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Harrowell, E. & Ozerdem, A.

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Negotiating reconstruction: Understanding hybridity in Sri Lanka's post-disaster and post-conflict reconstruction processes.

Dr Elly Harrowell

Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University.

Professor Alpaslan Özerdem

Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University.

Abstract

This paper considers the diverse processes of 'reconstruction' that have taken place in Sri Lanka following the devastating tsunami in 2004, and the end of the war in 2009. We argue for a reading of post-crisis reconstruction in Sri Lanka which complicates the 'liberal' versus 'authoritarian' binary often used to characterise these reconstruction processes, and brings to the fore the complexity of the decisions and tensions around reconstruction in Sri Lanka. We advocate using the concept of hybridity to better understand the multiple processes of reconstruction that have taken place in Sri Lanka since 2004, how they interact, and how an approach to reconstruction that is unique to Sri Lanka may be in the process of being negotiated.

Key Words: Post-disaster reconstruction, post-conflict reconstruction, hybridity, Sri Lanka, peacebuilding.

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Negotiating reconstruction: Understanding hybridity in Sri Lanka's post-disaster and post-conflict reconstruction processes.

1. Introduction

Sri Lanka has experienced 12 years of near constant physical, economic and social reconstruction processes in response to the devastation brought about by violent conflict and a natural hazard related disaster. The nature of this reconstruction has changed throughout this period, including post-disaster reconstruction (PDR) following the tsunami in 2004, post-conflict reconstruction (PCR) occurring in some regions whilst the war continued in others from 2007, and post-conflict reconstruction after the end of the country's long civil war in 2009. In other words, two major post-disaster and post-conflict reconstruction processes have at times, run concurrently or followed one by another in a relatively short period of time, posing a number of financial, strategic and operational challenges for international, national and local actors. These changes have also translated into differences in the character of the reconstruction, with the actors involved, locations, scale, approaches and types of reconstruction activities carried out varying considerably across this timeframe.

Generally the academic literature regarding these diverse processes of what can be collectively termed post-crisis reconstruction in Sri Lanka has crystallised around the idea that two competing models of reconstruction that have played out in the country. One, in the post-2004 Tsunami context, was largely guided by the principles and approaches already seen in a multitude of liberal peace and humanitarian aid interventions since the end of the Cold War. As such, international organisations, donors and NGOs occupied highly influential posi-

tions in shaping, carrying out and funding reconstruction programmes.¹ The other model represented a rejection of the norms of liberal interventionism in favour of a reconstruction process firmly driven by the politics of a victor's peace and stringent control over reconstruction by the national government after the end of the civil war with the Tamil Tigers.² Seen in this light Sri Lanka becomes an allegory for wider international tensions between traditional donors and rising powers, the persistence of the liberal peace orthodoxy and the renewed influence of authoritarian/realist international paradigms for action, and collaborative versus 'go it alone' responses to international challenges. Although investigations into peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction in Sri Lanka since 2009 have begun to probe what this means for the binary of 'liberal' versus 'authoritarian' responses to conflict, notably Höglund and Orjuela in 2012,³ little has been done so far to extend this understanding to take in the breadth of reconstruction experiences of Sri Lanka over the last decade, including those following the 2004 tsunami.

¹ See, for example, Jock Stirrat. 'Competitive humanitarianism: relief and the tsunami in Sri Lanka'. *Anthropology Today*, 22 no. 5 (2006), 11-16; M. W. Amarasiri de Silva. 'Ethnicity, politics and inequality: post-tsunami humanitarian aid delivery in Ampara District, Sri Lanka'. *Disasters*, 33 no. 2 (2009), 253-273; and Timmo Gaasbeek. 'Actors in a masala movie: fieldnotes on the NGO tsunami response in eastern Sri Lanka' in *Tsunami Recovery in Sri Lanka*, ed. Dennis B. McGilvray, Michele R. Gamburd (pp. 145-162). (London: Routledge, 2008), 145-162, for discussions of the roles and actions of international humanitarian actors, and Jim Kennedy, Joseph Ashmore, Elizabeth Babister and Ilan Kelman. 'The meaning of 'build back better': evidence from post-tsunami Aceh and Sri Lanka'. *Journal of contingencies and crisis management*, 16 no. 1 (2008), 24-36.; Sarah Khasalamwa. 'Is 'build back better' a response to vulnerability? Analysis of the post-tsunami humanitarian interventions in Sri Lanka'. *Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift-Norwegian Journal of Geography*, 63 no. 1 (2009), 73-88; and Sandeeka Mannakkara & Suzanne Wilkinson. 'Re-conceptualising 'Building Back Better' to improve post-disaster recovery'. *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business*, 7 no. 3 (2014), 327-341, on the particular approach to reconstruction embodied in this response.

² Jonathan Goodhand. 'Sri Lanka in 2011: Consolidation and militarization of the post-war re-gime'. *Asian Survey*, 52 no.1 (2012), 130-137; Jonathan Goodhand. 'Stabilising a victor's peace? Humanitarian action and reconstruction in eastern Sri Lanka'. *Disasters*. 34 no. 3 (2010), 342-367; David Lewis. 'The failure of a liberal peace: Sri Lanka's counter-insurgency in global perspective'. *Conflict, Security & Development*, 10 no. 5 (2010), 647-671; and Kristian Stokke. 'Liberal peace in question: The Sri Lankan case' in Kristian Stokke and Ja-yadeva Uyangoda ed. *Liberal Peace in Question: Politics of State and Market Reform in Sri Lanka*, London: Anthem (2011), 1-34.

³ Kristine Hoglund and Camilla Orjuela. 'Hybrid Peace Governance and Illiberal Peacebuilding in Sri Lanka'. *Global Governance*. 18 (2012), 89-104.

In this paper, then, we argue for a reading of post-crisis reconstruction in Sri Lanka which complicates this ‘liberal’ versus ‘authoritarian’ binary, and brings to the fore the complexity of the decisions and tensions around reconstruction in Sri Lanka. We advocate using the concept of hybridity, advanced in the fields of international relations and peace and conflict studies by Richmond and Mac Ginty,⁴ to better understand the multiple processes of reconstruction that have taken place in Sri Lanka since 2004, how they interact, and how an approach to reconstruction that is unique to Sri Lanka may be in the process of being negotiated. The paper follows in the footsteps of Höglund and Orjuela’s exploration of hybrid peace governance in Sri Lanka, and seeks to bring this same illuminating perspective to bear on the processes of reconstruction that have played such an important role in Sri Lanka’s recent history. This paper moves beyond Höglund & Orjuela’s work by applying the analytical prism of hybrid peace governance to a wider understanding of reconstruction in Sri Lanka, including the post-disaster reconstruction process. This investigation represents the first time the hybrid peace governance literature has been applied to a PDR process, and we argue that this brings to light a number of insights, particularly through emphasising PDR as a political process (a move that is often resisted by actors who seek to preserve a vision of disasters as apolitical),⁵ and complicating assumptions about relationships between the local and international. It allows us to understand how hybrid peace governance is being negotiated through more than peacebuilding programmes, but also disaster focussed interventions, and as such situates dis-

⁴ Roger Mac Ginty. ‘Hybrid Peace: The interaction between top-down and bottom-up peace’. *Security Dialogue*. 41 no. 4 (2010), 391-412; Oliver Richmond. ‘Becoming liberal, unbecoming liberalism: Liberal-local hybridity via the everyday as a response to the paradoxes of liberal peacebuilding.’ *Journal of intervention and statebuilding* 3, no. 3 (2009): 324-344; Oliver Richmond. ‘The dilemmas of a hybrid peace: Negative or positive?’ *Cooperation and Conflict*. 50 no. 1 (2015), 50-68.

⁵ Elly Harrowell & Alpaslan Özerdem. ‘The politics of the post-conflict and post-disaster nexus in Nepal’. *Conflict, Security & Development*, 18 no. 3 (2018), 181-205; Ayesha Siddiqi. Disasters in conflict areas: finding the politics. *Disasters*. 42 no.52 (2018), 161-172.

cussions of illiberal peacebuilding within a wider horizon of reconstruction interventions that have been occurring in Sri Lanka for over a decade.

Building on policy-focussed research carried out in the capital city of Sri Lanka, Colombo in 2017, the paper presents three areas in which a hybridity lens gives a new perspective on post-conflict and post-disaster reconstruction in the country. Using hybridity as a lens helps firstly to understand the apparent failure of key aspects of liberal interventions in Sri Lanka, such as participatory reconstruction methods and the tying of post-disaster projects to peacebuilding aims. Secondly, it questions assumptions about scale and dualistic divisions between the national and international. Finally, it provides insight into the shifting and expanding role of the military in post-conflict, post-disaster and urban development projects. We argue that future reconstruction processes will be contingent on the type of government in place in Colombo, not the will of the international community, and that this depends on the interactions and negotiations between a variety of actors at the local, national and international levels. Rather than relying on a binary view that sees Sri Lanka as oscillating between two competing models of reconstruction, we suggest that focusing on this fluidity and process of negotiation opens the door to the development of a hybrid reconstruction practice that builds on successes and acknowledges failures of what has gone before. In a wider perspective, the investigation of such a reconstruction experience through the hybridity lens will contribute to the development of methodologies for a more nuanced understanding of the post-disaster and post-conflict reconstruction nexus in other contexts such as Nepal where a post-conflict reconstruction process that was followed by a post-disaster one after the earthquakes in 2015, Aceh where post-disaster and post-conflict reconstruction processes have been run concurrently after the 2004 Tsunami) and Sierra Leone/Liberia where the devastating Ebola crisis was experienced by both countries in their post-conflict reconstruction contexts.

2. Materials and Methods

The paper is based on semi-structured interviews carried out with elite stakeholders in Colombo and London in April and October 2017. We carried out 21 semi-structured interviews with 26 people, chosen via purposive sampling because of their expertise in the fields of post-conflict and post-disaster reconstruction programming in Sri Lanka. These stakeholders were drawn from the Sri Lankan government, local and international civil society organisations, international organisations and donor government representatives, researchers and academics. In the selection of interviewees, the authors' previous work in Sri Lanka and their network of international and national organisations also played a pivotal role. Interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes, and were conducted in English. Field research benefited from a time of relative openness for local and international researchers, following the more restrictive environment during the previous Rajapaksa government. Nonetheless, we were aware of our privileged positions as incoming 'Western' researchers, as well the ongoing difficulties of Tamil and other minority communities in making their voices heard, and attempted to reflect critically on this at all stages of the research and analysis process. The data was then analysed using thematic analysis in order to generate findings grounded in the data, rather than applying a previously identified framework for analysis. This research forms part of a wider comparative study of places which have experienced both post-conflict and post-disaster reconstruction, which limited the amount of time we were able to spend in Colombo. All interviews were conducted in confidentiality, and the names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement. Before discussing the findings, the article will first explore the context of post-crisis reconstruction in Sri Lanka since 2004, paying particular attention to the politics of reconstruction interventions in this time.

3. Results

The Sri Lankan Context

From 1983 to 2009 Sri Lanka was devastated by a brutal conflict between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), an insurgent group seeking to establish an independent state for the large ethnic Tamil community in the north and east of the country, and the Sri Lankan government. Whilst a number of ceasefires were negotiated throughout this period, and several peace processes sought to resolve the conflict with varying degrees of success, the war would eventually be brought to an end through the comprehensive victory by government forces in 2009. The war was brutal, with between 80,000 to 100,000 estimated to have been killed. This death toll, and particularly the fate of civilians trapped in the Vanni and heavily shelled in the final days of the war, provoked outrage from the international community, with the UN forming a panel of experts to investigate allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity during the horrific final months of the campaign. These accusations were, in turn, bitterly contested by the Sri Lankan government at the time. In the midst of this, on 26th December 2004, Sri Lanka was rocked by a massive tsunami which caused devastation on a wide scale along the country's north and eastern coasts.⁶The tsunami affected areas under the control of the LTTE as well as the government, killing more than 35,000 people and displacing over a million more.

Throughout Sri Lanka's near three decades of conflict, it was difficult to try to disentangle the strands of PCR, PDR and development aid, such was the extent that these processes had been

⁶ The Indian Ocean tsunami was triggered by a 9.1 magnitude undersea earthquake, which struck in the morning of December 26 2004. This caused a tsunami that would hit Sri Lanka, Indonesia, India, Thailand and the Maldives and other countries to devastating effect. It is estimated that at least 225,000 people were killed by the tsunami disaster in total. In Sri Lanka alone around 110,000 houses were damaged or destroyed, and losses of over \$1 billion were sustained.

used to try to address challenges beyond their obvious immediate remit. Development aid, and aid for reconstruction in particular, had long been tied to the peace process in an attempt to incentivise negotiations following the 2002 ceasefire by providing for a peace dividend.⁷ Indeed, a donor conference was even held in Tokyo in 2003 with the aim of drumming up financial support for post-conflict reconstruction and development. Moreover, post-tsunami projects were often designed in an attempt to address conflict drivers or dealt with war-affected communities. Post-conflict reconstruction being carried out in the east via the *Nage-nahira Navodaya* (Eastern Awakening) programme, was implemented whilst war was still raging in the North, and both this and the subsequent *Uthuru Vasanthaya* (Northern Spring) programmes aimed to rebuild buildings and infrastructure that were themselves constructed as part of the disaster response. Within this complex and highly politicised landscape of reconstruction in Sri Lanka it can be difficult, and not always helpful, to try and sketch the outlines of the different processes. Nevertheless, it is useful to acknowledge a number of important features of the reconstruction that followed the tsunami and the war's end. Framing this analysis as an investigation of reconstruction, rather than peacebuilding, serves an important purpose. This approach implicitly opens our frame of reference to processes undertaken by a wide range of actors. Whilst activities carried out under the aegis of 'peacebuilding' tend to be discursively linked to the liberal peacebuilding agenda, 'reconstruction' is a more malleable term, a practical necessity in the wake of war carried out by apparently illiberal and liberal actors alike. Reconstruction can mean the physical business of rebuilding infrastructure to one stakeholder as much as it might mean rebuilding trust within a society to another. By focusing on this term within our research, we hoped to capture the full gamut of

⁷ Philippe Le Billon and Arno Waizenegger. 'Peace in the wake of disaster? Secessionist conflicts and the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami'. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 32 no. 3 (2007), 411-427.

activities, and actors, carrying out interventions in the wake of conflict and disaster in Sri Lanka without implicitly privileging one normative approach.

Post Disaster Reconstruction

Some writers have called the response that followed the events of 26 December 2004 as the ‘tsunami after the tsunami’ referring to the influx of international aid organisations that flooded the country in the weeks and months that followed.⁸ Sri Lanka received \$3.5 billion of aid to support relief and reconstruction.⁹ Faced with a crisis of this magnitude, the national government and LTTE alike were underprepared and overwhelmed, with the international community instead taking a leading role in designing and implementing post-disaster relief and recovery programmes. As a result of the leading role played by the international community, the post-tsunami reconstruction effort emphasised a number of elements related to liberal interventionist paradigms. These included a focus on participatory reconstruction methods and community involvement in planning and implementing such as housing reconstruction, and the guiding mantra of ‘build back better’.¹⁰ Crucially, this also included attempts to use reconstruction projects to address conflict drivers, both at a local level (for example, by applying ‘conflict sensitive’ approaches to community reconstruction processes, or bringing different groups to work together on building projects) and at the national level, through negoti-

⁸ Benedikt Korf. ‘Sri Lanka: The tsunami after the tsunami’. *International Development Planning Review*, 27 no. 3 (2005) i-vii.

⁹ Prema-Chandra Athukorala. ‘Indian Ocean tsunami: Disaster, generosity and recovery’. *Asian Economic Journal*, 26 no. 3 (2012), 211-231.

¹⁰ For further critical discussion of the post-disaster reconstruction process in Sri Lanka B Korf, ‘Sri Lanka: The tsunami after the tsunami’; MW Amarasiri de Silva, ‘Ethnicity, politics and inequality’; S Mannakkara and S Wilson, ‘Re-conceptualising ‘Building Back Better’’; J Kennedy et al, ‘The meaning of ‘build back better’’; Camillo Boano. ‘Housing anxiety and multiple geographies in post-tsunami Sri Lanka’. *Disasters*, 33 no. 4 (2009), 762-785.; and Kanchana Ruwanpura. ‘Temporality of disasters: The politics of women’s livelihoods ‘after’ the 2004 tsunami in Sri Lanka’. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, 29 no. 3 (2008), 325-340.

ations around the P-TOMS mechanism. The Post-Tsunami Operational Management Structure, or P-TOMS for short, was intended to coordinate responses to the tsunami between the national government and LTTE, though the international community also had clear hopes that this would be the catalyst for greater cooperation between both parties, and therefore kick start the stalling peace process. It is important to situate this approach within the context of the peace process, mediated by Norway, that had been taking place over the previous five years, and notably following the ceasefire agreement signed between the Sri Lanka government and LTTE in 2002. Despite the difficulties encountered in this process, it represented a relatively mature peace process organised along familiar liberal international lines, and one that was quite widely considered to have a chance for success in yielding a negotiated peace. As Sørnbø et al. note in their evaluation of the peace process, many people saw post-tsunami mechanisms such as P-TOMS as a ‘last window of opportunity’ in making this process work.¹¹ Although a Memorandum of Understanding for P-TOMS was signed in 2005, the mechanism soon became a target for the anger of nationalist politicians, who vehemently opposed the deal on the basis that it conferred too much legitimacy on the LTTE, and never fulfilled its potential as a peacebuilding tool.¹²

Overall, the achievements of the post-tsunami reconstruction period can be seen as a mixed bag. Faced with a disaster of unprecedented scale in Sri Lanka, it is clear that the international led response was able to marshal a great deal of resources; the tsunami prompted the largest donor response to a humanitarian disaster on record to that time and by the end of 2007 the country’s Reconstruction and Development Agency (RADA) reported that 76,000

¹¹ Gunnar Sørnbø, Jonathan Goodhand, Bart Klem, Ada Elisabeth Nissen and Hilde Selbervik. *Pawns of peace. Evaluation of Norwegian peace efforts in Sri Lanka, 1997-2009*. Oslo: Norad (2011), Quote at p.3.

¹² Jennifer Hyndman. ‘Siting conflict and peace in post-tsunami Sri Lanka and Aceh, Indonesia’. *Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift-Norwegian Journal of Geography*, 63 no.1(2009), 89-96.

houses had been rebuilt, with 34,000 more in construction (though this progress varied wildly between regions).¹³ However, the scale of this response did not necessarily translate into success on the ground. The PDR process was dogged by accusations of mismanagement of funds and poor planning, making it ‘neither as effective nor as efficient as it should be’.¹⁴ Moreover, rather than producing the hope for peace dividend, the process instead became highly politicized and bound up with conflict dynamics.¹⁵ Rather than providing an opportunity for peace, the failure of P-TOMS and impact of the ‘aid tsunami’ opened the door for the hard-line nationalist Mahinda Rajapaksa to win the Presidency in 2005, signalling a return to all out war after several years of fragile ceasefires and negotiations.¹⁶

Post Conflict Reconstruction

Against widespread expectation, Rajapaksa went on to win war with the LTTE in 2009. The closure of the sluice gates at a reservoir at Marvil Aru by the LTTE in July 2006, which restricted the water supply to a large number of families in government controlled territory, prompted the government to launch ‘Operation Watershed’, a military offensive which would signal a return to overt hostilities between the two sides. Over the next few years the government first focussed on retaking the East (from 2006 to 2007) then the North (from 2008 to 2009), culminating in the capture of the LTTE’s de facto capital, Kilinochchi, in January 2009. The LTTE’s last stand, trapped on a small sliver of coastline in the northeast is mired in controversy, with accusations that the LTTE used thousands of civilians as a human shield,

¹³ Worldwatch Institute, ‘Post-Tsunami Housing Reconstruction Varies Widely across Sri Lanka’ (March 2007) <http://www.worldwatch.org/node/5183>.

¹⁴ PC Athukorala, Indian Ocean tsunami: Disaster, generosity and recovery, 222.

¹⁵ J Goodhand, Stabilising a victor’s peace?

¹⁶ P Le Billon and A Waizenegger, Peace in the wake of disaster?; J Goodhand, Stabilising a victor’s peace?

and that indiscriminate use of force by the Sri Lankan army led to the death of up to 40,000 civilians.¹⁷

The post-conflict reconstruction that followed the war's end stands in stark contrast to the response to the 2004 tsunami, in large part due to a combination of international actors' concerns about the government's conduct in the war, and the Rajapaksa regime's distrust of these same actors. The Eastern Awakening and Northern Spring programmes paid little lip service to the kinds of participatory methods seen a few short years before, and could instead be characterised as infrastructure-led, focused on fast economic development and consolidated central control over the territory, with the military taking a central role in overseeing and implementing projects. This process was far less welcoming to programming led by NGOs and international actors, and was tightly controlled by the government.¹⁸ Strikingly, many of the activities that might usually be associated with reconstruction after war, such as transitional justice, reconciliation or security sector reform,¹⁹ did not take a central role in the Rajapaksa government's approach to the post-conflict. Instead, as Ruwanpura notes 'the underlying premise was that jobs and economic growth would generate the political will necessary and sufficient to overcome ethnic tensions'.²⁰ Whilst the space for 'traditional' humanitarian actors to engage in post-conflict reconstruction programming appeared much reduced, Sri Lan-

¹⁷ United Nations Panel of Experts, Report of the Secretary General's Panel of Experts (31 March 2011). http://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/Sri_Lanka/POE_Report_Full.pdf

¹⁸ For discussions of this phenomenon see Kanchana Ruwanpura. 'Militarized Capitalism? The Apparel Industry's Role in Scripting a Post-War National Identity in Sri Lanka'. *Antipode*, 50 no. 2 (2018), 425-446; J Goodhand, 'Sri Lanka in 2011'; K Höglund and C Orjuela, 'Hybrid peace governance'; Kristine Höglund and Camilla Orjuela. 'Winning the peace: conflict prevention after a victor's peace in Sri Lanka'. *Contemporary Social Science*, 6 no.1 (2011), 19-37; Oliver Walton. 'Between war and the liberal peace: the politics of NGO peacebuilding in Sri Lanka'. *International Peacekeeping*, 19 no. 1 (2012), 19-34.

¹⁹ Sun Yong Lee and Alpaslan Özerdem. *International peacebuilding: An introduction*. (London: Routledge, 2015).

²⁰ K Ruwanpura, 'Militarised capitalism', 1.

ka instead turned to governments such as China and Russia for support in this, capitalising on their newfound status as one of the only governments to successfully win a war against an insurgency. As Höglund and Orjuela point out, Sinhala nationalism was neatly linked to a narrative at the international level which ‘opposed the domination of Western nations globally and despised international intervention in the internal affairs of states’, symbolically situating the nationalist Sri Lankan government at the time alongside others seen to resist the liberal western hegemony, such as Russia, China, Libya and Venezuela.²¹

The Rajapaksa regime lost power somewhat unexpectedly in 2015, and the government that has followed, headed by Maithripala Sirisena, has once again extended the hand of friendship to the United Nations and other international organisations and NGOs, whilst lessening the crackdown on local media and NGOs that had been a feature of the Rajapaksa era, and opening the door to initiatives related to transitional justice and the war disappeared.

‘Hybridity’: an appropriate lens for the investigation of the PCR and PDR nexus?

In the context of this apparent oscillation between approaches to post-crisis reconstruction that drew on the international aid framework, and those models that drew on the country’s authoritarian turn under the Rajapaksa government,²² the value of adopting a theoretical lens that actively focuses on the tension and negotiations between competing modes of reconstruction is clear. Hybrid peace theory takes its roots from the work of post-colonial theorists such as Bhabha, Hall and Spivak, and focuses on the forms of peace and politics that result

²¹ K Höglund and C Orjuela, ‘Hybrid peace governance’, 89.

²² Jonas Lindberg and Dhammika Herath. ‘Land and grievances in post-conflict Sri Lanka: exploring the role of corruption complaints’. *Third World Quarterly*, 35 no. 5 (2014), 888-904.

from the interactions between the liberal peace hegemony and local forms of peace, politics and arrangements of power. As Richmond has eloquently summed up, hybrid forms of peace ‘are the result of the encounter, along a spectrum of local to international scales (Massey, 2007), of a range of actors engaged in peacebuilding, statebuilding, development, security, as well as envisioning the nature of progressive politics in conflict-affected societies’.²³ This approach acknowledges the agency of local actors to resist or adapt interventions by the actors of the liberal peace (such as states from the global north, international organisations and international NGOs), and to develop their own forms of politics, peace and peacemaking.²⁴

The key features of a hybrid situation can be summarised as the following: First of all, it blurs the boundaries between the local and international levels of analysis and actors, encouraging a focus on the negotiations and interactions between these levels rather than seeing them as fixed or bounded.²⁵ Building on this, a hybrid peace approach actively challenges binaries such as ‘internal v external’, ‘top down v bottom up’, ‘modern v traditional’ and ‘Western v non-Western’. It suggests that whilst these may be seductive in their explanatory simplicity, they are not accurate representations of the complex arrangements of power that are emerging in reality in post-conflict contexts.²⁶ A hybrid peace lens focuses on the interactions between different actors, policies and structures, the creativity often engendered in these encounters, and the effects these interactions produce.²⁷ Crucially, in a hybrid lens the power

²³ O Richmond, ‘The dilemmas of a hybrid peace’, 50.

²⁴ R Mac Ginty, ‘Hybrid Peace’.

²⁵ O Richmond, ‘The dilemmas of a hybrid peace’; K Höglund and C Orjuela, ‘Hybrid peace governance’.

²⁶ R Mac Ginty, ‘Hybrid Peace’; Nicolas Lemay-Hébert and Florian Kühn. ‘Letter from the Editors: taking the hybridity agenda further’. *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*. 9 no. 1 (2015): 1-3.

²⁷ R Mac Ginty, ‘Hybrid Peace’; Annika Björkdahl and Kristine Höglund. ‘Precarious peacebuilding: Friction in global-local encounters’. *Peacebuilding*. 1 no. 3 (2013), 289-299.

and agency of non-elites is taken seriously, and the importance of local knowledges is brought to the fore – as Richmond and Mitchell put it ‘the local is a site of various forms of power, resistance and agency, many of which overlap and even conflict’.²⁸ Hybrid peace is seen as a space of fluidity of both actors and institutions in the negotiation of peace and security (including temporally), and the possibility for co-existence of seemingly opposed norms. It allows for the dynamism of contexts in transition, and does not assume neat or strategic progress in a given direction.²⁹

To many, a hybrid peace represents an opportunity to ‘do’ peacebuilding better – to marry the might of the international liberal apparatus with the nuance and power of local knowledges, and in doing so install a peace that is somehow more authentic and legitimate.³⁰ As a consequence, recent years have witnessed increasing attempts by international organisations, INGOs and donor governments to ‘manufacture hybridity’ by building participatory approaches into their programming, and increasing calls for local ownership, bottom-up thinking and support for ‘community resilience’.³¹ Such initiatives have met with considerable scepticism from theorists however, who doubt the value and effectiveness of attempts to construct locally authentic hybrid outcomes.³² A key criticism of the literature on hybrid peace governance has been a concern that it in fact reinforces a reductive international-local binary, one which

²⁸ Oliver Richmond and Audra Mitchell. *Hybrid forms of peace: From Everyday Agency to Post-Liberalism*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 11.

²⁹ R Mac Ginty, ‘Hybrid Peace’.

³⁰ A Björkdahl and Höglund, ‘Precarious peacebuilding’.

³¹ O Richmond and A Mitchell, ‘Hybrid forms of peace’.

³² Oliver Richmond and Roger Mac Ginty. ‘Where now for the critique of the liberal peace?’ *Cooperation and Conflict*. 50 no. 2 (2015). 171-189.

risks romanticising the local, and downplaying the role of the national level³³. It is true that the ‘local’ can mean many things in discussions of hybridity, from national governments to the communities in which interventions are taking place. In a context such as Sri Lanka, where there are considerable cleavages within the national community along religious, ethnic and regional lines, it would be highly problematic to present the ‘local’ and ‘national’ as synonymous. Instead this paper makes the distinction between the international, national and subnational levels, adopting the caveat that the ‘local’ as subnational should not be assumed to be unitary, and itself is home to important power relations.

There is a rich body of literature that discusses the negotiation and production of hybrid forms of peace through PCR interventions (these representing one of the central features of the international liberal peace enterprise, after all), but very little work has been done to apply this same approach to PDR. This may be due to the lingering belief in some quarters that post-disaster reconstruction is not related to issues of peace and conflict.³⁴ There is ample evidence, however, of the interrelated nature of violent conflict and natural hazard related disasters and how this affects responses to both,³⁵ and extensive discussion of the use of post-disaster reconstruction to address peacebuilding aims.³⁶ It is important to recognize the distinc-

³³ Suthaharan Nadarajah, and David Rampton. ‘The limits of hybridity and the crisis of liberal peace’. *Review of International Studies*, 41 no. 1 (2015), 49-72.

³⁴ E Harrowell and A Ozerdem, ‘The politics of the post-conflict and post-disaster’.

³⁵ Janani Vivekananda, Janpeter Schilling, and Dan Smith. ‘Climate resilience in fragile and conflict-affected societies: concepts and approaches’. *Development in Practice*. 24 no. 4 (2014), 487-501; Philip Nel and Marjolein Righarts. ‘Natural disasters and the risk of violent civil conflict’. *International Studies Quarterly* 52 no.1 (2008). 159-185; Nina von Uexkull. ‘Sustained drought, vulnerability and civil conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa’. *Political Geography*, 43 (2014), 16-26.

³⁶ Insightful work on this specifically related to Sri Lanka has been published by MW Amarasiri de Silva, ‘Ethnicity, politics and inequality’; Le Billon and Waizenegger, ‘Peace in the wake of disaster?’; Jonathan Goodhand, Bart Klem, Dilrukshi Fonseka, S. I. Keethaponcalan, and Shonali Sar-desai. *Aid, Conflict, and Peacebuilding in Sri Lanka, 2000-2005*. Vol. 1. (Colombo: Asia Foundation, 2005); and Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake. ‘Sri Lanka and the violence of reconstruction’. *Development*. 48 no.3 (2005), 111-120.

tiveness of the two processes, not least with regards to the nature of the triggering event,³⁷ some of the activities concerned, and the willingness of donors to get involved. Nevertheless, there is a considerable level of overlap between PDR and PCR processes, including at the level of strategic and implementing actors, types of activities, and the ideal goal of long term reconstruction activities in both types of reconstruction attempt to address critical vulnerabilities that triggered the crisis.³⁸

This paper, then, seeks to understand Sri Lanka's experiences of post-conflict and post-disaster reconstruction through the lens of hybridity. Drawing on Mac Ginty and Sanghera's observations on the analytical opportunities of hybridity,³⁹ our analysis will focus on the key characteristics identified above – an acknowledgement of local agency, disruption of accepted binaries, blurring of levels of analysis, focus on processes of negotiation, and the development of creative responses and solutions grounded in the local context – in order to gain new insight into the processes of reconstruction in Sri Lanka. Interrogating these characteristics will allow us to unpack the agency of hitherto overlooked actors at the local and national level, and acknowledge the dynamism of the context in which reconstruction efforts have taken place. Taking its cue from Höglund and Orjuela's observation that 'Sri Lankan postwar society is characterized by a combination of relative absence of violence, especially compared to the war phase, but an entrenchment of authoritarian practices. It appears to display several features of hybridity',⁴⁰ the paper will understand which specific features of hybridity

³⁷ Jose-Miguel Albala-Bertrand. 'Complex emergencies versus natural disasters: an analytical comparison of causes and effects'. *Oxford Development Studies*. 28 no.2 (2000), 187-204.

³⁸ Mark Pelling and Kathleen Dill. 'Natural disasters as catalysts of political action'. *Media Development*, 53 no. 4 (2006), 7; David Keen. *Complex emergencies*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008).

³⁹ Roger Mac Ginty and Gurchathen Sanghera. 'Hybridity in peacebuilding and development: An introduction'. *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, 7 no.2 (2012), 3-8.

⁴⁰ Höglund and Orjuela, 'Hybrid peace governance', 91.

can be observed in reconstruction practices in the country, and what this can tell us about future responses to disaster and conflict. Rather than presenting the post-tsunami and post-2009 programmes of reconstruction as evidence of experiments with two very different approaches to rebuilding after crisis, the paper advocates focusing on the processes of negotiation and fluidity that these experiences represent when viewed as a whole. Are we witnessing the development of a hybrid practice of reconstruction in Sri Lanka? What will this mean for the response to the next disaster in the country? Before moving to consider these questions, however, it is worth reflecting on Sri Lanka's experience with attempts to manufacture hybrid structures in reconstruction activities following the 2004 tsunami, as these can also shed light on the negotiation of reconstruction that has followed.

The Failure of Manufactured Hybridity

As discussed in section two, one of the defining features of the reconstruction work that followed the tsunami in 2004 was a much vaunted focus on participatory reconstruction methods, focus on local ownership, capacity building and other 'bottom-up' approaches to post-disaster intervention that can be understood as part of the 'local turn' on the part of international humanitarian sector. Stakeholders interviewed as part of this research constantly returned to the theme of community participation when describing the PDR period in Sri Lanka,⁴¹ underlining how this – along with the mantra 'Build Back Better' – has come to be seen as a defining aspiration of the PDR work from 2005 onwards. And yet, how effective this approach was in reality has been hotly contested. Whilst representatives of international

⁴¹ In-depth Interview, international organisation representative, 19 April 2017; In-depth Interview, NGO representative, 17 April 2017; In-depth Interview, NGO representative, 19 April 2017; In-depth Interview, international organisation representative, 10 April 2017; In-depth Interview, donor government representative, 20 April 2017; In-depth Interview, NGO representative, 18 April 2017.

institutions defended the success of this approach,⁴² others were quick to highlight cases where apparently participatory projects had in fact made conflicts and inequality at a local level worse,⁴³ a phenomenon that has been interrogated in depth by numerous researchers.⁴⁴

Looking back at the PDR response with the benefit of a decade of hindsight, many stakeholders – particularly those drawn from local civil society organisations – were circumspect about whether this process should actually be considered as ‘locally owned’ at all. Despite the often stated commitment to local ownership, the PDR process remained overwhelmingly driven, and its activities defined, by a vast influx of international actors, leading one local NGO representative to characterise the tsunami as ‘an international disaster that happened in Sri Lanka’,⁴⁵ whilst another lamented the ‘international NGOs getting rich by selling our misery’.⁴⁶ The primacy of the needs and priorities of these international actors over their local counterparts and affected communities stands in stark contrast to the language of participation and local ownership that defined international responses to the tsunami. As one long-term employee of international humanitarian NGOs in Sri Lanka summed up eloquently:

‘I think we all committed to that idea [*note- local participation*]. But when it actually comes to practice, every agency’s number one priority is to ensure that they are compliant with their contract. NGO headquarters will make sure that becomes their priority because you mess up here, you won’t get your funding in Liberia. So all these headquarters their main

⁴² In-depth Interview, international organisation representative, 19 April 2017; In-depth Interview, international organisation representative, 10 April 2017.

⁴³ In-depth Interview, international organisation representative, 19 April 2017; In-depth Interview, international organisation representative, 17 April 2017; In-depth Interview, NGO representative, 18 April 2017.

⁴⁴ C Boano, ‘Housing anxiety and multiple geographies’; D Rajasingham-Senanayake, ‘Sri Lanka and the violence of reconstruction’; J Hyndman, ‘Siting conflict and peace’.

⁴⁵ In-depth Interview, NGO representative, 18 April 2017.

⁴⁶ In-depth Interview, local peace activist, 17 April 2017.

thing is risk management. So I see over the years, how have lost space, although the jargon is about more participatory, but in real practice we are less.’⁴⁷

For all the talk of Sri Lanka’s collaborative, community-driven PDR process, then, perhaps it is more accurate to see it as inextricably bound up with the logic and politics of the international humanitarian architecture. This is in keeping with Richmond and Mac Ginty’s criticisms of the instrumentalisation of hybridity.⁴⁸ They describe how actors such as the United Nations and European Union have adopted apparently ‘hybrid’ approaches in peacebuilding interventions as a cost-effective way of integrating international, national and local stakeholders into these processes. However, they note that ‘Problems arise where hybridity is coopted into the service of existing structures and modes of peace’. Rather than achieving the ‘emancipatory potential’ of truly hybrid structures, that put local knowledges at their heart and challenge oppositional binaries of local-international, these ‘manufactured’ hybridities actually reinforce the power of the international hegemony. In the case of Sri Lanka this is vital. Attempts to institute participatory and owner-driven project in the post-tsunami reconstruction can be read as part of a wider turn within the international liberal peacebuilding architecture (in which this humanitarian sector is an integral part) towards trying to capitalise on hybrid structures. In Sri Lanka’s PDR process, however, this actually contributed to the impression amongst many at the national level that it was slow and inefficient, and represented another case of international actors co-opting local processes and populations. Rather than contributing to the creation of a hybrid peacebuilding environment, this helped create the

⁴⁷ In-depth Interview, NGO representative, 12 April 2017.

⁴⁸ O Richmond and R Mac Ginty, ‘Where now for the critique of the liberal peace?’

conditions for a return to war, as nationalist forces led by Mahinda Rajapaksa capitalised on this discontent.⁴⁹

Complicating scales and dismantling the myth of international versus ‘local’ approaches to reconstruction

As discussed at the start of this paper, and backed up in our findings, the common perception of the reconstruction processes that have taken place in Sri Lanka since 2004 is that the PDR response was driven by international actors, and PCR by national actors, who constrained the room to manoeuvre of international actors. Whilst this may be true in broad terms, taking a hybrid analytical view of these activities allows us to unpack the subtleties of the negotiations and interactions between international, national, regional and local actors that have in fact characterised both processes. This is certainly true of the post-conflict period in Sri Lanka; Höglund and Orjuela have noted that this period demonstrates not only deep divisions at the level of international actors (largely between ‘emerging Eastern powers and Western ones’,⁵⁰ but also that the roles of diaspora actors and Western funded local NGOs blur the boundaries of what can be conceived as ‘local’ and ‘international’.

When it comes to PDR, there is little doubt that the actors and stakeholders that make up the international humanitarian architecture – international organisations, donor governments, and international NGOs to name the largest – took on a leading role following the tsunami, but it is important to recognise that this was mediated through actors at the national and local levels. One local NGO representative was at pains to remind us that the Sri Lankan government

⁴⁹ O Walton, ‘Between the war and the liberal peace’.

⁵⁰ K Höglund and C Orjuela, ‘Hybrid peace governance’, 94.

was not, in fact, absent in this process, but was involved in every cluster set up to manage post-tsunami reconstruction.⁵¹ Perhaps most important is the recognition of the diversity of the tsunami-affected regions where reconstruction took place. PDR in Sri Lanka did not represent an intervention by a homogenous external actor (the ‘international community’) in a homogenous affected zone. Interviewees stressed that post-disaster reconstruction took place in non-conflict affected areas controlled by the Sri Lankan government, in conflict-affected areas controlled by the Sri Lankan government, and in conflict-affected areas controlled by the LTTE, and with communities drawn from Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim groups.⁵² The capacities, attitudes and expectations of these national, regional and local groups all impacted on the way international actors’ interventions played out on the ground, and in some cases restricted what they were able to do. Interviewees recalled how local resistance and unforeseen tensions between ethnic groups or different types of IDPs (conflict affected or tsunami affected) had caused them to radically redesign their interventions.⁵³

By the same token, our research shows that the post-conflict reconstruction that has taken place since 2009 should also be understood as more complicated than just the backlash of the national authorities against international intervention. It is clear that PCR work has been more tightly managed and controlled by the newly emboldened national government, with some suggesting that this itself was a lesson learned from the chaos of the PDR process and the overwhelming role played by international actors in this.⁵⁴ The Presidential Task Force

⁵¹ In-depth Interview, NGO representative, 17 April 2017.

⁵² In-depth Interview, NGO representative, 17 April 2017; In-depth Interview, NGO representative, 12 April 2017; In-depth Interview, international organisation representative, 19 April 2017.

⁵³ In-depth Interview, NGO representative, 18 April 2017; In-depth Interview, NGO representative, 17 April 2017.

⁵⁴ In-depth Interview, NGO representative, 17 April 2017.

(or PTF) is emblematic of the way the government sought to control reconstruction following the war. This body was established in May 2009 with a mandate to oversee programmes to resettle IDPs, and rebuild the economic and social infrastructure of conflict affected areas. In effect, all proposals for reconstruction work in the North and East of the country had to pass through this body, with many representatives of international organisations and NGOs reporting serious difficulties in getting agreement for their work, particularly when this pertained to the so-called ‘soft’ elements of reconstruction (such as work on rights or reconciliation) rather than the provision of ‘hard’ infrastructure.⁵⁵

Contrary to the impression given by many, who felt international representatives had been shut out of PCR by the Rajapaksa government,⁵⁶ a closer reading of the situation demonstrates significant international involvement in this process. INGOs and international organisations such as the UN were still able to implement projects, albeit with less autonomy than they had previously enjoyed. Notably those projects related to ‘the soft things, training programmes, capacity building’ and other activities aimed at the ‘grassroots’ of conflict affected communities were rarely approved, whilst the construction of roads, houses and infrastructure was allowed.⁵⁷ This underlines the importance of local agency in resisting and shaping the activities of powerful international actors. Crucially support for PCR was also forthcoming from ‘non-traditional’ humanitarian actors and regional powers such as China and India, who provided loans for reconstruction and support for housing in the North respectively. In keep-

⁵⁵ In-depth Interview, international organisation representative, 19 April 2017; In-depth Interview, international organisation representative, 19 April 2017; In-depth Interview, NGO representative, 17 April 2017.

⁵⁶ Interview with donor government, 20 April 2017; Interview with NGO representative 18 April 2017.

⁵⁷ Interview with international organisation representative, 19 April 2017.

ing with Ozerdem's work on the rise of new humanitarian actors,⁵⁸ the Sri Lankan experience of PCR has shown the increasing significance of BRICS stakeholders in these activities, and the ways this complicates widely held assumptions about liberal humanitarian and peace-building interventions, particularly with regards to questions of conditionalities. In other words, emerging aid actors have brought about a number of significant opportunities as well as challenges in the way humanitarian and reconstruction programmes are planned and implemented such as the engagement of Turkey in Somalia and Brazil in Haiti. The overall absence of conditionality for good governance, rule of law and respecting human rights in their aid responses has meant a significant alternative to liberal peace agenda parameters and tools. Considering that such responses seem to have had a better reception by local conflict affected communities, i.e. the Turkish aid response in Somalia since 2011, there is now a stronger critique of how aid is provided by more traditional aid actors such as the UN, EU and Western aid agencies and significant trust challenges between these two types of actors. As one interviewee noted wryly 'they [the government] will go for easy money like if China is giving us one billion without much hassle they will try to take that rather than apply to ADB and going through all the monitoring assessment'.⁵⁹

What is more, several interviewees identified what they saw as the 'Japanese model', with its 'greater degree of tolerance of difficult stakeholders',⁶⁰ as a key factor that had allowed that country to continue to participate in PCR activities, including 'soft' initiatives such as grassroots capacity building that were discouraged from other parties. A representative of one

⁵⁸ Alpaslan Ozerdem. 'Turkey as a rising power: An emerging global humanitarian actor'. In Zeynep Sezgin and Dennis Dijkzeul ed. *The New Humanitarians in International Practice: Emerging actors and contested principles*. (London: Routledge. 2015).

⁵⁹ In-depth Interview, academic, 20 April 2017.

⁶⁰ In-depth Interview, academic, 21 April 2017.

donor government acknowledged they had modulated their approach, including adjusting terminology ('emergent regions' rather than 'conflict affected'), adding partners from the majority Sinhalese south of the country, and drawing on a longstanding relationship of trust with the Sri Lankan government, in order to maintain their access and ability to implement a range of partners in the North.⁶¹ Far from being a purely nationally led process, then, PCR also involved a multitude of international partners who were able to affect the process in different ways. Reconstruction practices and policies can be understood as emerging from the negotiations between actors operating at different levels and with different types of power and influence to deploy.

Interviewees in this project repeatedly identified other boundaries and relationships that had significant impacts on PCR and PDR processes, and which subvert the binaries of Western – Sri Lankan, and international – local that have largely been used to describe the country's experiences of reconstruction until now. These include tensions between Colombo (as the centre) and the regions (as the periphery), the urban - rural divide, the exploitative economic relationship between the north and south, the need for reconciliation within the Sinhalese majority community (and not just between minority and majority communities), and rising tensions with Muslim communities. Key amongst these was the question of the relationship between Colombo and the regions, identified by numerous local stakeholders as central to problems that have arisen in both the PDR and PCR processes.⁶² The continued existence of what one local academic termed 'structural problems, or non-existent structures, or weak struc-

⁶¹ In-depth Interview, donor government, 20 April 2017.

⁶² In-depth Interview, academic, 21 April 2017; In-depth Interview, Sri Lanka Government representative, 11 April 2017; In-depth Interview, NGO representative, 19 April 2017; In-depth Interview, academic, 19 April 2017.

tures' between the government in Colombo and provincial administrations has prevented them from responding effectively to crises and from holding the response at a local level to account.⁶³ As another local researcher observed regarding the tension between the centre and the regions:

'There is always a tension, even now. This country has still not quite got the balance of powers between centre powers and provinces even though we have had this current form of government for 1987, which is thirty years. The debate is still not over, how much power you give to the government. And I don't think that is going to be something is going to be beneficial for the country at all. We really need to decide the level to which we are going to devolve power and the way power is exercised. The centre still continues to tend to be all powerful and wants to be powerful and that's part of the problem'.⁶⁴

This tension, he argued, was a leading factor in the corruption and lack of accountability that had marked reconstruction after the tsunami and after the end of the war. Once again, this demonstrates how a hybrid view of reconstruction, one that focuses on the agency of the local and relationships other than that between international stakeholders and the national government, can unlock new insights into the way reconstruction has been negotiated in Sri Lanka. It shows that the practice of reconstruction has been far more complicated than a national-international binary. The internationally dominated response to the tsunami was mediated through a variety of local forces, including the government, LTTE and local communities. The government controlled post-conflict response is often characterised as exclusionary, even antagonistic, to international actors, but in fact has involved a range of international stake-

⁶³ In-depth Interview, academic, 21 April 2017

⁶⁴ In-depth Interview, NGO representative, 19 April 2017.

holders, both traditional and non-traditional. In addition to this, tensions and relationships between actors at the subnational level have also impacted reconstruction processes.

Despite this complexity, however, both international and national actors stand to gain politically from maintaining the notion that there is a clear divide between PDR (conducted in keeping with the norms of the international liberal peace hegemony) and PCR (carried out according to the priorities of the nationalist Rajapaksa government). By maintaining this division, international organisations and donor governments can blame the failure of years of engagement to bring about peace, including through post-disaster activities, on the actions of the Rajapaksa government. In the same way, the Rajapaksa government were able to use resentment of international organisations and their failures as the counterpoint to their own successes in ending the war and bringing about (re)construction throughout the country.

A Sri Lankan solution? Militarisation of development or urban regeneration as demobilisation

One of the most striking features of the PCR process that followed the Sri Lankan government's military victory in 2009 has been the central role taken on by the military. The military took on commanding role in this reconstruction process, overseeing operations, and actively intervening to insist donor organisations and NGOs change their plans and projects for reconstruction in the North and East, most notable through their principal role in the Presidential Task Force. This approach was not widely welcomed by the traditional donor community, but directly backed by the Rajapaksa government. As such, it can be understood as another example of resistance to international peacebuilding and reconstruction norms, and

an assertion of agency by national elites. In addition to their oversight function in the PTF, most often explained in terms of the impact of proposed activities on national security, the military also actively engaged in practical reconstruction activities. The reaction to this ‘hands-on approach’ amongst our interviewees was mixed. On the one hand, respondents recognized that the military engagement was effective and kept the reconstruction process moving at pace, and had resulted in projects – notably in the domain of infrastructure – where the quality was generally ‘quite good’.⁶⁵ On the other hand, many respondents expressed concerns that the high level of military engagement was antithetical to democratic oversight of this crucial process.⁶⁶ What emerged from these conversations above all was a recognition of the tension between approaches viewed as participatory or democratic and military efficiency, whereby people were keen to see results, but nevertheless uncomfortable delegating too much power in these realms to the army.

Nowhere was this tension more clearly and repeatedly expressed than in discussions of the military’s role in regenerating the country’s capital, Colombo. While this may note fall strictly under contours of PCR work, it is important to consider is as a part, indeed a direct consequence, of the post-conflict context. As discussed below, the regeneration of Colombo had a practical role directly linked to the conflict, in the need to keep troops busy and maintain and normalize military power. It also had a symbolic link, in demonstrating the new, confident and efficient face of post-war Sri Lanka, no longer bogged down in a costly and painful war, in which the benefits largely fell to the urban Sinhala elites. Most importantly, perhaps, including the regeneration of Colombo in this analysis serves as a reminder that PCR processes

⁶⁵ In-depth Interview, local peace activist, 17 April 2017.

⁶⁶ In-depth Interview, international organisation representative, 19 April 2017; In-depth Interview, academic, 20 April 2017; In-depth Interview, academic, 19 April 2017; In-depth Interview, NGO representative, 18 April 2017; In-depth Interview, NGO representative, 18 April 2017; In-depth Interview, academic, 21 April 2017.

should be understood as part of a continuum, a continuation of conflict dynamics and power relations, rather than as a series of bounded activities with distinct start and end points. Drawing on Kirsch and Flint's definition of reconstruction as 'a process of conflict and of militarized power, not something that clearly demarcates a post-war period of peace',⁶⁷ the military's role in rebuilding Colombo should be understood as discursively and politically part of the PCR process, even if it did not form part of the government or international communities formal programmes in this regard.

The change in the urban landscape of central Colombo in recent years is startling. From marquee projects such as the Nelum Pokana Mahinda Rajapaksa Theatre and the Old Dutch Hospital shopping precinct, to the pedestrian crossings along the wide, clean and smoothly tarmacked central streets, the quality of the urban experience for residents of central Colombo has increased markedly.⁶⁸ Outside the city, new roads to the airport and south to the city of Galle, for example, have considerably cut down travelling times in and out of the city to the delight of residents, commuters and visitors alike. Participants in our research repeatedly attributed much of this change to the army, who had been drafted in to take a leading role in carrying out urban regeneration projects after the Minister of Defence – Gota Rajapaksa – took on an additional ministerial responsibility for urban planning. They acknowledged that residents were overwhelmingly happy with the results of this unprecedented intervention by the military into the civilian domain of urban planning and development, whilst in the same breath cautioning that this should not become the norm. As one local NGO leader put it, the

⁶⁷ Scott Kirsch and Colin Flint ed. *Reconstructing conflict: integrating war and post war geographies*. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2011).

⁶⁸It is important to acknowledge, however, that this progress has come at a cost to some of Colombo's poorest communities – the army has notably been accused of forced evictions of long term city residents in vulnerable communities (see Centre for Policy Alternatives. *Forced evictions in Colombo: The ugly price of beautification*. (Colombo: Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2014).)

military might be effective but ‘that doesn’t mean that is acceptable in a normal context, efficiency may be good but we shouldn’t compromise on democratic ideals – just because of efficiency you allow military to do development work’.⁶⁹ Interestingly, this expanding role for the military has been mirrored elsewhere, as participants reported the army had developed its involvement in sectors as diverse as farming, boat services and hotels,⁷⁰ and continued to hold large amounts of land seized during the conflict. This was described memorably by one local research organization as the development of ‘Sri Lanka Army Inc.’.⁷¹ It is important to acknowledge, however, that this progress has come at a cost to some of Colombo’s poorest communities – the army has been accused of forced evictions to make way for development in the city, with one local research organisation pointing out the distinct similarities between the practices employed here and in the country’s North and East.⁷²

Once again, considering the idea of hybridity can help us to develop new insights into the significance of this expanding role of the military in reconstruction processes in Sri Lanka. A common explanation advanced with regards to the military’s role in the regeneration of Colombo was that this was, in effect, a form of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR), one of the central planks of most PCR processes that take place under the aegis of the international aid framework. By the end of the long war with the LTTE, Sri Lanka found itself with a very large standing army (a leaked report in 2011 estimated the size of the army at around 200,000 people and looking to expand). Numerous interviewees thus suggested that by engaging the army in urban development work, the government was attempting to

⁶⁹ In-depth Interview, academic, 20 April 2017.

⁷⁰ In-depth Interview, academic, 20 April 2017; In-depth Interview, NGO representative, 18 April 2017; In-depth Interview, international organisation representative, 17 April 2017.

⁷¹ In-depth Interview, NGO representative, 19 April 2017.

⁷² Centre for Policy Alternatives, ‘Forced evictions in Colombo’.

find an interim role for a large body of men who quite suddenly found themselves at something of a loose end – after all ‘we need to find a way to demobilize these people and so demobilization processes need this kind of work’.⁷³ They also pointed out that that taking on such a role ensured the continued relevance and access to resources of the military.⁷⁴ Urban development could therefore be understood as having provided a useful interim step toward the demobilization of large numbers of battle hardened soldiers (although, as one local employee of an international organization noted that this has had a deleterious effect on their marriage market, as army officers went from being ‘war heroes’ to ‘cleaning the drains’).⁷⁵ It is fascinating to note that just as traditional international aid actors were complaining that they had been prevented from implementing the kinds of non-infrastructure based PCR programming of which DDR is emblematic, this very same discourse was being used to explain the military’s expansion into new areas of responsibility as part of a DDR strategy. The further expansion of the military’s role into profit making ventures such as farming and hotels, and their important involvement in the PCR process, also poses a challenge to usual assumptions about who takes responsibility for development activities. In recent decades international organisations and aid actors have successfully staked a claim as ‘experts’ in the field of development, a process which Kothari notes is bound up with the ‘reproduction of systems of expertise and forms of authority’ that benefit these same actors.⁷⁶ In Sri Lanka, the militarization of development activities challenges this claim to expertise, and highlights al-

⁷³ In-depth Interview, NGO representative, 18 April 2017.

⁷⁴ In-depth Interview, NGO representative, 19 April 2017; In-depth Interview, academic, 19 April 2017.

⁷⁵ In-depth Interview, international organisation representative, 17 April 2017.

⁷⁶ Uma Kothari. ‘Authority and expertise: The professionalisation of international development and the ordering of dissent’. *Antipode*, 37 no.3 (2005), 425-446, quote on 426.

ternative approaches that have been deployed at a local level which both resist and co-opt the rhetoric of the international aid framework.

Furthermore, contradicting and unresolved attitudes towards the engagement of the Sri Lankan military in reconstruction and development work amongst our interviewees are reflective of the fluidity that characterises approaches to reconstruction in Sri Lanka. Generally speaking, interviewees who supported the idea of liberal and participatory approaches to reconstruction (reserving the right to be critical of how these had been put into practice) were critical of military involvement in these spheres. As one respondent put it ‘Ideologically, I do not support any civil-military interaction for development work’,⁷⁷ whilst another was quick to underline they were ‘not recommending it at all’ having described the benefits of military involvement for speed and enforcement of regulations.⁷⁸ On the one hand, they were unhappy because they did not consider the military as an appropriate actor for such undertakings, expressed concerns that the military uses such an engagement in reconstruction as a source of political and economic benefits, and suggested that nepotism and corruption were rife. To respond to such claims properly would clearly require their comprehensive assessment which was not possible in the scope of this research, but on the other hand, when those interviewees were further questioned over the outcomes of what the military has done in the realms of reconstruction and development, many admitted that the outcomes of this type of engagement were effective and popular (though less so in the North, where the army was still widely distrusted). Respondents overwhelmingly considered that the results of infrastructure, urban planning and economic revitalisation projects carried out as part of the military-led process responded to some of the most critical needs of the country. The purpose here with the pre-

⁷⁷ In-depth Interview, academic, 20 April 2017.

⁷⁸ In-depth Interview, international organisation representative, 19 April 2017.

sentation of such a paradox is not to provide an indirect endorsement for the military's engagement in reconstruction work. Rather it is to deconstruct how the manufactured hybridity orthodoxy also operates over, and indeed helps to create, a binary of 'good' vs 'bad' local actors, within which those local actors who are considered as 'non-liberal' are rejected as inappropriate aid actors outright, without making an appropriate attempt to measure their contribution to that aid environment or understand how this fits in the kind of reconstruction practices being developed there.

4. Discussion

Sri Lanka has suffered a number of disasters in recent years, including catastrophic flooding in 2016 and 2017, as well as the horrendous collapse of the Meethotamulla rubbish dump in April 2017 (as this research was being carried out), killing 32 people. The question of how the country responds and rebuilds after crisis remains important and pressing. Having gone through two major reconstruction processes concurrently, linked with each other or separately, as explained in this paper, it might have been possible to assume that the response to subsequent disasters should have been an effective and high quality undertaking in terms of meeting humanitarian and reconstruction needs. However, this has not been the case – one recent study of Sri Lanka's response to these disasters identifies 'considerable inefficiencies' in the Government's approach and concluded that 'the existing framework has not been able to manage previous disaster incidents properly'.⁷⁹ It is in relation to this experience that one striking element to emerge from this research was the emphasis placed by respondents that

⁷⁹ Chandana Siriwardana, G P Jayasiri and S S L Hettiarachchi. Investigation of efficiency and effectiveness of the existing disaster management frameworks in Sri Lanka. 'Procedia engineering', 212 (2018), 1091-1098.

future reconstruction approaches – whether following conflict or disaster – would be contingent on developments in local politics, rather than international interests. The country has seen large scale international interventions in reconstruction – both in PDR (characterized by traditional Western aid actors) and in PCR (characterized by emerging BRICS actors and national authorities), and respondents were keen to critique successes and failures of this, its impacts in communities and politics from local to national. However, there was near unanimity amongst participants interviewed when they were asked how would future reconstruction in the country might be characterized. This, it was strongly felt, would not be primarily influenced by the norms of the international community but by the character of the government in power at the time of the reconstruction process. That is, its priorities, its attitudes to international partners, its policy towards national minorities, its stance on decentralizing power. The national government is a crucial node in negotiating reconstruction outwards with international partners, and inwards with local communities. So far researchers have focused on understanding the relationship between national level and international actors in reconstruction and peacebuilding. However, our findings suggest that more emphasis should be placed on the inward processes of negotiation taking place between actors at the national and local levels in defining reconstruction practices. However, at times this has meant that there has been little experience sharing or transmission of practices between different phases of reconstruction. Instead, each new administration in Sri Lanka has pursued its own approach, often in direct opposition to the one adopted by the previous government. Rather than seeing this purely as a missed opportunity, or failure to learn from previous experiences, viewing this through a hybrid lens enables us contextualize this fluidity and recognize how it relates to power at the local and national level, as well as the international. It allows us to understand reconstruction as a process of negotiation between a variety of different actors operating at

different levels, rather than dismissing this as simple alternation between two incompatible models.

In a wider understanding, the case of Sri Lanka and investigation of its PDR and PCR experiences from a hybridity lens in this paper provides us with a number of insightful observations on both of those reconstruction processes. Of course, the paper is not arguing that PDR and PCR processes are either identical or interchangeable, but rather that there is insight to be taken from exploring the processes that have been pursued in the name of reconstruction after a crisis in Sri Lanka, and asking what these can tell us about how such interventions are being negotiated.

First, the attempts of manufacturing hybrid structures are problematic as we observed with the Sri Lanka's PDR experience. Attempts to build so called 'local participation', 'local ownership' and 'local empowerment' mechanisms as part of a manufactured hybridity has demonstrated that these externally driven agendas have not resonated strongly amongst disaster and conflict affected people. The national NGOs that took part in this research were circumspect about the PDR process being locally owned and on the contrary, they often underlined the stark contradiction between the rhetoric of local participation and the reality of what happened in reconstruction. The practice of hybridity in the eyes of most local actors involved in this research was a matter of international actors co-opting local processes and populations rather than using it for its emancipatory potential. Ultimately, local actors often expressed a relatively cynical view of the agenda and mandates of international organisations. In fact, as the field research indicated, such a utilitarian approach to hybridity could actually worsen conflicts and inequality at the local level. Therefore, to remove the political and pru-

dential reasoning of what hybridity should look like as far as the international community is concerned could mean new opportunities for real hybridity possibilities. However, if hybridity is about the 'local' becoming the main (or at least equal) agents of reconstruction, then we should question how realistic it would be that the international community actors would accept such a power relationship which would give them a very limited room for manoeuvring in terms of setting the reconstruction agenda and using it for wider conditionality interests.

Second, in order to have a more nuanced understanding of hybridity in PDR and PCR processes, it is important to consider the subtleties of different types of negotiations between different types of actors including emerging powers and diaspora. The Sri Lanka experience showed that there seems to be a limited attempt to measure the way local actors mediated with international ones in the planning and implementation of reconstruction assistance. Indeed, there was a relatively limited view of what 'local' actually meant. This shortcoming was largely because the diversity of local actors and diversity of how they mediate with international actors do not seem to be valued or acknowledged. Local respondents repeatedly underlined the way that they managed to get the radical redesigning of some reconstruction programmes. It is also in relation to such a biased understanding of local actors' capabilities to mediate and manage to reach hybrid responses, that the PCR was dismissed as no more than just the backlash of the national authorities against international interests. The main difference is that in this case, it was the international community that had to negotiate with the government, as it was the latter who has had the upper hand in mandating and implementation of reconstruction.

Thirdly, boundaries and relationships in both PDR and PCR were more defined and informed in terms of 'internal' characteristics such as the centre-periphery, capital-regional and urban-rural divides than the binary of international vs local. Moreover, the ethnic divides and tensions played a significant role in the way that reconstruction practices and motivations were perceived. Therefore, a conflict transformation perspective of looking at actors as heterogeneous units and understanding their own internal dynamics, and socio-political and cultural parameters would likely to be a more effective means for the hybridity analysis. Through such an approach that hybridity as a tool of emancipation could be analysed more effectively.

Finally, the engagement of the Sri Lankan military in the PCR process raises a number of paradoxes on how hybridity is perceived by the proponents of the liberal peace agenda and the outcomes of such an engagement at the local level. As this research did not look at the military's engagement in the PCR process exclusively and hence, did not involve appropriate respondents from the military side in the field research process, it would not be appropriate to come up with exhaustive conclusions on this issue. However, it is clear that for the hybridity context of reconstruction in Sri Lanka, the army and its work in all different aspects of infrastructure construction, urban planning and wider development activities pose serious questions over what hybridity would look like in autocratic governance contexts. The regeneration of Colombo following the war's end is indicative of the tensions between happiness at perceived efficiency in renewing the country's aging infrastructure, and discomfort at the role and methods of the army in this. Rather than dismissing this situation, and the wider context of PDR and PCR in Sri Lanka sketched out in this paper, as two incompatible sides of a liberal-authoritarian binary, this paper suggests that a hybrid lens allows us to focus on the negotiations taking place between actors arrayed along a spectrum between these positions.

Highlighting these negotiations helps us to appreciate the different configurations of reconstruction policy and practice that have emerged in Sri Lanka since 2004, particularly to understand why certain outcomes we might have expected – such as ‘lessons learned’ from PDR being transferred to PCR – did not come to pass, and why unexpected interventions like that of the military in Colombo have met with a level of public approval. Such an approach provides a useful way of situating the work of non-traditional aid actors, or traditional actors who follow a different model to the international aid orthodoxy, in our frames of understanding. For example, this paper highlighted the so called ‘Japanese Model’, which used innovative approaches to merge the priorities of both parties in the reconstruction process. Using a hybrid lens makes visible the full range of actors and actions being deployed in reconstruction processes and the crucial negotiations between them that shape outcomes. This is particularly important when it comes to understanding the often overlooked interplay between post-conflict and post-disaster processes, and could be a good starting point in analysing as well as enabling meaningful hybrid reconstruction responses in disaster and conflict affected environments across the world.