Representations of War and Culture in Sri Lankan Cinema: An Analysis of Selected Anti-war Films and Their Audience Interpretations

Ganegoda Arachchilage Pushpika Kumari Ganegoda

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Department of Media and Communication

School of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities

Faculty of Health, Arts and Design

Swinburne University of Technology

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the representations and constructions of Sri Lankan culture in three Sinhala anti-war films released in Sri Lanka during the peak years of the civil war (2000–2009) waged between the government of Sri Lanka and the group the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The three films analysed are: *This Is My Moon* (Handagama 2001) (original Sinhala title: *Me Mage Sandai*); *Shades of Ash* (Mahaadiwulwewa 2005) (original Sinhala title: *Sudu Kalu Saha Alu*); and *The Forsaken Land* (Jayasundara 2005) (original Sinhala title: *Sulanga Enu Pinisa*). The thesis explores how these films were interpreted by the key groups who actively contribute to the various cultural meanings circulating around them to illuminate how these films engage with and impact their cultural context. The research contributes to Third Cinema, Postcolonial Cinema, and the work of Cultivation Analysis. This study and its findings add to the broader existing literature on Sri Lankan films and specifically to the scholarly literature on censored political films of Sri Lanka and elsewhere.

This study aimed to determine the contribution of anti-war films produced during the war period in Sri Lanka to Third Cinema and Postcolonial Cinema by studying the Sri Lankan film industry's political economy at the time, film text, and the audience interpretations. A combination of methods was required to achieve such a holistic view of the phenomena. Thus, this research combined the interpretivist media/cultural studies approach that involves the textual analysis of the purposively selected anti-war films and the reviews of the films published in newspapers, and qualitative data-collection methods of semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Interviews were conducted with the directors and writers of the selected films; academics who had researched, analysed and published on Sinhala films; film reviewers; cast members; and government officials handling film production and distribution in Sri Lanka. Six focus group discussions with 36 members of the public as audience members who had viewed the films were also conducted. The qualitative data thus gathered were examined using the Grounded Theory method (thematic and textual analyses of the selected three films, newspaper reviews, stakeholder interviews and focus groups).

This research proposes that political films, such as anti-war films, are sites where social and cultural identities and political ideologies are forged, contested and recorded. This study also claims that the selected anti-war films exhibit characteristics of Third Cinema by including socialist political viewpoints of capitalism and colonialism, and realistically representing the nature of ethnic conflict, suppression, exploitation and the impact of war on marginalised people. However, the study reveals that the films' framing of communities in war-affected areas as impoverished, uneducated, unemployed, violent and sexually desperate support the Orientalising process in their international reception and since the products of local filmmakers support the Orientalising process, they extend the concept of Re-Orientalism.

The central findings of this study revealed that the small size of the film industry, film production and distribution procedure where the government has the power to control, war situation prevailed in the country, and the cultural background was the contextual aspects that influenced these films production and distribution and hence, the potential revolutionary spirit of those films. The textual analysis demonstrated that these films display significant characteristics of Third Cinema films such as cultural specificity, critical commitment, historicity, and politicisation by creating a critical view about the ruling elite and the impact of the ethnic conflict of Sri Lanka, recalling the memory of the ethnic conflict and the state suppression occurring in different instances of history. Furthermore, they awake the political consciousness of the audiences regarding the exploitative and destructive nature of war and capitalism and work as an anti-propaganda model of war depicting the political background of war and its impact on marginalised people's lives.

The audience analysis confirms that different interpretations of the social and cultural realities are constructed of the same texts by different individuals based on their gender, education, social and cultural backgrounds, personal experiences, and exposure to other media messages such as mass media and interpersonal communication channels. Interpretations of the representations of war were influenced by the political opinions of the participants, government war propaganda and the lack of knowledge about the war-affected areas and lifestyles of people living there. Female audience members were more descriptive about their interpretations of gender representations than the males; educated audience members could interpret the underlying meanings presented by the filmmakers than the less educated ones. However, the conservative cultural backgrounds of the participants were more influential than their education levels. Participants compared the films' representations with their cultural cognition, personal experiences and other media messages. When personal experiences are unavailable, they believe the media portrayals are realistic representations. Those who believed in anti-war political ideologies accepted war and state apparatuses represented in the films as realistic, and those who hold pro-war nationalistic political opinions interpreted that these films misrepresent the country, culture and the security forces.

This study confirms that the alternative filmmakers have the capacity and opportunity to produce Third Cinema films in Sri Lanka despite the government's control over the country's cinema industry. To promote Third Cinema in Sri Lanka, it is crucial to generally improve the media literacy and, specifically, the film literacy of the ordinary film audience. These improvements can be made by introducing film studies to the secondary education system and creating a culture of arthouse film appreciation among regular viewers. It is also essential to break the audiences' conservative cultural beliefs and stereotypical ideologies. However, since these long term strategies require an extended time and commitment, as a short term plan, the filmmakers can follow a more simplistic cinematic style that subtlely questions the

conservative cultural norms and practices so that the ordinary film audience can easily interpret the messages embedded in the films without being offended of the violation of their cultural beliefs.

DEDICATION

To my mother Anula Thennakoon and Father Sunil Ganegoda, and all the mothers and fathers in the world who shed their sweat and tears to educate their daughters, disregarding society's sexist comments.

DECLARATION

I, Ganegoda Arachchilage Pushpika Kumari Ganegoda, hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that to the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, nor material which, to a substantial extent, has been accepted for the qualification of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement is made.

Signature:

Date: 07.03.2022

ABBREVIATIONS

BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BMP	Bureau of Motion Pictures
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus / Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
IMDb	Internet Movie Database
JHU	*Jathika Hela Urumaya* (National Sinhalese Heritage Party)
JVP	*Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna* (People's Liberation Front)
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam
NFC	National Film Corporation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OWI	Office of War Information
PA	People's Alliance
PPB	Public Performance Board
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
STD	sexually transmitted disease
UNFP	United National Front Party
UNHCR	United Nations Human Rights Council
UNP	United National Party
VAO	Village Administrative Officer

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CHAPTER ONE

WAR AND MEDIA IN SRI LANKA

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Chapter Index

This study explores anti-war films produced in Sri Lanka and their contribution to Third Cinema and Postcolonial Cinema. It includes an analysis of the representations of the culture and ethnic conflict of Sri Lanka in those anti-war films and how audiences interpret them. The study focuses on three anti-war films produced and released during the peak years of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka to see how the political-economic conditions influenced these film productions. The study also seeks to understand the representational strategies used by the filmmakers to express the Sri Lankan cultural identities and politics of war in selected films. The cultural identities addressed in the study are gender identities, ethnic identities and religious identities. Politics of war discuss the power struggle government, nationalists, and state bureaucracy had during the war period and the influence of militarisation on the day to day life of the general public. Every chapter in the thesis includes a chapter index for the convenience of the reader.

1.1. Introduction

A very significant period in Sri Lanka's history is the decades of the civil war the country endured between 1983 and 2009. The war was waged between the Sri Lankan government and the group Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE)[1], who were demanding that the north and east parts of the country be established as separate territory for the regions' majority Tamil community. During this time, freedom of expression and information was highly restricted in many sectors of the Sri Lankan media, implemented under Emergency Rule to control and censor the reporting of war-related information (De Mel 2007, DeVotta 2010).

These restrictions were extended to the Sri Lankan film industry as well, with the government seeking to manipulate cinema as a medium for propaganda. Any film that was critical of the government's war agenda or its bureaucracy was either censored or banned outright through legal provisions provided by

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[1] LTTE was one of the several militant groups that initially represented the Tamil community and was later labelled as a terrorist group for recruiting child soldiers by force and using suicide bombers (Uyangoda 2007).

the Emergency Law, government institutions such as the National Film Corporation and the Public Performance Board, and government authorities such as the Competent Authority and the Minister of Cultural Affairs. Sri Lankan military officials, extremists (the nationalistic Buddhist political movement who manipulate the war and ethnic issue in Sri Lanka to gain and maintain power) and patriotic communities (those who speak for the culture, religion, reputation, and welfare of the soldiers without expecting any political gain) criticised these anti-war films for allegedly containing misrepresentations of social realities, local cultural values and social images, such as Buddhist priests, soldiers and their family members.

Censorship was not exercised against the selected films directly using the legal provisions and governmental institutions. Instead, the government exercised indirect censorship using its military power, and the advocacy groups worked for the government to threaten the filmmakers and push them into self-censorship in fear of death. However, when these indirectly censored films were shown to international audiences overseas, they were typically praised, such as at international award ceremonies, and became famous abroad. For instance, the film *Pura Handa Kaluwara* (Death on a Full Moon Day) (1997) won awards at the Amiens International Film Festival in 1999, Fribourg International Film Festival in 1999 and Singapore International Film Festival in 1999 (IMDb 1999). The film *Me Mage Sandai* (This Is My Moon) (2000) won awards at Singapore and Tokyo International Film Festivals, both in 2001 (IMDb 2002); and the film *Sulanga Enu Pinisa* (The Forsaken Land) (2005) won awards at the Cannes Film Festival in 2005, Cinefan – the Festival of Asian and Arab Cinema in 2005 and the Rotterdam International Film Festival in 2004 (IMDb 2006). In that sense, these films acted as delegates that carried Sri Lankan socio-cultural images to the international arena and provided a forum for public debate.

According to Gurevitch and Levy (1985), films as a mass medium provide a platform to establish superiority over the other identities, and record social and cultural identities. They also provide a forum for public debate, a space in which "various groups and institutions struggle over ideologies and definition and construction of social reality" (Kwansah-Aidoo & Owusu 2012, p. 53). Thus, "they can be seen as a major site for the definition of meaning, a place where the changing culture and values of society and groups are constructed, and reproduced or changed" (Kwansah-Aidoo & Owusu 2012, p. 53).

This thesis regards films as critical agents of cultural identity formation and re-negotiation in ways that add value to film and media studies. Hence, this research project analyses a representative sample of three anti-war films, which were a source of active debate in Sri Lankan society, regarding their representations of the nation's culture, concepts of nationality and social realities of the conflict during a critical period of its contemporary history.

I studied the text, context and audience interpretations of three anti-war films: *This Is My Moon* (Handagama 2001) (original Sinhala title: *Me Mage Sandai*), *Shades of Ash* (Mahaadiwulwewa 2005) (original Sinhala title: *Sudu Kalu Saha Alu*), and *The Forsaken Land* (Jayasundara 2005) (original Sinhala title: *Sulanga Enu Pinisa*). They were released during the war period and experienced overt or covert state suppression. I used Douglas Kellner's diagnostic critique model (Kellner 1995) for textual analysis and qualitative data collection methods of semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus group discussions for contextual and audience analysis. The Grounded Theory method was used for data analysis. The grounded theory method is developing theories about a given phenomenon under study based on the data analysed. It is an inductive method researchers can use to create theoretical accounts based on empirical observations or data (Glasser and Strauss 1967).

This study seeks to address significant social, cultural, political, and industrial issues relating to colonialism and censorship that limit Sri Lankan anti-war filmmakers[2] potency to produce progressive alternative films. Progressive alternative films are independent films produced as an alternative to the popular commercial film genre. They reveal the social realities that are not typically discussed in popular films. This study is essential as there is a paucity of literature on these aspects of contemporary Sri Lankan cinema, leaving a significant knowledge gap. This research responds to this gap by studying the genre of war films (and the role they play as state propaganda and political films), the genre of Third Cinema and Postcolonial Cinema with reference to the Sri Lankan film industry. The study relates the selected films with postcolonial cinema since the country's colonial history may have influenced Sri Lankan anti-war filmmakers. They are also part of postcolonial social, educational, political and economic systems currently operating within the country. Thus, while colonial history shapes the cultural productions of these filmmakers, their films shape the postcolonial structure presently existing in the country.

Sri Lankan cinema is so far under-studied compared to Asian commercial film industries such as Bollywood and South Indian cinema, and the alternative film industries in Asia such as Japanese, Chinese, Philipino, Iranian, and Bengali cinema. Hence, this study endeavours to contribute new insights to the existing literature on Sri Lankan film and censorship of political films in Sri Lanka and elsewhere, illuminating how various key groups involved in film production, distribution, and reception can shape narratives about cultural conflict and oppression in ways that promise to contribute to critical scholarly debates about Postcolonial and Third Cinema in times of war.

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[2] An anti-war filmmaker is the one who produces films showing the defects of war and its destructive nature instead of glorifying it.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Between 1983 and 2009, the Sri Lankan government engaged in an armed conflict with the 'separatist group' Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). One impact of this conflict was the heavy restrictions imposed on media freedoms. The LTTE was a militant group that demanded a separate state for the majority Tamil community within the northern and eastern regions of Sri Lanka. Overall, the Tamils make up 11.2% of Sri Lanka's population, but they consist of 93.1% of the Northern Province population and 39.2% in the Eastern Province (Department of Census and Statistics 2012), which are the relevant geographic regions included in their fight for separation. The final decade of this conflict was labelled the Fourth Eelam War, which marked an end to the conflict. Spanning between 2000 and 2009, the transitional period of the Fourth Eelam war was between 2000 and 2005.[3] During this period, freedom of expression was highly restricted in the media, including the cinema industry, under Emergency Rule legislation that controlled the reporting of the war. The Emergency Rule legislation included the Prevention of Terrorism Act of 1979, the Official Secrets Act, the Newspaper Ordinance, the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation (the national radio) Act, and the Sri Lanka Rupavahini (national television) Act (to supervise television), to censor their content and control the activities of the Sri Lankan media (De Mel 2007, p. 232). In addition to these officially established censorship mechanisms, indirect and unofficial censorship and repressive mechanisms were imposed during this time. Directors of anti-war films, for example, experienced indirect but severe state suppression, such as facing severe criticisms or allegations of indirectly supporting the LTTE (Weerasekara 2005) and hidden death threats allegedly made by military officials (Wickramasinghe 2005). The charge often made against these filmmakers was that the films misrepresented Sinhalese culture, Buddhist religion, government soldiers and their families (Wickramasinghe 2005).

Despite facing such major obstacles, important films were made about the war during this period, with several of them receiving international recognition, participating in prestigious international film festivals and winning awards. Many Sri Lankan reviewers and educated elites (such as veteran film directors, academics and film reviewers) praised these films for their artistic quality and for carrying anti-war messages that had awakened and appealed to audiences' humanity (Weragama 2009). Thus, these films created critical discourses in Sri Lankan society about cultural identity and nationalism. The emergent themes of these discourses were how these anti-war films represented gender as well as social and personal relationships, values and religion of the Sinhalese community – a major stakeholder of the

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[3] Between 2000 and 2005 Sri Lanka faced intense political turbulence, which affected the decisions made on the ethnic conflict. Elected governments were unstable and general elections were held three times during this period – in 2000, 2001, and 2004. In 2002, a ceasefire agreement was signed between the government and the LTTE, which was violated from time to time by both parties, resulting in its ultimate failure. The political regime of the central government was transferred from anti-war policy holders to pro-war policy holders during the latter part of 2004 when Mahinda Rajapaksa became the Prime Minister.

ethnic conflict – and how those representations created images of Sri Lanka, particularly of the Sinhalese community, for local and international audiences.

Different stakeholders' responses to these war-themed films raise several other issues that require scholarly discussion and analysis. First, was it the misrepresentation of the Sri Lankan culture that the government was concerned about, or was it the criticism of the government's war agenda that compelled the government to suppress the films? Second, was international recognition gained by these films based on their artistic quality and/or the resistant political messages carried, or could they be related to the broader cultural factors, such as catering to the West's imperial gaze, through Third World exoticism? Third, do the filmmakers use their artistic freedom and capacity to question the politics of war and address the audiences' conscience regarding the disaster of war, or did they merely use the burning issue of the time as a platform to gain international recognition and succeed in their careers and for fame?

To address these issues, the study examined the representations of Sri Lankan cultural values, gender roles and sexual relationships, ethnic identities, religious identities, political ideologies and the role of government and the bureaucracy as depicted in the three anti-war films. This research also analysed the different readings or interpretations of those films made by the interviewees and focus group participants representing the key stakeholder groups such as academics, film reviewers, filmmakers, cast members, government authorities connected to the film industry, and general audiences. Hence, this research sought answers to the following questions.

1. How do the selected anti-war films represent gender roles, sexual relationships, ethnic identities, religious identities and cultural values in Sri Lankan society?
2. In what ways (if any) are these presentations of gender roles, sexual relationships, ethnic identities and religious identities in the selected films interpreted as reflective of the reality of Sri Lankan Society?
3. What political ideologies are embedded in these films about the war, such as those of the government and state apparatuses?
4. In what ways (if any) do the selected films use their artistic capacity to question/address the politics of war and seek to speak to the conscience of audiences regarding the disaster of war?

1.3. Scope of the Study

As previously noted, this study focused specifically on only three anti-war films because selecting a limited number of films for a study permits adequate time to conduct an in-depth analysis of the film text and the political economy (the link between economic organisations and the behaviour of government) of the film industry and the audience interpretations of those films. The selected films are *This Is My Moon*, *The Forsaken Land*, and *Shades of Ash*, released during the war (2001–2005). These films were selected because they were released when media freedom was under severe restrictions due to the country's war situation. These films faced indirect censorship and state suppression. They were

also subjected to praise and criticism, opening a space for public debate of cultural identities and political ideologies. Thus, these films provide the best sample to explore propaganda, state suppression, Third Cinema[4] and Postcolonial Cinema[5] within the Sri Lankan context.

This study, therefore, is limited in scope by seeking to examine the representations of Sri Lankan cultural identity, political ideologies, the different interpretations of various audience members and key stakeholders such as academics, film reviewers, film directors and government officers connected to the film industry and general audience concerning these three films. The study argues that the selected anti-war films include socialist political viewpoints of capitalism and state apparatuses and represent in realistic and potentially socially productive ways the nature of ethnic conflict and the impact of war on marginalised people. They also portray patriarchal gender identities with the intention of criticising them. By doing so, they exhibit Third Cinema characteristics.

I locate this research in multidisciplinary studies since it addresses media studies, cultural studies and political economy. The research incorporates media studies by analysing the content and effects of anti-war films produced in Sri Lanka. It incorporates cultural studies by analysing films as cultural texts that influence and are influenced by the culture. The study also concerns cinema's political economy by revealing the impact of political authority on the production and distribution of cinema – especially during a power struggle such as the war.

While acknowledging that every research methodology has its strengths, weaknesses and limitations, this study finds the interpretivist media/cultural studies approach useful as the most productive way to analyse the impact of socio-cultural and industrial influences on the content, the political economy and the audience reading of these films. Thus, I adopted textual analysis and qualitative data collection methods of semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus group discussions and qualitative data analysis method of Grounded Theory as the methodology of choice.

1.4. The Relevance of the Study

Producing films with themes unique to the Global South, the regions outside Europe and North America, typically low-income and often politically or culturally marginalised, such as Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Oceania (Dados and Connel 2012), using funds and technical support from the West and cast and crew from the East is popular among filmmakers from Hollywood, South Asian diaspora and South Asian filmmakers. For instance, *Mississippi Masala* by Meera Nair (1991), *Bend It Like Beckham* by Gurinder Chadha (2002), *Slumdog Millionaire* by Danny Boyle (2008), *Funny Boy* by Deepa Mehta

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[4] Third Cinema is a political cinema that works towards social and cultural emancipation (Wayne 2001).

[5] "Postcolonial cinema is constituted by and within a conceptual space in which making connections and drawing inferences, specifically those that are occluded by national and colonial frames, is encouraged" (Ponzanesi and Waller 2012, p. 1).

(2020) and *The White Tiger* by Ramin Bahrani (2021) are productions of the East and West in combination that target audiences of both the East and West. Such films keep the discourse of globalisation and postcolonialism alive because they typically discuss the impact of colonialism in a postcolonial era as their theme, and from technical to artistic work of the film show the involvement of a global cast and crew. Most importantly, these films target a global audience beyond boundaries.

Two of the films selected for this study are also global productions. *The Forsaken Land* is a production with a Sri Lankan theme and a cast that received funds and technical support from France. *Shades of Ash* received funds from Sweden. In the global film industry, it is normal to receive western support for film production. However, films produced by the Global South filmmakers often receive funds from the West; these films consist of similar themes and being praised in the western film award ceremonies is quite not normal and attract the attention of academic research. Thus, it is vital to analyse how these films shape the culture and identity of Sri Lanka while being shaped by global contributors.

Higher-level political authorities, military officials, extremists (such as the nationalistic Buddhist political movement who manipulate the war and ethnic issue in Sri Lanka to gain and maintain power), and patriotic communities (who speak for the culture, religion, reputation, and welfare of the soldiers without expecting any political gain), criticised most anti-war films set in Sri Lanka for their supposed misrepresentations of Sri Lanka's social realities, local cultural values, and social images. Since these films depict representations of crucial incidents from contemporary Sri Lankan history, they serve as a source of historical information or records for future generations. Most anti-war films were shown to international audiences and were lauded at international award ceremonies, making them popular abroad. Hence, these films carry Sri Lankan socio-cultural images into the international arena. Thus, it is essential to examine how Sri Lankan society, culture, values and images were represented in these three anti-war films made in Sri Lanka between 2001 and 2005 – when the civil war was at its highest intensity. It is also vital to examine how the target audiences of these films, without whom none of the proffered opinions and arguments would be necessary, interpreted them.

1.5. Significance of the Study

The ruling elite's suppression of anti-war films was high during the civil war period in Sri Lanka. Contemporary filmmakers were victimised by banning their films, censoring, threatening and even being forced to leave the country in fear of their lives (Wickramasinghe 2005). The primary criticism of these films was that they 'misrepresented' Sri Lankan society and culture. The filmmakers were accused of engaging in treason and helping the terrorists in indirect ways due to their 'negative' representations of the military and the lives of soldiers and their families as 'pathetic' or pitiful, which could discourage other young people from joining the military (Weerasekara 2005). In other words, these films had either not supported or challenged the dominant view or ideology of the ruling elite of the time concerning the

civil war. The dominant ideology of the ruling elite was that the only solution for the ethnic issue was to defeat the LTTE by an armed conflict, and all the citizens should support and encourage war.

Nevertheless, many of these films and their directors were acclaimed internationally for their immense cinematic contributions to the global understanding of the realities of Sri Lanka's civil war. Given the stakes and the 'controversy' surrounding these films, it is essential to study them as an aspect of contemporary Sri Lankan cinema, mainly because it has been given little to no attention within Sri Lankan academia. In that regard, the study and its findings will add to the broader, existing literature on Sri Lankan films and the scholarly literature on banned political films of Sri Lanka and elsewhere.

Furthermore, academic research conducted on such issues would reveal the contrary or opposing viewpoints of at least some members of Sri Lankan society, who did not have the opportunity to express them due to censorship and, therefore, were silenced and marginalised. The study also has the potential to empower audiences to make decisions of their own as active audience members rather than being passive receivers who accept the decisions of authorities or other influential opinion leaders. The audience members will realise the alternative views exist about art by participating in and reading studies like this. This realisation will become a motivation for them to act as an active audience. Such empowerment can ultimately create a culture (both media and political) in which critical thinking and free expression will be encouraged and made possible.

Further, I conducted this study as a 'subaltern'[6] scholar by bringing up the viewpoints of the subaltern film audience regarding the films produced about their own culture and lifestyles. This study allowed them to express their views and opinions in their own language, giving them more freedom to express themselves rather than communicate in a foreign language.

1.6. Overview of Remainder of the Thesis

Chapter Two focuses on the three theoretical frameworks used in this research. They are the Theory of Third Cinema (Solanas & Getino 1970), Postcolonial Theory (Said 1978, Spivak 1994, Bhabha 1994), and Cultivation Theory (Gerbner et al. 1986). The Theory of Third Cinema, developed by Solanas and Getino, provides a useful framework to understand the challenges filmmakers can face in developing Third Cinema in a country like Sri Lanka under a politicised and militarised environment. Postcolonial Theory provides the framework to identify the impact of colonial ideologies on contemporary Sri Lankan filmmakers and audiences. Cultivation Analysis helps to understand the impact of films made about the war on audiences – especially on their attitudes towards different ethnic groups and gender constructs.

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[6] Gramsci (1973) used the term subaltern to refer to the marginalised social groups in European society. Gayatri Spivak (1994) later used the term in her work, "Can the subaltern speak" to refer to the people in Third World.

Chapter Three is dedicated to reviewing the literature, covering the genre of war films and their counterpart – anti-war films. The chapter then examines the propaganda role of war films in the history of world cinema. The chapter will also review the studies done about Sri Lankan cinema. Next, the chapter focuses on different definitions of culture and cultural identity. Finally, the chapter examines research conducted on the representations of gender, ethnicities/race, and religion.

Chapter Four addresses the methodology used in the research; namely, the key methods of data collection and analysis used from a media and cultural studies approach (Hammer & Kellner 2009). They are thematic and textual analysis (Kuckartz 2014), in-depth interviews (Legard et al. 2003) and focus group discussions (Hennink 2014) for data collection, and the Grounded Theory method (Strauss & Corbin 1994, Strauss & Corbin 1997) for data analysis.

Chapter Five is dedicated to analysing the political economy of film production in Sri Lanka and the interplay between the dominant political views of the powerholders in the Sri Lankan government and society and the three selected anti-war films in their production and distribution processes. The chapter discusses how the film industry's political economy and the country's political situation limit filmmakers' potency to produce Third Cinema films in countries like Sri Lanka.

Chapter Six focuses on the findings of the thematic and textual analysis of the three selected anti-war films. The main themes discussed are cultural values, gender roles and sexual relationships, ethnic identities, religious identities, the civil war, and the government and bureaucracy. The chapter discusses the findings within the frame of the Theory of Third Cinema and Postcolonial Theory.

Chapter Seven focuses on the different readings of the representations of culture in selected anti-war films made by the members of various audiences of Sri Lankan society. These are those made by academics and film reviewers and the selected groups of stakeholders interviewed (that included the general public), which were comparatively analysed. The chapter focuses on the factors that influence the interpretations of the audience members. It also discusses the features that determine the selected films as films of Third Cinema.

Chapter Eight discusses the opinions of different audience members about the selected films winning awards at international film award ceremonies and achieving international recognition. This chapter uses Postcolonial Theory as the framework since it discusses Third World exoticism, Orientalism and Re-Orientalism.

Chapter Nine critically discusses the different readings of the representations of war in selected films by sample audience members of Sri Lanka consisting of film reviewers, university academics, and general audiences. This chapter is predominantly based on the Theory of Third Cinema.

Chapter Ten focuses on discussing key findings of the research and the conclusions that can be made based on them. This chapter first discloses the answers to the research questions raised in Chapter One.

Then it reveals the contribution of this study to the existing knowledge. The chapter ends by providing recommendations for future studies and concluding remarks. This study concludes that the political context in Sri Lanka is a challenge for alternative film directors to establish a Third Cinema. The selected films exhibit Third Cinema characteristics. They support the Orientalising process in their international reception by framing the marginalised groups from war-affected areas as impoverished, uneducated, unemployed, sexually desperate, and violent. The Sri Lankan audiences for these films exhibit social, cultural, economic, and political influences on their reading of these films.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS USED

Chapter Index

2.1. Introduction

In this research, I argue that political films, such as anti-war films, are sites where social and cultural identities and political ideologies are forged, contested and recorded. This research focuses mainly on three aspects related to anti-war films. First, the research focuses on the representations of the cultural identities of Sri Lankan society. Then this study also looks into the representations of war in the selected anti-war films. Further, the study also examines audiences' interpretations of the films to see how they make meanings of their identities and identities of others and make sense of their socio-political environments out of these cinematic portrayals. On the one hand, anti-war films are political films. Anti-war films, being critical of the war and the politics behind it, make people aware of the disaster of war. On the other hand, films about the wars of the Global South grab the Occident's attention, opening the space for a Postcolonial discourse. Further, the audience analysis calls for an analysis of the possible effects of media content on its audiences – especially when the media context is about war and the target audience is also from the same context. Thus, this study requires a theoretical framework that focuses on all these three aspects: politics, culture and audiences.

This study used the Theory of Third Cinema (Solanas & Getino 1970, Wayne 2001), Postcolonial Theory (Said 1978, Spivak 1994, Bhabha 1994), and Cultivation Theory (Gerbner et al. 1986) to frame the three aspects – politics, culture and audiences. They provided a conceptual lens for understanding the political economy of Sri Lankan war films, representations and constructions of Sinhalese culture and cultural identities. The Theory of Third Cinema provided a framework to understand how the Third World cinema is manipulated according to the oppressor's will within a neo-colonial context. In a neo-colonial context, the oppressor would be the ruling political body, the government of a country, that functions according to the colonial policies. The Theory of Third Cinema also helps to recognise how the political economy of cinema (production, consumption and distribution of films) can impact filmmakers and their work. Postcolonial Theory helped me examine how cultural identities of postcolonial countries such as Sri Lanka are constructed through cinema productions. The governments that follow the colonial administrative and legal system control the Cinema (and other media) using watchdogs, such as the censor board and competent authority. The political economy, which is typically

capitalistic, primarily affect the filmmakers and their products. Third Cinema, which is not profit-oriented but revolutionary, faces many challenges in a capitalistic economic environment. In addition, colonial backgrounds often shape the cultural identities of postcolonial countries. It will also clarify how the educational and socio-political background of Sri Lanka (which was primarily affected by colonialism) and how the social backgrounds and experiences of the directors affect their filmmaking practices. Cultivation Theory provided the framework to understand how the selected war films may have influenced the audience to interpret their own socio-cultural environment and identities.

2.2. Theory of Third Cinema

In *Towards a Third Cinema*, Solanas and Getino (1970) state,

> Third Cinema is the cinema that recognises in an anti-imperialist struggle the most gigantic cultural, scientific and artistic manifestation of our time, the great possibility of constructing a liberated personality with each people as the starting point – in a word, the decolonisation of culture. (Solanas & Getino 1970, p. 2)

Solanas and Getino (1970) argue that in neo-colonised countries, culture, including the cinema, expresses dependency, which generates models and values that support imperialism. As they explain, "neo-colonialism needs to convince the people of a dependent country of their own inferiority" (Solanas & Getino 1970, p. 2) in order to enforce its rule. At this point, according to Solanas and Getino (1970), the oppressor would say to the inferior subject that if they are to counteract inferiority, they must deny their own identity and adopt the identity of the oppressor, speak the oppressor's language and transform the entire self into a different being. In this research, I focused on how far the selected anti-war films work for the decolonisation of the culture.

According to Solanas and Getino, "mass communications are more effective for neo-colonialism than napalm" (1970, p. 3) because "mass communication tends to complete the destruction of national awareness and collective subjectivity" (1970, p. 3) with the support of education and culture of the ruling class. Neo-colonialism misleads the artists of oppressed societies. It provides them with the general conception that "all-new cinemas are revolutionary" (Solanas & Getino 1970, p. 3), which in reality is not valid. As Solanas and Getino (1970) explain, neo-colonialism tries to frame the cinema as a universal artefact that does not connect with the social process of decolonisation. Any so-called 'new cinema' would get no objection from the oppressor until and unless it serves "to mobilise, agitate and politicise sectors of the people" (Solanas & Getino 1970, p. 3). The best example they provide is socialist art, cinema and literature, which are praised, promoted and commercialised by a capitalist society. The films selected for this study are also honoured in international film festivals. This international acclamation has allowed the nationalists to label these films as promoting colonial perspectives of Sri Lankan cultural identities, which might be inaccurate. At the same time, one can also argue that these films are not as

revolutionary in decolonising cultures as expected. Both viewpoints need a thorough analysis which I have done in this research.

Solanas and Getino introduced the concept of Third Cinema as an alternative to the Second Cinema, which is also known as the Author's Cinema, Artistic Cinema or Cinema Novo. Second Cinema arose as an alternative to the First cinema (McNamara 2011). First Cinema is the commercial bourgeois cinema that can be seen predominantly in Hollywood and many other countries (Wayne 2001), for instance, 'Bollywood' in India and 'Nollywood' in Nigeria. The Second Cinema was introduced as an alternative to the First Cinema to undermine the bourgeois conventions and work for cultural decolonisation. However, as Solanas and Getino (1970) state, filmmakers of the Second Cinema are not liberal since they are trapped within limits the system permits. Thus, a new cinema mode was expected to fulfil the decolonisation process of culture, which is the Third Cinema. Therefore, the selected films were analysed in this research to check whether they display Third Cinema characteristics by contributing to the decolonisation process of culture.

The Third Cinema Theory was introduced by Solanas and Getino and later adopted and developed by Mike Wayne (2001). It was included in the film studies curriculum in the 1980s (Wayne 2001). Teshome Gabriel, in his book *Third Cinema in the Third World: The aesthetics of liberation* explains that the Third Cinema intends to work for Third World issues while conserving Third World culture and national identity (Gabriel, cited in Hess 1984, p. 36). However, without using the term Third World Cinema, Gabriel borrows the term Third Cinema from Solanas and Getino because, as he emphasises, it is not the geography but the socialist politics that define the Third Cinema (Hess 1984). According to Solanas and Getino, Third Cinema does not consider a film's radical potential or its capacity to explore socialist or Marxist ideas, but its capacity to provoke "revolution within the hegemony of a commercially driven bourgeois establishment" (Solanas and Getino, cited in McNamara 2011, p. 79). In his book, *Political film: The dialectics of Third Cinema*, Wayne (2001) sees Third Cinema as a political cinema that works towards social and cultural emancipation. In this research, I looked for whether the selected films work for social and cultural liberation and, therefore, can be categorised as political films or Third Cinema films.

Unlike Solanas and Getino, Wayne does not see an apparent deviation between the First, Second and Third Cinema. His reflection on political cinema reconsiders the revolutionary film defined by Solanas and Getino (McNamara 2011). Wayne argues that the First, Second and Third Cinema have a dialectical relationship. According to him, even a dominant, commercialised, bourgeois First Cinema such as Hollywood might produce films with underlying themes of the Third Cinema such as "imperialism, political authoritarianism and capitalist class power" (Wayne 2001, p. 24). For instance, he stated the American film *Three Kings* (Russell 1999), while portraying Iraqi troops as an evil and irrational 'Other', also questions America's intrusion in the Middle East and the racism in the United States. Films

of the Second Cinema also have aspects of the Third Cinema. For instance, criticisms of colonialism and hypocrisy of the church as in *Aguirre, Wrath of God* (Herzog 1972), and mixing cinematic styles such as fiction and documentary as in Walter Salles' 2004 film *The Motorcycle Diaries* (Wayne 2001). Thus, according to Wayne (2001), a film can be a good or bad example of a 'revolutionary film' rather than simply be categorised as First, Second or Third Cinema. The selected films for this study also use cinematic techniques that belong to First and Second Cinema and the themes that can be counted as Third Cinema.

Wayne (2001) identifies four characteristics of the Third Cinema: historicity, politicisation, critical commitment, and cultural specificity. Historicity is how individuals, working under the limitations of social ideologies, make sense of history while forestalling the future (Hirsch & Stewart 2005). According to Wayne,

> Third Cinema seeks to develop the means for grasping history as process, change, contradiction and conflict: in short, the dialectics of history. History is the great explainer: why we are, where we are and who we are (Wayne 2001, p. 14).

Politicisation is the process of being aware of the oppression and exploitation people endure and deciding to do something about it (Wayne 2001). Third Cinema or revolutionary films intend to awake the politicised consciousness of audiences (Wayne 2001).

As Wayne (2001) states, revolutionary films are committed to the aims and ideals of the revolution, which he names as the 'critical commitment' of the Third Cinema films. The example he offers is the Cuban film *One Way or Another* (Gomez 1977), a film committed to the Cuban revolution while being critical towards the class and gender conflicts within the country. According to Wayne (2001), revolutionary films do not work for propaganda or act as an objective observer. Instead, Third Cinema actively engages in preparing its spectators for the revolution. As Wayne (2001) explains, it is evident that colonialism and imperialism attempted to control culture and economic resources throughout history. Since the film is a part of the culture and culture is a site of political struggle, Third Cinema delves into the culture. However, the Third Cinema is not a narrow protector of native or indigenous culture because, as Fanon (1967) explains, the uncritical celebration of the native's culture and the uncritical integration of colonialists' culture are both unconstructive. The academics, film critics and veterans of the industry also appreciated the films for the cinematic quality and the radical content they carry. Since these films are war-themed, I applied the four characteristics that distinguish the Third Cinema, introduced by Wayne, in these films, to see to what extent as political films they prove to be part of the Third Cinema.

2.3. Postcolonial Theory

Sri Lanka was under Dutch, Portuguese and British colonialism for several hundred years (1505–1948). These colonial rulers implemented the educational, administrative, economic, political and legal systems of Sri Lanka. Thus, the colonial influence on the cultural text produced in contemporary Sri Lanka is unavoidable because those cultural texts are creations of the colonial socio-political, economic and educational systems. On the other hand, some of the films selected for this study were funded and praised by European countries. Films from Global South that received Western support and appreciation are typically contained Oriental and exotic views of those countries' cultural and social identities (Mudambi 2013, Mousavi 2013, Desai 2011). According to Said (1978), these Oriental and exotic depictions promote western attitudes towards the East, including once colonised countries like Sri Lanka. Thus, Postcolonial Theory provides a framework to understand the representations of cultural identities in these films.

Edward Said (1978) introduced the concept of postcolonialism in his book *Orientalism*. Said (1978) states that the Western world creates a fabricated image of the East, and, in that false image, they represent the East as the primitive, uncivilised 'other' in contrast to the advanced and civilised West. As Said (1978) explains, even after winning their so-called 'freedom' from the colonisers, the colonised countries suffer from the aftermath of colonisation, such as disorder, rebellion, corruption, civil war, and bloodshed. He also points out how the coloniser imposes their language and culture on the colonised people, ignoring their cultures, histories, values and languages, to dominate and exploit them in the name of civilisation. In this process, colonisers stereotype the colonised people, who belong to mostly completely different cultures (Said 1978). For example, they "depict Indians, Egyptians, Palestinians, Latin Americans and many others as almost the same, the 'Orient', the 'Other'" (Hamadi 2014, p. 40). Said (1978) argues that these false depictions of the East in colonial literature reveal Western attitudes towards the East. These depictions tend to justify and encourage the behaviour of the coloniser (Hamadi 2014).

Said (1978) admits that many texts written by the most knowledgeable and well-intentioned Western Orientalists were highly biased since they were negatively influenced by European colonial rule. These texts "depict the Orient (the East) as irrational, strange, weak, feminised 'other' contrasted with the rational, familiar, strong, masculine West (the Occident)" (Hamadi 2014, p. 40) because by showing this difference between primitivism and civilisation they can legalise or justify the domination of the West (civilisation) over the East. Said (1978) also criticises the elites of Arab and other ex-colonies for internalising the American and British Orientalists' ideas of Eastern cultures.

Inspired by Said's (1978) work on Orientalism, Gayatri C. Spivak and also Homi K. Bhabha later developed a Postcolonial Theory (Hamadi 2014). Since Said focuses on the discourse and the agency of

the coloniser, Spivak concentrates more on the colonised people (Hamadi 2014). She adopts the term 'subaltern', which she borrows from Gramsci (Moore-Gilbert 2008). 'subaltern' refers to the marginalised social groups in European society (Gramsci 1973). However, she uses the term to analyse the Third World – particularly India. In her book *Can the subaltern speak?* (Spivak 1994) she suggests that "in colonial discourse, the subaltern's subjectivity is necessarily constructed according to the terms and norms of the dominant culture" (Spivak, cited in Moore-Gilbert 2008, p. 454). Unlike Said and Spivak, Bhabha sees the relationship between colonisers and colonised as "more complicated, nuanced and politically ambiguous" (Bhabha, cited in Moore-Gilbert 2008, p. 457). In this relationship, the coloniser feels more insecure both physically and politically, "because both identity and agency in the colonial context are deeply inflected by the operations of the unconscious" (Moore-Gilbert 2008, p. 457).

In this study, I am using the concept of Re-Orientalism, an extension of Said's Orientalism, which is introduced by Lisa Lau (2009). Re-Orientalism focuses on the representations of culture in South Asian countries, most of which were once British colonies. The works of postcolonial critics, such as Gayatri Spivak (1993), Elleke Boehmer (1998) and Anis Shivani (2006), have laid the foundations for the development of the Re-Orientalist Theory (Lau & Mendes 2012). Lau defines Re-Orientalism as "the process of Orientalism by Orientals" (Lau 2009, p. 572). By 'Orientals', she means the diasporic authors (and filmmakers) who produce literary works to cater to the Western audience. According to her, these diasporic Orients are based on the Occident but possess strong and immediate links to the Orients. These diasporic South Asian authors are also in a position of power and dominance (Lau 2009).

The main criticism directed towards these authors who engage in Re-Orientalism is that they promote 'exotic' Third World issues through their cultural texts. Most diasporic authors (and filmmakers) of South Asia use poverty in their literary works because the "exotica of poverty" has a high demand in the cultural marketplace (Mendes & Lau 2015, p. 710). The "Western craving for voyeuristic viewing" of colonial countries is especially fulfilled through these cultural texts (Mendes & Lau 2015, p. 708).

This study adopted the ideas of Postcolonial Theory, including Orientalism and Re-Orientalism, to analyse the three anti-war films selected for this study. The nationalist groups in Sri Lanka blamed the directors of the selected films for their misrepresentation of Sri Lankan soldiers, their family members and Sinhalese society as uncivilised (Kodithuwakku 2005). According to Lau and Mendes (2012), an examination of cultural texts (such as films) through the Re-Orientalism point of view helps us to understand "the issues of taken-for-granted premises and perceptions" and "also deals with issues of misrepresentations, limited, partial and/or skewed representations, which may even amount to distortions, inauthenticity and Orientalisms" (2012, p. 8) in different forms. In this study, Re-Orientalism was also tested and questioned since the films selected for this research are productions of Sri Lankan filmmakers, not diasporic film directors.

2.4. Cultivation Theory

Anti-war films are about violence and suffering. When the war is based on ethnic conflict, the tendency is that the ethnic groups in conflict may feel insecure. In such an environment, media images play a significant role in shaping the minds of audiences. Cultivation Theory provides a useful framework to understand the role media play in shaping the minds of people. It also helps to understand the nature of propaganda and its influence on people during a war period.

Gerbner (1972) claims, in Cultivation Theory, that heavy television viewers tend to develop an exaggerated belief in 'a mean and scary world'. The violence they see on the screen, as Gerbner states, cultivates a social paranoia that resists notions of trustworthy people or safe environments (Gerbner 1972). As Gerbner explains, Cultivation Theory mainly discusses how television violence reflects the structural nature of media power. According to him, primetime television typically exaggerates violence as a common phenomenon. Gerbner also explains that television creates a perception of a scary world, which is highly capable of changing its viewers' political attitudes. He claims that based on how dangerous the world is and how vulnerable they are in that world, viewers tend to create an attitude of having less trust in others. According to Gerbner, the consequences of having such an attitude are that viewers become less tolerant of difference, less supportive of civil rights, and more accepting of authoritarian governance capable of protecting them from a dangerous world. Gerbner et al. (1980) introduce the term 'mainstreaming', which means that social, cultural and political factors are less influential on heavy television viewers in changing their beliefs and attitudes.

Throughout this time, Gerbner's work has been subjected to criticism and improvement. Cultivation Theory has been challenged for its empirical and methodological weaknesses. Gerbner's perception of the impact of heavy television viewing on people was proven to be wrong by researchers Doob and Macdonald (1979). According to them, people are influenced by factors other than heavy viewing, and heavy viewing becomes a result of other factors. For instance, people living in violent environments show more fear and tend to stay home. Since they stay home more than an average person, they become heavy viewers and get exposed to television violence more (Ruddock 2011).

Newcomb (1978) criticises the methodology of Cultivation Analysis. According to him, Gerbner and his colleagues' work predetermined television's nature and purpose by assuming that television had a clear political philosophy that the audience uniformly understood. This presumption has prevented them from questioning various meanings expressed by the television content and the distinct meanings audiences interpreted (Ruddock 2011). Potter (1993) claims that Cultivation Analysis considered the overall effect of television rather than considering the specific impact television makes on different audience groups by interacting with different industries, viewers and content.

Cultivation Theory has been used for many other studies since Gerbner's work of cultivation analysis of television violence. The television representations of health, mental health, politics, gender and sexuality, and social and cultural relationships are aspects that researchers are interested in studying based on Cultivation Theory. Furthermore, with the recent developments of new technology, Cultivation Theory has been used to study media other than television, such as social media and video games (Morgan & Shanahan 2010, Cheng et al. 2016).

Cultivation Theory can be adopted in this project to evaluate the films' impact on both local and international audiences. Firstly, since the films are war-themed, they contain violent scenes. The films were released during the war period in Sri Lanka. The war was based on ethnic issues, and therefore it created a defensive feeling between the two ethnic communities, Sinhalese and Tamils. The local Tamil community and Tamil diaspora, who had less connection and communication with the Sinhalese community, may cultivate an insecure feeling after watching these films because these films were criticised for misrepresentations of the Sinhalese community, stereotyping them as uncivilised and violent (Weerasekara 2005, Kalugamage 2005, Kodithuwakku 2005). Since Sinhalese filmmakers produced these anti-war films, audiences may also believe that the Sinhala community's representations in the films are authentic. Secondly, since these films were screened in international film festivals and exposed to international audiences, especially the Tamil diaspora, they may tend to create an attitude of having less trust in the collective Sinhalese community. Cultivation Theory provides a theoretical base to check the relevance of the above ideas. Thirdly, these films represent gender, sexuality, ethnicities, religions and political ideologies and might cultivate stereotypical ideologies of cultural identities and dominant political ideologies.

<div align="center">**CHAPTER THREE**</div>

<div align="center">**POLITICS AND ANTI-WAR FILMS IN SRI LANKA: A CONTEXTUAL REVIEW**</div>

Chapter Index

3.1. Introduction

The Sri Lankan cinema industry is diminutive compared to cinema industries in other South Asian countries. It predominantly caters towards the Sinhala-speaking majority of the country, therefore is also known as 'Sinhala cinema'. A small proportion of the Tamil speaking community, who are bilingual/multilingual, also views Sinhala films, with the majority of the Tamil-speaking community in the country depending on South Indian Tamil films to fulfil their cinematic entertainment needs. The total number of films produced in 2019 was 12, and the number of cinemas in Sri Lanka is around 194 (National Film Corporation 2020). The industry caters to about eight million of the country's population as a mode of entertainment. The size of its patronage has made the film industry in Sri Lanka a less successful business compared to other film industries in the region. When it comes to alternative films, the situation becomes worse since these alternative arthouse films rarely focus on entertainment but more serious issues targeting a niche audience. Thus, the film directors have to depend either on the government to finance their film projects or on a limited number of businesspeople who are interested in investing money in films unlikely to be lucrative.

The Sri Lankan film industry is unique not only because of its size but also due to the control government has over it. The main governmental body that monitors film production and distribution in Sri Lanka is the National Film Corporation (NFC), which functions under the Ministry of Buddhasasana, Cultural and Religious Affairs. Before screening to the public, every film must receive the Public Performance Board's approval (PPB), which is also a governmental body. Film production and distribution can also be controlled during remarkable events, such as a war situation. In Sri Lanka, this was done through the Emergency Law Act. Additionally, the government bodies, such as the cabinet or the individual ministers, may also influence or control the country's film production and/or distribution (Priyadarshani 2012).

Since the government bodies have the capacity and power to influence film production and distribution, it is essential to examine the role politics plays in deciding the destiny of films containing political ideologies and messages in the Sri Lankan context. Therefore, this chapter discloses the contextual background in which the selected films were produced and screened. By doing so, I claim that the Sri Lankan film industry's political economy, the political situation at the time, and the cinemagoers' behaviour impacted the production and distribution of these three films because the production of Third Cinema films is not an individual task of the filmmaker but a collective attempt of the political, economic and social sectors.

3.2. Production and Distribution of Films in Sri Lanka

This section reveals the film production and distribution process in Sri Lanka and the government's influence upon it. It also discloses that the capitalised and politicised nature of the film industry gives a limited chance for filmmakers to produce films that can be categorised as films of Third Cinema. However, there are vacuums in the system where filmmakers can use their creativity independently to produce political films that show Third Cinema characteristics. This section contains information given by representatives of the National Film Corporation (NFC), the three directors of the selected films and the literary sources that reveal the production and distribution mechanisms in the Sri Lankan film industry and how those mechanisms impact the selected films.

Sri Lankan cinema does not have a national policy for film production and distribution, and therefore the regulations change from time to time. Senevirathne (2017) divides Sri Lankan film history into two paradigms based on the economic reforms that took place with political power changes. According to him, the first phase occurred from 1925 to 1977. The monopoly of two groups marks this first paradigm: from 1925 to 1972, several private companies held the monopoly of Sinhala cinema; in 1972, the government seized the monopoly from private companies by establishing the Sri Lanka State Film Corporation (Senevirathne 2017). According to the veteran film director Lester James Pieris, serious and ideological films were not produced during this time of "National Cinema" (Pieris, cited in Senevirathne 2017, p. 193). Instead, the majority of the films produced were imitations of south Indian commercial films (Mihindukula 2003). The paradigm shift occurred when the United National Party (UNP), which came into power in 1977, introduced an economic policy opening up the cinema industry for private entrepreneurs (Senevirathne 2017).

Dissanayake (1994) states that serious, ideological and socially committed films were produced after Lester James Pieris's film *Changing Countryside* (1963). According to him, *Changing Countryside* became an inspiration to filmmakers, such as D. B. Nihal Sinha, G. D. L. Perera, Titus Thotawatte, Sugathapala Senerath Yapa, Vasantha Obeysekere, Amaranath Jayatilake, Dharmasena Pathiraja, Sumithra Pieris, Vijaya Dharma Sri and Tissa Abeysekara. Their works were not only serious and ideological but also socially committed (Dissanayake 1994, p. 198). Much of these filmmakers' works

can be seen during this second paradigm of cinema. For Senevirathne (2017), during this paradigm, film directors such as Prasanna Vithanage and Asoka Handagama started a new cinematic trend that opened up the gates to international film festivals, which eventually attracted international film producers. This new cinematic trend created a space for alternative filmmaking in Sri Lanka which was later continued by Vimukthi Jayasundara, Sudath Mahadivulwewa, Sathyajith Maitipe and Sanjeeva Pushpakumara.

According to Robinson (2010), between 2002 and 2008, Sri Lankan cinema was resuscitated due to the removal of high import taxes and restrictions placed on the distribution of foreign films and the removal of the 30-years monopolistic control of the National Film Corporation. During this period, contemporary filmmakers gained the freedom to produce artistic films on crucial issues (Robinson 2010). However, these filmmakers tend to gear their films towards the international film festivals because the public attendance to cinemas was meagre, and the films had to wait for years to be screened in Sri Lanka due to lack of cinemas (Robinson 2010). Out of the three films selected for this study, *This Is My Moon* was produced during the period the National Film Corporation still had its monopoly. Funds for the film were obtained from a state bank loan. The other two films were produced with international funds. *The Forsaken Land* was funded by a France-based production company, while a Swedish organisation funded *Shades of Ash*. As stated by Robinson, these three films are based on a crucial issue of the country – the war. Therefore, it is essential to review the history of war films in Sri Lanka to understand the filmmakers, governments and audiences approach towards war films produced in the country.

3.3. War films in Sri Lanka

The themes connected to the ethnic conflict in Sinhala cinema first appeared in 1979 with director Sunil Ariyarathna's film *Sarungale* (The Kite) (1979), which was about the communal riots that occurred in 1958. This film faced censorship and was criticised by Sinhalese filmgoers because it partially displayed the violence committed against Tamils in Southern Sri Lanka but ignored the violence faced by the Sinhalese who lived in the country's northern and eastern parts (Mihindukula 1999). After *Sarungale,* several other films were made about the ethnic conflict and civil war. However, many films using the civil war as a backdrop of their story had the central theme of either love stories or biographies of the characters. For example, the film *Nomiyena Minisun* (The Immortal Men) (1994), directed by Gamini Fonseka, used the civil war as its backdrop but mainly focused on the lives of military officers fighting the war and their families (Mihindukula 2007).

Sri Lankan war cinema faced a crucial moment when the young new-wave film directors such as Prasanna Vithanage, Asoka Handagama, Vimukthi Jayasundara, Sudath Mahadivulwewa, Sanjeeva Pushpakumara, began producing films based on the civil war – the burning national issue at the time. The films often addressed civil war issues in three ways. Firstly, they delved into the nature of war and its effects in a melodramatic manner (Weragama 2009). For instance, the film *Saroja* (the titular character being a young Tamil girl of that name) (2000) was about a Sinhala family that safeguarded a

displaced Tamil man and his daughter secreted from their fellow villagers in a war-torn area. Secondly, promoting the nationalist position of war, reflecting the military and political leadership in a heroic manner (Jayasena 2012), was seen in *Prabhakaran* (name of the leader of the LTTE) (2008), *Gamani* (which is about a massacre of a Sinhala village by the LTTE) (2011) and *Alimankada* (The Road From Elephant Pass which had a Sinhala military officer as the main character) (2009). Thirdly, addressing the socio-political and economic backgrounds of the war critically and deeply was seen in films such as *Purahanda Kaluwara* (Death on a Full Moon Day) (1997), *Ira Madiyama* (August Sun) (2005), *Sulanga Enupinisa* (The Forsaken Land) (2005), *Me Mage Sandai* (This Is My Moon) (2000), *Sudu Kalu Saha Alu* (Shades of Ash) (2004) and *Igillena Maluwo* (Flying Fish) (2011). Apart from having reviews published in newspapers, websites and/or books, academic inquiry or analysis in Sri Lanka rarely focused on films belonging to the third type. For instance, De Mel (2007), Jayasena (2010), Jayasena (2012), Priyadarshani (2012) and Fonseka (2014) have published their work on the representations of cultural and political aspects in war films and state suppression exercised over such films.

In her study titled *Figure of speech: The female suicide bomber, censorship and the literacy–cinematic site*, De Mel (2007) focuses on three types of cultural texts – a stage play *Forbidden Area* by Visakesa Chandrasekeram (2000), a review published in *The Island* newspaper about the play, and several war films. She has studied how the stage play represents a female LTTE suicide bomber; how Asoka Handagama represents a Tamil woman in *This Is My Moon* (2000); and how overt and covert censorship exercised over Prasanna Vithanage's film *Death on a Full Moon Day* (1997) and Vimukthi Jayasundara's film *The Forsaken Land* (2005). She claims that *Forbidden Area* and its review indicates that "the militarisation has shaped the domains of speech that govern how the war, its economies and modalities that include suicide bombing, can be spoken about or not" (De Mel 2007, p. 240).

In her analysis of the films, De Mel (2007) claims that they share characteristics of Third Cinema films by using unorthodox viewpoints of the war, alternative cinematic and public screening techniques. At the same time, she criticises *This Is My Moon* (2000) for making an eroticised and voyeuristic gaze available and reducing a Tamil woman to her body by silencing her. She concludes that the cultural works such as stage dramas, films, or critical analyses that attempted to provide alternative narratives of the war have a limited space to speak of the larger discourses of war. Such cultural works face the risk of undergoing overt and covert censorship. Her audience analysis reveals that the film *Death on a Full Moon Day* (1997) could change audiences' attitude towards war. They rejected the official judgement that the film discourages the youth from joining the army and therefore it should be censored. De Mel's study opens up the opportunity to understand the impact of militarisation generally on social discourse and specifically on cultural texts such as films, stageplays, and newspaper reviews. It also reveals the impact cultural texts can have on their receivers in changing their attitudes towards war. However, the study does not analyse how these films shape cultural identities and political ideologies while being shaped by the cultural and political nature of the country. In my research, I limited the

analysis to anti-war films but extended De Mel's study by expanding its subject area (representations of culture and war) and selecting an audience sample for all three films and screening them ten years after the war to see how these anti-war films shape and being shaped by the political ideologies and cultural identities of the audiences in a different period.

Jayasena (2010), in his study, analyses the ethnic representations in Prasanna Vithanage's films *Death on a Full Moon Day* (1997) and *August Sun* (2003). He questions the absence and under-representation of the Tamil community. He claims that through the absence of bodies (both the Sinhalese and Tamil), the filmmaker challenges the dominant ideology that the cultural differences between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities are grounded in biological differences. The absence of the Sinhalese soldier's body in the sealed coffin in *Death on a Full Moon Day*, the missing Sinhalese Air Force pilot in *August Sun*, and the absence of Tamil bodies in both films "bring the two communities under one common denominator" and the filmmaker "suggests that the real enemy is the government, not the Tamil Tigers" (Jayasena 2010, p. 127). However, Jayasena justifies the underrepresentation and absence of ethnic minorities by narrowing it down to the absence of the soldier's and airforce pilot's characters in the two films disregarding the presence of the Sinhalese civilians and the absence of the Tamil civilians. In his research, he also excludes the opinion of the audience members. Thus, while analysing the ethnic representations in three selected anti-war films in my study, I considered the audience interpretations of those films' ethnic representations.

Jayasena (2012) discusses how the film *The Forsaken Land* criticises militarism and the policing of gender and sexuality within both Sinhalese and Tamil communities. In his article, he compares how the dominant cultural suppression worked on a pro-war film and an anti-war film produced in Sri Lanka. While the pro-war film *Prabhakaran* (Thushara Peiris 2008) was oppressed in South India during its post-production process for its negative depictions of the LTTE, the government fully supported the film to screen for an extended period despite its low artistic quality. On the contrary, *The Forsaken Land* was subjected to state suppression for its anti-war perspective, which the nationalists eventually defined as the pro-LTTE perspective. Within this cultural context, the researcher claims that, being an anti-war film, *The Forsaken Land* criticises Sinhala and Tamil nationalism and "the effect of militarisation on the lives of Sri Lankans on both sides of the political divide" (Jayasena 2012, p. 139). Jayasena's study helps identify the influence of governments and their political ideologies work for and against cultural texts like films reminding us that these films can act as propaganda tools. However, in this study, the researcher excludes the audience opinion, which can significantly influence the effectiveness of propaganda. Thus, in this research, while looking for the ethnic representations, representations of war and suppression exercised over the selected films, without limiting to textual and contextual analysis, I sought the opinions of the audiences regarding these representations giving a thorough idea of media censorship in South Asian countries like ours.

In her study titled *Sri Lankan cinema and censorship: Special reference to Sinhala films examined by the Public Performance Board between 2000 and 2010*, Priyadarshani (2012) discusses the political economy of the Sri Lankan film industry and how the political authorities exercise censorship overtly through institutions such as the Public Performance Board. She has analytically studied how films were censored, selecting four films as the sample. Two of them were anti-war films. She claims that the Sri Lankan authorities exercise censorship on films, violating the legal provisions and disregarding the accepted standard policies. In her research, Priyadarshani (2012) focuses on the official censorship and indirect censorship methods practised in Sri Lanka. Priyadarshani's study offers a thorough idea of direct and indirect censorship exercised over cinema in Sri Lanka. However, it does not picture the components that attract censorship, especially in anti-war films. Thus, in my research, I looked for the context and text that attracted the overt and covert censorship for the selected anti-war films and audiences' perception of them.

Fonseka (2014), in his research *Silence in Sri Lankan cinema from 1990 to 2010*, explores how silence is dominantly used in new-wave Sri Lankan films produced after 1990. The majority of the films he has selected for the sample are anti-war films. He uses a socio-cultural approach to his study. In his research, he claims that the silence in the selected films "reflects the forces of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism that trigger the civil war, youth unrest, social and systemic imbalance in the socio-political landscape of Sri Lanka" (Fonseka 2014, p. iii). He concludes that these filmmakers represent silence as a weapon people use to safeguard their personal and cultural identities, a space to create a mechanism to defend against the violence directed towards them and create a backlash to hegemonic authority that seeks to control personal identities. In his research, he focused only on one cultural aspect – silence which does not allow understanding the social, cultural and political aspects of Sri Lanka. The study offers only one point of view towards the phenomena: the researcher and the filmmaker. The interpretations can be differ based on the audience. It also varies based on different cultural factors. In my research, I focused on a broader area of Sri Lankan culture – gender, ethnicity, religion – and its aspects represented in anti-war films.

The above literature review of Sri Lankan war cinema demonstrates a necessity for more academic research to fill the knowledge gap of Sri Lankan anti-war cinema. Thus, to bridge this gap, I studied how war and culture were represented in three Sri Lankan anti-war films in the Sinhala language released between 2001 and 2005, films which led to severe debates among film makers, academics, political, military and cultural leaders and the general public. I studied the context, text, and audiences of these films to achieve a broader knowledge of the political economy, artistry and reception of the anti-war films. The following section explains the political economy of Sri Lankan cinema. Political economy refers to the link between economic organisations and the behaviour of government. The government's behaviour towards the cinema industry is visible in the film distribution process.

War films, including those selected for this study, created controversies in the film industry and political field, leading to an ideological clash between power groups who represented the main political parties, their supporters and the human rights activists. The result was the government's violation of media freedom by exercising overt or covert censorship over these films. The following section discusses how the state influences the selected war films in their production and distribution phases, making it difficult for those films to impact the audiences as expected.

3.4. State Influence on the Selected War Films

As mentioned in the introduction, film distribution in Sri Lanka is predominantly a government-driven process. The central governmental bodies in charge are the National Film Corporation (NFC) and the Public Performance Board (PPB). The NFC representative stated that the NFC had the power to allocate cinemas for each film, depending on their demand levels. The demand will decide the number of copies distributed and the number of cinemas they will screen in. The film producer can request to distribute it to as many cinemas as possible, mentioning the film's expenses. As its representative stated, the NFC can release a film in a way that disturbs the success of an already screening film. If a film screening in a privately owned cinema is not successfully attracting audiences, the cinema's owner has the power to remove the film from screening and give a chance to the film next in line. The NFC gives a 14-day compulsory period to screen the film.

> We will not allow the cinemas to remove the film for 14 days. Giving publicity to the film and running it for more than 14 days is a challenge filmmakers face. (NFC representative 2019, 07 August)

This statement shows that the film industry's capitalist structure makes it difficult for alternative filmmakers who often work with low budgets to go along with the existing system. Such low budget alternative films may not have enough financial scope to enable sufficient advertising and promotions to win the audience attraction. Although this situation applies to *This Is My Moon*, a low budget film produced with a loan obtained from a state bank, and *Shades of Ash*, which had insufficient allocations for advertising, *The Forsaken Land* was an exception since it received immense publicity with the reception of a Cannes award. Therefore, the NFC representative's statement needs to be cross-checked with the filmmakers' experiences to understand the political economy of filmmaking.

The main complaint from the directors of the selected anti-war films is that their films were removed from the cinemas when they were successfully attracting audiences.

> The film was not allowed to run in the cinemas. The real story is that when the film received more and more criticisms from the army and newspapers, more and more people came to watch it. It could have run for 100 days smoothly, but it was not allowed to run like that. (Mahadivulwewa 2019, 22 May)

> The film was screened in remote border villages in Anuradhapura and Ampara areas. The general public organised the screening. Many people came to see the film. However, later, the screenings were interrupted and stopped. We could not rent halls to screen the film. (Handagama 2019, 04 July)

However, the NFC representative's statement that the films were removed because they were not successful in bringing viewers to the cinemas contradicts the filmmakers' statements.

> *The Forsaken Land* was screened in Colombo and some remote areas. It was successful in Colombo but not in other areas. The cinemas in remote areas decided to remove the film. In such cases, we cannot influence the hall owners not to remove the film. (NFC representative 2019, 07 August)

According to the NFC representative, three things decide the success of a film. First, the content of the film. If the content is not interesting enough to attract a wide audience, the film is more likely to become a flop. Second, the taste of the audience. If the audience prefers commercial films over arthouse films, they are less likely to see arthouse films. This preference variance is because the arthouse films target a niche audience primarily residing in urban areas like Colombo. Third, the financial condition of the audience. If they are not in a good economic position, they are more likely not to spend money to see a film. As he explains, these were the reasons for the failure of the selected three anti-war films. However, one can also argue that most members of the general public avoided visiting crowded locations such as cinemas due to threats of suicide bombing from the LTTE, which may have prevented the films from attracting a large audience.

According to Senevirathne (2017), despite the fame these films achieved internationally, their spectatorship declined due to the politicisation of the state and private film governing bodies. Senevirathne (2017) states that in today's global society, "the capitalist traders do not concern on artistic value or cultural ground rules, but only chasing money" (2017, p. 56). As Handagama and Mahadivulwewa stated, if their films brought viewers into the cinemas, they must have been earning profits. If the private cinema owners were profit-oriented, they have no reason to stop screening those films. At this point, the factor of politicisation and the film viewing behaviour of the cinemagoers need discussion. One can argue that private and public organisations were under the rule of militarisation during the war. Therefore, the private film hall owners may also have to adjust to the situation because working against the government's will may cause trouble for their business.

The film industry's second governing body in Sri Lanka is the Public Performance Board (PPB). The Mayor first possessed PPB powers, and then it was transferred to the Minister of Defence. At the time of the production and release of the selected three films, the board was under the Ministry of Cultural Affairs. During this period, the PPB consisted of governmental officers, such as the Inspector General of Police, representatives from the National Information Bureau, Criminal Investigation Department,

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Higher Education (Priyadarshani 2012). According to the Act, members of the PPB are appointed by the Minister in charge. The PPB's content and its recruitment procedure indicate the degree of governmental intervention into PPB activities. In addition, the composition of the PPB hints at the possible bodies that can interfere in the film screening and distribution process. The Inspector-General of Police and the Criminal Investigation Department are part of the government's punitive forces. Therefore, one can argue that these government bodies can be utilised to exercise indirect censorship.

The statements of the NFC and PPB members clearly allege that none of these state bodies exercised direct censorship against these selected anti-war films. However, the film directors and other interviewees of the stakeholder groups clearly express that the three films were the target of state suppression and criticism of certain groups.

> There was no direct censorship exercised against this film. However, I had to face indirect censorship, which is ten times, a hundred times stronger than direct censorship. (Mahadivulwewa 2019, 22 May)

> I was criticised for making a film about Sri Lanka while living in France. A person affiliated with the military threatened me and wrote newspaper articles against me, stating that the director should be hanged in public. When the film was shown, people in southern Sri Lanka started to talk against me. (Jayasundara 2019, 14 March)

> The director of the film, Vimukthi, received death threats. He was residing in my house then. He was depressed due to these threats. His colleagues and I had requested him to go back to France because we were scared about his life. (Cast member 2, 2019, 10 June)

According to Asoka Handagama, the higher military officials formed an objection against his film, and consequently the film became a target of indirect censorship. As he revealed, when the film won best film at the New Delhi International Film Festival, some Sri Lankan Navy and Army officers who were in New Delhi came to see the film. These military officers were shocked after seeing this film. One of them had written an article to the newspaper stating that the films that misrepresent or destroy the image of the Sri Lankan army and the culture of the country should not be allowed to screen. He also stated that such filmmakers should be hanged. The experiences of the other two filmmakers were also like that of Asoka Handagama. According to Jack Mapanje (1997, p. 72), indirect censorship leaves no traces "by which the perpetrators could be pinned down in future. They let others perform their wicked jobs for them." The directors' responses indicate that state suppression worked against these filmmakers indirectly but intensely. Thus, the direct censorship was not exercised over these films have no meaning because the scenario shows indirect censorship is brutal and effective than direct censorship.

Interestingly, the filmmakers confirmed that they received government support for their films by receiving army uniforms, weapons and vehicles during the production process, although they were targets of indirect censorship during the time of screening. I argue that the political situation of Sri Lanka during the time of production and screening of these selected films was vital because, according to Hoglund and Orjuela (2012), the political atmosphere of the country has had a crucial impact on media production and distribution during the time of war and these films were not exceptional. The audiences' opinions regarding the resistance faced by the selected films also support this argument.

3.5. Resistance Faced by the Films: The Audiences' Opinion

The interviewees stated that the representations of six aspects might have caused the films to face overt or covert censorship: negative depictions of the security forces, the Buddhist clergy and the Sinhalese community, depicting social problems, war's impact, and representing the voice of the marginalised groups. According to the focus group participants, the reasons were the negative depictions of the security forces (35%), depictions of explicit sex scenes (20%), negative depictions of the government and state bureaucracy (15%), depictions of social problems (12%), negative depictions of the Buddhist clergy (7%), negative depictions of the Sinhalese community (7%), and depictions of violence (4%). The findings demonstrate that the opinions of the interviewees and focus group participants are almost similar to each other. However, they have given different significance to these reasons. The findings demonstrate that most aspects audience members identified as reasons for censorship and destructive criticisms challenge the status quo. Thus, these films act against government war propaganda, showing the critical commitment of Third Cinema.

3.5.1. Resistance faced by the films: opinions of film reviewers and university academics

Like the focus group participants, most interviewees stated the main reason these films faced indirect censorship and destructive criticism is their negative depictions of security forces. The following comments of the interviewees illustrate their argument.

> Interviewee 3 (Film reviewer): The problem with these films is that the government can sue the filmmakers for condemning the army.

> Interviewee 5 (Academic): The films contained ideologies against the country's dominant ideology at the time. Some groups criticised the films, saying that films can affect the morale of the soldiers negatively.

> Interviewee 6 (Academic): These films depicted an army soldier who rapes a Tamil woman, a soldier who sleeps with the wife of another man, a Home Guard who attempts to abuse a child and soldiers who treat innocent villagers rudely. Most of the critics who were against these films took the side of the group that supports the war.

> Interviewee 7 (Academic): *The Forsaken Land* film depicts the higher-ranked army officers mistreating lower-ranked soldiers. This depiction may damage the image of the army and cause damage to the national security because such negative representations of the army can affect the recruitment process of new soldiers. The youth might be discouraged to join the army when they see such depictions.

The above comments demonstrate that these films portray a negative image of the security forces against the image the government promoted of the soldier as a 'war hero'. These films were screened during the war, in which recruitment of youth as soldiers was a must to continue the war. Thus, according to the participants, the government might have thought these films were a threat to its war agenda and took necessary approaches to suppress them. If we consider these directors' perception that this ethnic-based war brings nothing other than destruction is true, they have worked to produce films that challenge the government propaganda that celebrates the war and makes it a heroic event. In that sense, these films exhibit the critical commitment of Third Cinema.

Interviewee 7 identified negative depictions of the Buddhist clergy as the second reason these films faced state suppression.

> Interviewee 7 (Academic): In Sri Lanka, Buddhism is valued a lot. Sometimes Buddhist monks may possess power more significant than the president. When films, such as *Shades of Ash* and *This Is My Moon*, represent Buddhist monks in negative roles, such films may be rejected by society. The government may also think that depicting such characters may harm the image of Sri Lanka and Buddhism. That might be why the government has suppressed these films.

This Is My Moon and *Shades of Ash* exhibit critical commitment of Third Cinema by criticising the pro-war Sinhala nationalist Buddhist institutions and destruction of such institutions in a war-torn environment (this was discussed in sections 6.2.5 and 6.4.5). The above comment of interviewee 7 demonstrates that these films challenge the Buddhist religious institutions that worked as an ideological state apparatus during the war, helping the government to shape the public mindset for war. The findings demonstrate that this anti-propagandist activity of these films attracted state suppression towards them.

According to interviewee 1, the third reason for state suppression is the negative portrayal of the Sinhalese community.

> Interviewee 1 (Film reviewer): We were in a war situation at that time. We were in a terrible battle. Nobody says war is good. However, still, we were in a war. Everybody thought of how to overcome this war. In such a moment, some social groups might think that films negatively impact Sinhalese society, which was the cause for objection. Some objections

went to an extreme level. Some said capital punishment should be given to the filmmakers. Social groups might have influenced the cinemas.

The above comment demonstrates two aspects. Firstly, the Sinhalese community is the main operator of the war, and therefore the dominant group. Secondly, these films negatively portray the Sinhalese community. One can also argue, based on the nature of the resistance that came against these films, it is not the depictions of the general Sinhalese community but the dominant Sinhala nationalist government and political groups connoted by the so called 'Sinhalese community' that provoked the government or its agents to suppress these films. If the latter is true, again, these films have exhibited the critical commitment of Third Cinema.

The fourth and fifth reasons interviewees stated were portraying social problems and the war's impacts in these films. They thought such depictions might raise audiences' awareness and compel them to take actions to pressure the political bodies to solve them, and the political bodies are scared to face such a situation. Therefore, they have resisted these films using overt or covert censorship. Interviewees' opinions demonstrate that these films could make audiences aware of social problems and convince them to do something about them. Wayne (2001) called this aspect the politicisation of Third Cinema.

An interviewee thought that, since these films represent a minority voice, the government and its supporters might have suppressed them.

> Interviewee 5 (Academic): The nationalist Buddhist movement in the country firmly states that they are the majority, so this is their country. The Tamil community have no right to say so because they have other countries that speak Tamil language, such as India. The Tamil community is not allowed to speak for their rights within this social discourse. These film directors depict the story of these marginalised minority groups. Although Tamil characters are absent, or a few can be seen in some of these films, these films talk about the civil war. That is why the government or particular social groups did not want these films to be screened.

In conclusion, the academics and film reviewers who have a thorough knowledge of films believe that the selected films criticise the three most crucial aspects of war-torn Sri Lanka. They are the security forces, the Buddhist clerical community supporting war, and the Sinhalese community. They were the three pillars that helped the government to continue the war. Security forces fought the war; the Sinhalese community provided the workforce for the battlefield, and the pro-war Buddhist clerical community persuaded the Sinhalese community to support the process. Revealing this process and the damage war can cause might disturb the government's order, which compelled them to suppress these films. Not only the educated niche audience, but it is essential to see the opinion of the general audience regarding the state suppression of these films, which I have discussed in the next section since the film viewers are also a part of this context.

3.5.2. Resistance faced by the films: opinions of focus group participants

The focus group members expressed seven reasons they thought the films attracted negative feedback from the government and nationalist political groups. The findings are given in Table 1.

Table 1: Reasons for films to attract negative feedback – focus group participants' opinions

	Categories of opinions	Total number of Participants
1	Negative depictions of security forces	17 (35)
2	Depictions of explicit sex scenes	10 (20)
3	Negative depictions of the government and the state bureaucracy	8 (15)
4	Depictions of social problems	6 (12)
5	Negative depictions of the Buddhist clergy	4 (7)
6	Negative depictions of Sinhala community	4 (7)
7	Depictions of violence	2 (4)
	Total	51* (100)**

 * Number of opinions expressed on a theme is greater than the total number of participants in the sample because one participant can express multiple opinions under a given category of opinions.

**Numbers within the parenthesis are percentages.

This Is My Moon

This Is My Moon was a target of indirect censorship and destructive criticism. Assuming that this is due to its negative representations of government bureaucracy and Sri Lankan culture, I asked participants why these films received indirect censorship and destructive criticisms. Many participants stated that the reasons are negative depictions of security forces and the Sinhala community. For some other participants, the portrayal of explicit sex scenes was the reason for indirect censorship. A few participants stated that depicting social problems and violence might have attracted destructive criticism toward the film.

According to the participants, negative portrayals of security forces, especially the soldiers, and the Sinhala community paved the way for destructive criticism and indirect censorship. They explained these depictions could create anger within the Tamil community towards the Sinhalese and may serve the Tamil diaspora to prove their perception of the Sinhalese community. Besides, one could argue that depicting the Tamil community's suffering (represented by the Tamil woman) and the government's shortcomings in the conduct of the war (represented by the soldier's misbehaviour) could also be used by the opponents in the same way.

The film depicts the army soldier as an irresponsible man with destructive behaviours (male participant 2).

Depicting the soldier and the Buddhist monk in a lower status (male participant 4).

Tamil diaspora can use this film to prove that the Sri Lankan army is violent and inhuman (female participant 1).

An (overseas) audience who see this film might think that Sri Lankan people are violent. This type of film can become a weapon in the hands of people who blame us for human rights violation (female participant 2).

This film is an obstacle to the reconciliation process. If a Tamil person sees this film, he/she will hate Sinhalese people. The film conveys a negative image of the soldiers (female participant 4).

These comments reflect the government's propaganda efforts during and after the war, which DeVotta (2010) mentioned in his article 'From civil war to soft authoritarianism: Sri Lanka in a comparative perspective':

Traitors then are anyone critical of the regime. These include journalists and political opponents who report on military and government malpractice; civil society groups, NGOs, and academics that promote liberal tenets and good governance; and local and foreign entities that call for investigations into human rights violations and the fair treatment of Tamils. This bunch is collectively portrayed as insidious, mercenary, pro-LTTE, and part of an international conspiracy to tarnish Sri Lanka's reputation and undermine the country's sovereignty (DeVotta 2010, p. 342).

Thus, this similarity between the participants' opinions and government propaganda against anti-war films demonstrates how the propaganda affected the audience's mind. The film's effort as anti-propaganda was ineffective because the propaganda seems to be more effective on audiences than the film. One can also claim that since the focus group members belong to the middle-class, averagely educated (most of them were educated to secondary level) Sinhalese community, they may have no adequate capacity to understand the anti-propaganda included in arthouse films like *This is My Moon*.

The portrayal of explicit sex scenes in the film is the second reason participants highlighted as the cause of indirect censorship and criticisms.

This film does not suit our culture. There are explicit sex scenes (female participant 3).

This film contains explicit sex scenes and violence (female participant 6).

This film does not convey any message to society. When there are plenty of sex scenes in such a film, the film gets criticised (male participant 1).

The director must have made this film [hoping] to receive an award. That is why, he has included explicit sex scenes in it (male participant 5).

These comments indicate that some participants believed explicit sex scenes contravene Sri Lankan cultural values and that the filmmaker has included these scenes in the hope of winning an international award. The comments also show that participants thought that sex scenes are essential for a film to win an international award. The introverted attitude of the Sinhalese culture towards sex might have influenced them to feel this way. As mentioned above, the social and educational status of the participants may have influenced their interpretation because they must be unable to read the connotative meanings (which I discuss in Chapter Five) conveyed by the film. Furthermore, a few participants believed that the presence of violence and portrayal of social problems such as poverty and unemployment might be the reason for indirect censorship imposed on the film. The government might have thought the film portrays the country negatively and contravenes the positive, propagandist image of the war it has carefully created.

In conclusion, the findings demonstrate that, similar to the interviewees, focus group participants also identified the negative portrayal of security forces and the Sinhalese community as the reason for state suppression of the film. Further, the inclusion of explicit sex scenes is another reason they mentioned. Their opinion reveals that the security forces, Sinhala nationalism played a central role in assuring the power of the government during the war.

Shades of Ash

According to its director, *Shades of Ash* faced indirect censorship and destructive criticism. When I asked the participants about possible reasons for this suppression by the government or any other social group, the participants emphasised four aspects: the negative portrayal of government officers, negative depictions of the security forces, representations of social problems, and depiction of explicit sex scenes and violence.

First, many participants thought the film's negative portrayal of government and its bureaucracy is the main reason for suppression and criticism. According to them, the film represents the government and its bureaucracy through some characters who are authoritarian figures in society.

This film criticises the political and administrative authorities [active in the villages] and religious leaders. Because it reveals the bitter truth [due to those characters' realistic nature], the governmental body must have used its influence to prevent the film from being screened (male participant 2).

The film portrays the authoritarian figures in the society, such as the Buddhist monk, school principal and the VAO, as villains. The film represents soldiers and Home Guards as rude people who mock innocent villagers and exercise [unwanted] force. The film also portrays those who join the army as villains. For example, Pema, after killing two villagers, [goes on to] join the army (female participant 1).

None of the government officers depicted in the film work towards the public welfare. They steal the resources the government gives for the people. However, the film's representations are not 100% realistic. [So] there is no reason to censor the film. (female participant 6).

The above comments suggest that the participants were conscious of the film's portrayal of the government as the villain. They interpreted the film as depicting ground-level government officers, the Buddhist monk and soldiers as government agents. According to the participants, the film portrays them as villains who steal public property, enforce their oppressive power on villagers, and torture them. Rather than depicting the top-level government officers in the film, the filmmaker's strategy of using ground-level government agents to show the injustice they impose on poor villagers in the setting appears to have been successful. Since the audiences frequently see and meet these government agents in their day-to-day lives, it is easier to compare the incidents portrayed in the film with their own experiences. Thus, compared to *This Is My Moon*, *Shades of Ash* appears to have been more successful in awakening a politicised consciousness in the audience members that made up the focus groups.

Second, the participants thought that depicting security forces negatively is another reason for indirect censorship and criticisms. Through these depictions, the film also meets the goal of "critical commitment" (Wayne 2001b, p. 18) in Third Cinema by not promoting the government's propaganda. Mahadivulwewa claimed that he never intended to make a propaganda film for the army to increase its soldiers' morale or hurt (the feelings and image of) soldiers by condemning them in his film (Mahadivulwewa 2019, 22 May). The focus group participants thought that the representations of soldiers and their wives in a negative light might have led the government and nationalist groups to condemn the film. On the one hand, the film shows soldiers as rude and unkind towards the local population. On the other hand, the film depicts a soldier's life as a pathetic one, their wives engaging in extramarital relationships during their absence from home, and their sisters working as prostitutes after their deaths (due to the loss of their breadwinner).

Participants suggest that these representations may discourage youth from joining the army, without which the government could not continue the war. However, given the level of unemployment and lack of other options available to young men in these villages, it is unlikely that such negative portrayals would have significantly affected the military's efforts for recruitment, especially given the low likelihood of these art-house films being seen by a significant number of people in such villages or elsewhere in the country.

The film depicts the life of the soldier as a pathetic one. Therefore, the youth might not join the army after seeing this film. The government authorities are concerned about the damage this film can do to our country. The film shows Komala's extramarital relationship in detail. Depiction of Komala as an unfaithful wife can create a negative image of soldier wives and widows (female participant 4).

The director mocks the army in the final scene [of the film]. When Pema blames Ajith for interrupting him when he is on his way to a good job [joining the military], Ajith laughs and asks the audience, "Why don't you laugh?" This final scene suggests that Ajith is experiencing the life he has now as a disable person because he joined the army and was injured (female participant 5).

These comments suggest that the participants think the filmmaker does not support the propaganda by mocking the army through his film, and damaging the country (not the government). This idea recalls the government's propaganda, which condemned the anti-war filmmakers as those who supported the enemy and betrayed the country (Weerasekara 2005). For instance, as discussed in Chapter Seven, under the representations of ethnic identities, the participants thought that the army soldier represents the Sinhalese community and Sri Lankan nationality. The participants' opinion reflects government propaganda during and after the war. While promoting the soldier as a war hero and the nation's guardian, the propaganda constructed a public opinion that whoever depicts the soldiers in a negative light is a traitor.

Third, according to the participants, *Shades of Ash* talks about social problems and social realities in Sri Lanka. Participants explained that this realistic content of the film might act in two ways. First, as previously outlined under the 'role of the government and state bureaucracy in the war', these common social problems may convince people to think about them and act in ways that challenge existing political authority. Therefore, political authority tries to suppress such films. Secondly, for participants, many viewers in Sri Lankan cinema prefer fantasy films to realistic cinema. Therefore, they avoid seeing such films. When a film does not bring sufficient viewers into cinemas, film distributors and cinema operators remove such films from further screening, as their box office earnings are too low.

The film depicts social problems and existing social reality. That is challenging to the political authority. (Hence) there must have been political influences exerted to stop screening the film. The government has censored many such films. This film suits university students (i.e. intellectuals), not the general public (male participant 1).

This film depicts the (existing social) reality. The government censors films that convince viewers to think critically (male participant 4).

Participants' comments suggest that films that convey the social reality of Sri Lanka and guide or convince audiences to think critically are more likely to be censored by the government. They are also under the impression that the general audience cannot understand these types of films, and they are more suitable to a niche intellectual audience. The following quotation explains this idea in detail.

> There can be another reason to remove the film from cinemas. The majority of (Sri Lankan) filmgoers does not like realistic films. They like fantasy films. The film might not get enough viewers during its (initial) screening period. Cinemas do not retain films that do not attract audiences (for more extended periods) (male participant 3).

> Cinema is an industry. The cinemas are profit-oriented. When a film does not bring (a significant number of) viewers to the cinema, they remove it from screening (male participant 6).

These comments support the views of the National Film Corporation (NFC) representative interviewed, who insisted that it was not government censorship, but the film's inability to attract the audience, that made them withdraw it from cinemas.

The participants' fourth reason suggested that the explicit sex scenes and violence depicted in the film led to censorship and destructive criticism of the film. According to them, such explicit sex and violent scenes led to an impression in the audience that the Sinhalese villagers depicted in the film are primitive and violent. Consequently, this could lead to viewers generalising it to the entire community of Sri Lankan villagers.

> The film also gives the impression that the lifestyle of Sinhalese Buddhists is primitive and uncivilised (female participant 2).

> There is a possibility that viewers will generalise to the whole community by looking at the characters in the film. For instance, the Buddhist monk (male participant 5).

In conclusion, these categories of opinions from the participants reveal that *Shades of Ash* could meet two goals of Third Cinema: awakening the politicised consciousness of the audience and critical commitment (Wayne 2001). Also, the participants guess the negative depictions of the security forces may discourage youth from joining the army. Both reasons were a deadly challenge to a government facing a war. This particular war context of the country created the environment for the government to suppress these films so that they would not reach the audience.

The Forsaken Land

Like *This Is My Moon* and *Shades of Ash*, *The Forsaken Land* was a target of state suppression and destructive criticism. Two significant reasons were suggested when I asked the participants about possible reasons for these suppressions and objections. They were: first, including explicit sex scenes in the film; and second, the negative depictions of security forces. Apart from these two reasons, some participants stated that the audience rejection of the film led to the film's removal from screening.

According to the participants, the film includes explicit sex scenes, which is against the cultural norms of Sri Lankan society. As they assume, these scenes were the reason for state suppression of the film from screening.

> We do not discuss sex openly in our (Sinhalese or Sri Lankan) culture. Since this film includes a lot of explicit sex scenes, the film might have received criticisms (male participant 4).

> We cannot see this film with the family and children. Therefore, people must have rejected it (female participant 6).

However, according to the film censorship procedure of Sri Lanka, if there are explicit sex scenes that are not suitable for local audiences and society, the Public Performance Board (PPB) censors them before the film's public release. The PPB representative interviewed stated that they did not censor the film by any means. For instance, the PPB discussed the scene of intercourse between the pregnant lady and the man in the woods and, after explaining the scene's relevance to the film's theme, the board had no objection towards it (Kumara 2005a). Therefore, it seems that the inclusion of the explicit sex scenes was not the real reason behind the state suppression, but possibly the reason for criticism made against it. Since the villagers depicted in the film represent the Sinhalese community, and these explicit sex scenes give an impression of primitivism, conservative individuals and the Sinhalese nationalists must have been critical towards the film, as was the case with the other two films.

The second reason participants stated was the negative portrayals of the security forces. Participants for all three film discussions typically made this comment, which was a common criticism made by several Sinhalese nationalists and military officers against *The Forsaken Land* (Kodithuwakku 2005, Weerasekara 2005). The following comments explain the reasons for their opinion.

> Depicting the soldier's abduction represents the insecure atmosphere created by the government during wartime. People went missing. The military kidnapped people. This portrayal might have been the reason to suppress this film (female participant 4).

> The film depicts how the army badly treated the civil defence soldier. The film depicts Home Guards as inferior to army soldiers. This depiction might affect the recruitment

process of the Civil Defence Force. People might think that if they join the Civil Defence Force, they will have to face a similar situation (male participant 1).

A government or army cannot fight a war alone. They need the support of the public. By watching this film, the public might feel disappointed about the military and might not support them (male participant 2).

Major General Sarath Weerasekara is the one who blasted this film. He was the director of the Civil Defence Force then. The film has represented the Home Guards as inferior to army soldiers. That can affect the recruitment process of the Civil Defence Force (male participant 6).

According to these comments, the participants think government suppression was exercised against the film because it portrays the military's human rights violations during wartime. As male participant 6 stated, the film depicts Home Guards in an inferior position which discourages the youth from joining the Civil Defence Force. During the war, new recruits were very important to continue the battle due to the heavy casualties incurred by the security forces. Previous research about war films shows that in countries like the United States, England, Germany and Japan, the government supported the propaganda films that promoted retention and recruitment of personnel to the military. In contrast, anti-propaganda films were discouraged from being screened (Gomez & Welsh 1992, Masters 1993, Shimazu 2003, Robb 2004, Westwell 2006, Starrs 2010). Similarly, in Sri Lanka, during the war period, the government may have used its supporters and allies to criticise and discourage anti-war filmmakers that would have adversely affected the smooth functioning of the recruitment process of the military.

One could argue that, during the later stages of the Vietnam War, news reporting about atrocities committed against Vietnamese civilians by the US forces led to loss of public support for the war, loss of respect for returning US soldiers and widespread anti-war protests that ultimately led to the withdrawal of US troops from Vietnam (Hammond 1989, Patterson Iii 1995). After that, starting from the Grenada invasion in the 1980s until the still on-going conflicts in the Middle East since the Gulf War of 1991 to date, the US government and the US military made sure that independent access to the battlefront by journalists was strictly controlled using 'embedded journalists' who could only visit battlefields accompanied by military units (Froneman & Swanepoel 2004, Ziede 2005, Tumber 2014). Press conferences by the military were highly orchestrated, only allowing their version of the wars to be reported worldwide (Rid 2007).

Sri Lankan news media being officially censored during the war for security reasons and the state-owned media carrying the government vision of the war, anti-war films released during the time, such as the three films selected for this study, would have been one of only a few independent and opposing viewpoints that were presented about the civil war to the general public. So the government's eagerness to censor or suppress them is understandable.

In conclusion, the participants' comments demonstrate *Forsaken Land* includes the negative portrayal of security forces like *This Is My Moon* and *Shades of Ash*. The film successfully creates a critical point of view about the Sri Lankan government and its suppressive militaristic practices exercised over opposing groups throughout history. In addition, explicit sex scenes in the film challenge the cultural belief system. These reasons have caused the state suppression against this film because these attempts of the film may affect the stability of the government by losing the trust it has among the public.

3.6. Conclusion

According to McNamara (2011), more than the film's revolutionary nature (as Third Cinema), we need to consider the context that terminates its potential revolutionary spirit. Therefore, he suggests the subject of revolution should "call for an investigation of the world beyond the film, the world within which film is manifest beneath the heel of hegemony, censorship, and control" (McNamara 2011, p. 87). The contextual analysis of this study demonstrates that the small size of the film industry, film production and distribution procedure where the government has the power to control, war situation prevailed in the country, and the cultural background was the contextual aspects that influenced these films production and distribution and hence, the potential revolutionary spirit of those films.

Sri Lankan cinema is a small industry due to limited patronage and infrastructure. Due to these limitations, the industry depends more on the government and a handful of businesspeople interested in filmmaking. The findings show that as a result, the state uses NFC and PPB to control film production and distribution. The country's highly politicised nature ultimately gives control of the behaviour of business people and private film hall owners to the government.

The profit-oriented and politicised capitalist structure of the film industry makes the journey of alternative filmmakers who work with low budgets a difficult one. According to the NFC representative, running a film for more than 14 days is a challenge filmmakers face in this system because they need to give publicity to the film, which costs a great deal of money. However, the opinions of the three filmmakers deny the opinion of the NFC representative. According to them, despite the successful audience attraction, their films were removed from the cinemas. This shows that censorship has been exercised over these films.

The findings also reveal that in an intense situation like a war, the government exercises its power over the cinema industry using the Emergency Law Act. Further, the responses of the interviewees and focus group participants demonstrate that the government was highly concerned about Sinhala nationalism, Buddhist cultural identity and the image of the security forces during the war because it wanted the support of the Sinhalese community and the Buddhist institutions to increase the workforce in the army. Another task government had was to maintain the countries' image in international forums of human rights organisations. The literary sources and the audience analysis show that the war films of alternative

filmmakers, such as those selected for this study, had functioned as an anti-propaganda challenging the government. These films fulfil the Third Cinema functions such as politicisation and critical commitment, challenging the government further, compelling the government to exercise indirect censorship against these films.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

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4.1. Introduction

This research combines the interpretivist media/cultural studies approach with textual analysis, drawing in particular on Douglas Kellner's diagnostic critique model (Kellner 1995), along with the qualitative data collection methods of semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus groups with members of relevant stakeholder groups of the phenomenon under study. Such use of multiple data collection methods provides a more holistic view of the phenomena under study because multiple methods bring various information from different sources and, therefore, an objective approach to the study. Multiple methods also can cover the weaknesses of each other. Hence, the research findings can provide useful insights that pave the way for further study of the phenomenon of war or other films produced in Sri Lanka or any other national setting at a time of civil unrest or political conflict that have led to widespread social unrest. This research is unique within the discipline of political film studies for several reasons. First, the Sri Lankan film industry as a national film industry is small-scale and government-driven. Second, the theme of the selected films is anti-war. Third, the films were released during the time of intense war and a state-controlled militarised environment. Therefore, the study's findings will not always be generalisable to other films made in Sri Lanka or elsewhere. They will also provide valuable insights that can serve as the basis for further studies on related topics in the future.

According to Kellner (2009), media/cultural studies attempt to overcome the narrow perspectives and positions often taken in media, communication and cultural studies research. As he explains, rather than focusing on just one aspect or facet (such as text/audience/political economy/effects), media/cultural studies focus on "making connections between texts and contexts, media industries and technologies, political economy and specific texts, practices and audiences" (Kellner 2009, p. 8), as done in this study. As Kellner (2009) explains, this approach provides a broad framework for contextualising and analysing a wide range of cultural artefacts and provides a better understanding of the role of media (in this case, war films) in the contemporary economy, politics, culture and everyday life.

An approach that combines media and cultural studies lenses is vital to understand the national cinema in Sri Lanka. According to Higson (1989), to draw parameters of national cinema, one should consider both production and consumption of films. Higson explains two approaches to defining national cinema. First, the economic approach that considers where a film is produced and who produces it, ownership and control of the production, distribution and exhibition. Lobato (2012) states that since a film text is a cultural artefact, it has a social impact. To make a social impact, it must reach the audience through distribution. According to Lobato, distribution determines what film audiences see and do not see it and how they see it. Second, the text-based approach that discusses the messages films convey, common styles and world views films share, type of projections of the national character films offer and their level of engagement in exploring, questioning and constructing a notion of nationhood in the films and the consciousness of the viewers as well (Higson 1989).

According to Kellner (2009), the Frankfurt School (1923) and British Cultural Studies (1964) articulated a "tripartite model to analyse production and the political economy of culture, cultural text, audience reception and the use of those texts and their effects" (2009, p. 8) to obtain a holistic understanding of a given phenomenon. The Frankfurt School approach, in turn, provides a theoretical lens to analyse the political economy of culture industries, media technologies and artefacts and their interpretations by audiences, while British Cultural Studies focuses on the interplay of representations and ideologies of class, gender, race, ethnicity and nationality in cultural texts including media culture (Kellner 2002, pp. 31, 34). Kellner (2009) states that the political economy of culture is the production and distribution of a cultural text within a system. According to Kellner (2009), textual analysis is an "analysis of the politics of representation in media texts" (2009, p. 12). On the other hand, audience reception analysis in the form of opinions expressed by the in-depth and focus group interviewees allows researchers to identify "why diverse audiences interpret texts in various, sometimes conflicting, ways" (Kellner 2009, p. 15).

This research project is a multi-method study consisting of: the thematic, qualitative content analysis of three war films recorded in the Sinhala language through an examination of relevant documents such as acts of parliament; published reviews of films; in-depth interviews with relevant stakeholders; and focus group discussions with audience members. Semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were conducted to identify three things. Firstly, the interpretations of the films made by members of various audiences. Secondly, the probable reasons behind such interpretations or why they interpret the films the way they do. Thirdly, how the representations of those films can affect the way audiences make sense of their social environments and cultural identities.

Audience research changed its focus from the concept of passive recipients to active audiences who engage in meaning-making of media messages (Srinivas 1998). The definition of active audiences suggests that "audiences are not cultural dopes but are active producers of meaning from within their

cultural context" (Barker 2003, p. 269) and their own life experiences. The active audience paradigm was first used in research about television audiences, which found that audiences actively create meanings based on the previously acquired cultural competencies. It was also argued that cultural texts such as television productions or films do not contain a fixed set of meanings but are polysemic (Barker 2003). According to Hall (1991), media messages carry multiple meanings (polysemic) and can be interpreted differently by distinct people. The use of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions in this research helped extract ideas from different Sri Lankan film industry stakeholders and the audiences. These ideas were comparatively analysed to see the differences of interpretations between various groups of audiences and individuals and reasons for their interpretations. Further, the information revealed the possible multiple messages included in the selected anti-war films.

Previous findings of audience analyses also provided a framework for audience analyses of this research project. Accordingly, "the audience is conceived of as active and knowledgeable producers of meaning – not products of a structured text" (Barker 2008, p. 512). However, according to Barker (2008), four things determine the meaning-making process of the audience: first, the way the creators structure the text and the domestic and cultural contexts of the viewing experience; second, the contexts in which the audience watches television (or films in this case); third, the audience's ability to differentiate between fiction and reality; and fourth, the differences in culture and the differences of "gender and class within the same cultural community due to their different social positions, lifestyles, and experiences" (Barker 2008, p. 512). I considered Barker's four features: text, context, intellectual ability, and the demographic background of the participants to analyse the audience response.

4.2. In-depth Interviews

In this study, semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from the sample of relevant stakeholders of the film industry. Semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer to gather information by asking the interviewee pre-designed open-ended questions. However, the interviewer is free to ask additional questions, seek clarifications, vary the wording or change the order of the questions if needed (Weerakkody 2015). If any question is not clear to the interviewee, the interviewer can further explain it. In this study, fourteen participants were interviewed using semi-structured interviews, and the group consisted of the representatives of various stakeholder groups, namely, the directors (3), lead actors (2), senior management of the National Film Corporation (1), academics (5), and film reviewers (3). The sampling methodology used to identify and recruit suitable participants was voluntary, by referral and purposive sampling. One of the interviewees was a member of the Public Performance Board when these films were released. Currently, he is a film reviewer. Therefore, he was interviewed to extract his opinion both as a PPB member and a film reviewer.

The interviews lasted for one hour, and were recorded with the permission of the interviewee. Before the interviews, the Consent Information Statement, Informed Consent Form and Withdrawal of Consent Form were emailed to the interviewees along with a letter of invitation. The invitation letters and the forms are given in Appendix VI, VII, VIII, X, XI, XII, XIII and XIV. Then, the interviewees were contacted over the phone and fixed appointments made to conduct the interviews. Immediately before the interview, the signed Informed Consent form was obtained from the interviewee. The researcher obtained the approval of the Swinburne Human Research Ethics Committee to conduct the interviews and focus group discussions before the data collection process (Reference number: SHR 2018/357). The ethics clearance email is given in Appendix XVI.

During the recruitment phase, most of the names and contact details of the interviewees were obtained from publicly available information of their organisations. The personal details and the contact details of the other participants are kept confidential. During the data collection phase, all the participants were given the choice of not answering any question the interviewer asks. Even after completing the interviews, participants were given a chance to withdraw any information they have given. To ensure that, the transcripts were sent back to the interviewees for approval before the data analysis. Hard copies of data are kept in a locked drawer, and all the soft copies are uploaded to the Swinburne One Drive, which is password protected. The directors permitted to use their names and data in the final thesis and any publications. The anonymity/confidentiality of other participants was maintained using an identification number (e.g. interviewee 1, interviewee 2) in the transcripts. In the final thesis and publications, the interviewees are identified in common categories (e.g. one of the cast members, one of the academic members, one of the film reviewers).

1. Directors of the three selected films (3 participants)

The selected films are *Me Mage Sandai* (This Is My Moon 2000), directed by Ashoka Handagama, *Sudu Kalu Saha Alu* (Shades of Ash 2004), directed by Sudath Mahadiwulwewa, and *Sulanga Enu Pinisa* (The Forsaken Land 2005), directed by Vimukthi Jayasundara. These films and hence their directors were purposively selected based on three factors.

i. The three films were released during the period of the Fourth Elam War (2000–2006). During this period, the government led by the United National Front Party (UNFP) signed a ceasefire agreement with Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE), which was in effect until 2006, but both sides violated it on several occasions (Uyangoda 2007). In 2005 a new government was elected in Sri Lanka, with the strong support of Sinhalese nationalists who demanded a militaristic solution to the ethnic conflict (rather than a negotiated one, which had been tried but failed on several occasions) and, as a result, the Fourth Elam War began in 2006. From 2000 to 2006, seven anti-war films were released in Sri Lankan cinemas.

ii.	Of the seven anti-war films identified as suitable for this study, four had experienced state suppression (De Mel 2007). They are *Me Mage Sandai* (This Is My Moon 2000), *Purahanda Kaluwara* (Death on a Full Moon Day 2001), *Sudu Kalu Saha Alu* (Shades of Ash 2004) and *Sulanga Enu Pinisa* (The Forsaken Land 2005). The director of the film *Purahanda Kaluwara* (Death on a Full Moon Day) filed a successful lawsuit in the High Court against the responsible government leaders when his film was suspended from distribution. As a result, his film was released for public screening (De Mel 2007). However, as the directors of the remaining three films explained in the interviews done with the researcher, they were targets of indirect and informal state suppression.

iii.	All three films had been screened at prestigious international film festivals and won one or more awards, and were internationally recognised.

The list of films that fit the criteria was obtained from the Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com) and National Film Corporation websites (www.nfc.gov.lk). The directors of the three war films in the sample were approached through publicly available channels (such as via Facebook) and/or from introductions through the researcher's contacts in the industry.

The directors were also questioned on their family and educational backgrounds, experiences of production and distribution of the film, opinions about the controversy the films created and the negative and positive reactions of different groups towards the films. The interview guide used for film directors is given in Appendix I.

2.	Cast members (lead actors) of the films under analysis (2 participants)

Two lead actors each – a male and a female who starred in the selected three films – were recruited using purposive and snowball sampling or referrals. Snowball sampling is making referrals among people who share or know others with the same characteristics the researcher seeks (Biernacki & Waldorf 1981). Researchers use this sampling method when the research focus is on "a sensitive issue or a private matter and therefore requires the knowledge of insiders to locate people for study" (Biernacki & Waldorf 1981, p. 141). This method is also useful when the researcher finds difficulties in reaching the study population (Etikan et al. 2016). Since snowball sampling is a non-probable sampling method, there can be issues in the sample's representativeness of the population. However, the researcher can overcome this disadvantage by having control over the sample selection by choosing the most suitable referrals to the study. The researcher must also select the initial group of sufficiently varied respondents to represent the population (Etikan et al. 2016).

Accordingly, the participants' contact details were obtained from the referrals provided by the directors of the selected films and using the researcher's other personal contacts. They were interviewed to obtain a more holistic view of the phenomenon under study from the actors' perspectives. The cast members

were asked to comment on their experience working in these films, the reaction they received from different groups and their opinion of the films' content and controversy they created. The full interview guide of the cast is given in Appendix II.

3. Senior management of the National Film Corporation (1 participant), and a representative from the Public Performance Board (1 participant)

One participant was selected using voluntary and purposive sampling to represent the National Film Corporation – the official government body handling matters related to film production and distribution in Sri Lanka. The contact details of the senior management of the National Film Corporation were obtained from the National Film Corporation website (www.nfc.gov.lk). The participants were asked about the National Film Corporation's role, its legal background, and their opinion about the selected three anti-war films and state suppression. The relevant interview guide is included in Appendix III. One of the interviewees was a member of the Public Performance Board when these films were released. Currently, he is a film reviewer. Therefore, he was interviewed to extract his opinion both as a PPB member and a film reviewer.

4. Academics (5 participants) and film reviewers (3 participants)

Five academics that teach and research on the Sri Lankan film industry were selected purposively and representatively based on gender, ethnicity, seniority and university. The academics were selected by examining the relevant university academic profiles and using snowball sampling. The academics represented the five national universities that offer degree programs in film studies. They are the Open University, Trincomalee Campus of Eastern University, University of Kelaniya, University of Peradeniya, and University of Visual and Performing Arts. Their contact details were obtained from their online university academic profiles.

Three film reviewers who write for print and electronic newspapers and websites were selected using snowball sampling. The film reviewers' contact details were obtained from the academics and film reviewers who were already interviewed. They were asked to comment on the representations of culture, war and social realities in the selected anti-war films, their opinion of state suppression and international recognition received by these films. The interview participants did not receive any payment or gift as they took part in their official capacities. The interview guide used for academics and film reviewers is given in Appendix IV.

4.3. Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions are a qualitative research method in which typically a predetermined group of five to eight people engages in an interactive discussion, focused on specific topics or issues that may run between 60 to 90 minutes, and led by a well-trained moderator (Hennink 2014). It is essential to

create a friendly environment so that all the participants feel free to express their views in the discussion (Hennink 2014). A friendly and comfortable environment can be created by recruiting homogenous groups, such as those of the same gender, age, race/ethnicity, level of education, or professional status (Weerakkody 2015).

Focus groups carry both advantages and challenges. They allow researchers to gather a broad range of insights in a single sitting from several participants. The interactive nature of the discussion enables different types of views and opinions to be expressed that cannot be accessed through individual interviews (Hennink 2014), and it also increases the clarity, in-depth and detail of the discussion (Hennink 2014). In focus group discussions, some group members might dominate the discussion while others stay silent due to the group dynamics of the setting. Sometimes the discussion might go off track while opposing views and ideologies of group members might create heated arguments, and data will prove less useful to the project. A well-trained moderator can overcome these challenges by giving every group member equal opportunities to express their ideas, and politely and diplomatically keeping the discussion on track (Weerakkody 2015, p. 209).

Six focus group discussions with six members were conducted to gather information from the audience members of the three films selected for analysis. An advertisement was displayed on notice boards of different institutions, such as private and public higher educational institutes and community centres (e.g. Red Cross, Lions Club, Rotary club) to seek suitable participants. The participants were not offered or paid any remuneration for their time. However, they were offered refreshments and a small candy bag for each member as a gesture of thanks. The advertisement is provided in Appendix IX.

Those who expressed interest in participating were provided with a Consent Information Statement, Informed Consent Form and Withdrawal of Consent Form both in English and their translated versions in Sinhala (see Appendix VIII for Consent Information Statement, Informed Consent Form and Withdrawal of Consent Form in the English language). Measures were taken to keep their identifying details and opinions expressed confidential, just as with the in-depth interviews. The discussions were conducted in community centres and educational institutes, where well-equipped (multimedia projector and an appropriate sound system) classrooms for film screening were available. The three selected films were screened to the groups before the discussions. The discussions took between 60 to 90 minutes and were conducted after the film screening and were audio-recorded and later transcribed. During the discussions, the participants were asked questions on the characters' cultural identities, incidents, and ideologies depicted or embedded in the selected films they viewed, to gather their opinions and viewpoints. The questions posed to the focus groups are provided in Appendix V.

The focus group members were between 18 and 55 years of age. Participants under 18 years old were excluded since the selected films are categorised as 'most appropriate for adults' by the Public Performance Board. The sample population was well informed about the war since they received

information through mass media (which may be biased towards the government), the internet (which may be unbiased or biased towards either government or LTTE) and soldiers (the firsthand information from the battlefield) who are family members of the general audience. However, Participants who had direct and traumatic experiences of war and pregnant ladies were excluded because these films contain violent scenes.

An equal number of men (18 participants) and women (18 participants) participated as group members. The two genders were grouped separately because the homogenous groups tend to feel more comfortable and freely express their opinions. This gender division of focus groups is vital in the Sri Lankan cultural context because women tend to be shy and reluctant to speak on their viewpoints freely in mixed-gender groups, in fear of being judged by the opposite sex (Adikaram 2014, Spencer et al. 1990). Furthermore, since the country's cultural background does not encourage sexual orientations other than heterosexuality (Human Rights Watch 2016), Sri Lankans may not be open about their sexual orientation. Thus, I did not consider the sexual orientation of the participants.

Participants belonging to different socio-economic levels (from youth fresh out of school to university academics and homemakers to accountants) were included in these focus groups to assure a fair representation of the population of the Sinhala film audience. The focus group discussions were conducted in the Sinhala language because Sinhala films are almost exclusively viewed by those who speak it and Sri Lankan films meant for local audiences are neither dubbed nor subtitled in any other languages. However, the selected films are subtitled in English language to represent the Sri Lankan national cinema in international arenas such as Cannes, Busan and Toronto Film Festivals along with other world national cinemas (Christie 2013).

At the beginning of the focus group discussions, the list of key questions was given to the participants, and they were asked to write brief answers in response. The aim was to keep track of everybody's ideas because, during the discussions, some participants may remain silent if the others' ideas were different from theirs. I moderated the focus groups.

4.4. Thematic and Textual Analysis of the Films

To complement this audience and stakeholder research, each film was textually analysed to examine the politics of representations related to gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion and political ideologies embedded in them and how these discourses were framed. The study used textual analysis from the thematic and semiotic points of view (Kuckartz 2014, Allen 1992) to examine the three films selected as the sample for this study.

According to McKee (2003), textual analysis is a method of data collection often used in cultural studies, media studies, mass communication, sociology and philosophy and is known as qualitative content analysis of media texts. As he explains, textual analysis often helps researchers understand how

individuals and communities across different cultures and within the same culture make sense of the world. According to McKee (2003), a text can be anything that people make meaning from: for example, a book, film, television program, magazine, advertisement, dress/fabric, a speech or conversation. In this research, the films were analysed to identify the representations of cultural identities such as gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, religion, nationality and ideologies of war, as well as the various discourses (Iyengar 1994) embedded in them and how they were framed (Entman 1993, Dicken-Garcia 1998).

Johnstone (2018) defines discourses as particular cases of communicative actions taking place using language, and that carry the views, agendas and ideologies of the persons or institutions that express them – either verbally, in their actions or as texts created by them. According to Coles (2019), discourse is the approach people use to "think and communicate about people, things, the social organisation of society". Some discourses are dominant if they belong to the powerful or privileged in society or a given setting or situation, and therefore they are considered truthful, normal and right. In contrast, other discourses are marginalised (such as if they belong to the powerless or disadvantaged in society within a given context) and, therefore, considered wrong, extreme and dangerous (Coles 2019).

For instance, the two main discourses that existed in Sri Lankan society during the war period were the pro-war and anti-war discourses, of which the pro-war one was the dominant one, arising from the government, the military and the majority of the Sinhala population. Social, economic and political power define what dominant discourses are, and these "discourses may belong to individuals, groups, organisations and institutions, such as politics, medicine, education, religion, family, marriage, military and corporations" (Weerakkody 2015, p. 292). A given topic or issue can be discussed using multiple discourses and framings, some of which can be complementary, while others may be neutral or even contradictory (Dicken-Garcia 1998, Weerakkody 2015).

Framing of a specific discourse involves "selection (of certain aspects) and the salience (importance) given to the aspects included in the discourse" (Weerakkody 2015, p. 290). For instance, in pro-war discourses, those against the war can be framed as 'traitors' or 'supporters of the enemy', and, in anti-war discourses, those who support the war can be framed as 'human rights violators' or 'Sinhala nationalists'. There are several strategies used in framing a discourse – especially in films – such as metaphors, metonymy, synecdoche. These strategies used in framing a discourse can guide the viewpoint or attention of a receiver of a given message in a particular direction as intended by the sender of the message and away from alternative viewpoints (Weerakkody 2015).

In this project, the discourses and frames identified as embedded in the three films were compared with the government's discourses and public debates about the same films. This comparative analysis examined how polysemic (the same message creating multiple meanings for the receivers) the films were and highlighted any patterns within the government's discourses and frames and the public allegations made against the films within the context of the civil war.

4.5. Thematic and Textual Analysis of the News Articles and Reviews of the Films

The content of news articles and reviews written about the three films was examined using thematic analysis or the Grounded theory method (Glasser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1994) to systematically and inductively identify the different categories of opinions embedded in them, to develop theories about a given phenomenon under study, which are 'grounded' or based on the data analysed.

Newspaper articles written about the selected films were analysed to identify the themes and different viewpoints expressed in them and to understand the socio-political context that existed during the periods the three films were screened. The 72 articles published in 2001 and 2005 (the three films were screened in those two years) were obtained from the Lake House Media Library, owned by Associated Newspapers of Ceylon – a government-owned corporation. The library maintains individual files on every filmmaker in the country, in which they archive all articles written about them. The articles were published in six state newspapers and ten private newspapers both in Sinhala and English language. The articles were categorised as news and features. The details of the newspaper articles analysed are given in Appendix XV.

The feature articles consisted of film reviews; articles about the filmmakers and their careers; filmmakers' opinions about the Sri Lankan film industry; and interviews conducted with the filmmakers about their films. The articles written explicitly about the three films in the sample were the primary consideration in this analysis. However, other articles were also scrutinised to identify the political opinions publicly expressed by the three individual filmmakers. The articles were analysed to identify the opinions included in the newspapers about: the representations of cultural identities and realities in the selected films; the depictions of political ideologies of war in them; reasons for state suppression and criticism against the films; and the films receiving international recognition and winning awards.

4.6. Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative data gathered from newspaper articles as well as interviews and focus group discussions were analysed using contextual, thematic and textual analysis. Under contextual analysis, the study provides information on the historical, social, political, cultural and biographical contexts in which the selected films were produced and, therefore, how those contextual factors shaped these films. The thematic and textual analysis provides information on the representations of cultural identity identified in the three selected films.

4.6.1. Interview and focus group data analysis

The interviews and focus group discussions were examined for the common themes of opinions and discourses embedded in them and how they were framed using the Grounded Theory method (Strauss and Corbin 1994). The Grounded Theory method was introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and further developed by Strauss and Corbin in 1990 (Weerakkody 2015). According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), Grounded Theory is an inductive method researchers can use to develop theoretical accounts based on empirical observations or data. As Strauss and Corbin (1994) explain, in this method, a systematic set of procedures are used to code data into named categories to discover patterns among and between them. The interpretations and comparisons of these categories are then used to understand the phenomena under study, develop theories and suggest strategies to design measures to provide some control over that phenomenon (Weerakkody 2015).

There are several steps to follow during data analysis using the Grounded Theory method. First, the interviews and focus group discussions need to be transcribed and read thoroughly to familiarise the researcher with the participants' opinions (Weerakkody 2015). Second, the research questions are used to guide what to focus on during the data coding (Weerakkody 2015). Third, theoretical sensitivity is maintained to reduce interviewer bias during data coding and analysis to maintain the validity and reliability of the findings. To maintain theoretical sensitivity, the researcher used the existing literature on the topic area, personal experience and knowledge of the topic area, and the cultural or other contexts within which these opinions were expressed (Weerakkody 2015).

Data coding in qualitative research is the breaking down of data, conceptualising and putting them back together (Weerakkody 2015): "a code could be a single word or a group of words, i.e. a phrase or even an acronym that will represent the concept being studied" (Remenyi 2014, p. 36). There are several types of coding – open or pattern coding, axial coding and selective coding (Weerakkody 2015, Remenyi 2014, Moghaddam 2006). In open coding, data are broken down into separate units of meaning. Axial coding is "an extension of open coding" (Weerakkody 2015, p. 303). In axial coding, the codes are reduced in number to group them to show the relationships existing among them. Codes are reduced through systematic analysis and constant comparison of data (Moghaddam 2006). Selective coding identifies the study's central phenomenon and, thereby, its main findings (Weerakkody 2015).

When analysing the responses of interviewees and focus group participants, three types of coding methods were used. Open coding was used to identify the main ideas expressed by the interview and focus group participants. Using axial coding, related ideas or opinions expressed by the participants were grouped to reduce the number of categories of opinions expressed. Finally, using selective coding, the number of similar opinions was categorised based on the study's central phenomenon – the representations of war and culture in the three films. The main themes examined were: representations of gender, ethnicity, religion, war, social realities of the time, reasons to censor the films, and reasons

the three films won awards at international film festivals. Under each theme, there were many sub-themes or categories of opinions embedded (as expressed by the participants) that related to each other.

After reading the transcripts of the interviews and focus group discussions, common ideas expressed by the participants were coded as sub-themes, themes and categories of opinions expressed. They are provided in Table 2 and Table 3, respectively. The number of participants who mentioned each idea (category of opinion) was counted to identify the most common ones expressed by the participants. The average (mean or $\bar{x}$) number of participants who expressed an opinion on a given sub-theme was calculated ($\bar{x} = \sum Xi \div N$). The "$\sum Xi$" is the total number of respondents who expressed a similar opinion under each sub-theme. It is important to note that the number of opinions expressed on a theme is often greater than the total number of participants in the study because one participant can express multiple opinions under a given category of opinions. The "N" is the total number of opinions expressed under each theme.

Table 2: Themes, sub-themes and categories of opinions in focus group discussions

Themes	Sub-themes	Categories of opinions expressed
Representations of cultural identities	Representations of gender	Negative* representations of women
		Negative representations of men
		Positive** representations of women
		positive representations of men
		Neutral*** representation of men and women
		*Negative – stereotypical representations (ex: weak, passive, sex objects) ** Positive – strong, assertive, independent ***Neutral – no stereotypical or judgemental representations, men and women as equally affected
	Representations of sexuality	Exaggeration of sexual behaviour
		Representations of homosexuality
	Representations of Ethnicity	Negative* representations of the Sinhalese community
		Positive** representations of the Sinhalese community
		Neutral*** representations of the Sri Lankan community affected by the war
		Under-representations of the Tamil community
		*Negative – abusive, dominating, exploitative **Positive – supportive, kind, lawful, empathetic ***Neutral – equal representation of the effects of war on all the ethnic communities
	Representations of religion	Negative* representations of the Buddhist clergy

		Negative* representations of religious practices of people
		No representations of religious identities
		*behaviours against the religious doctrines
Representations of war		The impact of war
		No depictions of war
		The role of government and bureaucracy in the war
		Under-representation of war
		Negative* representations of security forces
		*representing security forces as inhuman, brutal, irresponsible, self-centred
Representations of social realities		All the representations are realistic*
		Some representations are realistic
		The representations are not realistic
		*reflect the actual incidents and people the audience has seen, heard of or experienced
Reasons to censor the films		The negative depiction of security forces*
		The negative depictions of the Buddhist clergy**
		The negative depiction of the government and the state bureaucracy***
		The negative depictions of the Sinhala community****
		Depictions of explicit sex scenes
		Depictions of social problems
		Depictions of violence
		* representing security forces as inhuman, brutal, irresponsible, self-centred ** clergy behaviours against the religious doctrines ***ignorant,irresponsible,corrupted,failed ****abusive, dominating, exploitative

Reasons for winning awards at international film festivals		Third World exoticism
		    Depictions of social issues
		    Depiction of the war
		    Depiction of human rights violations
		    Depiction of nudity and homosexuality

		The artistic quality of the film

Table 3: Themes, sub-themes and categories of opinions, in-depth interviews

Themes	Sub-themes	Categories of opinions
Representation of cultural identities	Gender roles	Stereotypical gender representations
		The impact of war on women and children
	Sexual relationships	Exaggerated depiction of sexual behaviour
	Ethnicity	The negative representation of the Sinhalese community*

		Under-representation of the Tamil community
		The impact of war on the Sinhala community
		The impact of war on the Tamil community
		Neutral representations of the Sri Lankan community affected by the war**
	Religion	Negative portrayals of the Buddhist clergy***
Representations of war		Representations of the impact of war
		The role of government and state bureaucracy in the war
		The dominant mechanism behind the war
Representations of realities		All the representations are realistic
		Some representations are realistic
Reasons to censor the films		Negative depictions of security forces****
		Negative depictions of the Buddhist clergy***
		Depiction of social problems
		Films do not suit the Sri Lankan context # War situation of the country # Audience rejection # Directors' disregard of the local audience
		Depictions of the impact of war
		Negative depictions of the Sinhalese community*
		Representation of the marginalised group's voice
Reasons for winning awards at international film festivals		Third World exoticism # New cinematic experience for the international audience # Highlights the plight of the marginalised in society # Provides alternative viewpoints of a civil war.
		Cinematic quality # International audience is open-minded, liberal and high in cinema literacy

* Representing the Sinhalese community as abusive, dominating, exploitative

** equal representation of the effects of war on all the ethnic communities

*** clergy behaviours against the religious doctrines

**** representing security forces as inhuman, brutal, irresponsible, self-centred

CHAPTER FIVE

REPRESENTATIONS OF CULTURE AND WAR IN SRI LANKAN ANTI-WAR FILMS: A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

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5.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the representations of cultural identities and war in the selected anti-war films to reveal cultural and political ideologies embedded in those films. According to Clarke (2011), several factors mark cultural identities, such as race, ethnicity and class. In this chapter, I focus on the representations of gender roles, sexual relationships, ethnic identities and religious identities of Sri Lankan society in these films. I also interrogate the political ideologies of war embedded in them. According to Kellner (2009), rather than focusing on just one aspect or facet (such as text/audience/political economy/effects), it is vital to make "connections between texts and contexts, media industries and technologies, political economy and specific texts, practices and audiences" (Kellner 2009, p. 8). Thus, this chapter analyses the media text or the content of the selected anti-war films so that the findings of this chapter could be connected to the context these films were produced and screened in, which I discussed in the third chapter and the audience analysis in the following two chapters. In this chapter, I argue that these films display Third Cinema characteristics such as cultural specificity, historicity and critical commitment by complementing progressive cultural aspects and challenging exploitative and suppressive patriarchal and colonial cultural elements; attack the existing capitalist political system by revealing the oppression and exploitation of the marginalised people during the war; and criticising the pro-war Nationalist Buddhist institution. I also argue that by framing ethnic communities affected by the war as impoverished, violent and sexually desperate, these films support the Orientalising process in their international reception and extend the Re-Orientalising process at home.

This chapter uses textual analysis from the thematic and semiotic points of view (Kuckartz 2014, Allen 1992) to examine the three selected films: *This Is My Moon*; *Shades of Ash*; and *The Forsaken Land*. These three films were scrutinised to seek the politics behind the representations of cultural identities in Sri Lanka and the political ideologies embedded in them about war and political authority in the country. For this study, I used the Theory of Third Cinema (Solanas & Getino 1970, Wayne 2001) and Postcolonial Theory (Said 1978, Spivak 1994, Bhabha 1994, Lau & Mendes 2012).

The critical and controversial nature of these films invites the Theory of Third Cinema to guide this analysis. These films were subjected to criticisms of the nationalists and military officers (Wickramasinghe 2005, De Mel 2007) as they were critical of the government, the bureaucracy and the war agenda. As explained in the third chapter, they were also targets of indirect state suppression and censorship. Despite the destructive criticisms and state suppression, some researchers and veteran film directors in the Sri Lankan film industry marked them as revolutionary films that indicate Third Cinema characteristics (De Mel 2007). Thus, in this chapter, I have analysed the three selected films within the framework of three of the four characteristics that distinguish Third Cinema films. They are critical commitment, historicity and cultural specificity (the four characteristics are explained in detail in

Chapter Two, and two characteristics – politicisation and critical commitment – are discussed in Chapter Eight).

As Wayne (2001) explains, critical commitment is the commitment of revolutionary films to the aims and ideals of the revolution. For instance, the Cuban film *One Way or Another* (Gomez 1977) was committed to the Cuban revolution while being critical of class and gender conflicts within the country. The selected films were produced and released during a period that expected a revolutionary change in Sri Lankans' minds against the destructive war that was continuing for decades, and the directors of the three films revealed that they were committed to convincing people about this destructive war, which I have discussed in detail in the next section. Thus, in this chapter, I claim that these three films fulfil the critical commitment of Third Cinema by portraying the negative impact of war and being critical towards the government, state bureaucracy and their war agenda.

Historicity is an authentic representation of history[7] in a film text (Wayne 2001). According to Wayne (2001), "Third Cinema seeks to develop the means for grasping history as process, change, contradiction and conflict" because "history is the great explainer: why we are, where we are and who we are" (Wayne 2001, p. 14). For instance, the Chilean film *The Battle of Chile* (Petricio Guzman 1975) and the Argentinian and Mexican coproduction *Black Flowers* (Lita Stantic 1992) talk about the painful memories of political tension of Chile in 1973 and the 'Dirty War' in Argentina from 1976 to 1983 (Wayne 2001, Robben 2005). Looking for historicity in the selected three films is vital since these three films engage with the ethnic conflict of Sri Lanka, which has a significant historical and political background.

Cultural specificity defines the intimacy and familiarity of Third Cinema with culture because films, on the one hand, are themselves cultural texts, and on the other hand, they reveal the shades of everyday living (Wayne 2001). According to Wayne (2001), "Third Cinema explores how culture is a site of political struggle" (2001, p. 22). At this point, Postcolonial Theory applies to this study because, as Wayne (2001) explains, culture is one of the most significant domains colonisers attempt to control in colonised countries. The film is also a cultural text that may "shape" or "shaped by" the culture. Sri Lanka was a British colony for more than a hundred years. Even after 76 years of receiving independence from Britain, remains of colonialism can be seen at present. Some of the aspects of Victorian culture have been internalised by Sri Lankans. The education and administrative systems – gifts from colonisers – keep administering shaping the cultural institutions in the country. In a neo-colonial era, the cultural

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[7] Jones (2017) explains that authenticity occurs when the witness genuinely experiences an event. However, she also confirms that when it comes to the feature films that construct the history, may cause reduction in the authenticity of the narrative.

institutions and cultural text are controlled by the colonisers or their shadows stil remaining by the form of political, legal, educational or religious institutions.

In this chapter, the representations of Sri Lankan cultural identities in each selected film were discussed through postcolonialism and Third Cinema lenses. The study revealed that these films portray Sri Lankans – specifically, the villagers of war-affected areas – as impoverished and uncivilised 'others' catering to the imperial gaze of the West craving Third World exoticism. It also explored that these films contain historicity by portraying the politics behind the ethnic conflict and its impact on marginalised people, and cultural specificity by criticising villagers' cultural beliefs and practices that oppress them and approving those that strengthen them. All three filmmakers promote communist ideologies by negatively portraying religious beliefs and practices of people and criticising the capitalist ruling system and its pro-war mentality. Before the textual study starts, a review of the studies conducted on world cinema's representation of the culture has been provided as a background. The synopsis of each film is provided before the film analysis. This chapter contributes to the knowledge of the representations of cultural identities and political ideologies in cinema in Sri Lanka and elsewhere.

5.2. The Representations of Cultural Identities and Political Ideologies in Cinema

According to Clarke (2011), gender is an essential factor that marks cultural identity. Thus, the representation of gender and sexual identities in films has often become a focus of film studies. Most of these studies are focused on gender representations in mainstream Hollywood cinema (Mulvey 1975, Cooper 2000, King 2008, Neuendorf et al. 2010, Bleakley et al. 2012, Young 2018). A significant amount of research has been conducted on the gender representations in films produced in the Global South (Moruzzi 2001, Rajgopal 2010, Kim 2014, Akhter 2015, Sharpe 2015, Osei Owusu 2015, Khannous 2018, Izharuddin 2017, Pastor 2020, Wu 2020, Alola & Alola 2020, Gershon 2020). The majority of these studies are based on feminist film theory and postcolonial theory. The researchers have used content analysis, narrative and textual analysis, semiotic analysis and discourse analysis as the methodologies in their studies. This research also focused on gender representations in Sri Lankan films and used Postcolonial Theory, Theory of Third Cinema and Cultivation Analysis as the theoretical framework. I used textual and audience analysis to study these films.

Gender representation in war films is another popular area of study in academia (Brittan 1989, Newsinger 1993, Monk-Turner et al. 2004, Bell-Williams 2007, Khatib 2007, Furia & Bielby 2009, Summerfield 2009, Daiya 2011). According to Furia and Bielby (2009), the role masculine military culture plays in war has also influenced how gender is represented in war films. The United Nations Security Council (2003) reported that women and children are the most affected social group by war. Despite this fact, women's representations in war films are often stereotyped or under-represented (Summerfield 2009, Bulbul 2011, Akhter 2015, Daiya 2011). As far as sexual orientation is concerned, heterosexuality is typically promoted in war films, both in Hollywood and in the Indian film industry.

For instance, Hollywood films such as *Bataan* (1943) and *This Man is Navy* (1945) and popular Indian films with war theme such as *Fanaa* (2006), *Gadar* (2001) and *Sarfarosh* (1999) depict heterosexual relationships that promote extremely feminine women who meet conventional beauty standards, masculine men, domestic relationships and marriages (Daiya 2011, p. 602, Furia & Bielby 2009, p. 219). These studies discuss the representations of gender and sexual orientation in popular cinema. In this project, I selected three anti-war films accepted as alternative films. These films are supposed to portray views that alternate to popular cinema. Thus, in this chapter, I analysed how gender is represented in these three films.

Studies conducted on race and ethnic representations are focused more on African, Franco-Asian, Asian American and Southeast Asian identities in Hollywood films (Williams 2003, Luk 2014, Ponzanesi 2016, Poltecha 2017, Pollard 2017, Futamura 2017, Ramirez 2020). Some studies have analysed how the dominant ethnic groups are represented in minority cinema. For instance, Banjo and Fraley (2014) have studied how whiteness is portrayed in black films. These studies typically claim that these films represent the West as masculine, dominant and powerful and the East as feminine, weak and exotic. Some studies focused on how filmmakers represent their own ethnic community or the minorities in their own countries. For instance, Duong (2014) has studied how Vietnamese filmmakers portray Vietnam. The researcher claims that the Vietnamese films he studied establish an image beyond the Western portrayal of Vietnam as a war-ridden country. According to him, the local filmmakers' films promote Vietnam as "a site for local forms of commemoration and nation-building" (Duong 2014, p. 270). The majority of these studies focus on the popular commercial cinema that follows dominant ideologies of colonialism. It is essential to find alternative representations of ethnic identities in alternative films. Thus, In this chapter, I also focused on how the selected anti-war films portray the ethnic communities in Sri Lanka and their cultural values.

5.3. Aims of the Directors of the Films

A filmmaker may sincerely intend to produce a film to make the audience politically conscious about the social inequalities, injustice and exploitation they undergo and be committed to convincing people to be free from such sufferings. However, as stated in the Chapter Three, the internal factors of the audiences, such as their political opinions and media literacy, and the external factors such as their social backgrounds, state suppression and propaganda may disturb the flow of messages or meanings to the audiences.

According to the three selected anti-war film directors, their primary purpose was to make the audiences sensitive to the war's tragic outcomes. Asoka Handagama, the director of *This Is My Moon*, stated that through his film he wanted to express how cruel, useless, and inhuman the war is. According to him, the war was the main factor that decided who holds political power in Sri Lanka. The politicians often use the tension between the ethnicities to determine the future of the country. Both war and peace are a

project for the government to gain and maintain power. Handagama claimed that no government had a genuine intention to build an enduring peace (Handagama 2019, 4 July). When Asoka Handagama's cinema journey is considered, *This is My Moon* is his third film. Being a stage drama director, Handagama shows a unique cinema style enriched from his theatrical work. He is also famous for his fearless expression of critical political views and experimenting with different cinematic techniques, which he does in this film. Reviewers praised his film as a third cinema film due to the fundamental and postmodern cinema techniques he uses (Jayalath 2001, Seneviratne 2001). Thus, the veteran film director Lester James Peiris once stated *This is My Moon* as the third revolution of the Sinhala cinema industry (Galappaththi 2001).

Sudath Mahadivulwewa, the director of *Shades of Ash*, wanted to make people sensitive to the danger of the post-war situation in which human relationships are disturbed. As he explained, the real war starts once people resume their everyday lives within the vacuum created by the deaths of the people in their lives, which is a far worse experience for them than being fired at or dying during the war. The director believes that there is no victory in war. No country or person can win but instead often lose in a war. For him, the reason behind the war in Sri Lanka was the unjust political reforms imposed by the majority Sinhala government, which led the Tamil community to face difficulties due to ethnic differences. According to him, the Tamil political representatives also cheated the Tamil community. As the director explains, the 'border village' is a new word in the Sri Lankan vocabulary in which the 'border' actually meant the 'border of death' to those villagers living around them. The director claimed that both the government and the LTTE played a game to maintain the territorial border of their own power, with innocent villagers brutally sacrificed by being caught in the middle (Mahadivulwewa 2019, 22 May). *Shades of Ash* is Mahadivulwewa's debut film. However, he is actively involved in television productions and the advertising field. He is also well-known for his critical political opinion.

By making *The Forsaken Land*, Vimukthi Jayasundara wanted to show how people suffer from war and how war challenges humanity in a war-torn environment. He did not intend to display the war but to portray the sufferings of the Sinhalese people living in border villages. He also did not mean to express or portray what was politically right or wrong (i.e. he tried to be neutral or objective). Still, both Sinhala and Tamil communities misinterpreted him and his work, blaming him for making a film against his ethnicity. However, 14 years after the film's first screening, the director believes that today everyone seems to accept his ideology about the war, expressed through the film (Jayasundara 2019, 14 March). The Forsaken Land is Vimukthi's first feature film. Before that, he produced a black and white documentary called *Land of Silence* which talks about the war victims (Jayasundara 2019, 14 March). It was screened in several international film festivals. He went to France to study cinema in 2003. Reviewers comment that The Forsaken Land display French and Russian cinema styles of the 60s (Kumara 2005b). Like Handagama, Vimukthi also had used simple and fundamental cinema techniques in his films (Pieris 2005).

The directors' statements reveal that they intended to portray the impacts the war had on the marginalised and poor citizens who resided in 'border villages'. Further, they used the critical point of view against the government's policy to use the war as the dominant strategy to solve the ethnic conflict when the war was the deciding factor of the day-to-day lives of those citizens living in the border villages. The country was predominantly military-driven. The directors' intention to be critical of the ongoing war and its leadership (the government, military, and Sinhala Buddhist nationalism) through their films was exhibiting the characteristics of Third Cinema films.

One of the main questions of Third Cinema, according to Solanas and Getino, is "How do we understand a film's capacity to bring about real political change amongst its audiences?" (McNamara 2011, p. 79). The film is an effective medium of communication because it can contain ideological messages (of the creators or those dominant in society at the time) and gather "audiences with different origins" (Solanas & Getino 2014, p. 239). Wayne argues that the audience is vital to the dialectic category of Third Cinema because it is the stimulation of "revolutionary feeling" (McNamara 2011, p. 84), which Third Cinema must achieve. Explaining one of the leading indicators that differentiate Third Cinema – politicisation – Wayne (2001, p. 16) states that Third Cinema is very much concerned with exploring the process of making people conscious of the various oppressions and exploitations they may be subjected to and making them determined to do something about it. Thus, considering the audience's interpretations, this chapter will explore whether *This Is My Moon*, *Shades of Ash* and *The Forsaken Land* meet the goals of politicisation (that is, to address the audience's conscience regarding the disaster of war) and critical commitment – that is, to be critical of the propaganda and convince people against it.

5.4. Representations of Culture and War in the Film *Me Mage Sandai* (This Is My Moon)

Me Mage Sandai (This Is My Moon)
Released in the year 2001
Language – Sinhalese
Director and writer – Asoka Handagama
Producer – Iranthi Abeysinghe
Main actors – Saumya Liyanage, Dilhani Ekanayake, Linton Semage, W. Jayasiri

Synopsis of *This Is My Moon*

Me Mage Sandai (This Is My Moon 2001) revolves around a female Tamil civilian who accidentally enters a bunker where a Sinhalese soldier is hiding during a battle between the state armed forces and LTTE. She gets raped by the soldier and later follows the soldier to his village when he abandons the bunker and deserts the army. The characters and locations of the setting are kept anonymous.

The soldier's village is in a remote and dry geographical area. His elder brother runs an illegal betting centre, where he cheats his clients by withholding their winnings. The soldier's sister is a teenage schoolgirl who drops out of school while two young men love her. One of them is the brother of a widow of an army soldier, and she purchases a tractor from the dead soldier's compensation and runs a small business with her brother. The other is the brother of the soldier's girlfriend, who later joins the army and wins the girl's love. There are several minor characters: the shop owner, who sells cigarettes and chewing gum to the soldier; the villager whom the bookie is cheating; the father of the dead soldier; and the parents of the army deserter.

The Tamil woman becomes the main character of the village. She falls pregnant by the soldier, and the Buddhist priest of the village instructs the soldier to send the Tamil woman to a refugee camp, but she refuses to go there. The soldier's girlfriend informs the Military Police about the deserter so that he will be arrested. The bookie proposes marriage to the widow, which she refuses. Being rejected by the soldier's sister, the widow's brother rapes the Tamil woman in anger, arguing that, because of Tamils, the army soldiers have won all the respect, which is why he lost the girl to an army soldier.

In the film's climax, the Tamil woman elopes with the village Buddhist monk, and the bookie becomes the next monk of the village. The former deserter-soldier returns to the village where he attends his girlfriend's brother's funeral, who dies on the battlefield. There, the deserter-soldier sees his daughter, who was born to the Tamil woman.

Cultural values

The customs and practices depicted in the film represent the domination exercised by Buddhist cultural institutions within a Sinhalese village. As pictured in the film, the Buddhist monk plays a significant role in Sinhalese culture. For example, the villagers pay their utmost respect to the monk. The soldier's family offer the best chair they have to the priest to sit when he visits their house. They cover the chair with a white cloth as an expression of respect and as customary. When the soldier's father receives the gold necklace from the Tamil woman, he says he will offer it to the temple, but he does not own a penny for his own use. They worship the monk and speak to him and seek his advice whenever they have a problem. The villagers make sure the temple is always occupied with a monk. For instance, when the monk of the temple flees with the Tamil woman, the bookie becomes the next monk. This obsession people have with the temple shows their cultural dependency on the Buddhist temple. Those who do not follow the customs and traditions of Sinhala Buddhist culture are seen as outsiders to the culture – 'the other'. The Tamil woman becomes 'the other' to the villagers, not only because of her ethnicity, dress code and language but also since she does not respect the monk.

The film depicts the humanity and hospitality of the villagers while portraying their inhuman flaws. For instance, without knowing any personal detail about the Tamil woman, the soldier's parents and sister accept her, let her stay with them, and take care of her. The soldier's sister shares her clothes with the Tamil woman. She builds a sisterly bond with this 'outsider' in a short while and begs her brother not to send the Tamil woman to the refugee centre. Simultaneously, the soldier, his brother and the young man in the village abuse the Tamil woman sexually and physically. As a result, she becomes pregnant, and they attempt to send her to a refugee camp. The film shows female characters as marginalised, oppressed and exploited not only by the patriarchal social system but also by the capitalist political system. The war is an outcome of the capitalistic political system. It gives women no power, nor money or fair opportunity. They often become the victims and dependents and have to live with the help of men who possess all that. Therefore, *This Is My Moon* meets the criteria of cultural specificity by criticising the cultural values that oppress and exploit the marginalised social groups and complimenting the cultural values that strengthen them. The film, however, displays postcolonial features such as patriarchal cultural ideologies and female subordination, which I discuss in the next section.

Gender roles and sexual relationships

The film intentionally or unintentionally depicts the patriarchal ideology of women as weak and dependent. However, the filmmaker criticises and challenges the dominant patriarchal concepts that suppress women's freedom. The film shows female dependency by showing all the female characters not engaging in any job for a living. Women portrayed in the film depend on the salary or compensation of the soldier. They are either being raped, rejected, threatened or tortured by men who always hold power and exercise power over women. This filmmaker uses the male gaze in portraying an objectified image of women, making them the subalterns within the dominant patriarchal society. At the same time, the filmmaker criticises patriarchal concepts such as virginity and marriage that restrict the sexual freedom of women. This film also depicts the vital characteristics of women that challenge the dominant social system by using their femininity against men for their survival and occasionally fighting back and not giving up during hard times. Thus, one can argue that Handagama shows the female subjugation existing in Sri Lankan ground – especially war-affected areas – and attempts to criticise it.

The film represents female characters as physically weak at times, and the centre of their lives is always a man. For instance, the Tamil woman, the soldier's sister, the dead soldier's wife, and the soldier's girlfriend depend on men for their survival. Women in the film do not engage in any employment. Only the Tamil woman helps the deserted soldier to clear the land to cultivate. Most of the time, women are pictured just sitting aimlessly. The soldier's mother, girlfriend, and the Tamil woman's behaviour creates this impression. Women are depicted as physically weak subjects and are exposed to the power of men. For instance, the Tamil woman is raped three times, twice by the soldier and once by a young drunken man in the village. She is also threatened by the bookie several times. Later, she seeks the

village monk's support, and in the end she flees with him for her survival. The soldier's sister depends on her brother and later becomes the lover of her school friend who joins the army. She is looked after by her elder brother, the bookie. The dead soldier's wife depends on her husband's compensation, and the deserter soldier's girlfriend depends on the soldier, and later, her brother, who joins the army. This female dependency is common in war-torn remote villages in Sri Lanka since culture or war do not leave any opportunity for women in these areas to make their living and own independent life. However, another reading of this portrayal is that the film shows the dominance of native men exercised over native women. According to Suyufi (1993, p. 9), "the Oriental woman was portrayed sympathetically, only to reaffirm the colonial doubts about the 'humanity' and integrity of her male partner, who poses as a threat to the imperial dream of domination".

The rape scenes in the film signify the violence against women in which man plays the role of the predator, and woman the vulnerable and helpless prey. These depictions of the women show that even alternative films that are politically radical and revolutionary appear to carry dominant gender ideologies. This trend is common in most film industries that are male dominant, as in Hollywood (Mulvey 1975, Summerfield 2009, Bulbul 2011, Akhter 2015, Alola & Alola 2020). Pennell and Behm-Morawitz (2015) reveal that in many cultures men are understood as protectors and women as victims, and this common cultural ideology is visible in the selected anti-war films.

The film portrays objectified female characters. This objectification occurs by portraying women as passive sex receivers and men as active sex attackers and looking at female nudity both through the voyeuristic gaze of the camera and the male characters in the film (Mulvey 1975). The men in the film are always portrayed as sex attackers who exploit women sexually. For instance, the soldier, his brother and the village boy rape the Tamil woman and threaten her. Female nudity is depicted in two places in the film: first, at the beginning of the film, when the Tamil woman lifts her skirt to the soldier displaying the bottom of her body (Figure 1); second, when the deserter soldier's girlfriend lies on the ground, topless (Figure 2), with the soldier next to her. In the first scene, female objectification appears through the soldier's gaze, who looks at the naked bottom of the Tamil woman with a lustful gaze (Figure 3). The female objectification can be a tragedy of social destruction caused by the war. In Handagama's interview, he mentions that he wanted to express the war's impacts on the marginalised social groups. Female objectification must be one strategy he used to fulfil his task.

Figure 1: The Tamil woman lifts her skirt to the soldier displaying the bottom of her body.

Figure 3: Soldier's lustful gaze directed at the naked bottom of the Tamil woman

I thought you'll be killed before we got married.

Figure 2: The deserter soldier's girlfriend lies on the ground, topless.

In the second scene, the voyeuristic gaze of the camera makes the audience feel that they look at the woman as an object. A study conducted on pornography and women's objectification in the Nigerian film industry reveals that some female actors believe pornography and nudity in films is an opportunity to liberate themselves from the conservative Nigerian culture and religion. However, although it may further the female actors' careers, such imaging of the female body can negatively affect the larger female community because images on popular media can influence audiences' perceptions of the real world (Pennell & Behm-Morawitz 2015). The audience analysis of these films shows that female participants saw these representations as subjugating women rather than empowering them. One can also argue that since This is My Moon does not use any camera movement, the characters move in and out of the camera frame, and therefore, the film deconstructs the male gaze (Crusz 2001).

Although the film portrays patriarchal gender identities of men and women, the filmmaker fulfils the cultural specificity and critical commitment of Third Cinema by criticising the patriarchal social norms that restrict the sexual freedom of women, such as virginity and marriage. The film signifies the patriarchal control exerted over female sexuality. For instance, there is a scene in the film where the soldier's sister and two young boys play with each other in the woods. The bookie, the elder brother of the soldier's sister, arrives. When they see him, the girl and the two boys run away from the bookie. He orders them to stop. They stop, and the girl in her uniform goes to the front and shows her clean white uniform to her brother and says, "Look. There is nothing" (Figure 4) to say that she had no sex with the

two boys and is still a virgin. This scene illustrates the cultural phenomenon of protecting a woman's virginity by the family's male members.

Figure 4: The girl shows her clean white uniform to her brother.

The film also portrays how the cultural phenomenon of marriage controls female sexuality. For instance, when the soldier's girlfriend's brother passes the message of the soldier's arrival to the village with the Tamil woman, he says, "If you sleep with him, get married." At the funeral, the dead soldier's wife pretends that she is the dead soldier's wife. Her brother says to the monk that his sister is pregnant and that "My sister's marriage was registered, your worship." These expressions show that marriage is the deciding factor of a woman's honour and modesty, and engaging in sex or being pregnant outside of marriage is taboo in Sri Lankan culture (which does not apply to men). This patriarchal hypocrisy is criticised by the filmmaker using the Tamil woman. When the soldier's sister goes out of the house with her boyfriend at night, the Tamil woman goes to them and says to the boy, "When you mess around in the bushes, girls get pregnant." This dialogue signifies that the women alone had to bear the blame of society for mistakes in sexual relationships.

This Is My Moon challenges the patriarchal norms by portraying women engaging in vigorous and rebellious activities at times. The film represents women as strong and powerful since they use their femininity to keep control over men. For instance, the Tamil woman uses her sexuality for her survival. She lifts her skirt whenever she feels her life is in danger. She does not give up quickly and follows the soldier who abused her to his village. She becomes the main focus and the life-changing factor for the villagers. She overcomes the threats posed to her by the young and adult men in the village using her beauty, strength and sexuality. She becomes successful in charming the village Buddhist monk to give up his robes to be with her. The dead soldier's wife uses her pregnancy to win the dead soldier's compensation, claiming she is the widow of the soldier and that the baby belongs to the dead soldier. Despite being a widow, she kisses the deserter soldier and invites the bookie to her house for sex. The

soldier's girlfriend uses her sexuality to keep the soldier with her. When she is informed about the soldier's arrival with a Tamil woman, she spies on them. She fights with the soldier and attacks him (Figure 5). Finally she directs the military police to arrest him, saying, "I showed them [the military police] the correct directions [to find him]. That is how it is. Either he is mine or no one else's." The soldier's sister makes two young men fight over her and enjoys it. She chooses the man with whom she then lives. These female characters' behaviours make them an exception to weak, dependent, passive victims as identified by the patriarchal system.

Figure 5: The soldier's girlfriend fights with the soldier and attacks him

The film fulfils its critical commitment by representing the womanhood shared by women in war-torn areas, irrespective of their age or ethnicity. According to the film, women in a war-torn country experience common problems, such as physical and sexual violence, psychological harassment and economic insecurity. For instance, the director constructs each rape scene very carefully, excluding the man or woman's nudity. The Tamil woman's face is covered by her skirt during the rape, while her painful moan could be heard in the background. The sad face of the woman is shown afterwards, accompanied by melancholic background music. Through these portrayals, the filmmaker makes people aware of the subjugation and exploitation of women in war-affected rural areas of Sri Lanka.

The film highlights the female bond giving a sense of empowerment for women to act together for their wellbeing without counting on men. Female characters support and care for each other. Since they understand each other's problems and emotional status, they empathise with each other while resisting patriarchal power. For instance, the soldier's girlfriend never blames the Tamil woman for "stealing her man" but looks at her empathetically and fights with the soldier for putting both female lives in trouble. The soldier's sister takes care of the Tamil woman (Figure 6) and confirms that she will prevent sending her to a refugee camp. The Tamil woman looks after the soldier's sister and protects her from her boyfriend. In one scene, the soldier's girlfriend tells the Tamil woman, "I was to marry him but never mind." Then she erases the dot on the Tamil woman's forehead – the dot is an ethnic symbol of a Tamil

woman. The Tamil woman does a similar thing to the soldier's sister. She takes some blood from the soldier's sister's bleeding lips and marks a dot on her forehead. These two scenes signify that the only dividing factor between them is their cultures. All other social and economic issues are common to these women in Sri Lankan society. This feeling may have the capacity to bring all the underprivileged women into one group and empower them for their own wellbeing.

Figure 6: The soldier's sister takes care of the Tamil woman

This film shows the dominant patriarchal ideologies such as women are sex objects, weak and dependent, and men are the breadwinners and powerholders who exercise power over women. This portrayal of gender roles indicates the colonial stereotypical gender divisions (Mills 2005). The film then performs the cultural specificity and critical commitment of Third Cinema by criticising the patriarchal social norms such as the expectations around virginity and marriage. It shows the exploitation and subjugation exercised over women. It challenges the existing social system by depicting female characters acting liberally and rebelliously against the system, such as using their femininity to control men for their survival, fighting back, not giving up during hard times. The film also empowers marginalised women, portraying a sisterly bond between female characters who care for and protect each other. The celebration of this bond between women in films effectively exhibits resistance and challenges the patriarchy (Cooper 2000).

Ethnic identities

This Is My Moon represents both Sinhalese and Tamil ethnicities, depicted through the dress codes and languages spoken. The film depicts Tamil ethnic identity stereotypically through the Tamil woman's dress code and the Tamil language. The Sinhala community, in the film, wears both the traditional dress and Western dress such as Lungi, sarong, dress, t-shirts, shirts and trousers, indicating a more cosmopolitan and less conservative nature of the Sinhala culture when compared to that of Tamils. The villagers depicted in the film speak the Sinhala language.

The filmmaker differentiates the Tamil woman from the Sinhalese women using her attire and language. For instance, the Tamil woman wears a long skirt and blouse and a black shawl over her dress. Later in the film, she starts to wear the soldier's sister's dresses but keeps on wearing the same shawl over her dresses. It is also important to note that the filmmaker casts a popular Sinhalese actress (Dilhani Ekanayaka) for this character. Being a Sinhalese, the actress utters Tamil dialogue in an unusual accent that questions the authenticity of the representation of the Tamil character. During the discussion, the focus group members also questioned the authenticity of this Tamil character, pointing out that the portrayal is unrealistic (further discussion is available in Chapter Seven). Not offering minor community roles to be played by cast from the same community is questionable. Jayasena (2010) claims that using a Sinhalese actress for the Tamil character indicates the Sinhala cultural hegemony. He also suggests that since there is no Tamil cinema in Sri Lanka, it might be a practical difficulty to find a Tamil actress for the character. It is also possible to think that even an available Tamil actress would not agree to play a controversial role in an anti-war film produced by a Sinhalese filmmaker at a time of intense war and a highly militarised environment because, during this time, assassinations of both Tamil and Sinhala Journalists were common. Therefore, it is crucial to consider the filmmaker's possible intention to use this Tamil female character, which I discuss in detail in representations of war in *This Is My Moon*.

As part of this discussion about ethnicity, it is vital to analyse where the filmmaker positions the Sinhalese ethnic community. As I have discussed in representations of war in *This Is My Moon*, the filmmaker explicitly criticises the majority Sinhalese government's war agenda and the Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist wing supporting the pro-war policy of the government. Handagama uses some characters in the film symbolically to achieve his aim. In that criticism, the Sinhalese ruling elite is marked as responsible for initiating the ethnic conflict. For instance, the Sinhalese soldier raping the Tamil woman and the woman chasing the soldier to his village and become the main character of the village reminds us of the 1956 Sinhala-only language policy (raping the Tamil woman) and the consequent ethnic issue becoming a burning issue of the country (Tamil woman following the soldier to his village) for several decades.

Handagama's criticism of the Sinhalese ruling elite does not extend towards the general community of the Sinhalese. Instead, he positions the common Sinhalese community on the victims' side in the same way as the common Tamil community and discusses the impact of war on them and the suppression and exploitation exercised by the authorities on ordinary citizens in the name of war. For instance, the unemployment that compels the youth to join the army, who then had to die on the battlefield, and their parents, widows, siblings and children that suffer from poverty and mental stress, are portrayed in this film. This framing of the underprivileged, low-class, rural communities engaging in abusive anti-social activities such as rapes, cheating and murder attempts support Orientalising process in their international reception and extends the Re-Orientalising function at home.

Religious identities

The filmmaker, in portraying religious identities, reinforces Gramsci's idea (backed by Marxism) of hegemony and ideological state apparatuses in which he claims that religious institutions, such as the church (or in this case the Buddhist temple) "consolidate the hegemony of a ruling class by controlling and (re)producing an ideology suiting the interests of that same class" (Maduro 1977, p. 362). Therefore, his film displays characteristics of the Third Cinema, such as cultural specificity and critical commitment. The film criticises the Sinhala nationalist Buddhist institutions and the Buddhist monks therein who misguide the community for their political gain. Through the Tamil woman's character, the filmmaker reveals his resistance toward the institutionalised Buddhist wing that supports the war. The film depicts the immense power and dominance held by the Buddhist temple and the monk within the village and thereby the Sinhalese culture and then proves it wrong by portraying the Buddhist monk as a commoner who has flaws any human being may have.

The film fulfils critical commitment by criticising Sinhala nationalist Buddhist institutions and the Buddhist monks therein who misguide the community for their political gain. As depicted in the film, this Buddhist wing does not follow Buddhist philosophy. For instance, Buddhist philosophy does not encourage any means of violence or conflict. The monk in the film contradicts this principle by encouraging a village woman to give birth to a male child to go to the battlefield when he grows up (Figure 7). The monk gets angry when the soldier informs the monk that he deserted the army. He insists on him returning to the battlefield. He blesses a young man who goes to join the army (Figure 8). These characteristics indicate the pro-war mentality of the monk in the film. On the other hand, he does not show any sympathy or empathy towards the Tamil woman. Even though Buddhism encourages goodwill towards all creatures, he tells the soldier to send the Tamil woman to the refugee camp. Here, the Buddhist monk works to maintain the hegemony of the Sinhalese nationalism and the pro-war government by encouraging pro-war mentality among the villagers using the obsession villagers have towards the Buddhist temple.

Figure 7: The monk encourages a village woman to give birth to a male child.

Figure 8: The monk blesses a young man who goes to join the army.

Through the Tamil woman's character, the filmmaker reveals his resistance toward the institutionalised Buddhist wing that supports the war. In one scene, the Tamil woman throws the soldier's boots onto the roof of the soldier's house, frowning at the monk standing in front of her (Figure 9). The Tamil woman's frown signifies the director's resentment towards the pro-war Buddhist institution. She never worships the monk even if she is forced to do so by the soldier's mother (Figure 10). Through these scenes, Handagama shows that the pro-war nationalist Buddhist institution members do not deserve to be respected since they are also part of this destructive process of war; the outcome of that is the poverty, exploitation and death of the nation's youth.

Figure 9: The Tamil woman throws the soldier's boots onto the roof, frowning at the monk.

Figure 10: Soldier's mother forces the Tamil woman to worship the monk but she resists.

The film fulfils cultural specificity by depicting the immense power and dominance held by the Buddhist temple and the monk within the village, thereby proving it wrong by portraying the Buddhist monk as a commoner who has weaknesses any human being may possess. The monk's following dialogue reveals that he is no different or superior to the other villagers as a person.

> We all are human inside our clothes. These robes make no difference.

According to the film, he has the same mentality and desires as ordinary villagers, such as unconquered sexual desire, anger and fear. For instance, the monk in the film tells the Tamil woman:

> The priests who attained supremacy fly to the Himalayas using their spiritual power. When they see the flowers that look like women, they lose their spiritual power and fall to earth, like the helicopters being shot.

> It is cold and lonely in the temple. Come to the temple sometime.

These dialogues suggest that the monk is no different from any other human being, and he too has unconquered sexual desires and feelings despite the requirement for him to remain celibate as a Buddhist monk. Proving this fact right, in the climax of the film, the monk leaves his robe behind and elopes with the Tamil woman (Figure 11). He gets angry when a small boy rings the bell at the temple for play. He

feels fear for life, which is why he comes out of the temple with a rod (Figure 12) when he hears the Tamil woman's footsteps in the night.

Figure 11: The monk leaves his robe behind and elopes with the Tamil woman.

Figure 12: The monk comes out of the temple with a rod.

The film also highlights how the villagers blindly worship and follow these religious institutions. For instance, villagers in the film pay the utmost respect to the monk by covering his seat with a white cloth (Figure 13) as custom demands and worshipping him (Figure 14); they believe and follow his preaching, thinking that he is spiritually superior (to them). In the film, the director questions this aspect. He depicts the monks as ordinary human beings, and what they say is not always correct. For instance, although the Buddhist monk was supporting the war against the LTTE, in the end, he elopes with the Tamil woman, which is a contradiction.

Figure 13: Villagers pay the utmost respect to the monk by covering his seat with a white cloth.

Figure 14: Villagers worship the monk.

The film highlights the Sinhala community's deviation from true Buddhist philosophy and embracing the Sinhalese nationalist Buddhist cultural aspects, which is sometimes the opposite of the Buddhist philosophy. For instance, Hindu and Buddhist cultures worship gods in practice, but it is not part of Buddhist philosophy. The other aspect of Buddhist culture is the criteria of entering into the Buddhist institution as a monk. Although being a monk is an individual decision made by a person based on the

realisation of life according to the Buddhist philosophy, the film depicts that if a person is unsuccessful in running a family life, he can become a monk. That is how the bookie becomes the village monk after the previous monk leaves the temple with the Tamil woman. Being unsuccessful in running a gambling centre and rejected by the dead soldier's wife for marriage, the bookie becomes the village monk. In the film, the monk's position is depicted as one that anybody can access simply by wearing a monk's robe. At the funeral of the dead soldier, the monk tells the widow: "What the fire consumes are only garments. The person who wore them has gone away. Do not be sad." The same statement is repeated by the bookie when he becomes the monk. This repetition of the same dialogue signifies that these monks preach villagers the Buddhist teaching without understanding them but thinking of it as their duty. The Buddhist philosophy and Buddhist cultural institutions are two different entities; the film portrays and thereby criticises this Sinhalese Buddhist cultural institution.

This Is My Moon shows the cultural specificity and critical commitment of Third Cinema because the filmmaker uses Gramsci's idea of maintaining hegemony using religious institutions as Ideological State Apparatuses (Maduro 1977) as the base of portraying religious identities in his film. Here, the Buddhist monk works to maintain the hegemony of the Sinhalese nationalism and the pro-war government by encouraging pro-war mentality among the villagers using the obsession villagers have towards the Buddhist temple. The film criticises this Sinhala nationalist Buddhist institutions and the Buddhist monks who misguide the community for their political gain. The film depicts the immense power and dominance held by the Buddhist temple and the monk within the village and thereby the Sinhalese culture and then proves it wrong by portraying the Buddhist monk as a commoner who has flaws as all human beings have. The film also highlights how the villagers blindly worship and follow these religious institutions. The filmmaker uses the Tamil woman's character to reveal his resistance toward the institutionalised Buddhist wing that supports the war. This Buddhist institution appears to be an ideological state apparatus for centuries in Sri Lanka, playing a similar role as the church in countries such as Egypt and Latin America (Althusser 2006, Tadros 2009, Gill 2008). This film displays a critical view of this ideological state apparatus and its role in ethnic conflict.

The war

This Is My Moon displays the historicity of Third Cinema by symbolically discussing the background of war and its impact on people. The film specifically focuses on the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. At the beginning of the film, a written sentence appears on the screen that says, "There has been an ethnic war in Sri Lanka between Tamil rebels and the government forces, for nearly two decades." The incidents start from there onwards, and the story revolves around the Tamil woman who signifies the history of ethnic conflict. Symbolically, many characters of the film also represent the national issues of the country. For instance, the Tamil woman represents the Tamil community and their national issue, and the soldier and his role in the film signify the government and its reaction to the ethnic issue. The monk

represents the Sinhalese Buddhist cultural institution in Sri Lanka and its interference in the ethnic issue and government policymaking, while the shop owner represents capitalism and its followers who encourage the war for their own benefit. The rest of the characters represent the lower socio-economic class in Sri Lanka, which had become the victim of the Sri Lankan civil war. The film also fulfils critical commitment by criticising the state bureaucracy and the government war agenda.

The Tamil woman represents the ethnic issue of the Tamil community and their suffering. The incidents she experiences signify the background of the ethnic conflict. At the beginning of the film, the Sinhala soldier raping the Tamil woman signifies the domination of the Sinhala majority over the Tamil minority through the government's state language policy, which declared the Sinhala language as the official language in 1956 (Uyangoda 2007, p. 81). This state language policy trampled on the Tamils' language rights, closing the opportunity for Tamil youth to join the public service. Tamils started nonviolent protests against the Sinhala-only Bill all around the country, and the anti-Tamil riots against these protests killed around 150 Tamil civilians (DeVotta 2005, p. 149). Since then, the ethnic dispute became the burning national issue of Sri Lanka, which the national political leaders could not escape from. The film symbolises this by showing the Tamil woman following the soldier when he deserts the army and returns to his village. The Tamil woman gets raped again by the soldier and a village boy and threatened by the bookie twice. These rapes signify the oppression over the Tamil community, which materialised as anti-Tamil riots in 1958, 1978 and 1981 (Uyangoda 2007, p. 81), and, at the end of the film, she gets raped by a boy, symbolising the anti-Tamil riots in 1983.

The film's display of sex scenes and the human body also symbolises the nature of the ethnic issue. For instance, the Sinhalese soldier exercising his sexual power over the Tamil woman without her will signifies the domination Sinhalese society exercises over the Tamil minority. The film shows the naked buttocks of the soldier, signifying the government's nakedness, which pretends that it has a real intention to resolve the ethnic conflict. The Tamil woman exhibiting her body to the soldier out of fear for her life, offering the body to save herself from being shot by the soldier, is a metaphor for the Northern and Eastern Provinces, where her body (the land) is offered to the soldier (the military) to do whatever he pleases with it as long as her life is spared. She uses her body as the only thing she can offer in exchange for her life.

The characters signify the victims of the ethnic conflict, fulfilling the critical commitment of the Third Cinema. The soldier in the film plays both the roles of predator and victim. On the one hand, he, as a predator, rapes the Tamil woman. At this point, the soldier is the symbol of the nationalistic government. On the other hand, he represents the victims of war who are exploited by the capitalist society. As the film depicts, poor village youth join the armed forces as the only means of employment because there are high levels of unemployment among the less educated and those without the sought after academic and technical qualifications. According to the film, being soldiers, they have to fight someone else's

war; after desertion, they have to hide from the military police to avoid being punished; losing the job in the army, they have to engage in *chena* (land) cultivation, which is a difficult task in the dry zone of Sri Lanka. For instance, when the military police arrest him, he says, "It is easier to shoot a gun than to plough the fields." This dialogue shows that youth have few options to make their living in remote villages of war-torn countries, and even less for a deserter since he is being treated as a criminal. This social rejection and economic hardship lead them to crimes. Later in the film, the soldier becomes the agent of violence. He threatens the shop keeper for informing the military police about him and later raids the shop and steals money.

According to the film, women choose soldiers as life partners. For instance, the soldier's sister chooses the boy who joined the army over the boy who starts a business. Her choice indicates that soldiers are sought after in this village as 'good catches' for marriage as it is probably the best job available to men in the village. After all, a military job pays a salary when a soldier is alive; and a pension and compensation if he dies. Therefore, these village women try to be wives of soldiers for survival. It also shows that the women in these villages seek men with military employment rather than being financially independent by seeking self-employment or joining the military themselves. The film depicts that farming and small businesses are the only other employment opportunities available for the villagers other than military employment.

The film also depicts how the war and the military training given to soldiers destroy their humanity. In the opening scene, the soldier in his bunker whistles a song and dusts his shoes amidst the continued firing. His behaviour signifies how normalised the war has become for him. Knowing that death can come at any time, he focuses on simple things to escape from the terror. The soldier rapes the Tamil woman, who jumps into the bunker seeking security. The soldier lights up his cigarette from the fire of a dead soldier's crematorium. He tries to send the Tamil woman to the refugee camp when he realises she is pregnant with his child. He tells the Tamil woman:

> Get ready to go to the refugee camp. There is nothing I can do.

> It is safer in the refugee camp. Men and women are all together. [He laughs] You can
> be pregnant so quickly. Nobody will ever think badly about that.

This dialogue shows how ignorant the soldier is regarding the Tamil woman's life. He treats her like an object. When he gets to know about her pregnancy, for which he is responsible and which could be a burden on him, he tries to get rid of her.

The film depicts that military training makes people lose their ability to think and work independently. They depend on the commands of the higher-ranked officers. The dialogue between the soldier and his girlfriend's brother is an excellent example of this aspect. The soldier trains his girlfriend's brother since

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he expects to participate in the army interview. The soldier hits the boy with a rod when he does not answer his questions correctly. While the boy is marching, the soldier goes away. The boy shouts to him, "Give me the order to stop." Only after the soldier orders him to discontinue does he stop. The film portrays joining the army during a war period as a trap from which men have no way out other than from death. The military police officer, who comes to take the deserted soldier back, tells the soldier's father this reality: "When someone joins the army during a war period, there is only one way to remove the uniform. He should die."

The film also portrays the reality of the life of a village affected by war. The settings or characters of the film do not carry any names. These anonymous characters reveal that the impact of war is universal, with any location easily interchangeable with another. The film portrays war as the only deciding factor in life and the future of a war-torn society. When the dead soldier's wife is admitted to hospital for childbirth, her brother says to his friend, "My sister will have a boy, a child soldier in uniform." The dead soldier's father regrets his son having a child in a war-torn country. The soldier represents youth dragged into a war created by the country's political entities, which they may not have voted for. The film depicts that these soldiers fight someone else's war without knowing the reason why they are fighting. The soldier's dialogue with the Tamil woman unfolds this reality:

> We shoot not from anger. When we do not shoot, it is not because of love. Just with no reason. Just like the wind.

This dialogue reveals how economically marginalised men are forced into war. The film portrays an atmosphere where unemployment forces young men to join the military as their only means to make a living. A young man in the film says, "I ate only bread this morning. I do training. Now I am 18. I can join the army." This states the fundamental requirements to be a soldier – poverty, physical strength and reaching the age of maturity. The following dialogue between two young men, i.e., the soldier's girlfriend's brother and the dead soldier's wife's brother, also reveals this fact:

> Soldier's girlfriend's brother: "Seriously, don't you like to join the Army?"
> The schoolboy: "No."
> Soldier's girlfriend's brother: "You are afraid."
> The schoolboy: "No."
> Soldier's girlfriend's brother: "Then why?"
> The schoolboy: "I do not like to."
> Soldier's girlfriend's brother: "Do not like to... what?"
> The schoolboy: "To shoot."
> Soldier's girlfriend's brother: "Then... she is mine."
> The schoolboy: "How come?"

Soldier's girlfriend's brother: "She wants a man with a job."

The schoolboy: "I will find another job."

Soldier's girlfriend's brother: "There are no other jobs."

This dialogue indicates that a job is a deciding factor for winning a girl. The options available for the youth is being a soldier, farmer or a businessman. However, the film shows farming is a difficult task in the dry zone. A young man in the village asks the soldier why he deserted the army. He replies, "To die." His reply indicates that the war created a situation in which, if one joins the army, he will die on the battlefield; if not, he will die due to unemployment and hunger.

According to the film, a soldier's salary provides food for his family, whether he is dead or alive. The villagers depend on the compensation of the dead soldier for their living. The dead soldier's sister and her brother wait until they receive the soldier's compensation to buy a tractor and start a business. The film also portrays how the family members of dead soldiers become helpless due to the government's rules and regulations. Conversation 1 between the dead soldier's father and the dead soldier's wife, Conversation 2 between the soldier's girlfriend and her brother, and Conversation 3 between the dead soldier's wife and the bookie as given below reveal the extent to which the soldier families depend on his pension and compensation.

Conversation 1

Dead soldier's father: "Are you really married to my son?"

Dead soldier's wife: "Yes."

Dead soldier's father: "Then every cent is for you."

Dead soldier's wife: "I will take care of you [the in-laws] if I do well [in my business set up using the compensation money]. This [the child in my womb] is his child. I am sure of that."

Conversation 2

Soldier's girlfriend: "When a soldier gets killed, is the compensation large?"

Brother: "Yes. They [the widow in the film] will buy a tractor. That is enough to start a business."

Brother: "I am joining the army."

Soldier's girlfriend: "Then some other woman [the wife] will buy a tractor, and we [his birth family] are left with nothing. Is that it?"

These two conversations show that, after a soldier's death, his compensation legally belongs to his wife and children, with no mechanism set up by the government for the welfare of the dead soldier's aged parents or siblings, who were dependent on the soldier.

Conversation 3

Bookie: "I want to marry you."

Dead soldier's wife: "Do not pester me. I am married."

Bookie: "But he is dead."

Dead soldier's wife: "I will always be married to him." [Indicating she will not ever remarry]

Bookie: "Do you still love him?"

Dead soldier's wife: "Yes." [She walks away from him] "If you want, come around this evening."

According to the state regulations (Department of Pensions 1981, p. 11), widows of soldiers become ineligible for compensation or a pension if they remarry. Often, such widows may be relatively young (in their early 20s or so) but face a dilemma concerning remarriage due to losing the dead husband's pension and compensation if they do so. Therefore, to meet their physical and emotional needs, they tend to look for extramarital relationships and be forced to forego remarriage.

The film portrays the uncertainty of life and death as the only certain thing in a war-torn country. The beloved ones of soldiers suffer from the unending fear of whether or when their son, husband or boyfriend will die in the war. This factor is apparent in the film when the soldier's girlfriend says to the soldier, "It is good you deserted the army. I thought you would be killed before we get married." The conversation between the soldier's sister and her newly recruited soldier boyfriend also reveals this suffering.

Girl: "Shall we marry?"

Boy: "After I return."

Girl: "If you die?"

Boy: "All who go to war will not die."

Girl: "But many get killed."

Boy: "That is only the unlucky bastards."

However, this man dies in the film before they get married.

This Is My Moon displays the historicity and critical commitment of Third Cinema by symbolically discussing the background of war and its impact on people and thereby making people aware of the disaster of war. The film specifically focuses on the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, using the characters and incidents symbolically. The Tamil woman represents the ethnic issue of the Tamil community and their suffering. The soldier in the film plays both the roles of predator and victim. As a predator, signifying the Sinhala nationalist government, the soldier rapes the Tamil woman, signifying the capturing of lands belonging to the Tamil community. He represents the victims of war who are exploited by the capitalist ruling system. The film depicts how the war and the military training given

to soldiers destroy their humanity and their ability to think and work independently. They depend on the commands of the higher-ranked officers. The film also portrays the reality of the life of a village affected by war. Holding a critical viewpoint of war, this film acts as an anti-propaganda effort against the government's war propaganda.

The government and bureaucracy

The film is specifically critical towards the capitalist government and the state bureaucracy, displaying the critical commitment of Third Cinema. The film criticises the government's unsuccessful attempts to solve the ethnic issue while also criticising the pro-war government agents such as the Buddhist institutions and various capitalist agents.

It criticises the government's unsuccessful attempts to solve the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. The film pictures this symbolically. For instance, when the soldier arrives at his village with the Tamil woman, he goes to the shop and asks for chewing gum. Throughout the film, the Tamil woman is chewing that gum he gave her. The chewing gum, in this case, signifies the peace-making attempts[8] the government exercised from time to time, which were unsuccessful and dragged the problem on for about 30 years. Implementation of the Provincial Council system and peace talks conducted several times, without any result, can be given as examples. The Tamil woman chewing the gum signifies Tamil leaders' apathy towards finding a sustainable solution for the ethnic issue and manipulating the matter for their political gains. The film discusses the role of capitalist agents in the ethnic issue. The village shop keeper represents such agents. He provides cigarettes and chewing gums to soldiers; he directs the military police to catch the deserted soldiers; he receives cigarette packs for wholesale price from soldiers who come on vacation. This incident shows how the capitalist system or its agents encourage the conflicts within the country to their advantage.

This Is My Moon uncovers the real face of capitalist governments and their agents in the warfare, fulfilling one criterion of the Third Cinema: critical commitment. Symbolically, the film portrays the government's unsuccessful attempts to solve the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. The director uses the soldier's character to symbolise the government and its military agenda in ethnic conflict. As I have discussed in the representations of religious identities (in 5.3.5.), the film depicts the Sinhala Buddhist religious institution also as a government agent that supports its pro-war agenda.

In conclusion, *This Is My Moon* demonstrates the characteristics of Third Cinema, such as critical commitment, historicity and cultural specificity. The film shows the critical commitment by depicting the impact of war on the marginalised citizens of rural Sri Lanka, especially its youth and women. The film criticises the government's unsuccessful attempts at solving the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka and the

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[8] Peace attempts took place in 1985, 1987, 1989, 1994, and 2002 (Ministry of Defence 2007).

role of capitalist agents in it. The role of a Buddhist monk in the film represents the Sinhalese nationalist Buddhist institution whose monks supported the war. The film also depicts the reality of village life affected by the mechanism of war. The settings or characters of the film do not carry any names. This anonymity indicates that the impact of war is something universal and interchangeable.

The film shows the characteristic of historicity by focusing on the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. *This Is My Moon* is an allegory of the ethnic issue and its background. The Tamil woman represents the Tamil community, while the soldier represents the Sinhala government. The incidents are woven around the Tamil woman throughout the film: her being raped, abused and threatened signify the oppression exercised over the Tamil community using the Sinhala-only state language policy and anti-Tamil riots that occurred throughout history. The Tamil woman's body signifies the lands that belong to the Tamil community in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, and the soldier raping her signifies the militarisation of those lands. The film also portrays the consequences of that history by depicting the impact of war on present society.

The film indicates cultural specificity by complimenting cultural values that strengthen the villagers and criticising cultural aspects that exploit and suppress marginalised people. The film portrays the Buddhist monk as an ordinary man who has flaws any commoner has and challenges the traditional cultural ideology that offers immense power to the temple and the monk. The pro-war governments have created a heroic image of the soldiers and the Buddhist monks as patriots. The Buddhist religious institutions have established a dominant position within the Sri Lankan social and cultural context throughout history. Explicit portrayals of them in a negative way is a controversial practice that invites state suppression and criticism. In that sense, *This Is My Moon* is a revolutionary film.

The filmmaker also challenges the dominant patriarchal ideology by portraying strong characteristics in female characters, such as using their femininity to control men for their survival, fighting back, not giving up and supporting each other at difficult times. The film shows the cultural phenomenon of virginity and patriarchal control over female sexuality and freedom. Also, it displays the importance given to marriage and virginity in Sri Lankan society and how those two concepts are used to control the sexuality and sexual freedom of women.

Although the film displays the Third Cinema characteristics in representing gender, culture, political ideologies and the war, its framing of the underprivileged, low-class, rural communities engaging in abusive anti-social activities such as rapes, cheating and murder attempts support Orientalising process in their international reception and extends the Re-Orientalising function at home.

5.5. Representations of Culture and War in the Film *Sulanga Enu Pinisa* (The Forsaken Land)

Sulanga Enu Pinisa (The Forsaken Land)

Released in the year 2005

Language – Sinhalese

Director and writer – Vimukthi Jayasundara

Producer – Philippe Avril

Main actors – Saumya Liyanage, Kaushalya Fernando, Nilupuli Jayawardena, Mahendra Perera, Hemasiri Liyanage, Pumudika Peiris

Synopsis of *The Forsaken Land*

The story of *Sulanga Enu Pinisa* (The Forsaken Land) (2005) is set in a remote village in a war-torn area during a cease-fire period. The central characters of the film are a Home Guard[9] named Anura, his wife Latha, his middle-aged unmarried sister, an old man, a little girl (Batti) and a soldier. Anura's sister lives with Anura and Latha in a tiny house. She is educated but underemployed,[10] and she used to spend time with Batti. Batti becomes the attraction of the old man who is also a Home Guard and lives alone after his wife's death. He sees his wife (who is affected by dwarfism) in Batti and tries to befriend her.[11] Latha accidentally witnesses sexual intercourse between a pregnant woman and a man while walking in the woods (the pregnant lady is found dead later in the film, which Anura tells Latha is a suicide attempt). Aroused by this scene, Latha then develops a sexual relationship with a soldier who is a friend of her husband, Anura. The soldier gets caught by his superiors while having sex with Latha. The Army officers take the soldier with them and torture him. Anura, on the same night, is taken away by the army officers and is ordered to kill a man held hostage in a gunny bag (who might be the soldier). Without knowing who is in the gunny bag, Anura kills the soldier. After these incidents, Anura's sister commits suicide.

Cultural values

The film criticises the conservative culture of Sri Lankan society such as patriarchy, hypocrisy and fake morality that covers the uncivilised man or woman residing inside every human being and thereby fulfils the cultural specificity of Third Cinema. The film uses the characters who are binary opposites to show the never-ending conflict between culture and nature. Just like *This Is My Moon,* this film also critically

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[9] Home Guards/Civil Defence Force are adult males with training in use of weapons, selected from war-affected villages to serve as auxiliary to the police and generally help in maintaining internal security (Silva 2010).

[10] The film does not give details of Anura's sister's employment. In a conversation with Anura, she says she is going to apply for teaching appointments. It seems that she is working in a garment factory because many women in war-affected areas used to work in garment factories during the war.

[11] The relationship between Batti and the old man is not clear, and it was subjected to negative criticism stating that the relationship indicates paedophilia.

portrays how patriarchal social norms of marriage suppress the freedom of men and women. In addition to the critical depiction of culture, the film portrays appreciative aspects of Sri Lankan culture as well.

Using characters with opposite attributes such as honourable vs unethical, kind vs vicious, nature vs culture, the filmmaker critically portrays the struggle between the culture and the instincts of human beings. The main characters of the film are Latha, the soldier, Anura's sister, and Anura. While Latha and the soldier represent human nature, Anura's sister and Anura represent culture. Latha and the soldier depict natural human behaviours such as the urge to fulfil needs, vulgarity and self-centeredness. Latha does not hesitate to start a sexual relationship with the soldier displaying her urge to fulfil the need of sex, and she becomes stubborn enough to invite him to her house in the absence of her husband and sister-in-law. On the other hand, the soldier cheats his friend for sex showing the self-centeredness and does not hesitate to take the risk that can be life-threatening. Latha inviting the soldier to her home and the soldier violating his duties to have sex equally indicate their urge and vulgarity. In contrast, Anura and his sister represents the culture by acting as the watchdogs trying to discipline the little girl Batti, Latha and soldier when they "misbehave."

Anura's sister signifies the conservative culture system that acts as a watchdog. Anura's sister tries to discipline Batti, and she warns Latha about her extramarital relationship through hints. Latha's gaze towards her sister-in-law during her sexual intercourse with the soldier at Anura's home is challenging, as if the nature of human beings is challenging the culture. The film also criticises the hypocrisy of conservative culture by showing Anura's sister having a secret pleasure from the abuser she meets in a crowded bus. When Latha (nature) fulfils her need for sex openly, Anura's sister (culture) does it secretly while she is trying to maintain a disciplined and cultured image in society. Anura tries to discipline his friend, the soldier, by blaming him when he talks filth about God, and the same Anura kills the same soldier on the order of the army officer in the climax of the film. The soldier was tortured and killed by the officers because he had sex with another man's wife, which is considered highly inappropriate in the Sri Lankan culture. These incidents portray that both the consent and punitive forces in culture act according to powerful forces' will. "What is culture?" will be decided by the rulers according to their needs. Showing these loopholes of culture is revolutionary, and it seems that the filmmaker accomplishes that task through this film.

Further, the film is critical of patriarchal norms of marriage that intimidate both men and women. For instance, Anura's sister is portrayed in the film as a traditional, conservative woman. She is educated and employed, yet she is desperate about her unmarried status because the accepted norm of Sri Lankan society is that a woman is incomplete if she is unmarried, irrespective of her education level or employment status. Anura's sister's facial expressions and how she sighs express how desperate she is about her unmarried status in the scene where she touches Latha's bridal saree in secret. The film shows Anura's sister walking along in a deserted land with a bag in her hand. In the background, the viewers

can hear the old man's story of *Katikirilli*, a woman who searches for a husband and gets killed by a man she thinks she will be married to. This story signifies Anura's sister's situation. Unlike Latha, Anura's sister has become a prisoner of a conservative culture, in which she has to fulfil her desires in secret. Her situation is evident when a man in the crowded bus sexually abuses her, and she secretly enjoys it. Anura's sister shows the stereotypical characteristics of a traditional woman. She is restrained by accepted cultural norms and even from the dress code. She wears long skirts and blouses; she takes care of her family by bringing them gifts on her payday; she washes her brother's clothes; she loves Batti, plays with her, and, like a mother, convinces her to study well and tries to discipline her. At the end of the film, she commits suicide when she encounters her sister-in-law having a sexual relationship with another man. She might have felt guilty from thinking that she is the reason for the destruction of her brother's marriage.

The social norms of marriage torment not only women but also men. For instance, Anura's social responsibility (his sister's marriage) is a burden he emotionally suffers. The dialogue of Anura's sister reveals that Anura is worried about her marriage.

> Anura's sister: "You do not worry about me. How many unmarried women are out there? How nice if you can have a child. There were teaching vacancies advertised in last week's Gazette. I applied for it. If I get the appointment, I will go somewhere far away. Then I can make use of my education. You too will have a relief from me."

This cultural burden makes him feel guilty, which forces him not to have a normal sex life with his wife, Latha. Latha thinks her sister-in-law is responsible for her miserable married life. Therefore, Latha hates Anura's sister. Latha's feelings towards her sister-in-law are expressed through her tone of voice. Whenever she talks about or talks to her sister-in-law, her tone expresses anger hidden in sarcasm. The marriage between Latha and Anura appears as an aspect of the culture forced on them by society without considering either person's will or feelings. Their age gap and Anura's personality, compared to the soldier with whom Latha builds a sexual relationship later, support the idea that Latha and Anura's marriage might have been based on specific traditional social measures, such as class and caste.

While criticising the negative aspects of the culture, the filmmaker also appreciates the constructive aspects that strengthen the people in that society. For example, when the villagers find the pregnant lady's dead body, they get together and bring the body to the roadside. Anura says they did that to avoid wild animal attacks on the dead body. This incident shows how villagers get together to help each other at difficult times. However, one can also argue that this particular scene might connote the destruction of humanity caused by the war and militarism when the whole storyline is considered. Before this scene, the filmmaker shows this pregnant woman having sex in the woods with a man who might be her husband or a lover who might also be a military person. Later, Anura reveals to Latha that this woman

might have committed suicide. This sequence of the incidents indicates that the war and militarism have abandoned the woman and her unborn child to death. This argument is proven when it is connected to the climax of the film in which the soldier had to sacrifice his life for the relationship he had with Latha affirming that in a militarised society, nothing is valued except war.

The film *Forsaken Land* uses a cause and effect formula to build up the logical framework of the narrative. The activities and behaviours in the film are linked to either a psychological or social reason. Latha's anger towards Anura's sister, Anura's neutral feelings and attitude towards his wife, Anura's sister's feelings towards Batti, Latha's extramarital affair with the soldier, the old man's attraction towards Batti, and the soldier's death and Anura's sister's death have either a psychological or a social cause. War is simply one factor visible in the film as a cause, but other factors run through these characters and incidents, which will be discussed in the next two paragraphs.

Ultimately, this analysis reveals that *The Forsaken Land* follows cultural specificity by portraying the Sri Lankan culture's regressive aspects that oppress its members. The film depicts human relationships authentically, explaining the psychological and cultural causes and their effects on the characters. While being critical of the detrimental aspects of Sri Lankan culture, the filmmaker compliments the constructive aspects of it, exhibiting the cultural specificity of Third Cinema in his film.

Gender roles and sexual relationships

Like *This Is My Moon*, *The Forsaken Land* also shows stereotypical patriarchal gender roles and sexual relationships. The film critically portrays the oppressive aspects of patriarchal gender norms while portraying characters who challenge the existing social norms. Consequently, the film demonstrates Third Cinema characteristics, such as cultural specificity and critical commitment, by criticising and challenging patriarchal gender ideologies.

Representation of gender roles and sexual relationships in the film appears to take a stereotypical standard of the dominant patriarchal social system. The film portrays female characters as weak and vulnerable and their bodies as a "phantasy object" (Mulvey 1975). In the climax of the film, every woman faces a tragic experience. Except for Batti, no hope is left for those female characters in their future. The death of the pregnant lady, the death of Anura's sister, and Latha being startled with a feeling of guilt when she revealed the suicide of the pregnant lady depict women as victims. This victimisation seems to be a result of patriarchal social pressure. For instance, the pregnant lady's attempt to fulfil her sexual need, a similar attempt by Latha, and Anura's sister's inability to secure marriage at the "right" age are offences in patriarchal culture's point of view. The film portrays women who violate the dominant patriarchal norms getting what they deserve (Kim 2014).

Intentionally or unintentionally, the film objectifies female nudity through the male gaze to convey pleasure to the audience, just as in *This Is My Moon*. For instance, Latha is shown half-nude twice in the film. On one occasion, her breast is shown in a close-up (Figure 15) which signifies intimacy (Asa Berger 2012, p. 41) and her fully naked body is shown in a full-shot (Figure 16) which signifies strong social connection (Asa Berger 2012, p. 41). In contrast, it seems that the filmmaker is portraying male nudity to convey a sense of empathy or pity. For example, the director shows Anura and the old man's nudity in extreme long shots (Figure 17), signifying public distance (Asa Berger 2012, p. 41). One can argue that this display of stereotyped gender identities may reinforce the colonial gender ideologies that see women as the subaltern. On the other hand, one can also claim that this female subordination is an impact of the war which the film director intends to display in his film and therefore, based on the assumption that *Forsaken Land* is an alternative arthouse film, Mulvey's concept of women's body as a "phantasy object", which is more applicable to Hollywood, is not relevant to this film.

Figure 15: Close-up of Latha's breast signifies intimacy.

Figure 16: Full-shot of Latha's fully naked body signifies strong social connection.

Figure 17: Extreme long shots of Anura and the old man's nudity signify public distance.

The construction of characters in the film exhibits women choosing stereotypical male characters as their love interest. For instance, Latha chose a soldier who possesses masculine qualities over feminine Anura. A comparison of Anura's personality to that of the soldier reveals a pattern of paired opposition. Anura possesses feminine characteristics, whereas the soldier possesses masculine characteristics. The way Anura interferes with the arguments of his sister and wife, the way he consoles his wife when she gets distraught by seeing the dead body of the pregnant woman, him crying after being bullied by the soldiers, and him being reluctant to kill the man in the gunny bag and his behaviour afterwards, express a soft, caring, feminine male character. The soldier, in contrast, is depicted as a rough man. He takes the risk of sleeping with his friend's wife, knowing that can risk his life; his wild behaviour while having sex with Latha in the woods, and his attitude towards God, makes him more masculine. This depiction reinforces the patriarchal gender identities as well.

Similar to *This Is My Moon*, this film also depicts a critical view of typical patriarchal social norms, and through some characters and their behaviours the filmmaker challenges certain social norms of the dominant culture. For instance, the film expresses controversial and radical views of the sexuality of the female. According to the dominant Sri Lankan culture, typically women are expected to be modest, well behaved and introverted regarding their sexual needs and desires. However, the film portrays women who are extroverted in fulfilling their need for sex. For instance, the pregnant lady engages in sexual intercourse with a man in the woods, Latha has an extramarital relationship with the soldier, and Anura's sister enjoys being abused on public transport; these go against standard social norms regarding women's behaviour. Unlike *This Is My Moon* that promotes heterosexual relationships, this film gives a hint of homosexuality by depicting intimacy between Anura and the soldier, which is against the typical cultural norm that accepts heterosexual relationships as natural. Through these portrayals, the film stands with the subaltern groups of society against the dominant cultural aspects that oppress them. Therefore, the film shows the characteristics of the Third Cinema.

Ethnic identities

Although *The Forsaken Land* is counted as an anti-war film that discusses the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, unlike *This Is My Moon* it does not portray any character belonging to the Tamil ethnic community. At the end of the film, a radio announcer's voiceover announces some Tamil names as they are reported missing. Except for those names, all the characters depicted in the film belong to the Sinhalese ethnicity. One can argue that the filmmaker underrepresents the Tamil community, a main stakeholder of the war. However, one can also claim that the absence of the Tamil community brings both the Sinhalese and Tamil communities under a common denominator (Jayasena 2010) - victims and criticises the militarisation of both the government and the LTTE (Jayasena 2012).

Like Asoka Handagama, Vimukthi Jayasundara, follows similar framing to represent poor, uneducated/less educated, underprivileged communities in war-affected rural areas. The film shows villagers' sexual behaviours where no affection is involved. The village or its residents depicted in the film do not show any material or spiritual development: in fact, the village looks abandoned. They look and behave as if depressed. It appears that this framing of marginalised people supports the Orientalising process internationally and the Re-Orientalising process locally as it is done by *This is My Moon*. The film also portrays villagers' lives in war-affected areas as lost in a stagnated, forsaken land and do not know how to come out of that social system. One can argue that this depiction is similar to the gendered Western gaze of colonial countries in which poor, feminine Orientals are waiting for strong masculine Occidentals to come and save them from their pathetic condition (Shohat 1991). However, one can also argue that this social stagnation and forsakenness is the ground reality experienced by the people in war-affected areas.

Religious identities

The film represents the director's viewpoint of religion through the dialogue. A clash between the characters creates a discussion about religious beliefs and devotion. For example, the following conversation between Latha and Anura's sister reveals the nature of their spirituality.

> Anura's sister: [Speaks to Anura] "You do not worry about me. How many unmarried women are out there? How nice if you can have a child. There were teaching vacancies advertised in last week's Gazette. I applied for that. If I get the appointment, I will go somewhere far away. Then I can make use of my education. You too will have a relief from me."

> Latha: [Sarcastically] "Sister has attained the state of supremacy. In a moment, she will attain the supreme state of Buddha! Be careful."

> Anura's sister: [in anger] "Of course I am not going to bother anybody! I have many merits. No way am I going to die in this desert where there is no temple or a church. If they died, people would get reborn as frogs and reptiles."

This conversation indicates that Latha does not take the religion seriously, but Anura's sister believes in Buddhist teachings such as the concept of merits and rebirth. Anura's sister's dialogue reminds us of the Marxist view of religion as a medium of temporary escapism from oppression which is an illusion. Marx and Engels, in their book on religion, state that "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature … It is the *opium* of the people … The abolition of religion as the *illusory* happiness of the people is required for their real happiness" (Marx & Engels 2012, p. 42). Contrary to her dialogue, Anura's sister

commits suicide in the same village. Through this portrayal, the filmmaker reinforces the Marxist view of religion, proving that it is no help for the oppressed people in these remote villages.

A similar conversation occurs between the soldier and Anura that depicts their belief in religion. They have this conversation while smoking marijuana, which is symbolic.

> The soldier: "If I could go to work in Jaffna, I could have travelled at least by helicopter. You do not know the fun of it. When you smoke a joint and travel by a helicopter, it is like having sex with God."
> Anura: "Do not say filth about God."
> The soldier: "I did not say filth. I am a devotee of Buddha and God. I go to Katharagama every year."
> Anura: "Then what rubbish are you talking about?"
> The soldier: "I said the fun of flying. It is like sleeping with God. It is very comfortable."

This conversation reveals the devotion Anura has towards religion and the soldier's careless attitude. Depicting the characters smoking marijuana throughout the conversation also indicates the Marxist view of religion as like opium, which misleads the public from real social problems and their real suffering (George et al. 1975). This analysis of the representations of religious identities reveals that *The Forsaken Land* conveys the Marxist view of religion and, therefore, shows Third Cinema characteristics. The filmmaker's communist political background he learnt from his father may have influenced this point of view.

The war

Compared to *This Is My Moon* and *Shades of Ash*, *The Forsaken Land*'s portrayal of ethnic conflict and war is less apparent. However, one can argue that war is not all military encounters (De Mel (2007). Thus, the film seems to portray a general picture of state oppression through militarisation in any rebellion against the state, which Sri Lanka experienced during 1971 and 1988/89 as communist youth uprisings and from 1983–2009 as ethnic conflict. The director's childhood memories due to his father's affiliation to the communist group Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna must have influenced him to bring a general picture of state suppression to his film instead of being specific about the ethnic conflict. As Jayasundara mentioned in his interview,

> Whoever took up arms against the government was and would be hunted by the government. The best example of this is the [Southern Province originated and Sinhalese-youth dominated] rebel movement and insurrections of the JVP that occurred in 1971 and 1989 ... They [the government] adopted the same measures against the [Tamil dominated, and Northern and Eastern Province originated] LTTE ... Once every 20 years, a youth uprising

appeared to have occurred because governments do not consider finding solutions to the root causes of these youth uprisings [such as youth unemployment and social inequality]. (Jayasundara 2019, 14th March)

Thus, the film conveys a broader picture of state suppression through militarisation exercised over the marginalised groups of the Sinhalese society, and, consequently, it shows characteristics of the Third Cinema: critical commitment and historicity. The film shows the critical commitment by critically portraying the government's militarisation and oppression over the common people. The film fulfils the historicity of Third Cinema by portraying the militarised Sri Lanka and its experiences of people during the communist youth uprisings and the ethnic conflict.

The film *Forsaken Land* discusses the mindset of people in a society during a cease-fire period. The film depicts that the social stagnation during such a period can create a state of uncertainty of the future and cultivate a stressful mentality. No scene of the battlefield is included in the film. The only indication of the specific time is when Anura's sister brings a radio home and says, "We are like frogs in the well. There is no way to know if the war starts again." This statement indicates that the war is not over yet, but it is not in action. Several signs symbolise the engagement of the state armed forces in the story. The military personnel uniforms, the visuals and sounds of army vehicles such as jeeps, trucks and supersonic jets and the guns symbolise the military involvement of the area. Other than that, all incidents and characters reveal the impact of social stagnation and monotony resulting from a conflict situation, be it a war or a civil conflict, which can be witnessed in any society, either in Sri Lanka or any other country in the world.

The film depicts war as the reason for the stagnation of society, resulting in mental stress among people. The director uses several signs to express his idea. One is showing an armoured tank (Figure 18) three times in the film, which signifies the involvement of war in people's lives. Their day starts with the feeling of uncertainty, whether or not the fighting will begin again the very next day. Two army trucks can be seen driving back and forth in one scene, neither giving way to the other. This scene signifies the political face of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, where the two sides, LTTE and the government, keep fighting with each other instead of finding a solution to terminate the conflict. Similarly, in his research, Jayasena (2012) argues that *The Forsaken Land* criticises both the Sri Lankan government's and the Tamil militants' authoritarian, military rule – rather than attacking the Sri Lankan state institutions, as the way the Sinhala nationalists interpret it.

Figure 18: Armoured tank signifies the involvement of war in people's lives.

The film fulfils historicity by portraying people's experiences in militarised Sri Lanka, which can be applied to political turmoils that took place in history. The soldier's abduction, torture and killing reminds us of similar phenomena during the 1988/89 youth riots and the war between LTTE and the government (Public Interest Advocacy Centre 2019). The radio announcement about the missing people at the end of the film also reminds us of similar incidents. Thus, compared to *This Is My Moon*, *The Forsaken Land* appears to focus on state suppression that can occur at any point the state power is challenged, instead of focusing on the war based on ethnic conflict.

The government and bureaucracy

The film fulfils critical commitment by portraying the social system as militarised, and the powerless lower-ranked soldiers suffering due to the inequality in the bureaucratic hierarchy. Anura and the old man are Home Guards. The film depicts the Home Guards as village men recruited by the government to guard their own villages during the war period in Sri Lanka who do not receive advanced training, equal salary and weapons like army soldiers. Therefore, they are depicted as lower in rank than the soldiers. In the film, they wear faded reddish-brown uniforms, symbolising that they have been using those uniforms for an extended period. The pinkish colour of the Home Guard uniform signifies femininity compared to the soldiers' masculine camouflage uniforms (Figure 19). Both the old man and Anura are sharing the same gun.

Figure 19: The pinkish colour of the Home Guard uniform signifies femininity compared to the soldiers' masculine camouflage uniforms.

The film uses several strategies to indicate the lack of power and suffering of the lower-ranked soldiers, such as the tone of voice, language and army officers' behaviour. Lower-ranked soldiers and Home Guards use the term 'sir' to address their superiors, and they use a lower tone of voice, whereas the superiors use a higher tone of voice and even filthy language to address the subordinates. For instance, when the soldier comes to meet Latha and gets caught by the army officers, the conversation between them is as follows:

> Officers: "Where were you? Is this how you do your duties?"
> Soldier: "I just went to the toilet, sir."
> Officers: "You were caught several times like this. Have you come to have sex, you
> bastard? Go away."

In the film's climax, a superior officer orders Anura to kill the person tied in the gunny bag. He commands Anura in a high voice. Even though Anura was reluctant to kill the person, he follows the order due to its forcefulness.

The film also criticises the military bureaucracy. The mistreatment by superiors of the subordinates is presented on several occasions. The soldiers bullying Anura in the truck, removing his clothes, and throwing him naked into the lake shows the inferiority and helplessness of Anura, being a Home Guard. The conversation between the soldier and Anura given below reveals how their superiors mistreat the subordinates and how it can lead to violence.

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Anura: "Then, where was the gun?"

The soldier: "Under the bed. Not under his bed but major's bed. The boy woke up at about six in the morning. The plan came to his mind. He went there, took the gun kept under the bed, shot and blasted the major's head."

Anura: "Then what did the others do?"

The soldier: "The others were also fed up with the major by then."

Anura: "The same thing will happen here at any moment."

This conversation also signifies the subordinates' uprising against the exploitative and repressive military authority, which communism encourages. In that sense, this film reinforces the teaching of communism.

The film portrays that the citizens' lives in a militarised society will be decided according to the military will. For instance, the sexual need of the soldier is controlled by the military. The soldier is tortured and killed by the military superiors for having sex during duty hours. According to the film, when the military rule is violated, rulers punish the subordinates using people from the same social strata. For instance, to kill the soldier, they use Anura, the soldier's friend. In the film, the bureaucracy of the military is represented as inhuman. Anura being bullied by the army soldiers, the soldier having a sexual relationship with his friend's wife in secret, and the soldier being tortured and killed by his own superiors reveal the merciless nature of the military.

In conclusion, Vimukthi Jayasundara's film *Forsaken Land* contains characteristics of Third Cinema such as cultural specificity, historicity and critical commitment. It shows cultural specificity by criticising the hypocritical conservative culture in Sri Lanka. The film also portrays characters that challenge unwarranted patriarchal social norms. The film fulfils historicity by depicting people's experiences in militarised Sri Lanka during the time of war and other political turmoil as well. The film promotes communist/Marxist ideologies against religion and state bureaucracy, showing the critical commitment of Third Cinema. *The Forsaken Land* does not explicitly talk about the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. Instead, it represents state oppression that can occur at any time the subordinates challenge the state power.

5.6. Representations of Culture and War in the Film *Sudu Kalu Saha Alu* (Shades of Ash)

Sudu Kalu Saha Alu (Shades of Ash)

Released in the year 2004

Language – Sinhalese

Director – Sudath Mahadivulwewa

Writers – Sudath Mahadivulwewa, Sarathchandra Gamlath

Producer – Krishan Deheragoda, Goteborg Film Fund

Main actors – Dilhani Ekanayaka, Nilupuli Jayawardena, Mahendra Perera, Sanath Gunathilaka, Wasantha Kotuwella, Jayalath Manorathna, Irangani Serasingha

Synopsis of *Shades of Ash*

At the beginning of the film, a group of people arrive at a war-torn village. They are the refugees the government re-settles in their village after the war. The villagers have to live without basic facilities. For instance, since the village lake was poisoned during the war period, they have to depend on the water provided by the government using a bowser. The traditional village headman, Gambare, has become blind as a result of the war. His son in law, Ajith, an army soldier, deserts the army and returns to the village since he could not take leave. He finds his newly married wife, Komala, is sleeping with another man, Pema. Being angry and frustrated, he runs through the roads madly and meets with an accident. The vehicle that runs over him belongs to the army. Komala becomes a prostitute to look after her blind father, ill husband and Ukkuwa, the orphan child she adopts. After the revelation of her socially unacceptable profession, her father, Gambare, commits suicide. Komala, later being infected by a sexually transmitted decease, commits suicide as well.

There are several other characters in the film. They are Heen Eki, her father, her brother, the Village Administrative Officer (VAO), the school principal, the Buddhist monk, shop owner, bus driver, a little girl Ungi and an NGO officer from Colombo. Heen Eki is a young village girl who lives with her father and brother. Her father dies by drinking poisoned water from the village irrigation tank, and her brother, an army soldier, dies on the battlefield. At the end of the film, Heen Eki becomes a sex worker. The administrative officer of the village is a corrupted government servant. The school principal is a child abuser. The Buddhist monk is originally a thief who has escaped from prison. The NGO officer is a lady who arrives from Colombo to build a monument to the memory of dead villagers due to war.

The VAO in the film manipulates Pema to fulfil illegal tasks. Pema kills and threatens villagers on the VAO's command. The VAO sexually abuses Pema's mother and sister. As a result, Pema kills the VAO. In collaboration with the NGO lady and Buddhist priest, the newly appointed school principal sells relics of the temple. He establishes an economic monopoly in the village by tactically putting village

businesspeople in debt. Ungi, the small girl, is sent to the NGO lady's house as a servant and gets sexually abused by the NGO lady's husband.

Cultural values

The film positively portrays the village's traditional cultural values and depicts how the traditional village culture and way of living are disturbed by the war. Traditional cultural values such as unity, taking care of each other and respecting elders and clergy are depicted in the film. Compared to the other two films, *Shades of Ash* is less critical towards the backward traditional cultural norms such as patriarchy. Instead, it creates an image that expresses the village and its norms, beliefs and practices as ideal and what comes to the village from outside (the town) is destructive.

The character of Gambare, the traditional village headman, represents the traditional culture and the civilisation of the village that resists sudden changes. The war and the damage it does to the village shocks him. He is a blind man. His blindness is also a result of the war. He cannot see the change that has happened to the village but can sense the change and its danger. When he first enters into the village, he seeks the massive tree at the entrance with which he used to do the ritual of hanging a branch wishing the villagers' protection. The Home Guards at the checkpoint tell him that the checkpoint now surrounds the holy tree, and guns are hanged instead of branches. The Home Guards laugh at Gambare. Home Guards are portrayed as the agents of violence who laugh at the tradition and civilisation that supported nonviolent life. At the time, Gambare is shocked. He hugs the small girl Ungi and says, "Oh god! The guns have returned to our village." Gambare, as the most senior person in the village, might know of the previous rebellions in the country and the destruction they brought to the citizens. He might have sensed the possible danger that can arise in the future.

Gambare is depicted as the protector of the traditional culture. He senses the younger generation, the protectors of the tradition and civilisation of the village, are ruined due to war and industrialisation. He tells Ajith, his son-in-law, who later becomes mentally disabled due to an accident,

> You left our village and the lake. You went to town for a job. As a result, we lost our lake. You went to town, and we lost you too. If you had stayed and cultivated paddy, this would not have happened.

Being in charge of God's temple of the village, being the oldest person in the community, and living a peaceful and cultured life, Gambare wins the villagers' respect. Komala, the only daughter of Gambare, is drawn into prostitution since she has to look after her blind father, mentally disabled husband, and the orphan boy. When Gambare realises his daughter is involved in prostitution, he is shocked and hangs himself to death. Gambare's death signifies the end of the traditional culture and civilisation of the village.

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The filmmaker shows the positive values that villagers practise, such as being kind, taking care of others, helping each other at a time of necessity, and respecting elders and clergy. For instance, Komala is kind enough to adopt Ukkuwa, who is an orphan child. She helps to do the rituals at Ungi's puberty ceremony and do the almsgiving of Heen Eki's dead brother. The villagers donate water for Ungi's puberty ceremony, and they allow Gambare and the Buddhist monk to fetch water first. The filmmaker appreciates the good qualities of the ideal Sinhala culture but does not criticise the negative qualities, which I discuss in the next section.

Gender roles and sexual relationships

Shades of Ash, similar to the other two films, shows stereotypical patriarchal ideologies of gender roles. The film portrays women as sex objects whose only option is to sell their bodies for survival. Women are also depicted as the bearers of the honour of the family and tradition. The film depicts men as powerholders who exercise power over women. Unlike the other two films, this film does not overtly criticise or challenge the dominant patriarchal social norms.

According to the film, the sexuality of women is the only property they have to sell for their survival. For instance, both Komala and Heen Eki enter into prostitution as their way of living while the men in the film possess so many opportunities, such as soldiers, Home Guards, monks, principals, government officers, entrepreneurs, or bus drivers. One can argue that this portrayal indicates the lack of opportunities available for women or the subaltern in a war-ridden society. The film also depicts men as power holders over women. Women are represented as victims and weak subjects who need the protection of men. Once they lose the protection of men, they become helpless victims. For instance, Komala lives the life of a housewife when her husband is in good health. After he becomes disabled, she has to become a prostitute for the survival of her family. Heen Eki also faces a similar situation when she loses her father and brother. The bus driver was very protective of Ungi while she was in the room during the puberty period of her life. Ungi's father and the principal decide to send her to the NGO lady's house as a servant, where the NGO lady's husband abuses Ungi. Later, the NGO lady describes the incident as:

"Naughty girl, she put my innocent husband into trouble."

This dialogue shows that even women tend to conclude that other women are the guilty parties in such scenarios, and men are innocent in an abusive environment. The same thing can be seen in the relationship between Komala and Ajith. Ajith behaves as if Komala is fully responsible for the failure of their relationship, and Komala being a disloyal wife. The conversation between Komala and Ajith, after Komala gets caught having sex with Pema, shows that women choose to stay silent in an argument with men.

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Ajith: "You bitch! Couldn't you wait until I come back?"

Komala: "You made me your wife and stayed only two days. Then you left to go to work. A married woman cannot be without a man, you bastard!"

Ajith: "Why did you marry a soldier, Komala?" [He slaps Komala several times and then kisses her; Komala remains silent with no reaction.] "They did not grant me leave. I absconded to come and see you. Why did you marry a soldier?" [Ajith wraps Komala with the clothes he bought for her.] "I bought them for you."

The film depicts that men consider their honour resides in women's sexuality. When the sexual loyalty or purity of women is challenged, men get angry or disappointed. Ajith's reaction to Komala expresses this disappointment. The filmmaker keeps Komala silent when Ajith blames her. This scene creates a sense that makes audiences feel sorry about Ajith and judge Komala as guilty.

Shades of Ash represents women as bearers of the honour of the culture and its traditions. For instance, Komala, the daughter of the oldest person in the village, represents the village culture and tradition. After realising that Komala is engaging in prostitution, her father commits suicide because he expects her to maintain the family's honour as a chaste and respectable woman. He commits suicide out of the shame he faces as a father within the norms of that society. Due to the economic difficulties, she is compelled to engage in prostitution, which is unaccepted employment in village society, or most societies. The father's inability to be the traditional breadwinner of the family that leads to Komala taking up prostitution would have added to his shame, regret and suicide.

A common expectation and standard of behaviour found in most conservative and patriarchal societies considers women as carriers or holders of a family's honour and cultural traditions (Akhter 2015). A woman not following these rules is seen as having done so due to the weaknesses or failures of the men in their family. This situation, in turn, brings shame and blame to the men as well as women. In such situations, either the man or woman of the family commits suicide, or the family is killing the woman to preserve the honour, which is called honour killing (Gill 2006, Mortada 2010).

Pema killing the cart rider because he challenges his mother's loyalty and the VAO because he makes his sister pregnant are good examples of behaviour that confirm this ideology. The following conversations between Pema and the cart rider (Conversation 1) and Pema and the VAO (Conversation 2) reveal the same factor.

Conversation 1

The cart rider: "You prostitute your mother and run this village."

Pema: "You insulted my mother, you bastard!" [Pema chokes the cart rider to death in front of the VAO and the shop owner.]

Conversation 2

Pema: [In anger] "I am Pema, you bastard, you slept with my mother, and now you made my sister pregnant."

VAO: "Pema, you are talking as if you do not know me. Just as I did my duty by your mother, I will do my duty by your sister. There are no two ways about it."

Pema: [Grabs VAO from his collar] "Did I carry you on my back, and clean cattle shit, so that you could screw my sister?"

VAO: "Am I the only one, you fool? In this village, who has not slept with your sister?"

Pema: "What did you say, you bastard?" [He grabs the billhook from the monk's hand and comes to the VAO. The VAO becomes scared.]

VAO: "See Pema, I have done everything for you. See, this is your appointment letter to the army." [He shows the letter in his pocket; Pema grabs the letter from the VAO and cuts the VAO with the billhook until he dies.]

Both these incidents also reinforce the idea that the men in conservative patriarchal society believe women are the bearers of their honour. When a woman's character (which is always bound with her sexuality) is challenged, men react violently. Simultaneously, the conversation also shows that Pema's privileges have all come through offering his mother's and sister's bodies as sex objects to the VAO. Although this social truth is visible in the film, portraying Pema accepting the job as an army soldier indicates that the film does not challenge the existing system but encourages it.

A similar expression is there in the portrayal of the driver employing Heen Eki in prostitution after the suicide of Komala. Women in war-affected areas engage in many other professions such as garment factory workers, soldiers, police officers, farmers and entrepreneurs running small businesses. However, the filmmaker framed the female characters only as sex workers and sex objects. For instance, Komala becomes a prostitute with the bus driver's help, agreeing that she would pay a commission from her earning to the bus driver. When she is infected with an STD, she commits suicide. Then Heen Eki becomes a sex worker with the help of the same bus driver. The film shows that the village women

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embrace the system without challenging it. The only female character created out of this frame is the NGO officer, but the filmmaker has negatively presented her as a villain who economically exploits the very same disadvantaged and marginalised villagers she is supposed to serve and protect, while taking their children to do labour work. Thus, *Shades of Ash* does not challenge the exploitative gender norms of the patriarchal system but depicts characters that adjust to the system.

Ethnic identities

Similar to *The Forsaken Land, Shades of Ash* portrays only the Sinhalese ethnic community. No Tamil or Muslim representation can be seen in the film. Just like the other two films, this film also frames the Sinhalese villagers in war-affected remote areas as a feminine, uncivilised 'other' who suffer from the aftermath of the war, poverty, lack of education and unemployment and who are unable to handle the problems that come their way. One can argue that this framing supports the Orientalising process in its international reception and the allegations of the Sinhalese nationalists against the film. However, one can also claim that this framing represents the ground reality of war-torn areas in Sri Lanka, which is also the filmmaker's experience, as he revealed in his interview.

The film portrays a village shattered by the war in which ruins of houses, school and temple are the only surviving structures. The spirituality of the villagers is also shattered, just like their material surroundings. Adultery, child abuse, prostitution, child labour, corruption, threats and murders take place in the village, showing the villagers' spiritual destruction. The men, women and children in the film are suffering from hunger. They wear ragged, dirty clothes. In one scene, Ukkuwa, the child, tells Komala he is hungry, and the principal asks him to come to his room promising a plate of rice and curry, and then the principal abuses him. According to the film, villagers with power and money survive within the system while the innocent villagers become the victims. Most of the victims are those who are aged, children and women.

The analysis demonstrates that the film shows the existing social system's reality, the tragedy of war, strengthening the anti-propaganda campaign of the anti-war filmmakers. However, one can also claim that the film does not motivate people to stand against the existing system and change it compared to the other two films. Instead, the film creates pity in audiences' (in the city) minds towards the people in war-affected areas. Thus, *Shades of Ash* creates "secret and deep-seated self-loathing" (Wayne 2001, p. 16) instead of creating a revolutionary consciousness.

Religious identities

Unlike Handagama did in his film *This Is My Moon,* Mahadivulwewa does not use the Buddhist monk's character to criticise the pro-war Buddhist wing. Instead, the monk's character and the other religious symbols signify the destruction of the villagers' spirituality. Like the other two films, this film exhibits the Marxist view of religion – the villagers use religious practices to escape from social reality. However, religious practices and beliefs do not help people affected by the war driven by capitalist motives.

The film challenges the traditional villagers' belief system, especially their faith in God and the supernatural. The film connects these concepts to its central theme, the war and the destruction of the social system. The headless, broken statue of God (Figure 20) signifies the damaged spirituality. The Buddhist temple comes under the control of a criminal who escaped from jail. He removes the uniform given by the prison and wears a robe. This scene also signifies that when the war damages the normal flow of a country, even the religious institutions can get into the hands of evil. Later in the film, showing the villagers worship this monk pretender and offering him food, the filmmaker sarcastically portrays the blind belief of the villagers.

Figure 20: The headless, broken statue of God.

Villagers in the film keep trust in God and supernatural powers for their protection, which they also expect from the military forces or the government. However, both the supernatural and the government security forces cannot provide the necessary protection to the villagers of these war-torn areas. For instance, Ungi, before she goes to Colombo as a servant in an NGO lady's house, meets Ukkuwa. She gives him her necklace, called a "lucky charm", which villagers believe may protect their children. She tells Ukkuwa that both the lucky charm and the 330 million gods (a belief among the Sinhalese Buddhist community that there are 330 million gods to protect them) will protect Ukkuwa. However, Ukkuwa stepped on a landmine and lost his leg. No god, no lucky charm, or no military could save Ukkuwa or other villagers from the war and its aftermath. Ungi gets abused by the NGO lady's husband; Gambare kills himself; Komala kills herself after being infected by an STD; Heen Eki was pushed into prostitution for her survival; and the government officer gets killed by Pema. Picturing these tragic incidents, the director challenges the belief in God and the supernatural and fulfils the cultural specificity of Third Cinema by criticising the traditional religious beliefs and practices of villagers that keep them captured within the exploitative social system.

The war

Shades of Ash, just like the other two films discussed earlier, plays the anti-propaganda role by criticising the war agenda of the government. By doing so, it fulfils two functions of Third Cinema: politicisation and critical commitment. The film criticises the government's fake efforts and their claims that they resolved the ethnic conflict. The film shows that the government's actual intention is to continue it. *Shades of Ash* awakes the politicised consciousness of people regarding the exploitative nature of the war and the capitalist system that runs the war for its profit.

The film sarcastically depicts the government's war agenda and that they have no intention to solve the ethnic problem. The filmmaker mocks the government by inserting a news report at the beginning of the film, in which the radio announcer reports that the government has organised a function in Colombo, the commercial capital of Sri Lanka (which is far away from war-affected areas), to release 100,000 balloons with anti-war slogans written on them and conduct a musical show afterwards, expecting peace. This news report shows the government's ignorance of the real cause of the ethnic conflict and its failure to do the right thing to solve the issue.

The film also shows the state apparatus and its rule-of-law are null and void in a war-torn country. For instance, at the beginning of the film, one Home Guard is smoking at the village checkpoint. When army trucks enter the village with the displaced villagers, this Home Guard throws the cigarette he was smoking, which drops onto the Establishment Codes of Sri Lanka document and burns the document (Figure 21). This incident is symbolic. The document, establishment codes of Sri Lanka, signifies the general law of the country. The Home Guard's cigarette burns the document, symbolising that the

general law is not valid in a war-torn, remote village. Instead, the law of the jungle will take its place. Incidents later in the film prove this fact.
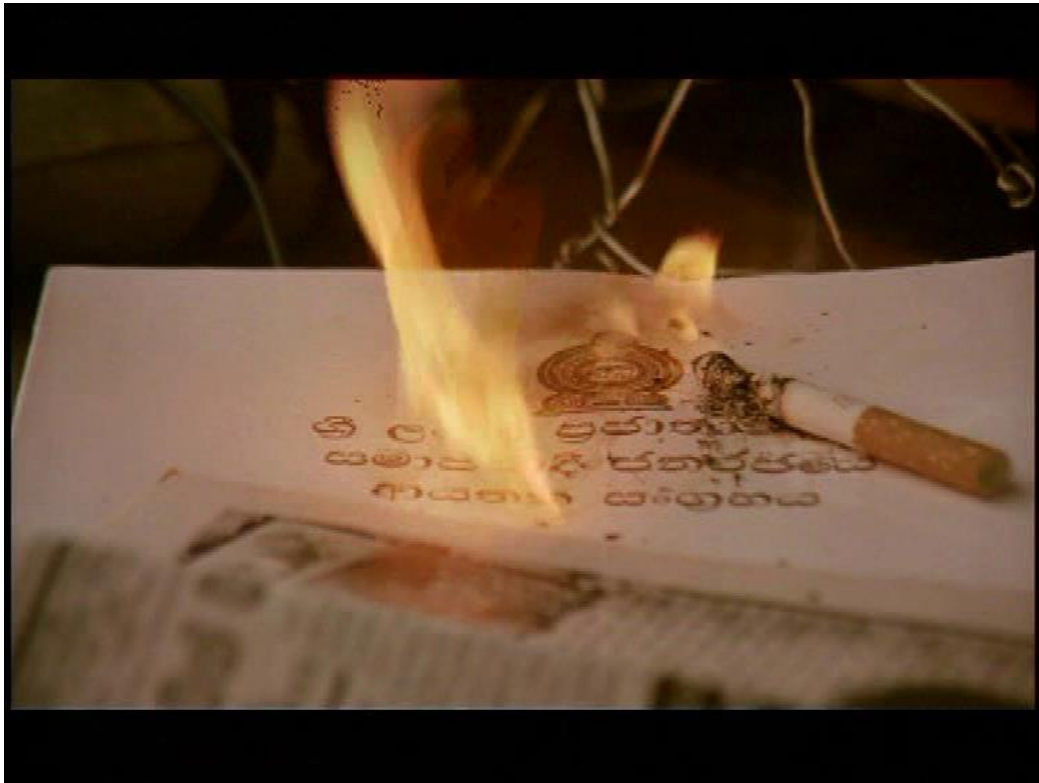
Figure 21: Home Guard's cigarette burns the Establishment Codes of Sri Lanka document.

The film portrays that the government intends to continue the war rather than finishing it. According to the film, the government uses 'nationalism' and 'independence' to mislead the citizens emotionally. This effort of the ruling elite is criticised in the film using Ajith's character. Mentally-affected Ajith mutters alone, saying, "territorial integrity... unitary state... bullshit..." The film also demonstrates the idea that soldiers would be the happiest people to see a world without wars. Ajith, seeing Heen Eki's brother in uniform, asks him,

> Why are you in uniform? Don't you know? The war is over. [The soldier laughs] You
> laughed. You do not believe me. Look behind you. There is an abandoned army tank.
> [He laughs madly] The war is over.

On the other hand, the film also reveals how militarisation can affect people's intimate relationships and lives in military service and their family members. Newly-wedded Ajith had to leave his wife to join the army. The higher authority refuses to grant him leave. When Komala justifies herself sleeping with another man, Ajith asks her, "Why did you marry a soldier?"

Shades of Ash also indicates the exploitative nature of the war and its controlling capitalist system. According to the film, by damaging the agricultural system, economy, education, spirituality and

personal lives of the people, the war damages the village's traditional socio-economic system. For instance, a poisoned lake, dead animals and people signify the demise of the traditional agrarian society of the village. As shown in the film, the only available job for the young men in the village is joining the military. The houses, school, temple and all the other infrastructure facilities are damaged due to war. Villagers are suffering from poverty. Poverty compels the villagers to send their children away as child labourers. Women are pushed into prostitution and become victims of sexually transmitted diseases. Bombing and gun-firing disturb people's day-to-day life.

In conflicts such as war, children and women are highly victimised, as depicted in the film. Ukkuwa, a small orphan boy, happens to find a bullet. He plays with it. Since the village school is severely damaged, no education is offered. The principal of the school sexually abuses Ukkuwa in exchange for a plate of rice and curry. Ukkuwa lost his leg by stepping on a landmine. The small girl Ungi loses her mother due to war. She is being sent to Colombo as a servant girl and gets sexually abused by the house owner. This destruction leads outsiders to spread their power over the villagers. The outsiders could be the government bureaucracy or Non-Governmental Organisations. These occurrences indicate that the capitalist rulers have created an environment in these remote areas that left people no other choice than to live with the consequences of war while the so-called rulers live an entirely different life in the city centres. The NGO lady's character is a perfect example of that.

The NGO lady represents the high-class Sinhala Buddhists who possess the political power of the country. She carries a Sinhala Buddhist name, Mahamaya Jayawardhana, and she wears traditional Sinhala attire, but she holds a capitalist, imperialist mentality. The film also reveals the influence of capitalism on traditional remote villages in war-torn Sri Lanka. Characters such as the school principal and the bus driver act as agents of capitalism. The NGO lady comes to the village, uses her money, and puts the poor village entrepreneurs in debt with the help of the principal and robs their property and businesses tactically. The film depicts the priest in the Buddhist temple, who was originally a thief, selling the antiques of the temple to the NGO lady with the principal's help. The driver acts as the middleman in providing village girls to the town for prostitution.

Thus, this film represents war and the exploitative and repressive political mechanism behind it. It also portrays the exploitation of commoners in war-affected areas. By doing so, the film fulfils the characteristics of politicisation and critical commitment of Third Cinema.

The government and bureaucracy

This film acts as an anti-propaganda model by criticising the government bureaucracy. Unlike the other two films, it offers a critical portrayal of bureaucracy connected to the war and the whole bureaucratic system in Sri Lanka. At the beginning of the film, a newsreader reports about displaced people's

resettlement in their abandoned villages. The reason for abandonment, according to the newsreader report, is "the violence of extremists". Later, the film criticises this reading of the government. The film shows that the violence against innocent villagers does not come only from Tamil extremists but also from the bureaucracy and the socio-economical system cultivated by the governing system. In that sense, again, the film fulfils the critical commitment of Third Cinema.

The film criticises the irresponsibility and carelessness of the government about its citizens. For example, the newsreader reports:

> The government is making efforts to strengthen civil society, but the villagers must also ensure their own security.

The primary responsibility of a government is to provide security to its citizens. The film indicates that the government's real purpose is to re-settle the villagers to display the strength of the government to its enemy. Ignorance of military forces and lack of accountability towards public security are also criticised in the film. For instance, when a thief broke into Heen Eki's house, she calls for help. The soldiers at the checkpoint listen to a radio song at a high volume, ignoring Heen Eki's scream. The government builds electric fences at the village border and places landmines along the fences on the condition that the landmines will be removed and the electricity of the fences will be disconnected every morning. A small boy called Ukkuwa loses his leg by stepping on a landmine, which the military forces missed removing. At the end of the film, Ajith (who is mentally ill) enters the checkpoint where he finds both the guards are fast asleep. He takes an unattended gun kept on a desk, and points the gun at the soldiers and plays with them. These incidents picture the government's irresponsibility and the low value given to the lives of innocent civilians.

The film symbolically depicts the nature of hegemony, explained by Gramsci (1968). According to him, hegemony is temporary, which depends on social power. Hegemony has to be re-won because the counter-hegemonic block always challenges it (Gramsci, cited in Barker 2003, p. 82). This idea of Gramsci is portrayed in the film using a puppet as the symbol of hegemony (Figure 22). For instance, the army officer who enters the village with the displaced villagers brings a wooden puppet. This puppet is passed between different characters several times throughout the film. First, the army officer gives the puppet to the government administrative officer in charge of the village (VAO). Second, it is snatched by the school principal from the VAO. Finally, Pema, a young village man who becomes a Home Guard, snatches the puppet from the school principal. The puppet is a symbol of power that is officially given to the government-appointed VAO. However, the power does not stay with him since the entire system is corrupted. First, it was with the VAO. Second, it goes to the school principal, who represents education. Finally, it ends up in the hands of a Home Guard who later becomes an army soldier. He is a representation of militarisation.

Figure 22: Puppet as the symbol of hegemony

The film criticises the bureaucratic system of the government. The VAO, who is a crippled man (Figure 23), represents the administrative bureaucracy of the government. His physical incapacity is a symbol of the crippled nature of the bureaucracy. The VAO uses his power to exploit villagers' resources. He keeps Pema, a member of the same lower-middle-class, as his guard and uses him to suppress the fellow villagers and get revenge against the people who go against him. The VAO is supposed to ensure law and order and report to the responsible higher authorities of any violations by the villagers. However, Pema kills a person in front of the VAO and with his support. He sexually exploits Pema's mother and sister. His character in the film criticises the state bureaucracy. For instance, the following statement of the VAO to Pema reveals the corrupted bureaucratic system:

> Remember this well. You got this job not because you are qualified. I dropped many other names to get yours on the list. They will send out a petition against me complaining that I gave an appointment to my cowherd. Let them ... as if I care! Keep this in mind. If you want to get ahead, you must move with prominent people. You looked after my cattle, cleaned their shit, you took me everywhere on your bicycle, now all that has paid off.

This dialogue shows how government officers breach government employment recruitment procedures for personal benefit.

Figure 23: Crippled VAO

On the other hand, the film portrays the political interference in the government administrative service. For instance, the principal is a government servant who receives a punishment transfer to this small village school as an act of political revenge. The principal is expected to develop the welfare of the villagers using his intelligence and education. However, his talents cannot be used to develop the village school within this corrupted and destroyed social system. As a result, he uses his talent to establish an economic monopoly in the village with the NGO lady's help. His character depicts how the skills of government servants are wasted and misused for the destruction of society. At one time, the NGO lady asks the principal to find an assistant to look after the shop if he is busy. Then, the principal replies,

> It is not necessary. I am here full-time, except for one day a month when I have to go to town to collect my salary from the education office. On that day, I ask him [the shopkeeper] to be here. As if there is a school to do any teaching.

The principal takes his salary but does not fulfil his duties. Instead, he does work for his own benefit. This depicts how government funds are wasted.

The film also pinpoints how militarisation compels village youth to engage in anti-social activities with the power of their uniforms. According to the film, this happens because the government bureaucracy has brainwashed these youth for their own gain. For instance, the VAO tells Pema that his uniform and the gun are powerful after being recruited as a Home Guard. He orders Pema to threaten the enemies of the VAO. Pema goes to the principal, who is the VAO's main enemy and asks for a cigarette. When the principal requests the payment for the cigarette, Pema refuses and says he used to pay for things before he wore the uniform, but now he does not pay anymore. Likewise, *Shades of Ash* is critical towards the government bureaucracy and its misdeeds. By portraying those misdeeds, the film awakens the politicised consciousness of the audiences.

In conclusion, the film approves of traditional cultural values such as unity, taking care of each other and respecting elders and clergy. However, it is less critical towards the backward traditional cultural norms that create gender inequality. The film shows stereotypical patriarchal gender identities and ideologies. By framing the rural Sinhalese community as feminine and uncivilised, the film supports Orientalising process in its international reception. However, it exhibits characteristics of Third Cinema, such as politicisation and critical commitment in representing religious beliefs and practices of people, war and state bureaucracy. The film exhibits the Marxist view of religion and challenges the traditional belief in God and the supernatural. Overall, the film acts as an anti-propaganda model by representing the exploitative nature of war and criticising the misdeeds of state bureaucracy and the exploitative nature of the capitalist system.

5.6. Conclusion

It has been shown that the selected three films, *This Is My Moon*, *The Forsaken Land and Shades of Ash*, display significant characteristics of Third Cinema films such as cultural specificity, critical commitment, historicity, and politicisation.

The three films criticise patriarchal ideologies. *This Is My Moon* and *The Forsaken Land* criticise and challenge the repressive patriarchal social norms, such as marriage and virginity, and they openly discuss the sexual needs and feelings of women, fulfilling the cultural specificity of Third Cinema. Compared to these two films, *Shades of Ash* is less critical towards the patriarchal social norms. Instead of challenging them, the filmmaker shows how the characters go with the flow of existing gender norms. Depicting women's bodies through a male gaze raises questions of female objectification. However, this female objectification seems to signify the subjugation of women in a patriarchal society and war-affected areas.

The three films significantly show critical commitment, historicity, and politicisation in representations of religion, war and the state bureaucracy. *The Forsaken Land* and *Shades of Ash* convey the Marxist view of religious beliefs and practices of people. *This Is My Moon* critically discusses the nature of the pro-war nationalist Buddhist institution in Sri Lanka. All three films are critical of the government's war agenda and capitalist social system. They convey the suppressive and exploitative nature of the state bureaucracy in war and almost every event in ordinary citizens' lives working as an anti-propaganda. *This Is My Moon* and *The Forsaken Land* fulfils historicity by portraying the historical background of the ethnic conflict and people's experiences during the 1988/89 youth rebellion symbolically. Three films also depict the destruction war caused on people's lives. However, the framing of underprivileged, low-class rural communities as violent, sexually desperate and helpless, supports the Orientalising process in its international reception and the Re-Orientalising process at home.

Based on the above findings, I claim that these three films successfully create a critical view about the ruling elite and the impact of the ethnic conflict of Sri Lanka, recalling the memory of the ethnic conflict and the state suppression occurring in different instances of history. They awake the political consciousness of the audiences regarding the exploitative and destructive nature of war and capitalism, and work as an anti-propaganda model of war depicting the political background of war and its negative impact on marginalised people's lives. Thus, they show characteristics of Third Cinema, such as politicisation, critical commitment, historicity, and cultural specificity.

CHAPTER SIX

THIRD CINEMA AND ANTI-WAR FILMS IN SRI LANKA: AUDIENCE INTERPRETATIONS OF THE REPRESENTATIONS OF WAR

Chapter Index

6.1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on different audiences' interpretations of the war and its leadership (the state bureaucracy) depicted in the selected films. It also examines the possible impact of the selected anti-war films on audiences due to two reasons. First, these films are war-themed, were released during the war period, and were subjected to indirect state suppression of their distribution and exhibition. The selected three films, *Shades of Ash*, *This Is My Moon* and *The Forsaken Land,* were targets of hostile and abusive criticism by nationalistic opinion leaders for their representations of war, government soldiers and their family members (Weerasekara 2005, Kodithuwakku 2005). As stated in Chapter Eight, the audience members criticised these films for their negative representations of the Buddhist clerical community and the Sinhalese ethnic community, who are major stakeholders of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka.

Second, films have been seen as an efficient propaganda tool (Paris 2007) throughout their history and continue to be seen this way. This nature of films was seen even in mid-2020 during the controversies that led to the removal of films such as *Gone With the Wind* (Fleming 1939) from streaming services such as HBO Max (BBC News 2020) during the 'Black Lives Matter' protests worldwide. The Oscar-

winning film is seen today as racist due to its representations of black Americans and hence giving a distorted view of the realities and times in which it is set for future generations of audiences. Therefore, this chapter examines how the selected anti-war films may have contributed to shaping audiences' perceptions about the disaster of war.

The investigation used data gathered from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Interviews were conducted with an intellectual audience consisting of university academics and film reviewers. The opinions of the academics and film reviewers were discussed together comparatively because, on the one hand, they were counted as one group since, in Sri Lanka, both are formally educated in media literacy and film texts and play the role of opinion leaders. However, on the other hand, their opinions needed to be examined comparatively since the academics are accepted to be objective in analysing a film text and political ideologies, while monetary benefits may influence the film reviewers. The opinions of the interviewees and focus group participants were analysed using thematic analysis. Similar opinions were classified under common themes embedded in them. Later the themes were listed from the most mentioned theme to the least mentioned theme based on the number of participants or interviewees who expressed opinions under those themes.

In this chapter, the Theory of Third Cinema was used as theoretical guidance. Theory of Third Cinema was introduced by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino (1970) and later adapted and developed by Mike Wayne (2001). According to Solanas and Getino (1970), Third Cinema is "enmeshed with revolutionary socialist politics" (McNamara 2011, p. 79). For them, the focus of Third Cinema is not merely the film's radical potential or its capacity to explore socialist ideas but the ability to be revolutionary (McNamara 2011, p. 79).

Solanas and Getino introduced Third Cinema as an alternative to the Second Cinema – the Author's Cinema, Artistic Cinema or Cinema Novo (Solanas & Getino 2014, p. 238) that undermine the bourgeois conventions. The Second Cinema arose as an alternative to the First Cinema – a bourgeois, commercial cinema (McNamara 2011, p. 79) (see theoretical frameworks in Chapter Two for a detailed discussion of the First, Second and Third Cinemas). This explanation of First, Second and Third Cinema is applied to the Sri Lankan war films. We can see pro-war films that glorify the war and its heroes, the government and the military as the First Cinema; films that portray the negative impact of war on people but not necessarily criticise or be neutral towards the leadership of the war as the Second Cinema; and the films that are primarily critical about the war and its leadership as the Third Cinema.

Wayne (2001), in his book *Political films: The Dialectics of Third Cinema*, states that "all films are political, but films are not all political in the same way" (2001, p. 1). As he defines, a political film addresses "unequal access to and distribution of material and cultural resources, and the hierarchies of legitimacy and status accorded to those differentials" (Wayne 2001, p. 1). Thus, he explains that a film can be an example of a revolutionary film. Wayne identifies four characteristics of a revolutionary film:

historicity (authentic representations of history), politicisation (making the spectators politically conscious about their oppression and exploitation), critical commitment (committed to the aims and ideals of revolution and being critical of the state propaganda), and cultural specificity (investigates the progressive and regressive aspects of a culture).

This chapter analyses the audience's point of view to see how effectively the politicisation and critical commitment of the selected films (as discussed in the previous chapter) have impacted their audiences. Here, I examined whether the selected three films – *Shades of Ash, This Is My Moon and The Forsaken Land* – are politicising audiences' consciences, being critical of the propaganda and convincing people against it. By doing so, I argue that these filmmakers use their artistic capacity to address the audience's conscience regarding the disaster of war. I also claim that the criticism of the government's war agenda and representations of state bureaucracy compelled the government to suppress the films.

6.2. Representations of the War: Opinions of Film Reviewers and University Academics

This study examines the viewpoints of the intellectual audience consisting of academics and film reviewers. The selected academics teach and research film studies in the Sri Lankan state universities, and the film reviewers are the journalists who write reviews to the leading newspapers and web pages. It is important to note that one of the film reviewers was a member of the PPB when these films were in post-production. The opinion categories of the academics and film reviewers are that the films portray negative impacts of war, the role of government and state bureaucracy in the war, and the dominant mechanism behind the war, such as hidden agendas and the role of NGOs during the war period, and under-representation of war.

6.2.1. Representations of the impacts of war

According to interviewees' responses from the intellectual audience, selected anti-war films successfully convey the impacts of war. They interpreted these films as taking the victims' side – the civilians who suffer due to war.

> Interviewee 1 (Film reviewer): Filmmakers try to look at the situation neutrally, and they are more inclined towards the victims of war.

> Interviewee 2 (Film reviewer): The two groups – the one who holds power tries to maintain it, and the other, who does not (currently) have power tries to seize it – use war as the mechanism of achieving and maintaining control. The public, who are already in chaos due to economic, political and cultural inequalities, become the victims of this power struggle. We can see this power struggle (depicted) in these films.

> Interviewee 4 (Academic): These films, in general, discuss issues of war and the lives of people affected by that. They portray what happens to soldiers' wives when they go to the

battlefield, what villagers could do for them, how value is added to men's lives when they become soldiers. During the war period, occupations in the military added more value to men in society because of the power and privileges they possess.

The interviewees described how these films portray the exploitation of marginalised or poor citizens in the Sri Lankan war context. As they explained, the ruling class celebrates the war, promoting the soldiers as war heroes. These soldiers are young men drawn mostly from poor, remote villages. The government disregards the fact that the families of the so-called 'war heroes' suffer from poverty and many physical and psychological difficulties. The ruling class is indifferent to the environment of poverty and high levels of unemployment existing in those remote villages, leading to young village men having no other option except to join the armed forces. However, being a soldier adds socio-economic value to them and their families. It provides them with a social status, economic privileges and security such as a fixed salary, and monetary compensation to their dependents if killed in action.

Interviewees 2 and 7 explained how the films portray the enhanced male-dominated sexual politics and dire economic situations that result from the side-effects of war and how villagers – mostly women and children – become the victims of sexual exploitation.

> Interviewee 2 (Film reviewer): It is a well-known fact that women and children are the primary social group affected by war in any country. All three films depict how vulnerable women and children are during a civil-war period. Especially the loneliness of the women and their vulnerability are depicted in these films. This vulnerability can happen in two ways: first, when men are engaged in a war, the family of that man, his wife and children, is insecure. Second, the family has to face intense social, economic, and sexual pressure. All three films represent these issues.

> Interviewee 7 (Academic): These films talk about how war can affect people and their means of fulfilling needs. I have heard that both the soldiers and Tamil militants caused sexual harassment (as depicted in *This Is My Moon*) and other sex-related issues as depicted in *The Forsaken Land* film.

For instance, *This Is My Moon* and *Shades of Ash* portray women and children facing sexual harassment. *Shades of Ash* and *The Forsaken Land* depict the infidelity of women living alone. *Shades of Ash* also shows women engaging in prostitution for a living, and *This Is My Moon* portrays women using their body in exchange to save their lives as the only option available when caught up in a battlefield.

6.2.2. The role of government and state bureaucracy in the war

The second category of opinion refers to the portrayal of state bureaucracy in these films. Interviewees have identified the critical political ideology the filmmakers tried to convey through their films, indicating their resistance or opposition toward the government, its pro-war mentality, and its lack of engagement with the Tamil community to solve the ethnic conflict. Interviewees explained that the films are critical of the three institutions of the state: the government, cultural institutions and security forces. First, the films criticise the government by disclosing the failure and lack of interest of the existing corrupt political system to improve the living standards of people.

> Interviewee 1 (Film reviewer): The film criticises the war and bureaucracy, which underline its narrative. None of these filmmakers believes in the existing system. They were not supporting the (apparent) pro-war mentality that existed in broader society at that time.

> Interviewee 8 (Academic): The filmmakers criticise the ignorance of the government of public welfare. They portray the socio-economic issues of the public and how the bureaucracy mistreats the soldiers (at the same time). The directors question the government's duty to understand the problems people face and find suitable solutions. These films also depict how power holders in society misuse their power against the powerless.

Second, *This Is My Moon* and *Shades of Ash* criticise a cultural institution – nationalist Sinhala Buddhist monks. They influenced the policies and decisions made by the government throughout history, causing the ethnic conflict to become worse (DeVotta 2005), which Chapter Five and Chapter Seven discusses in detail.

> Interviewee 2 (Film reviewer): In a conflict, religion is a sensitive issue. It is easier to continue a war when you link religion to it. For instance, when the armed forces needed the workforce, they used ethnicity and religion as a tool to persuade people. These films creatively talk about that issue. They portray the role of religion and its representatives in a war.

> Interviewee 5 (Academic): The characters of Buddhist monks in two films represent the role popular Buddhist priests played during the war period.

Third, the films create an alternative or oppositional image of the security forces, in contrast to the popular, patriotic war hero image created by the government within the majority Sinhalese society.

> Interviewee 4 (Academic): During a war period, soldiers go to the battlefield, knowing that they might get killed because they know their death compensation may help their families.

Just as I have discussed in Chapter Five, the above comments also describe that the films portray the pathetic situation of soldiers rather than celebrating them as war heroes.

6.2.3. The dominant mechanism behind the war

One of the interviewees mentioned that *Shades of Ash* depicts hidden agendas of some Non-Governmental Organisations that created a critical discourse among nationalist groups in wartime Sri Lanka.

> Interviewee 6 (Academic): *Shades of Ash* depicts the character of an NGO lady. NGOs active in Sri Lanka during the war period faced many criticisms for their hidden agendas. This film also critically discusses the role some NGOs played in Sri Lanka during the war period. Some of these NGOs took advantage of the situation.

Accordingly, academics and film reviewers' opinions reveal that these films meet two goals of Third Cinema: to awaken a politicised consciousness in the spectator (Wayne 2001) or the audience member and not being a part of state propaganda. Handagama, Mahadivulwewa and Jayasundara are popular among intellectual audiences in Sri Lanka for making alternative films, which raises the question: what about the general audience? Being members of the oppressed and exploited groups, such as women, youth, minorities, the marginalised, less educated, rural/remote area located and lower socio-economic status groups, do they become conscious about their own state of oppression and exploitation? If art-house films such as these are not so popular with them, how can the directors reach these audiences rather than 'preach to the converted' such as higher educated, higher status, liberal-minded, city dwellers who watch their films and share their views and ideologies? Next, this chapter will discuss the opinions of focus group participants to answer the above questions.

6.3. Representations of the War: Opinions of Focus Group Participants

The categories of opinions of the focus group participants (general audience) were somewhat similar to those of the academics and film reviewers in the sample. However, the level of importance they gave to those opinions were different. The categories of opinions of the focus group participants were that the films under-represent the war (41%), represent impacts of the war (30%), had negative representations of security forces (23%), no depictions of war (4%), and showed the role of government and bureaucracy in the war (2%).

6.3.1. Representations of the war in *This Is My Moon*

As mentioned in Chapter Five, *This Is My Moon*'s director expressed that his intention of making this film was to convey the cruel and exploitative nature of war to the audience. As Chapter Five has already explained in detail, the film symbolically captures the historical background of the war, which began in 1983, illustrating the resulting real-life challenges faced by Sri Lankan society nearly two decades later.

De Mel (2007), in her article 'Figure of Speech: The Female Suicide Bomber, Censorship and the Literary-Cinematic Site', claims that *This Is My Moon* "explores the multi-layered political, moral and sexual economies of the armed conflict" (2007, p. 221). The most important question that needs an answer is whether the film effectively made the audience aware of the negative impact of war and if the film could raise the audience's consciousness about the suppression and exploitation carried out in the name of war.

Twelve participants were engaged in the focus group discussions. They were school leavers, university students, volunteer social workers, small-scale entrepreneurs and private sector employees within the 18 to 45 age group. Although they were interested in films and were regular filmgoers, except university students, the other participants were not adequately literate in arthouse films. Regarding the representations of war and the state bureaucracy, participants raised two main types of opinions. First, although *This Is My Moon* is an anti-war film, it under-represents the war. Second, the film portrays security forces, mostly soldiers, in negative roles.

Under-representation of the war

According to the participants, the film allocates minimal screen time to depict the war. For them, only a few minutes of the film represents war, with the rest being about poverty and other social issues existing in the villages. They also claimed that the scenes of the battlefront are not realistic.

> The first battle scene, young men joining the army, and soldiers' funerals, are the only indicators of the war (portrayed in the film) (female participant 4).

> Only the first few minutes show a war scene. After that, we cannot see any war in the film except the dead soldiers' bodies being brought to the village (female participant 5).

> After the arrival of the Tamil woman in the film, the war stops. The film allocates little screen time to depict war (male participant 2).

> We have seen and heard about war through other mass media. Compared to that, there is nothing in this film regarding war (male participant 5).

The above comments suggest two things. First, the participants assume representations of war means gunfights, bomb blasts, and mass injury and death. These participants may have watched Hollywood war films with gunfights, bomb blasts, gore and carnage. The arthouse films like these portray the impact of war which is uncommon in popular movies. Second, as commented by male participant 5, they have already seen such battlefield scenes (in the media) because, during the final stage of the Fourth Elam War, state mass media and some privately owned media channels telecast daily updates of military missions against the LTTE. Even after the end of the war in 2009, video recordings of some military missions were available on different social media channels. Similarly, after the 9/11 attack, the Bush

administration dominated media channels disseminating news about possible threats from Al Qaida to shape public opinion towards bringing the war on terror and anti-terrorist Acts into force (Nacos et al. 2007, Shaheen 2012).

Since emergency laws were in force at the time, the state and privately-owned media channels may have covered the war mainly from the government's point of view. Even though the victorious battlefront scenes were visible to the audience, the home front (areas where civilians lived) was not. Battlefront footage telecast on television might typically have provided a sense of entertainment and escapism to the public, creating an expectation of war victory and a sense of satisfaction as to how the war was proceeding. What was absent in popular media portrayals was the reality of what the average people, living in conflict regions, lost in exchange for victory. That was what Handagama might have tried to portray in his film. However, it seems that the audience have been unable to create a real link between the battlefront scene portrayed at the beginning of the film with the rest of the film. This absence of the connection of the battlefront scene to the film's narrative might have created confusion in the audience's mind in interpreting the filmmaker's objective.

As Handagama stated in his interview, he wanted to show the destruction the war had caused to the economy, human relationships, village life and values. However, the participants claimed that the director's objective is not to show the effects or otherwise of the war but the sexual behaviour of the communities in border villages.

> If the main problem (within the setting) is war, then people (in border villages) must be scared and thinking about their lives. However, in this film, the main concern (for the local population) appears to be their sexual needs. Therefore, the film is not focused on war (female participant 2).

> The director had wanted to talk about the sex lives of border village communities and not about the war (male participant 6).

In the discussion in Chapter Seven about the representations of gender and sexuality, participants mentioned that the film includes explicit sex scenes. While the intellectual participants (academics and film reviewers) have interpreted the portrayal of sexuality as an indication of the sexual economy that had arisen during the armed conflict, the participants of the general audience read it differently. Since open display or discussion of sexual behaviour is taboo in Sri Lankan society, in *This Is My Moon* the explicit sex scenes might have overshadowed other aspects of the film for the general audience. This may have resulted in the audience members seeing such portrayals as unnecessarily emphasising sex scenes and therefore unacceptable within the Sri Lankan socio-cultural context. The following comment made by one participant indicates how that participant thought the filmmaker had failed to construct the film according to the country's socio-cultural context.

This filmmaker (appeared to have) had a reasonable control when he portrays the relationship between the Buddhist monk and the Tamil woman. (Therefore) he would have had the same control when constructing the other scenes (which are explicit sex scenes) (male participant 6).

Even without a single-sex scene included, the participants have interpreted the intimate relationship created between the Buddhist monk and the Tamil woman. Participants suggest that the filmmaker should have exerted a similar discipline or control in his aesthetic capacity in constructing the sexual behaviours of other characters in the film. Consequently, not giving unnecessary attention to the sex scenes may not have undermined the central theme and focus of the film.

Another criticism directed towards the filmmaker is that he undermines more substantial social, economic and political factors by reducing the problems the public face to a side-effect of war. Participants explained that the war is not the only cause of social issues depicted in the film, such as poverty, unemployment and violence against women, which are common problems faced by marginalised members of any society at any given time in history.

Some of the characters and incidents depicted in the film are realistic. However, blaming the war for everything is not practical. War is only one cause. There are many others (male participant 3).

The social issues depicted in the film are not unique to the societies affected by war. They are common problems (male participant 4).

The film depicts the social issues poor people in any area might face, whether there is a war or not (male participant 5).

When scrutinised, the participants' opinions raised the question: is the war the cause of social and economic problems or is war also a by-product of a bigger cause? If the answer to the latter is yes, what can be the more significant cause of all these problems? Participants' comments suggest that the film does not answer these questions adequately. However, the textual analysis of *This is My Moon* and the opinions of academics and film reviewers indicate that the film shows that the power greed of capitalistic society is the leading cause of the war and other socio-economic issues. Thus, the focus group participants' interpretation depends on their lack of literacy in arthouse films, suggesting that the film could not convey its message to the cinematically less literate audience.

Negative representations of security forces

The second category of opinion is that the film represents security forces in negative ways. Participants saw the film as depicting the soldier as an irresponsible, self-centred man. The following quotations illustrate those opinions.

The filmmaker depicts the army soldier as a greedy person. He forgets his duty when he sees a gold necklace and a girl (male participant 2).

It is not clear why the soldier deserts the army (male participant 3).

The film portrays the army soldier as sexually deprived. However, the majority are not like that. Therefore, it is unfair to show a soldier like that in the film because people might generalise this character to the whole (female participant 1).

In the film, the director only depicts a soldier with negative characteristics. He should have portrayed a positive character along with the negative one (for balance). By not doing that, he suggests that all soldiers, in general, are evil characters (female participant 4).

The film creates a negative image of soldiers. For instance, there is a scene in which the deserter soldier broke into a shop and steals money. These incidents might be realistic, but they can damage the image of soldiers in people's minds (female participant 5).

These comments imply that the participants are not happy about the negative portrayal of soldiers' characters. Although the filmmaker may have used the soldier to signify the government and its misdeeds during the ethnic conflict, the participants may see in their own minds the soldier's dominant image as a war hero created by government propaganda. This propagandist image seems to more heavily influence the audience perception than the image the filmmaker intended to develop. Simultaneously, one has to acknowledge that the participants who are members of the public drawn from the dominant Sinhalese community would naturally not like to see members of their own ethnic group within the military be negatively portrayed and thereby have their war hero image destroyed or challenged.

Handagama produced and screened this film nearly 20 years ago in 1999. During this time, people did not celebrate the soldiers as war heroes. They were referred to as *army karaya* in Sinhala slang, which means 'an army man/soldier', which is an irreverent term in Sinhala language. This was during a period where the government forces were not making much progress in winning the war. However, during the presidency of Mahinda Rajapaksa (2005–2015), government propaganda campaigns promoted the soldiers as war heroes, so the public celebrated soldiers as disciplined, patriotic, ideal heroes who symbolise the Sinhala Buddhist nation. Instead of as an *army karaya*, a soldier was referred to as a *ranaviruwa* or 'war hero'. The focus group participants may have been more exposed to those propaganda campaigns than to the film because the film did not reach a broad audience due to indirect censorship issues. Therefore, the study demonstrates that those campaigns were much more potent in changing how people see social images than a feature film at the time.

On the other hand, the filmmaker, according to the participants' point of view, has portrayed the soldier as a 'villain' who rapes the 'enemy woman' (De Mel 2007), deserts the army for no reason, cheats on his village girlfriend, and robs the village shop. Participants see no binary opposition to the soldier in

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the film, as only a 'bad' soldier is portrayed with no 'good' ones depicted for balance. Therefore, they think the filmmaker purposely created these images to harm the Sinhalese Buddhist nation's reputation via his bias towards the enemy. As Handagama stated in his interview, the enemy for them is the Tamil community, not the corrupted political powerholders of both sides (an aspect invisible in the film) who use the ethnic issue to fulfil their power greed. Therefore, the participants saw the film as biased against the soldier. For them, the soldier is not only the saviour of the country but also a member of their own ethnic group. On the other hand, the textual analysis and the academic and film reviewers' comments show that the film portrays the impact of war on soldiers' social and spiritual lives; how the war has generally destroyed the entire social system and specifically the soldiers' typical way of life and dragged them to a tragedy. The participants' level of film literacy might not be enough to interpret this representation.

When the opinions of the intellectual audience are compared with those of the general audience, it seems that the participants' media literacy plays a significant role in how people interpret a media/cultural text. Therefore, for a film to be revolutionary, not only the contextual factors (McNamara 2011, p. 87) but the intellectual factors such as media literacy and critical thinking skills of the audience also play an essential role. That might be why the participants were under the impression that the director was biased against the security forces and the Sinhalese ethnic group. As a result, the film had failed to create an anti-war mindset in the focus group participants. The participants seem unable to see the filmmaker as being objective in highlighting the other side of the war and the suffering of marginalised and powerless people in society, such as those living in border villages.

6.3.2. Representations of the war in *Shades of Ash*

The director of *Shades of Ash*, Sudath Mahadivulwewa, wanted to make people sensitive to the danger of the post-war situation in which human relationships are disturbed. In this section, I address whether the director had achieved his aim of politicising the audience conscience regarding the aftermath of war so that the film could create a public opinion against the on-going war. I scrutinised the opinions of 12 focus group participants who were school leavers, university students, school teachers, homemakers, small-scale entrepreneurs and private sector employees who belonged to the 18 to 55 age category. All these participants were from around urban settings such as Colombo and Kandy and therefore had no first-hand experience of war, war-affected areas, or people's lifestyles from those areas.

In this discussion, many participants saw the film as representing or portraying the impacts of war. In contrast, others claimed that the film focuses more on the difficulties people face due to poverty rather than the war. For some participants, the film portrays how the government and its bureaucracy ignore the soldiers and their family members.

Representations of the impacts of war

According to Mahadivulwewa, the film conveys the aftermath of the war in Sri Lanka. As he explained, the real battle starts when people start their lives within the vacuum created by the deaths of their loved ones. The focus group participants who had film literacy (university students and school teachers) also stated that the film portrays the impact of the war the filmmaker wanted to show.

> The dead bodies shown at the beginning of the film symbolise that this film is about war. Much of the film depicts the poverty and the life struggle of the people in border villages. Most of these problems are due to the displacement of these people. The cause for displacement is the war. The film, therefore, shows the side effects of the war (male participant 1).

> The film depicts insecurity people face due to war, destruction of war and how it stops people from fulfilling their basic needs. War creates a vicious cycle of poverty (female participant 1).

> The film highlights that the war's impact was more significant than the damage done by weapons (during battle) (female participant 6).

Opposing this viewpoint, some participants claimed that the social issues portrayed in the film are not unique to war-torn areas but familiar to the whole country. Participants raised the same point of view during discussions on *This Is My Moon*. The following comments suggest why the participants believed this.

> If this film had shown a massacre, then it would have given a feeling of war. This film shows the difficulties people face due to poverty. The only person who is dead due to the war is Heen Eki's brother, an army soldier. All others die due to social problems or problems related to the power imbalance (male participant 5).

> The film has not given much screen time to depict the war. The film portrays the battle people have with poverty. The incidents that hint of war are the dead bodies and the poisoned irrigation tank. Many other deaths depicted in the film occur not because of the war but due to social problems. For instance, Gambare commits suicide because he is ashamed to see his daughter engaged in prostitution (male participant 3).

The participants did not see a direct link between the war and the social problems portrayed in the film. As the participants of *This is My Moon*, these participants, who lack film literacy to read an arthouse film, must have compared this film with a Hollywood war film. The focus group members who participated in the discussion of *Shades of Ash* were from the commercial capital Colombo. They might not have ever been to war-affected areas. Thus, they may have applied the incidents they see in the film

to their own social surroundings and contexts, such as women engaging in prostitution due to poverty, ground-level government officers misusing power for their gain, school principals abusing school children, young girls being employed as housemaids and the house owners abusing them. Such incidents may be typical in commercially-driven Colombo city. Thus, the study demonstrates that *Shades of Ash* was not significantly changing the participants' mindset regarding the war. However, it was successful in making participants aware of other social issues existing around them.

The role of government and state bureaucracy in the war

Some participants stated that the film portrays the ignorance of the government and bureaucracy of the poor villagers, disabled and dead soldiers, and their family members. The rich and powerful people manipulate the resources of the village and the villagers for their own financial gain, but everyone seems to ignore the development needs of the village. Some participants thought that the film portrays no marked difference between the army and the terrorists because the film shows both parties harassing the villagers.

> The film depicts how village youth become the victims of war, how the higher military officers and the government mistreat and neglect the soldiers (female participant 4).

> The army officers and soldiers mistreat the villagers. They live like prisoners. (For them) there is no difference between the army and the terrorists. Both parties are harassing them (male participant 5).

> The people who move to the village from the city (for government or NGO jobs) do not develop the village. For instance, the school principal does not bother about the development of the village school but develops his financial status (male participant 6).

Unlike the participants who discussed *This Is My Moon*, those discussing *Shades of Ash* were not disappointed with soldiers' representations. Their lack of dissatisfaction might be because the filmmaker does not portray the soldier negatively but as a victim. For instance, Ajith becomes disabled due to an accident, and Heen Eki's brother dies on the battlefield. Unlike the participants for *This Is My Moon*, these participants thought that "the film convinces people to think", meeting the filmmaker's objective of Third Cinema – awakening a politicised consciousness in the spectator (Wayne 2001). This different reading must be because this focus group consisted more of educated participants such as university students and school teachers who are more educated and critical thinkers than the participants of *This is My Moon*.

6.3.3. Representations of the war in *The Forsaken Land*

Like the directors of *This Is My Moon* and *Shades of Ash*, the director of *The Forsaken Land*, Vimukthi Jayasundara, wanted to show how people suffer from war and how war challenges humanity in a war-torn environment. The textual analysis indicates that this film shows characteristics of Third Cinema films. Thus, in this section, I analysed the opinions of focus group participants to see whether this film succeeded in meeting two of Third Cinema's goals: politicisation and critical commitment, as I did with the other two films. Twelve participants in the 20 to 45 age group participated in the focus group discussions. They were university students, university teachers and administrative officers. In this discussion, participants debated the film as representing the impact of war vs the film's failure to convey the effect of war. Unlike the other films' focus groups, most participants of this focus group were media scholars and students.

Representations of the impacts of war

Those who claimed the film conveys the impact of war saw the film's setting, characters and incidents as symbolising the mental states and material conditions of the people who live in war-affected areas or border villages. The following quotations provide examples for this idea.

> The film depicts the impact of war on people. People in war-affected areas do not have chances to (hold) a good job, eat or dress well. They are mentally affected by the war (female participant 1).

> At the end of the film, we hear the information about missing people over the radio. That is also another impact of war (female participant 2).

> This film uses minimal dialogues. With the use of visuals, the filmmaker tells us a deep story. He shows us the emptiness of the lives of people living in war-affected areas (female participant 4).

These participants are university teachers and students who engage in media studies. Thus, they could read between the lines of this cinema language. However, some participants thought that the filmmaker was not objective and was biased towards the LTTE in portraying the war. According to them, the filmmaker describes the misdeeds of the army but excludes the same carried out by the enemy (LTTE). They also criticised the film because some of the scenes misrepresent the Sri Lankan army soldiers. However, one must acknowledge that the LTTE is a terrorist organisation, while the Sri Lankan military is a conventional army of the Sri Lankan government, which is bound by the Geneva Convention and other rules of war accepted by the United Nations and other civil society institutions and conventional militaries worldwide. Hence, the Sri Lankan military is expected to act according to the convention while holding a higher standard of behaviour towards civilians and enemy combatants than the LTTE.

The film depicts the impact of war on Sinhalese people and excluded that of the LTTE (male participant 1).

There were two parties involved in the war. However, the film depicts only one side. The film does not describe the acts of the terrorists. It represents the disappearances (of people) caused by the Sinhalese community (male participant 2).

Fellow army soldiers treat Anura in a lousy manner. They strip him naked and throw him into the lagoon. Such things do not occur. I know that since I was in the army. The army is very disciplined. The story of the assassination of an army major, as the soldier recalls, is realistic. Such incidents happen, especially when both LTTE and their own commanding officer threaten the soldiers. Soldiers typically get frustrated and kill the commanding officer (male participant 4).

These comments exhibit that the participants link the film's depiction of events to their real-life experiences. When they see contradictions between the film's depictions and real life, they tend to criticise the film. Some of these participants had their relations in the army, and one participant was in the armed forces. This factor must have compelled them to believe that the armed forces are always well disciplined. Or else, as discussed in Chapter Three, government war propaganda must have influenced them to think positive about the armed forces and negative about the anti-war filmmakers.

Simultaneously, the incidents and characters depicted in the film could be exceptions, such as the mistreatment of Anura by the army soldiers, which the filmmaker had incorporated while adding some fictionalised aspects to create audience appeal. The participant who claimed to have been in the army and disagreed with such a storyline may not have personally seen or known about any instances of such mistreatment. At the same time, he claims that the story of the assassination of a commanding officer is realistic, which contradicts his argument that the army is well disciplined. Thus, as given in the contextual study (Chapter Three), these comments also demonstrate that although the film could convince the participants about the impacts of war to a certain extent, the government propaganda of antagonising anti-war filmmakers seems to have more effectively impacted on the participants.

Under-representation of the war

Most participants claimed that, being an anti-war film, *The Forsaken Land* under-represents war, which is against the idea that the film portrays the impacts of war. They thought the film discusses people's typical social behaviour rather than the unique impact of war.

What the director wants to say through his film is not very clear. Is it about the war or common social problems? A typical film viewer might not be able to understand the film (female participant 5).

> If the filmmaker wanted to depict the impact of war, he has failed because the social issues he portrays in his film are common to any society, whether there is a war or not (female participant 6).

> Although this is considered to be a war film, it is outside that theme. What the film depicts is not unique to war-affected areas. Even in urban upper-class societies, we can see the same men and women and similar types of behaviour. Such (adulterous) relationships are not the result of war or poverty. The audiences need to have some experience of war to connect with this film. The viewers who see films for entertainment and who are not well educated cannot understand this film. The director might have targeted a specific audience, and he has conveyed his message to that audience (male participant 4).

> The director has failed to create a discourse of war in his film. He could have depicted the impact of war better. It is not clear what the director wanted to tell the audience. It is also not clear how this film conveys anything about the war at all (male participant 6).

The participants make several essential points regarding the cinematic practice of the filmmaker. One is that the filmmaker is unable to make a connection between the characters and incidents portrayed in his film and the war context. This reading must be because these participants have watched Hollywood war films like the other two groups I discussed earlier. As mentioned in Chapter Five, war is not all military encounters (De Mel 2007). However, it seems that these participants interpret the war as such. Second, these participants made the same point the participants for *This Is My Moon* made. That is: the filmmaker caters not to the general audience but a niche intellectual audience (maybe the international audience) through his film. These points made by the participants suggest that the filmmaker's objective was different from the Third Cinema's expectations; that is, to create a critical discourse of the war. Accordingly, we need to consider the intention of the filmmaker. As the filmmaker explained, he has used his experiences during the 1988–89 communist youth rebellion to construct this film.

> Whoever hold arms against the government was and will be hunted by the government. The best example is the southern rebel movement that occurred in 1971 and 1989. (Jayasundara 2019, 14 March)

The filmmaker's above comment suggests that he wanted to express the Sri Lankan government's suppression of the groups who went against them. The following remarks of the participants support the filmmaker's opinion.

> The film talks about missing (civilians) people. People were abducted during the war period by the Sri Lankan army and the LTTE members. We cannot say it happened only during the war period. War is just one situation (male participant 2).

As depicted in the film, abductions of people also have happened during the communist youth uprisings in 1988 and 1989 (male participant 5).

These comments indicate that the filmmaker's intention and the conventions of the film genre he used to express his political ideology have created confusion in participants. The war was a sensitive topic to the Sri Lankan people. In their description of war, the government played the role of rescuer and the LTTE the enemy. Thus, the study demonstrates that the war, as the backdrop of this film, does not fulfil the filmmaker's objective of creating a critical discourse against state suppression but gives a general picture of hardships underprivileged groups undergo.

6.4. Conclusion

This chapter investigated the interpretations of different audiences of the representations of the war and its leadership (the state bureaucracy) in selected anti-war films to examine whether the films are capable of addressing the audiences' conscience regarding the disaster of war and the reasons for state suppression of these films at the time. The investigation used data gathered from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with the Theory of Third Cinema used as the theoretical foundation.

According to the academics and film reviewers interviewed, the selected anti-war films successfully conveyed the impact of war, such as victimisation of the public and the exploitation of marginalised civilians in the Sri Lankan war context. Some interviewees explain how the films portray sexual economics within the settings as a side-effect of war and how villagers, mostly women and children, become the victims of sexual exploitation. By doing so, these films make audiences politically aware of the war's exploitative nature. Interviewees also identified the critical political ideology the filmmakers wanted to convey through their films to show their resistance toward the government, its pro-war mentality, and its lack of engagement with the other party to solve the ethnic conflict. From the focus group participants, those who had film literacy also could interpret these messages filmmakers intend to communicate. According to these participants, these films are critical of the three institutions of the state: the government, cultural institutions and security forces. Thus, these findings demonstrate that although these films fulfil the critical commitment of Third Cinema, only the educated niche audience could interpret the anti-war messages included in them. The participants who lacked film literacy could not read the filmmaker's anti-war messages, but typical social problems the entire country endures. The participants' comments confirmed that exposure to government propaganda also impacted how they read the film.

CHAPTER SEVEN

AUDIENCE INTERPRETATIONS OF ANTI-WAR FILMS: REPRESENTATIONS OF CULTURAL IDENTITIES

Chapter Index

7.1. Introduction

This chapter analyses how Sri Lankan audiences in the research sample interpreted the authenticity of the cultural identities constructed in the three selected films – *This Is My Moon*, *Shades of Ash* and *The Forsaken Land*. It examines the views on cultural identities, as represented in the films, of film reviewers, university academics and focus group participants.

Staiger (1992) claims that it is crucial to know how people read cultural texts because it helps understand society and popular culture's effects. Referring to British Cultural Studies scholars' research, she states that the audience "interpretations and uses of texts connect to ideologies and cultural, social and political power" (Staiger 1992, p. 89). According to British Cultural Studies scholars, both cultural texts and the

audiences are created by history (Staiger 1992). Thus, just like the text, audiences should be analysed with regard to the context.

In their study of audiences' interpretations of cultural texts, Brunsdon and Morley (2005) claim that audiences do not always interpret a message identically to what is encoded. Therefore, "the message is a structured polysemy" (Brunsdon & Morley 2005, p. 129). As they explain, readers' shared cultural formations and practices frame their interpretations. According to Hall (1991), cinema, as a cultural text, is polysemic or open to different or multiple readings and interpretations by different people. He claims that polysemy is not pluralism. Hall (1991) outlines three frameworks of audience readings: the dominant, negotiated and oppositional. According to Hall, dominant or preferred code is reading the text "within the dominant definition it has been connotatively signified" (Hall 1991, p. 124); negotiated code is reading the text with ground rules which are 'exceptions' to the dominant rule while acknowledging the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions; the oppositional code is decoding the message within an "alternative framework of reference" (Hall 1991, p. 127).

Developing this understanding of the polysemic nature of film reception in my analysis, this study considered the viewpoints of different audience members and stakeholders in the sample of participants to examine how they variously interpreted the representations of Sri Lankan culture depicted in these films and their authenticity, and what are the reasons for those various interpretations. The in-depth interviews conducted with film directors, reviewers and relevant academics and the focus group discussions and reviews of the films published in newspapers were analysed using textual analysis from the thematic point of view to identify the common themes that emerged from the opinions shared. In this chapter, I argue that there are both similar and different interpretations and those interpretations are constructed from the same texts by distinct individuals because their perceptions vary according to their social contexts, life experiences and values. Since professional film reviewers are fewer in Sri Lanka due to the industry's small size, only three film reviewers could be interviewed for this study. Further, film reviewers and academics' opinions were comparatively analysed because academics are expected to be objective critics of cinema while the film reviewers may be influenced by monetary benefits or political opinions when they write about a film.

7.2. Representations of Ethnic Identities

This section examines the audiences' viewpoints about the representations of ethnic identities in the selected films. The interviews conducted with the film reviewers and the academics and the focus group discussions are analysed and discussed in this section to highlight the common themes or categories of opinions embedded in them. Since the newspaper reviews of the three films do not discuss the representations of ethnic identities included in them, this section excludes newspaper reviews from the analysis and discussion.

7.2.1. Representations of ethnic identities: opinions of film reviewers and university academics

The selected three film reviewers work as freelance journalists to leading newspapers and write to the web pages and social media networks. All three belong to Sinhalese community. The selected five academics study and teach media and film studies in state universities. Four of them belong to the Sinhalese community while one belongs to the Tamil community. The film reviewers and academics gave opinions that can be grouped into five categories: negative representations of the Sinhalese community, the impact of the war on the Sinhalese community, the impact of the war on the Tamil community, under-representation of the Tamil community, and neutral representations of ethnicities.

Negative representations of the Sinhalese community

The interviewees expressed three main opinions under the category negative representations of the Sinhalese community. First, these films represent that the Sinhalese community is primarily responsible for the ethnic conflict and consequent war. Second, the Sinhalese community dominates the Tamil community. Third, the Sinhalese community is primitive and uncivilised. The following quotations of the interviewees illustrate these opinions. These quotations demonstrate that interviewees' cultural cognition and political opinions influence their interpretations. They also indicate that the media representations affect the audiences' understanding of the identities of other cultures.

> Interviewee 1 (Film reviewer from Sinhalese community): These three filmmakers do not keep the Sinhalese community in a higher status. They see the crisis in Sinhalese society. One view common to all three filmmakers is that the destruction of our own society is due to the war. All three films express that the Sinhalese society is mainly responsible for the war.

> Interviewee 2 (Film reviewer from Sinhalese community): In a war, based on racism and ethnic issues, the minority wins the attention. People pay their attention to how minority groups are negatively affected by conflicts. The minority groups, who live under the majority group's authority, face suppression all the time in a conflict situation.

> Interviewee 7 (Academic from the Tamil community): According to Tamil culture, women do not openly engage in sexual relationships. However, in these films, the Sinhalese women do so. That brings a negative feeling towards them.

> Interviewee 8 (Academic from Sinhalese community): My first impression of the *Shades of Ash* film is that it represents the Sinhalese community as barbarians.

According to interviewee 1 (Sinhalese film reviewer), the three filmmakers (being Sinhalese) have a self-criticism of their own society. As he observed, the films portray the internal crisis Sinhalese society faces; for instance, the poverty depicted in *This Is My Moon* and *Shades of Ash,* the corruption and misuse of power depicted in *Shades of Ash* and *The Forsaken Land.* He also thought that these three films show that the Sinhalese community is mainly responsible for the ethnic conflict.

Interviewee 2 (Sinhalese film reviewer) observed that the film *This Is My Moon* portrays the Sinhalese community dominating the Tamil community. According to him, the majority groups' domination of minority groups is typical in an ethnic or racial based war. For example, as I discussed in Chapter Five, *This Is My Moon* portrays a Sinhalese soldier and some Sinhalese villagers sexually and physically abusing a Tamil woman. These incidents symbolically show the domination of the Sinhalese majority over the Tamil minority.

According to interviewee 1 (Sinhalese film reviewer), interviewee 7 (Tamil academic) and interviewee 8 (Sinhalese academic), these films portray the Sinhalese (especially in remote rural war-affected villages) as a primitive and uncivilised community. They may think so because the three films depict explicit sexual behaviours of men and women, and people brutally killing each other. It is interesting to note the interpretation of interviewee 5, who is from the Tamil community. She compared the Sinhalese women the films depict with her cultural cognition. According to her, the portrayals of Sinhalese women explicitly engaging in sexual behaviours brought her a negative feeling towards the Sinhalese women. Her opinion indicates how media representations affect audiences' understanding of other cultural identities (Kellner 2011). The responses of interviewees 1, 2 and 8 show that their political opinions impacted on the way they interpret the ethnic representations. Interviewee 1 and 2 seem to hold an anti-war opinion while interviewee 8 seems to hold a pro-war nationalistic opinion, and therefore she seems to be offended by the representations of her ethnic community as violent.

The impact of the war on the Sinhalese community

According to interviewees 2 and 8, who are Sinhalese, these films represent the impact of war on the economically marginalised Sinhalese community who live in remote, rural, border villages.

> Interviewee 2 (Sinhalese film reviewer): What is depicted in the other two films (*Shades of Ash* and *The Forsaken Land*) are the marginalised groups in a war-torn society. War is not something to celebrate for the economically marginalised people.

> Interviewee 8 (Sinhalese Academic): All three directors depict how the Sinhalese community who live in border villages suffered from war.

Interviewee 2 thought that the two anti-war films *Shades of Ash* and *The Forsaken Land* portray an economically marginalised group of majority Sinhalese society. He explains that even being the majority, they are not in a condition to celebrate the war as is done by the economically privileged Sinhalese who belong to the ruling elite. According to both interviewees 2 and 8, the three films represent the Sinhalese community living in border villages. They are suffering from poverty, unemployment, and forsakenness (the rulers have abandoned them). The media literacy of these interviewees might have influenced their interpretations. However, their opinions are similar to the anti-war ideologies depicted in these three films. Thus, it seems that they hold an anti-war political ideology which might also have influenced their interpretations.

The impact of the war on the Tamil community

This Is My Moon is the only film that has a Tamil character. Interviewees 4 and 5 observed a symbolic representation of Tamil–Sinhala ethnic conflict in this film, especially the political factors behind the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. The interviewees' comments demonstrate that the media messages influence the audiences' understanding of other communities and the problems they face. Thus, this film fulfils the politicisation of Third Cinema by making people aware of the exploitative and repressive nature of war and the politics behind that. It also fulfils the critical commitment of Third Cinema by giving voice to the disadvantaged marginalised minority groups.

> Interviewee 4 (Sinhalese Academic): *This Is My Moon* discusses the ethnic issue. In our society, Tamil people have to face problems just because they are Tamil. *This Is My Moon* talks about that. The Tamil woman in the film is symbolic. She does not speak much. The reality is that the Tamil community is silent in front of the Sinhalese community. Within the Sinhala majority, Tamils do not receive a chance to speak. They are forced to listen to what the Sinhalese say. The language and attire of the Tamil woman represent the identity of the Tamil community. Depicting her problems and using her sexuality to survive is a good attempt at representing the ethnic issue symbolically.

> Interviewee 5 (Sinhalese Academic): The Tamil woman in *This Is My moon* represents the common Tamil community, the ethnic issue they face politically.

According to interviewee 4, the film symbolises the 'silencing of the Tamil community', the ethnic minority in Sri Lanka. The interviewee thought that the Sinhala majority does not give a chance to the Tamil minority to make their voice heard. Portraying the Tamil woman quiet most of the screen time shows the oppression of Tamil voice. She also thought that depicting the Tamil woman's problems and using her sexuality (or the body) for her survival symbolises the ethnic issue. As I discussed in the textual analysis, showing a Sinhalese soldier and Sinhalese villagers sexually abusing her may especially

represent the unfair political reforms made against the Tamil community by the Sinhalese government (e.g. the Sinhala-only Act in 1956 that made the Sinhala language the state language). The depiction of the Tamil woman using her sexuality for her survival may symbolise the Tamil political body using the Tamil commoners for their political survival. Ultimately it is the commoners who suffer due to the war. Interviewee 4, as a media scholar, has done several studies related to media representation and censorship. She studied *This is My Moon* and the *Forsaken Land* before this study. Her experience in critically analysing arthouse films must have influenced her critical and detailed reading. Her comment also indicates her empathy towards the Tamil community affected by the ethnic issue.

Under-representation of the Tamil community

According to the interviewees, unlike *This Is My Moon*, the other two films do not include any representation of the Tamil ethnic group, who are the other main stakeholder of the ethnic conflict. Some interviewees interpreted this absence of Tamil representation in *Shades of Ash* and *The Forsaken Land* as something unfair to Tamil and Sinhalese communities. On the one hand, it makes the Tamil community's voice unheard, and on the other hand it isolates the Sinhalese community as the offender of the ethnic conflict.

Interviewees 1 and 3 thought, by not including Tamil representation (as in *Shades of Ash* and *The Forsaken Land*) or under-representing the Tamils (as in *This Is My Moon*), the filmmakers have not given a chance to the Tamil community to tell their tale. Interviewee 3 thought it was unfair to the Tamil community because they also suffered from the war, just like the Sinhalese community.

> Interviewee 1 (Sinhalese film reviewer): We have not seen the other party in the war. We have not seen their participation. The most dangerous thing is that we have not seen them even after the war. Still, we do not give them a chance to express their point of view. Sometimes they may have decided not to speak. We do not know what has happened.

> Interviewee 3 (Sinhalese film reviewer): Since these three filmmakers are Sinhalese Buddhist filmmakers, they have not allocated enough space to discuss the Tamil ethnic issue in their films. The majority of the characters in these films belong to the Sinhalese community. We cannot say that only the Sinhalese community faced the difficulties of war. The difficulties were there for both groups. However, as usual, the voice of the Tamils is hidden in these films. War is a common phenomenon. It affects everybody without any ethnic difference.

These comments reveal that the main reason for the Tamil community's under-representation is that the filmmakers belong to the Sinhalese Buddhist community. The filmmakers' identity and cultural background might not have given them enough knowledge to depict Tamil characters or the Tamil

community's unique problems during the war. That might be why they have decided not to talk about the subject that they are not experts on. Their political opinions and media literacy level must influence the interpretations of interviewee 1 and 3. However, as discussed in Chapter Six, this absence of Tamil representation may also mean that it brings both the Sinhalese and Tamil communities under a common denominator (Jayasena 2010) - victims and criticises the militarisation of both the government and the LTTE (Jayasena 2012). The comments of interviewees 2 and 5 approve this opinion. According to them, the films show that, without any ethnic or religious difference, the war equally affected the poor communities living in war-torn areas. They also stated that the films do not depict the ethnicity or religion but the people's economic condition that makes them suffer. In that sense, these films convey a communist ideology fulfilling the critical commitment of Third Cinema.

> Interviewee 2 (Sinhalese film reviewer): Those who suffer from war are poor people irrespective of their ethnicity or religion. These films say that not the ethnicity or religion but the economy makes people suffer in a war-torn country.

> Interviewee 5 (Sinhalese academic): Generally, all three films talk about the poor community who are always kept in the battlefront. Without any ethnic difference, they experienced the same difficulties.

The media literacy and the political opinion of the interviewees might have influenced this interpretation of the films. However, one can also argue that these films do not cover equal representation of ethnicities in Sri Lanka affected by the war. For instance, Sri Lankan Muslims, who are also an ethnic minority, had to face enormous difficulties during the war (Ali 1997). However, none of these films includes Muslims and their story of the war.

Interviewee 8 (Sinhalese academic) suspects that the filmmakers might have a hidden agenda to exclude Tamil ethnic representation in the films.

> Interviewee 8 (Sinhalese academic): Since all of them (the filmmakers) are Sinhalese, they might have selected to depict the Sinhalese community in their films. I do not think these filmmakers wanted to show the entire issue. They might have had a hidden agenda in making these films. That is why they have excluded the other ethnicities from the plot.

Her opinion raises different and opposing ideas. Being Sinhalese Buddhists, the filmmakers may want to assure the Sinhalese community's problems are heard and shown because these films target the Sinhalese audience. Opposing this idea, one can also argue that these filmmakers wanted to isolate the Sinhalese community in the ethnic conflict as the offender (and show the Tamil community in a sympathetic light as symbolically depicted in *This Is My Moon*) and show them suffering from the after-effects of their own deeds. The latter may also remind us of the Third World exoticism that caters to the

imperial gaze of the West by showing Sri Lanka as an impoverished country in the Global South with uncivilised and primitive people who suffer due to war, as most American films depict Orientals (Kleinen 2003, Konzett 2004, Chaudhuri 2009). This idea also shows some similarity to the government propaganda, which stated that the Tamil diaspora spread false news of the government, military and the Sinhalese community internationally to win sympathy and support for LTTE (Chalk 2008, Wickramasinghe 2005). Interviewee 8's comment hints similarity of her opinion to the pro-war nationalists' ideas of anti-war filmmakers.

Thus, the findings reveal that the interviewees' political opinions, their media literacy level and exposure to the government's war propaganda influenced their interpretations. As discussed in the textual analysis, the audience interpretations also demonstrate that framing communities in war-affected areas as impoverished, sexually desperate, and violent support the Orientalising process in their international reception.

7.2.2. Representations of ethnic identities: opinions of focus group participants

Since all three films depict the Sinhalese village, focus group discussions on the representations of ethnic identity were focused on the representations of the 'Sinhalese village' in the selected films. Among the three films, only one (*This Is My Moon*) includes a character of an ethnic minority (Tamil). The other two films exclude any minority ethnic character. The discussion ran through four main opinion categories: neutral representation of the Sri Lankan community affected by the war (50%), negative representations of the Sinhalese community (42%), under-representation of the Tamil community (5%), and positive representations of the Sinhalese community (2%). All the focus group participants were Singhalese. The results are given in Table 4.

Table 4: The focus group members' interpretations of ethnic identities

No	Categories of opinions	Male participants	Female participants	Total number of participants
1	Neutral representations of the Sri Lankan community affected by the war	14 (73)	5 (27)	19 (50)
2	Negative representations of the Sinhalese community	3 (19)	13 (81)	16 (43)
3	Under-representation of the Tamil community	2 (100)	0 (0)	2 (5)
4	Positive representations of the Sinhalese community	1 (100)	0 (0)	1 (2)
	Total	20 (52)	18 (48)	38* (100)**

* Number of opinions expressed on a theme is greater than the total number of participants in the sample because one participant can express multiple opinions under a given category of opinions.

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**Numbers within the parenthesis are percentages.

Neutral representations of the Sri Lankan community affected by the war

Half of the focus group participants interpreted that these films represent all the ethnic communities. The majority of them were male participants. Their opinion was that these films portray the suffering that comes from war is common to all human beings irrespective of their ethnicities. This interpretation proves that these films fulfil the politicisation of Third Cinema by making them aware of the disaster of war and convincing them to think as equals.

Male participants believed that the film *Shades of Ash* takes a neutral stand in representing the Sri Lankan community affected by the war. According to them, even though the film portrays only one ethnic community in Sri Lanka, what is depicted in the film is familiar to any ethnic community. The following comments illustrate their opinion further.

> There is no ethnic difference depicted in this film. The film depicts the social inequality and how people suffer due to it. (*Shades of Ash* – male participant 2)

> The village can be a Sinhalese village or a Tamil village. There is no difference in the difficulties they experience. (*Shades of Ash* – male participant 3)

> There is no issue in the depiction of ethnicity. The situation depicted in the film can occur in any village in any corner of the country. (*Shades of Ash* – male participant 4)

According to these participants, the difficulties depicted in this film are prevalent for people living in border villages irrespective of their ethnicity.

Most male participants and a female participant for *This Is My Moon* also expressed that the Sinhalese and Tamil ethnicities are represented in the film neutrally. The following comments explain why they think in that way.

> According to the film, the only difference [between the Sinhalese and Tamil people depicted in the film] is their language. Otherwise, every character in the film looks similar. The attitudes [of both groups] are similar. They try to fulfil their needs by good or bad means. (*This Is My Moon* – male participant 2)

> I do not see a big difference between the two cultures depicted in the film. Both the Tamil woman and Sinhalese girl go to God's sacred chamber at the temple to worship. The only difference is in the language. (*This Is My Moon* – male participant 3)

Cultures of both ethnicities are depicted similarly. Their behaviours and mannerisms are also similar. (*This Is My Moon* – male participant 4)

Using blood on the soldier's sister's lips, the Tamil woman draws a dot on her forehead and they laugh together. It symbolises that we all are human beings with red blood despite the differences in languages and dress code. (*This Is My Moon* – female participant 2)

The filmmaker may have intentionally portrayed the two cultures similarly to show both communities that their enemy is not each other. The director (if so) makes this film fulfil the politicisation of Third Cinema because it attempts to build unity between two ethnicities in conflict.

The participants for *The Forsaken Land* thought that the film represents both ethnic communities neutrally. Their comments also state the possible reasons to exclude the Tamil community in the film.

There is a possibility that this type of incident may occur in any society irrespective of ethnicity. Since the director is a Sinhalese, he has chosen to depict Sinhalese society in his film. (*The Forsaken Land* – male participant 4)

Another thought that:

The film depicts a period in which there is neither war nor peace. In such a time, there can be no Tamil people living in a Sinhalese village. The director's intention is not to show a battle between two parties but to show the situation faced by ordinary people during such a period. Therefore, I do not think he is biased towards one ethnicity. (*The Forsaken Land* – male participant 6)

Addressing the issue of portrayals of Sinhalese village life in the film, another participant thought:

The film depicts the prevailing social issues people face due to war irrespective of their ethnic backgrounds. Villages in Sri Lanka are different from each other. Border villages are entirely different from the other villages. Therefore, we cannot compare the village the film depicts with a typical Sinhalese village. (*The Forsaken Land* – female participant 1)

Some interviewees also expressed the same opinion, and the textual analysis raised the same claim that although the Tamil representation is absent in this film, that absence brings both communities under one category - as the victims of war. Most of the focus group participants who expressed that the films portray a neutral representation of all ethnic communities affected by the war are from the academic community. This similar education background and anti-war political opinion might have influenced the similarities of their interpretations.

Negative representations of the Sinhalese community

A significant number of participants (42%) claimed that all three films negatively portray the Sinhalese village and its community. According to *Shades of Ash* participants, since the film portrays only the Sinhalese community, the film represents their way of life. The participants interpreted this representation as negative, and they were offended by that. As they explained, such negative depictions might convey a negative image of Sinhalese to international audiences, because these films have a low likelihood of being seen by local Tamil audiences. The following quotations illustrate their feelings.

> Representation of Sinhalese ethnicity may create a negative feeling in international audiences' minds. (*Shades of Ash* – female participant 1)

> I do not like to see my community represented in the way it is depicted in the film. (*Shades of Ash* – female participant 3)

> It is not acceptable to convey a bad image of the Sinhalese community to outsiders. (*Shades of Ash* – female participant 4)

Comments of these participants (who are Sinhalese) express that the film represents the Sinhalese community in a negative way. The film portrays sex and violence explicitly, which these participants may describe as negative depictions. Their comments also reveal their denial of the negative depictions of their own community, mainly because the film may convey those images to audiences outside the ethnic group. Participants may feel ashamed or uncomfortable to see their own community portrayed in a bad light. Their interpretations seem to be influenced by the government war propaganda that antagonised the anti-war filmmakers who were alleged to misrepresent the Sri Lankan communities to international audiences. One may also argue that since these participants, from the city, have not been to war-affected areas and have not seen the destruction the war brought to their lives, they tend to believe the government propaganda than an anti-war film.

The participants for *This Is My Moon* thought that the film portrays the Sinhalese community as those who suppress the minorities (Tamil community in this context) and the Sinhalese people as perverts who give priority to their sexual desires over all the other basic needs. Some female participants stated that, with such portrayals, the filmmaker intends to convey a negative image to others and he attacks the morals of the Sinhalese ethnic community. The following quotations illustrate their view.

> Without showing a Tamil man raping a Tamil woman or a Sinhalese man raping a Sinhalese woman, the director shows a Sinhalese man raping a Tamil woman. At the end of the film, the Tamil woman flees with a Sinhala Buddhist monk. The film gives an idea that the Sinhalese community suppresses the Tamil community. He [the director] intentionally

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ignored the fact that the Sinhala Buddhist soldiers also protected the Tamil people during the war. If a Tamil person sees this film, he or she will hate Sinhalese people. (*This Is My Moon* – female participant 1)

This film represents only two ethnicities. As a Sinhalese viewer, even I feel that the Sinhalese people suppress the Tamil people. (*This Is My Moon* – female participant 6)

The filmmaker has selected a Sinhalese village and has talked about the sexual behaviours of those villagers. That is not a fair representation of that ethnicity. They might have faced many difficulties due to war. For instance, the film depicts a pregnant mother being taken to the hospital. They do not have a good transportation service; the hospital is far away from the village. (*This Is My Moon* – male participant 1)

The female participant 6 seems to be influenced by the government's propaganda which promoted the Sinhalese soldiers as war heroes. The comment of male participant 1 indicates that the filmmaker ignores the difficulties faced by the villagers by overemphasising their sexual behaviours. The participants and the film reviews published in newspapers raised this matter in the discussion of gender roles and sexual relationships as well. The personal experiences of the male participant 1 might have influenced his interpretation because he stated that he has worked in such remote areas and has witnessed those people's hardships. The comments also reveal that the participants thought that the filmmaker is intentionally creating a sympathetic view towards the Tamil community while being biased against the Sinhalese community. However, one may also argue that since the Tamil community, being the minority, was the most victimised group, the director may have portrayed the difficulties faced by the Tamils.

Female participants for *The Forsaken Land* thought the film represents the Sinhalese village and its community negatively. According to them, the film conveys the idea that the Sinhalese are uncivilised – especially in their sexual behaviours. As they point out, this is because the film depicts sexual behaviour explicitly. The participants believe that the display of explicit sexual behaviour is a Western cultural aspect. The following quotations will clarify their ideas.

The way the director depicts the security forces in the film creates a bad image of the Sinhalese soldier. (*The Forsaken Land* – female participant 2)

Sinhalese society respects soldiers a lot. The soldiers are from Sinhalese society. Representing soldiers as ill-disciplined and uncivilised indirectly says that the Sinhalese society is ill-disciplined and uncivilised. (*The Forsaken Land* – female participant 6)

These comments indicate that these participants believe that one negative representation of a group member (one soldier) in a film becomes a stereotype applied to the entire group (the Sinhalese society – not even just the Sri Lankan military). However, only one participant mentioned that *The Forsaken Land* portrays a positive behaviour of villagers – unity at hard times.

When these comments are analysed, they indicate that a filmmaker cannot disregard the way audiences connect ethnic identity with the characters in the film – irrespective of the validity of the audience's beliefs. During the war period, the nationalistic political wing in Sri Lanka conducted a campaign to strengthen soldiers' reputation by creating a heroic image within the broader society. The campaign was also aimed at persuading and encouraging Sri Lankans, especially the Sinhalese youth, to join the government security forces, which badly needed recruits to win the war. The campaign used mainstream mass media such as advertisements, news, teledramas and films. This political campaign might have influenced how the audiences read war-themed films as contradictory or tarnishing the Sinhalese soldier's heroic image. Since most soldiers were of Sinhalese ethnicity, audiences probably were under the impression that they represent the entire Sinhalese community.

The findings demonstrate that most who interpreted the films as portraying the Sinhalese community negatively were female participants. Their comments show they are more protective of their ethnic identity than male participants. Females were more offended to see negative images of their ethnicity than males. This reaction may be because the patriarchal society trains women to defend their ethnic identities. They are trained as the protectors of tradition and the culture of their ethnic community.

Under-representation of the Tamil community

The participants (5%) for *This Is My Moon* and *The Forsaken Land* claimed that these films under-represent the Tamil community. The comments of the participants exhibit similarities to the government propaganda of antagonising the anti-war filmmakers. Thus, it is clear that state propaganda had influenced the participants' interpretations.

The participants for *This Is My Moon* blamed the director not for giving less space to discuss the Tamil community's social issues but for excluding the Tamil community's possible negative behaviours. Some participants seem to consider the Tamil community as the 'other' or the 'enemy' or both. They interpreted the film as supporting the enemy. Therefore, the filmmaker was seen as biased towards the Tamil community or even a 'traitor' to the Sinhalese community. The following comments of the participants exemplify this opinion.

> The social problems depicted in the film are common to any community irrespective of their ethnicity or religion, but the filmmaker talks more about Sinhalese society. There is a representation of the Tamil community, but the focus is mostly on the Sinhalese society.

The director does this intentionally to serve a hidden agenda [supporting the LTTE by showing a bad image of Sinhalese to international audiences]. (*This Is My Moon* – female participant 1)

The film shows what happens to a Tamil woman when she enters a Sinhalese village. The same thing can happen if a Sinhalese lady enters a Tamil village. The only good thing that happens to the Tamil woman is that the soldiers' family accepts her. In all the other occasions the Tamil woman is abused [both sexually and physically] by the soldier, his brother, the village boy and the Buddhist priest. (*This Is My Moon* – female participant 2)

Another participant saw the adverse effects of such portrayals beyond Sri Lankan borders:

The Tamil diaspora can use a film like this against our country. This film can increase the anger within pro-LTTE people towards the Sinhalese. (*This Is My Moon* – female participant 4)

When the participants expressed these views during the discussion, they expressed an intense annoyance towards the film. The comments themselves indicate the irritation the participants felt towards the film. Their comments show similarities to government propaganda that suggested these filmmakers were traitors who support the Tamil diaspora and the LTTE (Weerasekara 2005, Wickramasinghe 2005). According to the participants (and the state propaganda), a film that depicts the Sinhalese community in a negative light becomes a weapon in the Tamil diaspora's hands who want to convince the European community to believe the dominant Sinhalese violate the human rights of the ethnic minorities in Sri Lanka and take action against the nationalistic government who fight a war against LTTE terrorism.

The participants for *The Forsaken Land* thought the absence or exclusion of the Tamil community (the 'other') creates a space in which negative aspects of the Sinhalese society get highlighted, and hence is disadvantageous to the Sinhalese society. Their opinion is similar to the participants for *This Is My Moon*. The participants noted the absence of the role of the Tamil community in the films:

The film does not speak about the enemy [the Tamil community]. It speaks only about the Sinhalese community's role in the war. (*The Forsaken Land* – male participant 1)

Another argued that:

There are two parties involved in the war. However, the film depicts only the role of one party [the Sinhalese]. What was done by the other party is absent from the film. The film depicts the disappearances caused by the Sinhalese community but not [those caused by the Tamil] terrorists. (*The Forsaken Land* – male participant 3)

In the above two comments, the participants used the nouns 'enemy' and 'terrorist' to refer to the Tamil community – the other stakeholder of the ethnic conflict. Participants thought that including misconduct of Sinhalese soldiers (or the Sinhalese community/military) and excluding misdeeds of the 'enemy' (or the Tamil community/LTTE) indicate the 'bias' of the filmmaker towards the 'enemy', which makes the filmmaker someone who is against the Sinhalese community. The government propaganda also promoted this opinion regarding the anti-war filmmakers in Sri Lanka during the war period (Wickramasinghe 2005, Weerasekara 2005, De Mel 2007). Thus, this propaganda might have influenced the audience or believe in pro-war political opinion.

7.2.3. Representations of ethnic identities: summary

Academics, film reviewers and focus group participants expressed their opinions about the representations of the ethnic identities in selected films under common categories. There were similar and opposing ideas between the participants. The main categories of opinions are the neutral representation of the Sri Lankan community affected by war, negative representations of the Sinhalese community, the impact of the war on the Sinhalese community, the impact of the war on the Tamil community, and under-representation of the Tamil community.

Two interviewees and 50% of the focus group participants stated that the films hold a neutral viewpoint in representing the Sri Lankan community, irrespective of their ethnic identities. According to interviewees and focus group participants, the films depict the marginalised Sri Lankans who are affected by the war. As they explain, the films depict that it is not the ethnicity or religion but the people's economic conditions that make them suffer. Media literacy level and anti-war political opinion influenced their responses.

Four interviewees and 42% of focus group participants stated that these films include negative representations of the Sinhalese community. The negative representations are that the Sinhalese community is mainly responsible for the ethnic conflict, the majority Sinhalese community dominates the Tamil community, an ethnic minority, and the Sinhalese community is primitive and uncivilised. One Tamil academic interviewee stated that the films depict the Sinhalese women as sexually open, which she cannot see in Tamil women. While Political opinions of the audience members, ethnic background, patriarchal beliefs, and practices shaped their views, these films shape how audience members look at communities outside their culture.

While two interviewees asserted that *Shades of Ash* and *The Forsaken Land* represent the impact of the war on the Sinhalese community, another two interviewees claimed that *This Is My Moon* represents the impact of the war on the Tamil community. They thought that the film portrays the 'silencing of the

Tamil community' within the Sri Lankan political context. Media literacy level and the empathy towards the Tamil community affected by the ethnic issue influenced their interpretations.

Three interviewees and 5% of focus group participants stated that these films under-represent the Tamil community and their problems. Their opinion can be categorised into two. One group claimed that the absence of the Tamil representations in *Shades of Ash* and *The Forsaken Land* is unfair to both Sinhala and Tamil communities. It makes the Tamil community's voice unheard and isolates the Sinhalese community as the offender of the ethnic conflict. Their level of media literacy and political opinion might have influenced their interpretation. Another group argued that the filmmakers have a hidden agenda to exclude Tamil ethnic representation. The academic interviewee stated that the agenda could be either to assure the Sinhalese's problems be heard or to show them as the offenders of the ethnic conflict who suffer from their own deeds. The focus group members saw this under-representation as the absence of the 'enemy' or the 'terrorists'. According to them, the absence of the Tamil community creates a vacuum in the films. In this vacuum, the negative representations of the Sinhalese community are highlighted. As they explain, excluding the misdeeds of 'enemy' (Tamils/LTTE) and including the misdeeds of the Sinhalese community is unfair, and by doing so the filmmakers were biased towards the Tamil community. Their political opinion and the government propaganda may have influenced their interpretation.

7.3. Representations of Gender Roles and Sexual Relationships

This section analyses the opinions expressed by audience members regarding the representations of gender roles and sexual relationships in the three selected films and the authenticity of those representations. "Gender refers to the cultural assumptions and practices that govern the social construction of men and women" (Barker 2003, p. 289). Postcolonial feminists claim that gender intersects with race, ethnicity and nationality, ultimately deciding women's experiences (Barker 2003). According to them, women in the postcolonial context experience subordination both from colonial and native men. Thus, this analysis reveals how the postcolonial context in Sri Lanka affects the interpretations of gender representations in the selected films by their audiences.

In this section, considering the above factors, I argue that the cultural constructs of gender roles and norms significantly influence how audiences read the gender representations of films. The only factor that can dilute this influence, at least to some extent, is education and awareness of gender inequalities. Those working in academic institutions or undergraduates and graduates exhibited awareness of gender inequalities and recognised the stereotypical gender roles the films portray and the patriarchal gender norms they criticise and challenge. There were instances of the cultural background of the participants from conservative social sectors, such as rural areas, which influenced their interpretations more strongly than their education. However, such instances were fewer. Further, these films fulfil the cultural

specificity and critical commitment of Third Cinema films by criticising and challenging patriarchal gender norms.

This section comparatively analyses the opinions of male participants and female participants because, according to Kellner (1995), the gender of the participants may affect their interpretations. The audience members interviewed were film reviewers, academics and focus group participants. Three academics and 18 focus group members (total 21) were female, and two academics, three film reviewers and 18 focus group members (total 23) were male. This section examined 22 film reviews published in newspapers between 4 May 2001 and 13 October 2001 and between 4 May 2005 and 5 December 2005. The articles belong to eight reviewers, from which seven were male and only one was female. Given the predominance of male film reviewers in the Sri Lankan media, this male bias was unavoidable.

7.3.1. Representations of gender roles and sexual relationships: opinions of film reviewers and university academics

This section discusses the opinions expressed by the interviewed film reviewers and academics regarding the representations of gender roles and sexual relationships of the three films. Interviewees' opinions were categorised as 'stereotypical gender representations' and 'representations of the impact of war on women and children'. Under the stereotypical gender representations, interviewees expressed that these stereotypical gender representations occur through the male gaze, which objectifies women's bodies by representing the female body as a 'phantasy' object and women as passive sexual recipients. Another stereotypical gender representation the interviewees identified is the tragic endings of female characters. The findings also revealed that the female interviewees are more descriptive of stereotypical representations of gender roles than the male interviewees, even among intellectual audiences. This difference in interpretations suggests that although the male academics and film reviewers were aware of stereotypical gender representations, their attention was attracted by other issues (e.g. effects of war on women) than the gender stereotypes since they have been legitimised as a natural condition.

Stereotypical gender representations

A female interviewee and two male interviewees, who were university academics, observed that the films represent females in stereotypical gender roles, such as women being passive and subordinate to men. The main reason for that might be these three films were written and directed by men, and it may have intentionally or unintentionally led to their using the male gaze to illustrate female characters.

> Female interviewee 3 (Academic): Gender representations in all three films promote the patriarchal ideology of 'men are power holders'. Women are represented as an object used by men.

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Male interviewee 4 (Academic): These films show that female characters depend on men.

Male interviewee 5 (Academic): Women are depicted as subordinate to men.

The academics literate in media studies and gender studies interpreted that the films include gender stereotypes.

One could argue that if these films intend to reveal the reality of gender inequality, fulfilling the cultural specificity of Third Cinema films, the films are successful in doing so because Sri Lanka, in general, and rural and remote areas of the country in particular, are conservative and patriarchal settings (Vithanage 2015a, De Mel 2001). This situation would be more so during a civil war, a period of social unrest and during times of reduced levels of law and order and economic independence of women (Davies & True 2017). Therefore, as depicted in the film, the situation could have aligned with women's actual reality, especially for those who are marginalised and disadvantaged within the settings.

On the other hand, as Wanasundera (2010) states, gender-based violence, especially in Sri Lanka, is rooted in the patriarchal norms and attitudes regarding women in which women are seen as the property of men. If these films promote those patriarchal norms and attitudes regarding women, they violate the critical commitment of empowering women to be free from those exploitative norms and attitudes. By visualising the same stereotypes women experience in their lives on screen, they legitimise the patriarchal norms and attitudes of stereotypical gender roles. This legitimisation may have prevented the male academic interviewees from further discussing these gender stereotypes compared to their female counterparts. A similar response was seen among the male participants of the general audience as well. Further, as I discussed in Chapter Five, different interpretations of this text are possible. Thus, in contrast to the above argument, one can also claim that these films critically show female subjugation in a patriarchal society. By doing so, the filmmakers criticise colonialism because patriarchy denotes colonial power in which woman signifies the nation dominated by imperialists (Naaman 2000).

Although the male academic interviewees identified stereotypical gender representations in these films, only the female academic interviewees showed interest in explaining those representations in detail. These different expressions may be because being female in a Sri Lankan social context, and academics within Sri Lankan universities, they may feel the pressure of female subordination and workplace gender discrimination more intensely than male academics. These social experiences might mean they more readily identify with the ramifications of, and express the stereotypical gender roles portrayed in, these films and more readily recognise how filmmakers use the male gaze to project such gender images, which I discuss next.

Female academics identified that the male gaze is one strategy the films use to project the stereotypical gender identity of the woman as a phantasy object. By doing so, these films reinforce patriarchal gender

identities. According to Cooper (2000), the male gaze "is typical in mainstream Hollywood cinema" (2000, p. 277). Mulvey (1975) states that the male gaze projects the woman as a phantasy object to satisfy the male unconscious. As she states, women's objectification through the gaze happens in three ways: the camera, the character and the spectator. She explains that the voyeuristic male gaze of the camera and the male characters in the film ultimately become the spectator's gaze. According to Mulvey (1975), male dominance in cinema encourages this male gaze. Since Sri Lankan cinema is typically male dominant, and male directors produced the selected three films, the female academic interviewees might have witnessed the male gaze in these films.

> Female interviewee 1 (Academic): Intentionally or unintentionally, the directors had looked at women through a male gaze. In other words, while speaking for women's issues in their films to a certain extent, they had placed the audiences in a male gaze when looking at the female characters as the films discuss female sexuality in a male point of view.

> Female interviewee 2 (Academic): Male directors did these three films, and therefore male perception is represented in them.

In the three films, the female characters are portrayed as desperate for sex and easily approached by men. Those female characters are either looked at as sex objects or used (forcefully or with consent) for male pleasure. For example: in *This Is My Moon*, the Tamil woman being raped, the widow inviting men to have sex and the soldier's sister making love with the two boys she is friendly with; in *Shades of Ash*, Komala and Heen Eki are portrayed as prostitutes and the little Ungi is abused by the owner of the house she works in as a servant; in *The Forsaken Land*, Latha is shown being unfaithful to her husband by engaging in an extramarital affair with her husband's soldier friend. Anura's sister in the same film is depicted as desperate for sex and little Batti as an older man's love interest. Likewise, the female characters are portrayed as sex objects.

According to the female academic interviewee 1 and 3, these films depict sexually objectified female characters. Sexual objectification occurs when "women are treated as bodies and in particular, as bodies that exist for the use and pleasure of others" (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997, p. 175). This sexual objectification of women is a common trend in mainstream films (Mulvey 1975). As the female academic interviewee 1 stated, women's objectification in the selected films is expressed differently by representing the female body as a phantasy object and representing women as passive sexual recipients.

The female academic interviewee 1 explained that the male perspective objectifies the women's bodies in all three films. For her, the directors use the female body as a 'phantasy object' (as explained by Laura Mulvey (1975)) of sex in which women become the object of happiness for men.

Female interviewee 1 (Academic): The female nudity is used as a phantasy object in these films.

Female interviewee 3 (Academic): Sometimes, women were represented as objects used by men. For example, Komala's character in *Shades of Ash* is a typical woman who is a sex object [because she works as a prostitute] and the caregiver [and the breadwinner] of the family. Although Latha's character in *The Forsaken Land* represents some liberation [because she starts an extramarital relationship to satisfy her need for sex], in the end, the film uses her as a sex object [by showing her nudity and portraying her as a passive sex receiver]. The Tamil woman in *This Is My Moon* is being abused [sexually and physically] since she is alone and there is nobody to own [and therefore, protect] her.

The camera angles play an essential role in these three films in objectification. For instance, when the soldier first meets the Tamil woman at the bunker, she lifts her skirt to show her naked bottom. The film shows a long shot of both the soldier and the Tamil woman and then a close-up shot of the soldier's face, lustfully looking at the half-naked Tamil woman. This scene shows how the character's gaze is used to objectify the woman. The medium close-up shot of the topless soldier's girlfriend taken from above in *This Is My Moon* may give the audience a feeling of looking at the woman from the top which may signify men's dominant posture of sexual intercourse, which is a social construct (Bourdieu 2001).

In *The Forsaken Land*, a medium shot of the waxed thighs of Anura's sister (which is not realistic for women in remote villages in Sri Lanka), a close-up of Latha's breast and a full shot of her naked body taken from behind gives a feeling of looking at the women's body closely and also these "hot points of men's desire reduce women to the status of an object" (Young 2018, p. 66). The body of the actress who plays Latha's role meets the criteria of beauty in popular culture: slender body, trim hips, unblemished and smooth skin (Mazur 1986)). The film shows the medium and close-up shots of Latha's face while engaging in sex with the soldier two times. In their investigation of the sex difference in visual attention to moving images as sexual stimuli, Tsujimura et al. (2009) have found that men's gaze time for the naked actress's face and body were significantly longer than women's gaze time for the naked actor's face and body. Thus, by showing the face of Latha but not the soldier, the film caters to men's desire. The portrayal of Komala removing her undergarments while engaging in prostitution in *Shades of Ash* also signifies the voyeuristic male gaze in these films that objectify the woman.

The male characters' nudity and sexual behaviour are implicit compared to that of female characters. For instance, Anura and the older man's nudity are framed in extreme long shots and close-ups. In close-ups, none of their private parts except the buttocks can be seen. These nude scenes of the male characters are in no way connected to sexual behaviours. In the scene where the soldier engages in sex with Latha, his buttock is visible in a medium-full shot, and his face cannot be seen. These scenes indicate that these

films cater to fulfil the male desire by projecting women as a sexual object because, as Bleakley et al. (2012) found in their study *Trends of sexual and violent content by gender in top-grossing US films, 1950–2006*, the "female characters are more likely to be cast in roles that feature sexual depiction and/or behaviour" (2012, p. 78) than male characters.

The second strategy of female objectification, according to the female academic interviewee 1, is that these films represented women as passive recipients of sexual actions performed on them while the men played the role of active sex attackers. According to Mulvey (1975), the heterosexual division of labour controls the narrative structure (of the films). The sexual imbalance is the governing norm of heterosexual division of labour. This sexual imbalance creates a division of pleasure in looking between active male and passive female.

> Female interviewee 1 (Academic): When we talk about gender in general, we say a woman is always subordinate to man. Man is a sexually active person, and he is the sex attacker. This ideology is not challenged in any of these films. Women in Sri Lanka do not speak openly about their need for sex or act because of cultural boundaries and social norms.

Representation of man as the sex attacker and the woman as the passive recipient is visible in consensual and forced sexual activities. For instance, although Latha and the soldier have sex with Latha's consent in *The Forsaken Land*, the soldier initiates the action, and no affection can be seen in his behaviour. In the same film, Anura's sister is approached sexually by a stranger in the bus without her consent (however, the film portrays Anura's sister enjoying that incident) and the older man is touching Batti without her willingness. *This Is My Moon* shows a young man kissing the soldier's sister forcefully (although she is in love with him). The same film portrays the soldier, his brother and a young man in the village raping the Tamil woman. The only scene that goes against this norm is the widow kissing the soldier without his consent in *This Is My Moon*. In *Shades of Ash*, Komala and Heen Eki engage in prostitution because they have no other choice and an older man abuses Ungi.

According to female academic interviewee 1, depictions of sexually objectified women prevent the films from highlighting crucial issues women face. After all, in any war-torn setting, women and children face enormous difficulties, oppression, exploitation, disadvantages and challenges and are the most negatively affected (Turpin 1998, Machel 2016). As she further explains, even though the filmmakers had discussed such matters in their films to some extent, their use of the female bodies encourages audiences to focus on the women's body rather than paying attention to the difficulties they face.

> Female interviewee 1 (Academic): While speaking for women's issues in their films to a certain extent, they place the audiences in a male gaze when looking at the female characters. As audiences, we tend to fantasise Latha's body and forget about the tragedy

she faces. Sometimes the filmmaker might say that there are more important social issues during a war period than women's issues. However, they use women characters to make their film an attractive one.

Subordination of women's identity to mothers, wives, or caregivers tends to dominate patriarchal ideology in Sri Lankan socio-cultural contexts for centuries (Withers & Biyanwila 2014). Although it is not the reality in every setting or context, some people tend to believe it is or wish it to be so. These films have not challenged this ideology. For instance, in *This Is My Moon*, none of the female characters engages in any work except playing the love interest of male characters. *Shades of Ash* represents that most female characters depend on men. When they lose the support of men, they engage in prostitution as a way of living. For example, Komala works as a prostitute to take care of her blind father, disabled husband (who was a soldier), the little orphan boy, and Heen Eki also becomes a prostitute after her soldier brother's death.

Sometimes audiences, especially in Asian countries, may not recognise the patriarchal ideologies, discriminatory towards women and conveyed through film, as a facade, because such ideologies are inculcated in the society and generalised as social and cultural norms (Niaz 2003). The following opinion of the female academic interviewee 2 is an excellent example of that.

> Female interviewee 2 (Academic): Middle-class working women are sexually abused on public transportation. Women suffer from it, and they dislike it. However, it is depicted in the film as not so. For example, in *The Forsaken Land* Anura's sister is shown as enjoying such abuse on public transportation.

According to Cultivation Theory (Gerbner 1972), such depictions are harmful to women as they naturalise and condone the 'bad behaviour' of men harassing women on public transport as something desired by or benefitting women. This ideology may disempower women who stand against sexual harassment on public transportation. It may also encourage the abusers to continue their misdeeds. Cultivating dominant assumptions, such as patriarchal gender stereotypes, leads to discrimination against women (Sharda 2014). Gerbner (1972) claims that cultivating such assumptions symbolise who holds power and how the society functions. His study demonstrates that the mass media, primarily television, cultivates attitudes and values pre-existing in culture. The above comment of the participant confirms that cinema does too.

Another stereotypical representation of women noticed by female academic interviewee 1 is that the films depict tragic endings for most female characters: Komala (suicide), Ungi (abused) and Heen Eki (becomes a prostitute) in *Shades of Ash*; Tamil woman (raped, pregnant and abandoned) and soldier's sister (loss of lover) in *This Is My Moon*; and Latha (loss of lover) and Anura's sister (suicide) in *The*

Forsaken Land. According to female academic interviewee 1, this has been a trend in the Sri Lankan cinema for years.

> Female interviewee 1 (Academic): Many films on women's issues end by bringing the female character into a tragic situation. They are being killed, become mad or commit suicide. These three films also bring their female characters into a tragic ending. Therefore, I do not think that these three films have done justice to the female characters.

However, the Tamil woman's character in *This Is My Moon*, and the little girl Batti's character in *The Forsaken Land* show hopeful endings. The Tamil woman joins with the Sinhalese villagers and adapts their lifestyle. Her daughter symbolises positive hopes. Similarly, at the climax of the film, Batti goes to school, symbolising optimism for her future through education, despite her negative past experiences.

It is important to note that only academics, both male and female, expressed that these films represent females in stereotypical gender roles, such as women being passive and subordinate to men. However, the male academic interviewees did not explain how films stereotype women as female academic interviewees did. None of the male interviewees (neither the academics nor film reviewers) noticed women's objectification in these films through the male gaze. The interviewees' feedback ultimately shows that the gender difference of the audience members affects how they interpret the gender representations in these films. This analysis also revealed that although the academic members of the audience discussed the stereotypical patriarchal gender roles depicted in these films, they did not give significance to the patriarchal gender norms criticised and challenged by the films. As discussed in the textual analysis, these films portray stereotypical gender roles women play in Sri Lankan society. By doing so, the filmmakers discuss the female subjugation of the patriarchal society and the ground reality of the women living in war-affected areas. This variation of the interpretations shows the polysemy of a cultural text. However, the interviewee comments show that these films are not necessarily successful in awakening the audience's consciousness against discriminative and exploitative gender norms in Sri Lankan culture.

The impact of war on women and children

One male film reviewer, one male academic and one female academic expressed that these films represent the impact of war on women and children. In contrast, another male academic stated that these films represent the typical gender violence women and children face in Sri Lankan society. These responses confirm that these films acknowledge gender-based violence and gender discrimination in society and specifically in a war setting which was discussed in chapters five and six. According to the male film reviewer interviewee 2 and male academic interviewee 4, in any country, war affects women

and children is a typical phenomenon and these films portray the vulnerability and pressure they face. These films, as they stated, portray women who are connected to soldier families.

> Male interviewee 2 (Film reviewer): All three films depict how vulnerable women and children are during a civil war period. Primarily, the films depict loneliness and vulnerability women face. This vulnerability can happen in two ways: first, when men are in the battlefield, the family of that man – his wife and children – are insecure and isolated; second, the family has to face intense social pressure, economic pressure and sexual pressure. All three films represent these issues.

> Male Interviewee 4 (Academic): All three films commonly depict the difficulties women face in a war situation. All the female characters depicted in the films have some connection with the war. They are either mothers, sisters, or wives of soldiers. Violation of their needs due to war pushes them into challenging conditions. For economic survival, they compelled to do prostitution. To fulfil sexual needs, they are compelled to seek extramarital relationships.

As they explained, these films depict the difficulties wives/girlfriends and children of the soldiers (who fight at the battlefront) face at the home front. For instance, in *This Is My Moon*, the dead soldier's wife has to prove that she is married to the soldier to avoid social pressure of being called a 'bad woman' because she is pregnant and to avoid economic pressure by obtaining the compensation given by the government to war widows. In *Shades of Ash*, Komala engages in a sexual relationship with Pema outside of her marriage to avoid sexual pressure while her husband is on the battlefield. Later she becomes a prostitute to earn money to look after her family when her soldier husband becomes disabled. In the same film, Heen Eki also becomes a prostitute after her soldier brother's death because she does not have any other economic means of survival. Interviewee 2, as a journalist and a social worker, has worked in war-affected areas in Sri Lanka. His experiences may have influenced his interpretation.

Interviewee 4 is an academic from an urbanised area and has never been to war-affected settings. Thus, his responses show that they tend to believe these media depictions reflect reality. One reason for them to do so is that all three films show the same aspects of war – the impact of war on women and children. According to Cultivation Analysis (Gerbner et al. 1986), such common depictions can shape audiences' perceptions and eventually change their political opinions. In that sense, these films can convince people to believe the destructive nature of the war. However, it also seems that when the stereotypical roles of men and women are mixed with such depictions, people may tend to believe those stereotypical gender roles also as a social reality, or they do not notice such stereotypical representations.

According to the female academic interviewee, the films portray women's destiny within the "sexual economy of war" (De Mel 2007, p. 221). Female interviewee 1 is also an academic from an urban setting. She may also have never been to a war-torn area. However, her long term practice in critically analysing a media text and her film literacy may have influenced her interpretation.

> Female interviewee 1 (Academic): All three films talk about the tragedy women face in a war context. For instance, the Tamil woman in *This Is My Moon* becomes the primary victim of the war. She uses her sexuality to save her life.

As she explained, women in war-affected areas are compelled to use their sexuality for their survival. For instance, in *This Is My Moon*, the Tamil woman offers her body to the soldier in exchange for her life. Komala and Heen Eki in *Shades of Ash* become prostitutes for economic survival. One can argue that while portraying sexual exploitation of women, these films also reduce women to a sexually objectified body because they are depicted using their bodies for survival instead of using their brains or effort.

Male academic interviewee 5 and female academic interviewee 3 stated that these films portray typical gender-based violence against women and children in Sri Lanka. According to them, the violence against women and children depicted in the films is not unique to the war-affected areas but is common across society.

> Male interviewee 5 (Academic): Gender violence affects women without any age or ethnic difference. Rape, child abuse, sex abuse in public transportation, verbal abuse, all these incidents are depicted in these films.

> Female interviewee 3 (Academic): Any remote village, whether it is affected by war or not, can have a similar type of economic problem. Women from any area of the country may engage in prostitution due to poverty.

For instance, *This Is My Moon* portrays several villagers raping the Tamil woman several times. In *Shades of Ash*, Komala and Heen Eki become sex workers and adults abuse Ungi and Ukkuwa who are kids in *The Forsaken Land*, Anura's sister is abused on public transportation and the older man is touching little Batti without her willingness. According to the interviewees, sexual violence against women, sex trafficking, and child abuse are common phenomena across Sri Lankan society. As Vithanage (2015b) claims in her study *Understanding the nature and scope of trafficking of women in Sri Lanka for sex work: what needs to be done?*, identification of sex work as an illicit act by Sri Lankan constitutional law, stigmatisation of it as an immoral and shameful act by the society and culture, and subordination of women by a patriarchal social system cause trafficking women and children for sex work, exploitation and sexual violence against sex workers, making them vulnerable to sexually

transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS. This condition prevents sex workers reaching out looking for help, worsening their situation. These two interviewees are from urban settings. They must have seen or heard about similar incidents from their geographical surroundings. This demographical factor seems to influence them to generalise sexual violence as a common phenomenon in Sri Lanka.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, these films are successful in conveying the exploitative nature of war critically. The interviews conducted with academics and film reviewers reveal that they interpreted explicit and implicit portrayals of the impact of war on women and children. While some interpreted these portrayals as representing gender-based violence in general, some interpreted them as specific to war-affected societies. In that sense, these three films successfully fulfil the critical commitment of Third Cinema and politicisation.

7.3.2. Representations of gender roles and sexual relationships: newspaper reviews

Concerning the representations of gender and sexuality, the newspaper analysis found positive, negative and neutral reviews of the selected films. Some reviews published in mainstream newspapers exhibited the influence of government propaganda of war while the other reviews exhibited gendered social experiences, anti-war political opinions and media literacy levels of the reviewers. The professional film reviewers with high media literacy level had explained both negative and positive aspects of the films. The reviewers driven by political objectives reviewed the films negatively.

The films' positive reviews exhibited the reviewers' media literacy level, which they used to read the films' underlying meanings. In *This Is My Moon*, reviewers see the Tamil woman depicted in a dominant role as a positive point. Sumithra Peris, an acclaimed and pioneer female film director in Sri Lanka, stated that

> Although the Tamil girl speaks a little, she is not silent. She makes things happen in the village. She uses her sexuality to ward off aggression against her. Her power within the context of the film gives the audiences a hope that she and her child will have a better future. (Peris, cited in *Asoka Handagama wins again*, 2001, p. 11)

Another positive aspect the reviewers see is that the film depicts sexual pressure instead of sexual pleasure (Kaluarachchi 2001b) faced by the characters in the film.

The Forsaken Land depicts Anura's sister's character in an empathetic manner (Pieris 2005). The film portrays the melancholic mental state of Anura's sister due to several reasons. First, she is single and desperate for a life partner. The scenes that show her observing her sister-in-law's wedding saree, enjoying being abused by a stranger on public transportation, and comparing Anura's sister and the folk story about *Katikirilli* who goes to find a life partner emphasise her melancholic mentality due to

loneliness. Second, she is frustrated because she is educated but underemployed. For instance, she says to Anura that she applied for a teaching vacancy because she wants to use her education productively. Third, she thinks she is a burden to her brother because she lives with her brother and sister-in-law in the same house.

Some of the sex scenes depicted in *The Forsaken Land* received positive reviews. According to the reviewers, the sex scenes do not urge sexual feelings of the audiences (Pieris 2005, Ivan 2005) but "symbolises the feeling of abandonment and develop the forsakenness" (Ivan 2005, p. 17). For instance, the sex scene between the pregnant lady and the man may symbolise abandonment, mainly because the film later shows the pregnant lady is dead and Anura reveals to his wife that the lady is an outsider and has committed suicide. The sex scene between Latha and the soldier in the woods does not show passion but their mental stress, caused by the stagnated forsaken life.

Some newspapers reported negative ideas about the depictions of gender and sexuality in the selected films. One is that *This Is My Moon* portrays women in sexually objectified roles (Ilayaparachchi 2001, Seneviratne 2001). According to Seneviratne (2001, p. 10), "Woman play mostly sexually objectified roles. No community role is given to them other than those of objects of love and lust." For instance, five main female characters are there in the film and none of them are shown engaged in any employment or other household activity. All of them are connected to one or more men. The Tamil woman is used by the soldier, his brother, village boy and the Buddhist monk to fulfil their lust. The soldier's girlfriend tries to win him back from the Tamil woman. The soldier's sister is the love interest of the two village boys. Being a female film reviewer, Seneviratne has identified women's sexual objectification in the film and is descriptive (like female academics).

Ilayaparachchi (2001) sees unfairness in depicting the Tamil woman's character in the film. According to him, although the "Tamil woman represents the poor minority women caught up in a conflict, not of their own making, she is depicted as the disruptor rather than the disrupted. She disturbs the normal order of the border village" (Ilayaparachchi 2001, p. 15). When Ilayaparachchi's opinion is compared with interviewee 1 (who is also a film reviewer), they interpret the same subject (the Tamil woman) differently. While interviewee 1 interprets the Tamil woman as a symbol of Tamil community who faced the ethnic issue, Ilayaparachchi interprets her as a minority woman caught up in a conflict. These interpretations show the polysemic nature of a film text. Their interpretations might be based on their political opinion of war. As I discussed earlier, interviewee 1 might not like to accept that a Tamil woman might be harassed by the Sinhalese community which he belongs to. However, Ilayaparachchi might have thought such incidents are possible in war-affected areas.

Another interpretation of *This Is My Moon* is that the director is romanticising the war by depicting that the war has destroyed all the other aspects of human life except sexuality (Ilayaparachchi 2001).

According to the writer, the director gives priority to sexuality in the film. Sexuality is the main factor that decides the social space of these characters. As he explains, every character has a sexual dimension. For instance, there is a Tamil female slave for the soldier; the schoolgirl has two admirers who compete to win her. Everybody is sexually open to each other. For him, whether the war has created this sexual atmosphere is a question. This portrayal of explicit sex scenes was criticised by the majority of audience members as well. Their criticisms might be based on these audience members' cultural backgrounds because, in Sri Lankan culture, sex is a concept that is not discussed explicitly and openly.

Some film reviewers criticise *The Forsaken Land* for its sexual objectification of women. For Pieris (2005), the film imprisons Anura's sister's character in a sexual frame, and he also claims that her suicidal act is illogical. As he explains, witnessing her sister-in-law having sex with another man is not a logical reason for her to commit suicide. The film is also criticised in general for its portrayal of women in sexually objectified roles. According to Weerasekara (2005), the film illustrates "the innocent village women as undisciplined who would have sex with anybody, anywhere" (2005, p. 23). Weerasekara's interpretation displays stereotypical opinions of women's gender roles. For instance, Weerasekara's statement of "innocent village women as undisciplined" (2005, p. 23) labels village women as innocent and disciplined (the binary opposition of city women as cunning and undisciplined). It also indicates that women engaging in sex with anybody is undisciplined (which also brings the binary opposition of men engaging in sex with anybody is acceptable). Both interpretations reveal the patriarchal gender ideologies practised in Sri Lankan culture and society. Kodithuwakku (2005) reveals that the film shows women who do not engage in any labour work but providing sexual pleasure to men. Kodithuwakku's opinion seems extreme since the film depicts Anura's sister going to work, earning money and buying essentials for her family.

The Forsaken Land was also criticised for being over-sexualised (Kodithuwakku 2005, Wickramasinghe 2005, Pieris 2005, Weerasekara 2005). They blame the film for its sexual reductionism. According to them, the film shows sex as the only driving force of human life (Pieris 2005, p. 7) which is not realistic, and it also shows sexual acts explicitly (Wickramasinghe 2005). As Pieris (2005) explains, these direct sexual behaviours, such as harsh sexual activities taking place in the woods with no affection displayed, and the scene of the pregnant lady having sex with a man in the woods (which the reviewer compares to animal behaviour) represents the filmmaker's 'fantasies' regarding intimate human relationships. Among these reviews, the reviews of Kodithuwakku (2005) and Weerasekara (2005), overall, seem biased against the films. Weerasekara, a high-ranked officer in the army, might have thought the films are against the armed forces and the Sinhalese ethnicity. In one of his articles, he addresses the filmmakers who produce films criticising the armed forces and their family members as 'traitors', and they should be given capital punishment.

The reviewers who were neutrally criticising the films also claimed that these films express the idea of subordination. According to Seneviratne (2001), "the film expresses the idea of subordination, which is central to any conflict. The Sinhalese man's subordination of the Tamil woman; the state's subordination of the welfare of poor Sinhalese civilians; male subordination of women are examples" (2001, p. 10). The films express the subordination of marginalised groups: male subordination of women (e.g. Komala, Heen Eki and Ungi become victims of sex abuse in *Shades of Ash*); the subordination of minority groups by majority groups (e.g. the Tamil woman being raped by the Sinhalese soldier in *This Is My Moon*); subordination of vulnerable groups by dominant groups (e.g. army soldiers torture Annura, the civil guard, and the soldier being molested by higher officers in *The Forsaken Land*).

The reviewers, constructively critical of the films, stated that they depict brutalisation of sexuality. The brutalisation of sexuality is expressed by depicting the Tamil woman offering her body (to the Sinhalese soldier inside the bunker she hides in during an armed attack) in exchange for her life. According to the writer, this expresses the sexual brutalisation in the man and the woman.

The positive, negative and neutral interpretations of the films show that they are based on the reviewers' gendered social experiences, media literacy and political opinions. Through these reviews, it is also clear that these films portray patriarchal gender identities of women as sex objects while they challenge some patriarchal gender norms of female sexual freedom.

7.3.3. Representations of gender roles and sexual relationships: opinions of focus group participants

In this section, I argue that there are both similarities and differences in the interpretations of the films among audience members. These similarities and differences are based on social and cultural backgrounds, gendered experiences and the exposure to stereotypical media representations of gender identities. Six focus groups with 36 participants – 18 male and 18 female – expressed their opinions about the representation of gender roles and sexual relationships in the three selected films. They belonged to the age group of 18 to 55. The groups consisted of youth fresh out of school, university students, volunteer social workers, teachers, university academics, accountants, business people, homemakers and private sector employees. All the participants were Sinhala language speakers.

The focus group members' interpretations of gender roles and sexual relationships could be grouped into eight categories of opinions. They are: negative representations of women (30%), neutral representations of men and women (19%), negative representations of men (10%), positive representations of women (6%), positive representations of men (6%), exaggerated sexual behaviour (24%), and representations of homosexuality (3%). The results are given in Table 5.

Table 5: The focus group members' interpretations of gender roles and sexual relationships

No	Categories of opinions	Male participants	Female participants	Total number of participants
1	Negative representations of women	7 (37)	12 (63)	19 (30)
2	Neutral representations of men and women	10 (83)	2 (17)	12 (19)
3	Negative representations of men	2 (33)	4 (67)	6 (10)
4	Positive representations of women	3 (75)	1 (25)	4 (6)
5	Positive representations of men	2 (50)	2 (50)	4 (6)
6	Exaggerated sexual behaviour	6 (25)	9 (75)	15 (24)
7	Representations of homosexuality	0 (0)	2 (100)	2 (3)
	Total	30	32	62* (100) **

* Number of opinions expressed on a theme is greater than the total number of participants in the sample because one participant can express multiple opinions under a given category of opinions.

**Numbers within the parenthesis are percentages.

Negative representations of women

Focus group participants (30%) of all three films interpreted these films as representing women in negative roles. The majority (63%) of the participants who held this opinion were females. The participants' responses establish that their gendered social experiences, and educational, social and cultural backgrounds influence their interpretations.

Female participants for *Shades of Ash* are teachers, private sector employees and housemakers. All of them are from urban backgrounds and are educated. They expressed the opinion that the film portrays patriarchal gender stereotypes, such as women as nurturers, caregivers and sex workers who are weak and helpless and men as breadwinners. For instance, the village men work as army soldiers, entrepreneurs, government officers and religious leaders while the women engage in household activities or sex work. The film also portrays the conservative patriarchal view that women should take responsibility for relationship failures; for example, Ajith blames Komala for infidelity.

> Women are represented in stereotyped images as mothers, nurturers and caregivers. Komala adopts an orphan child and looks after her blind father and the sick husband. (*Shades of Ash* – female participant 1)

The only profession available for women in areas affected by war is prostitution. Women should take responsibility for relationship failure. (*Shades of Ash* – female participant 2)

According to the female participant 2, the film also depicts that the only profession available to women in war-affected areas is prostitution. Komala and Heen Eki work as prostitutes. These participants are from the urban settings of Sri Lanka. They have never been to war-affected regions. Thus, they may not know about women's limited opportunities to earn their living in such areas. However, they were educated enough to acknowledge the gender inequalities portrayed in the film.

Unlike female participants, male participants who are teachers, university students, school fresh outs and entrepreneurs from urban backgrounds do not see these portrayals as stereotypes. Instead, they normalise women being caregivers and nurturers and men being breadwinners as a cultural factor and the existing social reality. They have also taken women sacrificing their lives for the wellbeing of the family for granted. The following quotations illustrate this point.

Men in these villages have no other option than to join the army. When men go to the battlefield, the women become helpless. They have no way of satisfying their (sexual) feelings and are pushed into extramarital relationships. The film depicts the injustice women face due to their helplessness. (*Shades of Ash* – male participant 1)

The film depicts that women would do anything for their families. This act of dedication is a factor in our culture. Mothers would do anything for their children. That is why Komala engages in prostitution to feed her family. (*Shades of Ash* – male participant 2)

Komala chooses the wrong job because she is a mother, and she is helpless. Every woman ends up doing prostitution according to this film. For instance, Heen Eki, at the end of the film, starts doing prostitution. (*Shades of Ash* – male participant 5)

Men are the dominant and privileged group or superiors within the patriarchal social system. Therefore, male participants may think these stereotypical roles as a naturalised and acceptable way of life, whereas women, being the subordinated and marginalised group or inferiors within the same system, may see such roles as constructions of that social system. Further, the existing social norms or beliefs of the gender roles backed by patriarchal ideologies have significantly influenced the male participants' interpretations.

Female participants for *This Is My Moon* are from semi-urban regions of central Sri Lanka and a mix of averagely educated to well-educated women. They also have never been to war-affected areas. According to them, the film represents women in negative gender roles in three ways. First, the film portrays women as indecent by showing them revealing their sexual feelings openly. Second, the film

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depicts women as sex objects to be used and abused by men. Third, the film represents women as helpless victims and dependents who need to be protected by someone else – mostly men.

According to female participants, the film depicts women as indecent by revealing their sexual feelings openly.

> The soldier's sister has an affair with two young boys. This relationship status creates a bad image of the girls. The film also depicts that women convince men to have sex with them. (*This Is My Moon* – female participant 4)

Women openly expressing their sexual feelings is perceived as unacceptable and indecent behaviour within the Sri Lankan cultural context (Hewamanne 2016), even within less conservative settings. For instance, the soldier's sister being friendly with two boys and ultimately choosing one of them as the life partner, and she flirts with military police soldiers; the widowed soldier's wife kisses the army deserter and she invites the bookie to have sex with her. The female participants interpreted these behaviours as indecent. This participant is from a conservative cultural background. Thus, she may have thought a girl being talkative and friendly with many men was inappropriate.

Objectification of women is another criticism expressed by a female participant. According to her, the film illustrates men using women to fulfil their sexual needs and women as always ready to cater to them.

> This film persuades the male audience to look at women as a sex object. (*This Is My Moon* – female participant 4)

For instance, the Tamil woman is abused by several men in the village; the soldier's girlfriend, even after knowing the soldier has a physical connection with the Tamil woman, sleeps with the soldier; and the film exposes the nudity of the Tamil woman and the soldier's girlfriend to the audience. As discussed in the textual analysis, village men abusing the Tamil woman symbolises the background of the ethnic issue. However, the low level of film literacy may have caused this participant not to understand the symbolic meaning of these incidents.

According to female participant 6, the film depicts women as helpless dependents who need someone's protection, mostly men.

> The men abuse the Tamil woman in the film because of her helplessness. There are such helpless women in real society. (*This Is My Moon* – female participant 6)

However, she believed that women being helpless is a social reality more than a media construction. The patriarchal social norms have inculcated in women's minds that they are weak and helpless and therefore

need to live under the protection of men throughout their life. These responses indicate that the female participants' cultural backgrounds and their gendered experiences have influenced their interpretations of gender representations in this film.

Under the negative representations of women, participants for *The Forsaken Land* expressed that the film misrepresents the Sri Lankan woman by depicting female characters not engaging in any household activity. Furthermore, they stated that the director had given a tragic ending to women without giving the audiences any hope. According to some female participants, the film portrays women who spend their time doing nothing – no household work or other labour. They thought it is a misrepresentation of Sri Lankan women who always engage in productive activity. Unlike the other two participant groups, the participants of this group are university students and academics who study and teach media studies, and two administrative officers from the university also participated in this focus group.

> Latha spends time at home doing nothing. Generally, Sri Lankan women do not stay home without doing anything. They engage in some household activity. (*The Forsaken Land –* female participant 1)

> The film misrepresents the Sri Lankan women. Sri Lankan women do not have time to waste doing nothing. They are dedicated to their family. (*The Forsaken Land –* female participant 6)

These participants' claims apply only to Latha's character because the other main female character in the film, Anura's sister, is portrayed as an employed woman. These two female participants are from a rural background and were brought up in a conservative family setup. Thus, their responses show that their everyday experience might have compelled them to think like that. In patriarchal societies, women are expected to do household activities such as cleaning, cooking and child-caring, which this film does not portray. In that sense, the film also challenges the stereotypical patriarchal gender roles by showing a woman who exists out of that frame.

The second opinion some male and female participants expressed under negative representations of women is the depiction of tragic endings for female characters. This interpretation might be based on the education level of the participants because they are undergraduates.

> The director kills Anura's sister at the end of the film. At one scene, she says she has applied for a job. The director would have given her a chance to live through that line. However, he does not do so. (*The Forsaken Land –* female participant 2)

> The suicide of Anura's sister indicates that there is no support for women in this society. She tries her best to escape from that society, but she is unable to do so. She decides to

commit suicide. The death of the pregnant lady also proves this idea. (*The Forsaken Land* – male participant 6)

According to them, the characters of Anura's sister and the pregnant lady are negative representations of women. They thought these two characters give audiences the feeling that women always fail in their fight with the conservative patriarchal society. Rather than fight and live, they choose death – sometimes even without a fight. Thus, this depiction discourages women and prevents them from fighting back, which violates the critical commitment of the Third Cinema film that is intended to encourage women to fight against the repressive gender discriminations of society. However, in the textual analysis, it was also argued that these tragic endings of the women also symbolise the tragedy the war brings into people's lives.

Neutral representations of men and women

Both male and female participants (19%) interpreted that the films portray neutral representations of gender identities. The majority (83%) of them were male participants. The responses demonstrate that their gendered social experiences and education levels influenced their interpretations.

One male participant for *Shades of Ash* thought that the film depicts difficulties people face in war-torn areas, without any gender differences. According to him, the filmmaker represents the power relations between people in society in general. In *Shades of Ash*, men are depicted as people with power compared to women, but women with money possess more power than poor men within the same setting.

> The film depicts the power relations existing between people within the setting. According to the film, men possess more power than women. However, women possess more power when they are wealthier than men. The NGO lady is an excellent example of that. (*Shades of Ash* – male participant 1)

For instance, village women such as Komala, Heen Eki and Ungi play inferior gender roles compared to men within the setting, but the film portrays the NGO lady who represents the urban upper-middle-class as superior to village men. The participant sees this as something that can often be seen in society when gender interacts with class, education, power and social or professional position. Being a well-educated person from Colombo, this participant's educational background and social background might have influenced his interpretation because educated people from urban settings are more aware of gender inequalities and gendered power relations than rural, less-educated communities from conservative social backgrounds.

Two male participants and a female participant for *The Forsaken Land* explained that the film portrays the pressure Sri Lankan culture and society put on women using Anura's sister and the pregnant lady's

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characters. Thus, the film fulfils the cultural specificity by showing the exploitative aspects of culture to the audiences. It is also important to note that both male and female participants interpreted these repressive cultural aspects portrayed in the film. Their education level must have influenced their interpretations since they are either graduates or undergraduates.

> The woman is represented in the film as one who is suppressed by social and cultural issues. (*The Forsaken Land* – male participant 1)

> Anura's sister is very much concerned about socially accepted norms. When she sees her sister-in-law in a sexual relationship with the soldier, she could not tolerate that. That is why she commits suicide. (*The Forsaken Land* – male participant 5)

> Anura's sister is depressed because she is unmarried, and she has passed the socially accepted age of getting married. She is worried about that. (*The Forsaken Land* – female participant 5)

In a patriarchal society, women are trained to feel guilty for violating cultural norms. Anura's sister feels frustrated for not getting married at the right age and feels guilty about being a burden to her brother even if she is financially independent. When she encountered her sister-in-law engaged in an extramarital affair with another man, she (correctly or incorrectly) feels guilty for being the cause of her brother's unsuccessful married life (thinking of herself as being a burden and not allowing them privacy for intimacy) and commits suicide. Hence, the participants saw the pressure of society put only on women. However, the same can be seen with men as well. For instance, Anura may think it is his responsibility to arrange a marriage for her sister. His guilt may lead him not to have an active sex life with his wife, Latha. However, one has to question if he is gay as female participant 4 had observed below, which could have led to his wife's affair.

> The behaviour between the soldier and Anura gives a hint of homosexuality. When Anura was sobbing after a group of army soldiers harassed him, this soldier comes and consoles him. (*The Forsaken Land* – female participant 4)

These participants have a higher level of media literacy and are knowledgeable in gender inequalities in Sri Lankan society since they teach and study media studies and gender studies in university. Thus, their education level must have influenced their interpretations.

Some participants have observed that the folk tale of *Katikirilli* reflects Anura's sister's life, who is frustrated for not being married or not having a life partner.

> The *Katikirilli's* story is the story of Anura's sister. She is profoundly depressed. (*The Forsaken Land* – female participant 1)

The *Katikirrilli's* story is the story of Anura's sister. (*The Forsaken Land* – male participant 2)

According to the folk story, "*Katikirilli*" is a mature lady seeking a partner alone because her parents cannot find her one. At the end of the story, *Katikirilli* gets killed by her partner because he gets angry with the neighbours (society) for insulting him. *Katikirilli* gets killed for someone else's (society's) fault, and similarly, Anura's sister kills herself due to society's fault.

The society is generally at fault for strictly enforced traditions, rules and norms that are difficult for underprivileged and marginalised people to follow. Such rules are often created by men in power within a given society and setting, and enforced with older women and other family members, who see it as their duty to maintain the social order. For instance, within the Sri Lankan context, the basic rule is that a woman or man must get married to a member of the opposite sex at a particular age (women before 30s while men do not have an age limit) to have sex or to have their own household and women do not generally live alone, even if they may own a house or can afford to rent one for themselves.

A man or a woman is only expected to have sex with their married partner of the opposite sex. This norm often means a person who is gay (often a man) will be pressured to marry someone of the opposite sex, which could create problems for both parties. In a conservative, traditional society, most people do not have the freedom to seek partners themselves freely. Even if they do so, these partners have to meet social criteria that fit each other's socio-economic group memberships such as class, caste, region, religion, social status, education, income and family background, limiting the pool of suitable partners for a given person.

A woman who violates societal rules or norms will face openly expressed insults, marginalisation and penalties (such as ostracisation from society) and the social pressure put on her can provoke her to commit suicide or become mentally ill. However, the situation of a man is quite different as he might be insulted but may not have to face a problematic situation like a woman because his wealth or income would still make him eligible for marriage, unlike a woman who will end up as 'someone with a past' or 'damaged goods'. Comparatively, the situation of a man (who is unmarried or gay) within a patriarchal society who belongs to a marginalised group is better compared to a woman in a privileged group. Thus, the character of Anura's sister and the pregnant lady and the incidents they face explain the second factor the male participants stated – the film depicts that the society has given less value to women's lives. The following statement of male participant 1 further explains this phenomenon.

The woman is represented in the film as the one who is suppressed by society and culture. The film also depicts that the woman is given a lower status in society. For instance, the dead body of the pregnant lady is kept by the roadside in heavy rain. Batti sees the dead

body. She walks away. On the way, she sees a dead fish. Batti buries the dead fish and plants a tree on the grave. This scene symbolises that the women have been given a lower status than animals by this society. (*The Forsaken Land* – male participant 1)

The third neutral representation some male and female participants observed was that the film depicts that it is natural for both men and women to have basic needs and feelings and fulfil them. Latha engaging in a relationship with the soldier, Anura's sister secretly enjoying being abused in the bus and the pregnant lady engaging in sex with her lover in the woods indicate that fact. According to one of the participants, a naked lady's sketch drawn on the ruined house wall in the woods also indicates someone's sexual desire and how they tried to fulfil that.

> Both men and women follow their desires and try to fulfil them. The film shows the hidden desires of human beings. Latha sees a man and a woman having sexual intercourse in the woods. After that, she too tries to fulfil her desires by good or bad means. A man must have used the sketch of a naked woman drawn on the wall to fulfil his sexual desires. (*The Forsaken Land* – male participant 2)

> This film depicts the mental condition of men and women. I think both men and women have an equal level of sexual desire. This film also proves that fact. (*The Forsaken Land* – female participant 1)

By showing women fulfil their need for sex, going against the fundamental social norms, the film challenges the patriarchal ideology that restricts women's sexual freedom. By doing so, the film fulfils the critical commitment of the Third Cinema.

The audience interpretations confirm that these films fulfil the cultural specificity and critical commitment of Third Cinema by depicting the exploitative aspects of culture and women challenging such conservative norms. The difference between the responses of male and female participants indicates that the male participants do not interpret issues portrayed in these films as issues specific to women living in war-affected areas. Their gendered social experiences might have influenced the interpretations.

Positive representations of women

Only 6% of the participants interpreted that some female characters are represented in these films positively. The majority of them were male participants. The cultural background of the participants seems to influence their interpretations. The findings also reveal that *This Is My Moon* fulfils the critical commitment of Third Cinema by challenging stereotypical behaviours that patriarchal society expects from women.

Unlike female participants, one male participant noticed that This Is My Moon challenges one of the stereotypical behaviours of women regarding other women concerning men's attention. That is, women depicted in this film do not fight or compete with each other for men. They see the man in question as their opponent, not other women.

> We usually see that when a man has a relationship with two women, the women fight. Nevertheless, in this film, the Tamil woman and the Sinhalese lady who have an attachment with the soldier do not fight with each other. (*This Is My Moon* – male participant 5)

The film shows them fighting with the soldier. Patriarchal society trains women to fight for the violator (men) against each other or the other violated (women); however, this film shows the opposite – the violated fight with the violator, not with each other. In that sense, the film challenges the patriarchal gender norm and by doing so fulfils the critical commitment of Third Cinema films. Women fighting each other for men might be a male fantasy depicted in mainstream media products. When an alternative media text challenges that fantasy, it might stand out for the audiences. This male participant is well-educated and seems to possess a liberal mindset towards gender differences, which ultimately affected his interpretations of the film.

Two male participants who discussed *Shades of Ash* interpreted Komala engaging in prostitution to look after her family as a positive trait of that character. According to them, mothers sacrifice their lives for the family. A similar response came from a female participant for *The Forsaken Land* regarding the portrayal of Anura's sister. The participant stated that Anura's sister demonstrates the good qualities of a woman by depicting that she takes care of the family and the young child Batti. These responses demonstrate the expectations of the patriarchal society from women. That is, to sacrifice their lives for the well-being of the family and children and take care of them, which is not necessarily expected from men. Thus, this interpretation seems to be influenced by the cultural and social background of the participants. All three of them are young school fresh outs who are living under their parents. Their everyday experience is their mothers' commitment to household works and family.

Negative representations of men

Only the participants for *This Is My Moon* (10%) interpreted that the film negatively represents male characters. One male participant stated that the film depicts men as opportunists who use women in intimate relationships. However, he blames the environment for converting men to opportunists rather than seeing it as a personal construct of the man within the patriarchal social system.

> The film gives us a feeling that every man is an opportunist. Whenever they meet a woman, they try to use her to fulfil their sexual desires. The environment around them might have an impact on them to behave like that. (*This Is My Moon* – male participant 5)

Similarly, a female participant saw men using women forcefully to fulfil their sexual needs as a natural phenomenon that they have no control over.

> The soldier uses the Tamil woman to fulfil his sexual needs because he does not have any other option. Sex is a basic human need. (*This Is My Moon* – female participant 5)

In her comment, the female participant does not blame the man for abusing the woman. As she meant, the man abuses the woman to fulfil his basic need of sex, and he had to do so because he is in a bunker and the woman is the only option available for him. In this situation, the woman, her feelings, her consent do not receive any value. She is treated as an object available to please men, which is a dominant ideology of the patriarchal system (Mulvey 1975). Being members of such a system, both the male participant and the female participant may not put the responsibility of the act on the man. Instead, they may see it as an unavoidable circumstance created by the situation.

Positive representations of men

According to some female and male participants (6%), the film represents men as powerholders and active people who exercise force on the women, especially regarding sexual behaviour. Since these participants are from semi-urban settings of central Sri Lanka, consisting of conservative cultural and social surroundings, their patriarchal cultural backgrounds and personal experiences seem to influence their interpretations of gender roles and sexual relationships represented in the film.

> According to the film, men possess more power than women. (*This Is My Moon* – male participant 1)

> The director talks about sex openly in his film. He depicts it as strenuous activity. Anybody can sleep with anybody, and no emotions are involved in it. According to the filmmaker, sex is a forceful activity, and the man is the active person in that. For instance, the army soldier engages in sexual behaviour with or without the consent of the woman. (*This Is My Moon* – female participant 2)

It is important to note that the participants saw the open expression of sexual feelings or initiation of sexual activities by women as indecency, while men do the same as their active engagement in sexual relationships. Participant opinions reflect the hypocritic patriarchal ideologies that restrict female sexual freedom while assuring it in men (Ghanim 2015).

7.3.4. Representations of gender roles and sexual relationships: summary

This section considers the audiences' opinions regarding the representations of gender and sexuality in the selected three films. The interviews, focus group discussions, and the newspaper reviews were analysed to identify the specific categories of opinions embedded in them. Three interviewees were female academics, two were male academics, and three were male film reviewers. The focus groups (18 male and 18 female) consisted of youth fresh out of school, university students, volunteer social workers, teachers, university academics, accountants, business people, homemakers and private sector employees. One female and seven male writers wrote the film reviews published in newspapers. The discourses were focused on negative, positive and neutral representations of gender identities in the selected films. Their interpretations depend on their media literacy level, cultural and social backgrounds, awareness of gender issues and liberal thinking, and gendered social experiences. The findings reveal the following readings of the participants.

Comparatively, female interviewees and focus group participants demonstrated more interest in explaining the stereotypical gender roles portrayed in these films than the male interviewees and focus group participants. Unlike female focus group participants, male participants did not describe these portrayals as stereotypes. Instead, they legitimised women being caregivers and nurturers as a cultural factor and the existing social reality. Some female focus group members also interpreted the portrayal of women as helpless and weak as a representation of social reality. A newspaper review and a female focus group participant stated that these films portray women as indecent by revealing their sexual feelings openly and trying to fulfil them outside the social norms. A female focus group participant also interpreted the depiction of women not engaging in household activities as a misrepresentation of Sri Lankan woman.

The interviewees, newspaper reviews and focus group participants (30%) stated that these films represent women negatively by portraying them in stereotypical gender roles, such as nurturers, caregivers and sex objects who are passive, weak and helpless. Women are also portrayed as victims by showing that female characters who fight against or work against dominant patriarchal social norms face tragic endings. However, a newspaper review and a focus group participant stated that *This Is My Moon* portrays positive characteristics of women, such as depicting the Tamil woman as a powerful character. A male focus group participant stated that the film challenges stereotypical gendered behaviour of women who seek men's attention by portraying women not fighting with each other for men, but fighting with the man for their own rights and wellbeing. A few other male focus group participants stated that *Shades of Ash* portrays women committed to looking after their families as a positive representation of women.

Newspaper reviews, interviewees and focus group participants (19%) stated that these films show gender roles neutrally. According to them, the films portray the impact of war on women and children, the sexual economy of war, typical gender violence common across the society such as sexual violence, sex trafficking and child abuse, the subordination of the powerless, and the cultural pressure exercised on women. Male interviewees and focus group participants were more interested in discussing the impact of war on women and children.

7.4. Representations of Religious Identities

In this section, the opinions of the academics, film reviewers, focus groups and newspaper reviews are considered. The common opinion discussed was that the films represent either the Buddhist monk's image or the religious practices of the Buddhists negatively.

7.4.1. Representations of religious identities: opinions of film reviewers and university academics

The in-depth interviews with various stakeholder groups focused on the Buddhist priests' characters portrayed in *This Is My Moon* and *Shades of Ash*. According to the interviewees, both characters represent two different faces of religious institutions that dominated during the war.

All the film reviewers and academics claimed that the Buddhist clergy portrayals in *This Is My Moon* and *Shades of Ash* are negative. However, their interpretations of the negative depictions are different from each other. It seems that their personal experiences, mainstream media representations, media literacy and exposure to state propaganda had influenced their interpretations. The findings also reveal that these films question the backward practices of the Buddhist religious institutions in Sri Lanka. By doing so, they fulfil the cultural specificity and critical commitment of Third Cinema.

Two interviewees, one film reviewer and an academic, observed that the Buddhist monk depicted in *This Is My Moon* portrays the pro-war nationalist Buddhist wing of Sri Lanka while *Shades of Ash* depicts how some manipulate the Buddhist religious institution for their own benefit and survival. Their interpretations seem to be influenced by their personal experiences and media representations.

> Interviewee 2 (Film reviewer): When a war occurs based on ethnicity or race, the war is celebrated through a religious lens. In the south of Sri Lanka, the war mentality is cultivated using the Sinhalese Buddhist concept. In a conflict situation within a country, religion happens to be a sensitive issue. It is easier to continue a war when you use religion linked to it. For instance, when armed forces needed the workforce, they used ethnicity and religion as a potent tool for recruitment of soldiers. These films creatively talk about that issue. It pictures the role of religion and its representatives in a war setting.

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Another interviewee added that:

> Interviewee 5 (Academic): The Buddhist monks' characters depicted in the two films represent the role some popular Buddhist monks played during the war period. The monk in *This Is My Moon* reflects the behaviour of pro-war monks in Sri Lanka at that time. The monk's character in *Shades of Ash* represents the offenders who use the Buddhist institutions for their benefit.

During the war period, the Buddhist clergy's interference in politics was visible (DeVotta and Stone 2008, Korf 2005, Deegalle 2004). These interviewees might have had personal experiences of the pro-war propaganda implemented through the Buddhist clergy, or they may have been exposed to such news on mainstream media.

Three interviewees thought that these filmmakers use the negative portrayal of the Buddhist monks to fulfil two objectives. First, to attack the pro-war nationalist Buddhist monks to show their objection to the monks' practices. Second, they use the negative portrayals of Buddhist monks as a negative marketing or publicity strategy so that the controversy the film creates in the country makes it famous locally and globally. These two interpretations seem to be influenced by the exposure to state propaganda and the film reviewer's media literacy.

> Interviewee 3 (Film reviewer): The Buddhist priest characters in these films are a negative marketing strategy they used to bring viewers to the cinemas.

There is plenty of historical evidence that shows films being popular due to their controversial themes and content. *Dr Zhivago* (David Lean 1965), *Last Temptation of Christ* (Martin Scorsese 1988), *The Passion of the Christ* (Mel Gibson 2004) and *Water* (Deepa Mehta 2005) are some of the examples from the world's cinema (BBC News 2018, DeCarvalho 2012, Phillips 2008). In that sense, there is a tendency, as interviewee 3 stated, for films with controversial representations of religious figures (which is a sensitive subject in conservative societies like Sri Lanka) to catch the attention of audiences. The film reviewer may also believe in the nationalist pro-war ally who antagonised the anti-war filmmakers for their negative representations of the Buddhist clergy. Interviewee 8 also expressed a similar idea.

> Interviewee 8 (Academic): My problem is how two different directors represent the Buddhist monks' characters in an almost similar manner. When they win awards for these films, I feel that these representations attack the Buddhist culture. It is not clear what the filmmakers wanted to convey. Is it that the people have no relief from the religion, or is it to say that this is the real picture of the religion?

According to interviewee 8, two films have negative representations of the Buddhist monk characters, and they were internationally recognised and have won several international awards. She thought that the filmmakers included negative representations of the Buddhist culture to win international recognition. However, one can also argue that since the central theme of the film is war and one or two monk's characters cannot be generalised to the whole, these films were not necessarily made to attack the Buddhist culture. The opinion of the interviewee 8 also shows similarity to the opinions of state propaganda against the anti-war filmmakers which criticised these filmmakers for misrepresenting the Buddhist Clergy in Sri Lanka (Weerasekara 2005, Kodithuwakku 2005, De Mel 2007). The propaganda has influenced her interpretation, or she believes in similar nationalist opinions regarding the clergy and the soldiers.

7.4.2. Representations of religious identities: newspaper reviews

The newspaper review comments about the representations of religious identities in the selected films convey that these films portray a negative but realistic image of the Buddhist religious identity in Sri Lanka. The reviews raise two opinions. First, the films question the religious institutions in Sri Lanka as to where they lead their followers and their level of tolerance of the war (Seneviratne 2001, Kaluarachchi 2001a, Kumara 2005b). Second, the films depict men who use their status as monks or Buddhist religious beliefs to cover their misbehaviours which occasionally occurs within any religious institution. (Weragama 2005, Kodithuwakku 2005, Aththanayaka 2002, *Asoka Handagama wins again* 2001).

The newspaper reviews explain that the selected films criticise the religious institutions in Sri Lanka. For example, Gambare committing suicide inside the Hindu temple after realising his daughter engages in prostitution (Nanayakkara 2005), the ruined Buddhist temple acquired by a prisoner, and the Buddhist monk eloping with the Tamil woman, leaving his robe behind, all show the destruction of religious institutions during a war situation (Kaluarachchi 2001a). Asoka Handagama, the director of *This Is My Moon*, states that the director does not criticise the Buddhist philosophy but the Buddhist religious institutions that do not practice its philosophy (Handagama, cited in *Asoka Handagama wins again* 2001, p. 11). According to Seneviratne (2001, p. 10), "the film questions religious institutions. The village priest, full of racial intolerance, is bent on sexually exploiting the Tamil woman as much as the [army] deserter."

On the other hand, the films portray people using religious institutions and religious beliefs to cover their misdeeds. For instance, the soldier in *The Forsaken Land* speaks disrespectfully about god and maintains an extra-marital relationship with his friend's wife, but claims that he is a religious man (Kodithuwakku 2005); the NGO lady who steals the property belonging to poor villagers and uses village children for labour is named 'Mahamaya' – the same name of Lord Buddha's mother (Weragama 2005). As Aththanayaka (2002) explains, these negative characteristics of religious institutions are not limited to

Buddhism but are common to any religion, and the film directors are portraying this common phenomenon in their films. According to the newspaper reviews, these films question and criticise the Buddhist religious institutions and the religious practices of Sri Lankan people. By doing so, they fulfil the cultural specificity and the critical commitment of Third Cinema.

7.4.3. Representations of religious identities: opinions of focus group participants

All the focus group participants, who are Buddhists, interpreted the representations of religion in these three films as negative. They raised three arguments: 62% of participants claimed that the films represent people who use the holy robe for their benefit; 27% argued that the films criticise the blind religious practices of the laypersons; 11% stated that *The Forsaken Land* does not represent any religious identity. The results are given in Table 6.

Table 6: The focus group members' interpretations of religious identities

No	Categories of opinions	Male participants	Female participants	Total number of participants
1	Negative portrayals of the Buddhist clergy	12 (42)	16 (58)	28 (62)
2	Negative representations of religious practices of people	4 (33)	8 (67)	12 (27)
3	No representations of religious identities	5 (100)	0 (0)	5 (11)
	Total	21	24	45* (100) **

* Number of opinions expressed on a theme is greater than the total number of participants in the sample because one participant can express multiple opinions under a given category of opinions.

**Numbers within the parenthesis are percentages.

Negative portrayals of the Buddhist clergy

Two participants for *Shades of Ash* argued that the film depicts a negative image of a man who uses a Buddhist monk's position for his benefit.

> A Buddhist monk is a calm and quiet person. The monk in this film is not like that. He is not a monk. He manipulates the holy robe for his survival. He does not represent the Buddhist philosophy but the Buddhist institution. (*Shades of Ash* – female participant 5)

> The man depicted in the film as a Buddhist priest is not a Buddhist priest at all. His foul language and behaviour symbolise that he does not behave or practise as an authentic Buddhist priest. (*Shades of Ash* – male participant 4)

According to these comments, the Buddhist monk depicted in the film violates socially accepted stereotypical characteristics of a Buddhist monk. Therefore, these participants, define the Buddhist monk's character depicted in the film as a cheater who misuses the holy robe for his benefit. They also read this representation as representing the Buddhist institution established in Sri Lanka and not Buddhist philosophy. When people see negative portrayals of monks, they get offended because they accept a Buddhist monk as a role model who is spiritually superior to the average person. The following quotation illustrates that.

> I do not like to see a monk of my religion portrayed like that. (*Shades of Ash* – female participant 4)

The above comments indicate that participants' cultural cognition has influenced their interpretations.

All 12 participants for *This Is My Moon* thought that the film is representing the Buddhist clergy negatively. They also argued as to whether these representations are reasonable or not. Three of them argued that the negative representations of the Buddhist monks are unreasonable. The following quotations explain the reason for their opinion.

> The Buddhist monk lives alone in the temple. The wild elephants might attack the temple. It has no electricity, no water, and he might not get his meals (to be offered by his parishioners) properly. However, the filmmaker has not given enough space to show those matters. That is not fair. (*This Is My Moon* – male participant 1)

> There are both bad monks and good monks, but the filmmaker depicts only the bad monks. He, intentionally, has chosen characters and incidents to attack Buddhist culture. (*This Is My Moon* – female participant 1)

> The director has all the possibilities to depict the Buddhist monk in a positive image. However, he intentionally does not do that. (*This Is My Moon* – female participant 2)

According to these comments, participants see the filmmaker as being unfair by depicting only the Buddhist monks' negative characteristics. He ignored the difficulties they face in a war-affected area. He intentionally does not represent a Buddhist priest who has positive characteristics. Both monk characters in *This Is My Moon* contain socially unacceptable traits. For instance, the monk seen throughout the film is a racist (against Tamils), and ultimately flees with the Tamil woman, leaving the robe behind. The second monk who replaces the first priest had been a bookie (related to gambling which is unacceptable to Buddhism) and had cheated the villagers by withholding their winnings. As participants pointed out, the film director includes these negative depictions intentionally to attack the Buddhist culture.

The participants' comments show similarity to the criticisms government agents and supporters made against the film director. This similarity indicates the influence of state propaganda regarding anti-war filmmakers on participants' interpretations. The director, Asoka Handagama, in one of his interviews given to a newspaper, mentions that he "has nothing against the Buddhist philosophy, but … sees flaws in the Buddhist religious institutions in Sri Lanka" (Handagama, cited in *Asoka Handagama wins again* 2001, p. 11) and that is what he criticises in his film. The difference between the director's intention and audience interpretation indicates that the state propaganda had been more influential than the film. As discussed in Chapter Five, the filmmaker represents the Sinhalese nationalist Buddhist institution's role in supporting the government's war agenda. Since these participants had lower media literacy levels, they could not interpret the underlying meaning of the film text.

Negative representations of religious practices of people

The second opinion participants expressed is that these films portray the blind religious practices of laypersons. Participants' personal experiences seem to influence their interpretations. The comments also reveal that these films successfully fulfil the cultural specificity and politicisation of Third Cinema.

The participants for *Shades of Ash* discussed the enormous power the society has bestowed on the holy robe, disregarding the qualities or attributes of the person who wears it. They also thought that the film represents people who disregard the Buddhist philosophy.

> People in our country respect any offender who wears a holy robe. Because they respect not the person but the robe. (*Shades of Ash* – female participant 6)

> The film depicts that offenders can be anywhere, and no religion or ethnicity applies to such people. That is why Pema brutally kills the VAO within the temple premises and in front of the Buddha's statue. (*Shades of Ash* – male participant 1)

> An offender wears a holy robe to cover his misbehaviours. People blindly believe in them. (*Shades of Ash* – male participant 3)

> Not only a Buddhist monk but any member of the clergy of any religion may use the blind belief or faith of their devotees for their own gain. This blind religious belief of the laypersons is criticised in the film. (*Shades of Ash* – male participant 5)

The above comments reveal that the film also criticises the religious institutions who have no control over human behaviour during a crisis, such as a war. The participants did not see this aspect as unique to Buddhist religious institutions but saw its applicability to other religious institutions.

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These comments indicate that participants' personal experiences might have influenced their interpretations of these religious representations. Being members of the same community, the participants might have met or seen monks and laypersons who behave the same way as portrayed in the film. Consequently, the film successfully makes participants aware that the religious institutions and their clergy are not ideal role models. It convinces participants to see the blind beliefs and practices that make them slaves of religious institutions. By doing so, the film fulfils the cultural specificity and politicisation of Third Cinema.

Since there is no symbolic religious character included in *The Forsaken Land* as in the other two films, the discussion about the representation of religious identity in *The Forsaken land* was limited to a few opinions. The film includes dialogue that mentions God, Buddha and the state of supremacy or Nirvana (Nibbana). The participants expressed two opinions about the representations of religious identities: the film depicts the people's religious practices negatively, and the film does not have any representations of religion.

According to participants, the film sarcastically criticises the contradictions between people's behaviours and the religious teachings they believe. In the Sri Lankan context, religion is sometimes used as a part of a person's identity rather than a way of life. They use religion similarly to how they use their surname, gender or ethnicity when introducing themselves. Thus, people sometimes live in a manner contrary to religious doctrine. The film critically illustrates that, and the participants interpreted it as follows.

> The film also depicts the belief people have regarding god. They believe in god more than their inner strengths. (*The Forsaken Land* – female participant 2)

> The people depicted in the film are not following the deeper meanings of the Buddhist philosophy. They just touch the religion on a surface level. (*The Forsaken Land* – female participant 3)

> The characters in the film talk about god while doing religiously unacceptable things. For instance, the soldier is talking about god while smoking weed. It is a satirical depiction of religious beliefs of Sri Lankans. (*The Forsaken Land* – female participant 5)

According to participants, the film portrays people who are not serious about following the religious doctrines as much as they are serious about their religious identities. The participants' interpretations indicate that they are open-minded compared to the focus groups of *This Is My Moon* and *Shades of Ash,* who were offended by the negative representations of the Buddhist clergy. This open-mindedness might be because they are from an academic background. One could also argue that the participants were not offended because *The Forsaken Land* does not explicitly portray the Buddhist religious images as the

other two films did. However, by critically portraying the people's religious practices, the film fulfils the cultural specificity of Third Cinema as done by the other two films.

7.4.4. Representations of religious identities: summary

The audience members' discussions on the representations of religious identities focused on the characters of the Buddhist monks depicted in *Shades of Ash* and *This Is My Moon* and the religious practices of people in all three films.

The main argument the interviewees, focus group participants (62%) and newspaper reviews raised is that the selected films portray negative images of the Buddhist monks. Academics and film reviewers observed that *This Is My Moon* portrays the pro-war nationalist Buddhist wing of Sri Lanka while *Shades of Ash* portrays the offenders who manipulate Buddhist religious institutions and the holy robe for their benefits and survival. A film reviewer stated that these negative depictions of the Buddhist monks were used as a negative marketing strategy to promote the films locally and internationally by creating a controversy. Another academic claimed that the filmmakers portray negative images of the Buddhist clergy to attack the pro-war nationalist Buddhist monks. Although their media literacy level influenced their interpretations, for some interviewees, their political view was more influential than their media literacy level.

Newspaper reviews contained two opinions regarding the representations of religious identities. First, these films question the religious institutions in Sri Lanka as to where they lead their followers and their level of tolerance of the war. Second, the films depict men who use their status as monks or Buddhist religious beliefs to cover their misbehaviours, which occasionally occurs within any religious institution.

According to the focus group members, these films portray people who use the holy robe for their benefit and the enormous power society has bestowed on the holy robe. The participants interpreted that these films criticise blind religious practices of laypersons. A participant claimed that *This Is My Moon* unfairly depicts only the negative characteristics of the Buddhist monk. The participants stated that *The Forsaken Land* sarcastically criticises the contradictions between people's behaviour and religious beliefs. The media literacy level of the participants, political views, and government war propaganda has influenced their interpretations.

7.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I claim that different interpretations of the social and cultural realities are constructed of the same texts by different individuals because they vary according to their social contexts, life experiences and values. Thus, the interviewees and focus group members who participated in this research had similar and different interpretations. They were based on their gender, education, social and cultural backgrounds, personal experiences, and exposure to other media messages such as mass media and interpersonal communication channels.

There are significant differences among the audience members' interpretations of the films' representations of ethnic identities. The audience response demonstrates that these differences are based on their political opinions, exposure to government war propaganda and education level. Responses of two interviewees and 42% of the focus group participants exhibited the influence of government war propaganda by expressing similar opinions. They were offended by the negative representations of the Sinhalese community and the Sinhalese soldiers (who, they say, represent the Sinhalese community) as those who suppress the minorities and as perverts who give priority to their sexual desires over other basic needs. One academic interviewee and 5% of focus group participants read the absence of Tamil characters in *The Forsaken Land* and *Shades of Ash* and the Tamil woman's portrayal in *This Is My Moon* as a hidden agenda of the filmmakers. According to them, by excluding the Tamil community's negative behaviours and portraying the Tamil woman in a sympathetic role, filmmakers support the 'enemy' (the LTTE). This interpretation also demonstrates the influence of government propaganda of antagonising the anti-war filmmakers during the war period.

Anti-war political opinion is another factor that influenced the audience interpretation. For instance, a film reviewer interpreted that these films negatively represent the Sinhalese community as they dominate the Tamil community. Two film reviewers interpreted the absence of the Tamil community in *The Forsaken Land* and *Shades of Ash* as an injustice to both communities since it makes the Tamil community's voice unheard and isolates the Sinhalese community, framing them as the offenders in the ethnic conflict.

The audience members from similar educational backgrounds exhibited similar interpretations of the films' ethnic representations. Six interviewees and 40% of focus group participants from the university community interpreted these films as representing the impact of war on Sinhalese and Tamil communities.

The findings also show that these ethnic representations affect audience understanding of the identities of other cultures. For instance, a Tamil academic interviewee stated that she interpreted Sinhalese women generally as sexually open by watching these films. Similarly, the findings also exhibit that

media messages inform the audience about other communities and their problems. For instance, two interviewees stated that *This Is My Moon* represents the ethnic minorities in Sri Lanka and their political subordination.

The majority of female focus group participants and interviewees interpreted that these films portray dominant patriarchal ideologies about gender identities such as women as passive, weak, helpless victims and men as powerful, active and dominant. Their responses reveal that the gendered social experiences of female participants and male participants influence their interpretations. In Sri Lankan social and cultural contexts, men are the dominant and privileged group, or superiors within the patriarchal social system, and women are the subordinated and marginalised group, or inferiors. The female interviewees were more descriptive of stereotypical representations of gender roles than the male interviewees. Unlike female participants, male participants did not interpret these portrayals as stereotypes. Instead, they read women being caregivers and nurturers and men being breadwinners as a cultural factor and the existing social reality. The everyday occurrences of gender stereotypes legitimise patriarchal gender identities. This legitimisation may have influenced the male participants not to discuss stereotypical gender roles because they think that is the social reality.

The audience members' responses substantiate that the cultural background, existing social norms and beliefs of the gender roles supported by patriarchal ideologies influence their interpretations. Even the female participants claimed that women depicted in the films did not engage in household activities as a misrepresentation of Sri Lankan women. Both male and female participants saw that women openly expressing their sexual feelings is indecent, but that the same behaviour in men expresses men's active engagement in a sexual relationship. They did not interpret men's abusive sexual conduct as their misbehaviour. Instead, they interpreted it as unavoidable circumstances created by the situation.

The findings demonstrate that the personal experiences, mainstream media representations, educational background and exposure to state propaganda influenced audience interpretations of the representations of religious identities in the films. The personal experiences gained through associating with Buddhist clergy, witnessing people's religious practices, and being exposed to mainstream media images, have influenced audience members' interpretations. They interpreted the Buddhist monks depicted in *This Is My Moon* as the pro-war nationalist Buddhist wing of Sri Lanka. They also interpreted *Shades of Ash* as portraying the offenders who manipulate the Buddhist religious institutions for their survival, and all three films show misconceived religious practices and religious dependency of laypeople.

The audience members' responses confirm the influence of state propaganda about anti-war filmmakers. They stated that the filmmakers use negative portrayals of the Buddhist monks intentionally to attack the Buddhist culture. The findings also exhibit that the participants were offended to see media portrayals against their stereotypical cultural beliefs.

CINEMATIC REALITY: AUTHENTIC REPRESENTATIONS OF CULTURE

Chapter Index

8.1. Introduction

In the discussion of realistic cinema, Andre Bazin's (2004) theory of cinematic reality plays an important role. He claims that any art form, including cinema, will achieve realism through artifice – choosing what is to be preserved, discarded, and not considered. He explains making this choice as necessary but unacceptable. It is necessary because, without it, there will be no so-called art form. It is unacceptable because what is preserved will be decided at the expense of what is omitted or disregarded. However, Bazin (2004) claims that the art of cinema is exclusive to this contradiction of necessity because cinema is potent enough to capture most of the entire reality using its abstraction and symbolism. According to him, this complex practice without a technique can work for or against realism. Various cinematographic styles and narrative methods can represent the same event or object in various ways (Bazin 2004). These distinct representations do not allow the initial reality to stay the same. Instead, they create an illusion of reality (Bazin 2004).

According to Bazin (2004), at one point, this illusion of reality, which is a semblance, makes the spectators lose awareness of the reality itself. Thus, the filmmakers should be careful not to lose their focus on offering the spectators the reality. If not, the filmmakers can lose control of their production and represent events and objects far from reality. Thus, Bazin (2004) suggests "film sought to give the spectator as perfect an illusion of reality as possible within the limits of the logical demands of cinematographic narrative and the current limits of technique" (Bazin 2004, p. 26). Thus, in the audience analysis of this research, I focused on finding out how audience members interpret these filmmakers' efforts to create the illusion of Sri Lankan social reality.

The use of "reality" in social sciences also helps to understand reality in cinema. According to Greek philosophy, the notion of 'objectivism' is used to explain 'reality'. Objectivism is "the notion that truth and meaning reside in their objects, independently of any consciousness" (Crotty 1998, p. 42). Against this notion of objectivism, the notion of 'constructionism' was introduced by the social scientists who view reality as dependent upon human practices. It is constructed using interactions between human beings and their world and developed and transmitted within the social context (Crotty 1998, p. 42).

Rather than objectivism, constructionism can be more closely related to reality in cinema. According to the 2013 Cannes award-winning Chinese film director Jia Zhangke (2009), there is no notion of absolute objectivity in cinema (or elsewhere). For him, the 'real' in cinema is a mere social construction. He states that although the reality is a sociological concept, the 'real' in cinema is aesthetic, and this aesthetic concept of reality offers the filmmaker creative freedom (Zhangke, cited in Zhu 2013, p. 90). Since human beings construct reality based on their life experiences and interactions within their specific social contexts, realities vary from society to society or even from one person to another within the same society. Therefore, making a realistic film means "conveying a sense of the real that is both refreshing and familiar to the individuals belonging to that society or community" (Zhu 2013, p. 90). This study reveals that the filmmakers have used their freedom to construct reality in their films aesthetically. However, the social, cultural, educational and personal circumstances of the audience members affect their interpretations of these films in regards to the reality of Sri Lankan society. Thus, in this chapter, I argue that there are both similarities and differences in the opinions among various stakeholder groups. The responses show that their gender, education, social and cultural backgrounds, personal experiences, interactions with other ethnicities and exposure to other media messages cause those differences.

This section examines how audiences interpreted the representations of Sri Lankan cultural identities such as gender roles, sexual relationships, and ethnic and religious identities in the selected anti-war films as reflective of the realities of Sri Lankan society at the time.

8.2. Authentic Representations of the Gender Roles and Sexual Relationships

The interviewees and focus group participants stated similar opinion categories: all gender roles and sexual relations represented are realistic, some of the representations are realistic, and others are not. The comments of the interviewees demonstrate that their cultural and social backgrounds and personal experiences influence their interpretations. In contrast, for the focus group participants, their cultural and educational backgrounds, personal experiences, exposure to mass media representations and information coming from interpersonal communication sources have influenced their interpretations.

8.2.1. Authentic representations of gender roles and sexual relationships: opinions of film reviewers and university academics

The interviewees' interpretations of gender representations as reflective of the realities of the Sri Lankan society seem to depend on their social and cultural backgrounds, gender, experiences and exposure to stereotypical media representations of gender identities. Based on the above aspects, they had two main opinions: all representations are realistic, and some representations are realistic. They also claimed that realistic representations are not generalisable.

According to male film reviewer 1, some female characters depicted in these films are realistic while some other characters are represented from a war context and cultural context. As he explains, Komala's character and the NGO lady's character in *Shades of Ash* are realistic. However, Latha and Anura's sister in *The Forsaken Land* are represented from the cultural context of Sri Lanka.

> Male interviewee 1 (Film reviewer): The woman in *Shades of Ash* is a woman we see in our society. For example, Komala having a sexual relationship with a village man while her husband is on duty or the NGO lady taking Ungi for child labour are isolated incidents that can happen. However, such incidents cannot be generalised. In *The Forsaken Land*, the way the woman fulfils her sexual needs [enjoying being abused on public transportation] and the behaviour of her sister-in-law [loitering in the woods, not engaging in household activities, observing other people having sex, engaging in an extramarital sexual relationship with her husband's soldier friend] are difficult to tally with our dominant cultural framework.

According to him, these representations cannot be generalised since they do not represent the entire society but a cross-section. A viewpoint similar to this was expressed by female academic interviewee 3.

> Female interviewee 3 (Academic): When people have sex, it is observed by a third person [Latha observing the sexual intercourse between a pregnant lady and the man, and Anura's sister observing sexual intercourse between Latha and the soldier in *The Forsaken Land*]

which is not always realistic. When the two characters get to know that they are being observed, they continue their activity [Latha knowing that her sister-in-law is observing her, continues having sex with the soldier]. According to the way I am brought up, such things cannot happen in a real environment.

Both a male film reviewer and female academic gave a common opinion which seems to be influenced by conservative cultural beliefs. That is, the depiction of the sexual behaviours of some female characters does not represent the local cultural context in which women are expected to be engaged in household activities, not to walk in the woods alone due to security issues and not to engage in sexual activities outside of marriage (Hyndman & De Alwis 2004, Jordal et al. 2015). Thus, their interpretations seem to be based on their cultural and social backgrounds.

On the other hand, male film reviewer 1 was also under the impression that some female characters do not connect to the film's central theme – the war. As he explains, the Tamil woman's character in *This Is My Moon* does not represent unique issues faced by Tamil women in war-affected areas.

> Male interviewee 1 (Film reviewer): Some filmmakers discuss women beyond the context of war. For example, the Tamil woman in *This Is My Moon* is dominant compared to the other women (soldier's girlfriend, soldier's sister, soldier's mother and the widow). The film uses her as a symbol of the Tamil community and the ethnic issue they faced. The effort to win the sexual domination over the Tamil woman by the Sinhalese men symbolises the Sinhalese community's attempt to dominate the Tamil community. Reading the film as a depiction of difficulties Tamil women face when they live within the Sinhalese society is a misinterpretation of the film.

The film reviewer's interpretation seems to be based on his literacy regarding the film's symbolic representations, or it might be his conscience biased towards his ethnicity that convinces him not to accept the Sinhalese villagers being hard on a Tamil woman. However, one could argue that war is why the Tamil woman ended up in a Sinhalese village, and the resulting presence of Sinhalese soldiers in her own village and the battle situation that brought them together. Otherwise, there would be no need for her to meet with the Sinhalese soldier and follow him to his village. Showing the woman adapting to the Sinhalese village life could indicate that she is making the best of a bad situation.

According to male film reviewer 2, women's and men's portrayals in these films are realistic and, being a journalist and a social worker, he had been to war-affected areas and had met people as portrayed in these films. In that sense, his personal experience convinces him to interpret the depictions in the film as realistic.

Male interviewee 2 (Film reviewer): These films do not portray fake stories. This situation is visible in any society of any country which went through a war. I have been to the border villages (the correct term is threatened villages) during the war period. I have worked with the youth there to rebuild their minds. I have seen and met people that are depicted in those films in those areas. I have met soldiers whose families are suffering from extreme poverty.

In contrast, female academic interviewee 1, who is from a wealthy urban setting, stated that these films represent male characters more realistically than female characters. According to her, the films' representation of men as dominant and sexually active beings is a social reality, whereas women's representations as subordinate and passive sexual receivers are not always realistic. Her idea might apply to the women from educated, wealthy urban settings where women enjoy more liberation than women in conservative poor rural settings (Hyndman & De Alwis 2004, Rodrigo & Rajapakse 2010, Jordal et al. 2015) as depicted in the films.

8.2.2. Authentic representations of gender roles and sexual relationships: opinions of focus group participants

The focus group participants had two opinion categories similar to the interviewees. They are: all the representations are realistic (42%), and some representations are realistic (38%). Additionally, 20% of the participants claimed that the representations are not realistic. The results are given in Table 7.

Table 7: The focus group members' interpretations of the authenticity of the representations

No	Categories of opinions	Male participants	Female participants	Total number of participants
1	All the representations are realistic	6 (40)	9 (60)	15 (42)
2	Some representations are realistic	9 (64)	5 (36)	14 (38)
3	The representations are not realistic	3 (42)	4 (58)	7 (20)
	Total	18 (50)	18 (50)	36 (100) *

*Numbers within the parenthesis are percentages.

The focus group participants had two opinion categories similar to the interviewees. They are: all the representations are realistic, some representations are realistic, and others are not. The responses demonstrate that cultural and educational backgrounds, personal experiences, exposure to mass media representations and information from interpersonal communication sources influenced the interpretations.

Shades of Ash

Focus group participants stated that the film *Shades of Ash* portrays both realistic and unrealistic gender roles and sexual relationships. Some female participants stated that the poor women engaging in prostitution, occurrences of child labour, child abuse and rural women engaging in extramarital relationships are real incidents in war-affected areas. Some male and female participants stated that the clear demarcation of the characters as 'black' (negative) or 'white' (positive) is unrealistic. They were also under the impression that the film contains exaggerated depictions of sex scenes. The participants' responses show that their interpretations depend on their cultural backgrounds, personal experiences and exposure to mass media representations.

All focus group participants for *Shades of Ash* were privileged – city dwellers of higher socio-economic and educational backgrounds than the characters and settings depicted in the films, such as war-affected rural or remote border villages. According to these participants, in war-affected areas, poor women engaging in prostitution, child labour, child abuse and rural women engaging in extramarital relationships may be realistic incidents. Since the participants do not have first-hand experiences of war-affected areas, they may be more likely to believe what they see in media depictions is accurate.

> People like the bus driver and NGO lady can be seen in reality. Incidents such as child labour are also realistic. (*Shades of Ash* – female participant 3)

> Incidents depicted in the film may take place in war-affected areas in reality. This village might consist of displaced people collected from different villages. Therefore, clashes between people, child abuse, power exchange can happen. (*Shades of Ash* – female participant 5)

Simultaneously, one could argue that situations such as prostitution, extramarital affairs, child labour and child abuse are not limited to rural, war-torn areas, but quite common in any part of the country at any given time. Hence the participants could believe the portrayals in the film are realistic. They may have also heard of these situations occurring in real life in war-torn regions from media reporting and would see the films' depictions as reflecting them.

In contrast, a clear demarcation of the characters in the film as either 'black' (bad) characters (e.g. the driver, NGO lady, Pema, the principal, VAO, the Buddhist monk) or 'white' (good) characters (e.g. village headman Gambare, Komala, Ajith, Heen Eki, Ukkuwa, Ungi, Ungi's father) was seen by the participants as unrealistic since every individual has both positive and negative characteristics.

Although the characters and incidents pictured in the film are realistic, the director had categorised the characters as black and white, which in reality is not so. (*Shades of Ash* – female participant 1)

The reality is that every individual has a good side and bad side. However, in this film the director categorises good people and bad people separately. That is not realistic. (*Shades of Ash* – male participant 6)

Second, both male and female participants criticised the film for its exaggerated depiction of sex scenes. According to male participants, the film portrays villagers' sexual behaviours as a primitive activity they carry out with anybody without any control and often with impunity, and that it can mean life or death for those affected – both perpetrators and victims. Pema killing the VAO for having sexual relationships with his mother and sister is a perfect example.

The sexual behaviour of the villages is depicted as something primitive. They are engaging in sexual behaviour without any control. (*Shades of Ash* – male participant 4)

The way sex is depicted in the film gives the idea that these villagers live for sex. It shows the desire people have for sex without any gender difference. When they want it, they get it forcefully or secretly. They engage in socially unaccepted relationships; for example, Komala, Pema, VAO, principal, and the civil guards at the village entrance engage in sexual relationships that society does not accept. (*Shades of Ash* – male participant 6)

The female participants also criticised the film for its display of explicit sex scenes. According to them, the filmmaker unnecessarily highlights the sexual behaviour of Komala and Pema.

The filmmaker over-emphasises the sexual behaviour between Komala and Pema. (*Shades of Ash* – female participant 3)

The director goes to an extreme in representing the sexual relationship between Komala and Pema. (*Shades of Ash* – female participant 5)

Exaggeration of sexual behaviour can be seen between Komala and Pema. (*Shades of Ash* – female participant 6)

In the Sri Lankan social context, 'sex' is a taboo concept (Wijesekera 1965), especially outside of marriage or when adulterous. People are reluctant to talk about it openly because, for generations, it had been considered taboo and socially unacceptable (Wijesekera 1965, Nilaweera & Wijetunga 2005). 'Public display of affection' is considered a Western concept, which Eastern cultures and societies seem to condemn (Regan et al. 1999, Miller 2013). When they see it in Western films, where 'others' are

engaging in sex, they may feel they are simply observers as outsiders of that Western cultural phenomenon and hence may not feel offended. However, when they see members of their own society engaging in sexual behaviours on screen, they may become uncomfortable because they see those characters as challenging their traditional conservative culture. Even being an educated community from cities (who are accepted as less conventional than rural communities), these participants show resistance to the open display of sexuality. Knowing these audiences' attitudes, many local filmmakers practise alternative strategies to express sexual feelings or behaviours. In *Shades of Ash*, the filmmaker does not follow this method. Instead, he directly and openly shows Pema and Komala's sexual behaviour.

Thus, the above responses indicate that the participants' cultural background and personal experiences have influenced their interpretations of gender roles and sexual relationships represented in the film. The responses demonstrate that when the representations do not match their cultural backgrounds and personal experiences, they are reluctant to accept those as depictions of social realities.

This Is My Moon

The participants' cultural backgrounds and personal experiences seem to influence their interpretations that gender roles and sexual relationships represented in the film are authentic. According to female participant 3, government soldiers and LTTE militants used either Tamil or Sinhalese women to fulfil their need for sex during the war period, and this film appears to be depicting that reality.

> What is depicted in the film can happen in war-torn areas. There is a possibility that the soldiers or Tamil militants use Tamil or Sinhalese women to fulfil their need for sex. The Tamil woman offers her gold necklace to the soldier to save her life. Such things have happened during the war period. (*This Is My Moon* – female participant 3)

This response seems to be based on the stories she may have heard from interpersonal communication sources. The stories of the war might have been shared within the community as rumours, since such stories (mostly about sexual violence during the war period) were not formally reported due to the suppression exercised by both parties: LTTE and the government (Traunmüller et al. 2019).

Male participant 3 also saw the Tamil woman's character and incidents happening to her as realistic. According to him, men sexually abusing women is a common phenomenon in war-affected areas. The Tamil woman offering her body to save her life, for him, was also realistic.

> During the war period, the women might have faced such sexual violence as depicted in the film. Women might do anything to protect their lives, and the Tamil woman uses her body in the film. (*This Is My Moon* – male participant 3)

Participant 3 has never been to a war-affected area and has no first-hand war experiences. Thus his interpretation must depend on the information he received from other sources such as interpersonal communication sources such as soldiers and their family members and social media or mass media.

If audiences accept that the filmmaker represents reality in his film, it is essential to examine how and why audiences see the objectification of the female body in this film. They may see female objectification because the film is constructed with the male gaze, and therefore the female audiences may not see the film as representing the victimisation of women within that reality. Instead, they may see the filmmaker as using the female body to spice-up the plot for audience appeal, especially men.

The other realistic portrayal read by some male participants is that the film depicts men and women in remote rural areas using sex as their only means of entertainment. They thought that both men and women in the film use sex as their primary form of entertainment.

> People depicted in this film, irrespective of their gender difference, use sexuality explicitly. They even use it to save their life (e.g. The Tamil woman). The only entertainment and enjoyment they seem to have is having sex. They do that without any control. This behaviour is typical among the people in remote villages, whether they are affected by war or not. (*This Is My Moon* – male participant 1)

> The men and women depicted in this film are men and women that we see in our society. This film revolves around a specific community in a specific environment. Within that environment, sex might be the only thing that they feel. They do not have many options for enjoyment except smoking and having sex. (*This Is My Moon* – male participant 6)

Male participant 1 stated that he has personally seen people in remote villages start sexual relationships inside or outside marriages and raise children, starting from their very young age. According to the participants, the villagers in remote areas, especially in wartime, do not have any other entertainment modes available to people living in cities due to lack of infrastructure facilities. Thus, the film represents reality, even though this perception sometimes appears to be stereotypical for remote villages. These assumptions of the participants must depend on their personal experiences.

In contrast, the female participants claimed that the explicit depictions of sexual behaviours in a film is not realistic. According to them, such scenes are against Sri Lankan culture and reveal the filmmaker's pro-Western mindset. They interpreted it as a lack of creativity of the filmmaker.

> In Sinhalese culture, we do not show or talk about sex openly, but the director does so. He has a pro-Western mindset. (*This Is My Moon* – female participant 4)

The characters in this film are entirely different from the people that we see in our villages. In reality, people eat, do a job, but in this film the only activity people do is having sex. (*This Is My Moon* – female participant 5)

These responses show that the participants' interpretations depend on their cultural backgrounds because they are from semi-urban conventional environments. Participants seem to interpret the depictions that do not tally with their cultural values as unrealistic. However, one could argue that such depictions of sex in the film could be the filmmaker's way of challenging his culture and society's status quo and hence it is a progressive film.

The Forsaken Land

Participants argued about both realistic and unrealistic portrayals of gender roles and sexual relationships in *The Forsaken Land*. One argument was between the film's realistic representation of the gender role of an Asian woman and the film's misrepresentation of the gender role of an Asian woman. Second, the participants were under the impression that since the film constructs the characters' background and incidents in a logical sequence, it depicts the reality of society and its people. The participants' responses exhibit that their cultural and social backgrounds and media literacy levels influence their interpretations.

A female participant stated that the film misrepresents Sri Lankan women by depicting Latha's character not engaging in any household activity that a traditional homemaker should fulfil. She felt that Latha violates the criteria of the Asian woman's identity by engaging in a sexual relationship without any affection.

> Latha does not represent the Asian woman. Asian woman expects love from a man first and then sex. Latha receives love from Anura. There is a scene in which Anura kisses Latha's forehead. However, Latha starts a sexual relationship with the soldier. There is no love in that relationship. The soldier is aggressively expressing his sexual desires. Sri Lankan women do not have time to waste doing nothing. They are dedicated to their family. Latha does not fulfil the duties of a traditional wife. She does not talk with Anura intimately. She does not do other household activities. There can be such women in society, but that is not the majority. (*The Forsaken Land* – female participant 6)

However, the same participant, comparing Latha with Anura's sister, stated that Anura's sister meets the criteria of an Asian woman who takes care of her family.

> Anura's sister represents the Asian woman. She cares for her family. She brings gifts for her family on her payday. She knows Latha is in an extra-marital affair. However, she keeps

it a secret because she wants to secure the marriage life of her brother. Anura's sister suppresses her sexual feelings. That is the nature of Asian women. (*The Forsaken Land* – female participant 6)

Interestingly, this participant, despite her higher education and media literacy level, indicates strong conservative and stereotypical views including how an Asian (leave alone a Sri Lankan woman) woman should behave.

The opinion of female participant 6 also shows that the film challenges the traditional patriarchal view of a Sri Lankan housewife's role through Latha's character. When the audience members see characters that do not tally with the patriarchal ideology inculcated in their minds, they see such depictions as misrepresentations and unrealistic. Sometimes, through such portrayals, audience members might feel offended. However, a member from the same group brought a counterargument, stating that Sri Lankan or Asian women's identity is a construction of patriarchal ideology.

The role of an Asian woman is a 'man-made' concept. Asian women are also human beings. They too have the same needs and feelings any human being has. (*The Forsaken Land* – female participant 3)

According to the Cultivation Theory, people tend to believe what they often see on media as accurate. People do so especially if they do not have direct experiences of the events and settings portrayed in the media. The majority of the media representations show women engaging in household activities, living according to the patriarchal social system, cooking, nurturing and taking care of the family, and serving men's sexual needs. The same mass media represent men as breadwinners, power holders, and sexually oppressive and active dominants. When they see similar portrayals in media productions, they tend to accept them without being offended. However, when a media production portrays alternative identities, which are opposite to the mainstream representations, they become offended and reluctant to believe that it can be another facet of the same reality or an alternative viewpoint. These participants are well-educated university scholars. However, female participant 3 is from urban society, and Participant 6 is from a rural conservative social setting. It seems that conservative cultural beliefs, practices and experiences influence the audience interpretations rather than their education level.

In contrast to female participant 6, female participant 1 from a semi-urban social background stated that the film represents Asian women who suppress their feelings and needs. She also claimed that a traditional Asian woman might also violate the traditional patriarchal social norms to fulfil her basic needs. Therefore, she accepts these depictions of female characters in the film as realistic.

I think the female characters in this film represent the Asian women who do not express their sexual feelings openly. They try to hide it, suppress it. That is what Anura's sister

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does. Being single and depressed, she secretly enjoys the sexual experience she receives from the abuser on the bus. Latha receives Anura's love but not sex from him. She too might have suppressed her feelings for a long time and is therefore depressed. However, finally, she releases her pain by engaging in a relationship with the soldier. This film depicts the mental condition of both men and women. I think both men and women have an equal level of sexual desire. This film proves that fact. (*The Forsaken Land* – female participant 1)

This discussion on the identity of Asian women highlights the idea of the postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak. In her work *Can the subaltern speak?* (Spivak 1994) she suggests that "in colonial discourse, the subjectivity of the subaltern is necessarily constructed according to the terms and norms of the dominant culture" (Spivak, cited in Moore-Gilbert 2008, p. 454). In this context, the traditional Asian woman or Sri Lankan woman's identity is a patriarchal construction established in Sri Lanka with the introduction of the conservative Victorian social system during the colonial period.

The majority of the female participants, adding to that argument, stated the filmmaker creates a logical background for every character's behaviour in the film.

Anura does not have a sexual relationship with Latha because his unmarried sister is also living with them. He might feel shy to have a sexual relationship with his wife in the presence of her sister. (*The Forsaken Land* – female participant 2)

Characters depicted in the film are under intense pressure. That is a result of the war. To release that pressure, they use sexuality. The village they live in is a dry, isolated place. (*The Forsaken Land* – female participant 3)

Latha is not satisfied with her married life with Anura. That is why she seeks another sexual relationship with the soldier. Anura's sister is depressed because she is unmarried, and she has passed the socially accepted age of getting married. She is worried about that. Sometimes, she would have expected attention from the soldier. When the soldier goes to the toilet, she takes a water bucket for him. She might be disappointed to see the same soldier having sex with her sister-in-law. (*The Forsaken Land* – female participant 5)

According to them, Anura's sister is depressed because she has passed the socially accepted age she should get married, and she lives with her brother. Although Anura loved his wife Latha, he feels uncomfortable having sex with her with his unmarried sister's presence in his house.

One participant also raised the opinion that Anura and the army soldier are engaging in a gay relationship, and hence Anura's sexual orientation is a reason for his unsuccessful marriage. To fulfil her need for sex, Latha engages in a sexual relationship with the soldier. Anura's sister is disappointed

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to see Latha, her sister-in-law, engaging in an affair with another man, and she commits suicide. They said that this logical sequence convinces them to see the representation of men and women as realistic. These female participants are from the university community. Their media literacy might have influenced their interpretations of the gender representations in the film. According to these responses, it is clear that the film has been successful in conveying to audiences the social and cultural pressures applied to people in Sri Lanka, specifically at a time of political turmoil such as a war. In that sense, the film fulfils cultural specificity and critical commitment of Third Cinema films.

8.3. Authentic Representations of the Ethnic Identities

While some interviewees and focus group members thought the films represent ethnic identities realistically, others claimed that the ethnic representations are unrealistic. Audience members argued mainly about the portrayals of two things in these films. One is the Tamil woman's character in *This Is My Moon* and the second is the representations of the Sinhalese village in three films.

8.3.1. Representations of the Sinhalese village

Interviewee 6 (Sinhalese academic) claimed that the films represent the Sinhalese village realistically. According to him,

> The people against the film say that the film is not depicting the real Sri Lankan village. Because of the 30 years of war, the original Sinhalese village is no more existing. These films do not show reality as it is because they are not documentary films. The Sinhalese village depicted in the films is the modernised village that we see now in reality and not the ideal traditional village people expect it to be. New lifestyles are coming due to the war, whether we like it or not. People will be shocked to see the reality.

As he explained, the Sinhalese village portrayed in these films is the modern village spoiled by the capitalist social system. The 'original Sinhalese village' as described by Knox (1817) in his book *An historical relation of Ceylon, an island in the East Indies* has long gone, and interviewee 6 (who was a resident of urbanised Colombo city) claims that this reality may shock people. The participant's educational and social background must have influenced his interpretation of this social change.

Similarly, some *Shades of Ash* participants also thought that depictions of the (Sinhalese) village in the film is realistic. They explain that the film represents the village as poor and those who come to the village from outside are 'bad'. The film depicts several incidents that involve violence and unlawful happenings in the same village. According to female participant 5 (who is a resident in urbanised Colombo district), these incidents may occur in war-affected areas in reality.

Incidents depicted in the film may take place in war-affected areas in reality. This village might consist of displaced people collected from different villages. Therefore, clashes between people, child abuse, and power exchange between people can happen. (*Shades of Ash* – female participant 5)

According to male participant 3, *Shades of Ash* represents incidents and characters that occur in remote villages, and participant 1 thought that some characters show the difference between the village and the city.

The whole film is about the poverty of people in remote villages. (*Shades of Ash* – male participant 3)

The NGO lady's character is used to show the difference between the village and the city. (*Shades of Ash* – male participant 1)

This interpretation demonstrates that the participants tend to accept stereotypical images ('the village is poor', and 'the village is good'), which are similar to those cultivated in their minds as authentic. The NGO lady, the principal, the Buddhist monk and the bus driver bringing X-rated tabloids to the village from the city and selling village women to the city as prostitutes also establishes this viewpoint of 'the village is good' and 'outsiders are bad'. However, the participants did not highlight that the film also portrays negative characters such as the VAO and his henchman Pema as offenders from the village itself. The audiences' nostalgic ideal village concept may prevent them from identifying the ugly side of the village, or they may intentionally ignore that to feel good about the imaginative ideal village they believe in.

In contrast, the male participant 6 of *This Is My Moon* stated that the film represents a negative image of the border village, which is realistic.

The film depicts the reality of the community living in border villages. Their sexual relationships and behaviours show the mental stress of those villagers. I do not feel angry about how the director shows the two ethnicities. The director has visualised the truth. That is the real picture of the society. No use in criticising the filmmaker. (*This Is My Moon* – male participant 6)

His comment reveals that the people living in border villages are stressed, and the filmmaker reveals it. The villagers' harsh sexual behaviour indicates their stressed-out mentalities, which is a result of the war. His comment also exhibits that the film was typically criticised for its portrayals of explicit sex scenes. The filmmaker was criticised for being biased against the Sinhalese and towards the Tamils. However, according to him, the filmmaker had done nothing but depict reality. This participant has

never been to a war-affected village. However, he must have believed in media representations as realistic, or his empathy towards the villagers depicted in the film must have influenced his interpretation.

Except one, all the female participants for *The Forsaken Land* thought that the film depicts the reality of a border village. According to them, the film portrays the mental stress experienced by villagers in a war-affected environment. They also thought that the only means available for villagers to release their pressure is to engage in sexual activities.

> For me, the characters and incidents depicted in this film are realistic. These villagers have no other means of entertainment to release their social pressure. The only method they have is sexual relationships. The soldier's and Latha's uneasiness in their behaviour shows us their dissatisfaction in their sex life and how desperate they are. (*The Forsaken Land* – female participant 1)

Another thought:

> This film represents a border village. Usually, in border villages, teenage pregnancy is very high. That is because they use sexual relationships to release their social pressure. Therefore, what is depicted in this film is the real situation of border villages. (*The Forsaken Land* – female participant 2)

Female participant 2 demonstrates that her interpretation relies on the information she received from some other source regarding the teenage pregnancy rate in border villages. Since this participant is from an academic background, she might have access to such academic data. However, none of these participants has ever been to war-affected areas. Thus, the information they receive from secondary sources must have influenced their interpretations.

In contrast to all the above opinions, some audience members interpreted the Sinhalese village represented in these films are unrealistic. They gave explanations for their opinions. In comparison with the above opinions, interviewee 8 (who was a resident of a village in a semi-urbanised region) opens a new angle to see how different individuals in the audience interpret a text differently and their varied reactions to the same text.

> Interviewee 8 (Sinhalese academic): These films depict that these villagers' only need is sex. Typically, in remote areas, people have many difficulties. They have to find food and water. In *This Is My Moon*, everybody is looking at something aimlessly, doing nothing. Usually, villagers do not stay like that. In that sense, these films are not entirely realistic.

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Since the villages depicted in the films do not match the imaginary traditional Sinhalese village with a pleasant environment and ethical and civilised people, audiences may not tolerate that depiction, because it violates their nostalgic feeling about ancient ideal traditional Sinhalese villages (De Mel 2007, Jayarathna 2008). This concept of 'ideal Sinhalese village' may be a myth or a stereotype created by media, such as films, teledramas or books, or people may have generalised that all villages in Sri Lanka are ideal villages because they have seen or heard of one or two. Further, one can argue that since the interviewees are not from war-affected remote villages (as is the case with interviewee 8), their lack of knowledge about the setting portrayed in these films compels them to deny the representations are realistic. When a film does not suit the audience's cultural competency, they hardly connect with the film (Osei Owusu 2015).

The *Shades of Ash* participants were reluctant to believe that all the adverse incidents might happen in the same village. Some participants also stated that the film is overloaded with incidents, and therefore it confuses the audience.

> We cannot say that all the incidents happened in the same village. (*Shades of Ash* – female participant 4)

> The depiction of the Sinhalese village is an exaggeration. (*Shades of Ash* – female participant 6)

> It is unbelievable that all these incidents can occur in one village. (*Shades of Ash* – male participant 5)

The film portrays child abuse, murders, prostitution, corruption and cheating happening in the same village. According to the participants, this cannot be the reality and is an exaggeration. However, one can argue that adverse events (like war) can bring up the worst in people, and they may do things out of necessity or desperation. Another way of looking at it may be that the filmmaker wanted to show the war's impact in different border villages, and he has used composites of many events happening and applied them to one village. However, these participants have never been to a war-affected area, and they are not literate in media language or techniques. Thus, on the one hand, they are reluctant to accept that such a disastrous environment can be created due to war. On the other hand, they can not identify the film techniques such as composite used in this film.

The female participants for *This Is My Moon* claimed that the Sinhalese village illustrated in the film is not the real village they have seen in real life. However, it is vital to note that none of the participants were from war-affected border villages. All of them were from semi-urban areas.

> This film does not portray the culture that we see in our villages. (*This Is My Moon* – female participant 3)

> The village depicted in the film is different from the village that we see at present. The soldier's sister says she dropped out of the school. Typically, children go to school at least up to the ordinary level. (*This Is My Moon* – female participant 4)

> The characters in this film are entirely different from the people that we see in our villages. In reality, people eat, do a job. However, in this film, the only activity people do is having sex. (*This Is My Moon* – female participant 5)

However, it appears that these participants hold stereotyped views of what villagers and village life in Sri Lanka are like, without having direct experiences of living in such border village areas at all or during the conflict. On the other hand, the film director had spent time in such areas and based the plotlines on real events, even though as composites. As for the soldier's sister dropping out of school, the participant's view that 'Typically, children go to school at least up to the ordinary level' seems to have disregarded the fact that, during conflicts anywhere in the world, education of children and the young routinely gets disrupted along with other everyday life activities (Sommers 2002). In other words, the participant does not appear to understand or know what real life in a conflict area is like for those living there.

A female participant for *The Forsaken Land* disagreed with the other group members' idea regarding the realistic portrayals of the Sinhalese village. She thought that some of the characters and incidents do not apply to the reality of the setting. She disagreed with the idea that the villagers release their social pressure by engaging in sex. Being a member of the same rural community, she must have been offended by these portrayals of the village and her never been to a border village also prevents her from considering that such realities also can exist.

> I am afraid I have to disagree with the idea that the only means of releasing social pressure (for the villagers) is to engage in sex. Showing people (in the village) engage in sex in an uncivilised manner is unrealistic. For instance, people engaging in extramarital relationships are not unique to border villages. We can see such incidents in any corner of the country, in any society, irrespective of class, ethnic or religious differences. (*The Forsaken Land* – female participant 6)

According to her, the filmmaker creates a stereotypical image of the border village (a Sinhalese village) as uncivilised regarding their sexual behaviours. As she stated, the events and behaviours depicted in the film are common to any society irrespective of its class, ethnicity and religion. Since she is from an urban area, she must have seen similar events and behaviours in her neighbourhood. However, one can

also argue that the filmmaker has selected only one setting to portray the stagnation of a particular group (because he can not portray different ethnicities, social classes and geographical areas in one film) due to war. As stated by some participants under the opinion of neutral representations of Sri Lankan society, it is not appropriate to generalise all Sinhalese villages and community based on the portrayal of one village in one film.

One male participant thought that the filmmaker exaggerates the events and behaviours of the people in the film, and therefore the representations are beyond the reality.

> Sri Lankan culture is not that bad as depicted in the film. The director has selected one situation and has exaggerated it; therefore, it is beyond reality. (*The Forsaken Land* – male participant 5)

His comment shows that audiences do not always accept media texts as a resemblance of reality. Instead, they see the difference between social reality and cinematic reality. The intention of the filmmaker may be to use exaggeration to make a striking political opinion. For instance, war and consequent abandonment can create a society that disregards human values. The filmmaker may have intended to express not that the Sri Lankan culture is regressive, but that in specific circumstances, unacceptable incidents can occur in a country where a progressive culture is present. One can also argue that a few events or behaviours do not define an entire culture – they are only isolated incidents. Both participants commented above seem to be offended to see the Sinhalese village in a bad light. This reaction must be because these participants are also from Sinhalese villages, and they must have compared their village to the one depicted in this film.

The audience analysis also exhibits that most female participants disagree that the negative representations of the Sinhalese village are realistic. This finding demonstrates that female participants are more protective of the reputation of their ethnic identity than male participants. Female participants were more offended to see their ethnic identities negatively than male participants because the conservative societies train women as the defenders or protectors of their culture and social system.

8.3.2. Representations of the Tamil woman

Interviewee 1 held the opinion that the filmmaker of *This Is My Moon* used the character of the Tamil woman as a symbol or a metaphor for the Tamil community to discuss their plight and the political aspect of the ethnic issue, and therefore it is not appropriate to interpret the Tamil woman as a representation of the average Tamil woman who is a survivor.

> Interviewee 1 (Sinhalese film reviewer): If we try to interpret the Tamil woman, in *This Is My Moon* film, as a commoner who comes from the Tamil society and culture, we will be

in trouble because she is not so. The only successful way of interpretation is to take her as a symbol of Tamil society.

The opinion of the interviewee 1 seems logical when the casting of the film is considered. The director casts a popular Sinhalese actress for the Tamil woman's character. She speaks Tamil in a non-Tamil accent. According to Tamil culture, the film director portrays her appearance with her costume or attire but does not name her. These aspects show that the filmmaker's objective was to use the Tamil woman as a nameless symbol to express his political ideology about the ethnic conflict rather than representing the Tamil community in his film. Interviewee 1, being a film reviewer, could interpret the symbolical expression of the film.

A female participant mentioned that the Tamil woman using her body to save her life is realistic.

Not the entire film is realistic, but there are realistic scenes. For instance, the Tamil woman using her body to save her life is realistic. (*This Is My Moon* – female participant 6)

Similarly, interviewee 8 also thought that the Tamil woman offering her gold chain to the soldier at the beginning of the film is realistic. However, she claimed that the rest of the Tamil woman's behaviour is unrealistic.

She blamed the filmmaker's lack of knowledge regarding the Tamil community and their culture for this unrealistic representation of the Tamil woman. However, her comment also indicates the stereotype of Tamil women that they are typically submissive.

Interviewee 8 (Sinhalese academic): The Tamil character in *This Is My Moon* shows some rebellious characteristics. As I know, Tamil ladies are submissive. The Tamil woman offering her gold chain is realistic because they have gold. However, other than that, that character was not realistically represented. The filmmaker should have studied the Tamil culture and war environment more than this.

Two female participants agreed with the point made by interviewee 8 that the Tamil woman's character does not reflect the real nature of Tamil women. However, their reasoning contradicts the interviewee's reasoning.

Tamil women that we see in real life are very talkative. They are not silent like the lady in this film. (*This Is My Moon* – female participant 4)

The Tamil woman is different from the Tamil women we see in real society. (*This Is My Moon* – female participant 5)

According to female participant 4, Tamil women are talkative and not silent, as depicted in the film. Here again, she uses a stereotype of a Tamil woman as talkative, without acknowledging it is during the war when trapped in a Sinhalese village as a marginalised outsider from the 'enemy' camp. On the other hand, it might also be that this participant had misinterpreted the Tamil woman depicted in this film as an up-country Tamil (the tea plantation workers who arrived from South India and settled in the central province of Sri Lanka). Since they lived among the Sinhalese for an extended period, they are familiar with Sinhala language and people and are more friendly and talkative. However, the native Tamil community's culture and mannerisms – those who reside in north and eastern regions – are significantly different from these up-country Tamils (whom interviewee 8 refers to since she had associated with the native Tamil community in the Eastern Province). The participants might not have much knowledge about the native Tamils of Sri Lanka. Therefore, these comments also highlight that the cultural competency gained by interacting with other communities influences how audiences interpret the media representations (Osei Owusu 2015).

8.4. Authentic Representations of the Religious Identities

While three interviewees thought the representations of the Buddhist monks are realistic but ungeneralisable, five other interviewees thought those portrayals of the monks typically display the real characters.

8.4.1. Authentic representations of the religious identities: opinions of film reviewers and university academics

Although the interviewees saw the films as representing the negative images or aspects of Buddhist monks, they accepted these representations as realistic portrayals. However, they were also of the opinion that these characters are not generalisable. Comparing the two Buddhist monks in *This Is My Moon*, one interviewee stated that by portraying both characters negatively, the filmmaker conveys the idea that the Buddhist priest community generally possesses negative traits. The same interviewee compared those two characters with the Buddhist monk's character portrayed in *Shades of Ash*. According to him, comparatively, the Buddhist monk in *Shades of Ash,* is portrayed in a more realistic context.

> Interviewee 1 (Film reviewer): *This Is My Moon*'s representation of the Buddhist priest's character is questionable. Although such characters can be seen in real society, the filmmaker tries to generalise these images by depicting both Buddhist priests as men with evil characters. The filmmaker tries to express his objection towards the Sri Lankan Buddhist clergy through the film. *This Is My Moon* culturally attacks the entire Buddhist clergy in a severely negative manner. *Shades of Ash* depicts a man who escapes from prison becoming the Buddhist monk of the village temple because he has no other survival method.

This representation is reasonable because the filmmaker does not generalise the character to the broader Buddhist clerical community.

Interviewee 1, as a film reviewer, seems to expect binary oppositions of the characters to make a fair representation of the Buddhist monks. However, one can also argue that it is difficult to find people with positive characters in war-torn areas because the war has destroyed all the "good" in them.

Another interviewee also stated that the filmmaker does not construct images according to his opinion. Instead, he visualises the real characters in society.

> Interviewee 4 (Academic): We see the Buddhist monk as a symbolic representation of the religion. When society is distorted (such as during a war), we cannot expect an ideal representation of society in films. The film depicts what is happening in society. The filmmaker has given no new definitions. For instance, the Buddhist monk character that we see in *This Is My Moon* is similar to monks that we see in our everyday life and border villages during the war period. They are rude, stubborn and speak aggressively. This representation reflects the reality that we encounter in our society.

Personal experiences and the media representations of the Buddhist clergies during the war must have influenced interviewee 4. For example, television used to report pro-war opinions of monks in general and from war-affected areas in specific, which explained the threat they were facing due to LTTE attacks. The expressions of such monks were often looked aggressive.

Another opinion the interviewees made was that these films represent the Buddhist monk as a typical human being who may commit mistakes.

> Interviewee 6 (Academic): The villages represented in these films are modernised and corrupt. We cannot find an ideal religious priest in such a village, whether they be Buddhist, Hindu, Catholic or Islamic. That is the reality. Priests are also human beings. As depicted in *This Is My Moon*, it is natural for a priest to get attracted to a girl and begin a relationship (even though Buddhist priests are required to be celibate). However, people might get shocked to see that. Society has made monks role models and expects them to act according to the Buddhist code of conduct. However, as human beings, we all can make mistakes. These filmmakers try to depict the reality of people in that society. If you refer to the news, you will realise that such people exist in society and such incidents are real.

> Interviewee 7 (Academic): Whatever the religion, ethnicity or social position is, human beings are guided by their emotions. Therefore, even a priest can start an intimate relationship with someone.

Since interviewee 6 is also a Catholic priest, he must have seen or heard of similar incidents in their community. Thus he is empathetic towards the Buddhist monks who may still show behaviours of ordinary human beings. The same empathy must have influenced the interviewee 7.

8.4.2. Authentic Representations of the religious identities: opinions of focus group participants

The participants stated contradictory opinions on the authenticity of the religious representations: 77% of the participants believed that these films represent religious identities realistically; 11% claimed that they are unrealistic; and another 11% claimed there is no representation of religious identity in *The Forsaken Land*. While some participants claimed that the representations of religious practices and the images of people misusing the Buddhist clerical status are realistic but not generalisable, some other participants thought that these representations are unrealistic and can harm the image of the general community of the Buddhist clergy.

Shades of Ash

Participants who claimed the representations are realistic also claimed that they are ungeneralisable. They thought this ungeneralisable nature might misrepresent the general Buddhist community to those unfamiliar with Sri Lankan Buddhist culture.

> The Buddhist monk depicted in the film may be found in war-affected areas. However, the monk's image in this film can convey a wrong impression to outsiders because they might mistakenly interpret the behaviour depicted in the film as the general behaviour of a Buddhist monk. (*Shades of Ash* – female participant 1)

> The film can give a wrong impression of the image of the Buddhist monk. However, in war-affected areas, even a criminal might become a monk. (*Shades of Ash* – female participant 2)

The comments demonstrate that the participants thought the Buddhist clergy with negative traits can only be found in war-affected areas. This interpretation indicates that the participants from urban central Colombo see the community in war-affected areas as the 'other'. However, one can also argue that spiritual society's decay is not unique to war-affected areas but is common throughout society. The above comments reveal that these participants possess a feeling of insecurity. They think that these films might give a negative impression of clergy living in urban societies. Participants are reluctant to accept clergy in urban settings may have negative traits because their cultural cognition says it is not so.

Some other participants commented that these representations of the Buddhist monk are unrealistic and such representations can harm the image of the general community of Buddhist clergy. The participants'

social and cultural backgrounds seem to influence their interpretations since the socially and culturally constructed stereotypical images of Buddhist clergy are challenged in this film. The participants' comments demonstrate that they are offended by those representations, and they are reluctant to accept them as realistic.

> The Buddhist monk is not represented realistically. It is not good to show such images to outsiders. They might generalise it. (*Shades of Ash* – female participant 3)

> The depiction of a (former) prisoner being a Buddhist monk is unrealistic. (*Shades of Ash* – female participant 6)

> The Buddhist monk's depiction might convey a wrong image of the general Buddhist clergy community to society. That risk is there. (*Shades of Ash* – male participant 6)

Both groups of participants who accept and reject the representations as authentic are worried about how their own religious identities are challenged on the screen by their own filmmakers and how others may interpret those negative representations. Participants' thoughts seem reasonable when Tweed's (2008) study on media representations of Buddhism and Islam in the United States is considered. The researcher's work shows how Buddhism received media attention and subsequently the attention of the United States' public when Buddhism was linked to violence. For instance, Malcolm Browne's photograph of the Vietnamese monk setting himself on fire at a protest against the Vietnamese government backed by the American government in 1963 triggered a negative American perception and shaped the public opinion of the Vietnam war (Tweed 2008).

This Is My Moon

Like the *Shades of Ash* participants, eight participants for *This Is My Moon* argued that these representations are realistic because the filmmaker depicts the real characters and behaviours. However, they highlighted that these portrayals do not represent the whole. The following quotations clarify their opinion.

> The Buddhist monk is also an ordinary human being. He still has the desires any common man has since he has not attained the supremacy of *Nibbana*. (*This Is My Moon* – male participant 3)

> The depiction of the Buddhist priest is realistic. Typically, the monks in border villages behave like that. They are not perfect. Even a priest can do socially unaccepted things since he too is a human being. (*This Is My Moon* – male participant 4)

The Buddhist priest is also a human being. Therefore, he might start an intimate relationship with a woman. However, including such an incident can damage our culture. (*This Is My Moon* – female participant 3)

The representation of the Buddhist monk is realistic. There are such monks in real society. However, we cannot generalise it. (*This Is My Moon* – female participant 6)

These participants accepted that representing the Buddhist monk as an ordinary human being is realistic rather than depicting him as a superhuman saint. However, they stated that since these representations are ungeneralisable, they might damage the general Buddhist clerical community (which the participants state as their 'culture') who follow the standard Buddhist code of conduct. These comments demonstrate that the participants' personal experiences have influenced their interpretations because being members of the Sinhalese Buddhist culture, the participants might have seen or heard of clergy similar to those depicted in the film. Further, the comments show that the film has convinced the audiences to realise that the clergy are human beings like them. By doing so, the film fulfils the cultural specificity and politicisation of Third Cinema.

The Forsaken Land

Like the other two films, *The Forsaken Land* does not portray monks or a religious place. Therefore 11% of the participants stated there are no religious representations in the film. They claimed that the absence of a religious place in the village is unusual and unrealistic. Cultural cognition seems to influence their interpretations because a religious place is an essential part of the Sinhalese village (Jayarathna 2008). Those who accepted that the film portrays religious identity claimed that the dialogue that includes the religious terms are common expressions people use and therefore are realistic. Their personal experiences seem to influence their interpretations. By critically portraying the religious practices of people, the film fulfils the cultural specificity of Third Cinema.

One participant thought that the film, not depicting a religious institution in the village such as a Buddhist temple, Hindu temple, mosque or a church, is not realistic. In the Sri Lankan context, as he mentioned, it is strange to see a village without a religious institution. This interpretation is based on his cultural cognition.

It is strange not to see any religious place in that village because typically in any populated area we can find at least one religious place. (*The Forsaken Land* – male participant 6)

Similar criticism was directed at the Sinhalese film *Rekhawa* (1956) (The Line of Destiny) when reviewers criticised the film for not including a Buddhist temple in the Sinhalese village depicted in the film (Mihindukula 1999). In the Sri Lankan context, a religious institution is an essential component of

the village. Ethnographic studies reveal that one characteristic of the village is religion's influence on social behaviours (Jayarathna 2008, p. 14). Thus, the absence of a religious institution in a village depicted in a film becomes an unusual or unrealistic aspect to Sri Lankan audiences.

Some participants regarded the religious terms used in the dialogue as common expressions people use to express their amusement or sarcasm. For example, during the verbal confrontation between Latha and Anura's sister, Latha mentions the religious terms related to Buddhist belief – the state of Supremacy, such as "*Arihath*" (the state of enlightenment) and "*Buddha*" – sarcastically. The following quotations reveal how participants responded to that dialogue.

> The expressions that we see in the film regarding religion are common. Even we use the same dialogue to have fun. (*The Forsaken Land* – male participant 1)
>
> I do not think those dialogues say anything about religion. They are just funny expressions anybody would use. (*The Forsaken Land* – male participant 2)
>
> The dialogues in which they mention religious terms are dialogues we usually use in our day-to-day lives. (*The Forsaken Land* – male participant 4)

According to the participants, using such religious terms does not damage the image of the Buddhist religion. Participants' academic background seems to influence the way they interpret the religious representations of the film. When these participants' opinions are compared with the opinions of the participants for the other two films, it is clear that the Buddhist monk plays a vital role in defining the religious identity of Sri Lankan Buddhists. People may tolerate sarcasm on religious terms. However, they may not tolerate negative portrayals of the Buddhist monk.

8.5. Authentic representations of the cultural aspects: summary

Although the films illustrate the effects of war on women and children, the objectification of the female body prevents the unique issues faced by women in war-affected areas being highlighted. Focus group members (24%) also stated that these films portray exaggerated sexual behaviour. Some male and female focus group participants and newspaper reviews interpreted that the films overstate the sexual behaviour of men and women in war-affected villages. They represent the villagers as primitives, whose main driving force of life is sex. The newspaper reviews state that this explicit portrayal of sex scenes romanticises the war in these films. According to them, these portrayals are not realistic and against the Sri Lankan cultural context. Some interviewees, newspaper reviews and focus group members stated that the representations of sexual behaviours are realistic, and they depict the pressure people in war-affected areas suffer.

A female academic interviewee interpreted male gender identity as more realistic compared to female gender identities. Some female focus group members saw gender identities represented as realistic, while others did not. The realistic portrayals may be specific to the war-affected areas, but they cannot be generalised to other areas. According to them, portraying women as not engaging in household activities and engaging in sex without affection is not realistic.

Male interviewees (academics and film reviewers) interpreted the portrayals of both male and female gender identities as realistic but not generalisable. They also stated that the films had given enough space to portray women and children's vulnerability in war-affected areas. Some male and female interviewees and female focus group participants thought that the main female characters in *The Forsaken Land* do not represent woman in the Sri Lankan cultural context. They thought so because of how they behave and fulfil their sexual needs (enjoying being abused on public transportation, loitering in the woods, not engaging in household activities, observing other people having sex, engaging in an extramarital sexual relationship with a husband's soldier friend).

Regarding the realistic portrayal of ethnic identities, all three groups – academics, film reviewers and focus group participants – claimed that the three films portray unrealistic and realistic depictions. The main two subjects under discussion were the representations of the (Sinhalese) village in these three films, and the depiction of the Tamil woman in *This Is My Moon*.

One academic and some focus group members claimed that the village portrayed in these films is realistic. According to them, the films represent the modern Sinhalese village changed by the war and the capitalist economy. Opposing the opinion of realistic representations of the (Sinhalese) village, some other academics stated that depicting villagers as desperate for sex, and not engaging in work other than soldiers and sex workers, are not realistic. Some focus group members thought that depicting the villagers as uneducated, unwise, violent and unlawful is not a realistic representation.

Regarding the Tamil woman's character, a film reviewer thought that the filmmaker used this character as a metaphor for the Tamil community to show their plight and the political aspect of the ethnic issue. According to him, this representation may lead the audiences to misinterpret the Tamil woman as representing the difficulties a common Tamil woman may face within a Sinhalese village. An academic and some focus group members stated that the Tamil woman is not realistically depicted. The academic thought that representing the Tamil woman as a rebellious character is unrealistic because Tamil women, as she thought, are typically submissive. However, a focus group participant thought that portraying the Tamil woman as a silent character is unrealistic because, for her, Tamil women are typically talkative. According to them, the filmmaker portrayed the Tamil woman unrealistically because the Sinhalese filmmaker had no adequate knowledge about the social and cultural aspects of the Tamil community.

Regarding the authenticity of the religious representations, most of the interviewees and focus group participants saw these representations are realistic but cannot be generalised. Some interviewees thought that these portrayals of the monks typically display the real characters of the society. Some focus group participants thought that these representations are unrealistic. A film reviewer criticised *This Is My Moon* for attempting to generalise the negative representations of Buddhist monks by depicting both monks in the film as men with 'bad' characters. According to him, comparatively, the monk's character in *Shades of Ash* is constructed in a realistic background.

Focus group participants stated that the images of Buddhist monks depicted in the films are realistic because they are portrayed as typical human beings who have the same feelings and emotions, who may commit mistakes like any other human being. This portrayal challenges the virtuous image of Buddhist monks in Sri Lankan society. A focus group participant claimed that the representations of the Buddhist monks are sometimes biased and unreasonable. For instance, *This Is My Moon* ignores the everyday challenges a monk in a war-affected area may face. According to the focus group participants, when these films are seen by audiences unfamiliar with the present-day social, cultural and political aspects of Sri Lanka, these negative and ungeneralisable representations of the Buddhist monks may damage the image of the general Buddhist monk community.

8.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I argue that there are both similarities and differences in the opinions among various stakeholder groups. The responses show that their gender, education, social and cultural backgrounds, personal experiences, interactions with other ethnicities and exposure to other media messages cause those differences and those aspects influence what they accept as reality.

Regarding the representations of gender and sex, the interviewees and focus group participants stated similar opinion categories: all gender roles and sexual relations represented are realistic, some of the representations are realistic, and others are not. While interviewees' cultural and social backgrounds and personal experiences influence their interpretations, focus group participants' cultural and educational backgrounds, personal experiences, exposure to mass media representations, and information from interpersonal communication sources have influenced their interpretations.

Regarding the representations of ethnic identities, two opposing opinions came from interviewees and focus group participants. While some interviewees and focus group members thought the films represent ethnic identities realistically, others claimed that the ethnic representations are unrealistic. Audience members argued mainly about the portrayals of two things in these films. One is the Tamil woman's character in *This Is My Moon* and the second is the representations of the Sinhalese village in three films. The educational and social background, media literacy level, exposure to other mass media

representations, not having been to war-affected areas, information received from secondary sources, interactions with other ethnic communities and their own ethnic identity influenced their interpretations.

Regarding the representations of religious identities, one group of interviewees and focus group participants expressed that the portrayal of the Buddhist monks and people's spiritual practices are realistic but not generalisable. In contrast, some other participants thought that these representations are unrealistic and can harm the image of the general community of the Buddhist clergy. Their film literacy, other media representations of the clerical community, personal experience, religious identity and cultural cognition influenced their interpretations.

In the next chapter, I discuss how the audience members interpreted the international reception of these films and whether the films support the Orientalising and Re-Orientalising processes.

CHAPTER NINE

EXOTICISM, ORIENTALISM AND RE-ORIENTALISM: THE SRI LANKAN FILMS WINNING INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION

Chapter Index

9.1. Introduction

Concerning the audiences' readings of the representations of cultural aspects in the selected films, this section looks at how they interpret these films achieving international recognition and awards. A study conducted by Batık (2008) claims that the Western-based film festivals encourage filmmakers in the Global South to portray colonialism and Orientalism through their films. Batik's argument seems similar to the nationalistic criticisms against the selected anti-war films. However, in this chapter, I use Batik's claim as a hypothesis to check whether these films, in their international reception, support the Orientalising process by framing exotic images of war-torn Sri Lanka and thereby extending the Re-Orientalising process locally. I used Postcolonial Theory as a guide to this analysis. Film reviewers, academics and the focus group participants' opinions about why these films won international recognition and awards can be listed under two main categories: exoticism, and the cinematic quality of those films.

'Exoticism' is romanticising the people and cultures that are different and remote, and it inflicts inferiority on such people or cultures (Kempadoo 2000). Exoticism is connected to 'Orientalism', a

concept introduced by Edward Said (1978) in his book with the same title. As he explains, Orientalism is about how the West or the 'Occident' culturally construct the East or the 'Orient'. In this construction, the West is composed as the positive image, while composing "the East as its negative alter ego, alluring and exotic, dangerous and mysterious, always the Other" (Lau & Mendes 2012, p. 1). The exotic problems of the developing nations, such as poverty, corruption and exploitation, are highly demanded in the cultural marketplace (Mendes & Lau 2015, Mudambi 2013). The portrayals of such social problems offer the audiences a picture of unknown geographic and social background. Such films can attract a large number of Western audiences and eventually make more profit. This international reception eventually supports the Orientalising process. However, this point is counter-argued with the concept of realism and the opinions against the talking point from the nationalist dismissal of the films critical of the state.

9.2. Opinions of the Film Reviewers and University Academics

Academics and film reviewers expressed their opinions under two main categories: exoticism and the cinematic quality of the films. Under exoticism, interviewees discussed four opinions. They are that these films offer a new cinematic experience for the international audiences, highlight the plight of the marginalised in society, address social justice issues, and provide alternative viewpoints of a civil war.

9.2.1. Exoticism

Most interviewees claimed that since these films highlight the plight of the marginalised, they won international acclaim. In comparison, interviewees 2, 6, and 7 seem to offer their idea of how these award ceremonies are typically seen through the eyes of the global south. However, the opinion of interviewee 8 indicates a strongly nationalistic ideology. Since these academics and film reviewers communicate directly with the public and university students, they function as opinion leaders. Thus, their opinions are accepted as correct and reliable, which can shape the views of those exposed to them.

> Interviewee 2 (Film reviewer): There might be Westerners who would like to see primitivism in countries like ours. Cannes film festival often faces that criticism because the best foreign-language film award often goes to films made in Asia or Latin America about those countries' social issues. There is a saying that the culture is typically defined based on the ideology that the cultures of capitalist countries are superior, and the cultures of peripheral countries are inferior. They say they have a high culture that ensures human rights and equality. They live a happy and enjoyable life, and our countries do not have all that. So, when these films win awards, one can think that argument is valid.

> Interviewee 6 (Academic): Sometimes, some of the juries and organisers of these film festivals have hidden agendas. The argument of exoticism is correct to a certain extent.

There are no innocent artists or innocent organisations. They all have hidden agendas. They have their priorities since they are also human beings. Therefore, that argument may be accurate or may not be accurate. Pioneer filmmakers, such as Indian filmmaker Sathyajith Ray, were also accused of selling India's poverty in his films. After all, cinema is an industry, and it is about making money.

Interviewee 7 (Academic): Most international audiences, especially European audiences, like to see films that show their countries and cultures in the centre are superior and the countries in the periphery and their cultures are inferior. Those who see these films might think Sri Lanka is a war field with an ignorant government and people with enormous problems. When a film wins an award, it receives considerable publicity. People prefer to see films that are advertised as award-winning films. It grabs more and more viewers to the film.

Interviewee 8 (Academic): They (international audience) would have enjoyed it (negative representations of Sri Lankans in films) because these Asian countries are still like barbarians. All these films negatively depict our people. No film shows a developing character, not even a child. These international film festivals might have given the awards because they (the selected films) depict Sri Lankans who suffer.

The above comments of the interviewees refer to the concept of marketing exotic problems of developing nations through films. It is important to note that these interviewees question the criteria for selecting films to offer awards in international film festivals alongside the filmmakers' purpose. According to the interviewees, most award-winning Asian or Latin American films, including the films selected for this study, portray social problems of those countries such as poverty, corruption, exploitation and social unrest. For instance, the film *Slumdog Millionaire* (Danny Boyle and Loveleen Tandan 2008), which was nominated for ten Academy Awards and won eight, was criticised for its portrayal of slums, poverty and the communal riots between Hindus and Muslims in India (Mudambi 2013, Desai 2011). Further, films such as *Argo* (Ben Affleck 2012) depict Iranians as violent, aggressive and hostile 'others' while Americans are depicted as kind, compassionate and loving heroes (Mousavi 2013).

Not the initially introduced Orientalism (Said 1978), but its extended concept 'Re-Orientalism', is more applicable to this research because the three selected filmmakers of this study are Sri Lankans who belong to the Sinhalese ethnicity. Re-Orientalism focuses on "the Orientals' role in perpetrating Orientalism" (Lau & Mendes 2012, p. 4). According to Lau and Mendes (2012), Re-Orientalism plays a vital role in many Asian contexts – notably, the context of South Asian identity politics. Thus, according to them, Re-Orientalism provides a new perspective to look at the issues of (mis)representations in media products, including films. For instance, as mentioned by interviewee 6, Satyajit Ray, an Indian veteran

film director, was criticised for depicting poverty in Bengal and receiving a positive response from the West (Neher 2015). Further, Deepa Mehta, an Indian-Canadian film director, was criticised for portraying the Western stereotypes of Indian culture because they have higher market value in the West (Mason 2002). However, one can also argue that those who made such criticisms against these filmmakers were the Hindu nationalists in India (Mason 2002) and similarly, the Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists criticised the Sri Lankan anti-war filmmakers. For instance, when comparatively analysing the comments of interviewee 8, it shows strong nationalistic opinion similar to the government war propaganda.

As a counter-argument to the above opinion, some interviewees expressed that the films have won international recognition because they provide alternative viewpoints of the civil war. One interviewee, who expressed his opinion to support the idea that these films contain exoticism, also thought that the films might promote exoticism but they also provide alternative viewpoints of the civil war. For instance, interviewee 2, who is a film reviewer, thought that:

> these filmmakers have not done any false representation to win an award. They have discussed the reality of Sri Lankan society in their films. My idea is somebody should speak that truth. Politicians do not speak about social problems, and they do not let anybody do so. In no intellectual environment it is being spoken. Mainstream arts do not speak about it. I think at least these alternative filmmakers speak about that, and it is a good trend. These films influenced to build up criticisms about war-related matters and sharpen those criticisms.

According to him, although these films portray exotic problems of the developing nations, such as war and poverty, they depict reality. He saw this self-criticism as an alternative (and positive) trend to address war-related matters ignored by the political and intellectual elites. Similarly, interviewee 1, who is also a film reviewer, thought that:

> Even though they (the Western audience) do not know about the nature of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, they would have liked how these filmmakers present that issue through their films.

These films portray the politics of war in Sri Lanka (which I have discussed in detail in Chapter Six) and the impact of the war on marginalised civilians living in border villages. The comments of these two interviewees reinforce the suggestion of Korte (2010) in which she says that it is beneficial that the socially privileged elites such as writers (and filmmakers) can address the local and global audiences from similar social background to them about problems of developing nations such as poverty because it should be a concern of all. However, her suggestion is applicable only if these writers (and filmmakers)

have a constructive intention to undermine colonial preconceptions about poverty and the poor (Korte 2010). The opinions of the film directors of the selected three films discussed in Chapter Five indicates that they intended to make people sensitive to the disaster of war.

One argument made by some interviewees is that these films won international recognition because they offer a new cinematic experience for international audiences.

> Interviewee 1 (Film reviewer): When we have international film festivals, we too like to see films from countries about which we do not know much.

> Interviewee 4 (Academic): I think international audiences like to see issues of developing nations from a different angle.

These three films may offer a new cinematic experience to the international audiences because the Sri Lankan film industry is smaller compared to that of others in the South Asian region, such as the internationally popular Indian film industry (aka Bollywood). Thus, international audiences rarely receive a chance to see a Sri Lankan film unless it is screened at an international film festival. From its 70 year history, a few Sri Lankan films were selected to be screened at international film festivals around the world, and from them a few were screened in Western-based film festivals. One can also question this cinematic experience's novelty because technically and technologically, the Sri Lankan film industry is still at a fundamental stage compared to the European cinema industry. As interviewee 4 stated, these films represent the voice of a marginalised community that typically does not reach international audiences because what goes out from the country is primarily monitored by the government.

9.2.2. Cinematic quality

The second main category of opinion interviewees expressed was that these films were internationally recognised and won awards because of their cinematic quality.

> Interviewee 1 (Film reviewer): I feel that those film festivals' judge boards might have felt that these films have some cinematic quality. The films have used cinematic language correctly. The way of expression is perfect. Especially *This Is My Moon* is a film with international quality.

> Interviewee 4 (Academic): In all these three films, artistic quality is there. *The Forsaken Land* film has the quality the Cannes award demands. If we think the film is not about Sri Lanka, the content is still rich with quality aspects. It had the forsaken environment in it.

Interviewee 1, a film reviewer, appreciated the director's expressive style in *This Is My Moon*. According to him, the director's method of using cinema language is up to international quality. Veteran Sri Lankan

film director Lester James Peris has named *This Is My Moon* as the third revolution of Sri Lankan cinema. As De Mel (2007) explains, Handagama uses indigenous narrative frames and images, which he adopts from ancient Buddhist temple paintings. According to interviewee 4, *The Forsaken Land* shows the quality an international film festival expects from film production. It is important to note at this point that *The Forsaken Land* is a co-production with France. The entire production, editing, production design, sound and visual effects teams were from France. Thus, one could argue that this cinematic quality is due to its French professional involvement. However, technical inputs alone cannot produce a quality cinema product. Therefore, the filmmaker's artistic capacity and social philosophy have turned the film into a masterpiece.

In his thesis, Talbott (2015) claims that the major European film festivals such as Venice, Cannes, Berlin and Toronto support the filmmakers in the Global South, providing them funds and arenas to screen their films to serve their own agenda. As he explains, the agenda is to develop and maintain a European cinematic culture as a "counter-hegemonic strategy to Hollywood dominance" (Talbott 2015, p. 6). They control the access to such film festivals to make sure the films selected to screen are those that follow European art cinema models, such as Italian neorealism and French *nouvelle vague*. Besides receiving foreign funds and the opportunity to screen in prestigious film festivals, the films selected for this research were produced following the European art cinema models. According to Talbott (2015), "static long shots of expansive alienating landscapes, narratives typically [beginning] with a little back story or character development" (2015, p. 9), use of minimal and basic editing techniques and minimum to no camera movements are such characteristics of European art cinema models. Similar styles can be seen in the selected three films.

The interviewees also thought that international audiences are advanced in cinematic literacy and hold liberal opinions compared to local audiences. Therefore, the outsiders accepted these films when the insiders rejected them.

> Interviewee 3 (Film reviewer): Those who see these films are the niche audience who participate in international film festivals or the jury members of such award ceremonies. They are an open-minded group that has liberal thinking. They have [more] education and discipline to recognise a good film and a bad film than the general film audience. However, the local audiences are not liberal like that niche international audience. They are bounded by the laws related to war and the traditions and customs.

> Interviewee 5 (Film reviewer): These international audiences are knowledgeable. They know how to read a film.

According to these comments, the interviewees also believed the international (Occidental) audiences are more intelligent and liberal than the locals (Orientals). Therefore, they are unable to interpret high-quality films. At the same time, this argument seems valid compared to Saldanha's (2019) claim in which he states that the films of the Global South appreciated by international film festivals serve the expectations of the festival audiences. Their argument agrees with Talbott (2015), who claims the Global South films funded by European cinema institutions are made according to the European art cinema model and move unidirectionally to niche markets in the North. When considering these opinions with the ones discussed in Chapter Seven, it is clear that the ordinary audience members who lack film literacy find it challenging to interpret arthouse films. Sri Lankan film history also explains that the film audience in Sri Lanka, from its beginning, used to enjoy simple entertaining movies that needed less or no film literacy.

9.3. Opinions of the Focus Group Participants

Focus group members' opinions can also be listed under two categories: exoticism and cinematic quality. The majority (77%) of the participants claimed that these films won international recognition due to the exotic issues of war-torn Sri Lanka they discuss in them, whereas 23% claimed that it is the cinematic quality of these films that brought them the recognition.

9.3.1. Exoticism

Under exoticism, 77% of the participants stated four aspects depicted in these three films. They are social issues such as poverty, sex work, sexual pressure, child labour and child abuse (40%); the impact of the war (13%); human rights violations such as killings and rapes (15%); and nudity and homosexuality (9%).

Shades of Ash

The focus group members who discussed *Shades of Ash* thought that the film depicts exotic issues of developing nations like Sri Lanka, such as poverty, child abuse, prostitution, negative impacts of war on border villagers and human rights violations. It is important to note that the film was funded by Göteborg International Film Festival Fund, provided by SIDA (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency). The film was produced targeting the Göteborg International Film Festival held in Colombo in January 2004 (IMDb 2004).

> Depiction of war in this film might be a new experience for the European audience because
> they have not experienced war in the recent past. The film discusses child labour, child
> abuse and prostitution as an outcome of the war. This content might have impressed the

international audience since they are very much concerned about human rights (female participant 5).

Sometimes, this film might give the international audience an idea that the entire Sri Lanka situation is similar to what is depicted in the film. What is depicted in the film might be a new plot for them, and therefore they might see this film as unique (female participant 6).

The film depicts the image Europeans have about our country. The film portrays a country that is suffering from poverty (male participant 4).

International awards are given to films that include issues such as war, poverty, prostitution or sexuality. That is the recipe for an international award. That is a marketing strategy (male participant 5).

According to these comments, some participants saw the film following specific criteria to win an international film award. As they explain, selecting a theme such as war and portraying child labour, child abuse, and prostitution as the outcome of the war is a successful strategy in attracting international audiences. Some participants thought this composition is a new cinema experience for international audiences. According to male participant 4, such a portrayal reinforces the imperial perception of colonised countries and serves "western craving for voyeuristic viewings" (Mendes & Lau 2015, p. 708) of postcolonial countries such as Sri Lanka as "backward, poverty-stricken and crime-ridden" (Mendes & Lau 2015, p. 708). Further, female participant 6 thought that this filmmaker had utilised the culture, values and attitudes of a selected minority (villagers affected by war) to represent the majority of Sri Lankans through which he fulfils the purpose of Re-Orientalism – "imposing the culture, values and attitudes of a select minority as representative of the diverse majority" (Lau 2009, p. 573).   When compared with their opinions in chapters six and seven, these opinions look similar to the views promoted by the government propaganda against the anti-war filmmakers to antagonise them as traitors because they were against the war.

According to female participant 5, the film portrays some of these villagers violating human rights. For instance, the film depicts killing others, child abuse, child labour and prostitution. As the participant stated, this film had won international recognition because it talks about these human rights violations and social justice issues, and the international public (Occidental) is highly concerned about human rights. The participant's comment demonstrates two claims. First, she thought that the Europeans (Occidentals) were civilised and respected democratic values such as human rights, whereas the Sri Lankans (Oriental) were uncivilised, cruel and prone to violate human rights. Second, the filmmaker shows that Sri Lankans violated human rights during the war. While the first claim indicates the Orientalising process, the latter matches the government propaganda in action during the war through

which the anti-war filmmakers were alleged to tarnish the image of the government and its security forces of Sri Lanka, showing the influence of propaganda on her opinion.

This Is My Moon

The focus group participants thought that *This Is My Moon* includes exotic issues of Sri Lanka that promote Orientalism, such as poverty, the impact of war on the poor, and human rights violations by the soldiers.

The tension between the Sri Lankan government and some significant parties such as the United States, European Union, and United Nations over allegations of human rights violations and war crimes was visible during the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) sessions during and after the war (Uyangoda 2010). As a result, the Mahinda Rajapaksa government reoriented the external affairs away from the West and towards the Asian and Middle East countries (Uyangoda 2010). Sri Lankan media gave priority to cover news and political discussions related to this tense political situation and new foreign policy during this period. This media coverage may help create President Rajapaksa's image as a brave, patriotic leader who does not work according to the Western agenda. Those who were critical of the government and its military wing were condemned as pro-Western traitors of the 'motherland' (DeVotta 2010). The directors of the selected three films were also targets of these criticisms (De Mel 2007). The following comments of the participants show the influence of that propaganda on the Sri Lankan public.

> This film condemns the Sri Lankan army, and it ruins the image of the country. The jury who gave an award for this film might like this film because it serves the agenda of those (Western) countries these juries belong to (male participant 2).

> When a film receives an international award, that film becomes famous. When a film that promotes a bad image of a country gets an award (from the West) and become famous, many people tend to watch it. It is a marketing strategy (of the West) (male participant 4).

> The countries that gave awards for this film are the supporters of the Tamil diaspora. Giving awards to a film is a marketing strategy (female participant 2).

According to these comments, the participants approved the propagandist viewpoint of the government of this film, which says *This Is My Moon* portrays negative images of the state armed forces that can eventually support the ideology of the Tamil diaspora and Western countries who blame the Sri Lankan government for human rights violations.

Like *Shades of Ash*'s participants, some participants for *This Is My Moon* also thought that this film director had intentionally followed specific criteria to win an international award. The following comments illustrate this opinion.

> Probably exoticism might be the reason for this film to achieve an award (male participant 5).

> This film won an international award because it followed the criteria of that international film festival. The film includes sex scenes and the poverty of Sri Lankan people. The directors like him do not want to produce films to change the Sri Lankan people's attitudes. They intend to win an award from a foreign country. Handagama does not produce films for the Sri Lankan audience. He produces films for the international audience (female participant 1).

> There are explicit sex scenes. That is why they have given an award for this film (female participant 3).

According to these comments, participants thought the film was selected for foreign film festivals and had won awards because it contains exoticism. Here, the participants meant the inclusion of poverty of the war-ridden villagers, and sex scenes such as the Tamil woman being raped by the soldier and two other villagers, as exotic problems. The participants' argument seems accurate compared to the claim of Saldanha (2019) that international festivals support films that portray "Western expectations and fantasies related to countries of the Global South" (2019, p. 324). However, one can also argue that the low film literacy level of the participants and the government war propaganda has influenced the participants' interpretations.

Further, female participant 1 thought that the director produces films targeting only the international audience, not the local audience. Therefore, he does not intend to use his film to change the attitudes of the local audiences. In Re-Orientalism, the main criticism directed towards the Oriental authors who fulfil the process of Orientalism is that they intend to attract the Western audiences and to do that they portray exotic problems of developing nations in their films because they know well that the "exotica and destitution are commodities which thrive in the global literary marketplace" (Mendes and Lau 2015, p. 711) or this case cinematic marketplace. However, when considering the opinions of female participant 1 throughout the discussion, she showed strong nationalistic views. Thus, her statement must have been influenced by her political opinion and the government war propaganda.

Some participants thought international audiences recognised this film because it gives a new cinematic experience to international audiences.

Our culture is different from the cultures of international audiences. They like to get a different experience, which is why they give this film awards (female participant 6).

It is not the exoticism that attracts the jury. If so, there are plenty of other films that critically discuss the social problems in countries like ours. I think this film gives an experience that is not familiar to the international audience. This film is a new experience for them, and that is why the international audience accepted it (male participant 3).

According to these comments, the film shows new images of Sri Lankan culture to the international audience. However, one can also question whether the culture depicted in the film represents the authentic Sri Lankan culture. According to Saldanha (2019), although authenticity (cultural specificity, heritage) is one of the criteria to be selected for these film festivals, the consumer culture of these world cinema festivals compels filmmakers to serve the expectations of the festival audiences. As Falicov (2010) explains, even Western funders may also influence the Global South's filmmakers to shape their productions to serve these niche audiences.

The Forsaken Land

Focus group participants expressed two main ideas regarding the exoticism embedded in *The Forsaken Land*. Most participants believed that this film (like the other two films) includes exotic images. The following quotations illustrate this opinion clearly.

Countries in the centre love to see the weaknesses of the countries in the periphery. This film fulfils that desire of the powerful countries (male participant 2).

This film received awards from Europe. They (Europe) praised this film for depicting the weaknesses of our country and people (male participant 3).

I think the film received awards because it depicts negative images of our society and the military (male participant 4).

This film shows the war from a different angle. The international audience might have liked that point of view of war (female participant 5).

I have heard that the European countries provide funds and technical support for these types of films (male participant 6).

I think Western countries like to see countries like ours as uncivilised. This film depicts it very well. That is why it received an award (female participant 6).

All the above comments show that the film depicts negative images of Sri Lanka. Male participant 4 thought the film also portrays the state military forces in a negative image. His thinking may have been influenced by the government propaganda that promoted soldiers as heroes (which I discuss in Chapter six in detail).

It is important to note that male participant 6 stated that the film was provided with funds and technical support from European countries. It is a fact that a French production company produced *The Forsaken Land*, and the film received technical support from professional French film technicians (Les Films de Í Ėtranger 2005). The participants claimed that the film received French funds, technical support, a Cannes award, and the European audiences' recognition because the film displays exotic social issues in which Sri Lanka, once a British colony, is depicted as a land with uncivilised people who are impoverished and suffering from after-effects of war – the Western fantasy of the Global South (Saldanha 2019). However, one can also argue that with the help of international funders, anti-war films like this fulfil social responsibility by revealing the story of marginalised who otherwise will not have their voice heard. Unfortunately, in a highly militarised period, such alternative films may not receive government funding or the funds of Sri Lankan investors.

The film portrays a period in which the war is not ongoing or ended (it may refer to a ceasefire period). It shows the mental stress the stagnated life has brought to individuals. Female participant 6 saw this portrayal as a representation of war from a 'different angle'. One can argue that this 'different angle' of war is the difference between how local filmmakers represent their own war and how Western filmmakers represent the wars in the Global South. Thus, the filmmaker supports the Orientalising process while extending the Re-Orientalising processes at home. Compared with Hollywood war films that promote American heroism, this film or the other two films selected for this study do not celebrate war or soldiers in Sri Lanka. Instead, they portray soldiers' pathetic conditions, how they fail in their lives, and how their loved ones suffer. This 'different angle' of representations satisfy the core precepts of Third Cinema by being an anti-propaganda model of war.

9.3.2. Cinematic quality

Some participants (23%) thought these films' cinematic quality might have brought them international recognition and awards.

Shades of Ash

According to some participants, *Shades of Ash* is a high-quality film. They appreciated it for its unique script, performances of the cast, camera angles and mise en scene (the arrangements of the scenes).

> The quality of the film might be the reason to win awards (female participant 2).

There is a uniqueness in the script, and the performance of the cast is outstanding (female participant 5).

The film is high in quality and creativity. The performance of the cast is excellent. Camera angles and mise en scene is beautifully done. If not locally, the film deserves to be appreciated internationally (male participant 1).

These participants thought that the film deserves to be appreciated due to its cinematic quality. As young cinema-goers, these three participants may have seen artistically quality films and may have seen similarities among them. However, as for *The Forsaken Land*, one can argue that the film received international recognition since an international organisation funded it. The film was funded by Göteborg Film Festival Fund and screened at the Göteborg International Film Festival in 2004 in Colombo. According to Talbott (2015), films from the Global South that follow the European art cinema model are funded and supported by European cultural institutes. Even having that said, one can not disregard the film's cinematic quality, which the money alone can not bring.

This Is My Moon

Some participants thought that *This Is My Moon* is complicated and confusing for general audiences who have a lower level of cinema literacy to interpret. This opinion supports the argument some participants made about the film: that the director intentionally made it for a niche audience consisting of an educated elite.

The education level of the jury who offered an award for this film should be high. The jury members have understood a film that the general audiences could not understand (male participant 1).

The film might have received an award from the jury of those film festivals because the general audience has no time to see a complicated film several times to understand its content, and they do not have emotional freedom to understand such a film. That is why general audiences reject this type of film (male participant 6).

In their argument, they also thought that the general Sri Lankan audience is less educated than the audiences of those international film festivals. According to Talbott (2015), films from the Global South that follow the European art cinema model typically target the niche markets in the North. In that sense, the focus group members' argument regarding Sri Lankan audiences' film literacy level seems correct since the native cinema model is different from the European cinema model. Further, the ordinary Sri Lankan film audience used to see commercial films with simple storylines and cinematography. Thus, they may find it difficult to interpret an arthouse film like *This is My Moon*.

One argument most of the critics had against the selected films, including *This Is My Moon,* is that since the general audience lack the knowledge to decide whether these films are 'good' or 'bad', it is the responsibility of the government to decide whether to allow these films for public screening or not (Weerasekara 2005). However, one could also argue that, as male participant 6 stated, if the general audiences are sensible enough to reject films that they think are not worth watching, then the interference of the government is not necessary to decide on behalf of the audiences whether to allow the films to be screened or not.

The Forsaken Land

Some participants thought that the film is high in cinematic quality because of its use of symbols, cinematography and acting.

> The film is good in quality. The cinematography and acting are outstanding (male participant 5).

> The film is high in cinematic quality. It has used symbols to express different meanings (male participant 6).

> I think this film is high in cinematic quality and the international audiences recognise it because they are open-minded (female participant 1).

> This film has an international cinematic quality. It can compete with any international film (female participant 3).

> We do not value our own productions. However, they get recognition from international audiences (female participant 4).

The participants commented above are media scholars and students from a university who have seen and studied art film products worldwide. This exposure and their film literacy must have influenced their interpretations. One can also argue that the participants' opinions are based on the fact that the film won the Caméra d'Or prize at the Cannes Film Festival in 2005. The film also won two more awards at the Cinefan Festival of Asian and Arab Cinema in 2005 and Rotterdam International Film Festival in 2004 and was screened at film festivals held in 10 countries: Switzerland, Germany, USA, France, Greece, Poland, Canada, Belgium, Brazil and Argentina. The French-funded film *The Forsaken Land* winning a Cannes award and its circulation around Europe again proves Talbott's (2015) claim that Global South films that follow the European art cinema model are funded, circulated, promoted and appreciated by the European cultural institutes. However, again, one can not disregard its cinematic quality due to this factor.

9.4. Summary

This section considered the opinions of film reviewers, academics and focus group participants about the reasons these films won international recognition and awards. The opinions can be listed under two categories: exoticism and the cinematic quality of the films. According to the interviewees and focus group participants, these three films portray exotic problems of Sri Lanka such as poverty, corruption, exploitation, war and human rights violations that have a higher market value in the international film market. They also thought that these films generalise the culture, values and lifestyle of a specific group to the entire country. Some interviewees saw these representations not as exoticism but as a new viewpoint of the war that offers the international audiences a new cinematic experience.

Regarding the cinematic quality of these films, the interviewees and focus group participants stated two prominent opinions. First, these films are high in quality because of their unique scripts, use of symbols, the performance of the cast, cinematography and mise en scene. Second, international audiences are more liberal and educated to interpret high-quality film products than local audiences.

9.5. Conclusion

The opinions expressed under the categories exoticism and the cinematic quality support the claim that these films serve the expectations of the West, and thus they won international (especially from the West) awards and recognition. The audiences' comments demonstrate that these three films support Orientalising process in their international reception by portraying exotic problems of war-torn Sri Lanka, such as poverty, corruption, exploitation, war and human rights violations, since such representations have a higher value in the international film market. Some interviewees thought that the films won international recognition since they represent the war from a different perspective. One can argue that this different perspective of war represents the same exotic problems by the local filmmakers, which is distinct from the outsiders but still supports the Orientalising process in their international reception. It is also an example of an extension to Re-Orientalising processes at home because these filmmakers are not diasporic, but locals born, bred and residing in Sri Lanka. They act as the new Occidental since they are privileged, educated elites, and their films represent the underprivileged villagers from war-torn Sri Lanka as the 'other'. However, this 'different angle' of representations also satisfy the core precepts of Third Cinema by being an anti-propaganda model of war.

Some other interviewees and focus group participants claimed that the high cinematic quality gained through unique scripts, symbols, the cast's performance, cinematography and mise en scene is the reason to win international awards. They also commented that international audiences are more liberal and educated to interpret high-quality film products than local audiences. These comments confirm Talbott's (2015) argument that European cultural institutions support and promote Global South films that follow

European art cinema models as a counter-hegemonic strategy to Hollywood dominance. Thus, I claim that these film models are beyond the local film audiences' scope of film literacy because the ordinary audience members, who are used to enjoying simple entertaining movies that need less or no film literacy, lack film literacy find it challenging to interpret arthouse films.

CHAPTER TEN

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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10.1. Introduction

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10.4. Recommendations

10.5. Concluding Remarks

10.1. Introduction

This study explores how three purposively selected anti-war films represent Sri Lankan culture and the war. These films were suppressed and criticised locally; however, they were recognised and praised internationally. The representations of cultural aspects such as gender roles and sexual relationships, ethnic identities and religion were scrutinised in this research. The study also sought political aspects such as representations of politics behind the ethnic conflict, the government's war agenda, and the role of nationalists and state bureaucracy. By doing so, this study contributes to the disciplines of Third Cinema and Postcolonial Cinema. This study analysed the context, text and audiences' interpretations of the selected anti-war films. The data were gathered from nine members of the Sri Lankan film industry, five academics and 36 audience members using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Additionally, the selected three anti-war films, newspaper articles and reviews of the films were analysed using thematic and textual analysis.

The contextual analysis reveals that the small size of the film industry, film production and distribution procedure where the government has the power to control, war situation prevailed in the country, and the cultural background impacted the production and screening of the selected films. According to the textual analysis, these films display significant characteristics of Third Cinema films such as cultural specificity, critical commitment, historicity, and politicisation in representations of religion, war and the state bureaucracy. The three films criticise patriarchal ideologies. Depicting women's bodies through a

male gaze raises questions of female objectification. However, this female objectification seems to signify the subjugation of women in a patriarchal society and war-affected areas. Three films also depict the destruction war caused on people's lives. However, the framing of underprivileged, low-class rural communities as violent, sexually desperate and helpless, supports the Orientalising process in its international reception and the Re-Orientalising process at home.

Audience analysis revealed that the selected anti-war films successfully conveyed the impact of war, such as victimisation of the public and the exploitation of marginalised civilians in the Sri Lankan war context. These films are critical of the three institutions of the state: the government, cultural institutions and security forces. Although these films fulfil the critical commitment and politicisation of Third Cinema, only the educated niche audience could interpret the anti-war messages included in them. The participants who lacked film literacy could not read the filmmaker's anti-war messages, but typical social problems the entire country endures. The participants' comments confirmed that exposure to government propaganda also impacted how they read the film.

The interviewees and focus group members who participated in this research had similar and different interpretations of the ethnic, gender and religious representations. To accept these representations as realistic or reject them as unrealistic, they were based on their gender, education, social and cultural backgrounds, personal experiences, and exposure to other media messages such as mass media and interpersonal communication channels.

The study also focused on finding out audience members' opinions regarding these films facing criticism and appreciation. According to them, the negative portrayals of security forces, government and the bureaucracy, the Buddhist clergy and the Sinhalese community, and the portrayals of the impact of war, social problems, violence and explicit sex scenes are the reasons for these films facing destructive criticism. While four interviewees and 77% of focus group participants claimed that these films were praised for their portrayals of exoticism, another four interviewees and 23% of focus group participants claimed that these films' artistic quality brought them awards and appreciation.

In this chapter, I answer the questions raised in the first chapter. This chapter also discusses the study's contribution to the discipline – especially to the Third Cinema and Postcolonial Cinema, anti-war films in Sri Lanka, state propaganda and censorship. This chapter also provides recommendations for future research to cover the limitations of this study. I close this chapter by providing concluding remarks of the entire study.

10.2. Contribution of the Study to the Discipline

This study reveals the possibilities available to and challenges faced by Sri Lankan filmmakers to produce Third Cinema films. As a country in the Global South that has a history of colonialism, two failed youth rebellions, an ethnic-based war, and a present filled with the outcome of that history such as an unstable political system, corruption, exploitation and oppression of marginalised and minority groups, Sri Lanka offers an appropriate context and a necessity for a Third Cinema. The same history and context have become a challenge for the filmmakers to produce Third Cinema films.

The study also demonstrates that in Sri Lanka, there were attempts at producing alternative films during politically significant periods. Reviews of previous studies reveal that such films display characteristics of Third Cinema. For instance, Dissanayake (1994) discusses how alternative cinema productions came to light during significant social changes, and De Mel (2007) claims the films on war and militarisation produced by Asoka Handagama and Prasanna Vithanage share the goals of Third Cinema. Wayne (2001), in his book *Political film: The dialectics of Third Cinema*, claims that even the First and Second Cinema might produce films with underlying themes of Third Cinema. This study extends the studies done by Sri Lankan scholars about Sri Lankan cinema productions and their links to Third Cinema. It also adds to Wayne's dialectics of Third Cinema by testing his ideas with reference to Sri Lankan anti-war films. This study adds knowledge about Third Cinema of South Asia to the bigger picture of global Third Cinema. It confirms that although there are challenges for the filmmakers to produce Third Cinema films, such as a capitalist economy, state-controlled cinema industry, and a conservative social and cultural background, the opportunities are also available. The study also demonstrates that although these filmmakers have never declared that they are Third Cinema filmmakers, their films selected for this research exhibit characteristics of Third Cinema films. Thus, given the opportunity and support, there is full potential to establish a Third Cinema in Sri Lanka, which could implement a significant development in audiences' culture and society.

This study introduces an extension to the Re-Orientalism of Lisa Lau (Lau 2009), which is an extension of Said's (1978) Orientalism. In Orientalism, he discusses how the Western world creates fabricated images of the East as a primitive and uncivilised 'other'. In Re-Orientalism Lau talks about the South Asian countries which were British colonies. According to her, Re-Orientalism is Orientals fulfilling the goal of Orientalism instead of Westerners. She discusses Re-Orientalism practised by diasporic Orientals established in the West but with links and power in the East. Most of the work of Lau and her colleague Mendes is focused on Indian literature. There is much research conducted on Re-Orientalism by the diasporic Indian filmmakers as well. This study demonstrates that these film directors are not from the diaspora. They were born and bred and currently live in Sri Lanka and possess a significant social power in the country. This study demonstrates that these three films support the Orientalising process in their international reception through framing the communities from war-affected areas as

impoverished, uneducated, unemployed, violent and sexually desperate. Thus, I claim that it is a development of Orientalism by non-diasporic Orientals, an extension of Lau's Re-Orientalism.

Cultivation Theory has typically been used in studies conducted on television. There are instances where the theory has been used to study films as well. Much of the works framed by Cultivation Theory focus on the violence depicted in media and the effects on audience members. Some studies used Cultivation Theory to analyse the effects of cultivating stereotypical gender identities by media. This study frames the effects of war and cultural identities cultivated by the selected anti-war films on Sri Lankan audiences using Cultivation Theory. Although such studies were often conducted internationally, it is a new dimension for film studies in Sri Lankan academia. This study demonstrates that these films normalise stereotypical gender identities and gender-based violence, and cultivate stereotypical identities of certain ethnic groups.

The literature review reveals that multiple studies have been conducted worldwide to explore war films and the role of state propaganda and censorship regarding those films. In Sri Lanka, fewer studies were conducted on war films, and even fewer of them cover a larger area of context, text and the audiences. This study adds light to the covered areas of text and the political economy of Sri Lankan cinema. This study demonstrates that much of the censorship practised in Sri Lanka is indirect and compels the filmmakers to apply self-censorship; the state war propaganda was more potent than the anti-war films, and it also works as part of the state censorship mechanism.

10.3. Research Questions and Answers

10.3.1. Representations of gender roles, sexual relationships, ethnic identities, religious identities and cultural values

The first question I raised at the beginning of this research is: how do the selected anti-war films represent gender roles, sexual relationships, ethnic identities and religious identities in Sri Lankan society? The argument I made answering this question is that these films display Third Cinema characteristics such as cultural specificity, historicity and critical commitment by complementing progressive cultural aspects and challenging exploitative and suppressive patriarchal and colonial cultural elements; attacking the existing capitalist political system by revealing the oppression and exploitation of the marginalised people during the war; and criticising the pro-war Nationalist Buddhist institution exhibiting a Marxist point of view. I also argue that by framing ethnic communities affected by the war as impoverished, violent and sexually desperate, these films support the Orientalising process in their international reception and extend the Re-Orientalising process at home.

Gender roles and sexual relationships

These films portray patriarchal gender identities and roles, and by doing so they criticise colonialism. For instance, these films portray men as breadwinners and women as dependents. Men engage in different occupations, such as soldiers, entrepreneurs and government servants, in all three films. In contrast, women are portrayed as wives, mothers, sisters or lovers who depend on men or as sex workers as in *Shades of Ash* and garment factory workers as in *The Forsaken Land*. These films portray strong, powerful and dominant men who are sexually active, and weak, helpless and subordinate women who are passive sex objects. Portraying women getting raped (the Tamil woman in *This Is My Moon*), being used in sex trafficking (Komala and Heen Eki in *Shades of Ash*), being sexually exploited (Ungi in *Shades of Ash*) or committing suicide (Komala in *Shades of Ash* and Anura's sister in *The Forsaken Land*) depicts women as weak, passive victims. *Shades of Ash* portrays women as bearers of the honour of family and culture. The objectification of the female body is constructed in these films through the male gaze. These gender roles indicate the colonial stereotypical gender divisions (Mills 2005) and patriarchal ideology of female subordination, and the male gaze signifies colonialism in which patriarchy signifies colonial power and the male gaze signifies the imperial gaze (Naaman 2000). Recreating these gender deviations and inequalities present in Sri Lankan society, the filmmakers lay a platform to criticise and challenge those aspects.

These films fulfil cultural specificity and critical commitment of Third Cinema by criticising the patriarchal social norms such as virginity and marriage. This study demonstrates that *This Is My Moon* and *The Forsaken Land* portray how concepts like virginity and marriage are used to suppress women and their sexual freedom. These films challenge these social norms by portraying women who act against the dominant social norms. For instance, the Tamil woman in *This Is My Moon* follows her abuser to his village and establishes her life in a Sinhalese village. The dead soldier's wife (in *This Is My Moon*) uses her pregnancy to win the soldier's compensation and invites the bookie for intimacy outside of marriage. *This Is My Moon* shows women not giving up and fighting with men instead of fighting with each other for men. For instance, the Tamil woman and the soldier's girlfriend fight with the soldier for putting their lives in trouble. The film also shows a sisterly bond between the female characters who take care of each other at difficult times. The bond between the Tamil woman and the soldier's sister is one such example.

This Is My Moon and *The Forsaken Land* critically portray how patriarchal social norms of marriage suppress both men and women's freedom. *The Forsaken Land* criticises the hypocrisy of conservative culture. For instance, Anura's sister, a signifier of conservative culture, secretly enjoys the pleasure from the abuser she meets on the crowded bus, while trying to discipline Batti, the young girl, and her sister in law. The film also shows how the powerful ruling forces use culture to control commoners' needs

and feelings by portraying the army officers abducting, torturing and killing the soldier for sleeping with another man's wife, which is tabooed in the Sri Lankan culture.

The Forsaken Land also challenges the patriarchal social norms of female sexuality by portraying women who fulfil their need for sex outside of existing dominant social norms. For instance, Latha starts an extramarital relationship with the soldier to fulfil her need for sex which she does not receive from her husband Anura, and a pregnant lady is shown having sex with a man in the woods. The film also challenges the expected patriarchal social norm of heterosexuality by depicting intimacy between the soldier and Anura. Their behaviour gives a hint of homosexuality.

This Is My Moon and *The Forsaken Land* depict female characters who challenge the existing dominant social norms, and they create an ideology that encourages women in the audience. By doing so, they fulfil the critical commitment of Third Cinema. In contrast, *Shades of Ash* does not show this characteristic because instead of showing women who challenge the dominant social norms, the film shows women who embrace the system and go with the flow. This analysis demonstrates that these films exhibit characteristics of Third Cinema films by criticising and challenging existing patriarchal social norms.

Ethnic identities

These three films predominantly portray the Sinhalese ethnic community. No Tamil or Muslim character can be seen in *The Forsaken Land* and *Shades of Ash*. Only *This is My Moon* contains Tamil Characters. This absence of Tamil characters brought three meanings. First, these films under-represent the Tamil community; second, these films portray the dominance of the Sinhala community over the Tamil community; third, this absence brings both Sinhala and Tamil communities under one denominator – the victims. By bringing the two communities together, these three films show the destruction war brought on to the social and spiritual lives of the two communities. These films frame the Sinhalese villagers in war-affected remote areas as impoverished, uneducated, unemployed, sexually desperate, and violent. Although this framing represents the ground reality of the war-torn regions in Sri Lanka, it also supports the Orientalising process in its international reception and the allegations of the Sinhalese nationalists against the film.

Religious identities

These three films exhibit characteristics of Third Cinema films concerning their representations of religious identities. The filmmakers convey Marxist ideology through these films, fulfilling the critical commitment of Third Cinema. They represent the religious practices of the Sinhalese village community and the Buddhist religious institutions in Sri Lanka. All three films demonstrate the humanity, unity and hospitality of the villagers, which are also the teaching of the Buddhist culture. In *This Is My Moon*, the soldier's family welcomes the Tamil woman who is a stranger to them and takes care of her; and Komala

in *Shades of Ash* adopts Ukkuwa, an orphan kid who is displaced due to war. All three films show the villagers' unity by portraying them gathering at times of difficulty to help each other. *This Is My Moon* and *Shades of Ash* show people respect the elders and the clergy, which is accepted as a positive trait in Eastern culture.

None of the filmmakers criticise the Buddhist philosophy. They treat the Buddhist institutions as ideological state apparatuses and the monks in them as the government agents. For instance, *This Is My Moon* shows the pro-war nationalist Buddhist wing and the monks in them. *Shades of Ash* shows how religious places such as Buddhist temples become a part of destruction when law and order are not in effect. Although *The Forsaken Land* does not show a temple or an image of a monk, the film criticises people's religious beliefs and practices.

The study demonstrates that these films are critical towards the practice of blindly believing and respecting clergy who do not follow the Buddhist philosophy and teaching but misguide the community for their political and economic gains. It confirms that the filmmakers show the immense power the clergy and religious institutions, as ideological state apparatuses, have within the Sinhalese society. *This Is My Moon* and *Shades of Ash* portray the dominance the Buddhist cultural institutions (temples) possess within Sinhalese villages. The villagers offer the best of their effort and belongings to the temple and the monk. They listen to him, accept what he preaches and believe in him as a man of principle.

The study demonstrates *This Is My Moon* and *Shades of Ash* challenge this religious status quo. For instance, *This Is My Moon* portrays the Buddhist monk as a commoner who has flaws any human beings have. He possesses feelings, desires and insecurities as any other human being. The film ultimately shows him, who persuades people to support the war, eloping with the Tamil woman, leaving his robe to live a secular life. *Shades of Ash* portrays a criminal who escaped from prison disguised as a monk and running the temple. The villagers respect him by worshipping him and offering him food. The monk steals the property of the temple and sells it. According to the analysis, the obsession people have with the temple shows their cultural dependency.

Although *The Forsaken Land* does not show a Buddhist monk's image as in the other two films, it criticises the people's religious beliefs and practices. The filmmaker has a Marxist ideology of religion. This is demonstrated by showing Anura's sister, who believes in the merits and rebirth of Buddhist teaching, committing suicide in the same village, as she had promised not to die there because there is no religious place in that village. The film confirms that religious beliefs are of less help to followers when the whole social system is a failure. The same ideology is signified in the scene where Anura and the soldier discuss their religiosity smoking marijuana (Marx compared religion to the opium of the people).

The study demonstrates that these films exhibit characteristics of Third Cinema – the cultural specificity and critical commitment – by complementing the constructive attributes of cultural aspects and values and criticising destructive constructs of Sri Lankan culture and religious institutions. However, their framing of the marginalised ethnic communities living in war-torn regions as impoverished, uneducated, unemployed, violent and sexually desperate support the Orientalising process in their international reception. Nevertheless, these findings show that, with simple alterations, these films have the full potential to be improved as influential Third Cinema films.

10.3.2. Interpretations of the representations of gender roles, sexual relationships, ethnic and religious identities as reflective of the realities of the Sri Lankan society

The second question raised at the beginning of this research is: in what ways (if any) are these presentations of gender roles, sexual relationships, ethnic identities and religious identities in the selected films interpreted as reflective of the reality of Sri Lankan Society? This study demonstrates that different interpretations of realities are constructed of the same texts by distinct individuals because they vary according to their social contexts, life experiences and values. The findings reveal that 42% of the focus group participants claimed that the representations are realistic; 38% claimed that some representations are realistic, but some are not; and 20% claimed that none of the representations are realistic. The quantitative analysis indicates that the majority of the participants accept that these films represent the social reality. Receiving the acceptance of the majority audience is a progressive indicator of a Third Cinema film because more reach of the audience means more impact on those people.

Gender roles and sexual relationships

Regarding gender and sexual representations, there are contradictory opinions of authenticity. A female interviewee interpreted that representations of women as subordinate and passive is not always realistic while some focus group participants stated such depictions of women in war-affected areas are realistic because they face sexual violence. The findings demonstrate that the reality of the interviewee's social background (urbanised, privileged and educated) is different from the reality of war-affected areas. The focus group participants received information about sexual violence in war-affected areas from interpersonal communication channels such as word of mouth. They compared such information with what they see on screen and accepted the depictions as realistic.

Some participants claimed that it is realistic to depict gender-related social issues as occurrences in rural, war-affected areas. In contrast, some others claimed that they are not unique to war-affected areas but typical throughout society. The study confirms that participants who do not have first-hand experiences of war-affected areas are more likely to believe what they see in media as accurate. The study also demonstrates that audiences believe representations of films are authentic if they are similar to information they receive from new media reporting and word of mouth.

The study demonstrates that although media literacy plays a vital role in deciding the authenticity of media representations, conservative cultural beliefs are more influential than the media literacy. For instance, participants from academic backgrounds claimed that the characters in *The Forsaken Land* and their behaviours are logically constructed, and therefore they are realistic. However, an academic interviewee and a film reviewer claimed that the sexual behaviour of Latha and Anura's sister is not real since they do not match with the Sri Lankan culture.

The conservative cultural beliefs and practices cultivated in audiences' minds influence them to interpret whether the media messages are authentic or not. For instance, audience members claimed that Latha's character in *The Forsaken Land* and female characters in *This Is My moon* are not realistic since they are not engaging in household activities or any other productive work because conservative Sri Lankan culture expects women to engage in household activities.

Around 24% of the participants hold the idea that these films portray exaggerated sexual behaviour which is not realistic. According to them, people in a war-affected area are suffering from many sociological and economic problems. Therefore, depicting them as concentrating only on their sexual relationships and sexual issues is not realistic. However, a few participants stated that depicting people in war-affected areas often engaging in sexual activities is realistic since they have no other means of entertainment to release stress as do the city dwellers.

Thus, this analysis reveals that there are contradictory opinions of the authenticity of gender and sexual representations among the audiences. Their interpretations are based on their personal experiences, social and cultural backgrounds, and exposure to different communication channels, such as new media, mainstream media and interpersonal communication channels such as word of mouth. Thus, alternative filmmakers must first consider their viewers' cultural and social backgrounds and then the different communication channels and various information they receive from those channels because any of these can act as a barrier or support to convey the message the filmmaker intends to send their viewer.

Ethnic identities

Two things were discussed regarding the authenticity of the representations of ethnic identities: one, the realistic portrayals of the war-affected Sinhalese villages; second, the realistic portrayals of the Tamil woman. Regarding the Sinhalese village and the Tamil woman's character, there were contradictory opinions of authenticity. The opinions were based on audiences' personal experiences, social and cultural backgrounds, and exposure to stereotypical media representations and social ideologies.

There are contradictory opinions regarding the authenticity of the Tamil woman's character and her behaviour. The majority of the audience members claimed the Tamil woman's character in *This Is My Moon* is unrealistic. The justifications for their opinions are also contradictory and were based on their experiences interacting with distinct communities that follow different subcultures. For instance,

interviewee 8 stated that she sees the Tamil woman's character as unrealistic since the film portrays her as a rebellious character. According to the interviewee's experiences, Tamil women are submissive. However, another focus group participant interpreted the depiction of the Tamil woman as unrealistic because, according to her experience, Tamil women are talkative, and the film represents the Tamil woman who is not so. Those who claimed the Tamil woman's character is unrealistic also claimed that some aspects of that character are realistically depicted in the film. Their opinion was based on the stereotypical ideologies about the Tamil community existing in Sinhalese society. For instance, the Tamil woman offering her gold chain and her body to save her life are such ideologies that are popular among the Sinhalese community.

According to male film reviewer 1, the Tamil woman is just a symbol. Interpreting her as an ordinary Tamil woman who ends up in a Sinhalese village and facing difficulties from the Sinhalese people is a misconception of both the Tamil woman and the Sinhalese villagers. He claims that the Tamil woman represents the oppression the Tamil community experienced in the ethnic conflict. The textual analysis of the film also confirms this viewpoint. The study confirms that the interviewee's film literacy to read symbols and his political opinion regarding the ethnic conflict influenced his interpretation of the Tamil woman.

The second point interviewees and focus group participants discussed was the authenticity of representations of a war-affected Sinhalese village in these films. There were contradictory opinions. One group of participants claimed that the representations of the village show that is spoiled by the capitalist system, villagers are poor but kind and innocent, and people in war-affected villages are stressed out and realistically show unusual sexual behaviours. Another group suggested the representations of villagers as sexually driven people who are not engaging in any productive work (as in *This Is My Moon* and *The Forsaken Land*), and depicting all adverse incidents happening in the same village (as in *Shades of Ash*), are unrealistic. The audience members who claimed the representations are realistic based that on their social and educational backgrounds and the stereotypical ideologies of the ancient Sinhalese village depicted in books, teledramas and folk stories. Those who claimed the representations are unrealistic based it on their cultural competencies. The study demonstrates that their lack of knowledge of the war-affected villages and lack of film literacy to understand the use of cinematic techniques such as symbolism and composites also influenced their interpretations.

The knowledge about the socio-economic situation of a particular social sector changes the way the audience interprets a media production. For instance, male film reviewer 2, a journalist and social worker, stated that all the characters and their behaviour portrayed in these films are realistic. He has observed and heard of such incidents and met people as depicted in these films. As he explains, extreme poverty and the frustrated mentality are all real in war-affected villages he visited. Similarly, focus group members who participated in the discussion of *Shades of Ash* stated that some incidents portrayed in the

film, such as poor women engaging in prostitution, occurrences of child labour, child abuse and rural women engaging in extramarital relationships, are realistic in war-affected areas. These participants are privileged and educated city dwellers of higher socio-economic backgrounds. In contrast to the male film reviewer 2, they have never seen people from war-affected areas. However, since these participants have never been to war-affected sites, and the incidents depicted in the films are common occurrences in the country, they believe these media depictions are realistic because this is what they have heard from the news and new media reports.

The majority of interviewees and focus group participants, who interpreted that these films portray reality, stated that these representations could not be generalised. According to them, a few events or behaviours of a few people do not define an entire culture. Interviewees and focus group participants also stated that through exaggerated portrayals of some characters and incidents the filmmakers might intend to make striking political opinions such as the society created by the war can disregard human values, irrespective of ethnicity. The study demonstrates that the audience members thought the filmmakers intended to express not that the Sri Lankan (or Sinhalese) culture is regressive, but in specific circumstances, inappropriate incidents can occur in a country where a progressive culture is present.

The analysis revealed that the audience members accepted the portrayals of ethnic identities that match their social, cultural and educational backgrounds, personal experiences and stereotypical ideologies existing in society or conveyed through mass media, books and folk stories. The portrayals that do not match these aspects were interpreted as unrealistic. According to Osei Owusu (2015), the audiences' cultural competency influences how they accept the media representations of their culture.

Religious identities

The discussion of the representations of religious identities in these films revolved around the characters of the Buddhist clergy portrayed in *This Is My Moon* and *Shades of Ash*. Interviewees interpreted these clergy characters as being depicted negatively in the films, and they were realistic depictions. The majority of the focus group participants (77%) also accepted that these representations are realistic. Their interpretations were based on their personal experiences and information they heard through interpersonal communication methods such as word of mouth.

According to interviewees 1, 4, and the focus group participants, negative portrayals of the Buddhist monks in these films are realistic because they have seen such characters in society. They also suggested that socially unacceptable behaviours can be seen in clergy from war-affected areas since the war has destroyed the entire social system, including the religious institutions. Another opinion made by them is that even clergy may make mistakes since they are ordinary human beings. They stated that they have heard from mass media about such monks who have violated expected social norms. However, interviewee 1 also stated that although these characters, their behaviours and the incidents they face are

realistic, they cannot be generalised. According to him the monk in *Shades of Ash* is more realistic compared to the monks in *This Is My Moon* because in the latter, by depicting two monks possessing negative characteristics, the filmmaker is trying to generalise the idea that Buddhist monks are 'bad'. The focus group participants also expressed a similar opinion to this. According to them, portraying the Buddhist monks who possess only negative traits shows the filmmakers' bias against the Buddhist clergy because the Buddhist monks who follow the socially agreed and standard Buddhist code of conduct do exist.

In contrast to the above opinion, some focus group participants (11%) stated that the representations of the Buddhist monk in *Shades of Ash* and representing a village without a religious place in *The Forsaken Land* are unrealistic. The main opinion raised by the *Shades of Ash* participants is that portraying a prisoner becoming a Buddhist monk is unrealistic. They stated that such a portrayal could create a negative image of general Buddhist clerical society in Sri Lanka. Both opinions of the authenticity indicate the influence of stereotypical cultural ideologies on audiences' interpretations. The study demonstrates that the audience members are reluctant to accept portrayals that violate an ideal Buddhist monk's stereotypical image, created by the conservative cultural ideologies, as authentic. The study shows that the audience members' interpretations of the authentic representations of religious identities are based on their personal experiences and media representations of religion.

The findings reveal that most audience members interpreted either all (42%) or some (38%) representations of the cultural aspects as realistic. A few (20%) interpreted them as unrealistic. Their interpretations were based on social and educational backgrounds, personal experiences, political opinions, mainstream media representations, word of mouth, media/film literacy, conservative cultural beliefs and stereotypical ideologies of people or settings, and knowledge about the socio-economic situation of a particular social sector. When considering these influencing aspects, it is clear that some are easily changeable, but some are not. For instance, if education and film literacy are highly influential for an audience to interpret an arthouse film, filmmakers as a community can develop a culture where film literacy and education of their audience would be improved. A similar movement can operate to break the audiences' conservative cultural beliefs and stereotypical ideologies. Though such attempts are long term and require much commitment, as a short term solution, the filmmakers can come down to the level of audience and produce films using simple cinema techniques and style that is understandable to the audience of any education level.

10.3.3. Political ideologies embedded in the films about the war, government and state apparatuses

The third question is: what political ideologies are embedded in these films about the war, such as those of the government and state apparatuses? The study demonstrates that anti-war and anti-propaganda ideologies and the exploitative and repressive nature of the state mechanisms are embedded in these films. The content analysis exhibits that these three films indicate the features of Third Cinema films: historicity, critical commitment and politicisation. According to Wayne (2001), historicity is the explanation of authentic historical background (of a particular social group) that reveals the present conditions (of that social group) due to that history; politicisation is the process of being aware of the oppression and exploitation people endure and deciding to do something about it; critical commitment is the films being committed to the aims and ideals of revolution.

Historicity

The study demonstrates that the selected three films fulfil the function of historicity by portraying either the historical background of the war or how it has created the present scenario. It also exhibits that these films convey an anti-war ideology. For instance, *This Is My Moon* does its best to fulfil the historicity of Third Cinema by symbolically discussing the historical background of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka and its impact on people. Symbolically, the film portrays the injustice done to the Tamil community by the majority Sinhalese government by implementing unfair policy decisions and suppressing the objections of the Tamil communities through repressive mechanisms. The soldier and some villagers raping and abusing the Tamil woman, and the Tamil woman following the soldier to his village, eloping with the Buddhist monk, giving birth to the soldier's child and settling in the Sinhalese village symbolise the start of the ethnic issue, the birth of the LTTE (the Tamil militant group), the start of the war and its existence for nearly three decades.

Shades of Ash reveals the present condition of the people affected by war. The history, according to the film, is the dead bodies seen at the beginning. From there onwards, the film shows the impact of that history on the villagers. *The Forsaken Land* gives a general picture of the history of political turmoil in Sri Lanka. The study demonstrates that the film portrays a general picture of state oppression through militarisation against any riot against the state Sri Lanka experienced during 1971, 1988/89 as communist youth uprisings and from 1983–2009 as ethnic conflict. It shows the experiences of people in militarised Sri Lanka throughout history. For instance, portraying the soldier's abduction, torture and killing may remind audiences of similar phenomena during the 1988/89 youth riots and the war between LTTE and the government (Public Interest Advocacy Centre 2019).

When we consider these three films at the time they were released, the country was in a war situation. Therefore, these films were portraying the social situation of the time they were screened. I screened these films to the focus groups and did the discussions and interviews 14 years later. In that sense, these films are historical sources of the war.

Critical commitment

The study confirms that these films fulfil the critical commitment of Third Cinema films by playing an anti-propaganda role against the pro-war state propaganda. They do this by criticising the government's war agenda, and the role of government, its bureaucracy and ideological state apparatuses specifically in the war and generally in people's lives.

The study demonstrates that these films hold the ideology that the government and its capitalist system intend to continue the war to receive its benefits. For instance, *This Is My Moon* and *Shades of Ash* show the deceptive strategies the government has taken to give the impression that they are interested in finding solutions for ethnic conflict and putting an end to the war. *This Is My Moon* shows this symbolically by portraying the shopkeeper (capitalist agents) selling the soldier chewing gum (fake and unsuccessful peace-making strategies) which both the soldier (the government) and the Tamil woman (the Tamil political leaders) keep on chewing throughout the film. *Shades of Ash* sarcastically depicts useless strategies the government implements to end the war. At the beginning of the film, a news announcer's voice mentions that the government released a thousand helium balloons and held a musical show in Colombo, expecting peace in the country.

The findings exhibit that *This Is My Moon* symbolically represents oppressive state mechanisms behind the war by using the characters and incidents. For instance, the Tamil woman represents the Tamil community and their national issue, the soldier and his role in the film signify the government and its reaction to the ethnic issue, and the monk represents the pro-war Sinhalese Buddhist cultural institutions in Sri Lanka and their interference in the ethnic issue and government policymaking. The shop owner represents capitalism and its followers who encourage the war for their benefit. The rest of the characters represent the lower socio-economic class in Sri Lanka who had become the victims of the Sri Lankan civil war. The Sinhalese soldier exercising his sexual power over the Tamil woman without her will signifies the domination Sinhalese society exercises over the Tamil minority.

According to the study, these films hold an anti-propaganda ideology and convey an objection to the government's militarisation. The study exhibits that these films challenge the state propaganda that promoted heroic and perfect soldiers of the military forces. They show the powerless lower-ranked soldiers are suffering due to the inequality in the bureaucratic hierarchy; militarisation interferes with the personal life of the citizens as shown by military officers abusing the soldier for engaging in sex; and soldiers treating innocent villagers harshly. The findings show that *Shades of Ash* looks at the

soldiers empathetically by revealing the effects of war on personal relationships and people's lives in the military service and their family members.

The study also revealed that *Shades of Ash* is critical towards the entire administrative system of the government. It criticises the corruption of the ground-level administrative officers by showing the VAO using resources given to villagers illegally. He helps his henchman, Pema, to become a Home Guard, interfering with correct recruitment procedure. The school principal has been transferred to the village as an act of political revenge. Without fulfilling his duties, he fraudulently acquires villagers' property with the help of the NGO lady (who is also expected to work for the welfare of villagers) and the Buddhist monk.

Politicisation

The findings show that these films fulfil the politicisation of Third Cinema by making the audience aware of the war's impact. The films show that the capitalist system exploits the marginalised citizens of a country. While *This Is My Moon* and *Shades of Ash* focused on discussing the impact of the war on people, *The Forsaken Land* discusses underprivileged people's situation in a stagnated and abandoned society.

The study demonstrates that *This Is My Moon* represents how youth in rural Sri Lanka become victims of war and are exploited by the capitalist society. For instance, the film depicts the poor village youth joining the armed forces as the only means of employment, because of the high levels of unemployment among the less educated and those without the sought-after academic and technical qualifications which are hard to achieve for poor rural youth. According to the film, being soldiers, they fight someone else's war. Frustration compels them to desert the army. This film shows that youth have few options to make their living in remote villages of war-torn countries, and even less for a deserter since he is being treated like a criminal. This social rejection and economic hardship lead them to crimes. For instance, later in *This Is My Moon* the soldier becomes the agent of violence. He threatens the shop keeper for informing the military police about him and later raids the shop and steals money.

The study shows that these films portray the impact of war on marginalised and underprivileged communities. For instance, *Shades of Ash* shows that by damaging the agricultural system, economy, education, spirituality and personal lives of the people, the war damages the village's traditional socio-economic system. It portrays that, as a result, youth join the army and leave the village, poverty compels the villagers to send their children as child labourers and women are pushed into prostitution and become victims of sexually-transmitted diseases. The findings reveal that *The Forsaken Land* portrays the mindset of people in a stagnated and abandoned society. The film depicts that the social stagnation can create a state of uncertainty of the future and cultivate a frustrated mentality among people. The film depicts war as the reason for this stagnation of society.

The study demonstrates that these films show how the capitalist system uses war to suppress and exploit the marginalised people. They try to make the audiences aware of the disaster of war – how war changes the entire flow of people's natural and cultural way of life. Thus, these three films fulfil the politicisation of Third Cinema films.

10.3.4. The films' use of the artistic capacity to question/address the politics of war and speak to the consciences of audiences regarding the disaster of war

The fourth question of this research is: in what ways (if any) do the selected films use their artistic capacity to question/address the politics of war and seek to speak to audiences' conscience regarding the disaster of war? The study demonstrates that although the filmmakers use their artistic capacity to address the audience's conscience regarding the disaster of war, media literacy, political opinions and the exposure to state war propaganda changes the audience interpretations of these media messages. The answers to the third research question reveal that these films act as an anti-propaganda, portray the disaster of war, and criticise the role of government and the state apparatuses in the war. However, the answers to this research question reveal that not all the participants could interpret the films' anti-war messages, but only the educated niche audience with high film literacy could interpret the messages embedded in them.

The findings reveal that audiences with higher film literacy tend to quickly interpret the anti-war messages portrayed by the selected films compared to those who have a lower level of film literacy. For instance, the academics grasped the explicit and implicit meanings filmmakers intended to convey. The findings show that the intellectual audience could interpret the impact of war portrayed in the selected films. Interviewees stated that these films stand by the victims' side in revealing marginalised or poor citizens' exploitation in the Sri Lankan war context. They stated that these films portray the enhanced male-dominated sexual politics and dire economic situations that result from the conflict as side-effects of war, and how villagers, mostly women and children, become the victims of sexual exploitation.

Interviewees claimed that these films are critical of the three institutions of the state: the government, cultural institutions and security forces. First, the films criticise the government by disclosing their failure and lack of interest in improving people's living standards. Second, they (especially *This Is My Moon* and *Shades of Ash*) criticise the cultural institution of the nationalist Sinhala Buddhist monks, who support the war. Third, they create an alternative or oppositional image of the security forces, in contrast to that of the popular, patriotic war hero image created by government propaganda. These interpretations exhibit that these films successfully awakened the political consciences of the intellectual audiences regarding the politics of war and its impact.

In contrast, the findings demonstrate that the focus group participants' lack of film literacy leads their interpretations to differ from the interviewees and focus group participants with higher film literacy level. For instance, 41% of the focus group participants stated that these films under-represent the war;

23% of them stated that these films represent the security forces negatively; and 4% stated that there is no depiction of war in these films at all. Only 30% of the participants stated that these films represent the impact of war on people and only 2% of them stated that they represent the role of government and the state bureaucracy. The study confirms that the filmmakers do not cater to the general audience but a niche intellectual audience (maybe the international audience). The signifiers and the cinematography they use are too complicated for a general audience who lack film literacy to read and interpret them. Therefore, the study confirms that for a film to be revolutionary, not only the contextual factors (McNamara 2011) but the intellectual factors such as media literacy and critical thinking skills of the audience also play an essential role.

According to the findings, audiences' exposure to the state propaganda of war had a significant influence on their interpretations of the films. According to the propaganda, the government played the role of rescuer and the LTTE the enemy. It created the image of the soldier as a war hero. The study demonstrated that the focus group participants were more exposed to those propaganda campaigns than to the films because the films did not reach a broad audience due to indirect censorship issues. The study shows that, at the time, those campaigns were much more potent in changing how people see the war and the state mechanism than these films. According to McNamara (2011), more than the film's revolutionary nature, we need to consider the context that can extinguish film's potential revolutionary spirit. Therefore, he suggests revolution should "call for an investigation of the world beyond the film, the world within which film is manifest beneath the heel of hegemony, censorship, and control" (McNamara 2011, p. 87).

The study demonstrates that although the focus group participants identified the alternative ideologies embedded in these films, most of them negatively interpreted those ideologies due to the state propaganda's influence. For instance, the majority of the participants (64%) stated that the negative depictions of the security forces and their family members (35%), the government and the state bureaucracy (15%), the Buddhist clergy (7%), and the Sinhalese community (7%) attracted the criticism and indirect state suppression. Like the government and its allies, these participants interpreted such representations as biased and supportive towards the LTTE. The intellectual audience members who held strong nationalistic pro-war political opinions also expressed the same idea.

When the opinions of the intellectual audience and the general audience are compared, it is evident that the participants' media literacy plays a significant role in interpreting a media/cultural text. It is also evident that the state war propaganda had a more significant influence on the general audience than the intellectual audience. Thus, in promoting Third Cinema in Sri Lanka, it is crucial to generally improve the media literacy and, specifically, the film literacy of the ordinary film audience. This improvement can be made by introducing film studies to the secondary education system and creating a culture of arthouse film appreciation among regular viewers.

10.4. Recommendations

I suggest the following recommendations for future studies to cover the limitations of this research. Expansion of the sample of both the films and the audiences, including films from different time periods, genres and countries, is among the recommendations. In this study, I analysed only three anti-war films which screened between 2000 and 2005. The Sri Lankan ethnic conflict started in 1983 and lasted until 2009. Inclusion of films produced throughout these 26 years allows us to understand the evolution of war films in Sri Lanka and how different contextual conditions influence that evolution. I also recommend to include post-war films produced about Sri Lankan ethnic conflict by both local and international filmmakers to see representations of different perspectives of the issue.

In this study, I screened these films only to the Sinhalese film audiences. Since the anti-war films are about the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict in which all ethnic communities were affected, and those effects remain, including a sample of the Tamil and Muslim ethnic communities is recommended in future studies. This extended sample will allow us to understand how different ethnic communities interpret those films and what influences their interpretations. Further, audiences from other countries also could be included in the sample to learn how they interpret the same text as outsiders.

I analysed, in this study, only anti-war films produced in Sri Lanka. A comparative study of anti-war films and pro-war films produced in Sri Lanka should be conducted to receive an expanded knowledge of state propaganda and state suppression. Regarding the Third Cinema films, a comparative textual analysis could be conducted between Third Cinema films produced in Latin American countries, African countries and the arthouse films produced in South Asian countries to identify different styles these countries use in such films and the challenges they face under distinct political systems. A similar analysis could also be conducted regarding postcolonial films produced in the Global South to understand the trends in postcolonial filmmaking practices of those countries.

10.5. Concluding Remarks

This study demonstrates that the political context in Sri Lanka is a challenge for alternative film directors to form a well established Third Cinema. However, the anti-war film genre has provided an opportunity to experiment with the possibilities of creating a Third Cinema in the country. Although none of the film directors I studied in this research declares that they are Third Cinema filmmakers, their films exhibit Third Cinema characteristics. Being members of a culture and society influenced by colonialism for centuries, these filmmakers support the Orientalising process by depicting marginalised people in war-affected areas as impoverished, uneducated, unemployed, violent and sexually desperate. The Sri Lankan film audiences have exhibited a mixture of social, cultural, economic and political influences in their readings of these films, highlighting the significance and importance of such cinema in providing a window for perceptions about war.

Given the opportunity and support, there is full potential to establish a Third Cinema in Sri Lanka, which could significantly develop audiences' culture and society. To improve the audience's arthouse film viewing habit, in the long term, filmmakers as a community can create a culture where film literacy and education of their audience would be enhanced. A similar movement can break the audiences' conservative cultural beliefs and stereotypical ideologies. In the short term, the filmmakers can come down to the level of audience and produce films using simple cinema techniques and style that is understandable to the audience of any education level.

FILMOGRAPHY

Argo (Ben Affleck 2012)

August Sun (Ira Madiyama) (Prasanna Vithanage 2005)

The Battle of Chile (Patricio Guzmán 1975)

Bend it Like Beckham (Gurinder Chadha 2002)

Black Flowers (Lita Stantic 1992)

Changing Countryside (Gamperaliya) (Lester James Peries 1963)

Death on a Full Moon Day (Pura Handa Kaluwara) (Prasanna Vithanage 1997)

Dr Zhivago (David Lean 1965)

Funny Boy (Deepa Mehta 2020)

Gamani (Sarath Weerasekara 2011)

Gone with the Wind (Victor Fleming 1939)

The Immortal Men (Nomiyena Minisun) (Gamini Fonseka 1994)

The Kite (Sarungale) (Sunil Ariyarathna 1979)

Last Temptation of Christ (Martin Scorsese 1988)

The Line of Destiny (Rekhawa) (Lester James Peries 1956)

Mississippi Masala (Mira Nair 1991)

The Motorcycle Diaries (Walter Salles 2004)

One Way or Another (directors: Sara Gómez, Julio García Espinosa, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, Tomás González Pérez 1977)

The Passion of the Christ (Mel Gibson 2004)

Prabhakaran (Thushara Pieris 2008)

The Road From Elephant Pass (Alimankada) (Chandran Rutnam 2009)

Saroja (Somaratne Dissanayake 2000)

Slumdog Millionaire (Danny Boyle 2008)

Three Kings (David O. Russell 1999)

Water (Deepa Mehta 2005)

The White Tiger (Ramin Bahrani 2021)

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Appendix I

Interview guide – film directors

Background

Tell me about your family background. What kind of influence did your family have upon your development as a filmmaker? Were there any political affiliations to your family that shaped your political ideology as expressed through your films?

What is your educational background? How has your education or educational environment influenced your thinking and your filmmaking practices?

Did you engage in any political activities during the time of your education? If so, how did such activities influenced your filmmaking practices?

Where or how did you get your Film education? Who inspired you to become a director? Are there any film directors in Sri Lankan cinema or World Cinema who you follow?

Film career – Achievements and challenges

How would you describe your experience working as a filmmaker in Sri Lanka?

How have your achievements been supported by your casts and crews, and have you ever faced challenges working with your colleagues?

Do you feel you have been accepted by the film industry in Sri Lanka?

Do you feel you have been accepted by the audiences (national and international)?

The selected film

According to you, what is this film about?

Tell me about the background and the journey of making and releasing the film (how the plot came into your mind, the writing and directing process, up to the release of the film).

What was your personal experience of war? Did you draw on your personal experience in creating this film? If so, how did you do that?

Did you do any research on the people affected by the war before producing this film?

What kind of Approaches did you take as a director to create a discourse about ethnic conflict of Sri Lanka before you make this film?

What is your viewpoint of the war and how it was handled by the governments?

What audiovisual or formal techniques did you use to convey your opinion through the film?

What were the objectives you as a film director wanted to meet by making this film?

Why did you create characters and incidents in the way you have done it in the film? What were you hoping to convey?

Do you think the characters and the incidents in the film are realistic?

Do you think the meanings you wanted to create in the film have ultimately reached the audience?

Anti-war filmmakers of your generation, yourself included, often receive criticism regarding the accuracy of the representations of certain groups, such as Sinhalese culture, Buddhist religion, soldiers and their family members. What is your opinion about that?

Did your experiences on this film influence your career and the films you later made about war?

At present, how do you see the controversy sparked by your film and the reaction you got from different social and cultural groups at that time?

While your film received international acclaim and recognition, it faced restrictions and censorship in Sri Lanka. What are your thoughts on this?

Appendix II

Interview guide – cast

Tell me about your experience in working on this film. Was it the same as other films you have previously worked on, or was it different?

What do you think about the concept, themes and characters of the film?

How do you think the characters and incidents of the film reflect social reality particularly the reality of war?

What is your personal experience of war?

How did your life experiences contribute to or shape this film?

Were you or your career affected directly or indirectly, negatively or positively by this film?

How did you experience the reaction of some social and cultural groups towards this film? Did those reactions make any impact in your life or career?

Did you receive any threats while working on this film during the production or after it was released?

While this film received international recognition and acclaim the same film was rejected or faced restrictions in Sri Lanka. Tell me your thoughts on this.

Appendix III

Interview guide for the representative of National Film Corporation

What is the role of NFC in the film production and distribution process?

What are the main legal documents that guide the NFC's processes and decisions?

What kind of involvement does the NFC have in a film director's creative or thematic decisions? How is such involvement carried out and for which reasons?

Is there any way that stakeholders external to the film industry could become involved with, or even interfere with, the NFC's decisions, or a film director's creative and thematic decisions?

How would you describe the benefits provided by the NFC to both the Public and film industry?

Do you think it is possible that in some circumstances, the NFC could hamper or restrict a filmmaker's freedom of expression?

Several films have been banned and censored in Sri Lanka in recent years (2000–2011). Could you please explain the role played by the NFC played in these incidents, particularly during the war period?

Appendix IV

Interview guide for the academics and film reviewers

How do you read the representations of war and culture in the selected films? (The discussion should cover the concepts of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, nationality and war)

Do you think the characters and incidents depicted in these films are realistic? If yes, what aspects make you think that? If no, what aspects make you think that?

What is your opinion about the government's and some social groups' negative reactions towards these films and filmmakers? Why do you think these films sparked such a reaction?

What is your opinion about the international recognition and acclaim that these films have received? Do you think the acclaim is related to their artistic qualities or anti-war concepts, or did other factors attract international audience and acclaim in your opinion

Focus group discussion guide

Initially, the researcher will give a paper version of the questions listed below to get the original ideas of the participants because later when the discussion continues sometimes some ideas might dominate the ideas of others and original idea of the group members might go hidden. Participants will be given ten to fifteen minutes to answer the questions.

Then, the researcher will introduce herself and the consent information statement and consent form will be read to the participants and the questions of the participants will be answered.

Next, the researcher will ask the general idea of the participants about the selected films, the directors and the controversy they made in society. The researcher will then ask the participants what they think about the representations of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, and war in the selected films, opening up space for casual discussion.

Then, the researcher will move to the discussion of following questions provided on the paper questionnaire given to the focus group members at the beginning of the discussion.

Focus group questions

How did this film make you reflect upon or think about your own identity, gender, religion and ethnicity and that of other identity groups?

Do you feel the characters, themes and incidents that you saw in this film align with reality? If yes, what makes you feel this way? If not, what makes you feel this way?

What do you think about the representation of war and its impact on people in this film?

Did this film encourage you to think differently about war in any way, or to develop any particularly strong feelings about war that you did not harbor previously?

Why do you think this film was censored by the government?

Although these films were censored in Sri Lanka, they won awards in international film festivals. What are your thoughts on this?

Appendix VI

Consent Information Statement, Informed Consent Form and Withdrawal of Consent Form for the film directors of the selected films.

Project Title

Representations of war and culture in Sri Lankan cinema: An analysis of selected anti-war films and their reception by the audiences

Investigators and Other Project Personnel

Chief Investigator: Associate Professor Robert Gill

Non-student Co-investigators: Dr Jessica Balanzategui

                                         Dr Cesar Albarran -Torres

Student Investigator: Pushpika Kumari Ganegoda

Introduction to Project and Invitation to Participate

Dear Participant,

Thank you for expressing an interest in participating in my study. I am in the process of carrying out a research as part of my Doctoral degree at Swinburne University of Technology in Australia to examine how Sri Lankan cultural identities such as gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, nationality and ideologies of war are represented in three selected anti-war films and how different groups of Sri Lankan society read and interpret those films. In order to understand how the directors of the films define the way these films represent Sri Lankan cultural identity and war, their experience in production and distribution of the film and their opinion of different reactions of different groups of the society towards the films, it is necessary to listen to the opinion of the filmmakers. Therefore, I kindly invite you to participate in the interviews.

What this project is about and why it is being undertaken

The project is about the study of representation of Sri Lankan cultural identities such as gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, nationality and ideologies of war in three selected anti-war films released between 2000 and 2006 and their reception by the audiences. The three films are *Me Mage Sandai* (This Is My Moon) directed by Asoka Handagama, *Sudu Kalu Saha Alu* (Shades of Ash) directed by Sudath Mahadivulwewa and *Sulanga Enu Pinisa* (The Forsaken Land) directed by Vimukthi Jayasundara. These films were criticized for misrepresentation of Sri Lankan culture by the military officials and nationalist leaders. However, they participated in highly recognized international film festivals and award ceremonies and won awards. They were also acknowledged by the educated elites and pioneers in Sri Lankan film industry for their artistic quality and conveying an anti-war message. Therefore, it is important to do a systematic study of how these films represent Sri Lankan culture and how different groups of Sri Lankan audiences read and interpret those representations. While providing an opportunity for the audiences to voice their opinion about these films, this study will contribute to add knowledge to the existing literature of banned and censored anti-war films in Sri Lanka and elsewhere.

Project and researcher interests

This research is mainly to satisfy the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree and this research project is not funded by any organization.

What participation will involve – time, effort, resources, costs, compensatory payments, etc

The interviews will take place for about 30 to 60 minutes. You will be asked about your personal, educational and socio-political background that had an impact on your filmmaking practices, your experience in making of the selected film and the reactions of different groups towards it and your reading of the representation of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, nationality, war and political ideologies in the selected film as its director. Please see a copy of interview questions attached. The interview will be audio taped with your consent and will be held at a place and time convenient both to you and the researcher. Since this research project is not funded by any organization, there will be no monetary payments or incentives provided for your participation in the study. The interviews will be conducted in Sinhala language. However, if you speak English and would like to be interviewed in English, they can be conducted in English.

Participant rights and interests – risks & benefits/contingencies/back-up support

Your name and the details given by you about your personal, educational and socio-political background and your experiences as a filmmaker and your opinions and interpretations of your film will appear in the final report and publications that would arise from the project. However, the researcher will only seek your voluntarily expressed opinions, views, interpretations and information. You will be given the choice of not answering any question the interviewer or moderator asks. After the interview, you have the opportunity to review your interview transcripts and highlight quotes that you don't want to include in the final write up if you wish to do so.

Participant rights and interests – free consent/withdrawal from participation

Participation in this research is voluntary. Participating or declining to participate in the research will in no way affect your relationship with the researcher or the Swinburne University of Technology. If you decide not to participate in the study at any time, you may withdraw at any stage by submitting the Withdrawal of Consent Form (Provided along with this document) to any member of the research team, without affecting your existing or future relationships with the researcher or Swinburne University of Technology. Thereafter, your interview data will be removed from the data analysis, if it has not already been analysed. If the data has already been analysed, it may not be possible to remove all your data from the analysis, but any direct quotes from you will not be used in the findings and publications arising from the project. The consent of the participants will be obtained by signed consent form.

Participant rights and interests – privacy & confidentiality

The research data (interview tapes and transcripts) and signed consent forms will be securely stored in either hard copy or electronic format for at least five years as required by Swinburne University of Technology ethics guidelines. Only the research candidate and the supervisor will have access to data.

Research output

The findings of the study will be published as a scholarly thesis, journal articles, book chapters, conference papers and as media reports. If you request for a copy of any publication/s arising from the project, they can be mailed to you.

Further information about the project – who to contact

If you would like further information about the project, please do not hesitate to contact:

Associate Professor Robert Gill
Chief Investigator
School of Arts, Social Sciences & Humanities
Faculty of Health, Arts and Design,
Swinburne University of Technology
218 Hawthorn
Victoria 3122 Australia
Email: rgill@swin.edu.au
Phone: +61392145425

Dr Jessica Balanzategui
Non-student co-investigator
School of Arts, Social Sciences & Humanities
Faculty of Health, Arts and Design,
Swinburne University of Technology PO Box
PO Box 218 Hawthorn
Victoria 3122 Australia
Email: jbalanzategui@swin.edu.au
Phone: +61392144561

Dr Cesar Albarran-Torres
Non-student co-investigator
School of Arts, Social Sciences & Humanities
Faculty of Health, Arts and Design
Swinburne University of Technology
PO Box 218 Hawthorn, Victoria 3122 Australia
Email: caalbarrantorres@swin.edu.au
Phone: +61392148241

Pushpika Ganegoda
PhD Candidate
School of Arts, Social Sciences & Humanities
Faculty of Health, Arts and Design
Swinburne University of Technology
PO Box 218 Hawthorn, Victoria 3122 Australia
Email: pganegoda@swin.edu.au
Mobile: +94713034002 (Sri Lanka)
        +61490855548

Concerns/complaints about the project – who to contact:

This project has been approved by or on behalf of Swinburne's Human Research Ethics Committee (SUHREC) in line with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*. If you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of this project, you can contact:

Research Ethics Officer, Swinburne Research (H68),

Swinburne University of Technology,

PO Box 218, HAWTHORN VIC 3122 Australia.

Tel: (03) 9214 3845

             +61 3 9214 3845

Email: resethics@swin.edu.au

Informed Consent From an individual adult having full capacity to give voluntary consent in his/her own right on the basis of sufficient information provided.

Swinburne University of Technology Project Title: Representations of war and culture in Sri Lankan cinema: An analysis of selected anti-war films and their reception by the audiences

Principal Investigator(s):

Chief Investigator: Associate Professor Robert Gill

Non-student Co-investigator: Dr Jessica Balanzategui

                                                             Dr Cesar Albarran-Torres

Student Investigator: Pushpika Kumari Ganegoda

1. I consent to participate in the project named above. I have been provided a copy of the project consent information statement to which this consent form relates and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.
2. In relation to this project, please circle your response to the following:

I agree to be interviewed by the researcher	Yes	No
I agree to allow the interview to be recorded by electronic device	Yes	No
I agree to make myself available for further information if required	Yes	No

3. I acknowledge that:

(a)   my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without explanation;

(b)   the Swinburne project is for the purpose of research and not for profit;

(c)   any identifiable information about me which is gathered in the course of and as the result of my participating in this project will be

   (i) collected and retained for the purpose of this project and
   (ii) accessed and analyzed by the researcher(s) for the purpose of conducting this project;

(j)   I understand the length of time researcher/s will have access to this information;

(k)   My name and the name of my film, my educational and socio-political background, my opinions and views will appear in publications.

(l)   I have been given the choice of not answering any question the interviewer or moderator asks;

(m) even after the interview I have the chance to withdraw any information I have given.

(n)   the transcripts will be sent back to me for approval before the data analysis.

By signing this document I agree to participate in this project.

Name of Participant: ……………………………………………………

Signature & Date: ………………………………………………

Withdrawal of Consent Form

(To be used for participants who wish to withdraw from the project)

Full Project Title: Representations of war and culture in Sri Lankan cinema: An analysis of selected anti-war films and their reception by the audiences

I hereby wish to WITHDRAW my consent to participate in the above research project and understand that such withdrawal WILL NOT jeopardize my relationship with the researcher or Swinburne University of Technology.

Participant's Name (printed) ……………………………………………………….

Signature ……………………………………………………………….

Date ……………………

Please mail this form to:

Pushpika Ganegoda (Ms)

School of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities Faculty of Health, Arts and Design

Swinburne University of Technology PO Box 218 Hawthorn

Victoria 3122 Australia

Email: pganegoda@swin.edu.au

Consent Information Statement, Informed Consent Form and Withdrawal of Consent Form for cast members of the selected films, academics and film reviewers.

Project Title

Representations of war and culture in Sri Lankan cinema: An analysis of selected anti-war films and their reception by the audiences

Investigators and Other Project Personnel

Chief Investigator: Associate Professor Robert Gill
Non-student Co-investigators: Dr Jessica Balanzategui
Dr Cesar Albarran-Torres
Student Investigator: Pushpika Kumari Ganegoda

Introduction to Project and Invitation to Participate

Dear Participant,

Thank you for expressing an interest in participating in my study. I am in the process of carrying out a research as part of my Doctoral degree at Swinburne University of Technology in Australia to examine how Sri Lankan cultural identities such as gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, nationality and ideologies of war are represented in three selected anti-war films and how different groups of Sri Lankan society read and interpret those films. In order to get the information of production and distribution of films in Sri Lankan cinema industry; and to understand how the different groups of people interpret the way these films represent Sri Lankan cultural identity and war, their opinions of the reactions of different groups of the society to these films and the international recognition these films won, it is necessary to listen to the opinions of the stakeholders of Sri Lankan cinema industry and audiences. Therefore, I kindly invite you to participate in the interviews.

What this project is about and why it is being undertaken

The project is about the study of representations of Sri Lankan cultural identities such as gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, nationality and ideologies of war in three selected anti-war films released between 2000 and 2006 and their reception by the audiences. The three films are *Me Mage Sandai*(This Is My Moon) directed by Asoka Handagama, *Sudu Kalu Saha Alu*(Shades of Ash) directed by Sudath Mahadivulwewa and *Sulanga Enu Pinisa*(The Forsaken Land)directed by Vimukthi Jayasundara. These films were criticized for misrepresentation of Sri Lankan culture by the military officials and nationalist leaders. However, they participated in highly recognized international film festivals and award ceremonies and won awards. They were also acknowledged by the educated elites and pioneers in Sri Lankan film industry for their artistic quality and conveying an anti-war message. Therefore, it is important to do a systematic study of how these films represent Sri Lankan culture and how different groups of Sri Lankan audiences read and interpret those representations.

While providing an opportunity for the audience to voice their opinion about these films, this study will contribute to add knowledge to the existing literature of banned and censored anti-war films in Sri Lanka and elsewhere.

Project and researcher interests

This research is mainly to satisfy the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree and this research project is not funded by any organization.

What participation will involve – time, effort, resources, costs, compensatory payments, etc The interviews will take place for about 30 to 60 minutes. You will be asked about your readings of the representations of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, nationality, war and political ideologies in three selected films and your opinions of the reactions of different groups in the society to these films and the films winning international recognition. Please see a copy of interview questions attached. The interviews will be audio taped with your consent and will be held at a place and time convenient both to you and the researcher. Since this research project is not funded by any organization, there will be no monetary payments or incentives provided for your participation in the study. The interviews will be conducted in Sinhala language. However, if you speak English and would like to be interviewed in English, they can be conducted in English.

Participant rights and interests – risks & benefits/contingencies/back-up support

There are no anticipated risks or adverse effects to any participant taking part in the interviews as the researcher will only seek your voluntarily expressed opinions, views and interpretations of representation of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, nationality, war and political ideologies in three selected films; the reactions of different groups in the society to these films and the films winning international recognition. All the participants are given the choice of not answering any question the interviewer or moderator asks. After the interview, you have the opportunity to review your interview transcripts and highlight quotes that you don't want to include in the final write up if you wish to do so.

Participant rights and interests – free consent/withdrawal from participation

Participation in this research is voluntary. Participating or declining to participate in the research will in no way affect your relationship with the researcher or the Swinburne University of Technology. If you decide not to participate in the study at any time, you may withdraw at any stage by submitting the Withdrawal of Consent Form (Provided along with this document) to any member of the research team, without affecting your existing or future relationships with the researcher or Swinburne University of Technology. Thereafter, your interview data will be removed from the data analysis, if it has not already been analysed. If the data has already been analysed, it may not be possible to remove all your data from the analysis, but any direct quotes from you (even though attributed under a pseudonym), will not be used in the findings and publications arising from the project. The consent of the participants will be obtained by signed consent form.

Participant rights and interests – privacy & confidentiality

Your interview tapes and transcripts will only carry an identifying number (code), and your name, demographic details such as name, occupation and contact details will be kept separate from your interview tapes and transcripts. The research data (interview tapes and transcripts) and signed consent forms will be securely stored in either hard copy or electronic format for at least five years as required by Swinburne University of Technology ethics guidelines. Only the research candidate and the supervisor will have access to data.

Research output

The findings of the study will be published as a scholarly thesis, journal articles, a book, book chapters, conference papers and as media reports. We will ensure that your privacy is protected and will only

identify your contribution if you clearly grant us permission to do so, in the final report and publications that would arise from the project. If you request for a copy of any publication/s arising from the project, they can be mailed to you.

Further information about the project – who to contact

If you would like further information about the project, please do not hesitate to contact:

Associate Professor Robert Gill
Chief Investigator
School of Arts, Social Sciences & Humanities
Faculty of Health, Arts and Design,
Swinburne University of Technology
218 Hawthorn
Victoria 3122 Australia
Email: rgill@swin.edu.au
Phone: +61392145425

Dr Jessica Balanzategui
Non-student co-investigator
School of Arts, Social Sciences & Humanities
Faculty of Health, Arts and Design,
Swinburne University of Technology PO Box
PO Box 218 Hawthorn
Victoria 3122 Australia
Email: jbalanzategui@swin.edu.au
Phone: +61392144561

Dr Cesar Albarran-Torres
Non-student co-investigator
School of Arts, Social Sciences & Humanities
Faculty of Health, Arts and Design
Swinburne University of Technology
PO Box 218 Hawthorn, Victoria 3122 Australia
Email: caalbarrantorres@swin.edu.au
Phone: +61392148241

Pushpika Ganegoda
PhD Candidate
School of Arts, Social Sciences & Humanities
Faculty of Health, Arts and Design
Swinburne University of Technology
PO Box 218 Hawthorn, Victoria 3122 Australia
Email: pganegoda@swin.edu.au
Mobile: +94713034002 (Sri Lanka)
          +61490855548

Concerns/complaints about the project – who to contact:

This project has been approved by or on behalf of Swinburne's Human Research Ethics Committee (SUHREC) in line with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*. If you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of this project, you can contact:

Research Ethics Officer, Swinburne Research (H68),

Swinburne University of Technology,

PO Box 218, HAWTHORN VIC 3122 Australia.

Tel: (03) 9214 3845, +61 3 9214 3845

Email: resethics@swin.edu.au

Informed Consent From an individual adult having full capacity to give voluntary consent in his/her own right on the basis of sufficient information provided.

Swinburne University of Technology

Project Title: Representations of war and culture in Sri Lankan cinema: An analysis of selected anti-war films and their reception by the audiences

Principal Investigator(s):
Chief Investigator: Associate Professor Robert Gill
Non-student Co-investigators: Dr Jessica Balanzategui
                                               Dr Cesar Albarran Torres
Student Investigator: Pushpika Kumari Ganegoda

  1.   I consent to participate in the project named above. I have been provided a copy of the project consent information statement to which this consent form relates and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.
  2.   In relation to this project, please circle your response to the following:

I agree to be interviewed by the researcher	Yes	No
I agree to allow the interview to be recorded by electronic device	Yes	No
I agree to make myself available for further information if required	Yes	No
I agree to complete questionnaires asking me about	Yes	No

5. I acknowledge that:

(a)   my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without explanation;

(b)   the Swinburne project is for the purpose of research and not for profit;

(c)   any identifiable information about me which is gathered in the course of and as the result of my participating in this project will be
  (i) collected and retained for the purpose of this project and
  (ii) accessed and analysed by the researcher(s) for the purpose of conducting this project;

(d)   I understand the length of time researcher/s will have access to this information;

(e)   My anonymity is preserved and I will not be identified in publications or otherwise without my express written consent.

(f)   I have been given the choice of not answering any question the interviewer or moderator asks;

(g)   even after the interview I have the chance to withdraw any information I have given.

(h)   the transcripts will be sent back to me for approval before the data analysis.

By signing this document I agree to participate in this project.

Name of Participant: ………………………………………………………………………

Signature & Date: ……………………………………………………………

Withdrawal of Consent Form

(To be used for participants who wish to withdraw from the project)

Date

Full Project Title: Representations of war and culture in Sri Lankan cinema: An analysis of selected anti-war films and their reception by the audiences

I hereby wish to WITHDRAW my consent to participate in the above research project and understand that such withdrawal WILL NOT jeopardize my relationship with the researcher or Swinburne University of Technology.

Participant's Name (printed) …………………………………………………….

Signature …………………………………………………………….

Date ……………………

Please mail this form to:

Pushpika Ganegoda (Ms)

School of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities Faculty of Health, Arts and Design

Swinburne University of Technology PO Box 218 Hawthorn

Victoria 3122 Australia

Email: pganegoda@swin.edu.au

Consent Information Statement, Informed Consent Form and Withdrawal of Consent Form for focus group members.

Project Title

Representations of war and culture in Sri Lankan cinema: An analysis of selected anti-war films and their reception by the audiences

Investigators and Other Project Personnel

Chief Investigator: Associate Professor Robert Gill

Non-student Co-investigators: Dr Jessica Balanzategui

                                               Dr Cesar Albarran-Torres

Student Investigator: Pushpika Kumari Ganegoda

Introduction to Project and Invitation to Participate

Dear Participant,

Thank you for expressing an interest in participating in my study. I am in the process of carrying out a research as part of my Doctoral degree at Swinburne University of Technology in Australia to examine how Sri Lankan cultural identities such as gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, nationality and ideologies of war are represented in three selected anti-war films and how different groups of Sri Lankan society read and interpret those films. In order to understand how the different groups of people interpret the way these films represent Sri Lankan cultural identity and war, it is necessary to listen to the opinion of the audience. Therefore, I kindly invite you to watch the three films and participate in the discussion afterwards.

What this project is about and why it is being undertaken

The project is about the study of representations of Sri Lankan cultural identities such as gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, nationality and ideologies of war in three selected anti-war films released between 2000 and 2006 and their reception by the audiences. The three films are *Me Mage Sandai* (This Is My Moon) directed by Asoka Handagama, *Sudu Kalu Saha Alu* (Shades of Ash) directed by Sudath Mahadivulwewa and *Sulanga Enu Pinisa* (The Forsaken Land) directed by Vimukthi Jayasundara. These films were criticized for misrepresentation of Sri Lankan culture by the military officials and nationalist leaders. However, they participated in highly recognized international film festivals and award ceremonies and won awards. They were also acknowledged by the educated elites and pioneers in Sri Lankan film industry for their artistic quality and conveying an anti-war message. Therefore, it is important to do a systematic study of how these films represent Sri Lankan culture and how different groups of Sri Lankan audiences read and interpret those representations. While providing an opportunity for the audiences to voice their opinion about these films, this study will contribute to add knowledge to the existing literature of banned and censored anti-war films in Sri Lanka and elsewhere.

Project and researcher interests

This research is mainly to satisfy the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree and this research project is not funded by any organization.

What participation will involve – time, effort, resources, costs, compensatory payments, etc One of the three films (approximate running time of a film will be two hours) will be screened for you in a day convenient to you and the discussion will take place for about 60 minutes after the screening. You will be asked about your reading of the representation of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, nationality, war and political ideologies in three selected films and your opinion of the reactions of different groups of the society to these films and the films winning international recognition. Please see a copy of interview questions attached. The discussion will be audio taped with your consent and will be held at a place and time convenient both to you and the researcher. Since this research project is not funded by any organization, there will be no monetary payments or incentives provided for your participation in the study. The discussions will be conducted in Sinhala language.

Participant rights and interests – risks & benefits/contingencies/back-up support

There are no anticipated risks or adverse effects to any participant taking part in the interviews as the researcher will only seek your voluntarily expressed opinions. All the participants are given the choice of not answering any question the interviewer or moderator asks.

Please note that every participant should value and respect each others' opinions, views and interpretations, even if there are disagreements. Focus Group Members are not allowed to reveal or discuss with anyone the views and interpretations of fellow members beyond the group sessions. If the diverse opinions bring out any disagreement between focus group members and certain kind of aggression occur between members, the session will be halted and the member will be removed. If any of the participants is being psychologically disturbed by the violent scenes in the film, he/she will be provided with counseling.

Participant rights and interests – free consent/withdrawal from participation

Participation in this research is voluntary. Participating or declining to participate in the research will in no way affect your relationship with the researcher or the Swinburne University of Technology. If you decide not to participate in the study at any time, you may withdraw at any stage by submitting the Withdrawal of Consent Form (Provided along with this document) to any member of the research team, without affecting your existing or future relationships with the researcher or Swinburne University of Technology. Thereafter, your interview data will be removed from the data analysis, if it has not already been analysed. If the data has already been analysed, it may not be possible to remove all your data from the analysis, but any direct quotes from you (even though attributed under a pseudonym), will not be used in the findings and publications arising from the project. The consent of the participants will be obtained by signed consent form.

Participant rights and interests – privacy & confidentiality

Your interview tapes and transcripts will only carry an identifying number (code), and your name, demographic details such as age, occupation and contact details will be kept separate from your interview tapes and transcripts. The research data (interview tapes and transcripts) and signed consent forms will be securely stored in either hard copy or electronic format for at least five years as required by Swinburne University of Technology ethics guidelines. Only the research candidate and the supervisor will have access to data.

Research output

The findings of the study will be published as a scholarly thesis, journal articles, a book, book chapters, conference papers and as media reports. We will ensure that your privacy is protected and will only identify your contribution if you clearly grant us permission to do so, in the final report and publications that would arise from the project. If you request for a copy of any publication/s arising from the project, they can be mailed to you.

Further information about the project – who to contact

If you would like further information about the project, please do not hesitate to contact:

Associate Professor Robert Gill
Chief Investigator
School of Arts, Social Sciences & Humanities
Faculty of Health, Arts and Design,
Swinburne University of Technology
218 Hawthorn
Victoria 3122 Australia
Email: rgill@swin.edu.au
Phone: +61392145425

Dr Jessica Balanzategui
Non-student co-investigator
School of Arts, Social Sciences & Humanities
Faculty of Health, Arts and Design,
Swinburne University of Technology PO Box
PO Box 218 Hawthorn
Victoria 3122 Australia
Email: jbalanzategui@swin.edu.au
Phone: +61392144561

Dr Cesar Albarran-Torres
Non-student co-investigator
School of Arts, Social Sciences & Humanities
Faculty of Health, Arts and Design
Swinburne University of Technology
PO Box 218 Hawthorn, Victoria 3122 Australia
Email: caalbarrantorres@swin.edu.au
Phone: +61392148241

Pushpika Ganegoda
PhD Candidate
School of Arts, Social Sciences & Humanities
Faculty of Health, Arts and Design
Swinburne University of Technology
PO Box 218 Hawthorn, Victoria 3122 Australia
Email: pganegoda@swin.edu.au
Mobile: +94713034002 (Sri Lanka)
    +61490855548

Concerns/complaints about the project – who to contact:

This project has been approved by or on behalf of Swinburne's Human Research Ethics Committee (SUHREC) in line with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*. If you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of this project, you can contact:

Research Ethics Officer, Swinburne Research (H68),

Swinburne University of Technology,

PO Box 218, HAWTHORN VIC 3122 Australia

Tel: (03) 9214 3845,

        +61 3 9214 3845

Email: resethics@swin.edu.au

Informed Consent From an individual adult having full capacity to give voluntary consent in his/her own right on the basis of sufficient information provided.

Swinburne University of Technology

Project Title: Representations of war and culture in Sri Lankan cinema: An analysis of selected anti-war films and their reception by the audiences

Principal Investigator(s):

Chief Investigator: Associate Professor Robert Gill

Non-student Co-investigators: Dr Jessica Balanzategui
                                       Dr Cesar Albarran-Torres
Student Investigator: Pushpika Kumari Ganegoda

1.   I consent to participate in the project named above. I have been provided a copy of the project consent information statement to which this consent form relates and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

2.   In relation to this project, please circle your response to the following:

I agree to be interviewed by the researcher	Yes	No
I agree to allow the interview to be recorded by electronic device	Yes	No
I agree to make myself available for further information if required	Yes	No
I agree to complete questionnaires asking me about	Yes	No

I acknowledge that:

(a)   my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without explanation;

(b)   the Swinburne project is for the purpose of research and not for profit;

(c)   any identifiable information about me which is gathered in the course of and as the result of my participating in this project will be

      (i)   collected and retained for the purpose of this project and

      (ii)   accessed and analysed by the researcher(s) for the purpose of conducting this project;

(d)   If I'd be disturbed by the violent scenes in the film, I'll be given the assistance of a professional counsellor;

(e)   I understand the length of time researcher/s will have access to this information;

(f)   My anonymity is preserved and I will not be identified in publications or otherwise without my express written consent.

(g)   I have been given the choice of not answering any question the interviewer or moderator asks;

(h)   even after the interview I have the chance to withdraw any information I have given;

(i)   every participant should value and respect each others' opinion, views and interpretations, even if there are disagreements;

(j)   focus group Members are not allowed to reveal or discuss with anyone the views and interpretations of fellow members beyond the group sessions;

(k)   if the diverse opinions bring out any disagreements between focus group members and certain kinds of aggression occur between members, the session will be halted and the member will be removed.

By signing this document I agree to participate in this project.

Name of Participant: ………………………………………………………

Signature & Date: …………………………………………………………

(Advertisement – to be posted on the notice boards of selected community organizations, educational institutes and social media networks)

NOTICE

Call for Volunteers for a Research Project on the representations of Sri Lankan culture and war in selected anti-war films and their reception by the audiences.

A student researcher from the Faculty of Health, Arts and Design at Swinburne University of Technology, Australia, is researching about the opinion of Sri Lankan cinema audiences about the way Sri Lankan cultural identity (gender, sex, ethnicity, religion, nationality) and war are shown in three award winning anti-war films – *Me Mage Sandai* (This Is My Moon*), Kalu Sudu Saha Alu* (Shades of Ash)*, Sulanga Enu Pinisa* (The Forsaken Land) – as part of her Doctoral (PhD) Research project.

She is seeking focus group participants (both men and women) who are enthusiastic film viewers, over 18 years of age from all socio-economic backgrounds and who do not have direct war experiences.

One of the selected films will be screened to the participants and later a discussion will take place where the participants can share their opinions about the film. Film screening followed by the discussion will take about three hours and will be conducted in a language convenient to you (Sinhala or English).

The project has been approved by the University's Ethics Committee (Ref: SHR 218/357).

The data collected for the project will be kept confidential and will only be used for academic purposes.

If you are interested in taking part in this research please SMS your email address or postal address to +94713034002 or send an email to gpushpi@yahoo.com or pganegoda@swin.edu.au for further information.

Thank you

The researcher: Miss Pushpika Ganegoda

Appendix X

Email invitation to film directors

Invitation to participate in the research project titled: "Representations of war and culture in Sri Lankan cinema: An analysis of selected anti-war films and their reception by the audiences"

Dear Sir,

I am conducting interviews as part of my PhD research study. This research intends to seek how Sri Lankan cultural identities such as gender, ethnicity, religion, nationality and the ideologies of war are represented in three selected Sinhala anti-war films: *Me Mage Sandai* (This Is My Moon), *Sudu Kalu Saha Alu* (Shades of Ash) and *Sulanga Enu Pinisa* (The Forsaken Land) and how these films are read and interpreted by different groups of the society. As the director of one of the selected films you are in an ideal position to give valuable first hand information to this study from your own perspective. The interviews will be conducted in Sinhala language. However, if you speak English and would like to be interviewed in English, they can be conducted in English.

The interview takes around 30 to 60 minutes and is very informal. I am simply trying to capture your thoughts and perspectives on the representations of Sri Lankan culture and civil war in your film and your experiences and opinions of censorship over cinema. I only seek your voluntarily expressed opinions, views, interpretations and information. You will be given the choice of not answering any question the interviewer asks. All the relevant documents such as the interview questions and consent information statement are attached herewith for your information and perusal.

Since this research project is not funded by any organization, there will be no monetary payments or incentives provided. However, your participation will be a valuable addition to my research and findings could lead to bridge the knowledge gap on censored/banned anti- war films in Sri Lanka and elsewhere.

If you are willing to participate please suggest a place, day and time that suits you and I'll do my best to be available. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask.

My contact details:

email – gpushpi@yahoo.com, pganegoda@swin.edu.au

T.P – +94713034002

Thank you

With kind regards Pushpika Ganegoda

Email invitation to cast members

Invitation to participate in the research project titled: "Representations of war and culture in Sri Lankan cinema: An analysis of selected anti-war films and their reception by the audiences"

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am conducting interviews as part of my PhD research study. This research intends to seek how Sri Lankan cultural identities such as gender, ethnicity, religion, nationality and the ideologies of war are represented in three selected Sinhala anti-war films: *Me Mage Sandai* (This Is My Moon), *Sudu Kalu Saha Alu* (Shades of Ash) and *Sulanga Enu Pinisa* (The Forsaken Land) and how these films are read and interpreted by different groups of the society. As a cast and crew member of one of the selected films you are in an ideal position to give valuable first hand information to this study from your own perspective.

The interview takes around 30 to 60 minutes and is very informal. I am simply trying to capture your thoughts and perspectives on the representations of Sri Lankan culture and civil war in the film you contributed and your experiences and opinions of censorship over cinema. I only seek your voluntarily expressed opinions, views, interpretations and information. You will be given the choice of not answering any question the interviewer asks. Your identities will be kept confidential. Each interview will be assigned a number code to help ensure that personal identifiers are not revealed during the analysis and write up of findings. All the relevant documents such as the interview questions and consent information statement are attached herewith for your information and perusal. The interviews will be conducted in Sinhala language. However, if you speak English and would like to be interviewed in English, they can be conducted in English.

Since this research project is not funded by any organization, there will be no monetary payments or incentives provided. However, your participation will be a valuable addition to my research, and the findings could lead to bridge the knowledge gap on censored/banned anti-war films in Sri Lanka and elsewhere.

If you are willing to participate please suggest a place, day and time that suits you and I'll do my best to be available. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask.

My contact details:

email – gpushpi@yahoo.com, pganegoda@swin.edu.au

T.P – +94713034002

Thank you

With kind regards Pushpika Ganegoda

Appendix XII

Email invitation to the Chairman of National Film Corporation

Invitation to participate in the research project titled: "Representations of war and culture in Sri Lankan cinema: An analysis of selected anti-war films and their reception by the audiences"

Dear Sir,

I am conducting interviews as part of my PhD research study. This research intends to seek how Sri Lankan cultural identities such as gender, ethnicity, religion, nationality and the ideologies of war are represented in three selected Sinhala anti-war films: *Me Mage Sandai* (This Is My Moon), *Sudu Kalu Saha Alu* (Shades of Ash) and *Sulanga Enu Pinisa* (The Forsaken Land) and how these films are read and interpreted by different groups of the society. As the Chairman of National Film Corporation you are in an ideal position to give valuable first hand information to this study from the perspective of the chairman of a government institution that plays a majour role in film production and distribution.

The interview takes around 30 to 60 minutes and is very informal. I am simply trying to capture the role of National Film Corporation in the process of production and distribution of films and applying censorship on films. I only seek your voluntarily expressed information. You will be given the choice of not answering any question the interviewer asks. Your identities will be kept confidential. Each interview will be assigned a number code to help ensure that personal identifiers are not revealed during the analysis and write up of findings. All the relevant documents such as the interview questions and consent information statement are attached herewith for your information and perusal. The interviews will be conducted in Sinhala language. However, if you speak English and would like to be interviewed in English, they can be conducted in English.

Since this research project is not funded by any organization, there will be no monetary payments or incentives provided. However, your participation will be a valuable addition to my research, and the findings could lead to bridge the knowledge gap on censored/banned anti-war films in Sri Lanka and elsewhere.

If you are willing to participate please suggest a place, day and time that suits you and I'll do my best to be available. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask.

My contact details:

email – gpushpi@yahoo.com, pganegoda@swin.edu.au

T.P – +94713034002

Thank you

With kind regards Pushpika Ganegoda

Appendix XIII

Email invitation to academics

Invitation to participate in the research project titled: "Representations of war and culture in Sri Lankan cinema: An analysis of selected anti-war films and their reception by the audiences"

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am conducting interviews as part of my PhD research study. This research intends to seek how Sri Lankan cultural identities such as gender, ethnicity, religion, nationality and the ideologies of war are represented in three selected Sinhala anti-war films: *Me Mage Sandai* (This Is My Moon), *Sudu Kalu Saha Alu* (Shades of Ash) and *Sulanga Enu Pinisa* (The Forsaken Land) and how these films are read and interpreted by different groups of the society. As an academic who teach and conduct research on film studies you are in an ideal position to give valuable first hand information to this study from your own perspective.

The interview takes around 30 to 60 minutes and is very informal. I am simply trying to capture your thoughts and perspectives on the representations of Sri Lankan culture and civil war in the selected films and your opinions of censorship and state suppression over cinema. I only seek your voluntarily expressed opinions, views, interpretations and information. You will be given the choice of not answering any question the interviewer asks. Your identities will be kept confidential. Each interview will be assigned a number code to help ensure that personal identifiers are not revealed during the analysis and write up of findings. All the relevant documents such as the interview questions and consent information statement are attached herewith for your information and perusal.

Since this research project is not funded by any organization, there will be no monetary payments or incentives provided. However, your participation will be a valuable addition to my research, and the findings could lead to bridge the knowledge gap on censored/banned anti-war films in Sri Lanka and elsewhere.

If you are willing to participate please suggest a place, day and time that suits you and I'll do my best to be available. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask.

My contact details:

email – gpushpi@yahoo.com, pganegoda@swin.edu.au

T.P – +94713034002

Thank you

With kind regards Pushpika Ganegoda

Email invitation to film reviewers

Invitation to participate in the research project titled: "Representations of war and culture in Sri Lankan cinema: An analysis of selected anti-war films and their reception by the audiences"

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am conducting interviews as part of my PhD research study. This research intends to seek how Sri Lankan cultural identities such as gender, ethnicity, religion, nationality and the ideologies of war are represented in three selected Sinhala anti-war films: *Me Mage Sandai* (This Is My Moon), *Sudu Kalu Saha Alu* (Shades of Ash) and *Sulanga Enu Pinisa* (The Forsaken Land) and how these films are read and interpreted by different groups of the society. As a film reviewer you are in an ideal position to give valuable first hand information to this study from your own perspective.

The interview takes around 30 to 60 minutes and is very informal. I am simply trying to capture your thoughts and perspectives on the representations of Sri Lankan culture and civil war in the selected films and your opinions of censorship and state suppression over cinema. I only seek your voluntarily expressed opinions, views, interpretations and information. You will be given the choice of not answering any question the interviewer asks. Your identities will be kept confidential. Each interview will be assigned a number code to help ensure that personal identifiers are not revealed during the analysis and write up of findings. All the relevant documents such as the interview questions and consent information statement are attached herewith for your information and perusal. The interviews will be conducted in Sinhala language. However, if you speak English and would like to be interviewed in English, they can be conducted in English.

Since this research project is not funded by any organization, there will be no monetary payments or incentives provided. However, your participation will be a valuable addition to my research, and the findings could lead to bridge the knowledge gap on censored/banned anti-war films in Sri Lanka and elsewhere.

If you are willing to participate please suggest a place, day and time that suits you and I'll do my best to be available. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask.

My contact details:

email – gpushpi@yahoo.com, pganegoda@swin.edu.au

T.P – +94713034002

Thank you

With kind regards

Pushpika Ganegoda

The details of the newspaper articles analysed

Film	newspaper	newspaper type	type of the article	date	page
Shades of Ash	Daily Mirror	English Private Newspaper	News	2005/December/05	1,2
	Dinamina	Sinhala State Newspaper	Interview	2005/September/16	32
	Sarasaviya	Sinhala State Tabloid Newspaper	Interview	2005/October/27	39
	Sarasaviya	Sinhala State Tabloid Newspaper	Interview	2005/August/18	7
	Ravaya	Sinhala Private Newspaper	Interview	2005/September/11	17
	Lakbima	Sinhala Private Newspaper	Interview	2005/August/18	30
	Irudina	Sinhala Private Newspaper	Interview	2005/August/14	14
	Lankadeepa	Sinhala Private Newspaper	Interview	2005/ August/ 26	23
	Lankadeepa	Sinhala Private Newspaper	Review	2005/August/12	26
This is My Moon	Divaina	Sinhala private newspaper	interview	2001/August/03	12
	Dinamina	Sinhala state newspaper	interview	2001/September/7	11
	Dinamina	Sinhala state newspaper	feature	2001/August/17	12
	Dinamina	Sinhala state newspaper	News	2001/May/04	1
	Daily News	English state newspaper	interview	2001/July/28	16
	Daily News	English state newspaper	News	2001/September/4	1
	Dinamina	Sinhala state newspaper	Film review/feature	2001/August/3	12
	Lankadeepa	Sinhala private newspaper	interview	2001/August/10	12
	Daily Mirror	English private newspaper	Film review/feature	2001/October/13	10
	Dinamina	Sinhala state newspaper	News	2001/September/4	1
	Dinamina	Sinhala state newspaper	feature	2001/September/7	11
	Silumina	Sinhala state newspaper	feature	2002/February/17	18
	Island	English private newspaper	feature	2001/September/19	11
	Divaina	Sinhala private newspaper	feature	2001/August/17	12
	The Sunday Island	English private newspaper	feature	2001/June/17	7,13
	Dinamina	Sinhala state newspaper	Film review/feature	2001/August/16	11
	Ravaya	Sinhala private newspaper	Film review/feature	2001/August/19	15
The Forsaken La	Ravaya	Sinhala Private Newspaper	Review	2005/October/16	17
	Dinakara	Sinhala Private Newspaper	Review	2005/October/9	7
	Divaina (Sunday)	Sinhala Private Newspaper	Review	2005/September/25	23
	Irudina	Sinhala Private Newspaper	Interview	2005/May/8	20
	Tharunee	Sinhala State Tabloid paper	Interview	2005/September/07	32
	Island	English Private newspaper	Feature	2005/June/9	7
	Daily Mirror (life)	English Private newspaper	Interview	2005/May/9	4
	The Sunday Times (Plu	English Private newspaper	Review	2005/September/25	
	The Sunday Times, Mirror Magazine	English Private newspaper	Interview	2005/July/3	10,11
	The Sunday Times, Mirror Magazine	English Private newspaper	Newa	2005/June/6	1
	Daily Mirror, Life	English Private newspaper	Interview	2005/June/6	1
	Sunday Observer	English State newspaper	Feature	2005/August/7	21
	Irudina	Sinhala Private Newspaper	Interview	2005/August/28	8,9
	Daily News	English State newspaper	Feature	2005/May/28	21
	Sarasaviya	Sinhala State Tabloid paper	Feature	2005/June/02	9
	Lankadeepa	Sinhala Private Newspaper	News	2005/June/04	17
	Lankadeepa	Sinhala Private Newspaper	News	2005/November/04	23
	Island	English Private newspaper	News	2005/September/06	7
	Sunday Observer	English State newspaper	Interview	2005/May/29	31
	Lakbima	Sinhala Private Newspaper	News	2005/May/23	4
	Lankadeepa	Sinhala Private Newspaper	News	2005/November/04	23
	Daily News	English State newspaper	News	2005/March/05	
	Lakbima	Sinhala Private Newspaper	News	2005/July/28	1
	Lankadeepa	Sinhala Private Newspaper	News	2005/July/28	16
	Divaina	Sinhala Private newspaper	News	2005/May/23	1
	Lakbima	Sinhala Private Newspaper	News	2005/June/09	19
	Sunday Lankadeepa (Sandella)	Sinhala Private Newspaper	Review	2005/September/25	13
	Divaina	Sinhala Private Newspaper	News	2005/June/12	8
	Sarasaviya	Sinhala State Tabloid paper	Feature	2005/November/10	9
	Dinamina	Sinhala State newspaper	News	2005/June/3	5
	Daily Mirror	English Private newspaper	Feature	2005/June/08	4
	The Sunday Leader	English Private newspaper	Interview	2005/June/26	30

	Daily News	Sinhala State newspaper	News	2005/October/25	
	The Sunday Times	English Private newspaper	Feature	2005/October/09	2
	Daily News	English State newspaper	News	2005/June/02	1
	Daily News	English State newspaper	News	2005/June/03	4
	Irudina	Sinhala Private Newspaper	News	2005/May/08	20
	Lankadeepa	Sinhala Private Newspaper	Review	2005/September/25	13
	Lakbima	Sinhala Private Newspaper	Interview	2005/September/02	24
	Ravaya	Sinhala Private Newspaper	Review	2005/September/25	17
	Lankadeepa	Sinhala Private Newspaper	Interview	2005/August/12	24
	Lakbima	Sinhala Private Newspaper	Interview	2005/May/05	23
	Sarasaviya	Sinhala State Tabloid paper	Interview	2005/June/09	15
	Sarasaviya	Sinhala State Tabloid paper	Interview	2005/September/29	9
	Sarasaviya	Sinhala State Tabloid paper	Interview	2005/October/27	40
	Ravaya	Sinhala Private Newspaper	Review	2005/October/02	17

SHR Project 2018/357 – Ethics clearance

Astrid Nordmann <anordmann@swin.edu.au>

Tue 23/10/2018 8:51 AM

To:

- Robert Gill <rgill@swin.edu.au>

Cc:

- RES Ethics <resethics@swin.edu.au>;
- Jessica Balanzategui <jbalanzategui@swin.edu.au>;
- Cesar Albarran-Torres <caalbarrantorres@swin.edu.au>;
- GANEGODA ARACHCHILAGE PUSHPIKA KUMARI GANEGODA <101421327@student.swin.edu.au>

To: A/Prof. Rob Gill, FHAD

Dear Rob,

SHR Project 2018/357 – Representations of war and culture in Sri Lankan cinema: An analysis of selected anti-war films and their reception by the audience

A/Prof. Rob Gill, Ganegoda Arachilage (Student), Dr Jessica Balanzategui, Dr Cesar Albarran-Torres – FHAD

Approved duration: 24-10-2018 to 31-05-2020

I refer to the ethical review of the above project protocol by Swinburne's Human Research Ethics Committee (SUHREC). Your response to the review, as emailed on 22 October 2018, accords with the Committee review.

I am pleased to advise that, as submitted to date, the project may proceed in line with standard on-going ethics clearance conditions outlined below.

- The approved duration is **24 October 2018** to **31 May 2020** unless an extension request is subsequently approved.

 All human research activity undertaken under Swinburne auspices must conform to Swinburne and external regulatory standards, including the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007 – updated 2018)* and with respect to secure data use, retention and disposal.

- The named Swinburne Chief Investigator/Supervisor remains responsible for any personnel appointed to or associated with the project being made aware of ethics clearance conditions, including research and consent procedures or instruments approved. Any change in chief investigator/supervisor, and addition or removal of other personnel/students from the project, requires timely notification and SUHREC endorsement.

- The above project has been approved as submitted for ethical review by or on behalf of SUHREC. Amendments to approved procedures or instruments ordinarily require prior ethical

appraisal/clearance. SUHREC must be notified immediately or as soon as possible thereafter of (a) any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants and any redress measures; (b) proposed changes in protocols; and (c) unforeseen events which might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.

-      At a minimum, an annual report on the progress of the project is required as well as at the conclusion (or abandonment) of the project. Information on project monitoring and variations/additions, self-audits and progress reports can be found on the Research Ethics Internet pages.

-      A duly authorised external or internal audit of the project may be undertaken at any time.

Please contact the Research Ethics Office if you have any queries about on-going ethics clearance, citing the Swinburne project number. A copy of this email should be retained as part of project record-keeping.

Best wishes for the project.

Yours sincerely

Astrid Nordmann

Secretary, SUHREC

Dr Astrid Nordmann | Research Ethics Coordinator

Swinburne Research| Swinburne University of Technology

Ph +61 3 9214 3845| anordmann@swin.edu.au

Level 1, Swinburne Place South

24 Wakefield St, Hawthorn VIC 3122, Australia

www.swinburne.edu.au