

Road Memoir : libretto

EPISODE #1a : "This Land"

The Woman (sung) :

This land.
This land.
This land is a parchment.
This land is a skin.
Stretched taut
Over broken bones -
Our country.
Our blessed country.
Seething
Beneath a cruel sky.

The futile secrets
Of this fragile world
Nestle within the folds
Of these solemn hills.

Time writes it's memoirs
In the swirling dust.
Light shifts uneasily
In it's haze.

Smoke hangs over the city.
We watch each other nervously.

The Investigator (spoken) :

In the 15 months I worked for the U.N. I probably investigated a couple-a hundred mobile phones. Downloading, logging, assessing photos, video, emails, texts.

The potential value of this "device processing" had first been fully recognised following the Sri Lankan civil war, in 2009. Thousands of civilians had been trapped in this "no fire zone" in the north of the country - trapped by both the government forces and the Tamils. In reality the "no fire zone" was a killing field - the Sri Lankan army were systematically eradicating everyone in it - the fighters for sure but also the civilians. Shelling them, bombing them, summary executions, you name it. The old and the young, men, women, children. They did just about all they could to wipe them from the face of the earth.

Even after the slaughter, the Sri Lankan government kept the area shut down - controlling the facts - but soon photos and videos began to

emerge that recorded the horrors that had occurred - many filmed by the trapped civilians but also a significant number of trophy videos made by soldiers, wanting to record or celebrate the killing.

Ten years earlier a person would have needed to have a camera or camcorder to film this stuff but modern mobile phones have changed all that. Even the poor civilians of Northern Sri Lanka (and the poor soldiers of the army too) had the means right there in their hands...

The photos and videos found their way into the possession of journalists first, but soon they were gathered by human rights investigators who viewed and logged and analysed and compared what they found within them, piecing together the dreadful truth of what happened in that strip of land, between the jungle and the sea..

After that, mobile phone evidence became a big thing.

EPISODE #1b : "Yesterday"

The Woman (sung) :

On summer days
Like these when,
Drawn to the light,
We'd sit on the steps,
Talk about life and love,
Our hopes and dreams.

At first just a gathering
Then gradually a group
In the street below my window,

Suddenly a force that faced
The armed militia,
As the sun went down,
And cheered as they
Retreated into the night.

Only to drop back
When the morning came,
And the army arrived.
The tanks forcing them back -
The soldiers working their way,
Door to door,
Pulling people -
Innocent people -
From their homes.
Beating them in the street.

And the brothers -
Just kids really,

Kids I had watched grow up,
Babysat,
Joked with
Just days ago -
Refusing to back down,
Refusing to surrender
Their street - our street -
Shot for their defiance.
Shot from the rooftops.

And the crowd surged back -
Enraged - only to fall again
Under the soldiers'
Sudden, uncontrolled fire.
Under the shattering
Boom, boom, boom
Of the tank's guns.

And the buildings crumbling,
And the screaming,
And the panic,
And the running.
Running.
Running anywhere.
Running away.
Running
From the noise
And the fire
And the choking dust.

That's all.
That's all I remember.
That's all I remember of yesterday.