

M.A. THESIS IN LINGUISTICS

**VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS:
A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS
OF THE WAR IN SRI LANKA**

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Abstract

Language plays an important role in people's lives and people reconstruct social realities with language. This study examines how the war in Sri Lanka is discursively constructed around the victim/perpetrator binary by the two most talked-about texts in the human rights and reconciliation discourse in Sri Lanka: the UN Report of the Panel of Experts (POE) and the Report of the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC), by adopting Norman Fairclough's Socio-cultural framework which combines text analysis with processing and social analyses. In doing so, this study shows how the two texts, based on the same event, reconstruct the war in terms of different perpetrators through the use of ideologically-charged language and also how the polarized nature of these constructions impacts society and in turn is impacted by society. In reporting events of complex nature, writers may refrain from constructing ideologically-rigid narratives and this study proposes a guideline for ideologically-neutral language that can be used in representing realities of complex nature such as protracted armed conflict, where perpetrators become victims and victims become perpetrators over a period of time.

(179 words)