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Brooke Samaratunga
brooke.samaratunga@trincoll.edu

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The Camera as a Political Tool: Examining Photography and the Sri Lankan Civil War

Brooke Samaratunga
International Studies Department
Trinity College
Dr. Natassja Gunasena and Dr. Seth Markle
April 2022

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in International
Studies

Abstract

This research project is based on an analysis from photographs from newspaper and online media archives. All of the images the newspapers published from three specific media sources will be examined. These photographs have been accessed through online archives. This study will focus on images from the tail end of the war specifically from the years 2007-2009, as the war ended in May 2009. This project will focus on international sources and how they portrayed images of the Sri Lankan war. Domestic sources were not considered due to the inherent bias Sri Lanka has with the Civil War. News sources like *Aljazeera*, *The Guardian*, and *The New York Times* will be highlighted in this research project. It will be important to understand how various international news agencies depicted the Sri Lankan conflict as each country has their own prejudices and geopolitical agendas. The research question at hand dealt with how international sources depicted the Sri Lankan Civil War to global audiences. I argue that due to complicated geopolitical relationships with Sri Lanka, the Middle East, England, and the United States portray the Civil War in different ways that suit their own global interests. I did not want to consider South Asian news sources because of their proximity to the conflict. In addition, this thesis considers the historical context and relationship of the Middle East, England, and the United States in relation to Sri Lanka. This was done in order to gain a better understanding of why they depicted the Sri Lankan Civil War the way they chose to. In addition to a written thesis, a podcast has been made where I explore my family's memories of growing up during the Civil War. This project has allowed me to investigate the war through an academic and personal lens.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge my loving and supportive family for encouraging me every day of my life. Mommy and Thithi, it is the ultimate blessing of a lifetime to be your child. Aiya and Akki, you are my best friends, and I am so grateful to be your sister. You all are my inspiration and purpose in this world. I am grateful to my amazing friends for cheering me on throughout the thesis and college process. I would like to thank Dr. Gunasena and Professor Markle for their support and guidance throughout the thesis journey. Thank you so much, Dr. Gunasena, for your patience and encouragement. You helped me think about this conflict in relation to my experience as a diasporic Sri Lankan, which I am incredibly grateful for. Thank you so much, Professor Markle, for your encouragement and support throughout my college career. Thank you for your contributions to my podcast about family memories during the Sri Lankan Civil War. Podcasting was something that was very new to me, and I appreciated your help and guidance throughout this process. Thank you to both Professor Markle and Dr. Gunasena for being such pivotal mentors for me throughout my college experience. Thank you to Mary Mahoney for helping me with the editing process and storyboarding of my podcast. I learned so much from you and am thankful for your mentorship. I would like to dedicate this thesis to children of immigrants and diasporic individuals. Many times, we tend to romanticize our homeland, but it is through critically looking at where we come from that can help us have a stronger sense of identity and clarity of our position and purpose in life.

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Introduction

Being a Sri Lankan diasporic individual, who identifies with being Sinhalese, my views of the Sri Lankan Civil War have been shaped through my family's experience as well as through Western media. Being physically away from Sri Lanka, I have had to depend on the media and my family's memories in order to construct my own feelings and understanding of the complexities and layers of the Civil War. I became familiar with different narratives from the war that belonged to my majority Sinhala family as well as some of our Tamil family members. The war was not a subject that was brushed aside in my family, but the images surrounding what was going on in Sri Lanka has left a lasting impression on me. Through writing and researching this thesis project, I see this thesis as a way for me to understand the truth behind the context of the war. This thesis is a method for me to find ways that Sri Lanka can move forward as a country without holding onto the pain and scars from the war.

A picture is worth one thousand words is a common phrase that many people are familiar with. Photography can serve as a living memory of joyous and traumatic moments in history. This research project will analyze how photography can be used as a powerful tool in terms of perception and memory preservation. This research project will specifically look at the Sri Lankan Civil War and will examine how photography was used to impact the historical memory of the traumatic event. The war lasted about 26 years and consisted of an ethnic tension between the majority group, the Sinhalese, and the minority group, the Tamils. Tamils wanted more control in the country, which Sinhalese people did not think was fair. The war rocked the small island nation as the country tried to resolve the violence.¹ The research question this research

¹ Rico Neumann and Shahria Fahmy, "Analyzing the Spell of War: A War/Peace Framing Analysis of the 2009 Visual Coverage of the Sri Lankan Civil War in Western Newswires," *Mass Communication and Society*, 2012, 169–200. 171.

project will grapple with is the following: in what ways does photography surrounding the Sri Lankan Civil War impact the historical memory of this traumatic event? The hypothesis states that through photography, Sri Lankans and international audience members are able to gain a deeper understanding of the tensions caused by the war as well as its effects on ethnic group dynamics. It is vital to understand that there are three narratives that are competing during this time: Sinhalese, Tamil, and Western perspective of the war. These three aspects will create a basis of considering the context of the Civil War.

Historical Context

Establishing the historical context of the Sri Lankan Civil War is crucial in understanding how photography fits into the equation. The scholar Sharika Thiranagama provides historical contextual evidence of Tamilian life during colonization and how life changed post-independence. The author opens her piece with stating, “riots, bombs, and the checkpoints that crisscross Colombo make violence a constant feared spectacle of the urban, images of the possible bound by past violence.”² The riots, bombs, and checkpoints were aspects of Sri Lankan life that alienated and targeted Tamil individuals. The author shares, “Colombo epitomizes that crossroads, whether or not there is now the possibility of making a home for minorities in the larger Sri Lankan nation-state....Conversely, when one asks oneself, what is the soul of Colombo, the answer still points to a disavowed uncertainty about the uneasy place of Colombo in the national imagination. Colombo, while the economic and political nerve center of Sri Lanka, has failed to be rendered fully for later nationalist imaginations.”³ The capital city of

² Sharika Thiranagama, “Conclusions from Tamil Colombo,” in *In My Mother’s House* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 228–56, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt3fhdj6.11.230>.

³ Ibid.

Colombo was in a fight for the soul of the country. Colombo became an area that was consumed with violence as Tamils were alienated from Sinhalese people. The check points established by the majority Sinhalese government and riots throughout the nation provided a clear message to Tamils as they were seen as enemies of the state.

Because of the tension between Sinhalese and Tamils, the issue of national origin came into the picture. The author shares, “Colombo does not offer a redemptive pre-colonial ‘pure’ Sinhalized past with its diversity, mixed architecture, and colonial buildings marking the city as their own. Colombo’s own elite have sought their ‘national’ origins not in Colombo, but in the more all-embracing vocabulary of Sinhala nationalism, purified Buddhism, and the upholding of a seemingly declining and idealized rural past.”⁴ Sinhalese people put forth legislation that shunned Tamils away from society at large. Many Sinhalese people believed that they were better than Tamils because of their access to education and their desire to be connected to the colonizers. The idea of colonized people wanting to be like their oppressors is a common trope seen throughout the world. This was common in Sri Lanka as many Sinhalese people had the goal to be educated in England and emulate the lifestyle of Western individuals. The author states, “Colombo’s soul has thus always been up for grabs by those who lived in it, fearing that it is in fact marked by the other, the minorities from Tamils and Muslims to Burghers, the English-speaking elite, the colonial rulers, the slum dwellers.”⁵ The city’s soul should not have been tied to just Sinhalese people but should have been open to the diverse population of Sri Lanka. Because Sinhalese people had better access to education, they were able to communicate in English which deepened the rifts between Tamils and Sinhalese. Being able to speak English was

⁴ Ibid. 231.

⁵ Ibid.

another factor that separated Sinhalese and Tamils, as it was clear one group believed they were superior to the other.

The scholar Jayadeva Uyangoda brings to light the politics around the Sri Lankan Civil War. Many foreign entities were invested in the war and had an idea of how the conflict should play out. The author shares, “India and the U.S. appeared to be reluctantly willing to back the Sri Lankan state’s war against the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tigers Elam) at the time. Japan and the EU were less enthusiastic, even though each seemed to accept the argument that the LTTE had to be controlled in light of its unwillingness to explore a negotiated settlement. In contrast, China, Pakistan, and Iran were more unequivocal in their economic, military, and political support for the Sri Lankan government and its efforts against the LTTE.”⁶ This quote demonstrates how foreign countries were invested in this war in different ways and had different opinions on what the aftermath of the war should be. America and India were clearly against getting involved in the Sri Lankan war because of America’s supposed fight for peace. India was against the conflict as Tamils were descendants of South India, and the war became an issue of a conflict of interest. The communist country of China and the authoritarian government of Iran were quick to provide support to the Sri Lankan war. During the time of the war, Sri Lanka and China began trading with each other which could have influenced China’s involvement in the war. The author shares, “within four days of the war ending, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton telephoned Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa to personally ‘appeal for political reconciliation’ and ‘speedy resettlement of nearly 300,000 displaced Tamil civilians.’ Clinton also emphasized the need for ‘post-conflict power-sharing’ with Tamils....International actors seemed to focus on three issues they considered crucial for post-civil war peace-building in Sri

⁶ Jayadeva Uyangoda, “Sri Lanka in 2009: From Civil War to Political Uncertainties,” *University of California Press*, 2010, 104–11. 105.

Lanka: (a) early resettlement of displaced Tamil civilians in and outside of refugee camps; (b) provisions for speedy humanitarian aid to civilians with international assistance, participation, and monitoring; and (c) implementation of devolution.”⁷ For the United States, their top priority was to find a solution to relocate Tamils. This conflict was complicated as many international powers did not fully understand the history of Sri Lanka and how the war sparked. Without having background knowledge of the country’s past, it becomes impossible for foreign powers to guide Sri Lanka during the war. America’s foreign agenda was to fight for peace and democracy on a surface level. It was easy for America to blame Sinhalese people for the violence, but in actuality the tensions between these two ethnic groups started with the invasion of colonial powers. Colonial powers pitted Sinhalese and Tamils against each other as a way to have a tight grip on the country. After colonial powers left, colonizers made no effort to restore or rehabilitate these two groups, which is the root cause of the ethnic tensions. When foreign entities involve themselves in a country’s issues, the conflict becomes more complicated as foreign countries bring their own biases and agendas into the war.

After the war ended, Sri Lanka and America began to have tension as the West believed Sri Lanka committed war crimes.⁸ The author states, “for this reason, the Rajapaksa government turned to Iran, Pakistan, and China for direct military assistance and to Libya, Iran, Japan, China, and Russia for economic assistance. Sri Lanka has also been strengthening bilateral relations with China, Libya, Jordan, Burma, and Vietnam. For example, Rajapaksa visited Vietnam in October; in November, Burma’s military ruler Than Shwe received a warm official welcome in Sri Lanka.”⁹ Sri Lanka began to look for Middle Eastern and Asian foreign partners while

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid. 107.

⁹ Ibid.

turning its back to the West in some regard. International forces played a major role in the end of the civil war, as they shaped the outcome of the conflict. Outside factors pressured the Sri Lankan government to end the war, as relationships with foreign countries became strained.

Camilla Orjuela discusses how the diasporic communities of Tamils and Sinhalese played a role in the Sri Lankan conflict. Orjuela states, “in the Sri Lankan case, diaspora actors are believed to have played an important role pushing for peace negotiations in the early 2000s, while a number of attempts have been made to engage diaspora representatives in peace projects.”¹⁰ Even though diasporic communities were physically removed from their home, they were able to push for change in their home countries. This is an important point as it demonstrates how wars and other traumatic events do not just impact people who live in that area, but rather it affects the larger community. The author states, “the host country may offer opportunities for dialogue and the fostering of inclusive identities since people are removed from the direct threats of ongoing violence in the homeland. The new positions and experiences of migrants in multi-cultural and democratic countries can also be conducive for dialogue.”¹¹ In many cases the host country of diasporic communities can have stronger ties as these individuals are trying to recreate a sense of home while being in a new location. In some cases, it can be easier for oppressed individuals to demand for change when they are removed from their home country.

Orjuela shares, “a Tamil activist in Switzerland stated that ‘people here live mentally in Sri Lanka’...Many other interviewees too talked about how diaspora Tamils lived with the preoccupations and traumas linked to the homeland conflict(s), and that such worries were

¹⁰ Camilla Orjuela, “Divides and Dialogue in the Diaspora during Sri Lanka’s Civil War,” *South Asian Diaspora*, 2017, 67–82. 68.

¹¹ Ibid. 69.

enhanced in times of escalated violence. In some cases, the distress derived from personal experiences and worries for loved ones at home, while in other cases it was linked to the plight of the Tamils in general and the gruesome images transpiring from the war zone.”¹² This quote demonstrates how individuals still feel very connected to their homes while being separated. Being away from the violence is difficult for diasporic communities as they cannot contact loved ones as easily. The author states, “during the last intense months of war, thousands of Canadian Tamils blocked all lanes of a Toronto highway for several hours demanding an international intervention to stop the atrocities in Sri Lanka. In London, Tamils staged one of the longest large-scale pickets in recent history, spending 73 days and nights in Parliament Square....The pictures of the suffering Tamil civilians in Sri Lanka and the large-scale diaspora protests became an awakening for many hitherto unengaged Tamils and particularly second-generation Tamils got involved both emotionally and practically.”¹³ People abroad still had a deep sense of commitment to their country and felt the need to demand change in their own way.

Tamil and Sinhala diaspora had different motivations when commemorating the events of the war. The author states,

“the Tamil diaspora – including the dominant LTTE organisations – nurturing the Tamil identity was a key priority. Language and cultural classes were well organised and well attended and worked to ensure that the next generation maintained its Tamilness. The conflict in Sri Lanka reinforced the concern over identity...The Sinhalese were also caught between different ways of identifying the diaspora. While the Tamils clearly saw themselves as a distinct diaspora struggling for the liberation of their homeland, the

¹² Ibid. 71.

¹³ Ibid.

Sinhalese variably considered themselves as belonging to a Sri Lankan, multi-ethnic, diaspora or a Sinhalese diaspora.”¹⁴

This quote demonstrates how Tamils felt a desire to maintain their culture that they believed was compromised during the war. The issue of identity and homeland were major factors at play during this conflict.

Shahria Fahmy and Rico Neumann highlight how the Sri Lankan Civil War presented war and peace frames in the media. The authors state the importance of photography, especially around traumatic events, when it’s stated, “Undoubtedly, the camera has become a powerful tool through which we see the photos in the news as a ‘weapon.’”¹⁵ It is important to highlight how photographs serve as a living reminder of horrific moments. The authors state, “in the context of the Iraq War, Griffin argued that the pictures of Abu Ghraib confirmed the direct effect of visuals in shaping public opinion. In his view these photographs gave the world a vivid realization of the torture that took place in Iraq.”¹⁶ This quote exemplifies how images show horrific details of what goes on during conflicts. The Abu Ghraib example demonstrates how the world was able to get a peek into the torture Americans perpetrated against Iraqi people.

It is crucial to keep in mind that photographs are images constructed by the photographer. There is no true sense of accuracy as images are created with the photographer’s agenda at play. Images are biased and can be skewed. While photographs are important technological tools as they can highlight brutal details of war, they always carry a feeling of bias. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines bias as “an instance of such prejudice.”¹⁷ Prejudice plays a significant

¹⁴ Ibid. 72.

¹⁵ Rico Neumann and Shahria Fahmy, “Analyzing the Spell of War: A War/Peace Framing Analysis of the 2009 Visual Coverage of the Sri Lankan Civil War in Western Newswires,” *Mass Communication and Society*, 2012, 169–200. 173.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ “Definition of BIAS,” accessed March 18, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bias>.

role in the way images are curated as they subscribe to the political interests of their country and publisher.

The authors lay out the basics of the Sri Lankan Civil War when they state, “this conflict is primarily an ethnic conflict that pits the Sinhalese majority (82%, or roughly 14 million people) against the Tamil minority (9.4%, or 1.6 million people), but it is also a conflict that divides the groups along the lines of religion: most Sinhalese follow the teachings of Buddha whereas Tamils are largely Hindus.”¹⁸ The authors display the differences between the Tamils and the Sinhalese and illustrate how these groups historically were at odds with each other.

The authors share how many of the photos from this period showed distressing images such as child victims and graphic scenes. These images were used to present the war frame as they highlighted the violence that individuals had to experience. Especially towards the end of the conflict, more images of children were used in the media, and it was more challenging to find photos that followed the peace frame which promoted, “peace journalism—which sheds light on the roots and complexity of a conflict, provides possible solutions, and fosters creativity in the journalistic process.”¹⁹ Images were used to gain international sympathy and highlighted some of the worst moments of the Civil War to the global audience. The authors state, “they argued that visuals have become effective tools for framing and articulating ideological messages.”²⁰

Photographs are a powerful tool in terms of seeking the truth amidst violence.

¹⁸ Rico Neumann and Shahria Fahmy, “Analyzing the Spell of War: A War/Peace Framing Analysis of the 2009 Visual Coverage of the Sri Lankan Civil War in Western Newswires,” *Mass Communication and Society*, 2012, 169–200. 171.

¹⁹ Ibid. 176.

²⁰ Ibid. 173.

Research Design and Methods

This research project is based on an analysis from photographs from newspaper archives. All of the images the newspaper published from three specific articles will be examined. These photographs have been accessed through online archives. During the research portion of this project, it became evident that the majority of the images non-Sri Lankan newspaper sources published were images of the Easter bombings in 2019. Because the Easter incident took up most of the headlines, I was able to find articles that solely discussed the Sri Lankan Civil War, which included plenty of images from the war. Categories of photographs will be identified to further categorize the images. The image types will fall into the categories of deceased bodies, individuals with severe physical injuries, victims, and destruction of land and property. This study will focus on images from the tail end of the war specifically from the years 2007-2009, as the war ended in May 2009. These years were chosen because during the end of the war, graphic war images were circulated internationally. This project focuses on international portrayal of the Sri Lankan Civil War. International media sources like *Aljazeera*, *The Guardian*, and *The New York Times* will be analyzed in this research project. It is important to understand how various international news agencies depicted the Sri Lankan conflict as each country has their own biases. Initially, Sri Lankan news sources were analyzed as well, but after examining these sources it was clear that Sri Lankan journalists were biased about the conflict. In addition, Sri Lankan media did not make images of the war widely accessible which impacted this thesis project.

The geopolitical relationships of these news sources come into play as well. *Aljazeera*, being a Middle Eastern source, *The New York Times*, being an American source and, *The Guardian*, being a British source all have different political relationships with Sri Lanka and

South Asia at large. The global motives of these media sources is important to remember when analyzing the types of images they publish. Countries like China, Pakistan, and Iran were “unequivocal in their economic, military, and political support for the Sri Lankan government and its efforts against the LTTE.”²¹ India, Japan, the US, Britain, and Germany were hesitant about backing the Sri Lankan government in their fight against the LTTE. It is important to note that Middle Eastern countries like Iran were very forthcoming in their support of the Sri Lankan government’s agenda. This could have been in part due to the geo-political relationships that come into consideration. Understanding Sri Lanka’s global political relationships is vital when considering how different news sources portray the Sri Lankan Civil War.

Geopolitical Context

The scholar Michael Bishku maps out Sri Lanka’s historic relationship with the Middle East and how this relationship was portrayed during the time of Sri Lanka’s thirty year long Civil War. Bishku share Sri Lanka’s political non-alignment strategy when he states, “since 1956, Sri Lanka, despite whichever political party has been in power, has held firm to the principle of non-alignment as a means to enhance its political status in world affairs and in dealings vis-a-vis the major powers; of special concern has been the avoidance of tension and rivalry in the Indian Ocean basin, which Sri Lanka has regarded as a challenge to its own security.”²² Sri Lanka’s non-alignment political stance can be viewed as unconventional as most countries tend to either side or go against superpower nations. Sri Lanka and other non-alignment countries decided to make political choices that suit their own needs and desires as nation states, without being

²¹ Jayadeva Uyangoda, “Sri Lanka in 2009: From Civil War to Political Uncertainties,” *University of California Press*, 2010, 104–11. 105.

²² Michael Bishku, “Sri Lanka and the Middle East,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 56, no. 1 (2020): 116–30. 116.

influenced by more powerful countries. Bishku shares, “[Sri Lanka] as a founding member of the Non-Alignment Movement in 1961, along with India, Sri Lanka developed both multilateral and bilateral relations with most countries in the Middle East and continued to promote cooperation on issues of mutual concern for Asian and African countries.”²³ Sri Lanka’s relationship with Middle Eastern countries can be traced back to the Non-Alignment Movement as Egypt, especially the country’s leader Gamal Abd al-Nasser, and other Arab leaders were founding members of the Non-Alignment Movement. Sri Lanka became a republic in 1972 and Sri Lanka’s leader Sirimavo Bandaranaike, “proceeded to establish formal diplomatic relations with the Communist states, while playing an important part in the United Nations in defense of Egypt during the Suez Crisis and subsequent War in 1956, when Britain, France and Israel invaded that Arab state and which Ceylonese officials regarded as a continuation of their country’s opposition to colonialism.”²⁴ Sri Lanka was able to create alliances with socialist countries and the country remained adamant in their disapproval of modern day colonial tactics. The situation in the Middle East was turbulent as the region was going through a vast amount of political upheaval, “on 31 October, two days after Israel invaded the Gaza Strip and Sinai Peninsula in reaction to cross border raids and the blockade of its port of Eilat, Britain and France began a bombing campaign against Egypt, Bandaranaike expressed, in a message to the UN General Assembly, Ceylon’s ‘shock and perturbation at developments in the Middle East’ for which actions he saw ‘no adequate justification’ and called ‘most strongly’ for the immediate withdrawal of those forces from Egyptian territory.”²⁵ Sri Lanka fiercely advocated for their allies and made their political stance very clear in international settings. Bishku shares how, “The next day, Ceylon’s

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid. 118.

²⁵ Ibid.

representative to the UN, R.S.S. Gunawardene, gave a speech to the General Assembly stating that British and French actions were ‘construed as a continuation of colonialism. It does not require much foresight to see that no nation, however powerful, can turn back the clock in Asia and Africa and resist the inexorable march of events.’²⁶ Sri Lanka’s denouncing of colonialism made the country popular in the Arab world, as Sri Lanka’s political agenda was clear. Sri Lanka, “remained a strong supporter of Arab independence at the same time, while seeking foreign assistance – but not foreign interference in domestic affairs – for itself and others in Asia and Africa.”²⁷ Sri Lanka continued to support independence movements around the world including the Arab world and Algeria.²⁸ After gaining independence from the British in 1948, Sri Lanka believed that countries that wanted to find freedom, should have the freedom and ability to do so. “At the Lusaka conference...the Non-Aligned Movement also adopted a resolution on the Middle East, which called for an immediate withdrawal of Israel from the territories it occupied in the 1967 War as well as the ‘full restoration of the rights of the Arab people of Palestine in their usurped homeland’, while reaffirming ‘support in their struggle for national liberation and against colonialism and racism,’ the independence of Palestine was another issue that Sri Lanka supported.”²⁹

In 1978, J.R. Jayawardene became the President of Sri Lanka and was the country's leader during the Sri Lankan Civil War. Due to Sri Lanka’s positive relationship with the Middle East, Arab nations began to fund Sri Lankan infrastructure projects as, “Kuwait provided financial assistance for a large fertilizer plant near Colombo, while the UAE did the same to

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid. 119.

²⁸ Ibid. 120.

²⁹ Ibid.

modernize Sri Lanka's fishing fleet."³⁰ Even though Jayawardene had a good working relationship with the United States, as more American embassies were built in Colombo, the United States did not back the Sri Lankan government in the fight against the LTTE.³¹ The reason for the United States not supporting the Sri Lankan government could have been due to Sri Lanka's non-alignment political agenda as Sri Lanka tended to operate as an independent entity. Jayewardene then, "turned to Israel as well as Pakistan and China, the latter two countries as a counterweight to India. China, which had supplied 50% of Sri Lanka's arms and ammunition, provided additional Shanghai-class gunboats and assault rifles during 1984, while Pakistan supplied military training, arms and ammunition, and possibly aircraft, to assist the Sri Lankan military."³² Pakistan and China provided a vast amount of political and military support to the Sri Lankan government during the Civil War, as the Sri Lankan government was not able to fund and support the Sri Lankan military alone. Sri Lanka's long relationship with the Middle East started with the Non-Alignment Movement and came into fruition as the Middle East was able to support the Sri Lankan government's efforts in overthrowing the LTTE powers. These beliefs can be applied to when *Aljazeera* depicts the Sri Lankan Civil War through their media sources.

Sri Lanka's relationship with Britain can be traced back to the days of colonization, as Britain was the last country to colonize Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka was colonized for 443 years, which started with the Portuguese colonization which lasted from 1505-1658, followed by the Dutch from 1658-1796, and lastly the British which ruled the island from 1796-1948. The British were the only global power that was able to capture the entire island, as the Portuguese and Dutch only

³⁰ Ibid. 121.

³¹ Ibid. 122.

³² Ibid.

controlled the harbors.³³ “D. S. Senanayake, the conservative Sinhalese statesman, led the negotiations which created an independent Ceylon in 1948, and became the new nation’s first Prime Minister,” his negotiations with British politicians and civil servants became a vital tool for the fight for independence.³⁴ Sri Lanka was described as “‘The Model Colony’ , in contrast with the turmoil of the time in India and Burma,” this was largely in part due to the fact that independence in Sri Lanka was not nearly as bloody or destructive as in India.³⁵ The country dealt with ethnic tension, as the British gave more rights to the minority Tamil group, which created conflict among the majority, Sinhalese. The issue of ethnic cooperation was one that was at the forefront of Senanayake’s agenda as he had to find a way to gain minority support. “The Colonial Office took pains to ensure that Senanayake would deal fairly with the Tamils, especially the Jaffna Tamils. It was after protracted negotiations that the Colonial Office felt satisfied that the minorities would be given a fair deal in an independent Ceylon.”³⁶ Senanayake carefully crafted strategies to move Sri Lanka into independence, “the idea of an independent Ceylon granting to Britain air and naval facilities in Ceylon was a master stroke of Senanayake though it could have been boomeranged with either a resultant defeat for Senanayake at the hands of the Leftists or by, most probably, an opposing nationalist coalition headed by S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike.”³⁷ Britain felt like Sri Lanka was able to earn their independence as the country was loyal with Britain’s war efforts in India and Myanmar.³⁸ Senanayake was able to gain Tamil support and the Tamil Federal Party was launched in 1949.³⁹

³³ A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, “Ceylon’s (Sri Lanka’s) Passage to Independence,” *The Round Table*, 1999, 97–108. 97.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.* 98.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.* 99.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 102.

In Britain, Lord Soulbury was Senanayake's strong supporter as he believed that Senanayake's moderate agenda was not as threatening as Bandaranaike's leftist ideas.⁴⁰ "It was apparently difficult for Senanayake and his wily lieutenant, Oliver Goonetilleke, to understand why the British government was not enthusiastic about the proposal to give Britain air and naval bases in the island in exchange for independence. The alternative for Britain would have been a hostile Bandaranaike- led nationalist government."⁴¹ Scholars describe a powerful "left wing anti-British front was burgeoning in the island. This threat persuaded Britain among other things to grant Ceylon independence forthwith rather than delay it for a two to six year period which would doubtless have created bitterness among the political Sinhalese."⁴² Senanayake was able to ensure independence for Sri Lanka as he promised the British that Sri Lanka would be a loyal Commonwealth nation and the country would have a government and political system similar to the British Westminster model.⁴³ "Thus it could be said that Ceylon had obtained independence in 1948 solely because of the mountains of patience that Senanayake had displayed in his negotiations with Britain."⁴⁴ Senanayake carefully crafted relationships with British leaders in order to make sure Sri Lanka had a relatively smooth and bloodless independence, which was realized. These sentiments should be remembered when thinking about how *The Guardian* portrays the Sri Lankan Civil War through British media.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 103.

⁴¹ Ibid. 105.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 106.

Analysis

Aljazeera

Aljazeera displayed images of the end of the war in 2009 in an article that was published in 2016. The first image in the article depicts a victory monument that was erected after the war ended in Jaffna, Sri Lanka (Image 1).⁴⁵ The gilded monument showcases a soldier holding a gun in one hand and the Sri Lankan flag in the other hand. A pigeon flies above the gun which could be symbolic of prosperity. Four white lions surround the base of the monument in a protective stance. The symbol of the lion is extremely important to Sinhalese people as Sinhalese believe that they are descendants of lions, which is why a lion is on the national flag. The next image highlights a warning sign that indicates an area of landmines (Image 2).⁴⁶ Landmines were a common method of destruction during the war, and these signs remain in parts of the country. The white skull and crossbones against the red background highlights the casualties and severities of the war. These two images create a stark contrast of the war as it highlights the victory of the Sri Lankan government, while also showcasing the dangers and destructive nature of war. Landmines were extremely dangerous as people and any other living creature could die in an instant. In both images, the photographer has made the monument and the landmine sign the focal point of the photograph as the background is blurry.

The positioning of the camera is interesting in Image 1 as the walkway towards the monument is seen clearly. This adds a layer of dynamism as the viewer can imagine a human walking up to the massive monument. The looming and huge quality of the victorious soldier is

⁴⁵ Miguel Candela and Zigor Aldama, "The Scars of Sri Lanka's Civil War," June 6, 2016, <https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2016/6/6/the-scars-of-sri-lankas-civil-war>.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

one that can easily engulf the viewer. The four white lions on either side of the monument, create a feeling of importance around the victorious soldier. The lions are protecting the soldier, which demonstrates a sacredness to the soldier who sacrificed his life for his country. In many Buddhist monuments, the Buddha or other deities are surrounded by protective animals or figures, which indicates the significance of the monument. The soldier monument utilizes a similar method of protection.

In Image 2, the bright red and white sign immediately catches the attention of the viewer. The skull and crossbones are juxtaposed with the red background of the sign. The lettering on the sign depicts a warning in English, Sinhalese, and Tamil, the three national languages of Sri Lanka. The language makes it clear to all people that the territory is dangerous due to undetonated landmines. The barbed wire underneath the sign adds to the ominous feeling of the photograph. The positioning of the camera seems to be at the average human's eye level, therefore adding a feeling of accuracy to the image. The background of the photograph is blurred, as the warning sign is the only component that is in focus.

Comparing these two images together creates a feeling of the emptiness of war. After a war concludes, while there may be a victorious side, no one has really won anything. The country is still left in shambles as civilians must deal with the aftermath of the violence. The monument image, while some people can gain inspiration and hope from the victorious soldier, it is interesting that no one is seen with the monument. This could have been done on purpose by the photographer as a way to show the brokenness of the country after the war. The landmine image is particularly interesting as the wounds from landmines are extremely clear. Personally, I have passed people on the streets of Colombo who have lost limbs, which could have been due to the war. I have also come into contact with elephants who have lost their feet or other body parts

after stepping on landmines. The aftermath of setting off a landmine is extremely permanent if not deadly and was something that I was able to connect with after seeing people and animals with lost limbs.

The next image depicts a Tamilian man named Anthony Fernando standing in the ruins of his home (Image 3).⁴⁷ His house was destroyed during the conflict, and his wife and daughter were killed in the war. A shadow covers Fernando's bottom half of his face, while his eyes are seen in the light. The sadness that consumes his eyes is palpable, which is emphasized with the light highlighting Fernando's eyes. The elderly man stands with his shirt open as he stares off. The background is not in focus, but the structure looks destroyed and dilapidated. This image is extremely compelling as it demonstrates the destruction and the effects of the war on everyday individuals. The next image highlights two children, a boy and a girl, playing and running outside their home which has numerous bullet holes that have gone through the house (Image 4).⁴⁸ This stark juxtaposition of children playing in a location that was destruction ridden. This image highlights how the future generations of Sri Lankans will have to grapple with the dark past of the war in order to progress as a society. The next photograph depicts burned and destroyed buses and vehicles (Image 5).⁴⁹ The wheels have been removed from the buses as the image has a dark tone to it. The darkening sky adds to the feelings of despair and destruction.

These three images deal with individuals and the destructive nature of the war in terms of infrastructure and buildings. Image 3 is particularly striking to me as it highlights a man left with nothing. His facial expression is one of agony and pure sadness. All that is left of his home is the skeletal structure. The horizontal beam diagonally cuts through the photograph which adds a

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

layer of dynamism to the photograph. The camera angle is tilted and does not capture Fernando from a straight on angle. The diagonal angle of the camera could be a way to artistically demonstrate how Fernando's life has been turned upside down due to the destruction of the war. A shadow creeps to cover most of Fernando's face as only his forehead is in the light. The shadow could represent the darkness that has overtaken the country. The shadow could be another artistic choice by the photographer to showcase the dark and destructive nature of war.

Image 4 highlights the innocence of children, which provides a jarring contrast to the violence of war. The children run around playfully as they are completely oblivious to the destruction surrounding them. The bullet holes in the building that stands in front of them, is a stark reminder of the mortality of humans. The feeling of obliviousness and the notion of life continuing was one that I could relate to with my family's experience of being in Sri Lanka during the war. My family often told me how they were obviously scared about the violence in the country, but on the same hand their life did not stop and life kept continuing as normal as the violence was usually in the North of the country. This strong contrast of living like nothing is wrong, while also understanding the dangers and devastation of war is a very compelling topic to me. Children continue to play as adults continue to go to work. Life does not slow down or stop because there is a war occurring. The innocence of children is reflected in this image as they do not understand the full weight of the war.

Image 5 highlights the aftermath of violent episodes as the bare bones of the buses are left. The burned buses stand in a row against the beautiful Sri Lankan sunset. The sunsets in Sri Lanka is an image that I have personally felt very connected to as it is extremely peaceful and beautiful. Having the destroyed buses against a sunset that I dearly love evokes complex emotions for me. After interviewing my family members for the podcast component of this

thesis, my aunt described how she remembered seeing burning buses as a young child. She recalled how when the violence started to heighten in Colombo as her school was shut down. When her father picked her and her siblings up from school, the group passed mobs of people burning buses. She remembered feeling confused about what was going on but was ultimately whisked away quickly from the violent scene. Seeing an image of burned buses, helped me visualize what destruction truly looked like in Sri Lanka.

The next image shows a Tamil man praying at a Hindu temple (Image 6).⁵⁰ The elaborate and beautifully decorated temple is blurred as the man is in focus. The man's hands are in a praying position as he looks at the temple. The man's back faces the viewer as his identity is hidden. This image could be demonstrating how religion and faith were the only things that people could rely on during this time of war. The next image shows two intoxicated Tamil men riding a bus (Image 7).⁵¹ The men stare right at the viewer as they embrace each other. Their glassy eyes are significant as the man on the left looks like he is frightened. This image humanizes the victims of the war. Another image shows a patient with mental and physical ailments, as the patient's mouth is open, and his eyes look alarmed (Image 8).⁵² The caption of the image shares how the trauma of the war has severely affected civilians in a negative manner. The background of the image is not in focus, but the man's face is the only aspect that is clear. The man's alarmed eyes are captivating as it creates a human connection between the man and the viewer of the image. The next image highlights a boy who has injuries on his feet from the conflict (Image 9).⁵³ The boy's face is not shown, but his swollen and injured feet are shown clearly. The boy's shadow looms over the ground as a reminder of what the boy could have

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

achieved. The shadow could represent the boy's potential of where he could have gone with his life without being impacted by the violence of the war.

Image 6 is a beautifully captured moment of a man praying at a Hindu temple. The ornamentations of the structure stand out against the blue sky. The angle of the camera is taken slightly below the man, as the camera is pointing up towards the temple. This creates a grand feeling of the temple, as the temple towers above the man. The man is insignificant compared to the large temple. This was a concrete choice made by the photographer to depict the engulfing quality of religion. Especially during wartime, religion is something that individuals cling onto as it provides relief and comfort for many people. Surrendering to religion can help people come to terms with the fact that they can die at any minute due to violence. Religion helps civilians make sense of violence and what goes on during wars. Hinduism and Buddhism both believe in Karma and the idea that what goes around comes around. People could find solace in the fact that if they did good actions in their past lives, they could be spared violence in their present lives. Religion aims to make sense of everything that does not make logical sense. It does not make sense why someone would kill another, but in the eyes of religion (especially Buddhism and Hinduism) one could believe that that is one's Karma.

Images 7 and 8 highlight individuals and their experience with the war. Image 7 depicts two men embracing each other as they look directly at the camera. Due to their intoxicated state, the men's eyes are glossy and look glazed over. The bus is clearly crowded as many silhouettes of other people are seen. The two men are the only individuals in focus as the camera captures this movement. These two Tamil men could be on the bus as they could be looking for shelter, but their back story is unknown. The photographer highlights their facial expressions as they look scared and frightened about what is to come. Image 8 depicts a man with physical and

mental diseases. The man is seen sitting in a bus as his mouth is opened. Only one eye is seen clearly as the other eye is covered by the rails on the bus. This picture was taken outside the bus as the photographer zoomed into the man's facial expressions. The issue of exploitation is one that comes into play for both these images. It is unclear whether the photographer asked for consent to take these images, but in many cases unfortunately, the mentally disabled and minority groups are taken advantage of and can be exploited through photography.

Image 9 is one that is taken of a man's leg as he displays his scars from the war. The age of the man is unclear, although he seems to be young. The man's face is not shown, only his neck down is captured. His feet are extremely swollen as it is clear that this man will have difficulty walking after what has happened to him. The exact events of what happened to this man is unclear. The man is seen on the left side of the photograph as his shadow takes up most of the foreground. The shadow could symbolize the man's dreams and what he could have achieved. His shadow is contained to the ends of the photograph, which could highlight how the man's dreams are confined only to his imagination. The man looks away from his shadow as he has to come to terms with his new sense of reality. The image that the photographer depicts is powerful as it demonstrates the depressing reality of many individuals.

The following two images are of female victims. An image of Balasubramaniam Annaludchumy is shown as she recalls how she lost five family members in one night in May 2009 (Image 10).⁵⁴ The caption retells how Annaludchumy was able to find refuge in a safe area, but, later that night, her family was attacked, and she remembers seeing her husband with his chest open and her daughter holding her own intestines. Annaludchumy looks down with a blank expression on her face. Her hair is tied back as she reminisces on one of the worst moments of

⁵⁴ Ibid.

her life. Her gold earrings, nose ring, and necklaces are seen against her magenta and white saree. The blank background of the wall forces the viewer to observe Annaludchumy. The next image is of Kunarathiram Soba, a widow who lost her husband during the war (Image 11).⁵⁵ The caption shares how Soba continues to wear a red bindhi, which symbolizes her married status in order to ward off rapists or attackers. The woman seems to be inside her home as the interior is very dark and the only source of light is the back window. Soba is not wearing a bindhi in this photo, which is interesting as it does not align with the caption. Her floral dress is displayed as she has her hands in front of her body. One hand seems to be injured and her skin looks raw. This could be a potential injury from the war.

Image 10 highlights Annaludchumy as she has to continue moving forward in her life after her great loss. She looks down as she recalls her lost loved ones. Her red saree and black and gray hair are juxtaposed against the white exterior wall of the building. The blank background of the wall forces the viewer to look at Annaludchumy. The photographer could have done this on purpose to make sure that the viewer sees Annaludchumy's experience of pain and suffering due to the war. Image 11 shows Soba in her house. Soba is seen in a nightgown, which women in South Asia wear often only inside their homes. This is a more intimate image as the photographer captures Soba in a private setting. Her house is dark except for the window in the back. The clear light source illuminates Soba as she has her hands clasped in front of her. She looks down as if she is remembering the violent events that took her husband's life. Her expression looks like she is cautious of the camera and frightened as she keeps her distance from the photographer. These two images portray women in different ways. Both women lost loved ones, yet Annaludchumy seems to be more put together than Soba. Soba seems to be scared of

⁵⁵ Ibid.

the outside world as she is seen in her home. It would make sense for both these women to be terrified of going out after witnessing violent actions. Annaludchumy appears to be someone who has been trying to move on with her life as she enters the outside world. These two women could be depicting grief in different ways as well. Soba could be consumed with grief, which causes her to only stay home in a private setting. Annaludchumy could be experiencing grief but could want to be in the outside world to distract herself from her pain. Of course, these opinions of the two women are pure speculation, but the photographer brings up interesting points about grief and moving on after losing loved ones.

The images from *Aljazeera* highlight the human aspect of the war. Individuals are depicted as the harm of the war becomes clear. Images of children playing in the ruins of the destroyed buildings make a lasting impression on the viewer. Images of people with physical and mental injuries demonstrate the deep ways the war affects Sri Lankans. *Aljazeera* could have focused more on the victims of the war, because of their relationship and bias towards Sri Lanka. Because of the Middle East's support of the Sri Lankan government during the war, the Middle East and *Aljazeera* did not seem to publish any images that were too violent or explicit. All of the images that *Aljazeera* published were ones that dealt with the aftermath of the war and were not taken during the war. *Aljazeera* could have wanted to humanize the people of Sri Lanka in order to gain more public support for the Sri Lankan people. *Aljazeera's* images were ones that highlighted the war, but in a muted and toned-down manner.

The Guardian

The Guardian includes three images that were published in 2009 that showcases the displacement and disruption of the war. An image published in February 2009 shows a group of

Tamil civilians boarding a bus to take them to a camp for internally displaced people (Image 12).⁵⁶ The group of Tamil people line the bus with their belongings in tow. Members of the Sri Lankan army ushered the civilians onto the bus. A young child is seen standing in line as well, which displays how the war impacted all generations. The next image from an article published in May 2009 shows two Sri Lankan soldiers posing near their military tank (Image 13).⁵⁷ One soldier is seen standing on the tank while the other soldier holds the camera and takes the photograph. The scenery of trees and the sky are seen in the picture. The soldier holding the camera stares right at the viewer which humanizes the soldier. Another image published in an article in November 2009 shows Tamil civilians looking over barbed wire into internment camps in the country (Image 14).⁵⁸ Men, women, and children are seen in the photo as they look over the barbed wire. The expressions of the people are full of curiosity and fear.

Image 12 provides a clear picture of the type of security checks and harassment that Tamil civilians had to endure during this time period. Even though only two Sri Lankan army members are pictured, it is very clear that they are in charge as they are forces of authority. The Tamil people are carrying various forms of luggage as it is clear that they were forced to move suddenly. During the war, numerous Tamil civilians were displaced from their homes due to violence. The colorful patterns of the Tamil peoples' clothing contrasts against the army print of the soldiers' uniform. The bright red Sri Lankan bus is a bus that many Sri Lankans see on a daily basis, and something that I have witnessed countless times. It is striking to see the city bus

⁵⁶ Randeep Ramesh and Randeep Ramesh South Asia correspondent, "Sri Lanka Civil War Refugees to Be Housed in 'Welfare Villages,'" *The Guardian*, February 12, 2009, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/feb/12/sri-lanka-refugees-welfare-camps>.

⁵⁷ Rachel Williams and Matthew Weaver, "Timeline: Sri Lanka Conflict," *The Guardian*, May 18, 2009, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/may/18/sri-lanka-conflict>.

⁵⁸ Gethin Chamberlain, "Sri Lanka Vows to Free 130,000 Tamil Refugees," *The Observer*, November 22, 2009, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/nov/22/sri-lanka-frees-tamil-refugees>.

in this fashion, as it is about to be packed with Tamil people who were displaced as they go in search for a safe location. A bus that ordinarily would aid people in transportation, is now used as a tool to help Tamil people rebuild their life all over again. Image 13 highlights two Sri Lankan army officers posing near a military tank. This image is different from past photographs as the photographer of the image is included in the frame. One soldier snaps the picture as he is able to include himself and his comrade in the frame. This image has a more casual and candid feel as this type of imagery is something that the majority of people have taken part in. Many people have taken selfies of themselves during various activities, but this image elicits a different reaction as these two men are most likely engaging with efforts of defeating the LTTE which was brutal. Image 14 was another stunning image as the caption of the image shared how Tamil civilians were looking at internment camps. This fact of war was one that I was not familiar with, as I never heard that internment camps were set up in Sri Lanka. Reading this caption and looking at the image was a sobering experience for me as it helped me realize that there is no logic in war. The Sri Lankan government was trying to end the war in any way possible. Internment camps were something that the United States used to house Japanese descendants. Tactics of war are not ones that make sense and highlight the ruthless elements of war.

An article published in 2018 highlights the aftermath of the war. The first image is of an elderly woman looking to the side (Image 15).⁵⁹ The woman's son went missing during the war. The woman stands and is wearing a floral saree and slippers. The stone walled background adds to the dynamism of the photograph. The woman's expression is full of sadness and worry as she reminisces about her son. The next image shows young boys sitting on the ground of the ruins of

⁵⁹ Tim Adams, "Sri Lanka, the Land of the Disappeared – a Photo Essay," *The Guardian*, October 13, 2018, sec. Art and design, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2018/oct/13/moises-saman-interview-sri-lanka-tamil-minority-aftermath-war>.

the outdoor theater that was destroyed during the war (Image 16).⁶⁰ The destroyed tower of the building is shown as a man leans against the structure. A young girl in a dress walks towards the photographer as another boy sits on a ledge. These people move throughout the abandoned space as they try to add life to the space.

Image 15 marks the beginning of bringing black and white images into this thesis. Black and white imagery focuses on the negative prints of images which provides a more dramatic photograph. The image of the woman who had lost her son is a powerful one as it is a full body shot. The hard stone wall behind her provides a stark background for a woman who faces sadness and challenges due to the loss of her son. The background mimics the emotions of the woman, as she stands stoically as she looks to one side. Her wrinkles, gray hair, and aged skin on her hands indicate her age while also highlighting the fragile nature of her body. Even though her body looks fragile due to aging, her strong facial expression demonstrates her strength and resilience. Image 16 is another black and white image of young boys sitting outside a destroyed building. The boys sit calmly in the ruins as they may not have fully understood the destruction and violence that overtook this location. The building is left in shambles as only one wall remains standing. A man sits against the wall with his arm outstretched to his young daughter. One boy looks up at the sky as he could be remembering what stood in this location previously. He could be dreaming about his future, which forces the viewer to reckon with the fact that the war affected all generations of people.

The next series of images focuses on individuals and memorials of the war. The next image is of a sculpture of a hand (Image 17).⁶¹ The hand symbolizes a memorial of Tamil civilians who were massacred by Sri Lankan army members. The white hand is shown with dark

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

ink running down the hand. The ink is symbolic of blood and memorializes the blood that was shed during this conflict. Another image of an empty bed is pictured (Image 18).⁶² The bed is shown with the blankets strewn about on the mattress. The mosquito net is tied above the bed. The plain walls add to the starkness of the image. This bed belonged to a Tamil family that evacuated their home during the war. The next image shows a Tamilian woman entering her home after the army confiscated the property at the end of the war in 2009 (Image 19).⁶³ The woman's back is to the viewer as the bed frame and barbed wire cover the floor. Other household items are scattered on the floor as it is clear that this house was ransacked. The last image is of Vivekamanthyan Yeyalinkeswary (Image 20).⁶⁴ This woman's daughter went missing during an attack by the Sri Lankan army during the war. The woman stares right at the camera as a variety of calendars are seen behind her. The calendars have images of a baby and different Hindu gods. The paint on the walls seems to be peeling as it is clear the woman is in an older home. By highlighting specific victims of the war, this showcases how the war continues to impact people negatively.

The next set of images are also black and white prints. Image 17 highlights an artist sculpture of a hand. The hand represents the bloodshed in the country as the bright white hand is covered in dark blood. Image 18 is one of an empty bed and is a shocking image of a private space. The mosquito net is tied up and the blankets on the bed are askew. This bed was used as the individual or individuals had to leave quickly without tidying up. This image creates a great sense of haste and rush as this family had to quickly leave their home because of the war. The shadows of the mosquito net over the wall create a sense of looming darkness and sadness as the

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

country erupts in war. Image 19 shows a Tamilian home that was raided during the war. The woman in the back is facing the wall as her face is not visible. This image clearly shows the destruction and disregard to civilian privacy or life that was occurring. By including the woman in the back, this creates a more unsettling feeling to the viewer as this could have been her home. The bed frame and barbed wire is piled up in the room as everything else was taken out. The feeling of emptiness and loss of identity is visible in this image. Image 20 is of a woman who lost her daughter during the war. Yeyalinkeswary stares right at the camera forcing the viewer to look at her. The Hindu gods in the background serve as a reminder that religion was one of the only things people could cling to during this time of chaos.

The Guardian images focused on physical destruction of the war. Ransacked, empty homes and buildings were featured. The image of the group of Tamilians looking over barbed wire was a poignant image as it displays the fear of these people in Sri Lanka. As *The Guardian* is an English news source, it is important to remember the historic relationship of Sri Lanka and England. The relationship with England and Sri Lanka goes back to the days of colonization. Sri Lanka had a long journey to independence as they had to convince and win over British officials to side with their independence movement. Britain did not want to let go of their colonized territories which is why the fight for independence was extremely long. The images of destruction could be a way of Britain subconsciously displaying how Sri Lanka seemingly could have been in a better state if they were under British rule. The British believed that they gave Sri Lanka order and stability, and for individuals who are strong supporters of colonization, these images of destroyed homes and broken people support their stance. The destruction of the country could have been a focus of England's as it highlights how Sri Lanka is on a different playing field than England in terms of international relations.

The New York Times published a video in April 2009 which highlights the Tamil experience during the war.⁶⁵ The video starts out with Tamil civilians moving with their belongings in tow. It was clear that these people were being forced to move. Women have luggage on their heads as they hold their children's hands as they continue to walk to their destination. These civilians wade through water as they make their way closer to the filmographer. Young kids cling to their mothers as they move through the water together. The videographer follows the crowd as they walk on land and are being organized by military personnel. Boats of Tamil civilians are shown as the boats are packed with people. The next video clip highlights Tamils being transported through carts. The next few clips were difficult to watch as they displayed injured civilians. People are seen in bandages as they are packed together on the ground. The expressions of the people are full of pain as they wraith around. Young and old citizens are seen injured and physically harmed as people bleed and cry. Individuals are depicted with missing limbs and various other injuries. These images are challenging to look at as they do not censor the images.

An article published in 2019 showcases images taken during the end of the war. The first image highlights a scene after an LTTE suicide bombing went off at a mosque in 2009 (Image 21).⁶⁶ Dead bodies are covered with green tarps as motorcycles fall to the road. This section was cordoned off as policemen surrounded the scene. Civilians are seen on the sidewalk looking at the policemen. A Buddhist monk is seen in the background of the image with his deep red robe.

⁶⁵ Vijai Singh, "Video: The Next Phase of Sri Lanka's Civil War," *The New York Times*, April 23, 2009, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/video/world/asia/1194839720712/the-next-phase-of-sri-lanka-s-civil-war.html>.

⁶⁶ Mujib Mashal, "For Sri Lanka, a Long History of Violence," *The New York Times*, April 21, 2019, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/21/world/asia/sri-lanka-history-civil-war.html>.

This image highlights a slice of everyday life. The monk looks at the dead bodies as cars and people move around him. This scene highlights the common technique of the LTTE which was suicide bombing. Many of the bombings occurred in the capital city of Colombo, which shocked civilians as the violence was not concentrated in one area of the country. The article then includes an image from 2019 that shows Buddhist lay people lighting incense (Image 22).⁶⁷ Another image taken in 2007 shows army members searching a group of Tamils (Image 23).⁶⁸ Three soldiers are seen in the image as they go through the belongings of the Tamil civilians. One soldier points his gun as he stares at the Tamil people. Unfortunately, this scene was common during the war as Tamils were strategically stopped and searched by soldiers. These events were full of tension and anxiety as Tamil people could be harassed or harmed for any reason. Tamil men wear sarongs which is a common article of clothing that lower income individuals in Sri Lanka tend to wear. The socioeconomic status of this group of Tamils is clear based on their clothing.

Image 21 brings forth the violence and sense of life lost as dead bodies covered by bright green tarps litter the street. Fallen motorcycles are seen among the bodies as this brutal suicide bombing must have involved motorcycles. A series of small green flags are hung above the street as the police barricade the section off. If one looks closely, shoes and other personal belongings of the people who were killed can be seen among the green tarps. The camera is focused too far out to see facial expressions of the passersby, but it is clear that everyone is looking at the violence that has just occurred. The Buddhist monk in the back provides a strong feeling of mortality as the monk calmly looks onto the scene. On the right side of the image, there are men dressed in white wearing taqiyahs, which is a cap that Muslim men typically wear. The inclusion

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

of so many religions and people make it clear that the violence had a deep impact on every Sri Lankan. Image 22 is an image which includes religion, specifically Buddhism. A group of women are seen offering incense to be burned for religious purposes. The women hold bags of flowers, which is another common Buddhist offering. The women wear white clothing, which is common for Buddhist lay people to wear. Based on the facial features, the women seem to be older as one is seen with her hands in anjali, or the praying position. The scene looks serious as people may be praying for safety for their loved ones and country. It is a very retrospective scene as the women seem lost in thought. Like mentioned earlier, religion was one of the main things civilians could cling onto during times of turmoil so it makes sense why these women are engaging in religious acts. The smoke from the incense creates a very dramatic light as the sun breaks through the smoke. The smoke provides a feeling of the afterlife and mortality as life during a war can end very abruptly. Image 23 taken in 2007 is an image that depicts the security stops that Tamil civilians endured. A group of Tamil people are being stopped at security checkpoints that the Sri Lankan government set up for all citizens. The Tamil people in this image are being stopped and searched one by one. These situations could become hostile as Tamil civilians were targeted in many instances. Three Sri Lankan army officers are present. Two of the officers are searching the belongings of the Tamil people, while the other officer is seen at an angle with most of his back facing the camera as he has his gun pointing in a downward angle. The group of Tamil people seem to be nervous as they wait in line, as the power dynamic between civilians and military officers are made clear.

The next image was taken in 2019 and shows a Muslim man passing his home that was destroyed during the Easter bombings and the subsequent riots (Image 24).⁶⁹ The home is in

⁶⁹ Ibid.

shambles as a new wave of tension was born in Sri Lanka, this time involving Muslims and Sinhalese people. The last image in this article shows the Sri Lankan President at a luxurious gala (Image 25).⁷⁰ This image provides a stark contrast between the destruction in the country and the country's elite class. The juxtaposition of the deceased bodies along with the image of Tamils being searched makes a powerful statement of how it was extremely dangerous for Tamils living in Sri Lanka.

Image 24 was taken in 2019 and is an image that parallels the types of destruction that occurred during the Civil War. A Muslim man passes his home that was destroyed during the Easter bombings in 2019. His home is completely demolished as he stands with his young child. The young boy and man wear taqiyahs which indicate their religion. Another young boy with red glasses is seen walking through the rubble as he goes further into his old home. A young girl wearing a hijab has her back turned to the camera as she makes her way out of the home. An older woman, presumably the man's wife, is wearing a green hijab as she looks onto the destroyed home. Two Sri Lankan army officers are seen in the back of the photograph as they watch the family look at their old home. Image 25 taken in 2018 provides a stark contrast to the previous image as it showcases Sri Lanka's elite class. President Mahinda Rajapaksa who was president from 2005-2015 is depicted in the center of the image. Rajapaksa was the political leader who was in power when the Civil War ended. In the image, figures gather around a banquet table as they are deep in conversation. Men in suits and women in lavish saris are seen. I could have eliminated this image but wanted to include the entirety of *The New York Times's* body of work in relation to the Civil War. While this image is not one that highlights destruction

⁷⁰ Ibid.

or violence, it provides a clear picture of who the country's leaders were during Sri Lanka's tumultuous war.

The New York Times focused on images of injured or deceased individuals which was jolting to look through. The images *The New York Times* shared were ones that shocked the international audience. Seeing people with missing limbs as they are bleeding are images that are seared into the memory of many people. The choice of focusing on deceased bodies forces the viewer to remember how deadly and violent this conflict was. The video that *The New York Times* published showcased the treacherous journey Tamils had to face in order to find safety in Sri Lanka. *The New York Times* shared images taken from a variety of years, which include well after the war. It is important to keep in mind that some of these images were taken long after the war, yet still provide contemporary context to life in Sri Lanka. The agenda of this American source could have been to share images that shocked the world into paying attention to what was going on in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka and the United States do not have a strong geo-political history or relationship, so these images could be ones that introduce Sri Lanka to the general American public.

Next Steps

Sri Lanka's International Centre for Ethnic Studies published a manuscript detailing the process of truth and reconciliation in the nation. The center provides next steps for Sri Lanka to follow in order to rehabilitate the nation. The center believed that there needs to be "a commitment to spend as much time outside of Colombo as possible," and should "listen to victims and have dialogue so that victims buy into the process."⁷¹ The process of healing will

⁷¹ International Centre for Ethnic Studies, *The Relationship between Truth-Seeking and Prosecution: Report of a Dialogue* (Horizon Printing, 2016). 38.

take years to fulfill which ICES acknowledges. ICES believes that truth seeking should be the first step of Sri Lanka. Once truth seeking has been accomplished the country can then start looking towards justice and reparation models.⁷² The road to rebuilding the nation will be long and arduous but will be vital for Sri Lanka to move forward as a united country. Photography plays an important role in the truth-seeking journey as it can provide a deeper understanding of the conflict.

ICES created a roadmap of truth and reconciliation for Sri Lanka to go through during this period of rebuilding. In 2015, Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister, Mangala Samaraweera, announced the Sri Lankan government's plan for accountability and justice regarding the Civil War. The commitments include, "the creation of four transitional justice mechanisms: a Commission for Truth, Justice, Reconciliation, and Non-recurrence; an Office of Missing Persons (OMP); a Judicial Mechanism with a Special Counsel; and an Office for Reparations."⁷³ In January 2016, the Sri Lankan government created a Consultation Task Force to guide the process of transitional justice. This committee was led by members of civil society.⁷⁴ ICES states, "through this meeting ICES sought to create a robust discussion that would elicit specific recommendations with the potential to inform and shape the truth-seeking and prosecution structures and processes to be initiated by the Sri Lankan Government."⁷⁵ ICES drew on other truth and reconciliation initiatives around the world in order to create a unique program for Sri Lanka. Judge Møse who worked on truth and reconciliation programs in Rwanda stated that victims and witnesses believe that, "justice was realized when the court affirmed the truth of

⁷² Ibid. 40.

⁷³ Ibid. 2.

⁷⁴ Ibid. 3.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 4

their stories” and the result of the prosecutions did not hold as much weight.⁷⁶ ICES made the distinction that truth and reconciliation (TRC) projects focus on attributing responsibility to groups and organizations rather than individuals.⁷⁷ ICES shares, “Sri Lanka is considering a transitional justice process that would see a truth commission operating at the same time as criminal prosecutions...The experts agreed that, whatever form the truth commission takes, its core functions will be supporting victims in various ways (depending on their needs), finding facts, and producing recommendations that can be turned into policy”⁷⁸ Supporting victims and listening to their statements should be the first priority when having TRC campaigns. This is something that Sri Lanka seems dedicated to.

Because there have been various TRC programs around the world, ICES has been able to pull information from worldwide TRC initiatives to figure out what would be most optimal for Sri Lanka. Some people were skeptical in terms of Sri Lankan commissions as traditionally these organizations have not followed through with their word. Eduardo González, a sociologist and former director of the Truth and Memory Programme at the International Centre for Transitional Justice, suggested using social media to keep parties accountable when he states,

social media and live streams—may have created an environment in which commissions are more open, and thus accountable, to the public. He also suggested that civil society can play a role in complementing the new commission’s work and ensuring its success. He noted that, in Brazil, civil society was skeptical of the official truth commission and responded by establishing several of its own—on both the national and regional levels—some of which covered specific themes, such as students and peasants, that were not

⁷⁶ Ibid. 5.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 6.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 8, 13.

emphasized by the official commission. This dual system kept the government's commission on its toes and in dialogue with civil society.⁷⁹

Utilizing new contemporary technologies can help TRC efforts in terms of public pressure and engagement. ICES shared the importance of incentives for witnesses and victims to share their story as well. This is vital to the truth-seeking process as all effected people should be able to share their experience with the committee. This initiative of truth-seeking must be backed by local Sri Lankans. ICES expresses, "the experts agreed that effective transitional justice needs to be locally owned. Sri Lankans need to decide policy, establish institutions, and set objectives...To be effective and meaningful, the institutions will need to be owned by Sri Lanka's people."⁸⁰ Sri Lankans need to have a sense of ownership in the results and process of TRC work. While this work is challenging and difficult to go through as it requires individuals to recall traumatic memories, this process can be meaningful as it can bring about national healing and a sense of moving forward as a country and people.

Conclusion

Photographs can provide an inside look into the horrors of a conflict. When analyzing images, it is essential to remember the biases different publications have towards the conflict at hand. It is impossible to eliminate bias and prejudice as that is part of the human story. Every news source has their own agenda when publishing images for the global audience to see. Even with the issues of bias, images can help a country understand the damage of a conflict and can help jumpstart the healing process. Images serve as a reminder of the traumatic events of the war but can serve as a point of inspiration for Sri Lanka to move forward and rebuild the country

⁷⁹ Ibid. 18-19.

⁸⁰ Ibid. 25.

together. The images discussed in this paper highlight the worst actions of humankind as thousands of people were injured and killed, but this is not the end of the human story. Love, peace, hatred, and war are issues that are universal to every human. By being able to take a hard look at the worst moments of history, one can move forward and take the first step in restoring, rebuilding, and recommitting to peace and unity.

This paper would have been more robust if I had been able to access images taken from Sri Lankan photographers. It would have been fascinating to compare how domestic sources portrayed the war versus international sources. Looking forward in terms of this project, I will continue to seek out war related images and would be interested in focusing on domestic Sri Lankan sources. Analyzing these images helped me reckon with the violence that occurred in a place that I love very dearly. Being a Sri Lankan diasporic individual and the child of immigrants, it is very common for me to romanticize Sri Lanka. Researching and investigating images for this thesis has made me realize that no place is perfect. Each location on earth has a dark history and that is because of human conflict. Many of these images were ones that my family members, who were in Sri Lanka during the time of the war, said that they never saw with their own eyes, but rather they saw these images through the media. Through this project, I was reminded by the power of media and photojournalism.

Reconciliation and moving forward as a country is not a straightforward path. This path will be a very difficult one for Sri Lanka to navigate as it requires individuals to become vulnerable and recognize traumatic events. Through this project, I have been able to dive deep into my family's memories of the war through creating a podcast. Being able to engage with my family in an intergenerational sense, as I interviewed my grandfather, parents, aunt, uncle, and younger cousin, I was able to understand how the war is remembered through generations. My

experience with the war is shaped by Western media, as I have never lived in Sri Lanka. While the war does not impact my relationship with Sri Lanka, it has made me come to terms with how gray the world is instead of black and white. Humans are incredibly complicated people, who are driven by greed, power, and revenge. It is the light inside of us and our true sense of unity and humanity that are the real stories that are worth remembering. The Civil War in Sri Lanka is one chapter out of the country's remarkable journey throughout history. The war does not define the morals of Sri Lanka, but rather provides an opportunity for rebuilding and truth-seeking, as the country goes down the road of rehabilitation.

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Photographs

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