
AFTER THE TSUNAMI: RECONSTRUCTION, DECONSTRUCTION AND SOCIAL ANALYSIS

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Introduction

Several weeks after the Tsunami hit the conflict affected east and southern coastline of Sri Lanka in December 2004, killing more than 31,000 people and displacing many more in a matter of minutes, David Beckham, European foot ball heartthrob and Amithab Bachan, South Asian Bollywood film icon, spoke in a UNICEF advertisement in the aftermath of the disaster. They appeared on international TV channels speaking of the child victims of the "Asian Tsunami" – an event that has also been termed a "celebrity disaster" in the age of the internet giving.² Beckham and Bachan suggested that there were a large number of children that had been orphaned in the disaster and suggested that UNICEF that works in the interest of children best understood the plight of Asia's "tsunami children". The viewer of the fund-raising ad was invited to visit the organization's tsunami web site.

A several weeks later the National Child Protection Authority of Sri Lanka confirmed that all except 37 children who had lost parents in the disaster had been claimed by family members, extended families, relatives or other kin sometimes after rigorous identity checks and DNA testing. Given that the extended family is a major institution of the social fabric of all ethno-religious communities in Sri Lanka, as in most of South Asia, and the social service institutions of the State were not destroyed in the Tsunamis the suggestion that there would be large numbers of orphans whose needs UNICEF would take care of was largely unwarranted.

It is still unclear how much funding UNICEF that also works on the demobilization of child soldiers within the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka, garnered from the advertisements and how it would be spent. After Ache Province Indonesia, the east coast of Sri Lanka was the worst affected in the December 26 Tsunami. Both regions have on going armed conflicts and peace processes. Our concern here is with the transnational politics and poetics of disaster representation and reconstruction that the advertisements indexed and how they configure a mindset characteristic of international relief, reconstruction and development policy and practice, and their local-global articulations.

The post-Tsunami UNICEF advertisements in Colombo were aired where family members, relatives, kinship networks, religious networks, local business and civil society groups had worked round the clock from the moment the disaster struck in an unprecedented effort of giving and coordination across ethnic, religious, class and

caste lines. One could not but be amazed at the scripted and casual manner in which the celebrities suggested in hushed tones that UNICEF best understood the needs of child victims of the Asian Tsunami disaster and was therefore best able to address them. There was no mention that in the Asian counties where the disaster struck there exist strong extended family and kinship networks as well as local civil society and religious organizations (Buddhist, Hindu, Christian and Muslim), that worked ceaselessly and across religious and ethnic borders to provide relief for the survivors and care for and reclaim children who had lost parents. Nor did we hear of State, social services ministries and civil and administrative structures, health care systems, religious welfare organizations, and civil society organizations of these countries that used their long years of experience to deal with the emergency. Nor was there mention of the local organizations and individuals who had done much of the work before the international humanitarians be they UN agencies, "volunteers", other expatriates or INGOs who flew in, weeks later. The advertisement left one with a numbed sense that all local institutions, organizations, and discerning adults must have floated away, and Tsunami devastated Asia was left with child victims and UNICEF. The advertisement also failed to provide the information that despite an armed conflict of two decades, Sri Lanka has ninety percent literacy rates, a well developed health infrastructure and relatively high social indicators – in short significant levels of "local capacity" in country two kilometers inland from the tsunami devastated regions. Additionally, the country boasts a large number of under and unemployed university graduates who speak local languages who could well assist the relief effort.

Nevertheless, many INGOs and the UN agencies flew in young, well meaning but inexperienced "volunteers" from Europe and the US who did not speak local languages. Each one of their air tickets and per diems may have paid for the rebuilding of a couple of tsunami devastated homes. International agencies and disaster experts predicted wide spread epidemics, cholera, typhoid etc., in the wake of the Tsunami. These epidemics, like the long predicted AIDS epidemic predicted by various UN agencies and the World Bank in the conflict zones of Sri Lanka did not materialize.³ The prediction of epidemics and trauma saw many international health and trauma experts most of whom did not speak local languages and were unfamiliar with local religio-cultural coping mechanisms and rituals flying in to counsel those suffering from shock, loss, displacement, and despair. The Tsunami had affected a two-

kilometer coastal belt. The prediction of epidemics were clearly not based on analysis of existing health infrastructure and water supply and local social service capacity two kilometers in-land from the Tsunami devastated areas, where the displaced people were moved and resettled either by the various social service agencies of government of Sri Lanka or the Tamil Rehabilitation Organization (TRO) - the humanitarian agency of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) that control parts of the north east of the island.

The post-tsunami response of individuals and groups to the suffering of "other" communities of diverse linguistic and religious persuasions demonstrated beyond doubt that the so-called ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka was largely a product of and sustained by power struggles among politicians, presidents, and armed actors. After the Tsunami, civil society groups used to coping with the two decades of conflict talked of three tsunamis hitting the island: the wall of water was the first, the second was an international AID tsunami that had generated vast expectations and new conflicts, and the third was the NGOs and "volunteer" tsunami that hit the island, eroding local capacity and local ownership of reconstruction and development policy and implementation process, while promoting passivity among Tsunami survivors.

The conflict and tsunami affected areas seemed flooded by waves of aid and /INGOs (some of which were converting souls while saving bodies and fuelling local ethno-religious nationalism), international disaster experts who know very little about the country, culture and conflicts, etc. let alone local languages. This process generated a whole range of new expectations and conflicts at local community and national levels, and between the Govt. and LTTE, the primary one being the distribution of the aid. In the process the rapprochement that had emerged during the early days of coping with the Tsunami among the various ethno-religious communities were slowly eroded. This is not to deny there were sound international relief agencies and NGOs with long experience working with local partners in the country that did much to assist the government, military and civil society efforts at aid delivery and coordination during the early days of the disaster, but to flag some of the issues that the flood of global sympathy generated for tsunami affected countries. In the aftermath these agencies had to cope with the nationalist backlash from the JVP and JHU that seemed to unleash an indiscriminate witch-hunt against international humanitarian agencies and NGOs in the country.

In the context, this paper seeks to analyse the politics of representation embedded in international development, reconstruction and peace building discourse and practice in the wake of war and natural disasters and its implications for conflict de-escalation locally. The paper suggests the need for reconstruction that is owned by the communities affected by the disasters, and makes a distinction between national and community ownership of reconstruction policy. Such a process must derive from social analysis of conflict that is politically, culturally and historically located, and constant social monitoring of the reconstruction

process – an exercise not reducible to project specific Social Impact Assessments. Currently social analysis and oversight has been reduced to the measurement of "social capital" (or social networks as taught in introductory Sociology courses), by the World Bank, that also projects itself as the "Knowledge Bank" with characteristic modesty. In the development and reconstruction industry increasingly controlled by IFIs, INGOs and international consultancy companies, social analysis is treated as window dressing on the real reconstruction theory and policy work performed by economists, engineers, the private sector business and various technical "experts" and 'specialists', while disaster affected communities loose out.

Increasingly a great deal of humanitarian, reconstruction and development funding appears to be spent on media advertising of disaster anniversaries, that feature human interest stories about "disaster victims". These ads. and INGO press releases about international chivalry and/or victims who are doing it for themselves, appear to be designed more to elicit funds rather than educate the international public and civil society on global inequality that fuels many of the violent conflicts in the global south. What is avoided is critical analysis of the political economy of the international humanitarian and reconstruction industry that increasingly constitutes a fig leaf of what Naomi Klein has termed "disaster capitalism" in most of the global south where the structural adjustment of societies and economies that generate new cycles of conflict continues unabated in the name of "reconstruction", despite mounting critique. This is done by deregulation, liberalization, and privatization of natural resources, public utilities and services and the national wealth (not the national debt of course), of countries that are recovering from conflict (including Iraq). Disaster capitalism, where structural adjustments is pushed through and huge corporate profits may be made in a short space of time (the window of opportunity), while attention is focused on a society's trauma, is in short, a conditionality of international reconstruction aid.

An objective critique of the structures and practices of the international humanitarian, development, and reconstruction industry is to be distinguished from the xenophobic anti-INGO discourse that circulated among various nationalist groups in the wake of the disaster and the wave of international sympathy, care and assistance that the Tsunami disaster generated. Rather, there is a need for constructive critique of the international humanitarian and reconstruction industry, that rethinks the existing international development architecture bottom up.. The failure to do so will only result in further narrow ethno-religious fundamentalisms that destroy the fabric of historically multicultural societies, due to the fact that moderate local and national voices have been marginalized in the international development process increasingly driven by what Joseph Stiglitz termed "market fundamentalism", that has increased inequality the world over and made it a less secure place. Moreover if Sri Lanka and other disaster prone countries in the global south are to own their development and reconstruction policies they need to formulate strategies to manage and harness

the international development industry rather than be run by it. The latter process will only result in the destruction of local capacity, skills, knowledge and expertise - and a new cycle of war.

The Violence of Reconstruction

Wars, including struggles for ethno-national self-determination are fought to change the power-property status quo. If a peace process fails to acknowledge and address issues of economic and social inequality that structure a conflict it may result in an unsustainable peace that leads to renewed violence, years or decades later.⁵ A number of studies of the two decades long armed conflict in Sri Lanka have noted that the war was not simply an “ethnic” affair but rather a “complex emergency”. The conflict dynamic was sustained and fuelled by a range of global and local actors and factors including rural poverty, unemployment, caste marginalization (particularly in northern Tamil society and in the deep south). The majority of those who fought, died, and were disabled on both sides were drawn from the rural poor.

Additionally, in the last decade a ‘war economy’ that developed self-sustaining momentum emerged, as a number of trans-national actors and networks, from the diaspora to the military, humanitarian and development industry stabilized and sustained the conflict dynamic as the economy structured into a ‘war economy’. While a range of political actors and elites made profits through corruption, terror and taxation, the military became the leading employer of a class of marginalized youth from low-caste communities in the north and south alike. Simultaneously, economic inequality and poverty cleavages tended to be ethnicized and politicised due to the circular dynamic of poverty and identity conflict that results in a conflict trap that characterizes resource based ethno-religious identity conflicts in the global south (cf. Mayer, Rajasingham-Senanayake, Thangaraja: 2003).

After the CFA the presumption was that the free market would take care of social and economic justice issues that fuelled the conflict *a la* the Washington Consensus (World Bank and IMF). There was little discussion of the political economic transformation to society that twenty years of war had generated. The public debate is considerably influenced by global recipes for post conflict reconstruction focused on (neo-liberal) institution building and constitution design and the need for “good governance”. (UNDP Human Development Report 2000). Why else would the GoSL and the LTTE chose the World Bank that is closely allied to international finance and corporate interests, and in the grip of what Joseph Stiglitz, termed “market fundamentalism” to be the custodian of the post-conflict fund? This question was asked and answered by the Sri Lankan public two years later when the United Front government that brought peace to the country was voted out of office on its economic record.⁶

Likewise in post-tsunami resettlement discussion while the issue of a joint mechanism between the LTTE and GoSL to distribute

relief has received high priority, issues of social and economic inequality are not being addressed in any systematic fashion. The declaration of the 100/200 meter buffer zone by the govt., which claims to be left wing has impacted disproportionately on poor people who had flimsy shelters without adequate consideration of alternative methods to save lives in the event of further tsunamis. The JVP which claims to represent the poor and under represented has remained silent on the paternalistic and anti-poor nature of the buffer zone, while focusing its energies on supposedly preserving the fictitious unity of the nation.

The Crisis of Peace Building, Neoliberalism and the Reconstruction Tool kit

Despite recognition of a crisis in peace and post/conflict reconstruction processes (of 38 peace processes in the last decade, 31 have returned to conflict within the first three years), the international reconstruction agenda continues to be framed and carried out as a single ‘intervention tool-box’ by international agencies. The ‘tool kit’ approach to post/conflict and post-natural disaster reconstruction presumes that disasters are essentially the same and can be fixed with the same technical approach that leaves out political and economic analysis of the particular local conflict. Thus institution, constitution, social capital and local capacity building is a mantra for reconstruction. There is little recognition of actually existing local and national institutions and capacities in disaster affected regions. Those that exist are perceived as ineffective or irrelevant in the tool-kit approach to reconstruction. This tends to be the case despite the fact that historically international finance capital, dictators and military juntas have been allied to safe-guard their interests and deflect social justice issues embedded in complex conflicts. In this respect, the controversial analysis of violent conflict coming out of the World Bank research project led by Paul Collier on “the Economics of Civil War, Crime and Violence” is not encouraging. Collier claims that it is ‘greed’ rather than ‘grievance’, (as if these are not relational terms) that is the reason for conflicts in the global south. He suggests that the profit maximizing and utility optimising by war lords and armed groups explains violence. Collier thus rules out economic grievance and inequality as a cause of violence and views grievance arguments as a legitimacy clause for violence. While this kind of analysis may explain the Bush-Blair resource war on Iraq, it is telling in its misguidedness and ignorance of local issues, international political economic and global power/knowledge hierarchies that structure complex conflicts in the global south, and does not augur well for a sensibly theorised post-conflict reconstruction programme supervised by the Bank in Sri Lanka.

Primarily the tool kit approach to reconstruction consists of needs assessments undertaken by Multilateral Agencies – the UN agencies, World Bank and regional development Banks and implementation of neo-liberal institution, constitution and social capital building. The recipe is imported from one disaster zone to another and applied to diverse complex conflicts and contexts

whether in Africa, Latin America, or Asia. The role of the private sector, the market and privatization, structural and sector adjustments promoted by the Washington Consensus (World Bank and IMF) have become a *mantra* for peace building. Likewise, the industry was visible in the droves of international technical experts ubiquitous in the disaster zones of the world that arrived in Colombo and the northeast, from South Africa, DRC or Eritrea after the peace accord as well as the Tsunamis.

1. The tendency of the neo-liberal reconstruction and peace agenda is to presume that the free market will take care of the economics of peace and to ignore corporate corruption, crony capitalism etc. that are endemic in post/ war economies. Such policies in other conflict-affected parts of the world have demonstrably further distorted markets, fuelled inequality and cycles of social violence and conflict. There is clearly a need for a more balanced approach in the international post/conflict reconstruction agenda, where the benefits as well as the shortcomings of globalization and the neo-liberal emphasis on structural reform, the private sector and growth are recognized. In many parts of the global south globalization has become a race to the bottom as poor countries compete to lower already low wage rates in order to attract often speculative foreign capital and experts, and education systems are restructured to provide cheap labor at the lower end of the global economy, rather than to generate knowledge and research.

2. The international post-conflict tool-kit also entails application of a universal set of technical formulas transported from one conflict zone to another, (e.g. institution, constitution and social capital building). While often these are valid concerns they tend to be disarticulated from local social realities and political-cultural processes and hence become irrelevant exercises. Based on the assumption that conflicts are generically similar, the post-conflict tool kit approach produces a-historical, poorly theorized, a political and culturally insensitive strategies, many of them failing to effect sustainable solutions.

3. Given the logic of the operation of the international agencies, and the concern with the security of their personnel and international staff, programs and local communities often become a secondary matter. The bulk of the funds for post/conflict reconstruction go for administrative charges, salaries and maintenance and protection of internationals whose lives appear to be more highly valued than the natives that they are supposed to protect and develop. This is often reflected in disproportionate budget allocations for administrative charges and maintenance of internationals that work in the industry over actual programs and local staff. Indeed, a sort of institutionalized apartheid that distorts the value of lives and labour appears to exist in the institutions that constitute and operate the post/conflict industry where market imperfections and information asymmetries are glaring. It is in this context that the question arises: If the World Bank is to be the custodian of the post-conflict reconstruction fund in Sri Lanka, will the peace dividend become available to those marginal communities and social groups that were most brutalized and instrumentalized in

the neo-liberal was and peace machine? In short, would a neo-liberal post conflict peace that exacerbates socio-economic disparities as SAPs and sector adjustment programmes together with the questionable promise of long-term economic growth enable a sustainable peace? Is this constellation of actors and interests a recipe for a new cycle of violence that may destabilize the peace process in Sri Lanka? To answer this question it may be relevant to look back on how almost two decades of armed conflict was represented and analysed in the development discourse in Sri Lanka.

Representing Development: 'Growth with War' and other Myths

During the Second and Third Eelam wars (1990-2001), a public myth existed in the south of Sri Lanka that relatively high levels of economic growth could be sustained in the island while an expensive armed conflict was waged in the North-East provinces.⁷ As the Peoples Alliance government went ahead with structural adjustment programs (SAPs) and privatisation of various profitable and debt ridden government holdings just as the previous UNP government had done, the numbers of BMWs and Alfa Romeos that cruised the highways and bi-lanes of Colombo, the southern capital were on the rise. Signs of a growing economy and a market for luxury goods were apparent in the larger cities and in the display of sophisticated weapons to and communications technology in the security sector. The Central Bank projected national growth figures of five percent, a figure that helped the ruling party to win local and national elections and attract foreign investment. International development organizations such as the World Bank, IMF, and UNDP projected similar growth figures.

The late nineties were years of converging national statistical percentages in Sri Lanka. While defence spending was 5 percent of GDP, donor assistance also hovered at around 5 percent GDP. That international aid might subsidize the armed conflict given fungibility of aid was not missed by a number of commentators. Yet if research staff in leading national institutions of higher education such as the University of Colombo could not use the internet because the Ministry of Higher Education could not pay its telephone bills and the library could not buy books and journals due to the toll of the war economy on the education sector that was being restructured, the international financial institutions turned a blind eye to military spending despite widely known and rumoured corruption in military sector the defence ministry. While structural adjustments to education, health etc., sometimes bringing long overdue reform to these sectors were on the cards, structural adjustments of the military and state's coercive apparatus was not on the cards. Indeed, the IMF appeared to underestimate the Sri Lanka government's estimation of its military expenses (Discussion with IMF representative at ICES – August 2001) while the Sri Lanka government seemed to practice home grown military Keynesianism.⁸ The continuing failure of the international development industry to address military budgets of governments at war with segments of their populations remains the scandal of

international development industry. In Sri Lanka the growth rate of about 5 percent in the late nineties despite the war seems to have been used to bolster the argument that neo-economic liberal structural adjustments works – even in conflict situations. What was ignored was that after almost two decades of armed conflict the rural economy seemed to be substantially and increasingly dependent on non-productive activity. i.e. war making (cf. Dunham 2000).

During these years, national statistics impervious to the law of averages, that excluded the under-performing north and eastern conflict affected provinces were produced by the Central Bank and seconded by organizations such as the World Bank and UNDP. It was suggested that excluding the north and eastern provinces from national statistics did was insignificant since population densities in those provinces were low, and would not affect per capita calculations.

Of course, statistics and information on the conflict zones were highly politicised, particularly given claims and counter-claims regarding human rights violations, numbers of displaced people, and food aid to be sent to the war zones. During the years of the third Eelam war that started in 1995 with the collapse of the peace process that had commenced when Chandrika Bandaranaike-Kumaratunge became President, the military frequently and possibly correctly argued that the LTTE was inflating figures and skimming excess aid.

The information lacuna arising from the politicisation of information and the difficulties of information gathering in the war zones was compounded by the censorship on media and reporting from the northeast. Because of difficulties of information gathering in the conflict zones “national” data on health, education and literacy excluded the war-deprived and traumatised regions of the island. International evaluations along with national statistics on many social and economic matters provided impressionistic and often grossly misleading and optimistic scenarios of the life and livelihood in the conflict zones. It was rarely mentioned that transport was literally by bullock cart in the “uncleared” or LTTE held areas, given the fuel and fertilizer embargo, while the economy and market had been bombed into the dark ages, and food security eroded.⁹

The information lacuna in turn perpetuated a number of myths that sustained the conflict, both at the level of policy as well as in popular discourse. As the conflict escalated in the nineties, the notion that ‘growth with war’ is possible appeared to be the operative fiction in policy circles. Meanwhile the conflict generated a war economy with military service becoming the leading income generation project for young men from rural areas even as it generated new forms of social and economic inequality and marginalization (eg. Muslim-Tamil conflicts in the east coast). That Sri Lanka, the South Asian leader in social indicators may be slipping in health and education, and mortgaging its future as the numbers of disabled increased, and the economy structured into a

war economy, with the rural sector increasingly dependent on soldiers wages was not mentioned. Of course a second scenario of Sri Lanka’s conflict-development nexus that focused on the social costs of war, was captured in popular films, other critical media, and by various studies by NGOs but with little impact.¹⁰ Squaring the circle – an analysis of which sectors benefited from the war economy and SAPs and which did not remains to be done.

On the other hand, the devastation of war in the north and east, gave credence to LTTE claims that they had nothing more to lose and hence must fight an opponent intent on decimating them to the end. The war years made clear the domestic economic policy is increasingly a global affair. As the country became increasingly dependent on aid for fight the war the international financial institutions and successive governments pursued a neo-liberal policy of economic restructuring. As privatisation appeared to sustain the myth of growth with war, a number of other local and micro-conflicts were displaced upon the over determined war between the military and the LTTE. The myth of growth with war was rudely shattered by the LTTE attack on the airport and the manner in which the economic growth was reversed for the first time in Sri Lanka’s post-colonial history.

Information Asymmetries and Power/Knowledge Hierarchies

International measures, indexes and observations of “success” or “failure” of nation-states, economies, or people, have their own logic. They establish authoritative descriptions, and construct truths about “national” progress or regress. Indeed a number of theorists of development and developmentalism (Escobar 1995, Nandy 1983, Gupta 1998) have noted, that in the trajectory of “world development”, peoples, nations, regions, and the “third world” have come to see themselves as more or less developed/ underdeveloped, and more or less in need of development, or social capital, or institutions, or better governance, or globalization etc. They have also suggested that development processes might actually de-develop societies, and have traced how development indicators may conceal increasing economic inequalities and social and regional polarization.

In countries with skeptical publics, information from international development and financial institutions are sometimes given greater authority because of the presumption that they may be more independent and accurate than government’s figures. In turn, these authoritative indexes, measures, and narratives of developmental progress or regress configure local perceptions of local conditions. Sometimes, these constructions and their policy agendas elicit counter-reactions and ethno-nationalist back lashes.¹¹ In noting this dynamic of how a country may be measured, evaluated, and restructured for World Development, my purpose is not to suggest that poor people or armed conflicts do not exist. Rather it is to mark how poverty *qua* poverty, or conflict *qua* conflict, are constituted as objects of and for analysis and developmental-relief

intervention (read power/knowledge), and how such interventions are legitimated.

In the late nineties as the war escalated in Sri Lanka local and global political-economic processes and imperatives configured the dominant representation and interpretation of the conflict-development nexus in Sri Lanka, that growth with war was possible. The notion that war with growth was possible is a corollary of the economic reductionism that characterizes the argument that “violence is economically rational” and it is greed rather than grievance that fuels conflicts (Collier et al., 2001). 1997-98 were years when the Bank and IMF were increasingly critiqued on the crisis and escalating social violence in the Asian Tiger economies. Internally, in the World Bank, Stiglitz had criticized IMF policies and suggested that developmental macro-policy may fuel and deepen the crisis and ensuing violence in South East Asia (Stiglitz: 1997, 1998, Wade: 2000). In this context, success stories even in conflict torn societies were needed. In “Missed Opportunities”, the World Bank’s Sri Lanka country report in 2000 suggested that Sri Lanka is a relative success in terms of economic liberalization and structural adjustments.

A story of operative fictions and mutual entrapment between international financial institutions and a government fighting a dirty war (given that national economic policy is increasingly globally configured), amidst an increasingly dysfunctional democracy emerges in the myth that “growth with war” was possible in Lanka. This entrapment in turn sustained the war dynamic which developed self-sustaining momentum (Rajasingham- Senakayake 2001). The myth was shattered after the LTTE attack on Katunayake airport in July 2001, that impacted on sectors dependent on external markets, particularly trade, tourism, and shipping and the growth figures dipped from 5 percent into negative digits overnight. This entrapment may continue with the peace dynamic too with the government and Bank promoting an unsustainable neo-liberal peace.

The myth that growth with war was possible was also enabled by the history of perception of the island as an “outlier” in the fifty-year-old “world development” discourse. Sri Lanka had always followed the path of the unexpected. At independence in 1948, armed conflict was not on the island’s development agenda. The island’s social indicators that were the best in the South Asian region despite very low per capita income. Moreover, a multilingual, multiethnic, multi-faith, and multicultural land, Ceylon as it was called, was considered a “model democracy” until the mid-eighties. In the years of the conflict, growth in the south despite a debilitating armed conflict in the north east further buttressed Sri Lanka’s standing as an “outlier” in the world development discourse, and enabled the perception that it was land of “missed opportunities”. The “outlier” perception of Sri Lanka masked the island’s de-development and deep regional divisions that fuel the armed conflict in the island.

Indeed, it is arguable that the regional disparity between the conflict affected North-East and the rest of the island constituted one of the biggest challenges of peace building and development, even as the central barrier to human development in Sri Lanka may be the information divide and information lacuna. The engineering of information and the resulting ignorance generated at the highest levels of policy and opinion making on the national impacts of the war was one of the reasons that the war escalated to dire proportions, without giving rise to an anti-war peace movement in the late nineties.

De-Development and the Poverty of Reconstruction Policy and Theory

Post-conflict reconstruction, a growth sector in the world development industry led by the Bretton Woods institutions is about information asymmetries, global-local hierarchies of knowledge and power and the marketing of myths and models of development. Recognition by the development policy community that Sri Lanka was a “complex emergency” and that violent conflicts could undo years of development achievements, has not entailed acknowledgement of the converse process: that the macro-policies and practices of neo-liberal development that exacerbate social, economic and regional inequality may also structure and fuel domestic political-economic transformations and societal polarization leading to violent conflicts. Possible linkages between development processes that exacerbated social inequality and a number of social tensions (JVP and LTTE youth uprisings), to contribute to over determine the north-south “ethnic” divide in the island, and hence the need for mainstreaming conflict analysis into development policy and planning are hardly acknowledged. There is a need to link macro-policies of development to the local war economy in the conflict zone, rather than treating them as separate.

It is arguable that trans-historical “ethnic” readings of the violence in Sri Lanka and neo-liberal myths that “growth with war” is possible in the dependent economies of the global south have obscured issues of economic and social inequality that structured the 2 decades-long armed conflict in the north and south of Sri Lanka. They also obscured how the war had transformed the island’s society and political economy. But issues of political representation and economic justice are inextricably linked: self-determination will remain an unfulfilled promise without economic and social rights.

After the initial de-politicization that the peace process necessitated, it would be necessary to move on and deal seriously with political economic issues by linking civil and political issues of demilitarisation and de-escalation with social justice issues or economic and social rights. Post/conflict reconstruction must have a holistic approach and move beyond a formalist legal approach to devolution and power sharing among the armed actors and the State, and address issues such as poverty, inequality and their relationship

to macro-policies of economic adjustment and conflict. Otherwise, the risk is that a peace agreement might once again become a blue print for more war, or be merely a trade off between armed groups, and politicians who peddle ethnic conflict or ethnic peace to shore up their vote banks. Rather, the need is for substantive democratic reform and transformation of political culture and economic ideology and institutions (including the state's coercive apparatus) that have generated and fuelled multiple conflicts and much of the violence over twenty years.

The dominance of the World Bank in the post-conflict reconstruction industry in Sri Lanka and the manner in which a range of structural adjustments projects (including the recently stymied labour bill) are being pushed through parliament as the peace process takes centre stage in national politics may suggests otherwise. Structural adjustments usually mean that things must get worse before they get better-- if ever. Things getting worse usually mean another cycle of conflict that is very hard to stop. The timing of these interventions in the long-term may lead to increased levels of unemployment, spiralling cost of essential services and living and the unravelling of the peace process by spoilers who exploit popular disaffection. Argentina where riots and social unrest has occurred in the wake of massive neo-liberal reform sounds a warning to us all.

My purpose here is not to decry all reform. Certainly reform in the energy, education, public and social sectors and administrative and governance structures is necessary. The point is that the neo-liberal agenda may not be the most appropriate type of reform. What seems to be forgotten in the post-conflict and developmental emphasis on "good governance" (based on the model and language of corporate governance despite Arthur Anderson Enron and the expanding of corporate scandals) is that institutions are embedded in social, cultural and political process. The formalist focus on institutions and constitutions often reduce democracy to actually existing free market democracy and may result in a new cycle of war as peace spoilers use the grievance of spiralling costs of living and real and perceived increases in economic inequalities to upset the peace.

Finally, the question remains: will humanitarian and post/conflict reconstruction aid effectively subsidize SAPs and county's adjustment to Global Capital (ism)? State and civil administration structures, social services ministries and administrative structures, health care systems, religious welfare organizations, civil society, had no relationship to prior competition over land between peasants of the various ethnic communities, and issues of land settlement and redistribution. Redistribution has been a fundamental aspect of peace processes in Guatemala and El Salvador and other parts of the world. In Zimbabwe the failure to address the issue of land in the first instance arguable has fuelled the recent land disputes form which Mugabe has made political capital. The post-conflict settlement in Sri Lanka if it is to be sustainable in short must take into account issues of poverty and property rather than seeking to extend the interests of international corporations. In short, the peace

process will have to balance the right of return of the (individual) property of the displaced with the new (collective) allotment of territory that the war has affected and notions of individual rights with notions of collective or social property and re-distributive justice. Three years after the "no war, no peace process" and six months after the Tsunamis hit Sri Lanka, there are signs that many are discontent with the reconstruction program and some nostalgic for the war economy, as inequality and the cost of living soar while a neo-liberal peace looms on the horizon.

Conclusion: For a Structural Adjustment of the Peace and Reconstruction Industry?

There is a need to rethink the international development and reconstruction architecture in the context of a growing reconstruction debacle and increased global and local insecurity. The international peace building, reconstruction and development industry run by the multilateral agencies and the I/NGOs that uncritically follow them, appear to be one of the main impediments to building locally-owned sustainable peace processes in conflict torn societies in the global south. This insight was at the core of the "joke" about 3 international aid, experts and INGO tsunamis hitting Sri Lanka and generating new conflicts while eroding local capacity. Clearly there is a need for structural adjustment of the international reconstruction industry as well as a new paradigm for reconstruction and development that builds bottom up from local knowledge, debates and grounded historical and social analysis.

The global economy is an information and knowledge economy. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the international reconstruction industry that is characterized by deep global-local knowledge and power hierarchies, information asymmetries, that impact negatively on efforts to build locally sustainable peace and post/conflict reconstruction. Within this global-local knowledge dynamic the multilateral institutions engaged in reconstruction have their own logic of practice.

The international tool kit approach to reconstruction ignores and marginalizes at the policy level national and local expertise (even as listening to the 'Voices of the Poor', displaced and vulnerable has become fashionable), while it trivializes social analysis, local knowledge, and political analysis that are crucial to building *locally appropriate and sustainable policy interventions in conflict-affected regions*. The international post/conflict technical tool- kit approach that comes with and imposes preconceived frameworks often results in the failure to addresses complex structural issues of power and hence is vulnerable to surprise when a new cycle of violence begins. The path to hell in this case seems to be paved with good intentions and poor social, political and historical analysis!

The industry is characterized by over emphasis on international technical knowledge and undervaluing of local knowledge and social and political analysis. The international agencies and their staff sometimes cooperate with but largely compete among

themselves and with local institutions to advertise their work, publicize their deeds, and secure contracts and control of particular sectors and projects. This competition sets up its own dynamic the most obvious being the exclusion of local priorities, expertise and alternative approaches to development that depart from the neo-liberal orthodoxy. The tendency to marginalize local knowledge and trivializing of grounded social analysis that myth of the absence of "local capacity" and "social capital" indexes, along with the failure to come to grips with the political dimensions of conflicts is often a bi-product of competition between the various international agencies and expertise that constitute the industry. Substantive analysis and solutions and policies adequately prioritized to meet the needs of conflict transformation and de-escalation is the victim of this state of affairs in the post/conflict industry.

There are also various myths about the disaster zones of the world that sustain the global reconstruction industry. The purported uniform absence of "local capacity" and deficit of "social capital" is one. Although it is generally recognized by academics that the 20-year old armed -conflict in Sri Lanka is one of the most highly researched and written wars in the world, there is a pervasive myth in the post/conflict industry that there is very little research on the conflict because local capacity and social capital has been destroyed as in other countries that have experienced violent conflict. This myth of the absence of "local capacity" and "social capital" is curiously reminiscent of colonial constructions of the lands of non-European "others" as *terra nueva* and *tabular rasa*, to be both colonized and civilized as per the white man's burden. Elsewhere I have traced the similarities and breaks in the reproduction of the colonial imagination of conflicts in Africa and Asia in the social imaginary and mythology about the "war zone" that constitutes the cultural ethos of the international development and reconstruction industry and its *mission civilatrice*, that increasingly aims to transform whole societies and economies, via its governmentalities. The purported absence of local capacity more often than not constitutes a legitimacy clause for deliberate marginalization of alternative reconstruction and development paths. National and local academics and social scientists who disagree with the neo-liberal approach to reconstruction are deemed to lack capacity.

While there was a brain drain from the north and east of the island this is less the case of the south where throughout the war years a number of citizens organizations, NGOs, practitioners, scholars, and academics worked tirelessly to foster peace, build bridges, between the combatant groups, and critically analyze the complex dynamics of the war in Sri Lanka. Moreover, academics and practitioners from the northeast have also moved to other parts of the island and live and work in a range of institutions, governmental and NGO. In the north and east a number of diaspora members have returned. In short, the absence of local capacity is by no means uniform and is itself a ideological perception that marginalizes issues and approaches outside a preconceived frame. It means that the large amount of research and analysis that has already been

done on the conflict and the good analysis that exists in Sri Lanka, and the local institutions and personnel who have extensive knowledge and analysis of the conflict is systematically and often deliberately elided. Thus despite the multiplicity of studies and needs assessments the same information gaps are reproduced in the industry because institutional memory is short, like the ahistorical time frames of the international agencies and humanitarian consultants who parachute in and out of disaster zones.

A second myth that one encounters in the international post/conflict industry in Sri Lanka is that there are no citizens or nationals who are capable of non-partisan, de-ethnicized analysis, hence international personnel are needed who can act in an impartial manner. While international personnel often play an important protection role in conflicts where there are human rights violations by parties to an "ethnic" conflict, the assumption that the rest of local civil society is tainted by ethnic bias or hatred does not necessarily follow. It is also a common belief among external experts that the conflict in Sri Lanka is an more or less primordial ethnic one, rather than a complex modern war about poverty, exclusion from development, and political representation. Elsewhere, I have suggested that the narrowly ethnic reading of the conflict in Sri Lanka actually reproduces and mimics the conflict dynamic. For current interests, this also justifies importing internationals who have very little local knowledge and ability to engage in substantive analysis for sustainable interventions, but who are perceived to be objective vis-à-vis ethnic hatreds.

Structural Adjust of the Knowledge Bank

Highly qualified in-country academics, social scientists, and consultants often note that they were not treated as equals in reconstruction policy making processes orchestrated by Multilateral agencies. They were rarely recognized and involved in defining the parameters, priorities, substance and Tors of the studies being conducted by international disaster and development experts flown in to assess reconstruction need and priorities who have little grasp of the basis of conflict. At other times, consultations with local expertise by the multilateral agencies and related consultancy companies that proffer their knowledge and policy expertise to disaster besiged and sometimes corrupt governments, appears to be a matter of ex-post facto rubber stamping of Need Assessments and policy recommendations.

More often than not in-country social scientists who engaged in informed critique of neo-liberal development and reconstruction trajectories are perceived as "security threats" by the World Bank that with characteristic modesty also deems itself the "Knowledge Bank" . The bank and related developmental agencies fear their links with local social justice and grass root movements.¹² The undervaluing of social analysis and local knowledge often makes for inadequate policy and projects and programs that are unsustainable in the long run. Marginalization of social analysis is

partly the reason post/conflict reconstruction policies have often exacerbated real and perceived regional and income inequalities leading to new cycles of war and violence usually articulated in the form of ethnic or identity conflicts.

The result of the marginalization of moderate and informed in-country expertise in the development and reconstruction discussion is also one of the reasons for the increased prominence of anti-globalization and ethno-religious nationalisms of a fundamentalist bent in many parts of the global south.

The multilateral agencies involved in reconstruction cannot be assumed a-priori to be disinterested. International post/conflict and humanitarian agencies and interventions aimed at settlement are not always detached, well-meaning, and hence inherently effective. One important implication of this situation is intervention in the field of reconstruction must be premised on a more sophisticated critique of political economy, and of the relationship between local and global economic interests and embedded knowledge hierarchies in post/conflict reconstruction and peace processes. The local – global knowledge gap that structures the crisis in the international peace building and reconstruction industry is partly an effect of the fact that research and intervention aimed at conflict settlement is often initiated, funded, and carried out by external parties, while locally grounded social and political analysis is marginalized via application of the formalistic international technical tool kit approach to reconstruction, democracy and development. Meanwhile the issue the politics of knowledge production within the development and reconstruction industry is elided. Indeed at a policy level, these agencies do not appear to be accountable nor do they have the operational flexibility and necessary expertise to be accountable in a broader sense to the country they work in. Lip service is of course often paid to consultation with all stakeholders. However national expertise and social scientists often with far better qualifications than their international counterparts are paid and treated like research assistants while the analysis and report writing is done by the international technical expert.

The role, value and exit strategies of international development and reconstruction experts and actors must be constantly evaluated, monitored and assessed. Given the extra-ordinary and often indecent salaries that international experts and staff make in disaster stricken countries where a significant part of the population lives on less than a dollar a day, there is a tendency for internationals to extend their contracts and stay on. After all, Sri Lanka with its tropical beaches, fertile soil and lazy natives is considered a highly desirable disaster zone by those who work the international post/conflict humanitarian and reconstruction industry. As such, local capacity building and handing over of the project to locals is rarely a priority even though lip service is often paid to doing so. This is however necessary if reconstruction is to benefit the people who have been affected by natural and man-made disasters, rather than the global post/conflict industry. In the meantime, it may be relevant to do a conflict impact assessment of the post/conflict, post-tsunami reconstruction package and the role of international aid in the

making of violence. Sri Lanka simply cannot afford another cycle of conflict between its diverse ethnic and religious communities that co-existed in relative peace for centuries before the World Development industry led by the Bretton Woods institutions and the international military industrial complex came along. Finally, along with financial transparency social monitoring of the post/tsunami reconstruction package is necessary.

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End Notes

1. I would like to thank the Fulbright New Century Scholars 2002-2003 working Group 1 for critical comments and encouragement, particularly, Pratush Onta, Dan Rabinowitz and Courtney Jung. Needless to say they are not responsible of any shortcomings. A version of this paper is forthcoming in the Journal Development Vol. 48:2.

2. Peter Walker 2005 "Opportunities for Corruption in a Celebrity Disaster".

3. The World Bank and UN agencies has predicted an AIDs epidemic in the conflict affected parts of the country and set aside

a very large budget for free AIDs testing of refugees returning from India when the peace process began in 2001. These predictions of an AIDs epidemic and the culturally insensitive anti-AIDS program that took place were clearly was not base on a social political or cultural analysis of the relevant populations which have a highly conservative cultural profile buttressed by the moral Puritanism of the LTTE. They were based on a one size fits all reconstruction tool-kit imported from some conflict areas in Africa where there have been AIDs epidemics. The anti-AIDS campaign and predictions resulted in the stigmatizing of returnees from India in the northern and Puttlam districts.

4. See Ben Fine's *Social Capital versus Social Theory* (2001) for astute analysis of this issue.

5. In a recent book published by the Washington-based United States Institute for Peace, titled, *Effects of Violence on Peace Processes* John Darby notes: "Of the thirty-eight formal peace accords signed between January 1988 and December 1998, thirty one failed to last more than three years". Darby suggests that a peace process must be forward looking and potential spoilers of the peace must be on board, for if not they may destabilize the peace process. In Sri Lanka this would include potential spoilers who may use local conflicts and social and economic inequality that are not directly related to the macro armed conflict between the LTTE and GoSL.

6. It is of concern that a range of social conflicts have escalated in Latin American countries that undertook uncritical structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) at the end of "dirty wars". These economic programmes made them vulnerable to fluctuations in global financial markets at the behest of the World Bank and IMF (Argentina being a dramatic case).

7. The previous UNP government had managed to sustain growth and wage war, but by following a strategy of containing the conflict, and limited war.

8. It was noted that the Government's estimate was an underestimate of total defence expenditure, after the various military service sectors were accounted.

9. See "Voices of the Poor" ADB Poverty Study 2000.

10. *Pura Handa Kaluwara* (Death on a Full Moon Night) directed by Prasanna Vithanage, a film that commented critically on the futility of war and its social costs, was banned by the authorities and then unbanned following a prolonged legal battle and the Supreme Court ruling that the ban violated the freedom of artistic expression.

11. Michael Foucault's work on the dynamics of discourse and power to construct and represent an authorized social reality, and Nandy's work on how global discourses come to structure local realities and subjectivities has given us the tools to unveil some of the mechanisms by which certain orders of knowledge are produced as permissible modes of being and thinking, while others are disqualified, also in the historically singular experience, if not teleology of "world development".

12. The Senior Social Sector position at the World Bank Office in Sri Lanka has remained vacant for years despite there being many highly qualified and internationally recognized social scientists in the country. Many of these social scientists resist recasting capitalizing social relations and trivializing social analysis into the measurement of social capital.. Meanwhile the myth of the lack of local capacity, be it social scientists or construction workers persists among the multilateral agencies and related I/NGOs. ■

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