



RESEARCH PAPER

Magical Realist Motors and the Fictive Chats of the Dead of the Sri Lankan Civil War in Karunatilaka's *The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida*

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ABSTRACT

This paper closely reads Shehan Karunatilaka's *The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida* (2022) as a fictive response to the Sri Lankan Civil War. Using Maggie Ann Bowers' *Magic(al) Realism* and Anne C. Hegerfeldt's *Lies that Tell the Truth: Magic Realism Seen Through Contemporary Fiction from Britain*, as a base for theoretical framework, the paper explores various elements of the Sri Lankan Civil War and exposes the war brutalities as a major exploitation of the human rights. The paper also focuses on the fictive depictions of the role of the international powers in providing arms to both the Sri Lankan government and the state declared terrorist outfits like LTTE. Exploring nexus of global powers, it explores the sponsorship of the terrorism in the guise of NGOs. Finally delving deep, this paper unfolds the agenda of different factions of the war like JVP and satanic faces of the state ministers who protected themselves by some illogical magic charms while burning their own ethnic minorities.

KEYWORDS

Magical Realism, Shehan Karunatilaka, Sri Lankan Civil War, *The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida*

Introduction

Shehan Karunatilaka smashes the misleading and quasi historico-political facade of the Sri Lankan Civil War by presenting an alternative reality through the chats of the dead of the war, adopting magical realist motors to transfer the anguish, pain, and opinions of the war victims in his 2022 Booker winning *The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida* (initially published as *Chats with the Dead* in 2020). Second person narration attaches the reader with the text and largely with Sri Lankan Civil War which is being presented at a peak time of 1989. Not knowing how he died, Maali Almeida's soul, a gay photographer of Sri Lankan Civil War's brutalities, wakes up after his death. His soul interacts with Dr. Rane Sridharan, a volunteer, whose duty is to deal with the souls in the Afterlife and Maali recalls that she was the very lecturer who was killed by Tamil Tigers. Every soul has a time of seven moons to get their ears checked before entering The Light, but against the instructions of the staff of the Afterlife, Maali chooses to follow the soul of a JVP communist Sena Pathirana, who takes him to the time on the bank of Beira Lake where Balal Ajith and Kottu Nihal are chopping the dead body of Maali into pieces to throw them into the lake. Sena asks Maali that he would help him in knowing the reason of his death and in securing secret war pictures which are hidden under the bed of the cook who serves his mother. Those photos were taken by Maali during the Civil War as photographic evidences to the war crimes. Maali believes that those confidential pictures will bring down the government

and end the Civil War. So, all they have to do is publicizing these pictures and knowing reason of Maali's death but Sena's soul would help Maali only if he solely served Sena and willingly suspended obeying instructions of Dr. Ranee and rejected going to The Light. Learning that Maali's soul can go wherever his name is called, Maali reaches a police station where DD and Jaki - friends of Maali, had come along with Maali's Amma to report as they supposed that Maali had gone missing. Now, Maali's soul starts following Detective Cassim and ASP Ranchagoda in their search of disappeared (dead) Maali and they reach Hotel Leo where Balal Ajith and Kottu Nihal narrate that they found dead body of Maali in backside of the building. Moving forward in investigation, cops reach office of CNTR at the seventh floor of the same building where Elsa and Kugarajah of CNTR tell them that Maali worked for them but they didn't know about his disappearance (death). Here the first moon for Maali has passed and once again rejecting instructions of Dr Ranee to get his ears checked, Maali flies to Galle Face Court in the home of his friend (beloved) Dilan Dharmendran (DD) where ASP Ranchagoda, detective Cassim and Elsa, an official of CNTR, are illegally searching box of photos under Maali's bed as they want to use those pictures for their own purposes. Not finding the box there, they reach Maali's native house in Bambalapitiya where the Minister of Justice, Cyril Wijeratne appears to take same war photos which are finally found under Kamala's bed. Trying to secure these pictures from Minister Cyril and CNTR, Maali flies with Sena to the Crow Man who agrees to help Maali in talking to his friend Jaki if Maali pledged to help him in his black magical activities in return. Starting with the third moon, Jaki reaches to Crow Man's cave where Maali's soul uses Crow Man as a transitory medium to ask Jaki to search for the negatives of the pictures. Jaki, not believing in Crow Man's spell, tells about this to DD. Jaki calls one of the numbers from Maali's address book marked with the symbol of an Ace and after receiving invitation of meeting from the person on the other side of phone, they reach to British High Commission. Both the cousins are confused that how was Maali in association with this person of High Commission, named as Jonny Gilhooley who tells them that he only acted as a conduit between Maali and the international media. Dead bodies of Maali and Sena along with fifteen others are found in Beira Lake and Jaki working as a radio hostess narrates that UN has verified the bodies. Maali and Sena are suspected to have been killed by death squads of the government. Catching another wave of air, Maali's soul reaches to an office where Minister Cyril asks Elsa of CNTR to act as an "intermediary" between Britain's arm dealers and the government and that these arms can be given to Mahatiya section of LTTE and in return Elsa will get photos of 1983 massacre. Minister Cyril announces a curfew to run his affairs smoothly and also orders Major to "pickup" Elsa.

Starting with the fourth moon, the dead bodies are brought to burn into a furnace in a crematorium. Maali's soul flies to hear a conversation between DD and his father minister Stanley. On hearing of Maali's association with Robert Sudworth of Associated Press, Stanley tells his son DD and Jaki that there is a representative of Lockheed System named Robert Sudworth who sells arms to SAARC countries. Minister Cyril throws war photos and Maali's bones (dead body) into the furnace so that they could be burnt and evidences of war brutalities can be removed. On their return from crematorium, Balal Ajith, Kottu Nihal and Drivermalli are struck by an accident planned by spirits of Sena and his fellows, killing both Balal and Kottu. Thus, to some extent, the revenge is taken. Maali visits Palace, a house of torcher cells and watches war brutalities. Finally, Dr. Ranee appears and agrees to bend the rules for Maali with a condition that he must reach River of Births and The Light before his seventh moon disappears. Learning from Dr. Ranee, Maali appears in a dream of Jaki asking to find negatives of his war pictures. Jaki awakens and finally finds negatives of pictures along with a note saying that these pictures must be taken to Viran, who starts developing pictures from negatives to display them at Arts Centre Club. Maali's soul follows Jaki to Hotel Leo where he observes that office of CNTR is empty and Elsa

runs away. Maali listens to two Israeli's making an arms deal with a Karachi Kid who appears on the behalf of Colonel Mahatiya of LTTE. Maali recalls that he wrote a note to DD before his death, inviting him to meet at Hotel Leo. DD declined the invitation but still someone arrived to meet Maali although he was not DD. Maali is remembering who came to meet him on his last night but his thoughts are interrupted as someone calls his name and his soul flies in that direction. Starting with the sixth moon, Maali is observing Arts Centre where DD, Clarantha, Viran and some other individuals are framing photos of war brutalities on the walls of Arts Centre and thus Maali's plan is accomplished. Here dead dogs and dead tourists meet Maali. Dead tourists think that these war pictures had got Maali killed. Here Sena appears along with an army of dead journalists, revolutionaries and victims of bombs to execute Mission Kuveni. Here a dead child soldier exposes to Maali that Drivermalli is an undercover tiger and his real name is Kulaweerasingham Weerakumaran who has joined hands with Kugarajah of CNTR to avenge murder of his dead parents and two brothers in an army raid. Then Maali follows Sena's dead army to Palace where Maali peers into a room and is astonished to see Jaki in a torture cell along with PVC pipes. With the appearance of the seventh moon Maali urges Sena to help him protect Jaki. Ultimately Mahakali empowers Maali to make three whispers as a result of Maali's promise to help them in mission Kuveni. Using these whispers on Jaki and detective Cassim, Maali paves the way for Jaki's safety. Minister Stanley rescues Jaki from Palace and goes to a meeting of Minister Cyril and the Major, where Drivermalli, getting whispers from Sena's dead army, makes a suicide bomb attack killing members of death squad including Minister Stanley. However, Minister Cyril prevents death by the help of his Demon. Running from Mahakali, Maali's soul reaches The River of Births and here the secret of Maali's death is finally revealed as he remembers that on the last night instead of DD his father had come and killed Maali in order to prevent his son DD from Maali's company and his sexual desires. Maali's war pictures are displayed and his murderer is exposed as well. Entering The Light, Maali chooses a drink which ultimately made him a volunteer of Afterlife and Maali meets many souls including Drivermalli and Minister Stanley. Many moons later, Maali visits the Lionel Wendt gallery where his photos are being removed in the supervision of Minister Cyril who comes on a wheelchair and announces curfew once again. Few moons later Maali jumps into The Light to reach somewhere new and ultimately he will forget his past, his painful past of Sri Lankan Civil War.

Literature Review

V. V. Ganeshanathan's reading of the novel projects a resemblance between Dr Raneer with Rajani Thiraganama, a professor at the University of Jaffna's medical school and "a critic of militant" LTTE who was finally assassinated by them. Life of Maali is similar with real life journalist, Richard De Zoysa who was abducted and killed. She observes that "the book seems to invite us to look for such real-world correspondences" (*Foreign Policy*, January 7, 2023). Tomiwa Owolade maintains that Karunatilaka's novel through its second person narration gives a slightly detached feel, although this is offset by the sardonic humor. Its magical realism can be compared with that of Rushdie and Márquez. Beneath the fictional narrative is a horrific and terrible reality: "the carnage of Sri Lanka's civil wars". Karunatilaka has given a horrific chapter in his nation's history an artistic justice (*The Guardian*, August 9, 2022). Ron Charles holds that the novel "swings wildly from absurd comedy to grotesque tragedy" and the tale floats through Sri Lankan history and culture. Author made it easy for people to know about Sri Lankan Civil War even if they have a little knowledge about Sri Lanka (*The Washington Post*, November 1, 2022). Gayatri Devi also reiterates the fact that novel can be said to embody "reality" as the evil military general Major Raja Udugampola seems to be modeled after the real Deputy Police

Inspector General Premadasa Udugampola and character of corrupt minister Cyril seems to be a real representation of “real Ranjan Wijeratne, the minister of Defense to whom the government’s death squads allegedly reported” (*Asian Review of Books*, December 13, 2022). Nikhil Krishan grilling review finds in the novel “virtually nothing but jokes” and that it has “untranslated Sinhalese curses and half-explained references to Sri Lankan political history” (*The Telegraph*, October 18, 2022). Navin Sharma and Priyanka Tripathi (2023) maintain that the novel “functions as a tool for promoting Human Rights (HR) and as a cultural medium for spreading awareness about it” as it discusses that “ethno-nationalism” and various political and cultural discourses “dehumanize and demonize” minorities in a country, thus resulting in their genocide which is clearly seen in this novel.

Theoretical Framework

Maggie Ann Bowers (2004) in her book *Magic(al) Realism*, discusses magical realism as a narrative mode which offers “alternative approaches to reality to that of western philosophy, expressed in many postcolonial and non-Western works of contemporary fiction” (p. 1). She elaborates that this term is used to explain “all narrative fiction that includes magical happenings in a realist matter of fact narrative” and it “relies most of all upon the matter of fact, realist tone of its narrative when presenting magical happenings,” thus it’s a “version of literary criticism.” As it merges the realist and the magical aspects together in “two opposing aspects of oxymoron,” thus it’s regarded as “disruptive narrative mode” (pp. 2-3). And interestingly it is popular among writers as it enables them “to write against totalitarian regimes a means to attack the definitions and assumptions which support such systems” as they build their writings to attack stability of such systems.

The term “magic realism” was introduced by German art critic Franz Roh to refer to a new form of painting (p. 8). In writing, Massimo Bontempelli initially adopted magical realism during time of Mussolini and being impressed by fascism, he wanted “magic realist writing to provide means to inspire the Italian nation and to make Italian culture more international in outlook” (p. 12). Similarly, Bowers says Alejo Carpentier “recognized a need for art to express the non-material aspects of life” and he used the term “marvelous realism” (p. 13). For Bowers “magic” in magical realism is an extraordinary happening or phenomenon which is beyond “rational science”. These happenings or phenomenon may include “ghosts, disappearances, miracles, extraordinary talents and strange atmosphere” (p. 19). While Aristotle draws importance to “mimesis” or “act of imitating life” in art, magical realism builds its arguments, “upon realism but only so that it can stretch what is acceptable as real to its limits” (pp. 20-21). Same text can have “varied interpretations” which suggest that although distinct but there is a “closeness between magical realism, the fantastic, allegory and science fiction” and its magical component should be accepted as a part of material reality rather than being imaginings of mind or influence of drugs (pp. 28-29). Some “highly politically motivated writers” have used magical realism to feature those cities which “are the focus of political and social tensions” and these novels are written “from the marginal perspectives of people lacking political power.” These fictions utilize magical realism to argue against “colonialism” and its postcolonial decadence “from the perspective of the politically or culturally disempowered” indigenous people (p. 30). Thus, magical realism is a powerful artistic tool in fiction to be a “powerful form of indirect political resistance” (p. 39).

Many writers like Andre Brink have used “dead characters and spirits amongst the living” which signifies “relevance of past to the present” (Hegerfeldt, 2005, p. 54). Hegerfeldt establishes that using techniques of literalization and metaphors like ghosts in fictive texts signify “ongoing influence of the past by making it physically present” (p. 57).

Magical realism has the tendency to establish views of marginalized communities due to “its inherent transgressive and subversive qualities” (Bowers, 2004, p. 63). Zamora and Faris argue that employing both magical and real elements together, magical realist texts offer “resistance to monological political and cultural structures” and it is frequently used by “writers in postcolonial cultures” (quoted in Bowers, p. 64). Similarly its transgressive tendency enables the text to display perspectives from marginalized or deteriorated communities. Dominant ruling elite exploits “the others” by taking the right of self-rule or the power to challenge the truth but “transgressive power of magical realism provides a means to attack the assumptions of the dominant culture” and it equally challenges so called truths and history (p. 65). And thus breaking the idea of a singular absolute truth, magical realism maintains “possibility of many truths to exist simultaneously” (p. 67). Resultantly, in its postmodern tendency, magical realism challenges “already existing historical assumptions” like Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* along with Morrison’s *Beloved* reject “the official history” and they question so called history and truth. Thus, Hegerfeldt suggests that these texts display “interestedness and constructedness of historical accounts” by telling the story from an “oppressed perspective” (2005, p. 63). This employment of “multiple-perspectived” fictions and rejection of truth give rise to “a space beyond authoritative discourse where the unrepresentable can be expressed” (Bowers, 2004, pp. 73-77). And its selection by postcolonial writers signifies “its acceptance as a liberating and transformative narrative mode” (p. 122).

Results and Discussion

Dead Maali, a Witness of War Brutalities

The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida serves as an alternative historical document of the Sri Lankan Civil War. The technique of magical realism enables the character of dead Maali to easily visit ministers’ offices, torture cells, so called NGO workrooms, police stations and consulate as well as to mark war trajectory and discover sea of brutalities and oppressions by major actors. Living Maali Almeida shared as much painful souvenirs of war memories as does his soul. As Bowers (2004) suggests that magical realism enables a writer in “expressing views that oppose the dominant ways of thinking” (p. 49), the same is done by Karunatilaka in this novel. When the government is building a false claim of protecting the state, Karunatilaka not only challenges this dominant way of thinking but also presents a charge sheet against the war crimes of the Sri Lankan state. Ranging from forced disappearances to extrajudicial killing, this novel provides itself as a memorial site of exploitation of human rights in Sri Lankan Civil War. Occupation of Afterlife with souls is interlinked with “Tigers and Army killing civilians” and “Government is fighting the JVP and bodies are piling high” (Karunatilaka, 2023, p. 6). Dead Maali recalls a scene of war when he was stuck “in a bunker of terrified parents and screaming children” (p. 2). Hearing of pains of the dead brings the relevancy of the past to the present and thus magical realism as Bowers (2004) mentions challenges fundamentalism, ethnicity and racism (p. 4).

Maali reveals murderer of Dr Ranee in Afterlife that she got dead because of writing articles on the Tamil Tigers. Whole episode of Beira Lake in the novel is evidence of extra judicial killings and forced disappearances where bodies are thrown by death squads. Maali observes scenes when Balal Ajith and Kottu Nihal are dumping “four bodies in the Beira Lake” and one of the bodies has “the chunks missing from the face (Karunatilaka, 2023, p. 16). Level of oppression is such that Maali observes that limbs which he once owned are “packed into the boxes” (p. 21). Government’s hate for even dead bodies pops up when Maali’s soul hears from garbage men to “smash the teeth, pulp the face” of dead bodies so that those cannot be identified. Dead Sena confesses before Maali that “The JVP

killed less than three hundred” (p. 26). Although lower in number but this confession from a dead JVP anarchist in the novel is a clear evidence of JVP’s anarchy in the name of revolution. Sena’s soul reflects that “the government killed more than twenty thousand” (p. 26).

Being a source of information from all factions, Maali’s soul hears Kottu say: “They say STF and the IPKF are dumping bodies left, right and centre” (p. 34). This confession of government employees as heard by dead Maali is sufficient to expose war brutalities. While recalling about his death, Maali remembers about real life slayed journalist of Civil War, Richard who “got abducted” (p. 115) and Dead Maali uncovers the fact that “the government took out Richard de Zoysa” (p. 40). As Maali’s soul visits a police station, he observes a large number of cases of disappearances during the Civil War. In fact The UN Commissioner for human rights has also narrated about torture and disappearances of citizens (Anandakugan, 2021). And it is believed that Pakistan, UK and Israel trained STF of Sri Lanka while World Powers sold weapons to same country. In police station parents are “inquiring after sons and daughters who never came home” (Karunatilaka, 2023, p. 46). Once, while following cops, Maali confronts with a dead lawyer who was “burn[t] alive” (p. 59). Dead lawyer shares that she “encountered a Sinhalese mob with torches” (p. 61). As his soul reaches the consulate and observes Jonny Gilhooley, Maali remembers a battle between Mahatiya faction of LTTE and Army in which army attacked the camps and “villagers had either fled or were dead.” This account of war as shared by dead Maali is sufficient to reflect innocent people being used as shields in LTTE camps and ultimately their death by Sri Lankan Army. Although civilians are being killed in the name of war, the government minister gives a statement that dead bodies found on Beira Lake are not connected with “current political climate” (p. 204). As Bowers (2004) mentions that magical realism “can reflect manipulation of reality by a corrupt government” (p. 39) and in the same manner reader knows through Dead Maali that many of these dead bodies were results of extrajudicial killings by STF. Dead bodies are humiliated in such a way that Maali’s dead body hasn’t “much to bury” (Karunatilaka, 2023, p. 209). Maali’s soul flies and hears a telephone conversation between Minister Cyril and the Major as they are planning to impose a curfew so that they can burn dead bodies and run illegal affairs smoothly. Maali’s soul brings satanic role of characters on surface for he can hear their backdoor discussions as at a level the Minister asks Elsa to find negatives of Maali’s pictures but in her absence the minister orders the Major to abduct Elsa and this evil role of the minister is served before reader through Maali’s soul’s hearing of all the conversations. Maali’s soul witnesses brutal scene of dead bodies being burnt to remove evidences of extra judicial killings. Dead bodies of war victims are brought on cargo to the crematorium and “emptied into the furnace” (p. 225). Recalling about the Major, Maali narrates that same person would make large graves to “bury villages in, then he made soldiers dress the bodies in Tigers uniforms and pose them” (p. 249). This is enough to expose plight of the innocent Tamils on the hands of Sri Lankan Army. Palace, a torture cell has “rope, PVC pipe, barbed wire” to torture abducted individuals (p. 255). Talking with a dead priest near Palace, Maali hears “the screeches and the whimpers and the rattle of electricity” (p. 257).

During the Fifth Moon of Maali’s Afterlife, he meets five dead Tiger child soldiers who say their life is easy in Afterlife as “no one is shouting at us” (p. 286). As Bowers (2004) observes that magical realism enables writers to project ideas of marginalized community, this plight of children of marginalized Tamil community makes the novel a perfect magical realist text. This after death version of Tiger child soldiers unveils forced conscription of children and their ultimate sufferings. Maali floats to Palace and observes “the naked bodies of Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims and Burghers are indistinguishable” (Karunatilaka, 2023, p. 317). Barnes (2013) supports this fact by saying that Sri Lankan authorities

subscribed Sinhala nationalism and they tortured every ethnic group which stood against it. U.N. Human Rights Council evidences that “beating on the soles of the feet (falaqa), blows to the ears (telephono) and burning with metal objects” were practiced by military forces. Forced disappearances of people during the Sri Lankan Civil War were a normal case as shown through Maali’s friend Jaki’s illegal abduction to investigate about the negatives of the pictures made by Maali. Maali reads a report saying that Jaki was a friend of JVP terrorist and “was found in possession of narcotics” (Karunatilaka, 2023, p. 336). Tragedy of Civil War is summed up by Maali’s observation that “Lanka disintegrates. War continues and the people comfort themselves that the current lot weren’t as bad as the last lot” (p. 375).

Disclosure of Nexus of Global Powers by Dead Maali

Being an unseen force, Maali’s soul has access to all sides involved in the Sri Lankan Civil War: from government offices to consulates, from so called NGO offices to arms dealer offices. His soul brings to surface the multidimensional role of all the actors of the Sri Lankan Civil War and exposes their respective selfish approaches as well. Innocent people of Sri Lanka are not safe from any side as Maali, noticing a large crowd of the dead in the Afterlife, says: “Tigers and Army killing civilians. Indian peacekeepers starting the wars” (p. 6). Maali’s whole effort in the Afterlife is to make his war pictures displayed as some of them show “an army major, a Tiger colonel, and a British arms dealer at the same table, sharing a jug of king coconut” (p. 12). This picture unfolds a satanic nexus among war fighters who at a larger level are associated with each other. In fact, Maali himself narrates that IPKF is “willing to burn villages to fulfil their mission” (p. 23). Kodikara (1989) evidences that Research and Analysis Wing of India not only provided arms to LTTE but also started “killing the same people whom they came to protect.” At an occasion Maali remembers Elsa saying the names of Yael and Menachem, two Israelis who portrayed themselves as movie makers but in fact they “sell third-rate weapons to the government” (Karunatilaka, 2023, p. 107). This uncovers the role of global powers in the destruction of Sri Lanka. In a discussion between Elsa, DD and Stanley, Maali hears Elsa saying that IPKF “carried out two massacres of civilians this year. One was in hospital” (p. 127). Even Maali once photographed a hospital having “beds piled with dead doctors and nurses” (pp. 127-128). Although Jonny Gilhooley narrates that he works for the High Commission and Robert Sudworth works for the so called Associated Press but DD and Jaki are amazed to find office of the Associated Press at the British High Commission” (p. 180). Karunatilaka projects that in the name of journalism, several international arms dealers like that of Robert Sudworth, spotted during Sri Lankan Civil War, were even backed by International Consulates in Sri Lanka like that of England. Maali’s soul recalls that “British Arms dealers have been spotted in the war zone” (p. 181). David (1992) elaborates that third world countries can buy weapons from other third world countries along with USA, Russia, UK and Israel and it makes difficult to stop wars in these countries by cutting arms supplies from superpowers. Defining the British stance in the international affairs, Jonny Gilhooley says: “We pick the right side. Support the right team” (Karunatilaka, 2023, p. 189). In a conversation, Jonny Gilhooley of British Consulate confesses before Maali: “I work for intelligence” (p. 190). Selvakumar (2021) argues that UK not only provided arms supplies to Sri Lanka but also has “destroyed documentation implicating UK [involvement] in Sri Lanka’s [state] crimes”. SIPRI (2009) also views role of the US based brokers, dealers of EU and South East Asia in providing arms to terrorists in Sri Lanka. Even the US had some say in Sri Lankan Civil War, as “the CIA were rumored to be training” torturers in Sri Lankan Civil War. Maali flies and hears a phone call between Jonny Gilhooley and Robert Sudworth as the former is trying to beware the latter that he must be careful about his life and asked whether someone saw him having conversation with the Major and LTTE Colonel. This discussion as heard by Dead Maali is of great significance as at the other

moment Robert confesses before Jonny: "I'm just here to do business. That's all" (Karunatilaka, 2023, p. 212). In other words, business of selling weapons by adopting profession of journalism.

Maali's soul flies to a conversation between Elsa and Minister Cyril as the latter is trying to convince Elsa to act as an "intermediary" between Sri Lankan Government and Mahatiya faction of LTTE, so that the government can supply weapons to terrorists. Thus, this discussion is of utmost importance as it unveils, "SL government are arming terrorists" (p. 215). Role of Robert Sudworth is finally brought before the reader when minister Stanley, while hearing name of Sudworth from DD, exhibits that there is a representative for Lockheed Systems with this name who "sell[s] weapons to most of the SAARC governments" (p. 228). Karunatilaka through a dead priest who later becomes Mahakali, says: "Canadian refugees fund our terror, Israeli tanks kill our young" (p. 261). Maali's hovering over a discussion between Karachi Kid, named as Donald Duck and Yael and Menachem exposes that Israeli's were selling weapons to factions of Sri Lankan Civil War. As Yael replies: "You want scud missiles, we can get, brother," he also asks Karachi kid, "Have you done business with Colonel Mahatiya before?" (p. 283). Israelis confess that they have done business with Government and Tigers before (p. 284). In a flashback, Maali's soul remembers saying to Jonny Gilhooley: "You sell weapons to a government who sells them to terrorists to use on Indians. Now, you want to arm a splinter group" (p. 295). When dead Maali flies to meeting between Minister Cyril and the Major, he hears the minister saying: "We are inviting Indians to invade us. We are doing deals with Tamil terrorists. We are killing our own Sinhalese" (p. 345).

Terrorists in the Guise of NGOs

In search of their friend Maali, DD and Jaki are wandering around police stations and this entire quest is being monitored by dead Maali's soul throughout the novel. Sharing information with ASP Ranchagoda and Detective Cassim, Jaki says: "He was working for human rights NGO. Something to do with 1983" (p. 53). Maali also observes Elsa saying to cops: "We collect donation, spread awareness, [and] protect civilians" (p. 76). In fact, Kugarajah, director of CNTR and cousin of Elsa introduces himself: "I work with the governments of Canada and Norway" (p. 77). Throughout the novel officials of CNTR (Canada Norway Third World Relief) introduce themselves as people of NGO but their role in the context of warfare is of working for terror as Kugarajah arranges a bomb attack on ministerial building rather than rehabilitation of Tamils. Even cops are doubtful of the role of CNTR as they ask Kugarajah during investigation of Maali's disappearance: "Who's paying you, Mr. Kugarajah? India or LTTE?" (p. 78). Maali's soul observes Elsa trying to persuade cops to search the box of pictures taken by Maali and she tries to win their favor by saying that in the box there is a picture of the massacre at Batticaloa Police Station, "when six hundred of your brothers were executed by..." and here she gets the answer from Ranchagoda: "brothers of your" (p. 82). Throughout the novel cops try to relate the role of CNTR with terror rather than protecting civilians. In a flashback, Maali remembers that once Elsa had said that CNTR was having a legal team and they "[were] going after the murderers of 1983" (p. 106). Maali recalls Elsa saying: "We are not LTTE. Though our goals are not incompatible" (p. 107). Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2009) reads that LTTE had built an "organization for financing, buying and smuggling weapons" and this organization was owned by LTTE through which they made deals with US based brokers and dealers from Eastern Europe and South East Asia. Thus at various points, dead Maali confirms this hypocritic role of CNTR through flashbacks. Through focalization of dead Maali, Karunatilaka's novel uncovers that the so called NGO actually adopted violence as a means of revenge rather than using their legal team. Elsa's searching for Maali's war pictures is questioned by Minister Stanley that he being a cabinet

member had never “heard of [...] CNTR or of this project” (Karunatilaka, 2023, p. 126). Minister Stanley’s claim makes it further clear that CNTR was secretly operating its projects of so called civilians’ rehabilitation that even government officials didn’t know of. At one instant Maali recalls in flashback Kugarajah asking him: “I hope you haven’t told anyone about CNTR” (p. 112). CNTR’s role is so much racist that they even want to commission those photos by Maali which show deaths of Tamils and thus Minister Stanley asks ironically: “Do you also commission photos. That show the atrocities of the LTTE?” (p. 128). In response, Elsa replies that as a Tamil organization they “are bound by constraints” (p. 128). It is obvious that CNTR was interested using those pictures of war which show death of Tamils by Army and thus using it for taking sympathy or spreading further anarchy by brainwashing the Tamils like Drivermalli. Even when Maali hovers to British Consulate, he hears Jonny saying about CNTR that there are chances that CNTR “can be procuring weapons for militant ones” (p. 186). Thus showing a nexus of evil forces and the confusion brought thereby, Karunatilaka empowers the reader to look on all characters of the novel and parallel structure of war through a wider lens and makes their role obvious. When Maali flies to a conversation between Minister Stanley and DD, he hears the Minister saying: “Emmanuel Kugarajah is linked with LTTE proxies like EROS. And with RAW” (p. 229). During the sixth moon, it is finally revealed that the same Kugarajah of the CNTR was brainwashing Drivermalli for a suicide bomb attack on the minister’s office. Kugarajah says to Drivermalli: “You are doing a great thing, Thambi. Cyril Wijeratne’s death squad has killed thousands like this. You are being a true hero” (p. 315).

Agenda of JVP through Dead Sena

Bowers (2004) observes that magical realist texts present views of marginalized community lacking political power (p. 31). Tamils and JVP-ers, being marginalized communities, are seen in the novel expressing their views and sharing their pains. Karunatilaka (2023) unfolds the political agenda of JVP along with its violent insurgency and projects extremist terrorist mode of JVP as well. Usage of a dead character, Sena as a leading JVP-er in the text and his Afterlife activities of terror and preaching for JVP’s manifesto represent adherence of JVP-ers with their cause and anguish brought thereby. At the start of the novel, a dead atheist introduces Sena to Maali as “JVP communist scum. Dead and still talking revolution. Another killer that got killed” (p. 15). Calling Sena, as “Dead Anarchist” (p. 313), this text reflects agenda of JVP as based on insurgency. At the same time, atrocities faced by JVP are also uncovered, as Dead Sena says that a huge number of people had died: “20000 in the last year. Innocent fools, mainly” (p. 26) – a bitter fact that people suffered during the Civil War for just being doubted that they had associations with JVP.

Since 1971 JVP remained involved in conscription of thousands of militia to launch island’s first anti-state rebellion. In response, pro-state military groups captured and executed more than ten thousands cadres including those innocents who had no association with JVP at all. JVP in its ideological thought discusses Sinhala nationalism with reference to class structure and a socialist state (Venugopal, 2009). But they adopted violence to meet their ends, as Maali recalls in a flashback while writing to Andrew McGowan about JVP that they “are willing to murder the working class while they liberate them” (Karunatilaka, 2023, p. 22). In a discussion between the souls of Comrade Sena and Maali, first one says: “The only way we can enter the parts of this city is by calling the rich “sir”” (p. 42). This comment of Dead Sena clearly elaborates a class difference between rich and poor of economically devastated Sri Lanka. According to Nayar, in a postcolonial decadent society, colonial corruption is passed to the “postcolonial native elite that colonize and marginalize its weaker classes” (quoted in Shaheen, 2022, p. 93). And it is

visible that being a postcolonial decadent society, Sri Lanka is stuck in corruption and elitism of government as a dead journalist says to Maali: "Even if the country is in debt, even if wars escalate [...] there is always budget to provide each and every Minister with three luxury cars" (Karunatilaka, 2023, p. 319). Although stuck in corruption and a huge class difference this luxurious lifestyle of Ministers is another cause of poverty and economic downturn of marginalized Sri Lankan communities who eventually rose for their rights either in the form of JVP or LTTE. Dead Sena says: "I joined the JVP not because it was fashionable, but because it was necessary. I have known poverty and I have known the poor" (p. 92). Continuing his discussion for a change, rather a violent change, he says: "Revenge is your right [...] Demand your justice. The system failed you. Karma failed you. God failed you" (p. 93). Thus, a dead JVP-er is trying to express motto of JVP and he is even brainwashing dead Maali that they can even use insurgent activities to meet their ends. Expressing Marxist views of religion, Dead JVP-er says: "Buddhism forces the poor to believe they belong where they are. The order is made to appear natural. It is self-serving bullshit that keeps poor sick" going on. He says: "All religions keep the poor docile and the rich in their castles" (p. 241). Thus, these views of a dead JVP-er and dead journalist exist even in their Afterlife - a space beyond physical reality, and in fact it wasn't even possible for them to utter their views in the concrete corrupt air of Sri Lanka.

Mission Kuveni of Dead Army

Hegerfeldt (2005) suggests that appearance of ghosts signifies the continuous effect of the past on the present (p. 57). In the context of Karunatilaka's novel, it can be seen that each incident has a relevance to the past. Army of the Dead is trying to avenge their deaths, thus each murder has an association with the past. Karunatilaka successfully presents a coexistence of good and evil in the context of Sri Lankan Civil War. At a time when SL Government, LTTE, JVP, Death Squads and IPKF are killing people and chaos is increasing day by day, still there are activists who are working or speaking for people. Maali, although in Afterlife, is continuously trying to seek help so that he can portray the war pictures publicly, these war pictures are sensitive that can "stop wars" (2023, p. 6). Similarly Dr Ranees Sridharan wrote articles against Tamil Tigers. At the same times, Sena, a dead JVP anarchist, is raising an army of the dead to avenge his death and propagate further anarchy. He says to Maali that they will avenge deaths "by destroying these fuckers. Their bosses. And their bosses' bosses" (p. 29). Throughout the novel, Sena is trying to recruit Maali as a part of his dead army who has a Mission Kuveni at hand to kill the ministers and other government officials. There is a binary of two forces, evil and good who are struggling against each other. When the dead JVP-er is saying: "The innocent have the right to avenge their death," he is being replied by Dr Ranees: "Revenge is not a right. The island does not need more corpses" (p. 94). This Dead Army gets success when they finally kill Kottu Nihal and Balal Ajith when a dead engineering student of Sena's army wraps himself around the pads, eventually brakes don't work and their van hits an electric transformer killing both the garbage men whereas Drivermalli escapes death (p. 244). The souls of Balal and Kottu are eaten by Mahakali which projects that evil becomes part of evil even after death. Road accident of Balal and Kottu also results in death of five innocent civilians (p. 258). This is yet another example of JVP's manifesto which is even ready to kill innocent while it speaks for them. Mission Kuveni is being performed by Drivermalli who will kill the ministers and the Major by a suicide bomb but it is also being helped by army of the dead. A dead child soldier narrates to Maali that undercover Tiger Kulaweerasingham Weerakumaran has adopted the name of Drivermalli and is a leading figure of Mission Kuveni (p. 319). There exists a unique alliance between members of each group. Those who are spreading anarchy in Afterlife and are whispering in Drivermalli's ears to explode the bomb are a group of "Dead JVP-ers, Dead Tigers and Dead Innocents" (p. 313). This Dead Army comprising of "Dead Anarchists, Dead Separatists" (p. 345) finally gets success when

Drivermalli explodes the bomb. There starts a tussle between Mahakali and the minister's demon. The latter gets success in protecting Minister Cyril's life. Throughout this episode Maali tries to prevent Drivermalli in exploding bomb while Sena's Army motivates him to explode it. Thus, Karunatilaka puts his argument that there is agony among evil forces who even after their death try to avenge their death and thus for their evil plans there exists a nexus among these forces in the form of Sena's Army having both JVP-ers and Tigers. To stop anarchist propaganda of the government, LTTE and JVP, there are characters like Maali Almeida and Dr Ranee Sridharan who even in their Afterlife serve as volunteers and thus bring a message of hope, resilience and motivation.

Protection by Charms and Magic

Karunatilaka postulates that during the time when Sri Lanka was sandwiched between civil war and its effects and the people were being oppressed by all factors including government, army, LTTE, JVP and IPKF, the ministers were protecting themselves by adopting charms and magic of Crow Man. Same Crow Man, who uses souls of the dead for his black magical tasks, is supposed to be protector for the ministers and the Major as Minister Cyril, Minister Stanley and the Major are taking charms from him. Maali recalls through a flashback: "The Crow Man of Kotahena sells charms to protect rich ministers like Cyril Wijeratne" (p. 124). Maali recalls that if Minister Cyril would have been asked, how he survived five assassination attempts, he would say: "I am alive today because of the Crow Man" (p. 150). Here Karunatilaka is of the view that at a time when there was a lot of confusion about who's on who's side, as Jonny says: "Hard to say who is what these days," (p. 186) the ministers even had lost rationality in understanding affairs and were seeking protection from some irrational magical tricks. This claim is confirmed when Crow Man speaks with Maali's soul and says: "The richest, the most powerful, all ask my help" (p. 156). Minister Stanley meets Crow Man and Maali's soul witnesses him saying: "I need protection. For my son" (p. 328). Even minister Cyril is supposed to be driving his government by instructions of Crow Man as he says to minister Stanley: "Stanley, This is Sri Lanka's worst time. My astrologer says it is a black moon" (p. 238). Observing a "black moon," still the ministers enjoy luxurious lives, as a slain journalist says to dead Maali: "Even if the country is in debt [...] there is always budget to provide each and every minister with three luxury cars" (p. 319). Finally during the Seventh Moon of Maali when he oversees a meeting between Minister Cyril and the Major, it is revealed that both of them were wearing same bracelet taken from Crow Man. As the Major removes his bracelet, Minister Cyril says: "Don't be so cocky. Men who do our kind of work need protection from all sides" (p. 346). Associating ministers' protection and future planning of the country with some magical irrational acts, Karunatilaka elaborates that the Sri Lankan Civil War is the product of the government's policies, which are irrational and illogical and seem to be driven from somewhere upon which even ministers have no control. Minister Cyril interlinks his survival from Mission Kuveni of dead souls' army with charms. Along with his doctor he is also thankful to "his astrologer" (p. 375).

Conclusion

Learning from the physically existing world of Sri Lanka along with the magical world of the Afterlife, the reader comes to know about a horrific episode of the Sri Lankan Civil War in *The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida*. Through Maali's journey to know about the reason of his death and the purpose of displaying his war pictures, Karunatilaka unfolds the war brutalities which were being imposed on the innocent marginalized Tamils from STF, IPKF, and JVP. Thousands of the people died even on a doubt of the association either with the LTTE or JVP. Even the international powers like UK, USA and Israel, claiming to be champions of the human rights, actively sold weapons to the Sri Lankan government

whereas LTTE could also buy weapons from International arms groups quite easily. Arms brokers appear in the form of movie makers or journalists. Sri Lankan government was ready to provide weapons to Mahatiya faction of the LTTE. Sri Lankan Civil War was such a horrible historic phenomena that it was difficult to recognize who was on whose side? Terrorism sponsors like CNTR operated in the guise of NGOs to exploit the people while government ministers comprehended their affairs through illogical magical spells as those of the fictive character of Crow Man.

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