

Press News Narratives: Covering the Final Phase of the War in Sri Lanka

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The impact of the shock waves of thought sent by mass media through society, on the consciousness, mind, feelings, and behavior of individuals has been argued. The ethnic conflict has been given first priority in the national agenda of Sri Lanka for the last few decades. The role of the news media in the ethnic conflict is something that has not been identified. This study investigates whether the newspapers that targeted the Sinhala population which is the ethnic majority in Sri Lanka did perform professional news functions in covering the final phase of the war in Sri Lanka and what factors affected the situation. For this purpose, news professionalism theory, narratology theory, and structuralism theory were employed. In a society where conflicts occur based on ethnic diversity, this study found that newspapers that target the ethnic majority which possesses the monopoly, engage in covering war using the construction of narrative function instead of professional news reporting. The paper argues that the influence exercised upon the mentality of readers by narratives constructed by the news genre of newspapers in a society facing an armed conflict based on ethnic differences obstructs the ability to look at the ethnic conflict critically.

Keywords: Sri Lanka, ethnic conflict, newspapers, news professionalism, narratives

Introduction

The ethnic conflict has been given first priority in the national agenda of Sri Lanka for the last few decades. The division in the island state of Sri Lanka between the Sinhala majority and Tamil minority has already taken a heavy toll. The role of the news media in the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict is something that has not been identified. Some media theorists and practitioners have argued that an answer to this can be found through the analysis of newspaper content on the ethnic conflict (Demarest, 2021; Ishaku, 2021; Adisa et al., 2016; Ratnam, 2014; Gannaseelan, 2011). This study investigates how the news genre of the newspapers which targeted the readers of the Sinhalese ethnic majority behaved in covering the conflicts during the final months of the war.

The content analysis of the behavior of mass media on the ethnic conflicts through structural and narratives has been an academic concern for a very long time (Orand, 2022; Amna et al., 2021; Berhe, 2021; Demarest, 2021; Shwetangbhai et al., 2021; Hu et al., 2021; Omandi, 2016). In these studies, it has not been much attention on whether the newspaper in their news coverage utilized professional principles for news reporting or else, they employed the construction of narratives

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which is used in creative works. Thus, the study focusses on how the ideology of the dominant ethnic group among the ethnic groups involved in the war affects the professionalism of newspaper news.

There are studies on the role of mass media in the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. Nevertheless, relatively less attention had been devoted to investigating whether the newspapers abided by the professional news principles in covering the war news during the last critical months of the war. In a society where ethnic conflicts are prevalent based on ethnic diversity, news media possesses the feasibility to enhance the tension animosity, and suspicion among the stakeholders to the conflict or to strengthen ethnic cohesion, integration, and mutual understanding. Whether the media's feasibility to influence society is used for the good of humanity or not is determined by whether or not the professionalism of news is maintained. The professionalism of news depends on the editorial independence of the newsroom. Editorial independence relies on the ownership agenda of the newspaper, market demands, and the dominant ideology prevalent in society. In a context of ethnic and war conflict, the dominant ideology of society overriding professionalism seems to influence the newsroom to construct narratives for hegemonic purposes instead of practicing professionalism in reporting. The study focuses primarily on two questions: "how the Sinhala language newspapers covered the last months of the war against the terrorism in Sri Lanka?" and "Do newspapers concern the journalism ethics, news professionalism, objective reporting when covering war."

Literature Review

The consciousness of the mass, the physiological characteristics and the situation would be changed due to the impact of the media. All in all, the current mass media has become a strong tool that plays in shaping the thinking, actions, and decisions of the public (Weerasinghe, 2016). Meanwhile, David (2004) suggests that mass media depictions of fear, patriotism, consumption, and victimization contributed to the emergence of a "national identity" and collective action that was fostered by elite "decision makers' propaganda". Focusing on the situation in Sri Lanka, Desapriya (2003) argues that when a society is ethically divided, that division and ethnic bias could be perceived in the news media content. The editorial policy is ethnic-centric and ownership runs a monopoly in the society for ideology with ethnic dominance. Hattotuwa (2004) suggests that when politicians emphasize ethnic fear, dread, and stress that the response to such a situation is a requirement the news media falls in line with such requirement. Then the news media becomes a voice of that ideology. Added Media Monitor (2006) proposed that eighty-seven percent (87%) of Sri Lankan journalists believe that the Sri Lankan media is failing to provide accurate, balanced and fair information. Further Desapriya (2007) noted that Sri Lankan mainstream mass media is market-driven, subject to political control, covert censorship, and ethnic biases.

The historical role of the media in Sri Lanka was to disseminate the ideological messages of ethnic racism to its audience daily. Political and religious leaders, citizens, and the media seek during crises to create narratives, or stories that explain and assign meaning to events or issues. Language is integral to the construction of social realities (Ryan, 2004; Lind and Salo, 2002). When analyzing the way of reporting the massacre at Bidunuwawa¹, in Sri Lanka it is seen that the reporters have created the hero and the villain as their own wish (Jayaratne, 2001). Lévi-Strauss argues that within a culture “analogical thought” leads to some oppositions (such as *edible/inedible*) being perceived as metaphorically resembling the “similar differences” of other oppositions (such as *native/foreign*) (Lévi-Strauss, 1967). There are considerable analytical uses of such oppositions in relation to mass media texts (Fiske, 1987). Eco (1966) analyzed the James Bond novels in terms of a series of oppositions: *Bond/villain*, *West/Soviet Union*, *anglo-saxon/other countries*, *ideals/cupidity*, *chance/planning*, *excess/moderation*, *perversion/innocence*, *loyalty/disloyalty*. In constructive and creative fields (novels, film, etc.) binary polarities are made used to construct wider narratives within the popular genre of fiction construction. Yet does print media communication differ from this? The information media, too, deploys these figurative fictions and rapidly creates simplistic binaries in order to construct a hegemonic position for particular people and particular groups by focusing on certain incidents (Jayaratne, 2001). This, in turn, requires a better understanding of the role that press news narratives in general play in public life.

Narratives can be approached as causal and controlling factors in social life. Such a position is strongly implied in the political and administrative culture works of literature where narratives take on determinative roles by shaping the realities, values, and premises that form attitudes, decisions, and behaviors (Callahan et al., 2006, p. 11). Today, there is growing literature documenting the efforts to establish narratives that defined the nation’s enemies and the threats they posed. Some of these studies focus on the mass media helping set the public mood for war (Doherty, 1999). The concept of narratives has a long history of its own within sociology, anthropology, and socio-psychology. As Callahan et al. (2006) observe Narratives have taken on considerable importance in the social sciences in recent years. It has been used for discourse analysis (Gee, 1999; Schiffrin et al., 2001). Political scientists have addressed narratives through the study of political culture and rhetoric (in the form of symbols, ideology, and myths) and public policymaking (Callahan et al., 2006, p. 8). Robertson (1980) notes mythical narratives were part of the political reality and should be treated as such. Roelofs (1976) emphasizes a distinction between national ideology and national myth, noting that while ideology provides the country with a model of how things operationally are done, myth provided the cohesion and legitimacy for those government operations. Flood (1996) posited the concept of “mythopoeic narrative” to stress the role that stories and storytelling play in all political cultures

¹The massacre took place on 25th October 2000 at a camp in Bindunuwawa. The detainees at the Bindunuwawa detention camp included suspected Tamil terrorists who had left the LTTE and surrendered to the government. On the day of the incidents, there were 41 inmates of whom 27 were massacred.

in support of ideological positions. The common thread of these and related political science perspectives is the view of narratives as the tools and reflection of political power (as cited in Callahan et al., 2006, p. 9). Ryan (2004) argues that the creation of the war narrative clearly was an exercise of power. Levi-Strauss notes that the concept of language is activated within the structure and assemblage of a narrative, and depends on the impact of the binary opposition. Many scholars have been involved in this aspect of structural and narrative analysis (Berhe, 2021, Boyd and Blackburn, 2020; Venkateswaran, 2020; Barthes, 1988; Hendricks, 1973; Propp, 1970; Lévi-Strauss, 1967).

Ethnic Conflict and War against Terror in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka has been progressing as a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural country for a long time. The failure to address the identities and special needs of the minorities affected directly by the ethnic conflict. The ethnic conflict originated because the minority (Tamils) challenged the majority (Sinhalese) administrative, cultural and military rule.

The Tamil Eelam campaign to establish a homeland for Tamils in the North and East of Sri Lanka started at Wadukkodei summit in 1976. This was the crucial turning point of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. The conflict and the peace talk existed for about two decades between the government and the Liberation Tamil Tigers for Eelam (LTTE). Decades of war in Sri Lanka resulted in tension between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities (MiCT, 2016). The Sri Lankan Government which represents the ideology of the majority Sinhalese the final war to defeat the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) which was engaged in a war against government forces on behalf of the liberation of the Tamil ethnic minority community, during the early part of 2009. With the killing of the LTTE leader in May 2009, the war ended. United Nations claimed that during the final war, around 40,000 civilians were killed.

The Newspapers in the Context of Ethnic Conflict

Sinhala medium newspapers in Sri Lanka originated as a part of the campaign of the Sinhala national movement and the Buddhist enlighten movement. Sinhala newspapers and magazines became a strong weapon in the propaganda campaign during the British colonial period to awaken Sinhala nationalism in Sri Lanka. Some media have been criticized by journalists and politicians alike for sensationalist coverage, unprofessional use of sources, unreliable research, and lack of accuracy (Secretariat for Media Reform, 2016, p. 30). Further Rao and Weerasinghe (2012) write that reporter was allowed to go to the war front along with paramilitary units. These news reports contained visuals, images, and phrases that depict the bravery and heroism of the government forces.

Weerasinghe (2019) suggests that at critical moments on questions regarding ethnicity, it was observed that mass media used the same tactics to popularize the myths. That is to promote society's preference towards authoritarianism. Ayub (2018) added, if a foreigner who can read both Sinhala and Tamil go through the

newspapers published in Sri Lanka in those two languages, he might conclude that he was reading newspapers published in two countries. There is such a vast and strange gap between the priorities of Sinhala and Tamil newspapers. In addition, MiCT discourse analysis report findings strongly suggest that differences between nationalist and government-supporting Sinhalese media are more far-reaching than differences between Tamil and Sinhalese media (2016).

Jayaratne (2001) who studied the massacre at Bindunuwewa in Sri Lanka, suggests the newspapers' trend construct genre surpassing the factual truth within the context of ethnic conflict and it has further been neglecting objective reporting and journalism ethics. He further argues that a distance between Sinhala and Tamil has been created through reporting. In the past, it had been useful for people to live without unnecessary desperation by creating myths and genres in order to overcome defeats directed by the environment. The people understand the world through binary –oppositions. The reading of the world through binary- opposition such as; good and bad, man and woman, sea and land, and hero and villain man does not understand the world in its real nature. Jayaratne's (2001) Bidunuwawa case study suggests that the newspapers in Sri Lanka have created a genre equal to western cowboy films which have a hero and a villain. Bidunuwawa newspapers' genre proposed to annihilate the villains or components.

Sri Lankan newspapers are divided linguistically into Sinhala, Tamil and English. Capital Colombo's Sinhalese newspapers dominate the Sri Lankan newspaper industry. Tamil newspapers are mostly published in the Northern Province where Tamils are abundant. During the final phase of the war four Sinhala dailies, seven Sinhala weeklies, four Tamil dailies, Seven Tamil weeklies, three English dailies, and three English weeklies were published. It is common to see reading newspapers in urban areas, in offices, and the public places. During the final phase of the war, it was noticed that there was a remarkable development of circulation of newspapers which were in a position of Sinhala nationalism. The public trended towards the electronic media to access the instant and sensational news of the war and access newspapers for descriptive and analytical facts.

Methodology

For this study, mix methods qualitative approach is employed. In the studies pertaining to social sciences and behavioral sciences mixed methods are utilized extensively. Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) noted that reflexivity and revision are involved in the qualitative research process. The qualitative approach is employed to understand those involved and the content to which they liaise and to explore the relevant process and untapped phenomenon. Thus, the qualitative mixed methodology was applied to systematically analyze how newspapers reported war-related incidents. Further, qualitative content analysis of news of newspapers was integrated with semi-structured interviews with news editors, reporters, and media critics. News reported by selected newspapers during this period was selected under the keyword "war news". Many scholars have been involved in this aspect of structural and narrative analysis (Berhe, 2021, Boyd and

Blackburn, 2020; Venkateswaran, 2020; Barthes, 1988; Hendricks, 1973; Propp, 1970; Lévi-Strauss, 1967). Thus, in this study news content was analyzed through narrative and structural methods.

This research focuses on the front-page news and news photographs of Sri Lanka's three largest newspapers in the last months of the war against terror in Sri Lanka. The study does not focus on editorials, letters to editors, columns, features, or other commentaries. The front page of each issue was searched for news about the war against terrorism. The criteria were (1) objective reporting (2) the news build-up narratives support or neutrality toward military operations (3) understanding the narrative imagery built up by the Sri Lankan print media's news genre.

The contents of three Sinhala newspapers were analyzed. Thus, "Dinamina" was owned by the government, neutral "Lankadeepa" was owned by the private sector and "Divaina" was published by the private sector with the sense of Sinhala Buddhist ideology during the final phase of the war from 18.04.2009 to 18. 05. 2009 and data taken from the interviews with 24 media critics, newspaper editors, and reporters are analyzed in this context. In the field of journalism, this methodology has been used by Jayaratne (2001) to study Bindunuwawa media narratives.

In this study, semi-structured interviews have been used as non-literacy sources. Non-literacy is the society, people who interview have obtained, and research issues have been discussed. The relevant methodology adopted and research conducted regarding the knowledge, opinion, observation, comments, and experience on covering the war against terror in Sri Lanka. For this purpose, the researcher has conducted semi-structured interviews with media critics, newspaper editors, and reporters. Based on an interview schedule the researcher was to break down each interviewee's questions and guidelines. The analysis which follows is based on interviews with 24 media critics, editors, and reporters. All the interviewees interviewed were based in the capital and worked for either state-run or privately owned Sinhala national newspapers, universities, and the cultural industry. A majority of reporters and editors have covered the war. The interview data were collected over a period of three months. Although questions were guided during the interview, it was flexible and adopted specific questions to the flow of the interview. The interviews were deep conversations because the researcher uses special techniques which was instead of asking standard questions, the researcher was trying to explore experiences and understanding of his focus topic in indirect ways. At the same time noted the researcher's impressions and observations during the interview. These notes were guided for later stages to transcribing the interviews as well as for the overall analysis.

Findings and Discussion

The findings of the study analyze the factors of the narratives being constructed surpassing the factual truth and going away from objective reporting by Sri

Lankan Sinhala newspapers and also analyses how a distance is built between Sinhalese and Tamils through reporting.

The same incident has appeared in the newspapers from different angles. In general military spokesman has become the source of news and no clear source could be seen in most reports (NR and WT, personal communication, 2011). Media genre has been created by the newspapers and the headlines and content neglecting generally accepted journalism theories such as “objective reporting”, “balance”, “truthfulness”, “accuracy”, “fairness”, “social well-being” and “impartiality” (RK and SK, personal communication, 2011). Jayaratne (2001) notes that genres are created in the field of the cultural creative industry such as novels and films. In constructive and creative fields (novels, film, etc.) binary polarities are made used to construct wider narratives within the popular genre of fiction construction. Yet does print media communication differ from this? The information media, too, deploys these figurative fictions and rapidly creates simplistic binaries in order to construct a hegemonic position for particular people and particular groups by focusing on certain incidents.

From the news in the Sinhalese newspapers during the final phase of the war, the researcher observes a building up of a certain narrative that is not based on factual evidence. In the final month of the war the way of the narrative was constructed in the news of newspapers by using a binary-opposition narrative style as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. *Press Narratives: Binary-Opposition*

Hero	Villain
President Mahinda	LTTE leader Prabhakaran
Defense Secretary/ General Sarath/ Major general Shavindra	LTTE Leaders
Gamunu/ Gajaba Regiments	Tigers/Ferocious terrorists
Hostages	Tamil people faithful to tigers
Innocent civilians	Tiger committed suicides
Warrior	Gaspings tigers
Patriots	Traitors
Rajapaksha Government	Opposition Leader Ranil, NGO's, Peace activists
Human	Inhuman

The majority of news the details submitted subsequently were not based on facts. Also, what was done, as usual, amounted to the construction of the newspapers' own heroes and villains. If one of the roles of the media is to enable the people to participate in the political processes by making relevant information available, then the role played by the mass media is more difficult to understand. Clearly, the presentation of incidents and the actors behind those incidents diverge from reality (Jayaratne, 2001; SW and DL, personal communication, 2011).

In this narrative, the hero-villain concept is created according to the style of binary opposition and it was suggested by the newspapers that since the tiger terrorists were not a human being and subsequently, they should be destroyed (SK and SW, personal communication, 2011). In general, it was seen that all three

newspapers which did the content analysis have been maintaining their reporting in a way of constructing genre related to the war. Thus, the newspapers have taken sides with the government in the stance of implementing repudiating, detesting, and defeating the LTTE. In all occasions when both sides are mentioned, the separation could be seen as calling “others’ side” as villains and “our side” as heroes. It can also be seen that the image of the government, ministers, and government military leaders is built within the underline meaning of the genres indicating Rajapaksha government was belong to “our side”. The “other side” of the government, the opposition and opposition leader has been included in the villains’ side in order to build the government image within the war process and to justify military operations. Jayaratne (2001) suggests that the narrative demands the villain be destroyed by the hero. According to Claude Levi-Strauss, the way these conflicts are resolved in narratives cannot be replicated in the real world. The role of the myths is to symbolically resolve conflicts, which may not be actually resolvable. Yet the above binaries suggest an “annihilation of the other”.

When publishing the statistics of deaths, contradictory statistics have been presented by the three newspapers (RK and MR, personal communication, 2011). It can be seen abundantly where clear news sources were not mentioned. However, the numbers of LTTE deaths have been mentioned in the comprised analysis of three newspapers commonly yet nothing was mentioned about the number of deaths of the government soldiers. Genres have been created in order to appease the Sinhalese readers who have been in hopes of a military win. One-sided opinions and conclusions have been presented leaving nothing for the readers to think (DP and AJ, personal communication, 2011). Idiomatic phrases and clauses have been used to make it easy to construct genres in the use of language. Adjectives and words which get hints for the expected conclusion can be seen abundantly. For instance, “Lankadeepa” newspaper reported an incident removing a dyke, by government forces, which was built by LTTE as the “devastation of the biggest dyke”. In order to show the brutality of the ferocity of LTTE special words such as, “black tigers” and “brutal terrorists” have been used. The nature of binary opposition can also be seen in the words which were used to report the war (Table 2).

Table 2. *Press Narratives: Binary-Opposition*

Hero	Villain
Caught	Destroyed
Scarified the life	Killed
Minor casualties	Major casualties
Confirmed the power	Escape
Went forward	Hidden
Human operation	Suicider
War front	Being caged
Wipe out of terrorists	Battle pause
Operation to catch Prabakaran	Gasping tigers
Sinhala nation	Tamil suspects
Annihilate	In a vain attempt
Innocent/supporters	Brutal punishment given

Motherland	Separatists
Sri Lankan proud son	Traitor/ raged
March forward fearlessly	Retreating
Patriot	South Sinhala tigers
Recue civilians' victory	Tiger Child soldiers
Victory	Sad ending

These adjectives and phrases to show the destruction of the villains have been used to describe with a pre-conclusion presuming that it would be demanded by the readers of Sinhalese newspapers. Instead of describing the facts of the war between LTTE and government forces, attractive phrases have been used; “severe fight”, “heavy casualties”, and “huge attacks” (AJ, personal communication, 2011). It is a feature of constructing genres when one is not in a position to define something accurately. Here contradictions are used symbolically to solve puzzles that have doubt and uncertainty. The hero created by the news would never die. It is shown how the villain is gradually defeated and finally destroyed. Editorials have been used in order to justify the things taking place at present. For this purpose, myths have been used. Publishing the front-page news editorial by “Divaina” newspaper on the last day of the war of “King Elara and King Dutugamunu” which is considered a past war between Sinhalese and Tamils indicated that president Rajapaksha won the war in the same way how King Dutugamunu had. As Barthe observes:

If stated simply, myth is the language of a nation. Contemporary myth is a mode of communication. It has a communicative system with a message. A myth is neither a thing, nor a concept, nor or an idea. It is a type of semiotics. This type of language is a message. Therefore, it is not merely a verbalization. It can be written. It can occur through pictures, film or any other medium. All these assists in conveying the dialogue of the mythical language (Barthes 1988, p. 109).

Publishing photographs referenced to news is also seen as a way of binary opposition. Hero and the villain can easily be identified through the content of the photographs (Table 3).

Table 3. Photograph Narratives: Binary-Opposition

Hero of the photograph	Villain of photograph
Government soldiers well dress with uniform and arms	Fallen LTTE members discolored and naked
Smiling and Proud faces	Wounded, died and desperate or violent faces of LTTE members
Sri Lankan national flag and military flags	Devastated buildings and ruins
Assist the Tamil civilians	Aimed the arms at Tamil civilians
Facilities in government run refugee camps	Hard life in LTTE camps
Modern arms	Captured arms

Sinhalese newspapers acted in a way of not harm the government's military actions. The reason for them to think so is that it might harm their business and professional existence if they go against government militarization (NR, personal

communication, 2011). In addition, a media critic believed that the Sinhalese newspapers functioned partially for the government but disadvantages to the LTTE (JP, personal communication, 2011). A journalist stated that Sri Lankan newspapers acted dominantly towards the ethnic crisis. He further argued that newspapers functioned themselves on behalf of the feelings of the ethnic groups that they represent (CW, personal communication, 2011). Refusing this argument, the Chief Editor (Lankadeepa) said that the task of the newspapers was to fulfill the expectation of the people as they were anxiously waiting for the victory of the war (SR, personal communication, 2011). The Chief Editor (Dinamina) took a similar approach noting that the war reporting was very successful (MA, personal communication, 2011). A study of the war in Kosovo, for example, suggested that 'Serbian media have nationalized, mobilized and emotionalized the public sphere by the use of techniques of so-called "patriotic journalism" and by making historical myths a topical subject' (Hrvatín and Trampuz, 2000, p. 77). A media critic expressed that there is nothing as public opinion and he headed that if an idea is delivered to them by the media it would form public opinion. He further suggests that the government constructed a partial opinion about the war by controlling the media (WJ, personal communication, 2011). As Rao and Weerasinghe (2011) suggested Sri Lankan journalists come forward willing to help the government to combat terrorism. They fulfilled the demands of the government disregarding professionalism. Journalists said that they were under pressure for that.

A media critic described the narrative style that the Sinhalese newspapers reported the war:

The newspapers constructed the stories. In spite of the ability of a crime to be reported concomitantly, a story being written was a way of narrating genres. There was war news as well in the genres of the war in society. The reason was a competition between the newspapers. The genres are things that cannot be ignored by humans. The consent of the people to write stories is used here. The desire was more to construct genre within a war. Indecent actions of government forces were not revealed because of this usage (N.R, personal communication, 2011).

An editor of a newspaper expressed, the protest of the readers might be aimed unless the genres were constructed in the narrative style of creating images of the government forces (S.R, personal communication, 2011). However, a sub-editor refused the claim of constructing genres in Sinhalese newspapers. She further argued that a writing style for the readers to understand easily was used (C.P, personal communication, 2011).

Conclusions

This paper methodologically analyses and describes whether the news genre published in the Sinhala language newspapers which is the language of the majority ethnic community in Sri Lanka, used professional news coverage to report the final military operation by government forces to defeat the LTTE, which was fighting for the liberation of the Tamil minority. This study was done under the

hypothesis that the news reports on a war based on ethnic diversity could enhance the conflict between relevant stakeholders or would reconciliation those involved in the conflict. Thus, it is argued that the media can influence the public to understand the reality of war as well as mislead the public through a false reality. The news reports with the “war news” indicator published in three mainstream newspapers targeting the majority Sinhala population during the final phase of the war were subjected to qualitative content analysis to ascertain whether the newspapers employed professional news reporting principles such as accuracy, impartiality, objectivity, and balance in their reporting. Further, it was also measured whether, instead of the said principles some factors which are not used in professional news reporting such as conclusions, recommendations, ideologies, and narratives were not included in the news reporting. The findings included in the analysis were contextualized through the semi-structured interviews held with editors, reporters, and media critics.

The limitation of this study is that the newspaper sample selected for this study is only newspapers targeted at the majority ethnic group. The study did not focus on newspapers targeting the Tamil minority. Further, the study has not given the consideration to the issue of to what degree newspaper news reports influence its readers in making their own decisions.

The findings of the study indicate that within the context of war conflicts, news reporting construct narratives instead of factual reporting on professional ethics and code of conduct. This seems to be influenced by the relationship between the dominant ideology of society and newspaper ownership. The use of narrative construction strategies in the news ignores the main role of news to report the factual truth. This situation can adversely affect ethnic cohesion and integration in a war-torn society. Fulton et al. (2005) argued that the construction of narratives in news reporting instead of factual reporting of truth will have an unfavorable influence over the social role of the news. There have been arguments for a long time that news reporting should not construct narratives instead of facts (BBC, 2019; Probuska, 2018; Albright, 2017; Mary, 2010; Koch, 1990). The credibility of news media is established through reporting of the factual truths. In news reporting, information should not be structured as a narrative. The main news principles, namely accuracy, balance, impartiality, and objectivity should be applied in the information with factual truth. Conclusions, ideologies, recommendations, or constructed narratives should not be presented to the readers through the news. Constructing news as narratives involves pre-conclusions, interpretations, opinions, and fabricated stories in news reports that make recommendations to the reader for decision-making. Thus, the reader loses the opportunity to make critical decisions empowered by all the factual truths. This leads to an increasing rivalry between stakeholders in a conflict environment and imposes the monopoly of the major ethnic community on the minor ethnic communities. In such a situation, constructed narratives in the newspaper’s news could act as a weapon to enhance hate, take suspicions, and make anger. The construction of news as narratives denies the sovereignty of the readers. The reader who has lost his sovereignty loses the opportunity to make the right decision in a democratic society.

In the sphere of ethnic conflict, the role of media was challenging, complicated, and crucial. The war between the two sides in Sri Lanka was understood by the people through the media. The news narratives published by the newspapers were not accepted by the public, but also it is believed since the characteristics and the attraction towards them can be noticed in newspapers. This acceptance and belief are used strategically to form a public opinion by the media. The war, while arousing the racial feelings of the people, demanded the newspaper consumer goods with genre and information suited to its own ideology from the newspaper. Journalists are asked to identify and highlight news that infotainment, gossip, and “shock and awe” events related to terror rather than to provide critical and analytical coverage (Booth and Dunne, 2003, p. 14). War news of a wide range has been transformed into the genre by newspapers because of the urge by the government military mechanism, being pulled out to the competition of their own business aims and being partial to the ethnic group in which they represented. The belief of the desire and myth of the public towards the narrative style of the war was confirmed by newspapers through the existence of the genre. This study has shown that the news narrative of Sinhalese newspapers gave a monopoly to Sinhala racism ideology as their own within the society creating the hero and villain in the war. It is argued that the readings and understandings of the war against LTTE by the public were not realistic and uncompleted.

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