

OSU Sawyer Seminar Conference

"Imagining Alternative Modernities: Interventions from the Balkans and South Asia"

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Title:

Post-War Alterities: Cinematic Interventions on Loss, Justice and Fatherhood from Bosnia and Sri Lanka

Abstract:

Our paper draws on Bosnia and Sri Lanka, two countries in which local struggles to make sense of their past wars, violence, and deep personal losses are also a search for ways to see, and speak of postwar futures. In this quest, justice and futures that recognize and redress the hurts suffered during war become fiercely contested terrains.

Using two iconic, award winning films from both countries - Prasanna Vithanage's *Death on a Full Moon Day* (1998) and Pjer Zalica's *Fuse* (2003) –we examine the relationship of loss to justice, truth seeking, and individual and institutional accountability in the post-war context. Motherhood, and the loss of sons to war violence, has been a regular trope in war cinema. But the two films we discuss deal with father-son relationships. In both films, while the communities around the main father figures look to a brighter future beyond war, the fathers are tied to the loss of their sons and the search for truth as justice. In both films the sight/seeing and speech/language are important cinematic tools through which both the specific masculinities of the main characters, and their quest for justice are constructed.

In examining these two films together, we explore how they represent truth seeking and justice as fields of power, as practice, and as promise of progress and development in postwar contexts, and how masculinities are implicated therein. As both States and local communities mediate constructions of manhood and its relation to loss, truth, and justice, we also offer a critical look at the interplay of 'normative' international and national (legal) frameworks that may have little resonance with local ideas on how justice and truth, and better life, are defined, experienced, amended or abandoned. For example, while essentializing communities in terms of ethnicity is very much part of the 'force of the law', justice and futures as understood and practiced on the ground often take different routes.

While the paper offers an analysis of cinematic representations on the relationships between gender/masculinity, ethnicity, loss, and justice in post-war Bosnia and Sri Lanka, it also contextualizes those representations within ethnographic studies of gendered experiences of war, and local meanings and practices of justice in the two countries.