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How do women garment workers employ practices of everyday resistance to challenge the patriarchal gender order of Sri Lankan society?

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Abstract

This dissertation explores how women garment workers employed in Sri Lanka's Export Processing Zones employ practices of everyday resistance to challenge the patriarchal gender order of Sinhala society. Analysis is situated firmly within the feminist scholarship on women and work in the global South and particular attention is paid to the labour market as a "bearer of gender". Despite widespread scholarly attention toward the research issues raised, there is a dearth of evidence that explicitly links the feminist literature to the framework of everyday resistance in order to explore the women's everyday creative responses to the global onslaught. This dissertation is an attempt to fill this gap.

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1. Introduction

Since the 1960s export-orientated manufacturing industries have relocated from the global North to low-wage economies in the global South, famously termed the *"new international division of labour"* (Fröbel et al., 1978: 123; Elson and Pearson, 1981; Bair, 2010). The global integration of the world's economies was characterised by processes of economic liberalisation, specifically the initiation of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) and the creation of Free Trade Zones (FTZs), or Export Processing Zones (EPZs), in the global South (Engman et al., 2007; Kabeer, 2013). In 1978, Sri Lanka transitioned from an import-orientated economy to one based on export; the newly elected pro-market government established the country's first FTZ in Katunayake, a northern suburb of Colombo (Hancock et al., 2012; Senarth et al., 2016). Thousands of young, unmarried, rural Sinhalese women were attracted to work in the newly established garment and textile industries, a phenomenon that continues today (Attanapola, 2004; Senarth et al., 2016).

Feminist analysts have shown that the mobilisation of female flexible labour in world market factories is a chief component of the contemporary global economy and have sought to understand how processes of global production interact with the intimate social worlds and lived experiences of women workers. The feminist scholarship on gender and globalisation is characterised by a series of conflicting viewpoints and *"unsettling contradictions"*; specifically, the evidence base questions whether women's participation in the formal export economy is exploitative or emancipatory (Pearson, 2004: 117; Kabeer, 2013). Although this dissertation is firmly embedded within feminist debates and theories, the analysis explores how women garment workers in Sri Lanka's EPZs employ practices of everyday resistance to challenge the patriarchal gender order of Sinhala society. This is intended to shift emphasis from the exploitation versus emancipation binary that dominates the feminist literature and gain greater insights into women's creative responses to the gendered stigmatisation in which they are subject to as a result of their garment worker identity. As such, this dissertation is an attempt to bring together the feminist literature on the labour market and everyday resistance studies scholarship to explore the experiences of women garment workers in Sri Lanka.

The analysis is divided into six chapters. Following this introduction, chapter two introduces the seminal positionalities and debates in the feminist scholarship on women and work in the

global South and proposes a theoretical framework of everyday resistance. Chapter three then presents the Sri Lanka case study, study rationale, and guiding research questions. Subsequently, chapter four outlines the study research design and limitations. Chapter five presents the results of this research project, analysing both the ways in which Sri Lanka's EPZs act as gendered institutions and women garment workers practices of everyday resistance. Finally, chapter six summaries the research findings and offers recommendations for future research.

2. Literature review and theoretical framework

2.1 Gender and the globalisation of production: feminist scholarship on women and work in the global South

The relocation of the geography of industry under the new international division of labour was driven primarily by corporate desires to overcome the limits to profitability and capital accumulation posed by labour costs in the global North (Fröbel et al., 1978; Elson and Pearson, 1981; Bair, 2010). The governments of early export-manufacturing countries set up FTZs to promote trade and foreign direct investment (Lim, 1990). Such zones promote export-led growth by providing financial incentives, trade liberalisation, and streamlined business administration to a subset of the economy defined as a specific geographical area and/or targeting a specific sector (Engman et al., 2007). Special incentives include exemptions of import and export duties, liberal foreign exchange policies, more flexible labour market regulations, and tax exemptions (Engman et al., 2007). Importantly, these processes of economic liberalisation reflect not only the intensification of capitalism, but also comprise the interactions and shifts between different spheres of social activity (Chin and Mittelman, 1997). In this sense, globalisation is a *"contradictory process – an uneasy correlation of economic forces, power relations, and social structures"* (Chin and Mittelman, 1997: 26).

It is important to note that the emergence of the new international division of labour was *"not the first time that industrial capitalism…reconstituted the world system"* (Dannecker, 2002: 32). Strikingly, however, feminist political economists have demonstrated that the spatial fragmentation of the geography of production was accompanied by the mobilisation of female labour in countries as diverse as Mexico and Malaysia (Elson and Pearson, 1981; Fernández-Kelly, 1983; Bair, 2010; Kabeer, 2013). This resulted in a steady rise in women's share of labour market activity across the globe, termed the 'feminisation' of the labour force (Standing, 1989; Kabeer, 2013). Industry demand for female labour as a central feature of the global economy coincided with growing scholarly interest in women's changing roles, and thus engendered a vast body of feminist scholarship on women factory workers in the global South (Standing, 1989; Lim, 1990; Barker, 2005; Bair, 2010). This evidence-base is embedded in broader discourses about the interplay between the forces of capitalism, neoliberalism, gender, and patriarchy (Dannecker, 2002). For the purposes of this dissertation, patriarchy refers to

"the system of male dominance that subordinates women and privileges men at women's expense" (Polakoff, 2011: 11). Importantly, however, patriarchal systems and the ways in which women "bargain" with patriarchy differ in distinct contexts (Kandiyoti, 1988).

Writing in the 1980s and 1990s, the first generation of feminist scholars in the field primarily sought to explain why female labour is preferred in export-orientated production and how globalisation processes affect "Third World women" employed on the *"global assembly line"* (Standing, 1989; Bair, 2010: 205). Particular attention was paid to the conditions under which women participate in the labour market, such as concerns of equal pay, the provision of flexible hours and non-wage benefits, opportunities to achieve promotion, as well as freedom from sexual harassment (Pearson, 2004). Central here is the classification of formal employment in world market factories as unregulated, unprotected, and characteristic of work in the informal economy (Kabeer and Mahmud, 2004). Specific attention was also paid to the relationship between women's incorporation into the labour market and their position within the family and community – the production/social reproduction nexus (Kabeer et al., 2011). Relatedly, feminist analysts were interested in assessing whether women's access to wage labour had the potential to destabilise traditional gender roles and challenge female subordination (Bair, 2010). This encapsulates a long-standing and contested debate within the field of gender and development; namely, does the employment of women in world market factories confer exploitation or emancipation (empowerment) for women in the global South (Pearson, 2004; Kabeer et al., 2011; Kabeer, 2013)?

Elson and Pearson's (1981) seminal paper intervenes on the exploitation versus emancipation debate to investigate the relations through which women in the global South are integrated into the global capitalist system of production. For the authors, the gendered dimension of transnational production rests upon a widespread assumption of a "natural" differentiation between women and men; women are constructed as dexterous, manageable, and docile, possessing "innate" traits conducive to monotonous, labour-intensive production (Elson and Pearson, 1981). Additionally, women occupy a secondary status in the labour market due to an objective differentiation of their income needs, based upon their reproductive capacity to bear children and the traditional male breadwinner/female caretaker dichotomy, which results in lower wages for female employees and profitability for multinational corporations (Elson and Pearson, 1981). As Salzinger (2003: 21) contends, *"femininity matters in global*

production, not because it accurately describes a set of exploitable traits, but because it functions as a constitutive discourse which creates exploitable subjects". In other words, the ability of capital to exploit female labour depends upon the sexual division of labour in the capitalist labour process (Mies, 1982). In turn, a model of female dependence structures, and is necessary for the reproduction of, the relations of production of capitalism (Antonopoulos, 2009; Barrett, 2014).

According to Elson and Pearson (1981), three tendencies are fundamental to the relation between export-orientated production and the subordination of women, that is: *i)* a tendency to intensify existing forms of gender subordination, *ii)* to decompose existing forms of gender subordination, and *iii)* to recompose novel forms of gender subordination. Useful here is Whitehead's (1979: 11) distinction between relations which are intrinsically gendered, that is, the social relationships of kinship and family which are gender specific, and those of states and markets which are purportedly neutral and impersonal, but which nevertheless can be *"bearers of gender"*. This conceptualisation of *"labour markets as gendered institutions"* demonstrates the ways in which the forces of capitalism exploit pre-existing societal oppressions and tensions and integrate them into a larger structure of marginalisation (Elson, 1999: 611; Polakoff, 2011). As such, the extent to which women's participation in the global economy can undermine gender subordination is dubious. It is arguable that paid employment in world market factories merely bestows women *"socially attributed agency"*; that is, a capacity to act within the confines of a patriarchal, gender-bearing system (Villarreal, 1994: 217). Central here is Folbre's (1994: 51) notion of *"structures of constraint"*, defined as the long-held rules, norms, assets, and preferences that empower certain social groups and define boundaries of choice. The concept highlights the multi-dimensional nature of inequality; namely, the ways in which divergent forces of inequality interact to form the complex social worlds in which individuals and groups operate (Folbre, 1994). Although feminist political economists acknowledge that women make choices and exercise agency, it is recognised that such opportunities are constrained by the *"patriarchal structures of constraint"* which permeate the social, political, and economic institutions of a particular society (Folbre, 1994: 98; Kabeer, 2012). These "structures of constraint" converge as an overarching hegemonic force and challenge the ability of women *"to take an oppositional stance of the sort necessary to acknowledge one's involvement in an exploitative exchange of labour"* (Ferguson, 1989: 97).

Ultimately, the early feminist scholarship proliferated the image of *"poverty-stricken Third World women"* who suffer brutal exploitation at the hands of the global economy (Lim, 1990: 101; Pearson, 2004). Scholars have long critiqued this reductive, victim-orientated literature. For instance, early feminist analyses were conceptual and analytical rather than grounded in empirical studies, which led to the *"production of the "Third World Woman" as a singular monolithic subject"* (Mohanty, 1988: 61; Dannecker, 2002). Mohanty (1988) argues that the representation of a passive, homogenous mass of "Third World women" can be attributed to the Eurocentric epistemologies of Western (usually white) feminists. Moreover, the one-dimensional exploitation focus of the early feminist scholarship tended to rule out a priori the possibility that women's access to factory employment in the global South may have some positive implications (Kabeer, 2000). As feminist sociologist Diane Wolf argues, *"some feminist scholarship is relentless about the exploitative nature of global capital without bringing in what workers think or experience"* (Fernández-Kelly and Wolf, 2001: 1247).

These criticisms led to a distinct shift in the analytical strategies and epistemological commitments of feminist researchers (Bair, 2010). Recognising the salience of context-specific, contingent practices and the ways in which cultural meanings shape the interconnections of gender and globalisation, scholars began to emphasise *"local accounts of gendered production regimes"* (Bair, 2010: 204). In particular, the contemporary feminist literature draws attention to the specificities of gender relations and gender ideologies that exist in different context-specific locales on the global assembly line, termed the "geography of gender" (Kabeer, 2008). Significantly, the "geography of gender" highlights the ways in which differences in the constructions and practices of gender across societies give rise to associated differences in the meaning, availability, and acceptability of women's paid employment (Kabeer, 2008). Moreover, the contemporary feminist scholarship on gender and globalisation primarily explores women's experiences of wage labour in relation to notions of empowerment and agency. Empowerment as an analytical framework refers to processes of social change which expand *"the ability to make strategic choices by those who have been denied this ability"* (Kabeer, 2003; Kabeer, 2008: 19). The concept of choice is inherently linked to agency, defined as the capacity to exercise voice and act upon self-defined goals (Kabeer, 2008). Moreover, agency encompasses cognitive dimensions, that is, the meanings, motivations, and purpose that structure an individual's actions (Kabeer, 2008). In this sense, agency denotes the capabilities approach, championed by Amartya Sen, which refers to the capacity of individuals

to achieve valued ways of *"being and doing"* (Sen, 1992: 40; Kabeer, 2003). The concept of empowerment, then, constitutes interrelated dimensions that shape possibilities for change among disempowered and marginalised groups (Kabeer, 2008). Ultimately, empowerment denotes women's selfhood and social identity; their ability to challenge their subordinate status; their capacity to renegotiate their positions in complex power structures and exercise control over their own lives; and their ability to participate on an equal footing with men in the public domain to reshape their societies in ways that redress unequal distributions of power (Kabeer, 2008).

Whilst empowerment as an analytical framework is valuable to move beyond discourses of victimised "Third World women", in that it offers the conceptual tools to explore women's agency, the framework fails to explicitly consider strategies of "resistance" to the global order. This demonstrates a tendency within feminist scholarship to conflate notions of agency and "resistance". As Lynch (2007: 36) points out, "resistance" is *"too simple a way of conceptualising agency"* – correspondingly, agency is too simple a way of conceptualising resistance. For instance, scholars in the field of resistance studies have called for research on resistance to move away from the focus on consciousness, especially given that transformative processes are not necessarily structured by the intentions of actors (Ortner, 1995; Vinthagen and Johansson, 2013). Furthermore, if we are to recognise the importance of *"women's activities and creative responses to the global onslaught"* and understand the modes in which women attempt to subvert their circumstances, it is crucial to conceptualise "resistance" as a distinct analytical category (Fernández-Kelly and Wolf, 2001: 1247). Ultimately, the relative silence on women's "resistance" in feminist gender and globalisation studies, which Sherry Ortner (1995: 173) termed *"ethnographic refusal",* has eclipsed exploration of the spaces, realities, and complexities that exist in between the exploitation versus emancipation binary. As such, the contemporary body of feminist scholarship has, unintentionally, proliferated the neoliberal perception that female participation in the formal economy is tantamount to women's empowerment – a view at odds with an *"anticapitalst transnational feminist practice"* (Mohanty, 2003: 509).

2.2 Conceptualising "everyday resistance"

The topic of resistance receives significant attention in studies grounded in a multitude of disciplines, from sociology and anthropology to political science and women's studies (Hollander and Einwohner, 2004). Within this scholarship, a wide range of actions and behaviours that occur in diverse settings and at all levels of social life have been described as "resistance" (Hollander and Einwohner, 2004). In this sense, we can think of a resistance continuum *"between public confrontations and hidden subversion"* (Vinthagen and Johansson, 2013: 3). A key critique of the literature, however, is that the term "resistance" is often invoked without efforts to define the concept in a systematic way, which proliferates imprecise and contradictory uses of the term (Hollander and Einwohner, 2004). Despite this, Hollander and Einwohner's (2004) comprehensive review of the sociological literature reveals that resistance is generally accepted as an oppositional activity. Specifically, resistance is a social action that involves agency, carried out in a dynamic interaction with opposition to power (Vinthagen and Johansson, 2013; Johansson and Vinthagen, 2014).

Since James Scott introduced the theoretical concept of "everyday resistance" in *Weapons of the Weak* (1985), scholars in the field of resistance studies have investigated this different form of resistance (Johansson and Vinthagen, 2014, 2019). Everyday resistance draws attention to the ways in which mundane practices of accommodation and non-confrontation, woven into the fabric of daily social life, can be conceived as resistance (Johansson and Vinthagen, 2019). In this sense, in comparison to organised and confrontational articulations of resistance such as demonstrations, revolutions, riots, and civil war, everyday resistance is not spectacular or dramatic, rather it is typically quiet and disguised and not politically articulated (Vinthagen and Johansson, 2013; Johansson and Vinthagen, 2019). Scott (1985) demonstrated that a series of common behaviours and activities of powerless groups, such as foot-dragging, slander, misunderstandings, passivity, and laziness, can be conceived of as resistance to repressive domination. Consequently, given the ordinary quality of everyday resistance, actors themselves may not necessarily regard their actions as "resistance", rather such acts may be conceptualised as a normal feature of life, culture, and tradition (Vinthagen and Johansson, 2013).

Everyday resistance studies thus focus upon how people act in their daily lives in ways that might undermine power (Johansson and Vinthagen, 2019). To "undermine power", however, is a complex notion as, in line with Foucault, power is embedded into and dispersed throughout all social relations and societal levels (Johansson and Vinthagen, 2019). Foucault (1978) also conceived of power as productive and decentred. Here, power is neither an institution nor a structure, rather it can be conceptualised as a relation that exists between individuals (Foucault, 1978). In this sense, as individuals occupy multiple positions in networks of power, power relations are mobile and subsequently opportunities for resistance always exist (Foucault, 1978). As Foucault (1978: 95-95) famously theorised, *"where there is power, there is resistance"*. This points toward the entanglement of power and resistance as interdependent realms, produced in a continuous process (Butz and Ripmester, 1999; Vinthagen and Johansson, 2013). As Butz and Ripmester (1992: 2) claim, power and resistance are *"mutually-constituted parts of the fluidity, play, or ambiguity of social life"*. Thus, studies concerned with everyday resistance attempt to explore how this power/resistance interaction changes within the everyday life of subordinated groups (Vinthagen and Johansson, 2013). Importantly, this understanding of power and resistance allows us to conceive of individuals as simultaneously powerful and powerless within hierarchies of power (Butz and Ripmester, 1999; Einwohner and Hollander, 2004). Relatedly, although resistance has the potential to destabilise the nexus of power, not all resistance succeeds and may instead strengthen and/or reproduce unequal relations of power (Vinthagen and Johansson, 2019). This is predominantly due to the complexities, ambivalences, and irrationalities embedded in resistance (Vinthagen and Johansson, 2019). For Ortner (1995), in order to avoid accusations of the romanticisation of resistance, we must recognise these forms of internal conflict which are inherent to actors of resistance and the concept itself.

In summary, this dissertation utilises the theoretical framework of everyday resistance proposed by Vinthagen and Johansson (2013: 1):

1. "Everyday resistance is a *practice* (not a certain consciousness, intent, recognition or outcome);
2. It is historically *entangled* with (everyday) power (not separated, dichotomous or independent);

3. Everyday resistance needs to be understood as *intersectional* as the powers it engages with (not one single power relation); and, as a consequence

4. It is *heterogenic and contingent* due to changing contexts and situations (not a universal strategy or coherent action form). Thus, the heterogenic and contingent practice of everyday resistance is – due to its entanglement with and intersectional relation to power – discursively articulated by actors, targets and observers, sometimes as "resistance", and sometimes not."

3.   The Sri Lanka case, study rationale, and research questions

In 1948, Sri Lanka gained independence from British colonial rule and, after decades of protectionist policies, has since undergone an enormous economic transition toward export-orientated industrialisation (Abeywardene et al., 1994; Athukoralge et al., 2000; Hancock, 2006).   In 1977, Sri Lanka's newly elected United National Party government adopted a liberalised economic model and implemented a package of free market policies (Hancock, 2006; Withers and Biyanwila, 2014).   Championed by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, this included the adoption of SAPs and the development of EPZs (Hancock, 2006).   In 1978, Sri Lanka's transition from an import-orientated economy to one based on export-orientated manufacturing was cemented by the establishment of the Katunayake EPZ (Hancock et al., 2012; Senarth et al., 2016).   By the turn of the millennium, six EPZs and two industrial parks had been established in Sri Lanka (Attanapola, 2004).   Today, there are nine EPZs, two industrial parks, and one export processing park (Karunaratne and Abayasekara, 2013).   Manufacturing is dominated by the garments and textile industries; approximately 325 garment factories contribute to 7 percent of Sri Lanka's gross domestic product (Karunaratne and Abayasekara, 2013).   The garment factories are characterised by physically and mentally strenuous working conditions on a target-orientated assembly line, coupled with long working days and low wage payments (Hewamanne, 2008b).

Sri Lanka's economic transition did not occur in a vacuum, but rather within a specific cultural landscape (Lynch, 2002).   Representative of the "feminisation" of the labour force, the garment industry recruited thousands of young, unmarried, rural women to factory work in the newly established EPZs (Attanapola, 2004; Kabeer, 2013; Senarth et al., 2016).   According to Hewamanne (2008a), this is unsurprising as the government advertised the availability of obedient and disciplined women workers in an attempt to attract investors.   Presently, the garment sector employs approximately 300,000 workers, 85 percent of whom are young women, predominantly of Sinhala-Buddhist origin (Attanapola, 2005).

The internal migration of young Sinhalese women from their rural home environments to live alone in modernised EPZs has destabilised Sri Lanka's traditional patriarchal structure and generated a *"moral panic about good village girls going bad"* (Lynch, 2002: 95).   Similarly, female factory workers are likened to *"a great (cultural) disaster (maha vinasayak)"* (Hewamanne, 2008a: 37).   This moral panic has primarily focused upon popular accounts of

premarital sex, prostitution, sexually transmitted infection, abortion, and sexual harassment in the so called "whore zones" (Lynch, 2002; Hewamanne, 2003). Such anxieties derive from the patriarchal Sinhala-Buddhist ethno-nationalism that has shaped Sri Lanka's postcolonial era, firmly embedded in gendered constructions of the "ideal" Sinhala Buddhist woman (Lynch, 2002; Hewamanne, 2003). In the contemporary nationalist configuration in Sri Lanka, women are positioned as *"mothers of the nation"* and pillars of tradition, respectability, and morality (de Alwis, 1996; Lynch, 2002: 88). Central to these discourses is the Sinhala cultural concept of *lajja baya* (shame-fear), a social emotion that expresses shame and fear of social disapproval and public scrutiny (Obeyesekere, 1984). According to anthropologist Obeyesekere (1984), lajja baya is rooted in kinship structures and internalised in young children as an indicator of proper (good) behaviour. The concept is inherently gendered; girls are expected to conform to ideals of chastity, submission, and modesty, while boys are socialised as women's guardians and protectors (Obeyesekere, 1984; Jordal et al., 2013; Jordal et al., 2015). Ultimately, lajja baya pervades Sinhala society to the extent that it is intertwined with the micropolitics of power and acts as a method of social control (Obeyesekere, 1984; Jeganathan, 2000). For Lerner (1986, as cited in Rothenberg, 2004: 254), patriarchal systems depend upon the cooperation of women, and one way in which this cooperation is secured is *"by defining "respectability" and "deviance" according to women's sexual activities"*.

Notably, there exists spatial variation in gender identities in Sri Lankan society; girls from villages are especially expected to adhere to traditional village values which contest modern, urban, and foreign influences (Hewamanne, 2003; Attanapola, 2004). Thus, the integration of young women into global production networks is the space in which deep anxieties about cultural degradation, female morality and sexuality, and the forces of modernity are played out (Hewamanne, 2003; Withers and Biyanwila, 2014). Consequently, significant research has emerged on the experiences of female factory workers in Sri Lanka's EPZs, embedded in discourses of empowerment, power, and gender (e.g., Jayaweera and Sanmugan, 2001; Lynch, 2002; Hewamanne, 2003; Attanapola, 2005; Hancock, 2006; Hancock et al., 2012).

Sri Lanka proves an interesting case as South Asia is conceived as the belt of *"classic patriarchy"*, where women *"adhere as far and long as they possibly can to the rules that result in the unfailing devaluation of their labour"* (Kandiyoti, 1988: 280). Certainly, research in Sri Lanka has demonstrated the ways in which women garment workers internalise hegemonic patriarchal notions of female sexuality and strive to protect their lajja baya (e.g., Jordal et al.,

2014, 2015; Abeyasekera and Marecek, 2019; Hewamanne, 2021).   The literature has also explored the conflicts and tensions that arise as young Sinhalese women attempt to reconcile the gendered moral code with participation in the transnational labour market – a struggle between attachment to the local and to the foreign, constructed in terms of gender and sexuality (Lynch, 2002).   Scholars have tended to come from feminist perspectives and place considerable emphasis on themes such as stigmatisation, identity, respectability, patriarchy, and politics (Hancock, 2006).   Much of the literature in Sri Lanka traces the feminist exploitation versus emancipation debate and encapsulates Diane Wolf's assertion that *"globalisation is a double-edged process as far as women are concerned"* (Fernández-Kelly and Wolf, 2001: 1246).   Despite a marked feminist epistemology, however, there is a dearth of evidence which operationalises feminist theories of the labour market to explore women garment worker's practices of everyday resistance.   Moreover, studies which attend to women worker's resistance strategies in Sri Lanka have favoured overt, organised, and confrontational forms of resistance such as strikes (e.g., Biyanwila, 2009), with few exceptions (e.g., Lynch, 2007; Hewamanne, 2008a, 2008b, 2012).   This is remarkable given that *"women's resistance…is shaped by the **dailiness** of women's lives (and has) a profound impact on the fabric of social life"* (Aptheker, 1989: 173, emphasis mine).

This dissertation does not seek to determine in a discrete binary whether the women workers of Sri Lanka's garment factories are empowered or exploited, rather the aim is to explore the fragments in between this space; that is, women's modes of everyday resistance to the patriarchal gender order in Sinhala society.   Such everyday acts of resistance may not amount to a change in power relations, but a discussion of everyday resistance uncovers the ways in which marginalised women attempt to carve out space for themselves in a patriarchal environment, and this is certainly worthy of exploration.   Thus, this dissertation employs the feminist theory of labour markets as "bearers of gender" to establish the ways in which Sri Lankan EPZs and the surrounding city streets, as context-specific sites of global production, act as gendered institutions.   The framework of everyday resistance is then utilised to explore the ways in which women attempt to subvert their circumstances within this capitalist system.   This is intended as a mode to move away from the exploitation versus emancipation debate and recognise that individuals can simultaneously be bearers of hierarchies as well as agents of resistance and change (Vinthagen and Johansson, 2013).   In this sense, the concept of

everyday resistance enables actions which may appear to constitute the reproduction of power to be reconceptualised as disguised resistance (Vinthagen and Johansson, 2013).

The overarching research question guiding analysis is as follows:

- How do women garment workers employ practices of everyday resistance to challenge the patriarchal gender order of Sri Lankan society?

To explore this, the following sub-questions are useful:

- How do Sri Lanka's EPZs and the surrounding spaces act as gendered institutions?

- How do women garment workers challenge the dominant mores of respectability in Sinhala society?

- What strategies of everyday resistance do women garment workers employ to navigate the expectations and constraints of lajja baya?

4. Methodology and study limitations

The research design employed is a qualitative secondary data analysis of peer-reviewed literature, specifically a critical review of the feminist scholarship on women and work in the global South alongside a case study of acts of everyday resistance employed by female garment workers in Sri Lanka. The overall research aim is to explore how young Sinhalese garment workers challenge the patriarchal gender order that permeates Sri Lanka's EPZs through mundane acts woven into the fabric of daily life. Ultimately, the research attempts to bring together feminist theoretical concepts of the labour market and the framework of everyday resistance to the case study of Sri Lanka's women garment workers. In this sense, women garment workers' everyday resistance is situated firmly within broader feminist scholarship on gender and globalisation.

The literature search began by the identification of key concepts relevant to the overarching research question and sub-questions, including gender, patriarchy, respectability, sexuality, globalisation, and everyday resistance. Further key themes and terms were also identified such as export-orientated production, garment manufacturing, garment workers, and lajja baya. Three separate literature searches were then conducted:

i) the first search concerned feminist scholarship on women and work in the global South to ensure a concrete theoretical grounding; search terms included women, gender, feminism, globalisation, exploitation, emancipation, development, female labour force participation, patriarchy, export-orientated production, and EPZs,

ii) the second search focused upon the resistance studies evidence base; search terms included resistance, everyday resistance, power, and agency in the global South, and

iii) the third and final search attended to the above research issues in the case study country of Sri Lanka and was conducted in two parts: firstly, the search gathered research on a wide range of experiences of women garment workers – largely framed in an exploitation versus emancipation binary – and central here were themes of stigma, social

iv) marginalisation, gender inequality, gender relations, the sexual division of labour in the labour market, masculinities, and lajja baya; secondly, Boolean logic was utilised to search for scholarship which attended to these themes as well as female worker's strategies of everyday resistance. For instance, "women garment workers" OR "female garment workers" OR "women workers" OR "factory workers" AND resistance OR "everyday resistance" OR "resistance strategies" AND "Sri Lanka". These searches were also supplemented with further relevant terminology searches conducted throughout the research process. The evidence was obtained from academic journals and books; the LSE Library, SCOPUS, JSTOR, and Google Scholar databases were searched. Relevant module reading lists also proved useful throughout the research process and were regularly drawn upon to obtain evidence.

A qualitative secondary data analysis of peer-reviewed literature was selected as the principal methodology for several reasons. Firstly, interrogations of feasibility are central to the development of an appropriate research design. I had initially intended to travel to Sri Lanka to conduct ethnographic fieldwork, incorporating participant observation and key informant interviews. I have previously conducted fieldwork in Sri Lanka, both in Colombo and the Hambantota District, and thus have established research contacts in the region. However, fieldwork proved unfeasible given COVID-19 travel constraints. As such, I planned to conduct qualitative semi-structured interviews with Sinhalese women garment workers via Zoom. This also proved challenging, however, in terms of participant recruitment, participant access to relevant technical equipment (including Wi-Fi), and the potential language barrier. Given these considerations, the re-use of qualitative research was the most feasible methodological choice. Furthermore, this research design is well-placed to explore the research questions, and achieve the principal research aim, as secondary data analysis affords the opportunity to glean novel understandings from pre-existing evidence. For instance, as Irwin and Winterton (2011: 4) explain, qualitative secondary analysis can be utilised to prioritise a concept that was *"present in the original data but was not the analytical focus at that time"*. This is pertinent to this study which explores women garment worker's responses to the gendered global order as modes of everyday resistance. Ultimately, prior studies on women garment workers in Sri

Lanka have neglected to explicitly operationalise feminist theories of the labour market in relation to the framework of everyday resistance.

Despite this, it is undoubted that ethnographic methodologies would have enabled greater understandings and nuanced insights of the research issues raised. This is attributed to the ability of ethnography to capture the intimate meanings and motivations that structure informant behaviour, as well as deeper insights into the context-specific social worlds of participants. Thus, it is feasible to suggest that the inability to immerse myself in Sinhala society, and factory sites more specifically, represents a tangible barrier to my understandings of the complexities embedded in gendered factory work and women's acts of everyday resistance. A key critique of qualitative secondary analysis concerns a sense of dislocation and distance from the original context in which research takes place (Irwin and Winterton, 2011). This is compounded as secondary research is entangled with relations between the original researcher and her participants, the original researcher and the contingent social landscape, and the original researcher and the data, which has led to concerns that the re-use of qualitative research is circumscribed (Hammersley, 2010; Irwin and Winterton, 2011). Notably, some scholars further such critiques and argue that the possibilities for valid substantive findings to emerge from secondary research, given distance from the original research context, is limited (Irwin and Winterton, 2011). In contrast, Mason (2007: 7) asserts that geographical proximity to the original research context becomes less significant in the production of valid analyses if we acknowledge reflexivity and allow *"for a range of reflexive interpretations of the data, some from close range and some from a distance"*.

According to England (1994: 244), reflexivity refers to a *"self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as researcher"*. In this sense, reflexivity is the capacity to reflect upon the ways in which one's own positionality influences the research process and, in turn, how the research process influences one. I engaged in an iterative process of self-reflection from research design to write up. As a white woman affiliated with an elite British university, I was particularly attentive to concerns in the feminist scholarship about western feminists speaking on behalf of "powerless" "Third World women" and the *"hegemony of western scholarship"* (Mohanty, 1988: 64). Discussion of Sinhalese women garment worker's acts of everyday resistance arguably goes some way to evade claims of the negative implications of western feminist writing. The hegemony of knowledge production, however, is certainly a limitation given that evidence was limited to research

published in English. However, I continuously interrogated the evidence selected for analysis to ensure that scholars from the global South, and Sri Lanka specifically, are represented. It is also noteworthy that the entire research process was guided by an awareness that *"feminist scholarly practices exist within relations of power – relations which they counter, redefine, or even implicitly support"* (Mohanty, 1988: 63). This research is certainly not immune to this claim.

Moreover, Mohanty (1988) takes issue with the way in which western feminist discourse constructs "women", as a category of analysis, as an already constituted, homogenous group with identical interests and desires which can be applied universally across cultures. For the sake of clarity and brevity, this study presents Sinhalese women factory workers as a homogenous group and fails to attend to issues of intersectionality, and thus can be subject to Mohanty's critique. Despite this, it is recognised that these women have a multitude of identities and belong to numerous different social groups. Another key limitation pertains to sole focus upon an extremely bounded case – women garment workers in Sri Lanka's EPZs - which limits the generalisability of analysis. However, the Sinhala cultural concept of lajja baya has similarities across the South Asian continent and analysis is firmly situated within broader feminist discourses on gender and globalisation. Moreover, a distinctly micro-orientation is justified given feminist calls to move toward local and contingent accounts of global production. Finally, a qualitative research design is well-placed to address the research questions, particularly given that quantitative data would fail to account for the complexity of women's strategies of resistance in their everyday social lives. However, it is notable that the literature on women garment workers in Sri Lanka evidences the benefits of adopting a mixed methods approach. For instance, studies which collected survey data and conducted in-depth qualitative interviews arguably presented more convincing arguments as quantitative data supported researcher interpretations and evaded concerns of social desirability bias (e.g., Hettiarachchy and Schensul, 2001; Hancock et al., 2012)

5. Discussion

5.1 Sri Lanka's EPZs as 'bearers of gender'

In order to position Sri Lanka's garment manufacturing industry as a gendered institution, it is constructive to revisit Elson and Pearson's (1981) assertion that there are three tendencies between export-orientated production and the subordination of women. According to the authors, gender inequalities tend to be intensified, decomposed, and recomposed in world market factories (Elson and Pearson, 1981). In this sense, the labour market is not a neutral arena, rather it operates *"at the intersection of the productive and reproductive economies"* and is structured by *"practices, perceptions, norms and networks which are "bearers of gender""* (Elson, 1999: 611). This chapter attends to the gendered practices, perceptions, and norms inherent in Sinhala society and the ways such practices shape the experiences of women garment workers. Specific attention is paid to the stigmatisation of these women as they traverse the gendered spaces in and around factory sites. Useful here is to think of the social construction of space, which refers to the ways in which space is political and ideological as well as inextricably linked to processes of social exclusion and division (Shields, 1991; Johansson and Vinthagen, 2014). This discussion is intended to offer a crucial foundation to later explore the ways in which women negotiate and contest the patriarchal gender order in their everyday lives.

5.1.1 The gendered stigmatisation of women garment workers

In Sri Lankan society, women garment workers are stigmatised and marginalised. To Goffman (1963), stigma is the possession of an undesirable attribute that deviates from socially prescribed norms and societal expectations. Individuals who possess such a negatively valued difference are discredited and discounted by others as less than human (Goffman, 1963). In this sense, the stigmatised individual occupies a "spoiled" identity and is subject to varieties of discrimination (Goffman, 1963). The stigma in which women garment workers are subject to is gender-inflected and attributed to the cultural-patriarchal-political systems that pervade Sinhala society (Hancock and Georgiou, 2017). Perpetrators of this stigmatisation include factory workers, male colleagues, individuals who reside in the localities surrounding EPZs, politicians, and the media. In this sense, the stigmatisation of women factory workers is

embedded in the common sense of daily social life to the extent that it can be conceived as a form of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 2004). Key here is the Sinhala concept of lajja baya, which constructs gender identities and structures gender relations; specifically, women are required to perform cultural ideals of feminine "respectability" and "dignity" (Jordal et al., 2014). Notably, here "dignity" refers to virginity. Pre-marital sex is ferociously condemned in Sri Lanka and a real or perceived deviation from norms of sexual modesty places the status of the unmarried woman and her kin network in jeopardy (Jordal, 2014). Several ethnographic studies have demonstrated the adverse consequences of a "loss" of lajja baya among young women, including the performance of suicide and self-harm behaviours (e.g., Marecek and Senadheera, 2012; Abeyasekera and Marecek, 2019). Moreover, deviation from patriarchal ideals of female selfhood often results in social exclusion and public ridicule (Withers and Biyanwila, 2014; Jordal et al., 2015). The following female factory worker's sentiment expresses the importance of adherence to lajja baya and points toward the gendered stigmatisation women experience:

> *As girls we have to protect our dignity. Through an affair… even if the girl loses*
> *her dignity, they will not blame the boy. Society points the finger at girls.*
> (Jordal et al., 2014: 668)

The gendered constraints of lajja baya are intensified as women enter the public sphere of the formal labour market. In line with Foucault, the female garment worker body is constructed as in need of greater masculine discipline and surveillance. In turn, women garment workers are subject to moral scrutiny, as one factory worker employed in in the Katunayake EPZ revealed:

> *Society has a very bad perception of women factory workers. They look down on*
> *us and consider us as immoral people. We are not accepted and people disrespect*
> *us.*
> (Hancock, 2006: 235)

The moral scrutiny of women garment workers is attributed to the spatial production of the EPZs and the surrounding localities, which are perceived as corrupt and degenerate spaces (Lynch, 2007; Hewamanne, 2008a). This is evidenced by common nicknames proscribed to the zones such as "city of whores", "love zones", and "zones of prostitutes" (Lynch, 2007;

Hewamanne, 2008a; Jordal, 2014). Additionally, women factory workers are commonly branded as "zone girls" (Jayawardena, 2020). In this sense, the identity of women garment workers and the cities are inextricably linked. This is partly attributed to the population of young, unmarried migrant women who live as independents no longer under the surveillance of their parents and village communities (Lynch, 2007; Jordal et al., 2014). This represents a direct violation of societal expectations that position rural women *"as the sole upholders of the manners, customs, and traditions of a glorious Sinhala past"* (de Alwis 1998: 193-194). Thus, in societal consciousness and national discourse the "Woman Garment Worker" (as a category) becomes the symbol of the immoral city space. In turn, the female garment worker body becomes the site in which national anxieties about fading traditions converge (Lynch, 2007). The following poem written by a female factory worker evidences this cultural tension:

> *Little sister*
> *You came to the city from the village,*
> *Why did you change?*
> *You cut your hair short*
> *Started wearing trousers and short dresses —*
> *You were the most innocent girl in the village*
> *What happened to you after coming to the city?*
> *We can't correct the city*
> *But we can keep in mind to*
> *Protect the village [customs].*
> (Hewamanne, 2008a: 40)

Similarly, politicians opposed to the government's escalation of economic liberalisation policies in the 1990s argued that in garment factories, *"our innocent girls are sewing underwear for white women"* (Lynch, 2002: 88). Both the poem and statement invoke the moral panic that arises in Sinhala society as rural women enter the labour market and are exposed to foreign and "corrupting" urban spaces (Lynch, 2002). Additionally, a dichotomy is created between chaste Sri Lankan women and sexually loose Western women, which denotes the societal demands placed upon Sinhalese women to attain both sexual and cultural purity (Lynch, 2002). In this sense, discourses and practices of nationalism and sexuality are tightly interwoven (Lynch, 2002). This represents the ways in which state institutions employ strategies to wield a *"power of knowledge"* over the city space in order to characterise the

space in ways that suit national discourses (de Certeau, 1984: 36). As Foucault (1980: 252) notes, *"space is fundamental in any exercise of power"*.

Furthermore, women garment workers are stigmatised as "Juki girls", owing to a Japanese industrial sewing-machine brand commonly used in garment factories (Lynch, 2007). The term connotes sexual promiscuity and thus demonstrates the ways in which women garment workers are *"perceived to undergo a moral degradation…from innocent to disrespectable"* – from village to city (Jordal et al., 2015: 5). Here then, to draw upon the work of Elson and Pearson (1981), gender inequalities are recomposed as novel identities designed to dehumanise women garment workers are constructed and become commonplace at most levels of Sri Lankan society. This is encapsulated by the following factory worker's sentiment,

> *People do seem to think you are cheap and try to take advantage. People outside*
> *the zone consider the people working in the zone to be vulgar and different...we*
> *are branded as zone girls.*
> (Hancock, 2009: 412)

The above quote also signposts the women garment workers' vulnerability to adverse sexual and reproductive health outcomes as a consequence of their societal status. Ethnographic research in Sri Lanka has noted that these women often experience sexual harassment and sexual assault in the workplace and surrounding city streets, which encompasses a range of behaviours from verbal harassment to physical attacks and is perpetrated as a mechanism of control (e.g., Salzinger, 2003; Attanapola, 2004; Hewamanne, 2012). Specifically, Jordal and colleagues (2015) found that shifts in women's economic identities as a result of factory work contributed to male fears of marginalisation and powerlessness. In turn, men enacted traditional ideals of femininity to exercise power over women, demonstrate their status and superiority, and reconstruct masculinities (Jordal et al., 2015). Key here is the patriarchal societal norm that positions women as pure and virtuous yet in need of male protection; arguably, women who are perceived to transgress feminine ideals are thus unworthy of protection, which emboldens male sexual domination over "immoral" women (Jordal et al., 2015).

Ultimately, this discussion has evidenced the ways in which women garment workers are stigmatised and socially excluded in Sri Lankan society. This gendered stigmatisation represents the ways in which traditional gender roles and cultural ideals of femininity permeate

the public sphere of the labour market. In contrast to so-called "market feminism", premised upon the belief that capitalist economic development and women's access to paid employment redresses gender inequality in the global South, this discussion suggests that *"patriarchy has not vanished with progress"*, but is rather *"developing with progress"* (Von Werlhof, 2001: 15; Kantola and Squires, 2012). As young and unmarried Sinhala women enter the labour market, a specific space of gender, they are subject to greater patriarchal structures of constraint which uphold nationalist discourses and protect male interests. So then, we should ask, how do women resist and destabilise these structural forces?

5.2   Women garment worker's mode of everyday resistance

The following discussion explores how women garment workers perform oppositional acts of everyday resistance. These practices subvert the gendered stigmatisation in which women are subjected to, allow them to carve out space for themselves within the confines of a patriarchal, gender-bearing system, and ultimately undermine power structures embedded in contemporary Sri Lankan society. Specific focus is upon the ways in which women create and participate in gendered public spaces and perform sub-cultural styles which lead to the creation of new identities.

5.2.1 Creating and participating in gendered public spaces

Struggles over the spaces of everyday life reveal the rules, the exclusions, the prejudice, and the implicit hierarchies that exist between different groups of urban dwellers (Beebeejaun, 2017). Beyond this, gender inequality is maintained or challenged through daily interactions, complex negotiations, and access to city spaces (Beebeejaun, 2017). Hewamanne (2008a: 26) conducted long-term ethnographic research among women in the Katunayake Free Trade Zone and found that workers engaged in everyday *"oppositional cultural practices"* to hegemonic patriarchal norms. Key here is the ways in which women created and participated in gendered public spaces around the factory and reconstituted the socially constructed immoral city space as a site of gendered resistance (Hewamanne, 2008a). According to Hewamanne (2008a), the garment workers consumed and occupied the public spaces of the city to socialise, gather, shop, buy food items, and so on. For de Certeau, (1984) city space is a site of embodied everyday activity in which we can observe how individuals articulate their rights and claims to public space. The women workers appropriated space in the city landscape as a collective body and,

in so doing, in their daily activities, created a particular model of the world imbued with their own meanings. As Mitchell (2003: 132) asserts, inclusion in space is gained through *"demanding the right to be seen"* and *"to be heard"*. In this sense, the spaces of everyday social life become sites of micropolitics. In other words, women garment workers' mundane everyday activities of shopping, gathering, and gossiping represent spatial tactics, conceived as a *"construction of belong"*, which contest their marginalisation and challenge societal hierarchies (Fenster, 2005: 219; Beebeejaun, 2017). Further, through the performance of these everyday spatial tactics, the women invented and populated a creative and radical "third Space", that is, "an-Other" space which undermined the patriarchal male-dominated public sphere (Soja, 1996).

Moreover, Hewamanne's (2008a, 2012) ethnographic fieldwork also found that women garment workers not only engaged in public space for social participation, but also performed assertive and flirtatious behaviours in clear violation of the "ideal Sinhala-Buddhist woman" construct. Specifically, the women engaged in practices of "sexual banter" with men on the city streets surrounding the factory (Hewamanne, 2012). Such practices included the exchange of sexualised jovial remarks, in which women not only enjoyed but actively encouraged (Hewamanne, 2012). Notably, in contrast to Western notions, the research found that women workers did not agree that catcalls and sexual innuendos represented sexual harassment (Hewamanne, 2012). Instead, the exchange of sexualised comments fulfilled a necessary social function and allowed women to express emotional and physical desires in a non-permissive society (Hewamanne, 2012). Through the public expression of sexual desires, the women challenged the dominant mores of respectability in Sri Lankan society and thus further articulated their rights to the city space. In other words, in line with Ardener (1975), women garment workers refused to be "muted".

Useful here is Lo's (2015) concept of "unrecognised cultural currency", which refers to how certain cultural resources possessed by subordinate groups are employed to facilitate everyday acts of resistance. Such resources are not recognised as valuable by powerful groups, but nevertheless can be harnessed to facilitate practices that are useful to the subordinated (Lo, 2015). Importantly, marginalised groups use unrecognised cultural currency to lessen the impact of oppression without having to noticeably confront those in power (Lo, 2015). In the case of sexual banter, women garment workers utilised their sexuality as a valuable cultural

resource to create a *"communicative space"* in which they transgressed the dominant ideologies of female respectability (Hewamanne, 2012: 263). As Johansson and Vinthagen (2014: 7) note, *"a practice of everyday resistance emerges out of a series of relationships and processes of interaction"*. Specifically, engaging in everyday interactions of sexual banter is one way in which the garment workers "bargained" with patriarchy and reclaimed the "spoiled" "whore" identity imposed upon them (Kandiyoti, 1988; Hewamanne, 2008a). This allowed women to negotiate an alternative identity as a gendered group of migrant garment workers (Hewamanne, 2012). This identity was expressed and celebrated in the gendered public spaces that the workers created and participated in (Hewamanne, 2008a). Ultimately, this discussion has demonstrated the importance of the category of space and the ways in which women garment workers' practices of everyday resistance are spatially organised, structured by social sites, and practiced in and through particular locations as a central social dimension (Johansson and Vinthagen, 2014).

5.2.2 The performance of sub-cultural styles and the creation of new identities

For Lynch (2007: 33), women's work on the global assembly line engenders novel opportunities to garment workers, but these women *"do not simply land on static, pre-existing social relations and identities"*, rather social relations, particular histories, and senses of self are all subject to change in profound ways through engagement in the processes of global production. Central here are the ways in which women learn how to become garment workers and, in the process, learn how to become members of a new community (Lynch, 2007). In this sense, as rural women enter the labour market and traverse the new social milieu in and around EPZs, novel identities are forged (Lynch, 2007). Hewamanne's (2008a; 2012) research among garment workers in Sri Lanka demonstrated that the women engaged in sub-cultural practices and performed a distinctive identity as a gendered group of migrant garment workers. Such practices centred around the adoption of new fashions and styles of dress (Hewamanne, 2008a). Aesthetic preferences can be conceived of as everyday sites of struggle *"where identities are created, where subjects are interpellated, where hegemonies can be challenged"* (Kondo (1997: 4). Similarly, the enactment of the "female" body is recognised as an arena of resistance (Johansson and Vinthagen, 2014). According to Hewamanne (2008a), women garment workers wore "loud" colourful dresses, bold lipstick colours, accessories, nail polish, and heavy makeup to proclaim their difference from middle-class women and to subvert recognised

middle-class cultural tastes and values. These fashion choices conveyed membership to the community of industrial garment workers and signalled their "third-class" identity (Hewamanne, 2008a). In Sri Lankan society, the pejorative term "third-class" refers to working-class cultural practices and tastes which are considered disrespectable (Hewamanne, 2008a). The following women garment workers' statements evidence the ways in which women celebrate this identity and, in the process, oppose the subjugating forces of the dominant classes:

> *They say our fashions are third-class. Well, third-class is my class, and that is just fine with me.*
> (Hewamanne, 2008a: 51)

> *However much we try to be like them, they always brand us as lower class. Only when you realise that do you start seeing the stupidity of those hi-fi fashions. Then you start to think, Hmm, there is value in what we do and what we like.*
> (Hewamanne, 2008a: 51)

These quotes suggest that the women felt a sense of pride in their fashion choices and valued the ways in which this sub-cultural style separated them from the expectations of "respectable" tastes and practices. In this sense, the practice of body adornments produced women garment workers without shame and fear; in other words, without lajja baya. Whilst this categorisation is utilised to marginalise garment workers as disrespectable and deviant in Sinhala society, the women's performance of new cultural styles enabled them to refute this stigmatisation and reconceptualise the perceived loss of lajja baya in ways meaningful to them. This indicates the ways in which agents of everyday resistance can simultaneously occupy positions of power and domination in the nexus of power (Butz and Ripmester, 1999; Einwohner and Hollander, 2004).

Interestingly, representative of the tensions that arise at the global-local nexus, the garment workers' fashions reinforced societal anxieties about the pollution of traditional Sinhala values at the hands of global forces of modernisation (Hewamanne, 2008a). As such, stigmatising societal discourses framed the women as westernised, trouser wearing, immoral, and aggressive (Hewamanne, 2008a). Importantly, however, the garment workers articulated their fashion choices in the gendered spaces surrounding the zone and, in so doing, challenged

dominant gender and class ideologies (Hewamanne, 2008a). Lynch's (2007) ethnographic study of women workers employed in garment factories in Udakande, located five miles outside the town of Kandy in central Sri Lanka, evidences the transformative potential of the performance of sub-cultural styles. The author found that a particular hairstyle known as "the bump" (hair placed into a bump at the front and clipped into place) was popular among garment workers and represented a distinct shift from the middle part hairstyle worn by rural non-factory worker women (Lynch, 2007). According to Lynch (2007), informants described a "transformative moment" when co-workers adopted the bump hairstyle as it signified membership to the community of garment workers. Useful here is Judith Butler's (1988: 519) notion that *"gender is no way a stable identity… rather it is an identity tenuously constituted through stylised repetition of acts"* and thus the possibilities of gender transformation are found in a *"different sort of repeating, in the breaking… of that style"*. In this case, the bump hairstyle represents a new sub-cultural practice that ruptures women garment workers' ties to the patriarchal gender identity imposed upon them and indicates commitment to a new worker social identity. In this sense, women's everyday practices of self-expression via the means of fashion are imbued with deeper meanings and represent a form of everyday resistance to prevailing gender and class ideologies in Sri Lanka.

To summarise, this chapter has demonstrated how women garment workers perform new sub-cultural styles as a form of everyday resistance to the hegemonic cultural and class norms of Sri Lankan society. It has identified the ways in which women resist the subject positions imposed upon them, for instance as women without lajja baya, via the performance of their "third-class" garment worker identity. To take a Marxist viewpoint, this chapter has shown that female political interests rely upon women garment worker's engagement in and incorporation into the working class (Pearson, 2004). Ultimately, the performance of sub-cultural styles allows these women to article the new identity of garment worker and reclaim such an identity in meaningful and positive ways.

6. Conclusion

This dissertation has explored women garment workers' practices of everyday resistance to the patriarchal gender order that exists in and around Sri Lanka's EPZs. The feminist gender and globalisation literature on women and work in the global South has acted as the foundation for the arguments formed. However, analysis represents a distinctive shift from the feminist scholarship; it has critiqued the ways in which the evidence base frames women's access to paid employment as either exploitation or emancipation. Furthermore, this dissertation has suggested that exploring women's modes of everyday resistance offers greater insights into the intersections of gender, patriarchy, and globalisation that play out in context-specific locales of global production. As such, a framework of everyday resistance has been employed in relation to the feminist literature to analyse the case study of women garment workers in Sri Lanka. Specific attention has been paid to how Sri Lanka's EPZs can be conceptualised as gendered institutions that stigmatise women garment workers, and the ways in which this stigmatisation permeates Sinhala society. Central here is the Sinhala cultural concept of lajja baya, which requires women to perform feminine ideals of respectability in order to uphold the nation. Discussion of women's modes of everyday resistance, however, evidences the creative ways in which women garment workers challenge the subject positions imposed upon them and create novel identities in their mundane activities of daily life.

The category of space has also been explored to gain deeper insights into the women garment workers' social worlds and the gendered spaces they create and participate in as they traverse the patriarchal mode of production. This discussion has demonstrated both the social production of space and of everyday resistance. Ultimately, Sri Lanka's EPZs and the surrounding city localities represent the space where global capital entwines with national discourses and the local bodies of women garment workers (Jayawardena, 2020). This discussion has evidenced the ways in which women operationalise strategies in their daily lives to reclaim this space, create new gendered spaces, and express their garment worker identity. Finally, although this dissertation is certainly not without limitations, by exploring the everyday modes in which women garment workers challenge the patriarchal gender order of the transnational market and Sinhala society, we can forge more meaningful understandings of the complexities that arise at the local-global nexus. Further study should seek to employ primary qualitative ethnographic methodologies to uncover women's voices in their response

to the global onslaught. Potentially, this would go a long way to silence the *"unsettling contradictions"* characteristic of the gender and globalisation exploitation versus emancipation debate (Pearson, 2004: 117). In short, this research encapsulates the following sentiment, *"women's interests may be subjectively constituted, imperfectly understood, subject to constraint, and difficult to act upon. But if they are completely missing, there is no point in feminists encouraging women to act upon them"* (Pearson, 2004: 27).

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