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'Violent spaces': production and reproduction of security and vulnerabilities

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Introduction

This article is concerned with the spatial dimension of humanitarian interventions. It elaborates on the links between space, protection and the spatialities that emerge after a war or a disaster. It will investigate different forms of spatial intervention in violent, post-conflict and disaster settings, positioning the essential integrity of architecture as a responsive, dependent and locally grounded process, thereby evolving past the simplified vision of building and architecture as the provision of commodified objects. Acknowledging the differences of such fields of study without aiming to be comprehensive, it will offer a brief review of the spatial significance of humanitarian actions. Drawing on Foucault, Agamben and Lefebvre this article challenges the epistemological, ontological and transformative agency of architecture in the design of effective protection measures in the context of a possible humanitarian architectural discipline.

Imagining protection spaces: basic questions and spatial narratives

Humanitarian interventions for those affected by wars and disasters have sought to understand better the needs for protection of such vulnerable people, especially refugees and Internally Displaced People (IDPs), and to develop interventions that can achieve positive protection outcomes for them under such violent and traumatic circumstances. These interventions have often been spatial in character: from the provision of shelters and transitional camps, to the establishment of safe havens and humanitarian spaces, to resettlement sites and the reconstruction of housing.

In spite of these facts, however, the relationships that exist between space, protection and humanitarian agency remain poorly understood, both in conceptual and operational terms. Operational links between space, protection and the vulnerable spatialities that emerge after a conflict or a disaster, and the discourses surrounding the notion of protection, tend to focus on legal questions of rights and responsibilities rather than on matters of physical and social protection that may depend on spatial relations. On the other hand, practice is dominated by a rationalistic, modernistic and pragmatic approach to 'physical deliverables'. The way in which space is conceptualised, applied and expressed within the field of humanitarian work focuses on material provision of 'new spaces' without any attempt to 'place' vulnerabilities as outcomes of social relations that produce spatial contexts.

This paper[1] provides an overview of the relationship between space and protection taking into consideration the different forms of spatial intervention made by humanitarian agencies in violent conflict, post-conflict and disaster settings, with a special emphasis on displaced populations. It seeks to address these gaps in knowledge and understanding by investigating the relationship between space and protection in a number of ways,

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through alternative spatial disciplines. Cannibalising the famous Lefebvre (1991:26) quotation '(social) space is a (social) product' it offers a brief review of the recent resurgence of architectural interest in humanitarian aid and development, challenging the role of architecture in the design of effective protection measures.

With such an aim in mind, the paper has been designed as a reflective journey structured with the support of emblematic spaces collected in different locations over recent years. These images are not only powerful tools in representing everyday lives, lending them a blog-type and personal narrative style, but they also represent the overarching ambivalence of the discursive formations that construct, contain and contest their existence. Again, using Lefebvre (1991) they are both represented space and spatial practice.

Moreover, the collection of spatial practices is conceived not as a series of distinct, self-contained and sufficient cases, but rather as an assemblage, which emphasises spatiality and temporality: elements are drawn together at a particular conjuncture, mixed and composed in a momentary state of affairs.

The condition of displacement: material and symbolic consequences

Destruction of *space* and *place* provides an iconic image of forcible dispossession and displacement amongst conflict-affected populations. Loss of property and housing is not only severe material damage, but it also carries a powerful symbolic erosion of security, social wellbeing and place attachment. A landscape of violence existed in Bosnia Herzegovina, a violent environment in which houses were not only destroyed but 'killed' in order to expel their inhabitants (Fig. 1). When dwellings are destroyed and people have been banished against their will at gunpoint, their home is lost. This loss seriously erodes the very meaning of life and its continuity in space and time.

The protection of those displaced by conflict and disaster is deeply entwined with questions related to space and its transformation. Destruction of the built environment, loss of the sanctuary of home, erosion of individual and collective forms of livelihood related to land and properties, along with their symbolic, cultural and emotional meanings, provide compelling images of those affected by violence and wars.

It is impossible to recall here the vast amount of literature on displacement, but this condition could be described in its most basic form as a situation in which a new or alien element is introduced into a relatively stable context, resulting in confrontation between different cultural systems that seek to appropriate a common space. This gives rise to situations in which the meaning of things and places is not a shared convention, but part of contested territory (Heynen and Loeckx 1984: 100).

Loss of property and housing reflects not only severe material damage: it represents a powerful symbolic erosion of security, social wellbeing and place attachment (Zetter and Boano 2010). In such circumstances, as Cernea and McDowell (2000:25) state, 'homeless and placeless are intrinsic by definition'. In that sense, a condition of displacement can be compared with critical moments in an individual's life when one is confronted with alternate paths. Displacement is a condition; it generates a

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Figure 1. Slavonski Brod, border of Croatia-Bosnia Herzegovina (Boano, 1994).

discursive chain of actions and counteractions motivated by improvisation, instincts of risk reduction and protection, all of which generate spatial manifestations.

From another point of view, displacement itself may be understood as a spatial strategy for improving the protection outcomes of those who have crossed political and physical boundaries fleeing persecution. In this sense, the lived experience of dis-placement—intended both as the movement from one's place of residence to another as well as to be without a place of one's own (persona non-*locata)*—is to be almost non-existent, eroding the very nature of human connection.

The mechanisms used to provide physical protection to large groups of displaced people in the

'economy of aid' are generally spatial in nature, and include such forms as refugee camps, transit areas, temporary shelters, transitional settlements (during emergency), resettlement sites, return areas, open cities (during reconstruction) and the more recently adopted mechanisms of detention centres and *zones d'atende*, as well as Guantanamo-like security spaces. Spatial devices like green zones, buffer zones, checkpoints and walled areas can be considered as protection spaces and the by-products of changes in modern warfare and securitisation of the urban battlefield. Baghdad, Beirut and Jerusalem are prominent examples of cities in which such protection devices exist (Graham 2010).

Displacement will often be temporary, though paradigmatic cases prove the contrary as in Kenya (Perouse de Montclos and Mwangi Kagwanja 2000, Boano and Floris 2005), Pakistan (Anderson and Dupree 1990), or the prominent case of the West Bank and Lebanon (Shamir 1971; Sayigh 1994). Emergency spaces such as camps, where new habitats have formed and forged relations with the surrounding areas, can then evolve as social and economic entities (Werker 2007) and become iconic of a political and social presence, developing what Werker (2007) calls 'camp economies': a new set of dynamics influenced by host country policies, restrictions on movement and work, as well as by the physical and economic isolation of the site.

Finally, humanitarian jargon adopted by agencies and organisations often uses spatial metaphors in discourses about displacement and protection: safe areas, temporary security zones, safe havens, demilitarised zones and humanitarian corridors, to mention the most used (Hyndman 2003; Yamashita 2004). Thus, it seems that humanitarian policies and practices are spatial issues.

Housing loss and the systematic destruction of place

No aggregate data has been found for housing loss incurred by refugees and IDPs, but specific cases can illustrate dramatic losses. In the case of conflict displacement, it is estimated that during war in Bosnia Herzegovina, 24% of all housing stock in Republika Srpska and 68% in the Croat and Muslim Federation were damaged (Talmon L'Armee 2001:22). During the Kosovo conflict, a third of the province's housing stock was destroyed, while the war in Sierra Leone saw the destruction of an estimated 300,000 houses, leaving over a million people displaced (Barakat 2003:5). Moreover, more than 10,000 Palestinian houses have been directly destroyed in the Occupied Territories since 1967 (Halper 2003; Graham 2004) or indirectly through discriminatory planning policies and 'administrative destructions' (Coward 2006; Waizman 2007).

In the case of Colombia, whilst no data has been located on housing loss, the existence of over 2 million IDPs suggests a significant depletion of physical assets. The July War in Lebanon (2006) was a prolonged instance of the ceaseless armed hostility between Israel and Hezbollah that resulted in massive destruction to life and property. During 34 days of warfare, Israeli bombardments succeeded in pulverising the residential areas of almost 500,000 Shi'ias living in more than 15,000 homes spread mainly over the southern suburb of Beirut and the Lebanese/Israeli border (Arif 2008:676).

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The recent massive attack on the Palestinian Gaza Strip by Israel, which lasted 23 days, severely damaged 22,000 residential and governmental buildings whilst destroying another 4,000.

Besides the physical destruction, the coerced movement of people away from their homes to other locations due to violence and conflict constitutes another major process of housing loss and violence in the built environment. In 2008, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre estimated that the global number of IDPs exceeded the 26 million mark (IDMC 2009). Forced internal displacement produces many of the same consequences as natural disasters; however, with respect to housing, the affected populations can rarely return to their habitual settlements and homes for many spatial reasons linked to land scarcity, environmental protection measures and zoning, thus posing additional challenges in conceiving appropriate spatial responses along with the risk of generating new vulnerable spatialities.

Such compilation of data, although incomplete, renders evident the spatial significance of the destruction of spaces and places calling for an immediate and appropriate provision of shelter and settlement as a form of protection and supply of basic needs. In addition, destruction of spaces and places for 'natural' or man-made reasons has several names in established literature: *annihilation of spaces* (Hewitt 1983:464), *domicide* (Porteous and Smith 2000), *urbicide* (Safier 2001; Coward 2004), all of which denote the vulnerability of the built environment when faced with severe dissidences, whether political, cultural or otherwise. These terms, which refer back to systematic destructions of human habitats, outline ways by which power relationships can be manifested spatially; something common in conflicted environments where identity is often spatialised and de-spatialised.

Misselwitz and Weizman (2003:272) suggest that: 'the days of the classical Clausewitzian definition of warfare as a symmetrical engagement between state armies in the open field are over. War has entered the city again—the sphere of the everyday, the private realm of the house', while Hewitt (1983:260) argues that 'Destruction of places, driven by fear and hatred, runs through the whole history of wars, from ancient Troy or Carthage, to Warsaw and Hiroshima in our own century'.

For this explicit concentration on the (attempted) killing of built forms in modern war, Hewitt (1983:464) has coined the term 'place annihilation'. He stresses that: 'for a social scientist, it is actually imperative to ask just who dies and whose places are destroyed by violence' (*ibid*.), because destruction achieves the political, social, economic, ecological and cultural effects on the target population and their places that are desired by the attackers. Moreover, Safier (2001:422), commenting on the aftermath of 9/11, suggested that the common feature of these aggressions is their deliberate targeting of cities and the built environment, seeking to destroy the security, public order, civility and quality of life of all their citizens and to damage or destroy their viability and liveability.

Those elements have led to the definition 'urbicide', recalling a term that was first used by a group of architects in Mostar (Urbicid Mostar'92) then disseminated by a former mayor of Belgrade,

Bogdan Bogdanovic (1993) in relation to the deliberate physical destruction and ethnic cleansing of the city of Vukovar in Croatia in 1991–92 by the Serbian forces. What is involved in *urbicide* is the negation of all normal urban existence, both literal—in physical terms—and even more significantly, symbolic: in terms of such values as liberty, civility, diversity, heterogeneity and co-existence.

The politics of war: violence and protection spaces

In *The Politics of War, Citizenship and Territory* Cowen and Gilbert (2008:1) investigate how organised human violence shapes spaces, identities and practices suggesting that, 'being political is always a matter of becoming in place and through space'.

Such reformulation has been grounded in Foucault's work. The French philosopher, in *Securité, Territoire, Population* (2003:373), shows how mechanisms shift from exclusion to inclusion: from sending the victims outside the bounds of the polity, to spatial partitioning that allows them to be contained within. He then gives three examples of apparatuses—*dispositifs*—of security: town planning, food shortages and vaccination campaigns, in order to demonstrate the spaces of security and the relationship between technologies of security and population.

A vivid example of such *dispositif* of security or a protection-like spatiality is the separation barrier that runs all along the West Bank (Fig. 2). It depicts the essence of an overall system comprising a dispersal of fortress-like spatialities, enormous concrete barriers guarded by watchtowers manned by machine-gun crews, connected by special routes and bypass roads, military convoys, patrols and checkpoints, all forming a complex multiple space of 'hollow lands and vertical geopolitics' (Weizman 2007). Fortified spaces were exported to other conflict areas such as Afghanistan and Iraq, which became what Scranton (2007:282) calls 'a lattice of American quasi-control laid over the teeming metropolis of Baghdad'.

The expressions of liberation and oppression in heterotopian space

Interesting is Foucault's contention that the spatial distribution (*répartition*) for sovereignty, discipline and security is equally important but differently organised. Foucault offers readings of the geometric plan of towns, and particularly the utopian schemas (rigid, orthogonal and modernistic), where the relation between sovereignty and territory is one where the aim is 'to connect the political effectiveness of sovereignty to a spatial distribution' (Foucault 2003: 15–16). Foucault suggests that a 'well-policed territory in terms of its obedience to the sovereign is a territory which has a good spatial organization [*disposition*]'. For him, the construction of artificial towns in Northern Europe, modelled on military camps, with geometric figures and architectural precision are the most relevant examples where it is ' a question of structuring [*d'architecturer*] a space. Discipline is of the order of construction (in a large sense)' (*ibid.*:17–18): see Figure 2.

Foucault (1978) starts his discussion on space and power from the two very specific examples of the plague-stricken town and the Panopticon becoming 'the utopia of the perfectly governed city' (1978:198). Foucault suggests that architecture,

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Figure 2. The separation Barrier: Jerusalem/Abu Dis suburb (Boano, 2004)

although an inherently political act, cannot by itself liberate or oppress. In his mind, liberation and oppression are practices, not objects, and neither practice can ever be guaranteed by artefacts functioning in the 'order of objects'. Such ordering, however, seems to be central to humanitarian practices.

Without being explicitly Foucaultian in nature, a recent talk by Rony Bauman and Eyal Weizman entitled 'Planning for Emergency: Urbanism for the Displaced?'[2] represents such spatialities. The talk recalled multiple writings of modern architecture and planning as 'medicalisation of space' in which concepts such as hygienisation, sanitation, clearance and control were concepts that informed typologies and spaces. *De facto* recalling a Foucaultian perspective of humanitarian spatialities in which urban planning is considered a 'healing machine'.

Moreover, the notion of *heterotopias* (Foucault 1967), literally meaning 'other spaces', appropriately represents the materiality and narrative of protection spaces. Such aporetic spaces reveal or represent something about the society in which they reside through the contradictions they produce but are unable to resolve, in a continuous fluctuation between contradiction and acceptance, invisibility and recognition.

A heterotopia, argues Foucault (1967), is a place essentially of `deviation', capable of containing within itself a diversity of spaces. The space of a heterotopia is real space (like the cemetery or the theatre) as distinct from the idealised space of utopia; and its reality is likely to be intense, even overwhelming. The separation barrier as well as any camp provided in a humanitarian setting is possibly a heterotopia of unusual complexity and impenetrability. Such a heterotopian vision serves to frame our protection spaces as 'spaces apart, open but isolated' (Foucault 1967:22), spaces of illusion that denounce all that is in place around them and contest the cacophonies of order and control implemented by humanitarian powers.

At the school of war: the spatial significance

In his foundational text, *Politische Geographie*, written in 1897, Ratzel (1923:264) writes, 'War is the school of space'. Thought has always lagged behind the catastrophe of war, but most particularly it has lagged behind the ways in which war has taught us one fundamental lesson: space is produced by war. This production finds explicit reference in Lefebvre's indispensible classic, *The Production of Space*.

The key words 'production' and 'space' characterise Lefebvre's analytic intentions; by 'production', Lefebvre means that humans create the space in which they make their lives; it is a project shaped by the interests of classes, experts, the grassroots and other contested forces. For Lefebvre space is not a mere container or milieu, as a kind of neutral setting in which life transpires, or a backdrop in that it is the obvious base upon which all activity must occur. Architecture, human densities and locational relationships are forces in structuring what can be done in space itself. Walls and roads obviously privilege certain kinds of activities and inhibit others, support the projects of one type of actor and deter the goals of others. Beyond such material impediments are the symbols and styles that also influence behaviour: elements of monumental grandeur that disempower, varieties of endogenous architecture that falsely imply genuine choice, monotonous cubes and towers that stultify rewarding forms of sociability. Put more succinctly, space is produced on two registers simultaneously: it is a social product, that is to say, it is the concretion of a particular mode of production, while it is also a mental product: again, see Figure 2.

Thus returning to the war metaphor, and the picture, space is produced either as a space of plenty and safety, or naught and dissolution, by the machines and industry of war, but it is also produced in the sense that imagining space as the space of war produces certain effects: '[C]ertain spaces are construed as spaces of safety or danger, of devastation or preservation'(Mendieta 2006:9). That is to say, that actors in war, whether they be warriors,

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civilians or humanitarian workers, produce martial spaces as well as humanitarian spaces.

Humanitarian biopolitics: Homo Sacer and the spatial theory of Giorgio Agamben

A recent stream of humanitarian studies indirectly related to space and security has been developed around the notion of bio-politics, which paradoxically provides evidence that 'concentration camps and refugee camps for the delivery of humanitarian aid are two faces, "human" and "inhuman", of the same socio-logical matrix. . .In both cases, the population is reduced to an object of biopolitics' (Zizek 2002).

Many authors who have approached the question of spatiality and sovereignty have turned to the work of the political philosopher, Giorgio Agamben and his figure of *homo sacer* (Agamben 1998). An artefact of Roman law, *homo sacer* appears as a figure stripped of all political rights and literally cast out of the polis; a figure that may be killed but not sacrificed.

For Agamben (1998), the paradox of sovereignty is the fact that the sovereign is simultaneously outside and inside the juridical order. Thus, *homo sacer* is a figure defined by a double exclusion (from human jurisdiction and divine law) that it is possible to kill without punishment (the act of killing in this circumstance does not count as homicide). Agamben (1998:106) describes the camp as a spatial materialisation of 'the state of exception'. Refugees and the displaced are confined within the camp because they cannot be incorporated into the nation-state due to anxieties over 'national security' and the need to maintain 'national sovereignty'. Therefore, they are relegated to a special space, or 'a zone of indistinction' (*ibid*.:110) within the boundaries of the nation state and yet outside its normal juridical order.

Following the provocative opening Zizek quotation, Agamben draws links between refugee camps and concentration camps and argues that within both, human beings can be deprived of their rights and prerogatives to such an extent that no act committed against them can appear as a crime; in this way they are transformed into a 'bare life' (*ibid*.). From this perspective the camp emerged as a management technology best suited to the production of bared life.

The new *homo sacer* seems to emerge out of a new equation of exclusion and inclusion, whereby simultaneously, the same act of exclusion from political existence also prefigures an act of inclusion into a regime of humanitarian effort. In other words, the powers that strip the right to life are, at that same time, those that govern the techniques and processes that enable life: the geopolitics of military intervention and humane rehabilitation, produces an humanitarian bio-politics that simultaneously requires the delivery of humane aid.

Humanitarian space *par excellence*: the camp as iconic city

Humanitarian spaces par excellence, be they refugee camps, organised settlements, accommodation centres, assisted self settlements, transitory centres or reception centres, created in times of war or disaster, and for reception and detention camps, typically proto-European products for managing and controlling asylum seekers or migrants,

seem to be based only on the concept of strategic dislocation (Dicken and Bagge-Launsten 2002) and around the logic of risk management (Hyndman 2003).

Moreover, camps ironically and tragically become an icon of displacement in which literature is facing an immobility underlined by a basic contradiction (politico-strategic), which is that camps are perceived politically as a temporary option. Settlements which are designed and planned to cope with specific emergencies in terms of density and infrastructure, primary needs, standardised engineering projects and support mechanisms for distributing aid, clash with political and structural contradictions and become permanent, absorbing the features and expressions of actual newly founded cities both in terms of density and demography.

It is not a coincidence, therefore, if the camp option turns itself into a very effective icon that can reflect the contemporary categories of technology and security: the technologies of speed (emergency and its structural haste, but also repatriation), of flight from visibility and spectators (concealment mechanism) and of passivity, thus neutralising the displaced as unwanted strangers.

Officially speaking, camps are temporary, transitory or 'exceptional' places. However, camps often become semi-permanent or even permanent, denying the very concepts which initially led to their definition. This condition of 'transit' extends itself *ad infinitum*, becoming an irrevocable and permanent situation, where refugees are frozen in a rigid and non-negotiable structure: a continuous state of temporariness.

The quasi-urban dimension of these settlements comes from their size, population density, layout, concentration of technical infrastructure, socio-occupational profile and the economic activities that develop within them (Perouse de Montclos and Mwangi Kagwanja 2000; Boano and Floris 2005), and has much in common with the fast-growing cities of developing countries. Recent studies carried out in Chad (Herz 2008) confirm that the permanency of would-be temporary settlements could have positive impacts on the hosting territory as 'the shared use of schools and medical centres give the local population of the Chadian villages basic medical facilities and access to education. . .for the first time'. Herz (2007: 67) suggests that those settlements, because of their low density and homogeneity, are 'like suburbs without their corresponding city'.

The camp then becomes a city, or rather the symbol of a city. It is an interpretative key in the historical process that has seen the city imagined as a disciplined space, defended by walls, originating from a dynamic of exclusion/inclusion, leading to a clear distinction between inside and outside, between right and wrong, between the good and the bad. The fulcrum of the translation of the contemporary city is organised along principles of control, the codification of flows.

Redistribution of secure spaces in post-tsunami Sri Lanka

Shelter and settlement projects for forcibly displaced populations frequently introduce complex issues of access to land for residential use. In addition, ownership disputes and the effective restitution of

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property rights are major constraints in post-conflict return programmes. Even so, restitution processes have often been incomplete, generating additional frustration and grievance for the victims of involuntary displacement (Zetter 2005). From a rights-based approach, moving towards a spatial dimension of the risk of reproducing vulnerabilities with actions aimed to relocate people in different localities involves a great deal of debate around the concept and practice of housing reconstruction.

This is not the place to rehearse in detail how the debate over housing reconstruction has thought about its development (Lyon *et al.* 2010, Lizarralde *et al.* 2010, Zetter and Boano 2010). Recent eloquent accounts can be found in a wide array of literature, which often lead to a recurrent pessimism (Cuny 1978; Aysan 1990).

Environmental and physical geographers have long talked about vulnerable environments working on settings otherwise described as 'fragile'. Cutter (2003:6) has discussed the relationship between geography and 'vulnerability science', remarking that the latter 'help[s] us understand those circumstances that put people and places at risk and those conditions that reduce the ability of people and places to respond to environmental threats'. Moreover, throughout the subfield of geographical hazards research, questions of vulnerability have figured, often displaying a sense of not just environments but certain people being vulnerable precisely because of where they live and work, specifically in regard to their proximity to high-risk environmental conditions (Wisner *et al.* 1994).

To conceptualise better the spatialities of vulnerability and sustain a complex array of nexus between housing and space, a brief exploration of the recent case of the tsunami in Sri Lanka will be presented below.

Two images of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami in Sri Lanka are etched particularly vividly in my mind: the delimitation of the buffer zone (figs 3, 4) all along the coastal affected areas and the monotonous and rigid pattern of relocation sites scattered inland (Fig.5). Those images represent different spatialities, which emerged after the disaster and arose as the product of multiple sets of forces. The first one, although being provided as a protective measure against future waves, has been able to recreate and reproduce a different set of vulnerabilities for those who have had no choice but to relocate. The second represents such vulnerable spatialities perpetuated on humanitarian premises, both locally and globally produced from humanitarian interventions aiming to protect and offer security to those who have been displaced.

In order to alleviate the population from the environmental conditions that made them vulnerable to the tsunami, exclusion zones were mandated in Sri Lanka (TAFREN 2005) after the disaster. These were subject to inconsistent and arbitrary changes, influencing transitional polices and permanent reconstruction. Moreover, while exclusion zones generally reduce the risks from future tsunamis and other coastal floods, failing to conduct proper assessments in new sites could increase exposure to other hazards. This approach also damages livelihoods that depend on proximity to the sea.

In the aftermath of the disaster, the Government of Sri Lanka was extraordinarily prompt in announcing radical reform regarding the manner in which

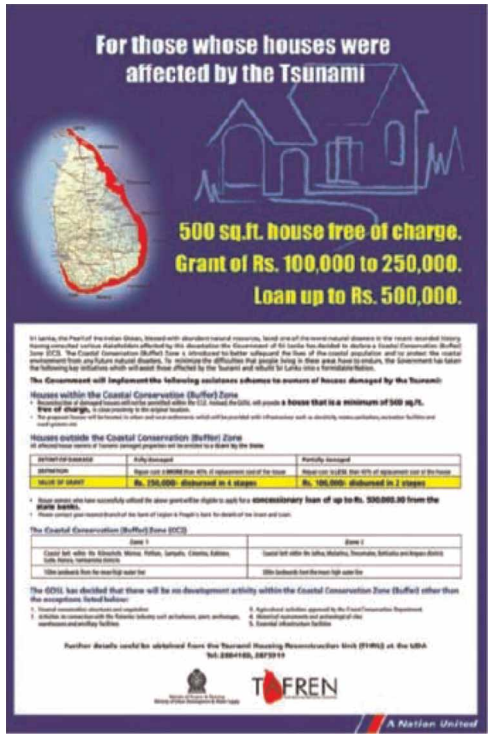
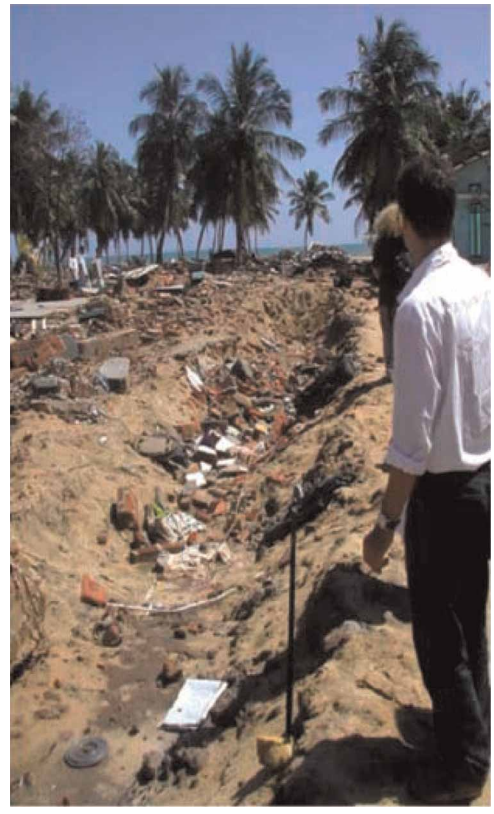


Figure 3, 4. Buffer Zone delimitation in Sri Lanka (Boano, 2005).



the country's coast was to be managed. An issue that has posed major obstacles to IDPs' return and repossession of coastal properties lies in what was called the *buffer zone*. In January, 2005, the Sri Lankan Cabinet of Ministers legislated buffer zones ostensibly as a public safety measure against the potential devastation of another tsunami in which any construction or reconstruction was prohibited except, as expressed in the law, for 'port structures, historical monuments and tourist centres' which shall be decided 'on a case-by-case basis' (TAFREN 2005), opening the space for a 'disaster capitalism' (Focus on the Global South 2006).

In early February, 2005, the Government of Sri Lanka initially proposed a buffer zone of 500 metres all along the coast; this was, however, progressively reduced down to 100 metres in the

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Figure 5. Tsunami Resettlement site, Sri Lanka (Boano, 2005).

densely populated South-West, dominated by a Sinhala majority and international tourism, and 200 metres in the North and Eastern Province, where tsunami-related devastation and damage proved greatest. In both areas, the high population density and scarcity of land made the setbacks highly contentious. This policy added confusion, creating uncertainty as to where residents within the zone would be relocated and what would happen to the land they were occupying in the zone when the tsunami struck.

As the Institute for Policy Studies in Colombo (INFORM 2005) explained, if public safety was the prevailing aim, the buffer zones should have been equivalent for all areas. No explanation was offered as to why specific environmental, social, and physical characteristics of coastlines in different parts of the country ostensibly required responses

tailored to those geographies and no research, rationale or examples of how this approach would work or had fared elsewhere were provided at the time of their introduction.

The buffer zone became a major issue during the recovery phases, and it created major debate among International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) and the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL). Sri Lanka's World Bank representative, Peter Harrold, has noted 'buffer zones have been the single greatest barrier to progress in housing reconstruction for those who lost their homes in the tsunami' (cited in Hyndman 2007).

Whilst landowners did not lose ownership of their property with the designation of the buffer zone, they did lose the right to build and live on it. Those whose properties were affected outside the buffer zone were given financial assistance to rebuild on the same land, provided they owned the land. This caused a sense of grievance amongst those outside the buffer zone who could not show ownership, since they could not obtain assistance to rebuild on a par with house-owners. The feeling of discrimination was aggravated by the fact that assistance policy for those within the buffer zone did not differentiate according to whether the damaged property was owned by the occupier or not. Moreover, as noted by Hyndman (2007) this apparent geographical 'fix' served instead to fan the flames of political controversy between the major political parties and among the various ethno-national groups that constitute the Sri Lankan populace, namely Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim.

The President's Office announced that the government would identify land (a parcel of land between 6 and 15 pearch: between 150 and a little less than 400 sqm) closest to the affected villages and build a house for 'every affected house owner who lived within the said 100 metres'. It specified that 'any owner of a home within the 100-metre zone will retain the ownership of his original land' and the government would not in any way claim ownership of such property (Boano 2007).

Settlement location can have significant impacts on how a sense of place is created and thus on the levels of satisfaction which displaced people feel. For example, the selection of sites for the relocation of post-tsunami settlements in Sri Lanka was made without feasibility studies or social and environmental impact assessments. The key criterion was the availability of government-owned land to avoid lengthy land acquisition processes. Once such land was identified, however, issues such as distance from people's livelihoods, markets and services, quality of soil and availability of water were not taken into account. As a result many of the sites are perceived by their inhabitants as remote either because they were indeed at a significant distance from their original homes and jobs (up to 12 or 15 km) or because they were poorly served by roads, public transport and water infrastructure, and therefore disconnected. These outcomes limit the sense of community attachment to new settlements and thus undermine the creation of places in the terms conceptualised earlier.

Power-lust and tragic flaws in post-disaster planning

Far from being only a theoretical construction, the exploration of the different discourses around the

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notion of spaces for protection, the practice of humantarian spatialities and the notion of camp render evident the deep complicity of architecture with social order. The narrative of the paper challenges the epistemological and ontological nexus between space and humanitarian practices taking into consideration the different forms of violent humanitarian spaces. The collection of emblematic spaces coupled with the text not only serve as representations of the tensions central to the debate or provide an architectural spatial vision of them. They indicate that humanitarian and post-disaster practice often dismiss the essence of socio-spatial materiality embedded in architecture, a consequence illustrated in the reductionist implementation of material(only)-oriented housing deliveries, buffer zones or security walls.

Disaster and conflict can also reduce the checks and balances imposed on a government's power, resulting in the already dominant socio-political power in a space becoming 'hyper-dominant'. This exaggerated imbalance of power in the immediate post-disaster landscape is indicated by actions such as the delineation of the 'buffer zone'. The lack of rational procedure and rigorous critique used to arrive at such immediate tactics is often defended by the dominant power with the fact that a 'state of emergency' (which ironically the government itself declares) warrants new rules. The resultant *tabula rasa* of planning policy mirrors the blank slate of the destroyed post-disaster city and landscape.

Crucial to creating spaces of protection following disasters is understanding how those in charge of rebuilding define success. Ultimately, aid agencies and government authorities must be self-serving in assuring that they have met the requirements necessary to achieve a 'successful' relocation: this is necessary to justify their existence. If, for instance, long-term follow-up research on livelihoods and well-being statistics in the displaced communities are not institutionalised procedures of the aid agencies involved, they will tend to be short-sighted. In other words, the agencies provide, claim victory and exit without ensuring that the new settlement camps have embedded within them the ability to maintain self-sustaining growth and evolution. This mirrors the 'tragic flaws' of Greek tragedies that are naïvely embedded from the start but only revealed later by the refugees' inability to grow and thrive: thereby openly displaying the extent of their disempowerment.

In the reconfiguration of the *polis*, especially in a post-war context, it is a forced reconfiguration that severs multiple networks—social, economic and spatial—that have evolved intricately over time, which can be seen as a discontinuity in the evolutionary thread of a city. This rupture often elicits a protectionist response that is manifested spatially. For instance, there is a strong correlation between the violence inherent in the conflict and the resultant physical manifestation of protective walls and barriers, as along the West Bank. These fortress-like arrangements tend to only heighten the tension and fear while reducing perceived security. As Foucault (2003) states, 'security requires the opening up and release of spaces, to enable circulation and passage'. Arriving at this conclusion requires a more thoroughly considered strategic approach to reconstruction than the instinctual reaction of seclusion and protection by wall building.

The design of shelters and settlements responsive to the wide range of needs and values which housing serves is a complex task. That complexity is exacerbated by the political and economic contours in which 'makeshift architecture and emergency urbanism' (Lewis 2008) take place. Without the deliberate appropriation of a responsible humanitarian architectural discipline, designers who believe they are engaged in the architecture of protection, delivering shelters or segmenting spaces, may be engaged in a different form of violence and coercion, enforcing a new disciplinary gaze.

Buildings do not contain any political essence in and of themselves; rather they become meaningful due to the relationship that their physicality has with specific social processes (Bevan 2006). Thus architecture should be conceived as a practice enmeshed in practices of power (Dovey 2010: 45) reinforcing the idea that design involves satisfying material needs and resolving competing social requirements through a process of active participation by the occupants and the mediation of 'professionals' who accept the responsibility of the inevitable production of identities, communities and cities: through architecture. Thus, the provision of security is simultaneously the production of physical form, the creation of social, cultural and symbolic resources and also, critically, the outcome of a facilitative process in which enablement becomes a central idea. Such an approach fundamentally repositions the role of architects. They are not, in Roy's (2006: 21) pointed phrase, the 'innocent professionals', but rather are fundamentally involved in a process requiring reflection upon how and what they produce, paying attention to the structure of social space and the 'micro-practices of powers' in the everyday.

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Notes and references

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2. http://roundtable.kein.org/node/794 (accessed 07.06.08).