire of the conflict. Ironically, public health care, welfare services, and education spending had to be restricted further to support escalating defense budgets (de Mel, 2007; Gamage, 2009).

The connections between militarization and neoliberalism in Sri Lanka are complex and multifarious, and I hope to uncover greater insight into their entanglements with this study.
5.0 THE RVSA-SEEDS WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM (WEP):

The RVSA-SEEDS Women’s Empowerment Program (WEP) is the focal point of my research, because I seek to analyze the operation of neoliberal and militarized governmentalities within the WEP, as well as how program participants negotiated these governmentalities. Thus the details of the program and its participants are integral for this study. The following sections overview the structure and implementation of the WEP and give a profile of its participants. This information was obtained primarily through focus group discussions with supplementation from individual interviews.

5.1 PROFILE OF THE WEP PARTICIPANTS:

All 17 participants of the WEP that I interviewed were Sinhalese and Buddhist. The average age of the participants at the time I interviewed them was 34 years. All of them were widowed, and the average age at which they lost their husband was 26 years. None of them had remarried at the time this study was conducted. Thirteen of the participants had at least one child, while three had never had children, and one no longer had any children because she lost her only son when he committed suicide shortly after her husband’s death.

Most of the participants had grown up in rural villages in the Western or Southern Provinces of the country. All of the women I interviewed were literate and had completed their junior secondary education (grades 6-9). A majority of them had gone on to pass the G.C.E. Ordinary Exam (grade 11), and four of the participants had passed the G.C.E. Advanced Level Exam. Upon successful completion of this exam, students can go on to pursue tertiary education, but none of these participants had done so. Although university education is free, only about ten percent of the students who qualify are accepted into state universities. Admission is competitive
and based on the results of the Advanced Level Examinations. Two of the four women who had written the examination said that they would have gone to university if they had been accepted.

All of the participants had been married between the ages of 19-25, and in every case to a man who was Sinhalese and Buddhist. Most of these marriages were described as ‘arranged marriages’, where they had little contact with their husbands prior to the marriage. Four described their marriages as ‘love marriages’, because they had married someone they had fallen in love with. One of the participants who had entered a ‘love marriage’ said her parents had disowned her over the marriage.

None of the participants that I interviewed were employed outside the home at the time of their husband’s death, although one of the participants tailored sari jackets at home to make some extra money for her family. They had minded the home and children while their husbands were the breadwinners. Following the WEP one of the participants worked part time as a bridal make-up artist and hair stylist, and some of the participants occasionally made handicrafts or sweets to sell.

While living, the participants’ husbands were each employed in the military and earned between 20,000 and 40,000 rupees a month ($222-$444 US), depending on their rank and position. Following the deaths of their husbands most participants continued to receive their husband’s salary until the year he would have retired, and afterward they received what would have been his pension (7000-11,000 rupees per month in this case). The average household income in Sri Lanka in the final year of the WEP (2005) was 20,048 rupees per month (Department of Census and Statistics, 2006), and the poverty line at this time was 2142 rupees per month (Department of Census and Statistics, 2007). This placed most of the participants’ official household incomes above the national average until they started receiving their
husbands’ pensions. Even after the changeover from salary to pension, the participants’ payments from the military kept them above the poverty line—at least on paper.

One participant was not entitled to any financial compensation from military because her husband had committed suicide. She was living at her parents’ home at the time of his death, and she remained there afterward so she could rely on her family members for financial support and assistance in caring for her son. This participant was invited to join the WEP even though her husband was not officially a ‘war hero’, because despite the terms of her husband’s death, he had served in the military. The military did, however, cover the cost of cremation/burial for all of the participant’s husbands, but some of the participants had to take out loans to cover other funeral costs including food, flowers, and travel costs for relatives.

Many of the participants had young children when their husbands died. Two of the women I interviewed were pregnant at the time of their husbands’ deaths. The majority of the participants were residing with their husband’s parents when he died. Three were living with their husband and children in their own parents’ homes, and four were living in a house that had belonged to their husband. At the time I conducted this study only three of the participants still lived with their in-laws, the rest having either moved to a parent’s or sibling’s home or into a house of their own acquired with assistance from the RVSA. The RVSA offers housing loans up to 200,000 rupees, and assistance in purchasing plots of land to members of the military and their families (Rana Viru Seva Authority, n.d.).

5.2 OVERVIEW OF THE WEP:

The RVSA-SEEDS Women’s Empowerment Program (WEP) was a joint effort by SEEDS and the RVSA to assist the wives of servicemen killed or missing in action, although each of the participants I interviewed had been able to confirm the death of her husband. The
program was funded through an initial contribution from the RVSA, with program course fees covering the remainder of the costs. The WEP commenced in January 2002, and officially ended in 2005. The program planning paper stated that the target group for the WEP was “the women who are under pressure or depressed due to the death or disappearance of their family members who worked for the forces” (SEEDS, 2002, p. 2). The program goals were to “integrate these women into community life, give them a social identity, widen their skills and knowledge base, and improve their mentality” (SEEDS, 2002, p. 2). As one coordinator of the WEP explained: “The problem is that these widows have no one. They are alone with their children and they become lonely and depressed without their husbands. The WEP was to keep them busy so that they would not feel so depressed” (Dr. K., interview, 2006). Members of the RVSA Physical and Mental Health Division had determined that many of the widows under their jurisdiction were “stressed and depressed” (Ibid). They believed that allowing the widows to meet each other would help them to feel less lonely, and teaching them to establish a home business would enable them to be active in their communities while generating extra income.

The stages of the WEP were as follows:

1) Locating women within the Kalutara District who met the target group criteria and registering them as participants.

2) Introducing the women to each other and forming them into a ‘Rana Viru Women’s Society’.

3) Discussion between the SEEDS WEP coordinating officer and the participants to “identify their inborn talents”.

4) Providing skills training to allow the participants to develop their talents.
5) Providing basic knowledge to enable participants to initiate their own businesses

Members of the RVSA located the wives of servicemen killed or missing in action throughout Kalutara District using military and RVSA records. RVSA officials contacted the women by post and by telephone when possible. The RVSA also created a mobile unit that toured the larger towns in the District to meet with potential participants at their homes. The RVSA staff involved in contacting the women informed them about the program and its goals, and encouraged them to register as part of a RVSA Women’s Society (Dr. K., interview, 2006).

Eventually almost 40 widows of servicemen killed in combat or missing in action registered with the RVSA Women’s Society and enrolled in the WEP. Three coordinating officers, one from the RVSA and two from SEEDS, organized the first meeting at the Kalutara Children’s Library, a central location close to Galle Road (a major highway that runs close to the coast). (Dr. K., interview, 2006). The women who attended had to arrange and pay for their own transportation to this meeting (Focus Group Discussion 1, 2006).

At the first meeting the women were introduced to each other, and they were given some possible training course options and asked to specify the ones that appealed to them most. One of the facilitators was a psychiatrist employed with RVSA, and she spoke with the participants about grief and trauma, and the benefits of speaking to a psychiatrist or counselor about one’s feelings. She asked the women if they would appreciate individual and group counseling sessions, and many said that they would. As a group the women decided they would meet every second Monday to spend time with each other, participate in skills training lessons, and to occasionally meet with a counselor (Focus Group Discussion 1, 2006).
At the second meeting one of the two SEEDS coordinators informed the participants that the first training course would be a sweet making course, and that there would be a cost of 200 rupees (approximately $2.25 US) per participant. The participants I spoke to about this thought it was a reasonable price (Manori, interview, 2006; Suranthi, interview, 2006). The participants were informed that they would be given advice on how to create their own home businesses, so they could sell sweets from their houses and earn an income (Focus Group Discussion 1, 2006).

At the next meeting, the coordinating officers introduced the instructor for the sweet making course, and she gave her first lesson. The course lasted three months, meeting every second Monday. Although the participants frequently had some time before and after class to socialize and get to know each other, most of their time was spent listening to the instructor (Focus Group Discussion 1, 2006). There were not enough ingredients for everyone to try making the sweets, and there was only one small stove, so generally the instructor would give a demonstration and the participants would watch (Vandana, interview, 2006). The women were taught to make a variety of sweets, and occasionally permitted to take some home to their children. The participants in the course received limited instruction on how to create a home business to sell the sweets they were learning to make. At the end of the course they were given a small quiz about the ingredients and methods necessary for different types of sweets, and those who passed the quiz were presented with a certificate a few weeks later by the SEEDS coordinator (Focus Group Discussion 1, 2006).

After the sweet making course ended, the SEEDS coordinating officer met with the participants and explained that the next course would be for mosquito net production, and that the cost of the course was 1,500 rupees. Many participants were unhappy with the high cost of the course, but most decided to pay the money and take the course, as they had enjoyed the first
one (Focus Group Discussion 1, 2006). The mosquito net production course also lasted three months, meeting every second Monday. It was conducted in a similar fashion to the sweet making course. At the end of the course the instructor quizzed the women, and those who passed were presented with a certificate by the SEEDS coordinator several weeks after the completion of the course (Focus Group Discussion 1, 2006).

The WEP meetings and courses continued in this fashion. Approximately 25-30 of the new RVSA Women’s Society members were able to attend the meetings regularly, which continued to be held at the Kalutara Children’s Library (Focus Group Discussion 2). Courses were given on sweet making, mosquito net production, sewing and patchwork, plush toy making, ekel broom production, garment production, sari embroidery, mushroom cultivation, and beauty culture and bridal hair styling (Indrani, interview, 2006). At most meetings a coordinating officer would be present to take attendance and to collect payments for the courses when they were due (Focus Group Discussion 1, 2006).

In December 2002, the SEEDS coordinating officers encouraged the participants to sell some of the products they had learned to make at the SEEDS Annual Trade Fair, a large five-day market where entrepreneurs who have received skill training or microfinance through SEEDS can sell products and potentially find distributors for them. SEEDS set aside four stall spaces at the Trade Fair for the WEP participants, free of charge. Twelve of the women decided to attend the Trade Fair, selling sweets, mosquito nets, and plush toys (Focus Group Discussion 1, 2006). The women sold most of the goods they brought, and their success at the Trade Fair was a confidence boost for many of the participants:
I did not think that I could make toys that people would pay so much money for. I did not think that people would want to buy these things from me, but people liked them. After I saw that people wanted to buy my toys, I felt proud. (Anushi, interview, 2006)

Each of the participants I spoke to who had attended the SEEDS Annual Trade Fair in 2002 expressed that it had been a positive experience, and many of them indicated that it had given them sense of self-pride and confidence.

At the end of the WEP’s first year in existence, approximately 25 of the widows were still attending the meetings/classes regularly (Focus Group Discussion 2, 2006). A majority of the participants I interviewed indicated that at this point in the program’s existence, the WEP had a positive impact on their lives. However, toward the end of 2004, active membership of the WEP had dropped to approximately 10 women (Focus Group Discussion 2, 2006).

According to the participants, the decline in membership occurred for a number of reasons. Some said that it was due to the poor quality of the training courses being offered, for although some of the courses taken by the participants received good reviews, others were not useful or practical for the women. The ekel broom production course is an example; ekel brooms have a very small market, because families generally only replace their brooms once a year during the Sinhalese New Year in April. The participants’ best access to potential buyers was through the SEEDS Annual Trade Fair, but this was held in December, so the participants had difficulty selling the ekel brooms they had learned to make (Roshani, interview, 2006). The participants also spoke of a garment production course that was considered a failure by many because it required the use of textile equipment that none of the women had access to:

The teacher came with this machine used to weave the cloth. She showed us how to use it, but no one in the class had this machine at home, so there was no purpose in teaching us
this... It was not useful for me. I would rather learn things that I can do at home. (Manori, interview, 2006)

Another reason given for the decline in membership was that instructors for the courses were not very knowledgeable and sometimes late or absent for classes (Vandana, interview, 2006). In addition to this, the cost of the courses continued to increase throughout the duration of the WEP. Originally the participants were told that the cost of their training courses would be highly subsidized, so they would only have to pay a small fee to participate in the WEP. However, after the first course in sweet making was given, the cost of courses ballooned to 1,500 rupees ($16.70 US) from 200 rupees ($2.25 US). A subsequent course in sari embroidery cost 1,700 rupees (Focus Group Discussion 1, 2006). Coordinating officers told them this was because SEEDS was “not a charity”, and they had to cover their costs (Roshani, interview, 2006). Most of the participants were surprised by the sudden increase in price, and many of the women I interviewed believed that participation in the WEP began to dwindle partly because the costs were too high for the calibre of courses being offered.

There was a similar price hike on the stall rentals at the Annual SEEDS Trade Fair, and this led to a further reduction in attendance. Initially there was no cost to the participants to rent a stall at the Trade Fair, but in 2003 the participants were asked to pay 3000 rupees ($33.30 US) for a stall. As a result of this price increase, only five participants took part in the 2003 Trade Fair, and all five of them shared one stall to ensure that nobody incurred a loss. The group managed to make almost one thousand rupees in profit after the cost of the stall was recovered, and they split this evenly among the five of them. Each woman went home with 200 rupees, but considering the time and energy they had put into making cushion covers, placemats, mosquito nets, plush toys, and sweets for the stall, the cost of the materials used to make their goods, the
cost of transporting their goods and themselves back and forth each day to the Trade Fair, plus the cost of food and water for the three days they were there, the women actually incurred a significant loss (Focus Group Discussion 2, 2006).

The SEEDS Annual Trade Fair was the only opportunity most of the participants had to sell their goods to a sizeable market. Since participation in the Trade Fair was so time consuming and expensive, and because some of the products the participants had learned to make proved difficult to sell there, several of the participants felt that the WEP was not worth their money or time. As Geetha noted:

Why learn to make things if you cannot sell them? We were taught how to make mosquito nets. I can only use so many mosquito nets in my own house. I have to be able to sell them to others. But where can I do this? I need to be at home with my children. The SEEDS Trade Fair let us sell our things, but the second year we had to pay. It was too much money, so I did not go to the Trade Fair and I stopped going to the courses. (interview, 2006)

Although some of the participants said they understood the need to charge for the stalls and training courses, a majority of the participants felt they were being charged too much for what they were getting in return. This caused some of the participants to quit their involvement with the WEP (Focus Group Discussion 2, 2008).

Many of the participants also felt cheated because they were promised a certificate for every training course they completed, but in 2004 SEEDS stopped issuing certificates to the WEP participants. The women expressed that the certificates had given them a sense of accomplishment as well as proof of the skills they had acquired, and they were all very disappointed that SEEDS had stopped distributing them. I asked the participants why they
stopped receiving certificates, and they explained that a SEEDS coordinator had blamed it on the failure of the SEEDS Head Office to have them printed. This coordinator promised them they would receive their certificates as soon as they were printed and delivered to the Kalutara Regional Office. However, according to each of the participants I spoke with, certificates were never presented for the courses they took in the final year of the program. When I asked a coordinator from SEEDS about them, he claimed that certificates had been issued to each participant for every course they successfully completed. When I enquired about the certificates with Dr. K., who was the only person at the SEEDS Head Office to have any involvement with the WEP, she explained that the issuing of the certificates had been the responsibility of the SEEDS coordinator at the Kalutara Regional Office.

I was not able to get to the bottom of what had happened, but it was clear that many of the participants became discouraged after SEEDS stopped issuing course certificates. While some participants continued to pay for and participate in the training courses, others withdrew from the program because they did not see why they should pay high fees and work hard to complete a course if they could not have written documentation of it (Focus Group Discussion 2, 2006).

The final straw for two of the participants came when they went together to meet with a program coordinator to request their certificates for the sari embroidery course they had completed. Manori and Vandana had hoped to earn some extra money with the skills they had learned in the course, and they wanted to have a record of their achievements. They claimed the coordinator promised to give them their certificates only if he received a sexual favour in return:

He told us that if we want our certificates, we would have to… Do him a sexual favour… Sometimes men think that because we are widows we are like prostitutes, and they try to
take advantage of us… After (the coordinator) said these things to us we would not go back to the program… We did not feel comfortable. (Manori, interview, 2006).

It was difficult for Vandana and Manori to avoid this person, because he was a coordinating officer for the WEP and he frequently met with the participants to collect their payment for the training courses and to occasionally oversee the classes. So rather than remaining in the WEP and having to see and work with this particular coordinator, the two decided to stop attending.

For these many reasons, membership in the program began to dwindle. Following the tsunami on December 26, 2004, SEEDS shifted its focus to the resulting humanitarian crisis and the WEP was discontinued (Dr. K., interview, 2006). However, several of the women continued to meet together on a more informal basis. They gathered at their convenience, “…sometimes every week and sometimes only once in a month” (Chandrika, interview, 2006). They usually met at Chandrika’s house, because it was centrally located between the town of Kalutara and the village of Mathugama, and because she lived on her own with plenty of space for a meeting. Attendance at these gatherings ranged from three to ten people, with a regular group of six women (Roshani, interview, 2006). They met together mainly to socialize. They would have tea together and talk and “follow the local gossip” (Chandrika, interview, 2006).

However, only a few weeks after they began these informal meetings, four of the women decided to pool some of their money together to help Anushi, who was struggling to raise funds for house repairs she sorely needed. These four women decided that instead of having Anushi repay them, they should establish a rotating credit fund (Roshani, interview, 2006). Thus every month each of the five women contributed 2000 rupees to a collective pot, and one of them would take the lump sum of 10,000 rupees to spend any way she liked. The fund rotated each
month until every member had received the lump sum, and then the cycle began again. The rotation did not always happen in the same order, because the recipient of the lump sum was sometimes determined by who had the most immediate need for the funds (Focus Group Discussion 2, 2006).

Some of the women who came to these informal meetings were not inclined or not financially able to participate in the rotating credit fund. However, every participant I spoke to who was able to attend these meetings was happy they had the opportunity to do so. The participants who were members of the fund said they enjoyed its economic benefits, however a majority of them stressed that what was most enjoyable about their meetings was the company of the other women (Focus Group Discussion 2, 2006).
6.0 ANALYSIS:

This chapter contains my analysis of how militarized and neoliberal governmentalities exerted themselves through the structure and implementation of the WEP, and how they were accepted, negotiated, and resisted by the coordinators and participants.

6.1 GOVERNMENTALITY THROUGH STRUCTURE:

Elements of the way the WEP was structured worked to promote the logics of militarization. The RVSA conceived the idea for the program and approached SEEDS to partner with them. This pairing of a military authority with an NGO parallels the broader trend of militarization in Sri Lanka. Through engaging in humanitarian work, the military positions itself as an extension of, or surrogate for, the state, NGOs, and civil society. Projects like the WEP give the military the means to construct itself as benevolent, protective, and deeply integrated into Sri Lankan communities, rather than merely an institution used for security purposes.

The RVSA was able to select who was invited to participate in the WEP, since they developed the concept of the project and were in charge of recruiting participants. As a result, only widows whose husbands died during active military service were invited to join, rather than the widows of civilians, despite the likelihood that widows who do not receive a military pension might have a greater financial need for the kinds of income-generating skills that the WEP sought to provide. The privileging of the ‘widows of war heroes’ buttresses the idea that women who are widowed because their husbands were killed during military service are different and somehow more deserving than widows whose husbands were not. This drives home the message that military service is more virtuous than other activities, that military deaths are more virtuous than other deaths.
Privileging widows whose husbands served in the state’s military also links martial virtue to ethnic identity, as the government’s ‘war heroes’ are almost invariably Sinhalese. Although the Sri Lankan army recruited one hundred Tamil women in 2012 as a step toward reconciliation, the armed forces have virtually no Tamil or Moor representation (Radhakrishnan, 2012). Limiting WEP participation to widows whose husbands were members of the military effectively limited participation to widows whose husbands were Sinhalese. So the privileging of military service also privileged Sinhalese ethnic identity, and the virtue that accrued to the former simultaneously accrued to the latter.

The presence of militarized rationalities is again apparent when one considers the participants’ automatic designation as victims in need of ‘empowerment’. The trope of widow-as-victim is pervasive in militarized regions, because it serves to justify the military project (de Mel, 2007). The participants’ victimhood and disempowerment did not need to be assessed prior to the program, it could be assumed because in conflict settings the positioning of women as a homogenous category of vulnerable victims awaiting rescue is such a well-worn trope that it seems to be irrefutable (Ramnarain, 2014). This especially applies to women who have lost their status of ‘wife’ through war, because their loss is that much greater (Tambiah, 2004). However, the participants’ lived experiences contradicted this assertion:

I joined the program because… It’s mainly that I was curious. I was surprised to be invited to the group, and I wanted to see what we were meant to do… No, I did not need to make any income, these things you don’t get very much money for. With my children I don’t have time for these things, they keep me very busy… I enjoyed the sewing and embroidery because that is useful to me. (Suranthi, interview, 2006)
Suranthi was not in any dire need of financial assistance when the WEP began, and she expressed satisfaction with her full life. She saw the WEP as an enriching aspect in her life because she learned to make toys for her children and to embroider elaborate tablecloths. She certainly did not fit the image of a vulnerable victim waiting to be rescued. However, despite such evidence the contrary, the WEP was founded on the assumption that the widows were ‘stressed and depressed’, because it accommodated the militarizing idea that war widows are victims that must be avenged.

The structure of the WEP also functioned to promote the logics of neoliberalism. Many widows who do not receive pensions have to find work outside the home or other means of generating an income in order to care for their families, and thus these widows are already engaged in the market economy. The WEP can be viewed as targeting women who are perhaps outliers of the capitalist system, as a means of initiating them into its mores. This is evident in the way the WEP was focused solely on income generating projects while disregarding the other interests expressed by the participants. For example, many of the women expressed an interest at the first meeting about regular meetings with the psychiatrist, but this aspect of the program never materialized. When I asked one of the SEEDS coordinators why this was the case, he told me that the psychiatrist had come from the RVSA, and as a SEEDS employee he did not have the ability arrange regular visits. And furthermore he stated that:

The widows can go to the RVSA if they need these things. There’s always that. The purpose of the program was to teach them to be entrepreneurs. We had to focus on getting them teachers… For the mental problems they have, they have to go elsewhere. We are not equipped for that… (Mr. W., interview, 2006)
The structure and purpose of the WEP were in place before the participants could express their particular concerns, and although there was lip service paid to the idea that the women could choose the focus of the program and the courses they were offered, in reality the coordinators always intended to select courses based on the availability of trainers working in the SEEDS Enterprise Services Division (ESD). As one coordinator revealed:

It was difficult because the teachers were not always available. We had to hire ones who were available at that time to go to Kalutara… The women asked for a cooking course, however this is not something we could provide… Cooking is not done through ESD. We were able to a sweet making course instead. (Dr. K., interview, 2006)

It was easiest for SEEDS to recruit teachers who were already under their service, so the specific interests of the WEP participants took a backseat to the availability of the instructors, and anything the participants wanted that was not related to developing entrepreneurial skills was ignored. Yet the WEP coordinators felt justified in this, because they regarded the services they were providing to the women as more valuable than some of the other interests of the participants:

With cooking, the women, yes, they can make fancy dishes for their families but they cannot sell these things. The food they can sell as packed lunches they can already make. The more difficult dishes they would need a restaurant, or a stall, or some such thing, because people will not buy them from their homes. … The sweet making course was more useful to the girls. (Dr. K., interview, 2006)

The requests of the participants for a cooking course were ignored not just because SEEDS lacked easy access to a cooking instructor, but also because it was not seen as a particularly marketable skill for the women. SEEDS did not want to waste time with something
that was not ‘useful’ in a neoliberal sense, and instead shaped the program around projects that were. This reveals the operation of neoliberal governmentality through the structure of the WEP; it privileged activities that fit with the logic of neoliberalism, while rendering activities that did not as secondary or unimportant.

Another feature of the WEP’s structure that worked to reinforce neoliberal modes of thought was its conflation of ‘empowerment’ with income generation. The title of the program referred explicitly to women’s empowerment, yet there was little discussion of what empowerment might look like beyond earning an income (Focus Group Discussion 2, 2006). The inference that empowerment can be gained through participation in economic markets (regardless of the personal details of one’s life) supports the extremely de-politicized neoliberal conception of empowerment that is so pervasive in mainstream development discourse (Sharma, 2008). Empowerment has been reconfigured from an emancipatory idea into an instrument of neoliberal governmentality that is used to promote participation in capitalist markets (Miraftab, 2004). According to the neoliberal logic of the WEP, self-empowerment and self-improvement is attained solely through increasing one’s income and contributing to the economy.

Further evidence of the neoliberal governmentality of the WEP lies in the fact that the psychiatrist the RVSA included in the first meeting of the WEP never made a reappearance in the program, despite some of the participants’ interest in having someone to speak to about their mental health. Janaki in particular expressed that she would have benefitted from access to a psychiatrist:

I wanted the psychiatrist because I could talk to her. She could help me… I have no one to help me. I can talk to the other women but I am ashamed… There is something the matter with me. I have such pain… They (the Rana Viru Seva Authority) have psychiatrists to
help the soldiers and sometimes women too, but I am afraid when I go there. (Janaki, interview, 2006).

Janaki was experiencing feelings of pain and fear that she wanted to discuss with someone who would not judge her and who would know how to assist her. Although the RVSA had psychiatrists and trauma counselors on staff, she did not feel she had access to them because she was intimidated by an environment dominated by male members of the military.

Janaki had hoped the WEP would enable her to have access to a psychiatrist, but this component of the program failed to materialize. The coordinators of the WEP were preoccupied with providing skills training to the women to encourage their market participation, because the structure of the program was built according to neoliberal priorities. There was no discussion of political, legal, or social forms of empowerment, nor any projects to explicitly promote them. The ‘empowerment’ program was restricted to economic activities alone, which reflects and reinforces the influence of neoliberal governmentality.

Many of the WEP participants expressed to me that their primary concerns and struggles had little to do with income generation. For some of the participants, their greatest source of worry was conflict with their in-laws over the compensation they received from the military. Most of the participants reported feeling pressured by their husband’s kin to hand over all or a portion of the compensation they received, even when they were not living in their inlaws’ households (Focus Group Discussion 2, 2006). Frequently the argument given by the parents of the deceased was that they had lost their son, whom they had been counting on to support them in old age, and they deserved to be compensated for that loss.

A majority of the participants said they gave a portion of their compensation to their in-laws every month, but some said they felt pressured to give more, and that the money was a
source of anger and resentment among their in-laws (Focus Group Discussion 2, 2006). Two of the participants were asked to leave their in-laws’ homes when they would not hand over more money. Four participants left the homes of their in-laws on their own accord in order to avoid feeling pressured; one went to live with her own parents, and the other three sought assistance from the RVSA to find a piece of property and secure a loan for the construction of a house. At the time the WEP began, only three of the participants still lived with their in-laws, with one giving half of her compensation to her mother-in-law, and the other two giving all of their compensation directly to their father-in-laws. One of the women who gave away all of her compensation said she felt she had no choice:

    I did not want to live alone, I did not want to raise my children alone. I felt more protected in that house, with a man living there, so I wanted to stay. But my father-in-law insisted that I give him the money. What could I do? I wanted to keep the money and make sure I had enough to buy my children their school uniforms and books. I wanted to make sure they had enough to eat, and save for emergencies. But I could not ask to keep it myself. I was afraid he might ask me to leave, and I felt I had nowhere else to go. So I give him the money and he spends it the way he wants to. (Amanthi, interview, 2006)

    To stay on good terms with her father-in-law and to retain the protection she felt he provided her with, she felt forced to surrender all of her financial compensation to him. Although she wanted to control how the money was spent, her father-in-law did not feel that she was entitled to the money or capable of managing it herself. This type of attitude regarding widows’ rights to inheritance, property, and control over household finances is common (Tambiah, 2004), yet the WEP did not engage in any activities to challenge these attitudes. Nor did it seek to
provide the participants with awareness of their rights or access to legal resources to protect those rights.

Perhaps Amanthi could have used the training provided by the WEP to develop a steady source of income to replace the compensation that her father-in-law was appropriating, however this did not happen. Most of the products she learned to make were used for private consumption (Amanthi, interview, 2006). Had she developed an income source, the WEP provided little assistance in reducing the likelihood that her father-in-law would assert control over those earnings as well.

Although I have no evidence that the WEP exacerbated the conflicts that had cropped up between some of the participants and their in-laws over military compensation, the program did nothing to mitigate these conflicts, despite this being a prevalent issue and a top concern for many of the participants. The program promoted income-earning skills as a means to ‘empower’ the participants, rather than, for instance, education about their legal rights to their military compensation. Thus the WEP’s activities and overall focus constructed empowerment as something directly linked to economic activity, and divorced from notions of power or rights. As in Miraftab’s analysis of government waste collection strategies in Cape Town (2004), the WEP had the effect of depoliticizing and instrumentalizing empowerment for the purposes of neoliberalism.

While the WEP neglected to address the participants’ struggles with their in-laws over their military compensation, it similarly avoided any engagement with the stigmatization the participants faced as widows. For many participants this was one of the hardest aspects of being widowed:
Ever since my husband died I have been alone… When people see me walking down the road, sometimes they turn in another direction to avoid crossing my path… I feel ashamed.

(Janaki, interview, 2006)

Some were excluded from family celebrations:

There is a girl in my family. She is my niece. Due to my sister-in-law going to Saudi Arabia to work, I practically raised the child. Then the day came that she was a woman. For this there was a celebration. However, my brother purposely told me the wrong time for the event, and I missed it. I missed the most important event of her childhood because my brother thought I would bring misfortune to her by being there, because I am a widow.

(Priyanka, diary entry, 2006)

Some were forced to maintain a low profile:

I was allowed to attend my sister’s wedding, but I had to come after all the other guests had arrived and stand in the back. I could not sit near the front or be seen too much because I might have brought my bad luck to my sister’s marriage. (Manori, interview, 2006)

The stigma and exclusion that the participants experienced as a result of their widowed status led them to restrict their social presence and caused them feelings of shame, loneliness, and reduced confidence. However, the WEP did not attempt to tackle the issue of widow stigma by engaging in public advocacy or by providing counseling to the participants to help them manage it more effectively. The WEP did not address the issue directly at all, but merely pushed the importance of entrepreneurial skills. As a result, the participants’ struggles with stigma were framed as something that could be remedied through market participation and increased earnings.
Another primary concern for the WEP participants was harassment and violence. The participants who were mothers faced the dilemma of being expected to remain at home and keep a low profile as widows, yet having more obligations outside of the home than ever before as single parents. These contradictory pressures meant that some of the participants felt forced to endure unwanted attention and harassment when they left their homes. Many of the participants had experienced sexual harassment and assault while walking along the road or taking buses alone. It was so pervasive that some of them refused to travel unless absolutely necessary:

Since my children were old enough to go to school by themselves I just stayed at home. I did not like to go out. People in the village would say nasty things to me. Young men would follow me and tease me. I became so ashamed… If I had to take a bus I would bring a sari pin with me, so if a man tried to bother me I could jab him with it. Once I did this, and the man got so angry with me, he yelled at me and called me a witch. I never did that again, I stopped taking the bus. I started paying extra money to take a trishaw when I had to go someplace far, but usually I stayed home. (Renuka, interview, 2006)

Renuka’s ability to pay for private transportation in the form of a trishaw (a three-wheeled auto rickshaw or taxi) allowed her to travel outside the home while avoiding the harassment she might encounter on the bus. However, not all participants could afford to do this, particularly those who were giving their husband's entire pension to their in-laws. The threat of harassment worked to restrict the participants’ mobility and confine their opportunities, yet it was not addressed or even discussed by the WEP. The coordinators of the WEP designed the program to assist participants in building home-based businesses without interrogating the reasons why they assumed that a widow’s place is in the home, or why the participants might willingly confine themselves there. The program problematized the women’s ability to earn an
income from home rather than the violence and harassment that restricted their access to the public realm. The violence the participants faced as women and as widows was not addressed by the WEP because the program was structured according to neoliberal rationalities that fail to account for women’s lived realities.

Beneath these concerns about how neoliberal governmentality constructs and ignores problems of violence against women lie the connections between militarization and violence. Militarization has the effect of advancing and normalizing hyper-masculine forms of violence that suppress both women and non-dominant men (Mama & Okazawa-rey, 2012). During Sri Lanka’s civil war, incidents of violence were common. Massacres, assassinations, abductions, extra-judicial killings, displacement, ‘disappearances’, sexual assault, and rape happened with such frequency that they have raised the threshold for violence of Sri Lankan society (de Mel, 2007). Militarization uses the threat of violence to justify its process and logic, which in turn leads to more violence.

Women have had to negotiate this climate of violence alongside a heightened presence of military and paramilitary entities that are not accountable to the law. Military men in charge of ‘securing’ communities subject women to sexual assault and harassment at checkpoints, among other forms of custodial violence. Such behavior has become naturalized and even acceptable, something women have to expect and for which they must prepare (deMel, 2007). This is not only because soldiers are constructed as inherently virtuous due to their military work (and thus entitled to do what they want), but also because sexual harassment is perceived as only a minor irritant in a society traumatized by hyper-violence. Even rape usually goes unreported, particularly if the perpetrator is a soldier or police officer (Tambiah, 2004). One of the participants had such an experience:
He came to my door wearing his uniform. He said he knew my husband and we spoke about him. I should not have spoken to him. I should not have opened the door… He raped me in front of my baby daughter while she cried… I thought I would die that day… After that I never opened the door to anyone. (Janaki, interview, 2006)

Janaki blamed herself for opening the door, rather than the soldier who targeted her and sexually assaulted her in her home. She did not report the rape to the police because she was ashamed, and also because she did not know who she could trust. She did not seek medical attention because she was too frightened to leave her house. She was too humiliated to talk about the incident in detail with anyone, but she told her brother that a soldier had come to the house and threatened her. From then on she asked him to accompany her when she had to run errands or go to the army headquarters to pick up her compensation. It took several months before she would go anywhere on her own again, because she felt vulnerable to violence unless she was behind the locked door of her house or in the company of her brother.

Neither neoliberal nor militarization governmentalities interrogate the presence of violence in women’s lives. Militarization facilitates and relies upon this violence, and neoliberalism offers technical solutions to it, such as buying better locks for your door, or paying for a trishaw instead of taking the bus. The WEP did not recognize or address the issue of violence and its negative impacts on the lives of the participants because it was structured according to the logics of neoliberalism and militarization. However, these logics are seductive; even the participants who were most concerned with the threat of violence regarded this violence as something inevitable that required economic investment to guard against it:

I had to take a loan of 100,000 rupees from the People’s Bank. I was forced to do it because my house was burgled. My house was still unfinished at that time, with no doors
or windows, so I took the loan to have the doors and windows fixed. They are fixed now, but at night I still fear for my daughter’s safety as well as my own. Sometimes at night men come to the house and throw stones at my windows. They stand outside and shout rude things and tell me to open the door. On these nights I can do nothing but shake with fear and hold my daughter close. I have not been able to sleep soundly since my husband died.

(Kumari, diary entry, 2006)

For Kumari, the only way to mitigate the threat of violence was to take out a loan to fortify her house. This is an instrumental strategy for a problem that is not instrumental (Ferguson, 1990); it fails to address the power dynamics and rationalities that construct violence against women as a natural state, and it frames consumerism as the key to coping with it.

In a similar fashion, the WEP was structured in a way that ignored the problem of violence in the participants’ lives and instead centred on improving their ability to produce goods and generate incomes. This had the effect of diminishing the issue of violence and invisibilizing forms of empowerment that were not economic. The violent effects of militarization remained unacknowledged, and the logics of neoliberalism remained unquestioned.

6.2 GOVERNMENTALITY THROUGH IMPLEMENTATION:

The governmental effects of militarization and neoliberalism were also present in the way the WEP was implemented. The WEP was conducted in a top-down and non-participatory manner, with the coordinators making all decisions concerning the program. The courses were selected on the basis of the availability of instructors and their perceived suitability for the participants, and they corresponded with income-generating tasks traditionally performed by women such as baking, sewing, and beauty culture. If the participants had other interests they had no means of altering the program’s activities to include them:
I wish we had done an art course, because I love to draw and paint. Now that my children are older I have more time to do things like this. I like to practice and become better… No, I did not ask (Mr. W.) to have a course on this, because it is too difficult to make money from these things like drawings and painting… We did not get to choose the courses, SEEDS was responsible for the choosing… (laughter) Anyway I am not good enough to sell my paintings. (Vandana, interview, 2006)

Vandana did not even suggest to the coordinators that the WEP include an art course, even though it was something she wanted. SEEDS selected only ‘gender-appropriate’ courses that would enable the participants to establish a home enterprise, and vetoed ideas that did not serve this purpose. Vandana perceived an art course as unsuitable for the program because it likely would not equip the participants to increase their incomes. Here the normative capabilities of the neoliberal governmentality operating through the WEP is very apparent; the program construed some activities as more valuable than others according to their ability to achieve neoliberal aims. Actions and interests that were not marketable possessed little value according to the program’s neoliberal metric.

Similarly, the details of the WEP’s implementation reveal the militarized governmentality at work within the program. Militarized logic is discernible in the language the coordinators employed throughout the WEP. They referred to the participants as ‘Rana Viru widows’ (widows of war heroes). Such language works to glorify the military and construct a hierarchy of widows. The title ‘Rana Viru widows’ distinguished the WEP participants from widows whose husbands were not killed during service in the military. It reinforces dying for the military as a heroic act, and it portrays the women who have lost their husbands in this way as having made an important sacrifice; they are not just widows, they are martyrs for their country.
The stigma of their widowhood is in some ways mitigated by the prestige they are afforded by this distinction and title—a distinction and title which happens to be reserved almost exclusively for Sinhalese widows.

Thus it is not a surprise that many of the participants of the WEP embraced the term ‘Rana Viru widows’ and accused one of the participants of having tenuous claims to the title because her husband had committed suicide rather than being killed in action:

My husband was brave, he died in battle. Her husband was a coward and killed himself. He did not have to die. He could be alive today… And yet she is called a war hero widow. Her husband was not a hero, my husband was a hero. I have no objection to her being with us, but it makes me angry that my husband had to die and hers did not have to die. (Priyanka, interview, 2006)

The language that was employed throughout the implementation of the program reinforced militarized hierarchies and fuelled resentment toward a participant who was perceived to be lacking the requisite martial virtue. In repeatedly referring to the participants as ‘Rana Viru widows’, the WEP coordinators identified the women through their relationships with their deceased husbands and through their connections to the military, thereby reinforcing gendered and militarized modes of thought.

However, the language of the WEP was not the only aspect of its implementation that channeled the governmentality of militarization, this was also achieved through the marketing of the project by both SEEDS and the RVSA. Although widows in Sri Lanka are generally expected to maintain a low profile and a conservative mode of dress, the participants’ sacrifices to the military afforded them a public importance. Thus they were invited by the RVSA to appear at memorial events in front of the media. On Rana Viru Day many of them were present at the
national ceremony in white saris as the poster children for the RVSA’s efforts to empower widows. The WEP participants who appeared at these events enjoyed being treated like important guests of honour and publicly praised for their commitment to Sri Lanka’s future.

These public appearances by military widows broadcasts an image of an ideal Sinhalese woman; one who is willing and proud to have her husband die for military purposes, one who remains loyal to the military even after a loved one is lost through its activities, one who mourns stoically, gracefully, and remains committed to the memory of her husband for the rest of her life. In short, her worth is derived from her relationship to her husband and his engagement in the military project.

Photos of The WEP participants and information about the program were showcased on the RVSA website to demonstrate the successful outcomes of the authority’s ‘personal skills development programs’ (Priyanka, interview, 2006). The RVSA’s commitment to the families of servicemen is a prevailing theme on their website; whenever they give a parcel of land, a house, a loan, or a scholarship to a serviceman or a member of their family, they display it online (Rana Viru Seva Authority, n.d.). While I was in Sri Lanka I also observed that the RVSA broadcasted television commercials to advertise their work in caring for those affiliated with the military.

This brand of marketing is aimed at potential recruits, their families, and broader society in order to shape public opinion of the military. It constructs the RVSA (and thus, the military) as an entity that is working in the best interests of Sri Lankan families. It also signifies that certain families are special and worthy of assistance because of their commitment to Sri Lanka’s military project, thereby reinforcing the idea of martial virtue and linking it to material reward in a way that reveals how militarization and neoliberal governmentality inform each other. Not only is the soldier celebrated publicly as a hero, he can expect to be compensated for his heroism.
The RVSA’s self-representation as a crusader for loyal families places a normative focus on ‘traditional’ family units and intertwines martial virtue with notions of what a good father is, what proud parents look like, what a happy family consists of, and how a righteous widow behaves. The RVSA used photos of the WEP participants as a part of their continuing public relations campaign to construct military service as something admirable and necessary for the survival of Sri Lankan families and the Sinhalese way of life. Yet the RVSA’s staged photos of WEP participants also framed them as victims of the war in need of help and charity from the army. The presence of war widows is introduced as a visible scar, a reminder of the price that has been paid for the future of the country. Such a reminder is useful in stoking the fires of resentment and hatred that have accumulated during the decades of conflict. The existence of war widows is thus a means of rationalizing further militarization and acts of violence.

SEEDS also publicly showcased the WEP participants in the same fashion. The WEP was featured in the SEEDS Annual Report in the years 2002-04, with photos of the participants holding the handicrafts and sweets they had made, smiling brightly for the camera. The WEP was featured in the section of the Annual Report devoted to ‘Gender Empowerment’ as an example of how SEEDS was working to empower women generally, and military widows particularly (SEEDS, 2004). SEEDS also held an annual public ceremony every International Women’s Day, and presented participation certificates to WEP members at this event every year that the WEP was running in order to display SEEDS’ contribution to the women associated with the armed forces (Dr. K., interview, 2006). The participants I spoke to who were present at these events or who were featured in the Annual Report indicated that they were happy to do so, and felt pride in this recognition. However, some noticed a discrepancy between the attention that SEEDS offered them publicly, and the treatment they received privately. For example, Anushi
exclaimed that she would have rather received the certificate for plush toy making that she was owed but never received through the WEP than any of the participation certificates she received at the International Women’s Day ceremony:

The Women’s Day event is nice. We get cake and certificates. But if SEEDS can make us certificates for Women’s Day, then why can they not make them for the courses we took? Still I have not received the last certificates… I am proud of the toys I have learned to make. I am good at it, and I would like the certificate that shows others what I have accomplished. (Anushi, interview, 2006)

SEEDS was eager to present certificates to the women publicly in a way that marketed the organization’s contributions to the war effort in a positive light, but less concerned about ensuring that the participants received the certificates they had been promised after the cameras had been put away. This selective attention supported the notion that the participants were more valuable as symbols of the conflict than as individual subjects. The implementation of the WEP therefore simultaneously reflected and reinforced the values of militarization.

6.3 COMPLIANCE/VIOLENCE:

It is all too easy to point to the coordinators of the WEP as culpable for the transmission of militarized and neoliberal logic through the WEP. However, as Ferguson notes, the planners are not the blueprint of the machine, they are parts of the machine (1994, p. 276). The SEEDS coordinating officers I interviewed seemed to genuinely want to assist the participants of the WEP. They were not consciously trying to promote any particular rationality. However, as NGO workers they are inevitably steeped in mainstream development discourse, which at that time endorsed neoliberal technologies such as enterprise development and skills training as a means to empowerment.
During the timeframe of the WEP, SEEDS was reliant on large international donors including Oxfam Novib (the Dutch affiliation of Oxfam International), the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ), and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) for financial and technical support (SEEDS, 2004). As such, SEEDS programming was shaped around the priorities and ‘expert’ opinions of their international partners.

Dominant development discourse placed a strong focus on microfinance and entrepreneurship at that time, due to the excitement generated by the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, so much of SEEDS programming was focused on skills training, microcredit, and ‘enterprise services’ at the time the WEP took place. The assumptions and biases of international organizations guided the practices of SEEDS personnel who felt pressure to fall in line with the preferences of donors in order to obtain funding. This in turn shaped the design and implementation of the WEP.

This is not to say that SEEDS workers and the WEP coordinators were opposed to the priorities of the donor organizations and had to submit to them reluctantly. In the discussions I had with SEEDS employees and directors, very few people suggested that SEEDS was being oppressed or lead down the garden path by the consultants that arrived from the Netherlands, Germany, and Canada to assist them with the direction of the organization. The neoliberal governmentality of development discourse has been so successful because it presents itself as a straightforward and technical solution to the problems faced by the poor and marginalized.

The neoliberal governmentality operating through the WEP was not the result of coordinators knowingly enforcing rationalizations of free markets and war in the lives of the participants. The same can be said for the members of the international development and donor organizations who assisted SEEDS with their operations. As Ferguson suggests: “One must
entertain the possibility that the ‘development’ apparatus... may do what it does, not at the bidding of some knowing and powerful subject who is making it all happen, but behind the backs or against the wills of even the most powerful actors. (Ferguson, 1994, p. 18). Neoliberalism and militarization did not function as forms of governmentality through the WEP because the donors or the coordinators intentionally willed it so, but because these forms of governmentality had restricted the possibilities for any alternative.

The coordinators might not have deliberately complied with the militarized and neoliberal governmentalities operating within the WEP, but their compliance is evident, and it sometimes took the form of violence. One of the coordinators was accused of sexually harassing two of the participants. Not only did this reinforce notions of widows as victims, submissive and sexually available, it also contributed to the climate of violence that had been created through the process of militarization. Even if it was not true, just the rumor that a program coordinator had subjected participants to sexual violence reinforced the normalization of violence in the women’s lives:

I heard of what (the coordinator) said to (Vandana) and (Manori). But it is to be expected because we are widows. Lots of men say these things to us. It is to be expected. Why should (the coordinator) treat us differently? ...(Vandana) and (Manori) are just not hard enough yet. Widows need to learn to be hard like stones. (Indrani, interview, 2006)

The acceptance of gendered and militarized notions of how widows should expect to be treated leads to the conclusion that sexual harassment is inevitable and unavoidable, and all one can do is accept this and prepare for it.
6.4 AMBIVALENCE/RESISTANCE:

Despite the regulatory effects of militarization and neoliberal governmentality through the structure and implementation of the WEP, neither one operated as a totalizing force. While the participants were not immune to the governmentalizing effects of the program (no one can be), they also acted and reacted in ways that resisted them. One example of this is Indrani, who enjoyed the WEP’s beauty culture and bridal hair styling course so much that she decided to attend a more advanced course being offered in Colombo. She paid 4000 rupees for tuition (approximately $44 US) for a 6-month course that held classes once a week. She had to take her children to the home of another WEP participant who lived nearby on the day of her class because the trip to Colombo was 30 minutes walking and then 2.5 hours by bus from where she lived in Mathuga. However, she finished the course and received a diploma in bridal dressing and beauty culture, making her, to her knowledge, the most qualified bridal make-up and hair designer in the Kalutara District (Indrani, interview, 2006).

By word of mouth this became known in her community, and women from her village and the outlying area began coming to her house seeking to hire her to dress them for their weddings and other important social events. At the time this study was conducted, Indrani was dressing two to three women every month. She worked from her house so that she did not have to travel, and so she could be home when her children finished school in the afternoons. She had also participated in three bridal shows in the town of Kalutara, where the bride she dressed won second place in 2005 (Indrani, diary entry, 2006; Indrani, interview, 2006).

Indrani expressed great enjoyment and satisfaction in her work:

I love doing other women's make-up and arranging their hair. Since I was a little girl I loved to look at beauty magazines and dream about dressing that way... Now I get to help
prepare brides for their weddings and make them beautiful. I worked very hard to learn this. I am so happy that I can do this for them and I am proud of the results. (Indrani, interview, 2006)

On the surface this appears to be a case of uncomplicated consent to and adherence of the neoliberal ideals present in the WEP. However, Indrani was able to cultivate her abilities not only to earn an income, but to assist others, to develop her own creativity, and to receive social recognition and respect. Rather than playing the role of the unfortunate and lonely widow, she cultivated her identity as a successful cosmetic artist, turning the narrative of widow-as-victim upside down. No longer was Indrani an appropriate photo opportunity to demonstrate the evilness of the enemy, the importance of martial virtue, and the generosity of the RVSA.

Perhaps the most telling detail of Indrani’s story is what she did not tell me. At no point did Indrani speak about the income she earned through her business. However, she repeatedly mentioned, both during our interviews and in her diary, that she loved her work, that she had achieved her dreams, and that she enjoyed being able to help other women feel beautiful. So although two of the WEP coordinators cited Indrani as evidence that the program was successful in neoliberal terms (Dr. K., interview, 2006; Mr. W., interview, 2006), Indrani’s success can be viewed as an act of everyday resistance to neoliberal governmentality. As Scott (1989) notes, acts of everyday resistance are “often accompanied by a public discursive affirmation of the very arrangements being resisted” (p. 56). Indrani seemed to be embodying the neoliberal ideal, but she was using her business to engage in art, to connect with others, and to reshape her self-image and public role by challenging conventional notions of widowhood. She took the instrumental priorities of the WEP and shaped them to fit her own goals—which included much more than just participation in capitalist markets and the generation of income.
Further signs of ambivalence and resistance to the militarized and neoliberal governmentalities of the WEP can be found in the fact that the women continued meeting after the program was disbanded, not to develop their income generating skills, but to socialize:

Now we meet together still, there are ten of us who sometimes come… We talk about our families and we gossip… They are my friends. Before I was very lonely, but now these women are my friends... They help me to stand up to my mother-in-law, they help me to feel brave… We can meet anytime we decide. We even made our own (rotating credit) fund. We do not need (the program coordinators) to tell us when to meet or what to do.

(Roshani, interview, 2006)

Roshani was happy the participants continued meeting together because of the friendship and support they provided each other. The rotating credit fund they formed was included almost as an afterthought when she was telling me the reasons why she enjoyed their meetings so much. Although the WEP had placed the utmost importance on improving earnings, what Roshani valued most about the program was the opportunity to connect with women who shared her interests and experiences, who were capable of understanding the challenges she faced.

Furthermore, their rotating credit fund is a form of cooperativism that counters the individualistic values of the WEP. The program was intended to teach the participants how to work individually from home, but they were taught to make only a limited variety of products. In effect, the participants would have been competing against each other for business had the program achieved its goals. Through the rotating credit fund the women were able to cooperate with each other to expand their options and provide each other with a safety net. Freed from the constraints of the WEP, the remaining participants could guide it in a new direction, one that prioritized friendship rather than profit.
7.0 CONCLUSIONS:

This study is not an evaluation of the success or failure of the WEP in achieving its aims, but rather it is an exploration of how militarization and neoliberalism worked to shape the WEP and reproduce themselves through the program’s structure and its implementation; through the selection of participants and activities, through the language used, through the ways it was marketed to the public, through its conceptualization of problems, and through the strategies it offered as solutions. The very involvement of the RVSA in the WEP promoted the logics of militarization, as did the program’s focus on Rana Viru widows over other widows, the use of the participants as symbols of martial virtue and sacrifice in the marketing of the program, and the WEP’s failure to interrogate the presence of violence in the participants’ lives. Neoliberalism was simultaneously reinforced through the program’s conflation of empowerment with market participation, and through the coordinators’ disregard for any of the participants’ interests or concerns that could not be addressed through income generating activities.

However, this study reveals that the governmental aspects of the WEP were not totalizing. The participants displayed ambivalence and resistance to the governing narratives they encountered in the program, and they were able to use the WEP as a springboard for their own ‘project’ based on friendship and cooperation—A collective initiative that works to resist the militarized and neoliberal governmentality that were present in the WEP. This serves as a reminder that resistance and rupture are necessary elements in the evolution of governmentality, but that in order to recognize them, researchers must be attuned to subtle negotiations as well as what happens in the ‘off hours’ and after the project has finished.

It is my hope that this thesis will contribute to an understanding of how particular governmentality operate and are resisted within development projects in the context of Sri
Lanka. There is much room for future study, including a closer look at how constructions of ethnicity are enmeshed with militarization. These understandings will be necessary for Sri Lankan development organizations working to promote reconciliation, healing, and continued peace.
References:


