**Constructing the image of soldiers by using newspaper media**

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**Abstract**

Sri Lanka is a country that has experienced gruesome chapters of an ethnic conflict for nearly three decades from 1983 to 2009. During the war time, military forces have played a key role by actively involving in the battlefield.  However, it was evident that during different phases of the war in Sri Lanka, the acceptance and the reputation for the armed forces, by the civil society, have subjected to a great extent of variation. Although protecting the country was their duty, criticisms were occurred against them from both national and international spheres because of the civilians’ deaths and the military actions. In this context, there was an active attempt for the legitimation of the battle, and media was widely used as a platform for this process. Although a considerable number of literature and researches have been conducted to study about the war in Sri Lanka, lack of studies and literature regarding the soldiers is recognizable. Hence this study tried to fill that study gap, by focusing on how media was used to construct the image of the soldiers in the Sri Lankan context, during the war period. Therefore, the objective of this study was to critically investigate the role of newspapers in terms of constructing the identity of soldiers, during the wartime with special reference to the final phase of the war. This was based on a discourse analysis of the weekend Sinhala and English newspapers, using both the government and the private newspapers. This study revealed that during different phases of the war, different identities have existed towards the soldiers and these identities have had both positive and negative impacts on their image with respect to their role on the battlefield. As part of this, it was evident that the media has uplifted soldiers' identity from less educated people to war heroes or ultimate protectors of the country. Furthermore, as another observed fact, the newspapers have widely highlighted and brought forward the humanitarian facet of these soldiers by using sentimental heart-catching pictures, words, and phrases during this war period. Therefore, it can be identified that the military media management project has successfully influenced the public opinion, as they were intended to ensure that their role as soldiers is socially justified. However, this study was conducted based on the newspapers of only two official languages, out of the three main languages. This may lead to missed perspectives from the Tamil newspapers which may have conveyed other opinions about the soldiers and their actions, during these periods. Moreover, this research may open up the space to conduct further research by future researchers as well, concentrating on the different perceptions of the military actions at different levels.

Key Words: war, soldiers, constructing image, war heroes, newspaper