



Decolonizing theory: Sri Lankan grassroots women in NGO-led peacebuilding

Vibusha Kalanee Madanayake¹ and Piumi Lakchani Denagamage²

^{1,2} *University of Northern British Columbia*

ABSTRACT

At the end of a 30-year civil war in Sri Lanka in 2009, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) played a prominent role in post-war development and peacebuilding. Primarily relying on donor funding from international sources, women were a major “beneficiary” of NGO activities on socio-economic empowerment, advocacy, and grassroots activism. Undoubtedly, their contribution to Sri Lanka’s post-war transition is tremendous. As development practitioners and researchers who have worked closely with several international and national NGOs in Sri Lanka’s post-war setting, the authors use the De-colonial and Post-Colonial Feminist theoretical frameworks to analyze the NGO sector involvement in women’s participation in peacebuilding. It examines the privileges and powers of Colombo-based feminists who use Western-led feminist approaches. Practicing self-reflexivity, the authors question these powers and privileges of Colombo-based feminists to portray diverse forms of oppression women face at grassroots levels, their needs for advocacy, and different modes of resistance on the ground. Contributing to the existing literature on Feminist international development, this analysis connects with the Decolonial and Post-Colonial feminist perspectives to problematize the power relations between Western knowledge systems and the lived experiences of grassroots women in the peacebuilding process through NGO activism. While sharing a concern that NGOs’ power to adopt Western knowledge systems is often unchecked and unmitigated, the paper signifies the importance of embracing the decolonial approaches of alternative feminist theorizing to ensure meaningful participation of Third World women in peacebuilding.

Keywords: Alternative theorizing, Decolonization, NGO, Post-colonial feminisms, Women, Peace, and Security

