Channel 4's blatant lie about Sri Lanka
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In November 2013 Engage Sri Lanka published *Corrupted Journalism: Channel 4 and Sri Lanka*, a critique of Channel 4's misreporting on Sri Lanka.¹ *Corrupted Journalism* was a 222-page study of two of Channel 4's programmes on the last months of the Sri Lankan civil war between the Government of Sri Lanka and the “Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam” (LTTE, also known as the “Tamil Tigers”) rebel movement, which ended in May 2009. In the course of two hour-long programmes, directed by Callum Macrae and presented by Jon Snow, Channel 4 alleged that war crimes and human rights abuses had been committed by the government as the war came to an end.

*Corrupted Journalism* showed that Channel 4's programmes were unprofessional, prejudiced and inaccurate, both in the content presented, the claims made as well as in the material and facts they omitted. A key omission in the programmes was that while claiming that Sri Lankan forces shelled no-fire zones they themselves had established with the then war zone to protect civilians, Channel 4 News ignored clear evidence that these areas were actually shelled and mortared by the LTTE, that the LTTE themselves fired from within the no-fire zones, often from the vicinity of hospitals and that the Sri Lankan army had fired back in response. In fact there is not a single reference in either of the Channel 4 programmes to the LTTE having fired a single shell in the entire period said to have been investigated. *This gave viewers of the programme the false impression that the Sri Lankan army fired unilaterally into the no-fire zones without any provocation whatsoever.* This was despite the fact that the LTTE possessed and used a wide range of artillery and mortars, including 152mm long-range guns, 130mm artillery pieces, 122mm artillery guns, 120mm mortars, 81mm mortars, 60mm mortars and multi-barrel rocket launchers noted for their inaccuracy within the no-fire zones and elsewhere.

To make its case *Corrupted Journalism*’s study drew on dozens of first-hand observations, including witnesses presented by Channel 4 itself as being credible - at least as far as Channel 4 was concerned. Channel 4’s star witness was Gordon Weiss, a former UN employee who had worked in Sri Lanka in 2008-09 but who had not been in the war zone.² *Corrupted Journalism* documented that Weiss very clearly pointed out that the LTTE had been present in the no-fire zones and had in fact shelled the civilians and hospitals within them - something ignored by Channel 4.

In February 2014, Channel 4 and Callum Macrae published *The Uncorrupted Truth*, their response to *Corrupted Journalism: Channel 4 and Sri Lanka*.³ *The Uncorrupted Truth* attempted to rebut the case made in *Corrupted Journalism*. Channel 4’s stated

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that in publishing *The Uncorrupted Truth* "[w]e demonstrate that...their serious accusations have no basis in fact."

Far from doing so Channel 4 has dug itself into a bigger hole. One of the key criticisms of Channel 4 made in *Corrupted Journalism* was that Channel 4’s programmes were skewed and unprofessional in that while it was very difficult to attribute responsibility as to who was shelling into the no-fire zones - and when - preferring instead to lay the blame solely at the feet of the army, they had totally ignored abundant evidence, not least of which from their own star witness, that civilians and hospitals in no-fire zones had been shelled by the LTTE. This omission was either through prejudice or journalistic ineptitude. As *Corrupted Journalism* pointed out, the implications were disturbing:

But even more serious...would be the fact that Channel 4 clearly ignored exculpatory evidence – that is to say evidence which might prove the defendant is innocent. Had Channel 4 and its researchers read Weiss’s *The Cage*, they would have known that the very hospital at the heart of their first documentary was hit repeatedly by LTTE artillery. Weiss himself admits as much. It is very difficult indeed – and Channel 4 made no such attempt – to differentiate between the alleged shelling by the government and that of the LTTE. The UN on the ground certainly believed it was very difficult. If Channel 4 was not aware of that fact then it was grotesquely incompetent and unprofessional in making the serious claims contained in the programmes.⁴

In *The Uncorrupted Truth*, Channel 4 is finally and reluctantly forced into admitting for the first time the pivotal fact *missing* from the Channel 4 programmes in question - that the LTTE had itself shelled civilians in the no-fire zones. Channel 4 reluctantly admits that its own star witness had documented the fact:

Weiss did indeed say the LTTE had shelled civilians⁵

What then follows, however, is truly bizarre. Having been forced to concede that one of key claims in *Corrupted Journalism* was in fact true, Channel 4 then accused the authors of *Corrupted Journalism* of lying regarding another key claim. They correctly record that *Corrupted Journalism* stated “Weiss notes that the LTTE shelled their own civilians and hospitals”, but then go on to claim:

while Weiss did indeed say the LTTE had shelled civilians, there is no mention of the LTTE shelling their hospitals. *That is just invented*.(Emphasis added.)

Far from being invented, this is precisely what Weiss very clearly stated in his book. On page 131 of *The Cage: The Fight for Sri Lanka and the Last Days of the Tamil Tigers* Weiss unambiguously states with reference to the hospital, Puthukkudiyiruppu hospital, at the heart of Channel 4’s programmes that was said to have been hit by artillery fire on several occasions, that “a number of strikes appeared to be from

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⁴ *Corrupted Journalism*, op. cit., p. 189.
We reproduce the relevant section from his book below.

"independence celebrations on 4 February. The hospital was repeatedly struck by shellfire, and staff, patients and people in the grounds were killed and wounded. The majority of the fire came from government lines, but witnesses say that a number of strikes appeared to be from Tamil Tiger positions. The army, its lines briefly overstretched in an..."


Far from being "invented" by the authors of Corrupted Journalism, and that "there is no mention of the LTTE shelling their hospitals" as claimed by Channel 4 and Callum Macrae, Channel 4's own witness Gordon Weiss very clearly documents this fact in his book. This tells us a lot about the credibility of Channel 4 and Macrae regarding Sri Lanka and its attempt to rebut the case present in Corrupted Journalism. It also raises several questions for Channel 4 and of Channel 4.

The most obvious question is why was the LTTE shelling its own civilians and hospitals in the no-fire zones - was it a ruthless attempt to pass them off as army attacks in order to provoke the international intervention it so desperately sought? Why was this key possibility absent from all of Channel 4's three "forensic" programmes?

Why were the pivotal facts that the LTTE had shelled civilians in the no-fire zones and that the LTTE had shelled hospitals in the no-fire zones, totally absent from Channel's self-proclaimed "forensic" examinations of events in those no-fire zones when they are easily available to read in a key book on the subject by Channel 4's own star witness, Gordon Weiss? Wikipedia defines forensic as a "scientific method of gathering and examining information". Channel 4's studied avoidance of including anything that jarred with its own predetermined script is stunningly unprofessional.

Did Callum Macrae, or any of Channel 4's 800 employees or any of the employees in Callum Macrae's own production company actually read Gordon Weiss' book, The Cage: The Fight for Sri Lanka and the Last Days of the Tamil Tigers? If they did why did they cherry-pick the parts they wanted at the expense of clearly exculpatory material in the same book? Or is it the case that none of Channel 4's 800 employees or Callum Macrae or any of the employees in Macrae's own production company had read Gordon Weiss' book? If this is the case then it is an unforgivable failure in due diligence on their part.

The reality is that Channel 4 has itself now eventually admitted that the most serious "accusation" in Corrupted Journalism, that Channel 4's programmes was either unaware of or ignored key exculpatory evidence damaging their claims, such as the fact that the LTTE shelling the very civilians it was claiming to protect, was absolutely true.

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7 Weiss, op. cit., p. 131.