CHAPTER IV
MEDIASCAPIC
CONFIGURATION OF THE
NATION: PERFORMING
IDENTITIES
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PERFORMING IDENTITIES

In the present era of globalisation, the media plays a major role in constructing different identities as well as nationalisms. In Modernity At Large Arjun Appadurai discusses the power of images and ideas: “the new power of the imagination in the fabrication of social lives is inescapably tied up with images, ideas, and opportunities that come from elsewhere, often moved by the vehicles of mass media” (54). In the light of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation media plays a vital role in governing nationalist sentiments. ‘New Media Cultures’ (a term used by Bignell) not only challenge the authenticity of the written texts but also questions agencies of “political activity”. Coordinated by the ‘private and public interests’ they entail new tropes of identification which create, comprehend and sustain discursive practices. Visual texts by sideling the assumptions of legitimacy mobilise the “distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspapers, magazines, television stations and film-production studios)” (Appadurai, “Modernity” 35). Modern nations and nationalisms are rearticulated through image and digitized spaces.

Appadurai devises mediascapes as, “image-centred narrative based accounts of strips of reality” that offer a “series of elements (such as characters, plots, and textual forms)” by which people (especially those in the margins – the transnationals) can precisely regain and configure “imagined lives” for them and others. The mediascapic flows are characterised by the practices of resistances that predominate the virtual platforms. They become the “protonarratives of possible lives, fantasies that could
become prolegomena to the desire for acquisition and movement” (Appadurai, “Modernity” 35) that orient the individual’s sensorium to integrate the simulated and real representations. The images perpetuated by mediascapes have to be understood as “complex sets of metaphors” (Lakoff and Johnson qtd. in Appadurai, “Modernity” 36) that conditions the lives of people and constitute narratives of ‘Us’ and the ‘Other’.

To apprehend the operation of mediascapes, films and documentaries on Sri Lankan civil war for separate nation have been examined. This chapter provides a succinct introduction on the ethnic war followed by analysis of films and documentaries. *Terrorist* (1998), *Forsaken Land* (2005) and *Dheepan* (2015) have been used to read the projection of imagining the nation in the Sri Lankan context. Along with this Callum Mcrae’s documentary, *Killing Fields of Sri Lanka* (2011) will be analysed vis-à-vis *Lies Agreed Upon*, a documentary released by the Ministry of Defence, Sri Lanka, in response to the former. In addition the research attempts on analysing the role of websites (like the Sinhala.net and the tamil.elam.net.) in imagining the Sri Lankan nation. The chapter further reads select photographs from *Sean Smith’s Frontline: Conflict in the 21st century*. By reading select photographs from Israel, Afghanistan and Iraq the researcher intends to read the interplay of media images and photographs in producing conceptions of nation, power and knowledge.

The consequences of globalisation have unequivocally inflected the sway of media. With the ushering of monolithic production and consumption of information, network societies have become centres of new “political arena” (Castells, “Rise Network Society”) which incite political consciousness and rework historical perspectives. While claiming to permeate differences, the pervasive ‘network societies’ also to a certain
extent constructs binaries. This procedure also reveals the cultural contexts that actively propagate identities and those that passively negotiate them. As Jeff Lewis reports the nature of ‘mediaspheres’ are often synchronous with the “democratic public sphere” which embodies “the convergence of public and private interests” (19). They become “the site where media organizations, governments, texts and audiences ‘converge’ in a cultural politics which may be described as ‘broadcast democracy’ (Lewis 19).

To understand the discourses loaded with ideologies of liberty, power and separatism disseminated by mediascapes (through documentaries and websites) with regard to the Sri Lankan crisis, it is mandatory to look at the history and politics that has shaped a distinctive ideology regarding nation, nationhood and nationalism.

In the case of Sri Lanka, common lineage and collectivity were invoked to garner a collective imagination. Problem erupted when efforts were made to homogenise culture and identity. In the epigraph of his book *Postcolonial Insecurities*, Sankaran Krishnan quotes from Kumaratunga’s talk on the fiftieth anniversary of Sri Lanka’s independence from Britain.

> We have failed in the essential task of nation-building. . . . In 1948, when our forefathers first set out along the path to freedom, they envisioned a truly free and united Sri Lanka. . . . We have failed to realize the dreams of our freedom fighters to build a strong and united nation. The silent majority watched in horror, whilst a great nation with an ancient civilization, steeped in one of the finest cultural and architectural heritages of the world, nurtured in the traditions of the noble Buddhist philosophy of
peace, tolerance and love veered off into a terrifying era of ethnic, political and social violence. (qtd. in Sankaran Krishnan)

The tear drop island has always housed multi-ethnic population inclusive of Dutch, Burgher, Sinhalese and Tamils. While the northern and eastern parts of the island had been occupied by the Tamils, the southern and western Sri Lanka encompassed the Sinhalese populace. Though Sri Lanka gained independence from the British only in 1948, tensions regarding natives vs. foreigners had begun among the Sinhalese and the Tamils as early as 1930’s. The battle between Aryans and Dravidians was inbuilt in the societal structure (Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam 114). Both the Sinhalese and the Tamils used history, ethnicity and myths as factors to seize power. They demanded the right to administration on the claims of their ‘historical past’. In the wake of modernity Sinhala and the Tamils started vying for exercising their monopoly over the state. This idea consequently resulted in the emergence of a secessionist ethnonational movement and the belief that only by taking over the government they can assert their ethnic and religious pride (Bandarage 39).

Despite declaring pacts it was difficult to foster a distinct Sri Lankan nationalism for the island was distinctively divided into Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism and the Tamil Hindu nationalism (Spencer). Ironically the Tamil population wanted to be assimilated into the Sri Lankan ethos but at the same time they were demanding a separate nation (Bandarage 41). Nationalism deliberated and politicised ethnic separations. Rather than perceiving people as a collective entity it was keen on engendering the national culture of a ‘specific’ group (Gregory Jusdanis 19).
Though attempts were made by print capitalism to raise Sri Lankan consciousness, it was the turn of events in 1956 that made it possible (Spencer 43). The celebration of the “2500th anniversary of Buddha’s attainment of nirvana” followed by the “Sinhala Only” Act passed by the government established the Buddhist interests in Sinhala nationalism (Clarance 36). The totalitarian attitude of making Sinhala the official language intensified the hostility between the two sects. Riots broke in the Tamil parts of Sri Lanka, and the Tamils refused to incorporate the character “Siri” in their workplaces or vehicle. Bandaranaike who tried to ameliorate the situation by granting Tamil to be used in administrative sectors of the North eastern parts of the country was assassinated by a young Buddhist monk. Conditions worsened after his death. The Tamils resolved to institute a new state “Eelam” and talks for separate homeland ensued. As violence escalated in many parts of the island arriving at a political solution was totally out of the question (Bandarage 2009, Clarance 2007).

Consequently while there was a steady mobilization among the Sinhalese to form a unitary Sinhala Buddhist nationalism, the Tamils lost faith in their political leaders. The Tamils determined that peaceful means would not yield any result and resorted to violent practices. In the early 70s the constitution was rewritten and the name Ceylon was changed into Sri Lanka, thereby laying special emphasis on the Buddhist values. 1970s marked a shift in the perceptions of both the groups. Universities became hub of student activism and the agitators formed the group of ‘Tamil New Tigers’ (1970). In 1975 the TNT turned into the LTTE and become notorious for assassinating Sinhala politicians (Clarance). Demand for a separate homeland became an armed struggle and Vellupillai Prabakaran became the head of their militant wing. The Sinhala defeat in 1977 elections
worsened the situation. Incidents like discharge of tear gas at the international conference on Tamil research (1974) and burning of Jaffna library (1981) aggravated the hostilities between the two groups. The crisis reached its height in July 1983 which came to be called as Eelam war I. In the words of Bandarage,

Their (Tamils) uncompromising stance, along with staunch Sinhala opposition to secession, the failures of local politicians, the contradictions of regional politics, and the forces of economic and cultural globalization, would ultimately combine to provoke a civil war (76)

The civil war intensified during June 1990 – November 1994. Rampant killings and massacres of the period led people label it as the Eelam War II. The Tamils won the battle with the killing of Ranasinghe Premadasa in May 1993. Though a temporary ceasefire was agreed between the Sinhala and Tamil groups it was called off and riots resumed in 1995.

The dawn of the twenty first century witnessed efforts to maintain peace. Due to the efforts of the wide spread transnational Tamil diasporic networks the ethnic conflict had become a ‘spectre’ of international significance. But by then most of the Tamil separatists - LTTE leaders were ready to give up arms and majority of the Tamil population was declared as ‘Internally Displaced Persons’. The Sri Lankan forces finally started having an upper hand over the separatist guerrillas. Along with peace treaties violence mounted and the split among the tigers worsened over time. The Sri Lankan army killed Prabakararan on 18 May, 2009 and on 19th May Rajapaksa declared that Sri Lanka has been liberated from terrorism. With the death of the LTTE leader claims for separate state ceased (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/in_depth/8055015.stm).
Visualising the Nation

It is a well-established fact that the medium has gained more significance than the message (Mc Luhan 1964). In an era besieged by information societies, media plays a decisive role in influencing the human psyche. It propagates a hegemonic ideology to ‘interpellate’ the masses. As Baudrillard claimed we seem to have “entered an age of simulation” (qtd. in Laughey 148). The message encoded by the desired group is fortunately or unfortunately decoded in various ways. As Stuart Hall critiques in the essay ‘Decoding and Encoding’ (1980), media texts transgress “univocal meanings”, and decoding a text is influenced by various factors such as one’s locale, ideology (ies) and desire (Barthes). Therefore in this chapter it becomes mandatory to study the “politics of signification” (Laughey 60) ingrained in the cultural myths propagated through films. By analysing the films we seek to realise how media and mediascapes have replaced the role of “ideological state apparatus”.

Kristeva rightly authenticates that, “The universe of the image invades us through film and television” and “the cinematic image” becomes “the central place of the imaginary” (qtd. in Goodnow’s preface ix). As Barthes contends, it is important to discuss “ideological structures and discourses” and how media texts become vulnerable to “diverse readings based on political and ideological contradictions” (qtd. in Stam 230). The analysis while focusing on the basic cinematic components i.e. the “filmic signifier” (Stam 189) will also take into account the narrative and plot structure.

Films dealing with Sri Lankan Tamil terrorists and the idea of a separate nation are discussed by analysing the film texts Terrorist (1998), an award winning Tamil film on the Sri Lankan crisis, Forsaken Land (2005) a Sinhala film and Dheepan (2015) a
French film. As Metz observes these films are nothing but, “a reworking of socially available discourses” (qtd. in Stam 188). The movies deal with Sri Lankan Tamil terrorists. While Forsaken Land (2005) and Dheepan (2015) made by outsiders perpetuate a discourse of the ‘other’ to the rest of the world- predominantly the west. Terrorist, a Tamil movie by Santosh Sivan tracks the journey of Malli, a nineteen year old Sri Lankan Tamil woman, who becomes a suicidal bomber. Malli is delegated by the LTTE chief to assassinate an Indian leader which she cherishes as an honour. The film draws striking similarities to the killing of Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi by the LTTE’s soldier, Thenmozhi Rajaratinam aka Dhanu. The film provides a cliffhanger ending where Malli decides not to detonate the bomb and it ends with an instrumental rendition of ‘Raghupathi Ragava Raja Ram – a subtle hint of giving up arms.

Though the movie’s plot overtly seems to be a simple one, where a cold hearted terrorist is reformed, it carries stereotypical images and is polysemic in nature. Malli for instance begins in vacuum without providing the background details and the necessity of war. The scene begins with the guerrilla war of the Sri Lankan Tamil tigers where women willingly vie with each other to shoot a ‘turncoat’ and become a suicide bomber. The dynamics of sacrifice built in the woman soldier’s disposition unfold when the women state, “If today our flesh merges with the soil tomorrow, this country can be ours” (“Terrorist”, 00:06:41) and explicitly plead, “Select me... I want to die a martyr” (00:06:44). Having lost her father a “revolutionary nationalist poet” (00:06:31) and her brother Ramu a martyr to the civil war Malli has trained for twelve years and has thirty successful operations to her credit, she proclaims: “My death should not be a routine one. I want to die in glory” (00:06:48). In the Eelam space she is considered as an
embodiment of ‘valiance’ and is ‘hero-worshipped’ by her peers. The Sri Lankan Tamil woman is projected as a stereotypical barbarian, who is unabashed, gluttonous and brutal. Interestingly there is an absence of Sri Lankan woman in the movie. This deliberate absence juxtaposes the Sri Lankan woman as domestic and fragile in contrast to the Tamil guerrilla fighter. Malli defies the ‘timid’ stereotypical image of the South Asian woman as she consummates in the battlefield. She also doesn’t carry guilt for her action. The rest of the movie moves to India (Tamil Nadu) where she has to kill the political leader. Malli’s stay in Tamil Nadu instead of preparing her to be a suicide bomber only brings out the feminine instincts dormant within her. The house where she stays (for a period of five days) with the elderly couple, itself is a simulated Sri Lanka, where nothing happens. Everything about the quaint house is discreet. The inmates comprise the landlord Vasudevan aka mad Vasu - who cooks, tends the house and attends his sick wife, the old woman who is sick and Malli who hardly speaks. The life within the house is bleak in comparison with the lush vegetation surrounding the house. For Malli (under the guise of the scholar conducting research project on agriculture) this ‘refugee’ space facilitates a chance to think about her lost lover and rethink her ideals and she begins to empathise with the senile woman. In India, while she is perforce inculcated by Thyagu (a covert LTTE handler) that her “sacrifice” and “valiant death will stir the hearts of people” (01:2:32-34) she is also subtly inducted by Vasudevan that, “a man has to be father a woman has to be mother to fulfill their lives” (01:09:17) and “motherhood is to be revered” (01:09:22).

The ideological nation projected by both the LTTE and the Sri Lankans in the movie is metonymic. The movie extensively uses culture, and culture in fact becomes a
site for meaning production (Thwaites, Davies and Mules 2). The movie projects Sri Lanka as a nation endowed with distinct and pure cultural heritage where the Tamil suicide bomber is a misfit. The Sri Lankan Tamil woman in the war field becomes a threat to the ‘peace loving’-masculine (which is again a contrast) Sri Lankan nation. The movie by sending Malli to India is a strict warning that the Sri Lankan land can no more be their (Tamils) rightful one. Indoctrinated by the ideology that the, “mission is for the future of our people” (00:31:55), Malli anxiously embarks on the journey to India without any hesitation unlike most of the natives who refuse to flee. In contrast to Lotus, the Tamil boy who laments about his past and reminiscences about his family, Malli doesn’t mourn her family or state of the nation. Lotus is in fact appalled to see Malli use an explosive. Malli becomes “an infalliable weapon- a thinking bomb” (00:12:46-50) in contrast to the Tamil male who wants to read books and is forcibly recruited by the LTTE (00:43:39). The land captured beautifully in Santosh Sivan’s lens becomes a stark reminder of the contrast between it fertility and the grim virility of the Sri Lankan Tamil women.

The film on the ground level denotates a failed attempt of a Sri Lankan Tamil woman suicide bomber for a separate homeland. But the connotative meaning/s signifies Tamil women as traitors of the Sri Lankan nation and also as the separatist Tamil nationalists. The first order and second order meanings signify a myth where motherhood embodies the Tamil woman and nation. The woman attains significance only when incorporated within the framework of nation and vice versa. In this connection we see that, on one level Malli, who discovers she is pregnant, aborts the mission to bomb the Indian leader despite being told that, “It is all in your hands. Tonight is the beginning of a
new era” (01:27:21) and rethinks her ideologies regarding violence. Treading deeper, at a point Malli – the expecting mother becomes a subdued loving woman; unlike the fierce guerrilla fighter (she was shown earlier). Therefore the ‘reformed’ Tamil woman can be incorporated into the Sri Lankan nation – for the Sri Lankan nation itself becomes a metaphor of the passive, virtuous woman. But the problem is that Malli might be heroic, but she isn’t as ‘virtuous’ as the Sri Lankan woman or the Tamil woman- therefore it leaves her in an ambivalent position where she- the Sri Lankan Tamil woman / nation, cannot identify her(it)self with the Sinhala/ the Tamil. The ‘morality’ of the woman become a threat to the culture and values system of a nation. Hence she has to flee somewhere only with an image of reproducing a desirable nation. The image of a pregnant woman is highly symbolic and indicates that she is capable of reproducing a nation, but only outside the geographical borders of Sri Lanka. Malli undergoes a transition from the heroic female warrior to a monstrous female who gradually subdues into a helpless mother figure. The political ideology for a stable and separate nationhood squanders in the face of motherhood. The metanarrative of the motherhood interestingly is suggestive of the woman’s inability to proliferate the desired nation.

Vimukthi Jayasundara’s Forsaken Land (2005) banned by the Sri Lankan government an anti-war film and “a new form of terrorism” (Wickramasinghe) received the best debut feature at Cannes film festival. Unlike the earlier films produced and directed by the Sinhalese it does not glorify the civil war crisis. The movie discusses the psychological (self) and topographical transmutations (nation) of identity in the aftermath of war.
Forsaken Land elicited controversies regarding the ‘moral obligation’ of the film makers and started dialogues on propaganda film vs. artistic film. The movie was accused of deriding the Sinhala values system and culture. The Sri Lankan government banned the movie, for the movie according to them perpetuated a new form of terrorism. The film a joint venture of the Sri Lankan and the French, questions the morale and the value systems that went into the making of the nation. The movie subverts the ideas of nation and nationalistic fervour, and in fact hinges on the border of being anti – nationalistic. Therefore the director was issued death threats by the Sri Lankan nationalists, Admiral Weerasekera stated, “If there is a film on war even indirectly contributing towards fulfilling terrorists’ objectives willfully, then it amounts to treason and should be dealt with severely” (1). The mettle of the Sri Lankan soldier and the virtue of the Sinhala woman which were key factors in fashioning an exclusive Buddhist Sinhala nation, are ridiculed. Jayasundara’s movie that “scoffs at the soldier, insults his wife and tends to demoralize the soldier” was considered “indirectly contribute towards fulfilling the terrorists’ objectives” (Weerasekara 1).

While the politicians try to portray an ideal landscape after the war, the film presents a dystopian society where the individual is least bothered about imagined communities. There is an urge to die and destroy. Death is no more a spectacle as it was during the war; it has become a means of escape from the boredom of an apocalyptic space.

The arid topos shown onscreen reflects the barren and hopeless situation in Sri Lanka. The film captures the life of Anura – a security guard who watches a deserted outpost along with another old alcoholic guard. The movie also projects glimpses of the
lives of Anura’s wife Lata, his sister Soma and their ward Batti caught in a mundane set up, which they cannot escape. War has taken its toll on the individual lives and they are not able to escape the psychological ravages caused by the war. Anura, the introvert is not only stripped, teased and made fun of by the Sri Lankan soldiers but also is cheated by his wife. The film centres on the lives of the dejected women characters - Anura’s lascivious wife Lata who cheats him with his friend, his sister Soma who is single and frustrated (physically and psychologically) at her inability to find a groom commits suicide. The soldiers shown in the movie are not the epitomes of valour instead are a bunch of cowards who indulge in lecherous activities (“Forsaken” 00:18:12). The film depicts a decadent nation where men are alcoholics, eunuchs and perverts, and women are reduced to sexual objects.

The frustration and loneliness of the individual becomes highly symbolic of the Sri Lankan nation. Lofty ideals and nationalistic spirit which once seemed to be the quest that kept the individual on the move are critiqued. Soma asserts that she doesn’t want to “die in this desert” (00:38:26), but despondency of the post-war period doesn’t give her any chances to escape the monotonies of her neighbourhood. As truces were drawn decreeing the interdiction of shooting the civilian and the suspected terrorists the soldiers resorted to ‘other’ practices. When Anura is ‘duty-bound’ to beat an unknown guy to death the pressure escalates and his fissured state is even more traumatized. An average Sri Lankan soldier is bereaving his pride and ‘masculinity’. Anura knowing well he cannot escape the drudgeries of the nation continues to lead his life with the hope of raising Batti. While Anura atleast has a chance to recuperate, his sister is dejected with her inability to love. Anura can neither reclaim his ‘old’ Sri Lanka nor adapt to the ‘new’
post-war Lanka. The image of the Sri Lankan woman which was heavily relied in rhetoric of constructing the civil war, it gets disintegrated with the picture of Lata. Anura’s wife is preoccupied with gratifying her ‘desires’ and is unmindful of the ‘sacrifices’ of her husband or the mental state of people around. The film by dealing with the ‘ordinariness’ and ‘normality’ of the post-war period deconstructs all the ideals projected by the Sinhalese. Interestingly in an article “Sri Lankan Military Threatens Antiwar Filmmakers”, Admiral Ratnayaka, a Sri Lankan official critiqued that this “foreign funded” movie was in fact a “vehicle of terrorist propaganda hell- bent on ridiculing the armed forces (and) delighted the LTTE.” (Wickramasinghe)

*Dheepan* (2015) directed by Jacques Audiard is a tale of immigrants. The refugee story is an attempt to obliterate the nation’s past, its culture and identity to forge a new identity (in a new space). The movie opens with the cremation of bodies covered in palmyra leaves, signifying the end of the Tamil nation. Their leader Sivadhasan, war battered and weary apprehends that they have lost the battle as he confronts the dead bodies. He realizes that imagining a nation in the post war space is not a possibility. To forget his defeat and the loss of his family he escapes to France, and in order to survive as a refugee in France he requires a new identity – a family. Thus Sivadhasan becomes Natarajan Dheepan (35). Dheepan an ex-LTTE leader along with Yalini (24) a young woman (whose only desire is to meet her cousin in London) and an orphaned girl Ilayaal (9) enter France in a hope of sustaining a family and identity peacefully in a foreign space.

In France Dheepan becomes the proscribed immigrant who is chased by the officers and is left with no other choice but to become a refugee. The once LTTE
commander identifies himself a “peace activist working in a NGO” (“Dheepan”, 00:11:51). As directed by the French government the family moves to Le Pre’ Saint gervais - which becomes a constant reminder of their gruesome past. The neighbourhood populated with minorities, Muslims and Blacks is highly volatile, where Dheepan has to keep vigil all time. He tells Ilayaal he never wants to return to Sri Lanka and she should study French get acculturated and not intend on returning (00:12:47). Added to this, with the widespread Tamil transnational networks the ex-guerrilla fighter is under surveillance. He is lured by the terrorist networks as he tries to start a peaceful family by working as a janitor & caretaker. Though Dheepan enunciates that, “It’s all finished . . . the war is over” (01:03:42) the family is caught in the trauma of forgetting and remembering. Ironically the more he tries to forget his family and the civil war; he has to repetitively perform his Sri Lankan Tamil culture in order to get accepted in the ethnoscape. Nevertheless Dheepan comes to terms with the futility of war and the impossibility of attaining a nation, he (is forced to) gets involved in raising money for generating a guerrilla army in Sri Lanka.

Even in the diasporic space the ego of the Sri Lankan Tamil male is vigilant (tending to the wife and the child), while the female is shown as being rebellious and wayward. Yalini is an independent woman. She is not particular on raising a child or cherishing a family. In fact she feels awkward when she has to perform her maternal duties and states, “I don’t know about what to do with children” (00:38:49). Dheepan on contrary is all emotional and carries the photograph of his deceased wife and two daughters along with him everytime. He insists that Yalini must take Ilayaal to England and provide security. In fact it is Dheepan who suggest her to find work for the sake of
the family. But at the same time he exerts pressure on her (holding her passport) expecting her to abide by gender roles. Wielding control and guarding the honour of his ‘wife’ becomes an alternate to protecting the ‘lost’ nation as it not only, “becomes not just an armature of stable (if inhuman) systems of cultural reproduction but a new arena for the formation of sexual identity and family politics, as men and women face new pressures at work and new fantasies of leisure” (Appadurai, “Modernity” 45).

Nation is a faint memory in their lives. The territorial space is substituted by cultural gatherings and house parties. An ideal new ‘Sri Lanka’ is generated in France. Dheepan equates the brutality of the mafia with the Sri Lankan army and would therefore go to any extent to save Yalini from not getting hurt by the mafia. The film also foregrounds Yalini’s fondness toward the mafia kingpin, who unlike Dheepan is fair, elegant and charming. The film abounds with nation metaphors as Dheepan stands for the Sri Lankan Tamil nation. Yalini the female is caught between Dheepan and Brahim- the gangster (Tamils and Sri Lankans). Fascinatingly while Yalini inwardly yearns to associate herself with the rich – alien group (Mafia), it is Dheepan’s anxiety and patronizing attitude that prevents her from doing so. Though the conception of territorial nation is dissipating in the film, the idea of nation has metamorphosed into the female. As he retorted to violence to save his Tamil nation, he seeks violent methods to take down the mafia and restore his wife’s honour. Dheepan’s brawl with the hoodlums starts only when Yalini refuses to stay in the violent neighbourhood. He marks the territory as “No Fire Zone” in order to protect his wife and daughter (01:22:35). For Dheepan, violence becomes a means to display his love and allegiances. As Appadurai says in Modernity At Large, “The honor of women becomes increasingly a surrogate for the identity of embattled communities of
males, while their women in reality have to negotiate increasingly harsh conditions of work at home and in the nondomestic workplace” (45). While Dheepan is preoccupied with generating funds for the lost battle, Yalini has to confront Brahim. As Brahim warns Yalini regarding Dheepan, she is left helpless.

The French director reminds the international audiences that though the war is over, there is a presence of invisible territory inside the psyche of the individuals marked by cultural values. While the movie deliberately ignores war, it addresses the question of life after war. The absence of the Sri Lankans in the movie is conspicuous for ‘their’ side of the story is not narrated. The filmy plot exploits the Sri Lankan – Tamil issue not for constructive/remedial purposes, instead to earn accolades on the international dais. The film is a stark reminder of the futility and the hopelessness of eelam war.

The films taken for study analyse the symbiotic relationship between the female body and the landscape. While Malli-The Terrorist, projected the scope for the reproduction of a desired Tamil nation outside the Sri Lankan soil, Forsaken Land is a stark reminder of the inability of Sri Lankans to imagine or reproduce an exclusive territory and Dheepan is a realisation that the crisis no more carries any meaning. The visual medium conceptualises the ‘real’ as a situation where the nature of conflict has lost its mystification. The implication of dislocating the self (Malli’s ideological shift from a terrorist to a pacific female, Anura’s escapades suggestive of dissociating his Sinhalese identity, and Dheepan’s mutation from a belligerent to pusillanimous person) is a cognitive mapping to come to terms with the ‘real’ where materialist claims supersede ideological one.
As Appadurai opines they succumb to the fact that in the alternate scapes, “however much they may enjoy the fruits of new kinds of earning and new dispositions of capital and technology” they “have to play out the desires and fantasies of these new ethnoscapes, while striving to reproduce the family-as-microcosm of culture” (Appadurai, “Modernity” 45). In India Malli identifies her as the nurturing woman, forgetting her motives of assassinating the statesman she emotionally connects with the family which houses her. Anura the sentry would have had ‘real’ job during the war, once the civil war is over he has to “impersonate” the roles of husband, father and brother. Earlier the Anura the soldier needn’t have thought about his household but in the new scape he is left with nothing other than his family. While Anura realises his position towards the end, Dheepan readily moves into the father figure. But they fail to realise that in a ‘deterioralised community’, though “the shapes of cultures grow less bounded and tacit, more fluid and politicized” eventually “the work of cultural reproduction” would become “a daily hazard” (Appadurai, “Modernity 45).

**Documenting the Nation**

The digital scapes focus on the causal interrelationship between documentary and collation of societies. The films in their mechanics of concretizing cumulative identity subsume an interpretive approach which mostly tends to be subjective. Contrasting to this perception an element of ‘objectivity’ (which is claimed as myth by theorist like Fox) has been associated with documentaries. This section focuses on the interpenetration of national allegiances in the documentaries.

Modern form of documentary originated in 1922 with Robert Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North* and developed by Grierson and Dziga Vertov has been “purposive” in nature
Believing that a ‘new and vital art form’ can replace films, Grierson formulated the “first principles of documentary” which are relevant even today, according to him documentary photographed, “the living scene and the living story” using “original (or native) actor and scene”. Hence they are “better guides to a screen interpretation of the modern world” (McLane18). In Auferheide’s view “Documentary is an important reality-shaping communication because of its claims to truth” (5). The narrative form is grounded in ‘real life’ and known for its reliability (Rayner 62) and is able to conceive the tensions of ‘representation’ and reality” (9-10). As McLane contends that the ‘complexity’ in defining the genre has risen in the twenty first century for,

There are so many types of work laying claim to the term ‘documentary’, so many practitioners of the form, and so many ancillary ‘documentary’ activities, that the more one examines it, the more confused the label might seem. In this, documentary is much like other aspects of our post-post-modern world: extremely rich in data and nuance that sometimes falls into the bathos of self-importance (363)

While acknowledging the fact that documentary can be “constructed” to a certain extent, documentary as known for its ‘sobriety’ and ‘authenticity’ documentary exposes a rendering of the world “that bears a recognisable familiarity” (Nichols, “Introduction” 42). The ‘semiologics’ of present documentaries can be determined either by ‘organic approach’ as advocated by Nichols or Renov’s ‘cinematic idiom’. While a few manifest “Expository, Observational, Interactive, Reflexive, and Performative modes, suggesting a chronology of linear development” adhering to Nichols, others promote “the illusion of immediacy insofar as it forswears ‘realism’ in favour of a direct, ontological claim to the
‘real’” in accordance with the Renov model. (McLane380). Even though the credibility of documentary as a form is being constantly debated, the turmoil projected in documentaries invokes and provoke ideological questions creating “a spectacle out of the ordinary” (Rayner 60). The efficacy of visual cultures and media neither lies in imposing “a false consciousness” nor in creating varying outlooks but is realised in fostering “unconscious categories through which conditions are represented and experienced” (Bennett 24). Philip Rayner and et al claim that in any documentary forms has also influenced the reality televisions wherein docu-drama focus on, “main narrative drive coming from personal experiences of the central personality; these programmes explicitly make ‘stars’ out of ordinary people, with their experiences rendered worthy of our scrutiny” (60).

Nichols in his Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary registers that despite the ‘new hybrid’ form, documentaries are still the “site of contestation and change” (12). As the global scenario and (online) funding has altered and accentuated the paradigmatic approach one has to be attentive to the fact that , “since there is nothing natural about the representation of reality in documentary, documentary filmmakers are actually aware that their choices shape the meaning they choose” (Aufderheide 11). Before analysing the text it is important to remember the words of Stuart Hall who states that the process involved in encoding the message and the meanings signified while decoding the message could be entirely different.

Killing Fields of Sri Lanka encapsulates the final weeks of the Sri Lankan Civil war in 2009. Directed by Callum Macrae and presented by Jon Snow the documentary was broadcast in the British TV station Channel 4. It premiered at the 17th session of the
United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva on 3 June 2011 (www.channel4.com/news/un-screens-channel-4-sri-lanka-war-crimes-film). Since it attracted international attention and enormous viewership Channel 4 decided to surrender its copyright and uploaded it on You Tube for free. From then on, various organisations (Human Rights Watch in particular) have been screening the documentary for varied audiences.

The documentary has a couple of sequels namely *Sri Lanka’s Killing Fields: War Crimes Unpunished* on 14 March 2012 and *No Fire Zone: In the Killing Fields of Sri Lanka*, 2013. The Sri Lankan government irked by the *Killing Fields of Sri Lanka* dismissed it to be a fabricated account. Nevertheless the government responded to the Channel 4’s accusation with a counter investigative documentary *Lies Agreed Upon* which was released on August 2011 at Hilton Hotel, Colombo. Following this an anonymous publisher identified through the website address www.Engage Sri Lanka.com came up with a book *Corrupted Truth: Channel 4 and Sri Lanka*, which is a similar negation of war crimes. While this book has been oft quoted in the Sri Lankan newspapers, Channel 4 retaliated to this with *Uncorrupted Truth* - a booklet. The integrity of the pro-Tamil documentary is supported by the forensic reports of the footage data that state it has been,

examined by a respected team of forensic digital analysts often used by the British Courts – who looked for any evidence of editing, manipulation, or visual, audio or technical inconsistencies. They also examined the metadata associated with the footage. They concluded that the footage shows no signs of manipulation and appears to depict genuine executions.
Metadata encoded within the video indicates it was recorded on the 15th of May 2009, in the last few days of the war (Macrae 40)

*Killing Fields of Sri Lanka* produced and circulated a (dark) image of Sri Lankan government and administration. This montage of footages was shot by the victims, witnesses, LTTE and Sri Lankan soldiers from their mobile phones and cameras. Snow, warns the audiences about the “disturbing” nature of the documentary. Gruesome images of Tamils murdered in the last stages of war are exposed and are accompanied by statements of ‘witnesses’ / ‘victims’, the ‘volunteers’ (Vany Kumar), a few former LTTE combatants, bureaucrats and UN workers (Benjamin Dix, Gordon Weiss). The alleged war crimes committed by “increasingly repressive president Rajapaksa” (―Killing‖ 00:03:14) and Sinhala army are highlighted in the documentary. In the very beginning of the documentary Snow declares that channel 4 is not pro-LTTE and points out that, “The Tigers themselves were a brutal army – often conscripting child soldiers and pioneering the use of suicide bombing” (“Killing” 00:02:19-21). The narrative also elides the idea that “Sri Lanka is a very beautiful place” and refutes it as the fabricated image that “the government would like you to remember” (00:01:28). Adhering to the ‘objective’ nature of the genre it aims to bring to fore the “war crimes against humanity” (00:01:02), and emphases that the “humanitarian rescue operation” was a farce and couldn’t incite the “civilian causality” (00:13:50-59).

The documentary shows Tamils desperate for asylum turning to the UN – a western forum pleading with the “international eyes on the ground to see the truth” (00:05:59). Their discontent with internal political power system is entrenched in their pleas. But when the UN deserts them and Ban Ki Moon’s pretentiousness visit only
reduces the Tamil condition as being a “showcase for the foreigners” (00:45:41) the “survivors” lose hope in the UN are persuaded to look “to international community for justice” (00:48:31). The final section of the documentary carries abysmal images called “war trophy” (00:33:29-31) that records images of naked and raped Tamil women combatants (00:43:53). Appalling images captured by soldiers and civilians not only signify the unimpeded supremacy of the Sinhala regime but also bring to fore the influence of media, and the power it vests within the individual (in disseminating the images). The recurring images of retreat from the ‘no fire zones’ signify the need among the Tamils to imagine a separatist nation. The text focusing on war atrocities urges the audiences – the Tamils to reconstitute a new conception of nation.

*Lies Agreed Upon* demonstrates that the Sri Lankan nation state has been exploited by media- channel 4 and the LTTE operations. This documentary accuses the LTTE as “principal agent of death” (“Lies” 00:52:54) who “took the will and freedom of innocent people with brutal control (00:53:44). Unlike the statements of the foreign correspondents and diplomats produced in *Fields of Sri Lanka*, it includes the proclamations made by the ‘native’ Tamils. The victims – the Tamils (including civilians and government physicians from Vavuniya, Killinochi and Mulaithivu) refute all the claims made by Snow and Macrae’s team. The state sponsored video clip critiques the “disturbing images” constructed in KFSL as providing a “dramatic opening” where “liberal lies are presented as authentic (“Lies” 00:00:05-13). Further it indicts channel 4 as mollifying the separatists and distorting the figures, the body of work produced by Channel 4 is considered as a “lie [that] had to be dress [ed] up” (00:08:20). The ‘characters’ in LAU avow that it is not the Sri Lankan government but the LTTE which
was a threat to their livelihood as and in most of the protests in Killinochi people were coerced into participating, as a laundry worker states the protests were “staged to prevent the UN from leaving” (00:02:41-46). It records the conciliatory efforts of Sri Lankan soldiers and how women residents in IDP camps feel safe with the Sri Lankan soldiers and affirm that “we have never experienced any sort of harassment from the army” (00:31:05) deliberately repudiating the lewd remarks passed by the Sinhala soldiers in *Killing Fields of Sri Lanka*. This documentary tries to assimilate Tamil national sentiments into a Sri Lankan nationalism via narratives of the individuals (mostly the women). The ‘aesthetics’ of the woman is recognised, as the former LTTE women soldiers are regularized into domestic activities, there are instances of them professing the “Sinhalese never looked at us at enemies or prisoners. We were always treated as friends” (00:43:35) and that “professional training in IT and English and Sinhalese” (00:37:15) has helped them to rebuild their world. The Sri Lankans in their defense paint a picture of the army being the ‘father and brother’ to the Tamils -a protector who dutifully rescues the woman combatants from the LTTE and restores them within the domestic realm. The women talking in this documentary refute and feel ashamed of the alleged crimes of the Sri Lankan soldiers harassing the Tamil women.

Unlike KFSL concentrating on the war period LAU focuses on the post-war period which incorporates the Tamils into their national frame by providing education, vocational training, dozer training, agriculture programme, computer training. Snaps of the former soldiers as teacher volunteers are shown. It accuses channel 4 of either being “ignorant or naïve” (“Lies” 00:57:57) of the diasporic networks that fund the civil war in Sri Lanka or being “complicit” (00:58:00) with the guerilla forces. To validate their
statements, testimonials of former LTTE commando’s family members and media personnel are included. The former LTTE members assert in this video that the LTTE disguising themselves as Sinhala army massacred their own kith and kin in order to frame the Sri Lankan government.

This myth of nation calls for production of counter-myths by subcultures (i.e. to challenge the dominant forces by embracing their subordinate culture and identity). The documentaries show how the dominant culture propagates and reiterates a ‘myth’ of power from its viewpoint. All the statements made by the Sri Lankan government are challenged by channel 4; likewise Vany Kumar’s discernments too are countered by the doctors in LAU. Though the media is decentralised the data is centralised and the production of counter myths or narratives is never absolutely possible in this context.

The documentaries insinuate that the project of nation heavily relies on gender performativity. From the documentaries it is apparent that the LTTE codification places the woman within the categorical frame of warriors. Perceptions of sustaining national culture come into play. The LTTE cogitated valour as part of their national culture. They actively and forcibly recruited female soldiers (soodhya regiment) and children form ten years on. According to KFSL, Tamil women played a very active role in construing the nation. This channel 4 documentary indicates that the conflict has become a medium to empower the woman. Being part of the Soodiya and Radha regiments there are recurring images of the women combatants who are active in the demand for separate nation. Despite the subtexts and metacodes imbricated in this process the female soldier rescued from her stultifying environment and placed in a contributory space codifies power. As Anthias and Yuval Davis observes the LTTE woman soldier participates “in national,
economic, political and military struggles” (7) and thus pledges her loyalties in the materialization of a nation. The rift between the “battle front” and the “home front” disappears once there is no “sexual division of labour” in the warfield (Yuval Davis 95). But the Sinhala soldiers are pejorative of this ‘aberrance’ of women and therefore in the last few sections of the documentary violate them physically (“Killing” 00:39:37). To rebuke the idea of gender parity among the LTTE, Sinhala soldiers rape and kill women combatants in the battle front. Once the woman tries to step out into the public forum she became a threat to the (Sinhalese) national culture and therefore had to be executed. Lies Agreed Upon shows footages of the former LTTE women (abhorring violence) living peacefully in rehabilitation centre. KFSL uses the recurring figure of Isaipriya, the LTTE television anchor and an icon of Tamil liberation struggle, who was eventually killed by the Sri Lankan army. Isaipriya projected as the news reader in KSFL is incriminated as the LTTE warrior in LAU. Her vulnerable image is countered in LAU, she is blamed as providing “motivation” for “suicide bombers” (“Lies” 00:22:07) and mobilising “innocent Tamils for a ‘purpose’” (00:22:19).

The polysemic text, Killing Fields of Sri Lanka while recognizing the nation-state as the centre of power and identity production simultaneously deconstructs the connotation of nation form as a mass of land. It subtly states that the discourses of the minority and its version of nation and nationhood can only be performed in transnational space. Ideals of nationalism are invoked not to manufacture a nation but to dissolve one. Lies Agreed Upon signifies that the reclamation of the land and ethno nationalistic demands of nation has lost its significance within the territorial base as the LTTE
War images of genocide encoded in the text can be decoded as discourses of hegemony and cultural imperialism. The graphic images while highlighting ‘otherness’ perpetuate discourses of / on ethnicity. ‘Truth’ and ‘Reality’ are brought out by discourses of power. As Tony Bennet states, the documentaries abounding with pluralistic views of the society provide, “a forum for contending social and political positions to parade their wares and vie for public support” (21). Both the documentaries interpellate their subjects and fashion an ideological discourse and assert, by reading the texts we understand that media has replaced “classical repressive state apparatus” and has indeed become an “ideological state apparatus” (Bennett 24).

The documentaries are suggestive of Virilio idea that, though war is carried out by military forces, it is “fed by image technologies that are in total control – and continue to breed control of the processes of the sentient eye” (qtd. in Colman 203). An image thus propagated is actively proliferated by the working of transnational societies. The active online engrossment and promotions indeed become the decisive factors in propelling the circulation and viewership of the documentaries. Though the Tamils have been defeated on land, they perpetuate an idea of a virtual nation online. The idea of reclaiming the territory doesn’t exist anymore; instead the idea of nation becomes a juncture to perform their culture. Affected by network societies the audience is baffled as the lines blur between fact and fiction. The nature of documentary too has come under the scanner in this post-modern space therefore the ‘reality’ quotient projected too is unreliable.
As Virilio observes the documentaries strategized in “conditions of overexposure and visual disinformation” implicitly create “instability of sensorial dimensions where new forms of war aesthetics are produced” (qtd. in Colman 206). Both the documentaries offer their account of a nation, along with accusations. While *Killing Fields of Sri Lanka* charts out the rampages of war it also concedes that the territorial Tamil nation doesn’t exist in Sri Lanka anymore, *Lies Agreed Upon* also dismisses the idea of a perfervid Tamil nationalism. But the documentary fails when it proffers an idea of a homogenous Sinhala territory/identity.

**Online Nations**

The internet has to be recognised as the “new political culture” (Castells 156). As Wyatt states the internet, “needs to be studied as a complex sociotechnical whole system that has both symbolic and practical significance” (qtd. in M.I Franklin 198). The diasporic communities (to a large extent the Tamils) spread over the globe utilize the web to defend their opinion in a space that attracts the global audience, and the diaspora. For them as Castells in *Power of Identity: the Information Age, Economy, Society and Culture* had documented, “networking means no center, thus no central authority” (156) but also stresses that it shouldn’t be ignored that “through the Internet that relatively isolated movements have succeeded in building their networks of global solidarity and support, and have been able to post their information in real time, becoming less vulnerable to repression in their localities” (155). The online communities and websites enable “an instant relationship between the local and the global, so that the movement can think locally, rooted in its identity and interests, and act globally, where the sources of power are” (156). Thus the decentralized structure “invested with authority and decision -
making power’ has become tantamount with “investigative reporting” and “political strategy” (154). These societies are not exclusively used by the militants as presumed, they appropriate and democratise information (Castells). Virtual sites while channelizing political cohesion simultaneously perpetuate discourses that culminate in the realisation of counter cultures.

The war which had taken place on the Sri Lankan soil gained momentum over the online forums, blogs and communities. As Castells observes in *Rise of Network Societies* “the new social order, the network society” ultimately appears as “a meta-social disorder” (208). The internet is considered as a space where the “gatekeepers no longer exist” (Vedel 44) and manifests multiplicity paving way of dialogues. Online platforms have the power to circumvent the media limitations that prevail in Sri Lanka. The crisis came to limelight as the gruesome images and evidences were released by Sri Lankan and Tamil websites respectively. By interweaving violence and political extremism with politics of identification the online communities became locales of identity and meaning production. The virtual war of words not only brought in different perspectives about the ethnic conflict, but also invested the individual with great power. The websites, blogs and online communities elude censorship and channelize individuals all over the globe.

The LTTE organisation is considered as the pioneer in adapting to the modern network and media (Tekwani 25). While the Sri Lankan government website was launched in 2000, the LTTE have been using the internet since 1994. Their technical virtuosity had enabled the Tamils to reinforce the ‘Eelamese’ identity (Tekwani and Kluver 125). In fact the LTTE had hacked the Sri Lankan embassy networks way back in 1997 (Tekwani 28). Therefore the availability of sources is numerous when it comes to
Eelam websites and communities. A few portals like Tamilcanadian.com, Eelam.s5.com, infoeelam.com, thamileelam.org, eelamantion.com, TamilPower.com, Sangam.org, tamilmaravan.com discuss the relevance of eelam (Tkwani 13-14). Based on the quality of writing and its popularity the researcher has chosen a few featured articles from the Sinhala.net and TamilNet. The Sinhala.net an agent of the Sri Lankan authority is well conceived and presented online website.

The Sinhala website has the nation symbol of the lion on the left corner followed by clear cut subheadings (i) News (ii) Publication (iii) Sri Lanka {Mahawansaya, Sri Lankan Flags, Outlook of Sri Lanka } (iv) LTTE (v) 13 A (vi) Videos (vii) International (vii) SL Constitution (viii) Road to Federal. With an inbuilt gallery and daily cartoon (regarding the status of affairs in the island) the site maintains an archival account with special features on the LTTE attacks and focuses on news about the terrorist activities of the Tamils. A recent cartoon published on December 30, 2016 satirizes the involvement of the West in the civil war, as Obama nursing the wounded LTTE’s head (http://www.sinhalanet.net/cartoon-9). Being a pro –Srilankan website, Sinhala.net concentrates on branding the Tamil diaspora as terrorists, who are supporting and turning the minorities into guerrilla with financial aid. The articles posted on this site talk about arriving at a ‘just’ solution and that the ‘truth’ would emerge atleast during Trump’s reign. Their apprehension of the Sri Lankan paradigm of power being threatened is registered as Ariyarathe claims that “The picture given was becoming scary for any Sinhalese, as it showed Sinhalese as a Minority in ‘Dravidastan’” (“Sri Lanka: A Voiceless Majority January” 06, 2017). Another prominent feature of this website is the contiguous advertisement that states, “Stop Terrorism in all fronts. Stop political
terrorism. Stop media terrorism. Stop misuse of power” (www.sinhalanet.net). This platform is pragmatic in its approach. Knowing well the proliferation of Tamil websites this official Website is an attempt to regulate the synthetically constructed ideas of the Sri Lankan nation.

There are numerous portals on Tamil Eelam that sell “e-cards, flags and pictures of LTTE leaders and numerous songs on and about Tamil pride” (Tekwani 16). These online sources meticulously provide an exhaustive history, background and aims of the Tamil nationalists. Unlike the Sinhala.org that uses English as the standard medium of communication, the portals on eelam, use Tamil language as the binding force to bring about a nationalistic fervour. As Tekwani argues language becomes a decisive factor of cohesion and mobilisation in virtual communities. While the Eelam Web is a composition of various features, unlike the official website of Sri Lanka, TamilNet carries articles in English and is scrupulously dogmatic. EelamWeb bearing the picture of Heroes cemetery and the tagline, “Here sleep, The Warriors who gave their lives. . . That others will live. . .” (www.eelamweb.com) is a composition of news under the banner NRI, News, Technology, Medicine, Life Style and Sport. Though overtly it resembles an elite magazine for specific audiences, a note from the administrator reads,

EelamWeb © is aimed at rebuilding Tamil Eelam, the traditional homeland of the Tamils, which has been ravaged by the genocidal policies that have been undertaken by successive Sinhala dominated Sri Lankan governments. The mass human rights abuses committed by the Sri Lankan government and its forces are done so in the cover of a complete censorship of all information concerning Tamils in Tamil eelam. Due to
the sufferings that Tamil people are facing in their own home land, we, at EelamWeb have found this page a necessity to expose the terror of the Sri Lankan government and its forces. . . EelamWeb shall strive to provide as much literature regarding the Tamil freedom struggle that has been published over the years by various Tamil scholars. At the same time, we shall also provide information relating to the tradition and culture, which the Tamils of Tamil Eelam have struggled to safe guard despite the various methods of suppression by the Sri Lankan government. (www.eelamweb.com/about-eelamweb.htm)

TamilNet keen on “Reporting to the World on Tamil Affairs” is a forum for contemplating the political debates in the post war Sri Lanka. The articles focus on the depredations of genocide and the supremacy of the Buddhist nationalism that cannot be brushed aside (https://www.tamilnet.com/cat.html?catid=13, 09 January, 2017).

From reading the visual texts we understand that Sri Lanka will only house an exclusive Sinhala identity, and that the Sri Lankan Tamil identity has to be performed only in an “anti – nationalist, ambivalent nation- space” where transnational cultures are realised (Bhabha, “Nation Narration” 4).

‘Capturing’ Nations

In the “media saturate” (Meek 26) society, any form of collective experience of trauma or conflict is comprehended and altered by the visual medium. The connotative meanings embedded in the photographic images which dominate the media culture have eventually raised questions on the legitimacy and “ideological complicity” of images
With the conception of nation states withering away due to the impact of media and migration new power structures are circulated through visual codes. In the preface to *Fear of Small Numbers*, Appadurai mentions that in the current space “imagination” has to be conceived as a “social practice”. Castells reprises that this imagination would facilitate new political spaces. At this point in time, mass media via visual medium of photographs enable the “social/oppositional movements” to inform their local experiences to the global audiences via virtual networks (Stevenson 195-6).

Photographs have borne witness to historical transformations and in the process simultaneously documented trauma theory (Meek). As Jeff Lewis asserts that, ‘The camera, according to Virilio, is the essential technology for warfare and information since it affected the very nature of ‘power realization’ in war’ (Lewis 8). Barthes considers that photography instead of capturing horror only projects the “scandal of horror” (qtd. in Shawcross 4). According to Benjamin, photographs are “mnemonic devices that replace long memory characteristic of stable societies, localized communities and traditional cultures” (Meek 6-7). In the current sphere where reality has been replaced by “hypperreality” (Baudrillard) and “sign” overpowers representation the simulated version is far-fetched (Berger 15). The ‘hyperreal’ spaces create “an unstable rendering of meanings and culture, creating new opportunities for alternative semiosis, fragmentation and an uneven but expanding cosmopolis of discourses and expressivities” (Lewis 71).

The group of images circulating in the media deconstructs the power which was initially vested with the rulers and propagates discourses on state, political identity and freedom. This section aims to bring out the discourses on /of democracy, statehood and freedom disseminated through the images. Sean Smith’s *Frontline: Conflict in the 21st*
Century, a compilation of images of conflict from war torn zones of Israel, Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon and Congo is used to understand mediascapes. Photographs from regions like Israel, Afghanistan and Iraq have been taken because the civilians as well as refugees hailing from there are considered as “homines sacri” (Gregory 261). In this connection, he mentions that in these war torn zones

The deaths of American, British and Israeli citizens mattered, unless of course they were killed opposing or witnessing the wars in Afghanistan, Palestine or Iraq. But in this grisly colonial calculus the deaths of Afghans, Palestinians, and Iraqis were rendered not only uncountable but also unaccountable (249)

As Baudrillard asserts in Spirit of Terrorism person’s enthrallment with the conflict lies in the “fascination with images”. In his words, “the image consumes the event in the sense that it absorbs it and offers it for consumption. . . the image is there first, and the frisson of real is added”(28 -29). A semiotic approach is used to interpret the images. As the photographs deal with the insecurity and ambiguity in the production of minorities, by analysing the media images, this section of the chapter will bring out the ideology and quest for separate state is engrained in select images taken for textual analysis. Furthermore it examines the rhetoric of violence and sacrifice that are inbuilt in the images that go into the making of a unitary nation.

Section I: Israel

The first section of images is presented under the banner Israel. The compilation of select photographs is a deliberate effort to capture the social, cultural and political
history of the conflict. The front page with a concise history of the nation shows a photograph of the funeral of the Palestinian bomb-maker Abu Ayash. Sean Smith’s photographs² (nineteen) from 1996-2004 describe the varied sentiments that go into the making of a nation state. On p12-13 obeisance is paid to the bomb maker in the huge portrait hoisted by the Palestinians. In the snap we witness the Palestinian flag and Kalashnikovs placed on either side of Abu Ayash who is praying. The photograph shows an iconic image of the bomb maker. But the indexical meaning shows him as an outlaw-a pious individual who gave up his life fighting for his people. On a deeper level he becomes a symbol of the martyr who would inspire future generations. This picture refutes the dominant idea proliferated by the Israelis as Palestine being a nation filled with degenerate bomb-makers. Though the presence of the gun escalates the terrorist image accorded to the nation, cleverly packed within the image is also the counter narrative behind the violent ideology that creates martyrs and victims. The symbol of the martyr becomes a powerful imagery that impels the quest for a separate country.

Following it are images of Yasser Arafat on p.14 during the year 1996. The image of Yasser Arafat deliberating with his army men shows a sensible and wise Arab leader. Conspicuously one is not able to spot any weapon in the background. Interestingly Arafat’s sentinel in the snapshot is holding an umbrella instead of a kalashnikov. The idea of the PLO being a radical organization is stamped all over the photographs. The photograph shows Arafat contemplating with others who are all ears. This connotes the stable leadership which hints at the possibility of creation of a separate state. Contrasting

² Refer to Appendix I for the photographs discussed in this section.
the Israeli claims that PLO is a tyrannical body, the image implies that democracy is possible if freedom be granted.

In this sequence the clash between the Israeli militants and the young Palestinian civilian in 2000 is captured in photographs. Repetitive images of Palestinian youth pelting stones at the Israeli soldiers resonate with the biblical imagery of the fight between David and Goliath. While the Israeli army is equated with Goliath, the Palestinians are conferred an indigenous and righteous position. Captivatingly the Palestinian youngsters are foregrounded in every picture which carefully excludes the Israeli soldiers. The element of mystery or bestiality is inevitably associated with the Israeli army. The photographs become sources, “in which fantasies of purity, authenticity, borders and security can be enacted” (Appadurai, “Fear of Small” 23). The image shows the inequality of the conflict happening between the young Palestinians armed with slingshots in contrast to the well-equipped Israeli army. There is a continual portrait of the Palestinians resorting to indigenous measures. By resisting modern warfare, the images perpetuate a wish to reclaim the mythical land usurped by the opponents. There is a conscious effort to carry their flag and at the same time disfigure the opponent’s flag i.e. to reinvent their national symbols.

Even after the dawn of a new century, despite the U.S trying to negotiate deal between Israel and Palestine, violence escalated. The images in the Frontlines seize this moment. The photographs on p24 and 25 show medical relief volunteers carrying an injured man from the emergency hospital in the Al Beak mosque to the Anglican Hospital during the curfew. With men injured and a woman volunteer waving for peace, the images become symbolic of the Palestinian nation. The nation is bereft of men who can
guard their territory and ‘honourable’ women who were within the private space have come to the public forum. While the Israeli soldiers are macho and powerful, the Palestinians are reduced the ‘other’ who have to oblige authority, images of Palestinians standing with identity papers to be scrutinized (Sean Smith 27) show them as submissive in contrast to the Israeli soldiers.

The final picture taken for analysis in the series is that of Israeli security barrier near Walandia checkpoint between Jerusalem and Ramallah taken in 2004. On a denotative level, a line of cars are placed on one side of the fence, and on the other side of the barbed wire are men dismantling truck parts from rubble (Sean Smith 30-31). But the second order signifier exemplifies civilization on one side vs. mob mentality on the other. The differences in value system are brought out where the fence stands for irreconcilable differences.

Through the pictures the Palestinian fixation on constructing nationalist discourses on martyrs, bomb-makers and suicide bombers is shown in the images, the images reveal another phase of the story too. The narrative told through the photographs shows various emotions inclusive of pride, hope, disdain and affliction. Rhetoric of sacrifice becomes an important trope on which demands for separate nation is placed. The images compiled under the caption ‘Israel’ evidently do not feature any white soldier. The involvement of the American soldiers is not even hinted. The conflict is representation of a fight between the Arabs and the Muslims. There is no acknowledgement at any point of the Western intervention. The images reprise the notion that nation for the Arab Palestinians and the Israeli is different from the western political
institutions of nation state. The demand for reclamation of the land and the denied welfare rights are voiced out through the images.

Section II: Afghanistan

The conception of Afghanistan is reduced to terrorism (Pfaff). The cover picture on p 32-33 shows the graveyards of Kabul and a Taliban soldier keeping vigil over it. Though the picture of graveyard becomes iconic of the state of the nation, on another level it reflects the despair and hopelessness of the land. The picture critiques Afghan as a land of victims and death becomes a spectacle. Sean Smith photograph is a reminder of the myth of how the presence of Taliban has ruined the lives of the Afghans. It also registers the reluctance of the Taliban to vacate the wasteland.

Images of women inmates at mental health hospital (Sean Smith 34-41) and prison (Sean Smith 48-49) are displayed. Unabashed Afghan men - heroin addicts and body builders (Sean Smith 37) look into the camera. The picture of a body builder is foregrounded with picture of Arnold in the background. There is a yearning to identify with the west. It emphasizes the superiority of the west and the desire of the east to emulate the west and western ideals. The photographs while celebrating the masculinity of the Afghan men also objectifies them. The images manoeuvre an ideology which shows Afghans as uncanny and uncouth. While men relish the forbidden pleasures of celebrating their body, women are still in their hijab. Most of the images show women as subjugated and the conditions for them are deteriorating in Afghanistan. The images project an idea that Afghan women still need to be rescued by the west, for they are
caught in the land of opium eaters. The images of Afghan men can be divided as either heroin addicts or indigenous populace who are barbaric.

Images of U.S. military contractors training the Afghan policemen (Sean Smith 44, 45, 46) and the locals inspected, photographed and fingerprinted (Sean Smith 234-239) indicate that Afghans will be puppets of the western power. Supervised by the West every native is subject to suspicion. The Afghans are taught to oblige the West. Colonial narrative on the primitiveness and how Afghan should always remain the subjugated is echoed in the photographs. As Appadurai in Fear of Small Numbers affirms, “the nation state has been steadily reduced to the fiction of its ethnos as the last cultural resource over which it may exercise full dominion.” (23)

Photograph of a British soldier mentoring an Afghan soldier near ruins (Sean Smith 246) brings out the vast differences between the two. While the British soldier is clutching his weapon and a cigarette, the Afghan is leaning on his gun seated with a rose flower in his hand. The story of the orient vs. the occident is reiterated in the image. The British man becomes symbolic of the Western imperialist trying to educate the native. Images of soldiers from Black Watch (Sean Smith 254) resting in a base tired with a forlorn look; with a smiley on the uniform is a grim reminder of the situation. Images of the American soldiers protecting the rights of the natives (Sean Smith 262) mark the transition of the American soldier to a hero. Pictures of brutality toward Afghans are not found in the images compiled.

The compilation ends with a photograph of two American soldiers guarding the frontier (Sean Smith 270) leaning over the fence keeping guard over the arid land. It is a
symbolic representation that the outsiders protect the vast foreign country. But the photo also exemplifies the fact that to a point, Afghanistan permits outsiders but will allow them to remain on the frontiers only. Conflict does not arise until they do not invade the private realm or harm their lives. The landscape becomes an object of collective gaze of the young male American soldiers.

Section III: Iran

Unlike Israel or Afghanistan’s gloomy cover page Iraq’s titular image is vibrant and celebratory in nature. On the front cover, a picture of a happy Iraqi wedding is foregrounded. The groom and the bride are decked up in Western outfits. Interestingly the bride doesn’t even cover herself in the traditional veil. Smiling radiantly she is clinging to her groom. The photograph shot in 2003 doesn’t show any trace of conflict. In fact the girl bearing flowers for the wedding is also in western attire. The image is so lively that the consumer of meanings is deceived about the conflict bound past of the nation. No clue of war or disruption can be deduced from the picture.

Images of normal life inclusive of equestrians, (Sean Smith 52) carefree soldiers smoking and grinning (Sean Smith 54-56) and supporters of Saddam Hussein are provided successively. The image of an exclusive women’s battalion (Sean Smith 57) with armed women covered in veils in support of Saddam Hussein produces a counter hegemonic narrative to the western discourses on third world feminism. The photograph showing traditionally clad Iraqi women adhering to their cultural belief systems manufactures consent among their peers.
From the pictures we deduce that till 2003 there were signs of normality. There is a valourisation of Islamic tradition and Saddam Hussein is considered as the saviour. But things changed after the inception of American forces in Iraq. Till 2003, there are only images that show women as combatants but gradually after the entry of American forces Iraqi women are shown as refugees and victims (Sean Smith 66). The string of images distinguishes life before war and life after war i.e. nation before war vs. nation after war.

The popular image of U.S. marines knocking down the statue of Saddam Hussein (Sean Smith 70-71) brings to the fore discourses of nation and power. The American flag muffled around his face resembles a noose. Connotatively it means that the forces of U.S. would suffocate and kill him. By toppling down the statue of the ideologue the ideology of the nation state gets dissipated. The soldiers are also unmindful of the spectacle. The much worshipped leader is reduced to rubble. By destroying his statue the West celebrates victory over ‘terrorists’. The image is coded with ideological messages of the superiority of the West and the inferiority of the East. The discourse of power validates specific forms of knowledge and practice (of demolishing the statue) as acceptable and dismisses the ‘other’ (the presence of the statue) as deceitful.

Image of an American woman soldier happily posing in the master bedroom of Uday Hussein (Sean Smith 72) makes the reader intuitively juxtapose it with the images of the Iraqi woman soldiers (Sean Smith 57). While the Afghan woman is shown to be morose and dull, the American woman sniper is ebullient. The former is branded by the media as taking sides with the terrorist and the latter is hailed as the liberator. The western woman’s victory is understood as conquering Iraq- the traditional mindset.
In the same book we see pictures of children with looted weapon contrasting an earlier picture of a young boy dressed as the soldier. The young boy carrying the rifle and bullet hints at the possibility of a militant nationalism. This image of an aggressive militant nation is reduced to a terrorist network. After the “Operation Steel Curtain” (2005) we witness images of the U.S. soldiers who are mechanical and frustrated. They are smoking, playing monopoly and look worn out in contrast to their time of arrival in Iraq. While the photographs deliberately shows the American soldiers bereft of family the photojournalist has also included pictures of suffering Iraqi families. According to Schama the Iraqi soldiers at a level cease to be ‘foreigners’ as they become part of the “colonial geography” fighting for the “trancendent good” of the Iraqi’s (qtd. in Gregory 235).

There are many images where women are caught in war. They are helpless in contrast to the active combatants before the arrival of foreign forces. Various images of families being separated show how the nation has been taken under siege. Images of suspected insurgents captured by the U.S. marines are shown (Sean Smith 106) followed by many photographs where the U.S. soldiers lead the blindfolded Iraqi civilians and suspects. As Bhabha observes the figure of the native is reduced to a mere refugee in his/her own land where he/she becomes both “wanderer and prisoner” (qtd. in Gregory 258). Giroux and Street’s view can be used to read the photographs as they show how the conflicts become a means of, “Moral imperative to collapse the boundaries between innocent and guilty, between suspect and non-suspect, between peaceful political dissent and pathological, extremist alienation.” (qtd. in Gregory 261)
It also shows how the once emancipators who had come all the way from the U.S. have turned tyrants. The American reign in Iraq resembles forms of “new imperialism and new colonialism”. Ignatieff views that while establishing the project of “empire” the U.S. upholds hegemony without creating colonies. From the images one can deduce the production “of global influence without the burden of direct administration and the risks of daily policing” (Ignatieff 2-3). The siege of Iraq is viewed by the Arab population as a “grisly charade”. As Tariq Ali deposes the political intervention is built on avarice and imperial fantasies (qtd. in Gregory 148). Iraq gradually becomes America’s Iraq. The images build a vantage point which perceives the American as epitome of innocence and the Iraqi/Israeli/Afghan inhabitants as evil (Stam).

Reading the photographs one comes to understand them largely as “state sponsored violence against terrorist and local violence against ethnic neighbours” the spectacle of the arrested, injured or humiliated enemy serves as the “proof of the very treachery it was designed to destroy” (Appadurai, “Fear of Small” 107).

From the images taken for analysis we come to a realization that every Afghan, Israeli and Iraqi citizen is a threat and the war is individualised (Henry Giroux and Paul Street). The select images studied conceptualize pictures and metaphors of class, gender, ethnicity and nation. Coded with eurocentric discourses, the images are laden with ideoscapes that clearly demarcates ‘us’ vs. ‘them’. The unequal distribution of power results in “imaginative geographies” (Said) where power games are played. Discourses of national myths are perpetrated by gruesome images loaded with cultural significance. They bring out how justice is protracted and counter cultures are created. The myriad
images while capturing vicissitudes enunciate a pro American view of supranation thereby dismissing the battle for an independent nation.

While the active Middle East or Sri Lanka is personified as being tumultuous, quiescent citizens, the West is the rational messiah readily volunteering to rescue them from oppression. The texts are resonant with culture and restructure the general discernments. As Slavoj Zizek rightly observes, reality is not constructed through the images, instead it is these images which determine and construe reality for the world. In Zizek’s works the images act as the “symbolic coordinates which determine what we experience as reality” (16). The body of ideas encapsulate in the texts conjure a sense of reality. The images analysed go in accordance with Achille Mbembe’s view as quoted in the Fear of Small Numbers, and coerces us to “imagine a more terrifying landscape, in which order (regularity, predictability, routine and everydayness itself) is organized around the fact are the prospect of violence” (Appadurai 31).

Modern conflicts endeavour to institute a “new global narrative” in which the authority to narrate is consigned in a specific array of “power and knowledge within the United States of America” (Gregory 16). The mediascapes perpetuate conflict as being fought between civilization vis-à-vis barbarisms through images. As Lewis comments the mediascape becomes, “A cultural site where the public and private dimensions of social life converge through the communications experiences of individual subjects: that is, the site where individuals and the media interact.” (Lewis 10)

Myths and symbols loaded with cultural values are circulated on the virtual platforms to shape a distinct national identity. The photograph becomes an alternate site
for ideology production. Despite the fact the snaps have been captured by an ‘outsider’ – Sean Smith, they keenly bring to fore how the western powers or hegemonic centre (Taliban /Arabs/Jews) consciously undermines them. The images to a certain extent bring out the justification for the rise of separatist and guerrilla forces claim for nation.

    Though media claim to create static social meanings, in trying to comprehend or recreate nation and reality through virtual spaces, meaning is increasingly becoming ambiguous. This ‘information age’ is characterised and complicated by the cultural and power battles “fought in and by media” (Castell, “End of Millennium” 384) where films, photographs and web sources alter our perceptive of things. As Castells had proposed the network societies logically disrupt stability of political power centres in formulating syntaxes of cultural identity. The interdisciplinarity of the visual texts reinforces the empirical nature of the media culture. As Castells proposes the ‘network societies’ while liquidating the hermetic structures deploy newer forms where, “Nationalism, localism, ethnic separatism, and cultural communes break up with society at large, and rebuild its institutions not from the bottom up, but from the inside out, the ‘‘who we are’’ versus those who do not belong” (Castells, “End of Millennium” 388).