

Cinematic Portrayal of Forms of Violence Rooted in the Sri Lankan Ethno-Political Crisis: A Thematic Appreciation of Three Films

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Abstract

The ability of the general public to make informed political decisions about war and peace or on other important topics, is at the very heart of the democratic system of governance. In this context, it is extremely important to explore how well the media tells its story concerning the issues that people have little or no access at all. Further, the socialization and educational role of the mass media in fostering ethnic tolerance calls for inculcating right knowledge, attitudes and behaviour in keeping with civility and harmonious coexistence. Therefore, it follows that the media in a country where there are inter-state wars and ethnic tensions should carry the responsibility of performing greater ethnic tolerance, among the citizens, and call for openness and acceptance towards multiculturalism. More importantly, the watchdog function of the media requires media to warn the citizens about various catastrophes that are either manmade or natural. However, some scholars have argued that in times of war, with conflict escalation and state mobilization against insurgencies, media generally functions according to the wishes.

Introduction

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towards multiculturalism. More importantly the watch dog function of the media warns the citizens about various catastrophes that are either man made or natural.

However, scholars have argued that in times of war, with conflict escalation and state mobilization against internal insurgencies media generally function in accordance with the propaganda needs of the state (Barret, 2000, Carruthers , Knightly 2000, Daniel, 1986). This is also very true of national media in Sri Lanka, where war has been fought for the last five decades. More explicitly national media in Sri Lanka from its inception has been divided into ethnic and religious identities (Fernando, 2007, Kandiah, 2001, Nadarajah, 2005, Haputhanthri, 2007) and taken the side of the majority Sinhalese who are also Buddhist in their religious beliefs. This narrow focus of the national media has led to conceptualize the internal conflict between the LTTE, (liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) and the government of Sri Lanka as an ethnic, hiding the root causes of the conflict which is mainly economic, political and social (Uyangoda, 2003, Fernando 'Abeyratne, 2004' Bush 2003). Although, the main stream media and the state media, with the approved consent of the hawkish elites appease the government in power by using patriotic metaphors, slogans, such as " we are for the country", "first country next mouth" , "War for the mother land" and sing patriotic songs, through carnivals, Television and Radio, Films, print Advertisements to glorify soldiers, and read the present conflict from the perspective of government and soldiers, few have questioned the glorified and bloated image of war by asking questions such as, what goes behind the wars?, who is affected?, what is the reality behind the plight of a soldier, his sacrifices, and dependants left behind by him, has he joined the army just serve the country or with other motives,? And war is at what cost?, What are the deeper roots of the conflict in structure and culture including the history of both?, If violence occurs, how about such invisible effects as trauma and hatred, and the wish for revenge and for more glory? And finally and most importantly who initiates reconstruction and resolution, and who are reaping benefits from reconstruction, and other contracts?

One of the main interpretive tools used to examine the political discourse of main stream media, and state media that glorify war is the concept of myth. Specially pro war media, including war films that overtly transcode

history, myth is particularly a rich concept, as it links narrative, collective (or popular) memory, and ideology. According to Hellmann, a myth is the construction in narrative, or story, of a collective memory. Accordingly, memory involves acts of forgetting, fantacising and preserving. By the term "public myth," reference is made to the core story articulated through a succession of specific variations upon it expressing the dominant ideology of the "nation-state" or the "territorial integrity". More importantly according to Barthes (1972), 'myth is depoliticized speech'. Barthes, sees, myth not only as a powerful tool for the promulgation of ideologies, but also an instrument capable of blunting critical thought about society and connoting the political, social, cultural, and historical as natural: in passing from history to nature, myth acts economically: it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialects, with any going back beyond what is visible, and further it organizes a world without contradictions because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity: things appear to mean something by themselves.

According to Galtung's (Galtung, 1969) theoretical frame, in wars what is only visible is direct violence, which is mainly physical and psychological. What is invisible is cultural violence and structural violence. Though, structural violence and cultural violence are invisible, they give rise to and sustain direct violence. In the conspicuous absence of the state or main stream media to address the root causes of war, and further, invisible effects of war, one is motivated to look at alternative media, to inform and challenge the status quo that war is the only solution, and only option and what is important is only winning, regardless of cost or other consequences.

In the absence of mainstream media, more specifically the print media not focusing on the ill effects of the war, one is justified in looking at alternative media such as films to find out what is going on behind the theater of war.

Role of the Films and Social Construction

As a communication medium, it is said, that films have the capacity not simply to reflect reality, but also comment on it, and even magnify certain aspects of it, so that viewers perceive these aspects in a new or more profound and

powerful way. Narrative films have never been just about entertainment. As popular cultural products, they have an important role to play in molding consciousness, forming identities, and promoting development. In other words films have become one of the most visible, pervasive, and widely consumed media of representation of our time. Many have characterized films as the paradigmatic art form of the twentieth century because they are the illuminating vehicles which help us to understand the frequently paradoxical complexities of intermingling with space and time, environments and technologies, selves and things of our time. Historians and social scientists have further come to appreciate the extent to which diverse media such as journalism, newsreels, and movies were involved in concealing the real nature of war and the forces that spawned them (Campbell 1985; and Fussell, 1979). Films and other forms of popular representations of World War II conceal certain features or parts of reality while simultaneously disclosing other aspects of that same past, present and range of conceivable features. Further, Walter Benjamin has observed that "the film is the art form that is in keeping with the increased threat to life which modern man has to face" (Benjamin, 1969:250). Emphasizing not only film's subversive potential but its deep pacifism as well, Griffith observed in 1914, "We've gone beyond Babel, beyond words. We've found a universal language . . . a power that can make men brothers and end war forever" (May, 1983:60).

Research Focus

In Sri Lanka, since 1979, concepts such as "ethnic harmony", "multiculturalism", "war and peace" have become the subject of cinematic exploration. However, they have not received or sustained required scholarly scrutiny. With this background, we move on to thematic analyzes of the films that are chosen by the researcher for the present paper. After viewing all 10 films that were produced during the last five decades that directly spoke, promoted, multiculturalism, pluralism, peace and harmony among the two main ethnic communities, and effects on war or peace building, the post conflict situation, and the root causes of the war, such as *August Sun*, 2003, *Peck on the cheek*, 2002, *This is my moon*, 2000, *Ponmani*, 1978, *Death on a Full Moon Poya day*, 1998, *Saroja*, 2000, *The Kite*, 1979, *White, Black and Gray*, 2004, *The forsaken land*, 2004, *The Terrorist*, 1999 , the researcher chose three specific films for

the analysis. The three films chosen for the purpose of this paper are, *Death on a Full Moon Poya Day*, directed by Prasanna Vithanage, *White, Black and Gray*, directed by Sudath Mahaadivulwewa, and *The Forsaken Land*, directed by Vimukthi Jayasundara. Most of these films have subtitles in English and available in DVD format on request. What motivated the researcher to select these three films was that after they were shown for few days, they were forced to withdraw from the theaters by the government due to undue pressure by certain interest groups saying that these films may bring down the morale of the armed forces who are fighting the war in the north and east of Sri Lanka. According to the Newspaper article titled, "The War, black cinema and morale of the soldier" "...there have been a handful of films based on war and in all these films one could observe a deliberate attempt to tarnish the image of the soldier, his wife and Sinhalese culture as a whole..." . Although, these three films created controversy and also admiration of some of the public, in Sri Lanka, all three films, won many prestigious awards at international film festivals. The political significance of these three film lies, not solely within their narratives, but also in what they exclude, downplay, their relations to other texts; and their transcoding of history.

Death on a Full Moon Poya Day (Pura Handa Kaluwara) , Directed by Prasanna Vithanage

Synopsis: This film is centered on an elderly blind man living in a remote area of Sri Lanka. On a full moon day, a hearse comes to the village with the sealed remains of his soldier son who had died in the war. The old man is pressured by his family and the neighbors to accept the compensation offered by the state for dead soldiers. However, the old man continues with his days, retaining the faith that his son is not killed but still alive. At the end old man digs up the grave and opens the sealed coffin, there is no body: only the chopped up pieces of a plantain tree.

As mentioned earlier, initially banned by the Sri Lankan government, and now seen as a modern day classic of Sinhalese Cinema, the film deals with the brutal 16 year war between the Sri Lankan state and the Tamils living in the North of the island. The film unfolds the story of the main character (Vannihami), an elderly farmer from one of the Sinhalese villages in the

Northern Dry Zone of Sri Lanka. In the opening frames our eyes are focused on a barren land parched by a long drought, and villagers including Vannihami, undergoes great hardships due to the scarcity of water. Since water is the symbol of life, the director through this opening scene portrays the hardship or the poverty of the people living in the village. Vannihami, even though he is blind and feeble, predicts that the rain can be expected within four days. He asks the help of his future son in law, to repair his small mud hut, especially the roof to withstand the downpour of the monsoon rain. We are told that Vannihami has two daughters and a son. The elder daughter, already married has moved away from home. The younger daughter is at home and taking care of Vannihami, and intends to marry a young man from the same village. Vannihami's son, has joined the army, and is serving in the North. What happens next?

The film begins with the sound of gathas (Buddhist doctrinal verses that are rhythmically chanted). Using a panoramic long shot the director establishes, that story of this film unfolds in an ancient Buddhist village. The long shots, and the symbols of village temple, namely, the lake and dry land reminds the viewer the Buddhist and the ethnic identity of the majority of the people who live in this village. The ethnic and religious identity of the village and its people is further confirmed by showing a long shot of a Buddhist monk who goes somewhere sitting behind a village security guard riding a bicycle. The gun hanging behind the security guard who carries the monk in his bike is also very symbolical. It connotes war brings insecurity to all. Peace and tranquility, and the normal rhythm of the village life is broken by war and everyone lives in fear. Perhaps symbolically the chanting and the monk going in a bicycle with a village guard with a gun, viewers are reminded that the great disparity of Buddhist doctrine that is practiced by rulers by sanctioning the war. Perhaps the director tries to connote that majority religion of Sri Lanka, namely Buddhism, has lost or losing the pacifism preached by its founder Lord Buddha. Using multi-modal texts, that is using music, images and words, and sound of a bird, which is considered to be an unlucky omen, the director brilliantly foreshadows the evil and sorrow war has brought to the village. As the full moon appears in the sky, we see the lonely hearse coming to the village with a coffin. Usually, in Sri Lanka, death brings sorrow not only to the kith and kin of the dead, but whole neighborhood, and therefore people wait patiently and

eagerly for the body to arrive. We hear and see a bird flying in the sky. This is a bad omen to the village. There is also a heard of buffalos looking at the hearse, as though telling us, is it worth sacrificing your life for this? What is the message that director of the film, *Death on a Full moon Poya day* presents here? The lonely hearse, searching desperately for the house of the dead tell us that the main stream media image of the soldier who is a hero, who joined the army to save his country is not true. The lonely hearse stops the motorbike rider, and the Buddhist monk who sits at the back seat of the bike to inquire about the house of the dead soldier. The house is shown and we are confronted with a coffin draped with the national flag of Sri Lanka, to symbolize that he sacrificed his life for the country. The coffin draped with the national flag also symbolize the myth of the nation state, where all its people are not nationally integrated at all.

The close up shot of the full moon appearing in the sky is also very symbolic. Full moon day, is a day of immense religious significance to all Buddhists in Sri Lanka. They consider, this is a sacred day of ahimsa; that no harm should be done to any living being. It is on this day, namely when serenity is supposed to reign in the thoughts, deeds and words of mankind, that the coffin said to be carrying Vannihamy's son arrives in the village. As the body is carried reverently and solemnly by a group of soldiers, we see the utter poverty of Vannihamy and his family. In a way vannahamy and his family represents in this film all other poor families in Sri Lanka's south where young men are recruited for the army to fight in the North and East. Critics say that fodder for the war is supplied by the poor families in the south and other parts of Sri Lanka. Coffin can be hardly taken into the house, because it is so small and the roof is very low. The mud house and thatched roof represents not only the destitute poverty of Vannihami and his family but the whole village. We see the moaners and villagers getting ready for the funeral. When the rain came the coffin also got wet, showing us the poor back ground of the people who join the army.

"How could this happen to my poor brother" cries his sisters. People come to the funeral house and village headman, the official representing the state is also coming to the funeral house. As he goes into the house, he tells other villagers who are in the house "Many rebels are also killed and injured"... "Their casualties were more than ours, according to TV news" This

is always the official position of the government, to appease the people, when one of "Our soldiers or soldiers die many rebels have also died, so the death of our soldier or soldiers are justified. The conflict in Sri Lanka, majority verses the minority, "We" against "they" or "Us against "Them" is captured with the official hegemonic position of the conflict portrayed powerfully by the director of the film.

In this fast moving film, the funeral seen is over, and as Vannihamy struggles for day to day living, we see a postman delivering a letter to the family. We come to know that letter was written by the soldier to his family before his death. A voice over is used to reveal the content of the letter. Solder writes to his sister:

" I am going on an assignment , Operation" to fight with the rebels....When I come I will bring money to build the house and bring money needed to have sister's wedding.."

One of the root causes of the war and the reason for joining is revealed in this letter read through a voice over. The use of voice over to read the letter provides a Brechtian "epic voice" that "greatly" enhances our perception and understanding of complex emotional events. The reason for joining the military, namely the economic reason is again articulated by the intended son in law of Vannihami, who tells his fiancé, namely Vannihamy's younger daughter:

"The army is the only way I can make a living... how to make ends meet by making bricks in this village...? . People join the army not to fight for the country, but to find work, there are no other jobs available. In the same vain, Vannihami also reveal to us why his son joined the army. When festered by his kith and kin, and also by the village headman that, he should by all means get the money, namely 100,000 Rupees allocated by the state as a compensation for a dead soldier, Vanninami tells his daughter:

" Bandara(My son) did not join the army for compensation, but to built a new house and to find money to give you in marriage....."

In general, one can say the whole narrative of the film "Death on a Full moon Poya day" centers around main protagonist, Vannihamy's reaction to his son's death, against all evidence to the contrary, namely that his son was killed in the war. When the monk in the temple talks about the religious ceremony to commemorate his son's death after three months he says firmly, to the monk and others, "My son will come back soon....." Vannihamy also rejects the

money given by the state as compensation to members of a dead soldier's family.

According to Wijegunasinghe, (2000) the idea, which provides the film's essential foundation, is that the war raging in the North is not considered by the people to be their war. None of the characters representing ordinary people speak passionately about either taking part in the war or winning it. It is certainly something outside the pale of their deep felt needs, but at the same time has insidiously managed to become a "necessary evil", namely a way to earn a living, when conditions of life are extremely difficult and problematic. We are also shown that the state official village headman is the one who is very keen to get the compensation money for Vannihami and family. One of the invisible effects of war is also the problem of money scandals, bribery, and corruption by the officials. When pressed by the village headman to accept the compensation money, Vannihami reacts angrily: "What does that man care? He even steals the money allocated for the beggars...Now he comes to give advice....."

The hawkish, or the popular war narrative, a young man joins the army to serve the country is presented in the film through the chief Buddhist monk of the village. Accompanied by a few villagers, he tells Vannihami, that ".....Villagers have agreed to build a shade house for the bus commuters in the village...because he was a hero who gave his life for the country..". But this patriotic frame is challenged throughout the film.

Further war brings other types of evil to the country. Conflict at micro level spreads and creates tension and suspicion at intra- and interpersonal level. Another major invisible effect of the war is the violence on women. There is a scene in the film showing us that intended son in law of Vannihami, suspects that Vannihami's daughter is going out in the morning not to work in the garment factory in the town but to serve as a prostitute for the soldiers. This is what the director says about his film: "When I made the film in July 1997, prostitution was just beginning in Anuradapura. Now after Colombo, the highest prostitution rate in Sri Lanka, is in Anuradapura, the sacred city. Soldiers who come from the north spent two days in the city, and a whole prostitution industry has developed...."

Finally "*Death on a Full Moon Poya day*" is a powerful anti-war film, which has been widely praised at many international film festivals. It makes it very clear that the war has no popular support but has been forced on the people by the state. Invisible consequences of the war and its futility is powerfully brought out in this film. As mentioned earlier at the beginning of the film the coffin of the soldier was brought, solemnly draped in a national flag. Film ends by showing Vannihami digging the burial ground to find out whether his son's body is there. He is disappointed, inside the coffin there is nothing only chopped up pieces of a plantain tree. It seems that the final message of the director, though state has launched war as a patriotic act, at the end, there is nothing to look for, only emptiness, in other words much ado for nothing. Is it really worth?

The Forsaken Land (Sulanga Enu Pinisa) directed by Vimukthi Jayasundara

Synopsis: The film unfolds around five main characters living in a period of 'no-war/no peace' times, and how the whole environment effects their personal relationships. Five characters namely the home-guard officer, his wife, alcoholic brother, his maiden sister and a young female child. Home guard attends to his routine duty in a wind-swept, barren landscape, switching off with elderly alcoholic brother. Both display a weariness, coming from years of lonely service in a cause too distant or abstract for them to believe in or probably even remember. Army vehicles occasionally pass by, trying to dispel the lethargy with a bit of prankish behaviour (making fun of the home guard and throwing him to a lake to swim) but the stillness and sense of waiting is never broken during the entire film. Sharing, home guard (Anura's) home are his equally bored, sensual wife, and his maiden sister. The inhabitants daily routings are interrupted only by a deep sense of sexual frustration.

The opening sequence of the film, namely the panoramic objective view of an arid landscape of The Forsaken Land, and the haunting melody and wailing music connotes a metaphoric, barren space-a land transfigured by the suppressed scars of a five decades long civil war and the ominous silence of a fragile uncertain peace. Our focus is immediately drawn to a lonely home guard (Anura) impatiently walking up and down the main road of the village. He

seems to pass his idle hours inspecting the contours of an open field, looking for irregular patches in the land. A disembodied arm juts out from the undulating water, articulated in rigor resembling a prehistoric sea monster surfacing from the lake. It also recalls to the Sri Lankan, mind the youth insurrection in 1971, where the bodies of Sinhalese able youth were dumped in the lakes and rivers of Sri Lanka in order to warn the public the consequences of rebelling against the so called state. The harsh white light from a florescent bulb illuminates a dark room, its intensity reflected in the crosscut to a shot of the human eye. A restless woman, the unmarried sister of the home guard rises at dawn to bathe not from a well but from a barrel suggesting the hardships and lack of basic facilities.. She hears a sound of an army truck moving fast to conduct military exercises. In a way these powerful visuals capture and resemble the isolation of a people trying to live harboring the persistent memory of a violent, unreconciled past. Meaningless daily rituals like over cleaning the pair of sandals, washing clothes show their boredom and frustration.

The film, *"Forsaken Land"* cinematically and gradually reveal to the viewer that the bare or basic essentials of the people tormented by war both environmentally and emotionally, are reduced to two basic needs, which demand satisfaction are food and sex. "The principal focus of the film is sex. Directly or indirectly". Right at the beginning of the film the viewer is shown the bare breasts of the sexually frustrated home guard's wife.

There are several explicit sexual encounters, such as soldier having sexual intercourse with an advanced pregnant woman, connotation of homosexual behaviour between the home guard and a soldier, who happens to be also his wife's lover, and other violent explicit sexual scenes taking place right in the jungle and as well as inside the home guard's house. In one intimate conversation soldier tell the home guard that he now misses some of benefits of war, like rare chance of going about, in helicopter. After revealing that he has killed also his own major, he says "*that going in a helicopter, is like "having an anal sex with a god,"*" In another captivating scene we see the soldier, climbing the hill to go to the far away toilet and it is also the same route, that Anura's wife takes to go beyond the toilet bypassing it, in a leisurely manner; but they are also visually expressive enough to suggest the

physical proximity to nudity. Another scene, she strays spraying her sexual debauchery into the jungle with her panty removed itching for sexual pleasure. These visuals suggests that war robs the sanctity of family and family values, forces on all inhabitants, conventional and unconventional anti-social sex for survival.

According to film critic, Edirisinghe,

".....each scene in the film is packed with a load of senses opening several dimensions and layers. For instance, Anura's sister taking a bucket of water to the soldier who was inside the toilet. Unmarried, she is sexually frustrated. The moment he spoke to her, she addresses him as 'malliye' in a clear animated tone, meaning not 'younger brother' but 'dear young boy'; it carries the connotation of sexual arousal in her maiden heart. The water was taken to the toilet by her because it takes her physically closer to him. On the other hand, her subconscious had sensed that he was in the nude inside. The soldier rushing to the toilet was evidently pulling down the zip ready to remove the trouser witch excited her itching sexual desires. Her body and mind are begging for sex, and later when she finds her sister in-law in bed with him she loses her hopes which leads her to commit suicide later being defeated at every turn of events..."

Similarly in another occasion, Anura's sister takes a ride in the bus, and a stranger touches her body from behind pressing his own body towards her. In the film, viewer is shown, how she comes home and lies on a bed and enjoying orgasm quietly by herself.

Further, as Edirisinghe, comments,

Later, ".....when Anura's wife throws all the doors and windows of the house wide open inviting the soothing wind to blow in from anywhere, it was symbolic of the cultural, moral and spiritual degeneration into which the war itself or its fallout could ring into man...once the winds of sex blows in, all doors and windows deny any entry for anything else other than sex. Sex whether, it is in advanced stage of pregnancy, homosexuality, abuse of children, old age, road or bed, it is immaterial..."

More importantly it is within this context of protracted ethnic war, that the elderly night guard narrates a fairy tale about an imaginary woman called "little Bird' who once set out with a cup of rice as dowry to faraway lands in order to find a husband, only to be killed by her prospective husband after a perceived

quarrel and humiliation. According to a reviewer, "...this fairytale can be interpreted as an allegory for the civil war itself: a marginalized people who has razed its own home in order to assuage its guilt and insecurity, eternally condemned to a karmic cycle of self inflicted retaliation as victim and transgressor. ...".

Edirisinghe, interprets this narrative of the fairy tale saying , ".....story of the little bird as told by the grand father dragged on a little too far with his seductive overtones, but it finally ends in fusion with the totality of environment which portrays that every being is sexually sensed. That little bird is still looking for a husband as every woman is..." ".....In the Forsaken Land, the family unit has lost significance and sanctity. The basic instinct for sex as in the case of animals remained active and virile. The home guard Anura is awoken by night by the army, and asked to hack anonymous character covered in a white sheet resembling mysterious death and disappearance that occur on daily basis in war zones. In another shot our attention is drawn to a dead body of a pregnant woman carried by a group of people including Anura, and it also represents the visible violence done especially on women's bodies in times of war.

In the film, forsaken land we see also the impact of war on children. The little girl, "Battie" happens to witness how a captive's nails are pulled out in torturing. In other words she represents all the children who are exposed to many forms of violence in war torn countries. Further, Women's bodies become objects to be used sexually. In one scene one of the army officer asks a soldier who had gone to the toilet, did you go to "F" a woman?....."

The film simply scrutinizes how the decades-long civil war and years of violence have precipitated a breakdown in conventional behaviour patterns—resulting in civilian suicides, adulterous sex, and participation in summary executions. Beautiful but withholding, it doesn't offer much in the way of explanation—the soundtrack features more birdcalls than dialogue—but a lyrical portrayal of women and their men caught in a war-torn, haunted landscape. The film was praised for its command of cinematic language, evident in the evocation of post-war trauma.

As veteran film maker in Sri Lanka, Sir Lester James Peris says, in this film the director makes no concessions what ever to popular tastes....there is no story; hardly any dialogue; the narrative focuses intently on a series of images which in its inexorable progression builds up a sense of foreboding. Music is

felt more in its absence than its presence. .the cumulative effect of narratives with in narratives combine to present a fresco of suffering, humiliation and despair. Every aspect of film making, picture, sound, acting the use of the landscape, are all deployed towards one end-to project the image of a forsaken land.

"Shades of Ash" also known as Sudu, Kalu, saha Alu (White, black and grey) directed by Sudath Mahadivulwewa.

Synopsis: The world is stripped of colour when people are destroyed in the war. Those who survive war are neither alive nor dead. This aspect is also conveyed powerfully and symbolically, in the title of the film itself. Black and white are neutral or no colours at all. To make colours they will have to be mixed. When the land is stripped of its colour only ash will remain. They are the 'Shades of Ash". The film is centered on a community of survivors who return to their boarder village, which they abandoned following a bloody massacre of their kith and kin by terrorists. The film unfolds cinematically, through 13 characters, how they adapt to rebuild their lives and homes amidst the newly emerging socio-economic culture, nurtured within the "business " of war and peace.

Usually, any film begins with a list of names that are connected with a film. Therefore, the opening frames have two different contexts: the diegetic context of the film's story and characters, and the non-diegetic contexts of the film. According to Maier (2009) the diegetic context includes visual or verbal information concerning characters, events and sounds belonging to the film's story. The non-diegetic contents includes visual or verbal information concerning the names of the film, director, film companies, actors, date of release etc. The film "Black, White and Grey starts with the following quotations or famous sayings of need for non violence. In a way, director right at the beginning establishes the main theme of his film or the philosophy he attempts to convey through this film:

"My war is to bring about non-violence" Mahathma Gandhi. "Every man is entitled to dignified birth and death"-Martin Luther King. "Those who take up the swords die by sword "Lord Buddha. "In war there are no victims" Pandit Neru. "What is terrifying is not war but the hour that draws when it ends ".

The village lake in the boarder village (Kalu Visa Pokuna) has been poisoned by the extremists. A young villager "Army Ajith" deserts his ranks to find his wife, Komala, with another man and loses his mental balance after a road accident, ironically knocked down by an army truck. An escaped prisoner camouflages himself with a dead priest's robes and becomes a monk. The crippled village headman and Pema, a young ruffian, engage in corrupt dealings. The new school teacher transferred to the village due to political vengeance opens a tea shop instead of reopening the school. An agent from a Non-Governmental Organization forms an alliance with the school master to export archaeological artifacts and child labour from the village to the town. Saddled with a mad husband and derelict children Komala become a sexual worker in the nearby town. The village caretaker, blinded by war and overhearing of the nature of his daughter's profession hangs himself on the rafters of the village kovil. Ukkuva, a boy orphaned, steps on a land mine and becomes a cripple. The story ends with illustrating how vicious cycles of war repeat themselves. This film powerfully portrays some of the atrocities, human right abuses, and brutality perpetuated during and after the war.

What makes this film so unique, is that the script for the film has been based on a scientific and comprehensive research done on the displaced persons by Dr. Krishan Deheragoda, a Senior Lecturer at Jayawardenepura University in Sri Lanka. According to him,

"Over 50,000 people have been killed and more than 800,000 have been displaced due to this war. While every third person among the displaced is a school-going age child, Rs. 15 million is spent per day to keep these displaced people alive and Rs. 178 million was spent per day to keep the war going. Though, certain physical elements of destruction caused by war can be estimated thus, the socio-cultural and spiritual damage done by it could never be estimated."

As the film unfolds, we see "Gambara Aththo", the village elder, who returns back to the village in a truck, blinded by war, thus making him incapable of preserving the system of social and cultural values, symbolizing the system which has been rendered dormant by relentless war. Film starts with a long shot of dead bodies scattered on the ground, and flies hovering over the dead bodies. In the back ground we hear war planes, going after their targets and

sounds of bombs and we also hear Mangala Sutraya chanted rhythmically. (A doctrinal Buddhist chant which is used to be chanted on auspicious and happy occasions). The director has made use of, multimodal texts, namely use of language, images, sounds and background music brilliantly, and you feel that fly of death is rejuvenated or resurrected by a war machine of the state flying over you, or next to you in the cinema hall. You cannot escape, war has taken you a prisoner directly or indirectly irrespective of your states. Explaining, this multimodal approach, Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996, 2001) says that meaning is produced not only through different modes, but also through their interaction and intersection with each other.

As the film unfolds before our eyes, we hear the official voice of the state, namely a radio news bulletin, telling us how people are moving into a border village, which was devastated by the war. The news bulletin of the radio is supplemented by visuals showing us how villagers are escorted by army jeep and a truck, and tractors. Although, the news says that army will protect and provide security to this particular border village what echoes simultaneously in the minds of the villagers is what a former President said,

"... Each one also should look after one's own security...". The village headman who walks with a pair of clutches, as a victim of war comes to meet the villagers who are returning, and an army officer gives him a puppet, in shape of a human made of cardboard. The symbol of the puppet is so powerful, it also denotes an official of the state, manipulating other villagers also like puppets with the help of state mechanisms fueled by the pro war attitude of the state itself. As the film unfolds gradually and throughout the film, we see, puppet figures held closely by the Headman the symbol of power in the village. The indirect message of the director to the audience is very clear. All the state officials and the citizens including the army are used or manipulated by the government in power to justify the war for the sake of *"territorial integrity, and the" "unitary state"*. Later we see one of the leading characters of the film, Corporal Ajith, as he is called in the film, who has become insane mainly due to the accident and also brain washed by the state while in service, ridiculing these two concepts highly esteemed by the nationalists and war mongers, saying: *"... They are all bulshit..."*

"Army Ajith" - the soldier in the film, represents the village youngsters joining the army to protect the unity and the territorial integrity of the country. As "Army Ajith" returns home with lots of presents for his newly wed wife, Komala, she is with another man in her husband's room. He becomes a wreck as a result and this ruins his personal life, driving him mad. Due to his enlistment in the Army, the villagers are deprived of his service as the protector of the village lake. The blind village elder tells him: "...You left our village and our lake and went to town for a job.." "As a result we lost our Lake." "...You went to town, and we lost you also." "If you had stayed and cultivated paddy this would not have happened to you..."

"Komala" is a young woman married to soldier Ajith, who becomes a deserter. "Komala", who does not even enjoy her honeymoon due to exigencies of services of her husband, later becomes a destitute with an insane husband, a child and a blind father.

"You bitch.. You could not wait till I got back..You make me your wife and stayed only two days...Then you left to go to work..A wife cannot be without a man you bastard. "Why did you marry a soldier? She is beaten ruthlessly by the soldier."They did not grant me leave.."I absconded to come and see you""Why did you marry a soldier? "Why did you marry a soldier? "

Komala having no other option to feed Ukkuva, her mentally ill husband- army Ajith and blind father, starts to serve as a sex worker in the nearby town and eventually contracts a social disease . Towards the end of the film we see, Komala also taking her life by drowning in the lake.

The director also, focuses our attention to the dark truth that hardships that befall women in the aftermath of any war are endless. They are not just caught in cross-fire, but are direct victims of violence of many kinds. As further, explained (Rehn and Sirleaf, 2002; Wood, 2004), there are widespread atrocities; in war, women's bodies become a battle ground, rapes, forced pregnancies, kidnappings, and sexual servitude are common.

The bus driver who acts as a pimp tells, the wife of the ex-soldier who was forced to sell her body due to poverty and shouts at her. She is not a person but a thing to be discarded after the usage. He also represents the

patriarchy which is prevailing very much in countries like Sri Lanka. This is the conversation that takes place between the two of them:

"I do not need your excuses, you are trying to cheat the wrong person..." "I do not understand what you are saying..." "We agreed that a part of your earnings belong to me..." "That is true, but I am not earning properly as yet..." "Do not lie to me..." "How many men have I introduced to you..." "Why should I lie to you.....You know this gentle men better than I do....They are very stingy with their money.. It is just a waste of energy..." "You cannot get away by saying that..." "I am not a novice, I know this business very well..." "When they are hungry .. these goddesses would lay naked on any man's bed.. now the bitches have forgotten their roots..."

Her father, namely the blind village elder, over hears the above dialogue between his daughter and the bus driver and slowly learns the bitter truth, that his daughter has become a prostitute in order to keep the home fires burning. So shocked and devastated by this news, he commits suicide by hanging himself on a tree in front of his church where he used to perform religious rituals on behalf of the village. Though he is supposed to be an elder and a holy and religious man the ethnic enmity between two communities has also made him a biased man toward his own community. *"They poisoned the water..." "....They blinded me..." "....I feel everything" "I too feel the heat from "our people" in this mass grave." "They are "our" people..."*

The village is in chaos and with the war many evils becoming predominant. The tree at the entrance to the village at which Gambara Aththo, used to ask for God's blessings is cut down to build the bunker in which two young home guards spend their time reading trashy pornographic newspapers and listening to cheap love songs. The elderly blind man says, metaphorically *"We used to hang leaves here in this huge sacred tree, but now: "Guns have walked in to the village"*

In the same way we are shown in this film how a notorious rogue has put on the yellow robe and taken charge of the duties of the temple, and he thrives there by selling antiques, and Puskola Poth (ancient scrolls with sacred writing) belonging to the temple to Antique dealers in Colombo through a NGO lady with the help of the school teacher. We are also shown a headless statue

of a god or goddess connoting sanity and reverence has left or driven away by the war.

"Kokila" and "Ukkuwa" are two child characters representing the children destroyed in war. "Ukkuwa" witnesses the brutal killing of his parents. A victim of a landmine, he later becomes a victim of sexual abuse. "Kokila" too has seen her mother killed by an extremist. A woman from an NGO coaxes her to get rid of her virginity and later presents her with a gold chain. Kokila says: "...One day when the lady was not at home, her husband removed all his clothes. ..." "He removed my cloth as well. After that he told me not to tell anyone..." "The lady returned and started beating me.. these are the marks he bit me....."

Similar to the first film, "*Death on a Full moon Poya Day*", poverty is the root cause of war, and in this film, *Black, White and Grey* villagers are compelled to join the army because of their poverty. There is no other way to make a living. Like in the first film which was thematically analyzed at the beginning of this paper, we see even in this film all the houses are huts, and they do not have basic essentials. Another youth who has joined the army also gets killed and his only sister becomes an orphan. When his coffin is brought home, we see that he is also from a very poor family and perhaps he has joined the army to build a house and look after his sister. After his death, his only sister is becomes a destitute and she is also forced to sell her body in order to survive proving that in wars there are no winners, but only victims.

Without doubt, war extracts a cruel toll on children and families. Lykes (2002) observes that 'although individual children respond in quite distinct ways to loss of traumatic events, a small number of relevant studies suggest that children in situations of institutionally –structured violence generally experience higher than usual level of fear. Anxiety, insecurity, and aggressiveness', (Jensen, 1992:986) are the effects of the war on children's security and their emerging personality. Further, children not living in or near direct combat zones are often exposed to war through television, movies and hearing adult conversations. So whether a child is suffering from the symptoms of war due to direct or indirect exposure, the psychological effects can be

significant. Two children in the films are examples. The little girl asks her father, "Where is mommy?..

In another visual we see the boy is sexually abused by the school teacher. "The school teacher said, he has some rice for me to eat.. he told me to come at night.. that is why I came.. then he..."F"....me.."Komala, who look after him laments their helplessness and poverty, "...I could not give you rice for two days..."

The village headman nicknamed "Hora Gramaya", who has a lot of power is a cripple, who symbolizes a bureaucracy that exploits a war situation. He says: "...If anyone wants to help this village, that happens through me.. I am entitled to that lady's donation..."

He is so corrupt and abuses and exploits his villagers, physically and sexually. He meets a violent death in the film and ironically killed by one of his trusted workers: "You fucked my mother and made my sister also pregnant .." "Who has not slept with your sister in this village?..." is his derogatory answer to the trusted worker.

Further, "Sudu, Kaḷu Saha Alu" focuses on the human drama in a war devastated community, and it reaches many untouched boundaries of social agony and human trauma. Bus driver brings pornographic material, to the soldiers in the check points, and he is shown as a pimp who supply women for men in the village.

According to Lai and Clayton (2007), civil wars are likely to cause school enrollments to decrease, owing to the physical destruction of schools, school closure in the interest of safety, displacements of refugees, deaths of students and educators, and subversive tactics of rebel groups. In the "Black, white and grey" film we see a depleted school building now occupied by cattle denoting to us that education of the children is no more possible due to the conflict. Ukkuwa the village child who cannot read or write is a direct victim. The only school teacher, who happens to come to this post conflict village is also portrayed negatively in the film. The only teacher in the village school happens to be there in school because his is on a punishment transfer for being "anti-

government". He is the sole teacher in a school with dilapidated desks and chairs and with no students except one, who is sexually abused by the teacher.

The director shows us how human lives are used to show the strength and demarcation of an endless war. The government resettlement plan is to show the extent of state power but in reality these people were forced to live in a place which was not suitable for human habitation. Now the village is not what it was when they left and there is no peace, unity or harmony anymore. Without exception both living and dead have become victims of war.

In the film, *Black, White and Grey*, after his accident, and also his rude shock that in his absence his wife is having sex with someone else, we find that ex soldier becoming or behaving in a very strange or insane ways. He is shown playing with a doll, saying, "*...This is my wife Komala...*" *I absconded from the army and came to see you with many gifts...*" "*I wanted to come, but they did not grant me leave....*"

"They said, they cannot grant me leave, Yes, I came looking for you"

In a way the director wants to suggest that insanity of the soldier may also be due to the long exposure in a battle field, causing posttraumatic stress disorder commonly known as (PTSD). According to the Mental Health Advisory Team IV Operation Iraqi Freedom 05-07 (MHAT.IV: Office of the Surgeon General US Army Medical Command 2006), those with high combat exposure were 3.5 to 4.6 times likely to screen positive for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as those with combat disorder. See also Lyons (2007)

Another very prominent and powerful symbol in the film is the empty white plastic bag that flies in from place to place bringing ill luck and misfortune. Whenever it is flown on the air, we hear eerie sound made by a peacock. According to the director of the film plastic bags are not easily recyclable. Likewise, "once the germ of ethnic hatred is introduced or imposed on a country it will not go away easily and it will only bring disaster upon disaster and ruin. This message using multimodal texts is conveyed powerfully in the film. "Bring a handful of pepper from a house that was not affected by war," says the filmmaker Sudath Mahaadivulwewa reminiscing the words of Lord Buddha to

Kisa Gothami, the mother lamenting over the death of her son, to fetch a handful of mustard seeds from a house where there was no death., "what is terrifying is not war, but the hour that dawns when it ends" . Whether we like it or not at the end, war will directly and indirectly affect each and everyone. There is no escape. The symbol of power, namely the puppet or the card board cartoon figure symbol, right at the start of the film, is brought by the army and finally goes back to the army. The ex soldier, who suffers from insanity and (PTSD) laughs cynically at the person with a questionable character who says he is going to join the army. When the film ends The ex soldier, finally asks the audience a thought provoking question:".....**Why are you not laughing as well..?**

Definitely the invisible effects of conflict and violence, emotional trauma and damage to social structure are cinematically captured by these three films. Although, the point of view or the plight of the Tamil minority is not represented or commented by these three films, they focus our attention on the ill effects and invisible effects of the war, sanctioned by the state. These three films visually beckon all of us to see what is happening behind the theatre of war. The impact of the conflict on the impoverished rural populations of the South and specially the families who are totally depending on soldiers in combat to keep home fire burning is a significant factor. Our attention is also drawn on the invisible people namely children and women who are forced to become breadwinners in the absence of their male partners or the head of the house hold. All these three films use personal tragedies, saying all are victims of structural cultural and physical violence, and there are no winners, to articulate critically on a number of politically salient and even sensitive and controversial themes and issues.

Further, invisible effects of the war includes, ecological impact. There are many symbols in the film denoting environment damage." *Fish are dead*", "*Lake Water is poisoned*", etc. As we are aware used by both parties, government as well as the LTTE, Cannons, 50 caliber machine guns, artilleries, Mortar and aerial bombings, Multi-Barrel Rocket Launchers, and cluster munitions attached with thousands of artillery shells that have exploded, in the North and East have polluted the atmosphere. All of the fuels and smoke that have emanated from these weapons, have polluted the air. And the debris

left behind the surface of the earth make the land impartial and when residual chemicals are taken underneath of the surface of the earth, pollution of water, flora and fauna are bound to happen. And it will have a tremendous and a negative impact on the future generations.

As indicated in the beginning of this paper, the main stream media of Sri Lanka has not fulfilled properly its watch dog function. Indeed, national media in Sri Lanka, has been divided, on the lines of ethnic and religious identities. These three directors of the film have boldly called to our attention the impending doom that awaits our country in the future. What is praise worthy is, when main stream media with the consent of the state tries to make the Sri Lankan conflict "a conflict largely without witnesses", the three directors of the above three films have focused their camera eye to show us the "Business of peace and war". The three films, "Death on a Full Moon Poya Day", "The Forsaken Land" and finally "White, Black and Grey" have proved that beyond any doubt the root cause of the war is mainly economic, political and social, but politicians have managed to convince people an ethnic crisis, in order to stay in power. We must seriously ask ourselves as in the film "Black, White and Grey" ".....**Why are you not laughing as well..?**" or perhaps "**Why are we not crying as well.**"

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