

# Constructing the image of soldiers by using newspaper media during the final phase of war in Sri Lanka

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## Abstract

Sri Lanka has experienced an ethnic conflict for nearly three decades (1983-2009). As of any conflict, military forces have played a key role by actively involving in the battlefield during this war. However, it was evident that during different phases of the war in Sri Lanka, the acceptance and the reputation of the armed forces by the civil society have subjected to a great extent of variation. Although protecting the country was their duty, criticisms directed against them because of their military actions. In this context, there was an active attempt to legitimize 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 the war in Sri Lanka, the lack of studies and literature regarding the soldiers is recognizable. Hence this study tried to fill that study gap by focusing on how print media was used to construct the image of the soldiers in the final phase of the war in Sri Lanka. Therefore, the objective of this study was to critically investigate the role of newspapers in terms of constructing the identity of soldiers during the final phase, from 2006 to 2009. This was based on a discourse analysis of the weekend Sinhala and English newspapers. This study revealed that, different identities have existed towards the soldiers. Furthermore, as another observed fact, the newspapers have widely highlighted and brought forward the humanitarian facet of these soldiers. However, this study was conducted based on the newspapers of only two official languages. This may lead to miss the perspectives from the Tamil newspapers which may have conveyed other opinions about the soldiers and their actions, during these periods.

**Keywords:** war, soldiers, final phase, constructing the identity, newspaper

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Recalling the History

Sri Lanka is a country that has vast multi-ethnic composition and diversity. During the period of colonization in the country (from 1815 to 1948), the colonial rulers began to practice a system of governance that would enable the development of inter-ethnic disunity with the aim of facilitating their ruling system and mainly suppressing future protests against their rule from the subjugated state. As a result, it marked the beginning of the gradual breakdown of cooperation between the Sri Lankans who lived a life of harmonious cooperation until then.

As a result of this disunity and misunderstanding among the ethnicities, later led to the development of fear and suspicion among the ethnicities, and ultimately resulted in the ethnic crisis that began as a racist riot and later escalated into an armed conflict. According to the Reuter, ethnic conflict is a form of conflict in which the objectives of at least one party are defined in ethnic terms, and the conflict, its antecedents, and possible solutions are perceived along ethnic lines. The conflict is usually not about ethnic differences themselves but political, economic, social, cultural, or territorial matters (Reuter,2015). This definition shows that ethnic conflicts are occurred not only because of ethnic differences but for other structural differences and diversities that have both direct and indirect impacts on ethnic conflicts.

Considering the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, caste and the class gap in the society, political reforms such as the Citizenship Act (1949), The Language Act (1956), The policy of standardization (1971), the behaviour of some Sinhala and Tamil politicians, weak democratic practices and institutions, feelings of fear and suspicion that exist between ethnicities were few root causes which kindle the ethnic conflict in the country. Due to these reasons, the 'New Tamil Tigers' were formed in 1974 under the leadership of Velupillai Prabhakaran to face the pressure on themselves and their community and to find alternatives. However, they restructured as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 1976. Thereafter LTTE started to claim a Tamil Eelam (A separate state for them) (Balasooriya,2011).

Afterwards, the LTTE focus was directed to winning their demands using guerrilla warfare and weapons. As a result, the war officially began at Jaffna in July 1983, and then onwards this conflict has arisen as a physical conflict in the country, and continued as a four-phase war until mid-May 2009 in various

forms and at various times. Therefore, civil war in Sri Lanka can be considered as a result of releasing the long-standing pressure within the Tamil minority in an unfavourable, unacceptable way by a part of the Tamil representatives who formed L.T.T.E. and demanded a separate control of the country by the Tamil society. Four phases of this Sri Lankan warfare can be identified i.e., Phase I - 1983 -1989, Phase II - 1989 - 1994, Phase III - 1994 - 2001, and Phase IV - 2006 - 2009 (Balasooriya,2011).

As a result of the civil war thousands of civilians were turned into internally displaced and refugees not only because of the terror attacks in north of the country but also attacks were emerged all over the country. Therefore this civil war caused both direct and indirect impacts and was affecting the entire country. Under these circumstances, control of the terrorist crisis became a strong demand of civil society. Since the beginning of the 20th century, the need for lasting peace was the country's top priority as it had created a great deal of insecurity to the national security and the development of the country.

2006 marked the beginning of the formal involvement of the Sri Lankan government in the war by further organizing government forces for the war. After the number of ceasefires, L.T.T.E. was unable to keep those agreements. Therefore, these types of involvements were proven to be useless in establishing peace in the country, since every time L.T.T.E. signed a ceasefire, later they start the bombings and violations to those agreements, taking maximum advantages of such times of negotiation. Because of this, the government of Sri Lanka started the war on terror from 2004 to 2009, especially after the incidence of the closure of the Mavilaru sluice by the LTTE, which deprived thousands of civilians of their access to water which is a major human need for the survival. Therefore, the government initiated the humanitarian war to save those civilians. After this humanitarian battle, the government led military forces for a series of humanitarian operations to rescue innocent civilians who were in the L.T.T.E. capture, as a human shield.

However, the humanitarian struggle launched by the government forces drew the attention of all Sri Lankans as well as the international community to Sri Lanka. Because according to the survey done in the country as of December 2006, only 32% of the people believe that military action was needed to resolve the war, while the remaining 68% believed that the devolution of power was essential to the resolution of the ethnic conflict (Kumarathunga,2006). In this

context, the greatest challenge then faced by the Sri Lankan government was to obtain the legitimacy for the military action taken against terrorism. Therefore, on 07th December 2006, President Mahinda Rajapaksa explained the government's stance on going to war in the Parliament. "Until the assassination attempt on our Army Commander at the Army Headquarters on the 25th of April, 142 of our soldiers were killed without any provocation. This was done by the L.T.T.E. without any provocation. We as a government and as a world community tolerated all these. We made maximum sacrifices for peace. Because back then I told you not to worry, that I will meet Prabhakaran (the leader of the L.T.T.E.) face to face and solve this. It was the moment that the L.T.T.E. entered our army headquarters and tried to assassinate the Army Commander, that for the first time we decided that this task could not be accomplished without answering in a language that L.T.T.E. could understand. Meanwhile, when the Mavilaru reservoir was closed and thousands of acres of paddy fields were destroyed and people in the Eastern province were about to die without drinking water, we rescued those people through a limited military operation" (National Peace Council, 2010:623). Therefore, the Sri Lankan government had to take military action to resolve the issues that affected the entire country.

However, because the military interventions and critiques came from both national and international civil society, the government of Sri Lanka draws attention to legitimize the military actions which they have taken against terror. In order to legitimize this, they carried out a comprehensive military media management campaign by using various media platforms. Here, the concept of military media management, based on a combination of two of the main concepts that are currently in focus today, namely 'media' and 'military conflict'. This concept highlighted the importance of the role of the media in war zones in times of war and the media coverage of any conflict would add new definitions to the war, legitimize it, and so on (Maltby,2010:04). Here, as a part of this media campaign, they tried to uplift and promote the image of soldiers, due to the extremely negative attitude towards soldiers at the time, especially within the international community.

## 1.2. Soldier

Since this study was based on the study of how media constructed the soldier's identity in the different phases of civil war, first of all, it is useful to know who is a soldier. When considering the term, "a soldier", by

definition, a person who is engaged in military service and especially in the army can be identified as a soldier (Merriam Webster Dictionary). Being a soldier, he or she is bound to obey the official orders, which means all soldiers have a moral and legal obligation or duty to obey the lawful orders of the officers and leaders appointed over them. Other than this, they have a moral and legal obligation to work as a part of the team to accomplish all assigned tasks (Parker,2018). Therefore when considering this definition it is clear that soldiers are bearing the official power which was granted from the official legal sources in terms of protecting their nation.

Based on this when it comes to the Sri Lankan context, other than Army, Navy, and Air force, Police, Special Task Force, and Sri Lanka Civil Security Force hold the legitimate power to bear weapons and protect the country by fighting with enemies who are threatening to the nation. Considering the military history of the country, Sri Lankan Army was the oldest force which was established in 1949, while Sri Lanka Civil Security Force was the youngest (1986).

However, considering the reputation of these troops, between 1949 -1983, the army troops of the country had the facet of a ceremonial army. Because there were fewer violent clashes in the Sri Lankan society during that period, their powers and functions were limited. However, it can be observed that their powers and functions were somewhat complicated due to the riots of 1978-1980. Because of this, we can identify how they had gone beyond their symbolic role. Here in Sri Lanka, there is no compulsory military service like in Ecuador, El Salvador, and Finland (Weerasinghe,2009:15). There was solely a volunteer-based recruitment process in Sri Lanka. However, the militant group called L.T.T.E. who fought with the government forces since 1983, most of the time they have practiced conscription in their recruitment process, especially when recruiting children and women as L.T.T.E. soldiers. Also, the main difference of the L.T.T.E. was they do not have the government legitimacy as a legal militant group same as the government forces.

During wartime, military forces in Sri Lanka have played a key role in terms of protecting the country. It was evident that during different phases of the war, the acceptance and the reputation for the forces have subjected to a great extent of variation. With the criticism for the military actions which came from the national and international civil society, especially after 2006, the government focus to legitimize their actions

toward the war. To do so they have launched a media campaign and as a part of this campaign, constructing the image of soldiers can be identified. Therefore this context it is interesting to understand how newspaper media functions to construct the soldier's identity during all these periods.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

Although a considerable number of literature and researches have been conducted to study the war in Sri Lanka, the lack of studies and literature regarding the soldiers is recognizable. Hence, this study tried to fill the 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 with special reference to the final phase of the war. Therefore the objectives of this study can be identified under two scopes. Firstly, to critically investigate the role of newspapers in terms of constructing the identity of soldiers, during the IV phase, and Secondly, investigate the techniques that newspapers used in terms of constructing the soldiers' image.

This research was directed to address the key research problem, 'How did newspapers change the perceptions of the Sri Lankan society about the soldiers and built a new image around them during the final phase of the war?'. To investigate this broad question, discourse analysis was used as the research methodology. This study was based on the selected weekend newspapers in the period from May 2008 to December 2009. In this study, newspapers were selected according to the ownership and the medium. Based on that criteria, as state-owned newspapers, *Silumina* and *Sunday Observer* newspapers, and as the private-owned newspapers, *Lankadeepa* and *Sunday Times* newspapers were selected for this study. Also, this study was conducted based on only Sinhala and English medium.

### 2.1. Limitations of the Study

Since the study was conducted based on limited newspapers within a limited time frame which may lead to either over or under-representation of some of the information. Also, this study was conducted based on two official languages out of the three official languages in Sri Lanka. Therefore, there is an opportunity to miss the perception of the Tamil journalists towards the soldier's image during the war period. Thus, these areas may open up space for future researchers concerning these untouched aspects, providing further understanding of the use of newspaper media for the image construction of the soldiers.

## 3. FINDINGS

### 3.1. Created a New Social Image Towards Soldiers

The main finding of this study revealed that during the final phase of the war, newspapers have constructed a new image towards the soldiers, resulting in better recognition from the Sri Lankan society. This novel image was a positive image for the soldiers when compared with the identities they were represented before. When considering newspaper news, enlistment advertisements before 2008, different identities of the soldiers have existed in society and the field of media as well. For instance, under British colonial rule (before 1948), forces in Sri Lanka were exercised only as a ceremonial army.

However, when they published advertisements in the newspapers, especially in their enlistment notices they tried to create a kind of a manly image towards the soldiers by symbolizing them to a lion with bravery (Picture 01). And also they highlighted that state has the ability to make them a man with a new personality with the state sponsorship. When focusing the attention to picture 01 implies that during this period they tried to create a collective identity towards the soldiers by emphasizing 'Forward together'. And here they have presented most of the enlistment advertisement in a cartoonish manner.

**Picture 1:** Enlistment advertisement for the army during the colonial period



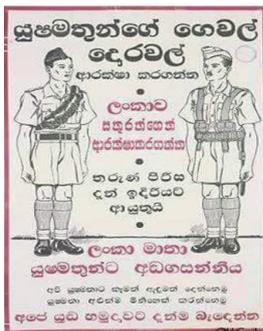
**Source:** Archival data

Prior to the civil war in Sri Lanka (before 1983), the media used various terms to call soldiers such as, 'Yushmatha' (Defendant), 'Soldaduwa' (Soldier), and 'Hamudabataya' (Army Soldier) (Picture 02). The meaning of these terms were merely soldiers. And through these newspaper advertisements, they tried to identify the army as, 'our army' and tried to convey this message to society by using newspapers as the medium. With this, the newspaper media tried to create a kind of a collective identity towards the

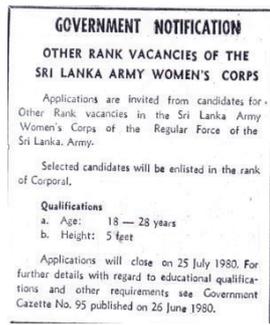
forces, giving the soldier's image/identity a sense of belongingness to the nation. The main reason for this concept during this era was the formulation of Sri Lankan forces, which formally occurred after the independence of Sri Lanka as a country.

Focusing on the newspaper reporting styles, they have widely used black and white fonts along with cartoonish pictures most of the time, with a very simple structure to convey the message to the society during this period. And newspapers in this era (Picture 03), were not paying special attention to highlight the soldiers from the common civilians in the country. However, in this era most of the time people used the term 'Armykaraya' to identify the soldier, and this term implies a very negative image towards soldiers since the term called 'karaya' is using to identifying a person with low social status and the recognition in the Sri Lankan society.

**Picture 2 and 3:** Enlistment advertisement for the army (Prior to the civil war)



Source: Dawasa, 1977



Source: Sunday Observer, 1980

During the first phase of the war (1983-1987), the media has used quite similar, simple terms to call soldiers such as, 'Yudahamuda Sebala', 'Hamuda Sebala', 'Hamuda Bataya' with the meaning of just an 'Army Soldier'. When reporting the news no special attention towards soldiers or their role on the battlefield. However, when analyzing the content of the newspapers during this period, a new identity articulation towards the soldiers can be identified. This articulation provided a kind of a positive and nationalist image towards soldiers by calling them the 'Buddhist Army', with the fact that most of the soldiers who voluntarily recruited represented the Sinhala, Buddhist community or the background. In this period also they have used simple fonts, cartoonish pictures, and lots of letters to report news related to the soldiers can be noticed.

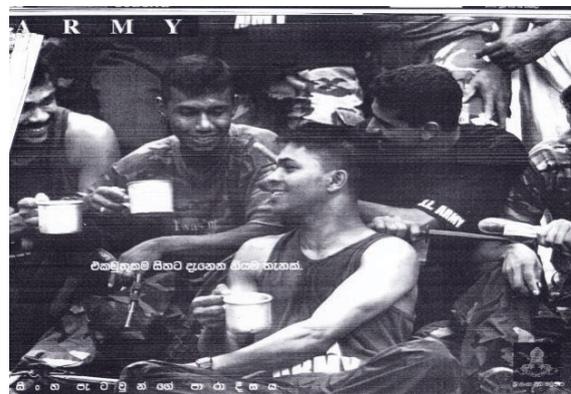
However, when it comes to the second phase of the civil war (1989-1994), media has articulated a kind of institutional and individual rank based identities

towards soldiers such as private, lance corporal and corporal etc. Other than using the common terms 'Yudahamuda Sebala', 'Hamuda Sebala', 'Hamuda Bataya' which means 'army soldier', the media started to use the novel terms 'uniform bearers', 'bravery soldier' to address them in some of the newspapers. Other than this, for the official notices, they have started to use their official logos instead of using cartoonish pictures. This can be identified as a kind of attempt to articulate a different identity to soldiers.

**Picture 4 and 5:** Enlistment advertisement for the army (1994 - 2001)



Source: Lankadeepa, 2000



Source: Lankadeepa, 2001

During the third phase of the civil war, a clear difference can be identified in the news reporting style. In this era, media have created a new social image construction towards the soldiers. Other than the previously used terms to identify the soldiers, the media has tried to build an institutional identity towards the soldiers. To do so newspapers have largely used soldiers institutional ranks such as private, lance corporal, corporal etc., when they reporting the war-related news and advertisements. Also in this period, media have created a kind of heroic, manly identity towards the soldiers. In this period media created a kind of Rambo type, American army type heroic identity towards the Sri Lankan armed forces (Picture

05). When looking at the contents of the advertisements in this era (Picture 04 and 05), it is clear that they have used more realistic images of the soldiers with strong, confident personalities thus giving a new definition to the manliness, while highlighting the heroic figures from the well-trained armed forces. This can be identified as the uniqueness of this era. However, from this period onwards a clear difference can be noticed in the enlistment advertisements.

Here the newspaper media have used various techniques to emphasize the life of soldiers', which were new to that period. In here they used some attractive phrases that easily captured youth's attention and their appreciation. Phrases such as 'Paradise of lions', 'Nothing is impossible' etc. were used to motivate the youths for their volunteer enrolments. Also, during this period media gave a considerable space to report the death and injuries on the battlefield in the social texts. Yet, in this era media has successfully highlighted and constructed the bravery of the soldiers by emphasizing their pictures with their great morals for the victory of the nation. Through these efforts, media created a kind of notion of war heroes during this era by creating a gap between a civil person and a soldier, when compared to the previous two phases of the Eelam war in Sri Lankan history.

When it comes to the final phase of the civil war (2006 - 2009), the media's contribution to constructing the soldier's image was increased drastically. In this period, newspapers used more colourful and realistic pictures with eye-catching phrases compared to the previous eras. When it comes to the enlistment

advertisements, here they largely used institutional identities as in the previous eras again can be identified. More creatively influential phrases such as, 'Make up your mind to head this' which implied the great honour to be a soldier, and also the phrases such as 'We are for us' which indicated that the soldiers stand for everyone in Sri Lanka. Because of the number of victorious battles, the media further uplifted the soldier's identity from a person who merely passed a grade 8 school qualification, to the extremely positive, better honoured and recognized identity, by calling the soldiers as 'the brave son of the mother Sri Lanka', bravery hero or 'gods on Sri Lanka who protect the country'. With this, media was able to socially uplift the soldiers' image positively by articulating them a new facet, while successfully organizing the public opinion of the society as well.

In the attempt of uplifting the soldiers' image, newspapers have followed certain important strategies. To do so the newspaper media has reserved considerable space to reporting war-related news during this period in terms of constructing the soldiers' image while legitimizing the military actions. When comparing with the newspapers before 2008, it is clear that the numbers of war-related news articles and soldiers related news articles have considerably increased after 2008, providing the public with an in-depth understanding of the achievements and the sacrifices on the battlefield.

Study data in table 01 shows that the news related to the soldiers can be categorized under several themes. According to the statistics, information related to the battles and missions done by forces was the highest

**Table 1:** News related to the soldiers (From May 2008 to December 2009)

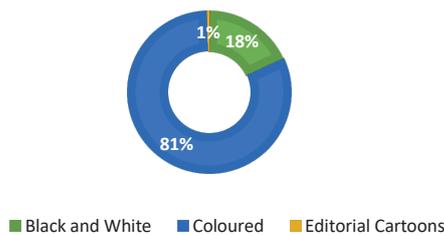
Area	Government Media	Private Media	Total
History of the Sri Lankan Defense Forces	56	138	194
Operations launched by forces	212	307	519
Recruitment notices related to the Security Forces	177	146	323
Creative works related to the soldiers (poems, arts, essays, etc.)	132	101	233
Pass out parades, colours awarding ceremonies, funerals	77	69	146
Welfare of soldiers	188	204	392
Religious programs and ceremonies for war heroes	158	121	279
<b>Total</b>	<b>1000</b>	<b>1086</b>	<b>2086</b>

Source: Research data

news field which was rapidly published during the study period. The 2nd highest is welfare programmes for soldiers and the 3rd highest is recruitment advertisements to the triformes. Therefore, considering these facts, we can assume that during this period, by uplifting the soldier's identity and by socially constructing the image of the soldiers, maybe the government tried to attract more of the skilful young crowd to the tri forces, due to the high demand of the military workforce during that time. Also by highlighting the welfare facilities such as donating houses, giving scholarships to the members from the military families, and other welfare facilities provided, kind of attraction and motivation to join the forces. Therefore, when considering these facts, it is clear that this type of social constructions could motivate the people to join the armed forces.

**Diagram 1:** Usage of pictures of the soldiers in the newspapers (May 2008 - December 2009)

**USAGE OF SOLDIERS PICTURES**



**Source:** Research data

Diagram 01 shows the usage of the pictures and editorial cartoons related to the forces during the study period. This implies that a considerable number of pictures were used in the newspapers to deliver the news related to the triformes during the study period.

Overall, it is clear that both government newspapers and private newspapers (Table 01) have done an equal job when constructing the image of the soldiers and in some aspects, the private newspapers were slightly ahead of the government media in their news allocations for the triformes.

**3.2. Bringing Up the Humanitarian Facet of The Soldiers**

Another vital factor worthy of consideration is the utilization of newspaper media to bring forward the humanitarian facet of the soldiers during the final phase of the war. This further assisted in the construction of this new image and identity around the soldiers. To do so newspaper journalists have used a wide range of sentimental eye-catching colourful

pictures of the soldiers during the wartime (Diagram 01), highlighting the fact that the service of the Sri Lankan armed forces go beyond the military mission and ensuring the wellbeing of the general public despite their differences (Picture 06 and 07).

**Picture 6 and 7:** Sentimental Pictures of the soldiers



**Source:** weekend newspapers

With this new approach, newspapers have merged the boundaries of soldiers and civilians to a significant level, trying to highlight the inner human being within these patriotic soldiers. Therefore, this factor can be considered as one of the highest influential factors in this image constructing process as it allowed the readers or the civil society who read these newspapers to understand, trust these soldiers as their ultimate saviours, who come for their help when people are in danger.

**3.3. Implementation of the 'Together for all' project**

Another strategic action that has taken to uplift soldiers' identity is, the 'Together for all' programme (Picture 08, 09 and 10). This project is a welfare project which was implemented by the Ministry of Defense that aimed to uplift the lives of the heroes in the triformes. According to the ministry, the mission of this project is to encourage all Sri Lankans to support our service personal who dedicated their lives to bringing peace to the country (TriAd,2017). Since this is a fundraising programme, newspaper media has dedicated a special space to publish the advertisements related to this project. This project further highlighted

the humanitarian face of the soldiers and encouraged the general public to pay their gratitude to those who sacrificed their lives to protect all of us at the Warfield. Through this project, they tried to transmit the message to the society that the ‘soldiers are also people, who live with us’.

**Picture 8, 9 and 10:** Together for all programme promotion posters



**Source:** TriAd,2017:189

Therefore, this campaign used very sensitive captures, by emphasizing soldiers as a son, as a brother, as a husband, as a father, as a friend, and as a protector, (Pictures 08,09 and 10) utilizing all forms of media, attracting huge publicity towards the role of the soldiers in the battlefield and outside the battle. Therefore, as a result of this, society also started to look at the soldiers from a different angle than ever before. And because of the publicity given by the media to this project, breaking down the boundaries between the soldiers and civil persons can be noticed this cause to uplift the soldier’s image in a humanitarian way.

### 3.4. Using Various Reporting Techniques

Another significant finding observed in the study was the newspapers used various influential techniques when they report war-related news on a daily basis. Other than using sentimental pictures, newspaper journalists have used different writing techniques at different scales, such as the usage of attractive headings, subheadings, and also paying special attention to the soldiers’ life stories etc. Through these write-ups they allowed the soldiers to share their memories about how they joined the military forces, memories of battle fires, difficulties etc.

“The weather was getting worse day by day. The LTTE hoped that the army would cease its operations as it could no longer withstand the situation. The courage of the soldiers engaged in the operation was insignificant ..... They did not give up the fight even when they were wearing a wet uniform for days in the rain.” - (Wijeweera,2009:94).

“It is because of this courageous man that our children are able to think about tomorrow. He considers every child of any race in this country as a child born of his own blood and allows all of us, big and small, to live freely. This man is our own man, the father of the whole country. We value a country and a state” - (TriAd,2017)

“Terrible Experiences of War Heroes on the Battlefield ” - (Hewagela,2009:16)

Another fact is that these journalists’ have used eye catchy phrases to create sympathy and kindness towards members who represented the triforms acknowledging the fact that these soldiers are on a battlefield on behalf of the entire Sri Lankan nation.

“The world’s largest hostage rescue operation is underway” - (Rajapaksha,2009:09)

“Leading Task Force on Humanitarian Operations” - (Mihindukula,2009:12)

“The spread of humanity on the battlefield” - (Bandara, 2009:04)

In this way, such headlines published during the war show the war heroism of the war heroes of the country. Therefore this helps to grow the attitudes and identities in society regarding war heroes continuously. Not only that when designing the page layout of the newspapers, but they have also reserved front pages, 3,5,7,9 pages, and small magazine type newspapers for war-related news reporting, in order to prioritize the war-related news during this period. Because these are the pages that have recognized easily captured the reader’s attention. Moreover, they have used different fonts, font sizes, and background colours (especially blue, red, and green colour) to capture the readers’ attention to that news and to the background stories of the great achievements of the soldiers.

### 3.5. Exercising the War News Reporting Technique

Moreover, journalists exercised the war news reporting methods as another technique to deliver accurate truthful news to their readers. This technique was started during the mid-2008 after the Wanni battle fire. In here journalists went to the front line on the battlefield along with the soldiers and did the live news reporting to their fan base. This also helped to uplift the image of the war heroes as well as merge the gap between the society and the forces because these reporters revealed the actual struggles these

soldiers faced on a daily basis, especially towards the end of the war. This also largely contributed to see the soldiers from a different angle.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

When considering these study findings, it shows that the media has the ability to construct public opinion of society. This can be identified by paying attention to the scholars' ideas related to this type of the influence. The media is directly involved in shaping the basic opinion as well as the specific views of the majority of the people (Weerasinghe, 2005:158). The fact that the media has the potential to play a major and direct role in shaping public opinion, and thus to understand the relationship between newspapers and public opinion, can be seen as a factor in organizing the public opinion (William cited in Perera, 2003:12). The service rendered by newspapers to society is extremely important. Because according to the Press Council, journalists can create true or false news, and thereby they have the potential to build public opinion, both positive and negative (Press Council, 2002:61). All these prove that the media's ability to create public opinion is possible and can be done as intended.

Therefore, based on the findings of the study it is clear fact, how media have worked to construct a new image and identity towards soldiers during the final phase of the civil war in Sri Lanka. "The army rescued civilians sooner than we thought and it should be appreciated... Despite the difficulties faced by the security forces without getting their new year leaves and they helped the displaced people during the new year. People who escaped the clutches of L.T.T.E. were in hunger pangs. Our troops provided the foods to them and helped them ." Considering these types of phrases, it is a clear fact that these types of phrase caused to develop a positive attitude towards the military troops and this helps to emphasize the humanitarian facet of the forces as well. Therefore as Gorvett pointed out it is well known that our conscious decisions are routinely influenced by unconscious thought-processes, emotions, and prejudices (Gorvett, 2015). Thereby it is clear that the media has influenced the readers by using their conscious habit of reading while unconsciously influencing the readers' mind by constructing a new kind of public opinion about war heroes, as they intended. This shows that how the government has successfully utilized their political psychology project alone with the military media management by using newspaper media as one of the mediums in terms of organizing public opinion of the society.

Not only that the success of this image-building

campaign of the soldiers can be identified with the feedback from society. For example, when the military is accused of committing war crimes, the people stand up together and came forward against those false charges. At the time, various articles, such as 'People are with war heroes no matter what anyone says' (Brahmanage, 2009), shows how people's attitudes regarding the soldiers were changed from time to time, from a tough person to protectors or gods of the country. This shows how the media successfully organized public opinion.

In addition when focusing on the success of this media campaign can be understood based on the various welfare project which emerged from the society such as 'Be together for all housing project', 'Artificial legs distribution for disabled war heroes', 'Scholarships for children of war heroes' as well as commercial programs such as 'Dialog together for all fund', 'Mobitel tribute fund for soldiers' are few examples. It is clear that the role played by the newspapers was significant and that all of this was due to the growing love, respect and devotion of the people for the war heroes of this country and their view of them as gods and heroes living on earth.

Therefore, the active role played by the newspaper media during the final phase of civil war especially after 2008, helped to create a positive public belief and image about the soldiers as "our guardian deities in Sri Lanka" during the studied timeframe. As McNair pointed out the press is indeed a major vehicle for building political identity (MaNair, 2011:91). Therefore, it is clear that the Sri Lankan government has successfully exercised their political communication project accordingly as they intended, during the final and the most critical war period. This in turn was very positive from the soldiers' aspect, as their true sacrifices were publicly recognized and much appreciated.

However, at first glance, this may seem like an easy task, but it should be noted that it is not an easy task. Because these media representatives also had to face a lot of difficulties during this period especially after they started the live war news reporting. For instance difficulties in securing information from the authorities, regular inspections by security personnel, phone call threats, physical assault, murders were few exerting pressure on journalists engaged in war news reporting (Free Media Movement, 2006:12).

#### 5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the image of the soldiers has changed

from time to time with the more influential reporting of the newspapers in Sri Lanka as the evidence of this study attested. Here, because of the media contribution including the newspapers, instead of the 'Sinhala Army' identity that was seen in the early stages of the Civil War, the collective identity of 'Our Army', 'Our Children' can be traced back to the formation of Sri Lankan war heroes. Furthermore, because of the active role played by the media, it helped to construct the soldier's image positively while creating a collective identity to them helped to merge the boundaries between the civil society and the tri forces. This provided the soldiers with a better recognition as human beings who have dedicated their precious lives in a patriotic manner and their actions on behalf of every citizen of Sri Lanka were publicly appreciated.

However, when compared to the contribution of the government newspapers for this process, the private newspapers studied in this research, had a slightly higher allocation for the construction of the soldier's image during this selected period. However, in the process of building a new face and identity for the Sri Lankan security forces during the period of war on terror, the Sri Lankan press, either government or non-government, had a decisive impact on the opinion creating, although may or may not had the potential to completely transform public opinion in that regard. Because at that time newspaper distribution process also subjected to the barriers and because in some areas people who are with the lack of the literacy all caused to this.

Moreover, in Sri Lanka, those who belong to the triforms, the police, Special Task Force and the Civil Defense Force are identified as war heroes. However, it is clear from the observation that in the general public, the term 'war hero' is understood to refer only to persons belonging to the triforms. This is due to the fact that the people of this country identify the war hero as a person who directly involved in the war. This led to a lack of recognition of the Sri Lanka Police, Special Task Force and the Civil Defense Force in the dialogue on war heroes. It was observed in the study that the contribution made by the newspapers for this purpose was not sufficient. Accordingly, although the Police and the Civil Defense Force have rendered service as valuable as the role played by the Tri-Forces in the war, it is clear that the newspapers have been given less consideration when it comes to the news related to the police. Due to this, it will be clear that this propaganda project has not succeeded in building such a new image of the police and the civilian forces,

even though the war heroes have been elevated to a higher position by the media.

But when it comes to the post-war scenario, significant dynamics can be identified due to the war-related criminal charges against some soldiers who were previously identified as war heroes. Other than this, in the post-war context, soldiers labour was used for the urban beautification projects in Sri Lanka, which was openly criticized. This caused a slight decrease in the identity of the soldiers as "War Heroes" and this impacted their image in a kind of a negative direction during the post-war period. Therefore, the image constructed by the newspaper and other media which was examined in this study can be further examined considering this post-war period.

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