

# Peddling Paradise, Rebuilding Serendib<sup>1</sup>: The 100-Meter Refugees versus the Tourism Industry in Post-tsunami Sri Lanka<sup>2</sup>

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## Abstract

*The December 26, 2004 tsunami killed nearly 40,000 Sri Lankans, left about half a million homeless, including 90,000 from fishing communities, and destroyed two-thirds of the country's fishing boats. The tourist industry was also severely affected, with the suspension of some 27,000 jobs in various tourism-related businesses. The national recovery strategy was to invest in rebuilding the tourism industry, and to create a 100-meter coastal buffer that essentially prevents artisanal fishing from regaining its livelihood. This paper examines how the strategic and symbolic significance of tourism for bolstering national pride, boosting development, and providing a source of foreign revenue has relegated to a secondary place the needs and concerns of disaffected low-income artisanal fishing communities. This paper shows that disasters never take place in a social vacuum, that vulnerability is socially produced, and that recovery efforts need to attack the root causes of vulnerability by avoiding the further impoverishment of those affected. Beyond the human toll, the tsunami provided a pretext for evictions, land grabs, unjustifiable land-acquisition plans and other measures designed to prevent homeless residents from returning to their original homes and lands. Thailand, India and other affected countries have restricted the right to return, but Sri Lanka stands out as the tsunami-affected country that has sought most dramatically to re-shape its residential landscape through a tourism reconstruction process (Leckie 2005:1).*

## Introduction: Resorts as Recovery

**T**he 2006 annual "Hotels" issue of *Travel and Leisure* (TL) magazine, with its worldwide circulation of nearly a million copies a month, proudly boasts the opening of a new high-end beach resort in Southern Sri Lanka in September 2006 called The Fortress and places it on the "It List" of tourist resorts that offer the ultimate in creature comforts. Concealing any reference to the shattered lives and livelihoods of tsunami victims, the new resort is one of two to open after the December 26, 2004 tsunami, and hailed as pivotal to the post-disaster recovery of Sri Lanka (Novogrod 2006:18). The second resort TL refers to is Amangalla, which opened on February 15, 2005, a mere two months after the tsunami. Both resorts are located in the southern coastal town of Galle and owned by Aman Resorts International, a hotel group that owns and operates a chain of luxury hotels catering to the super rich in France, French Polynesia, Indonesia, Mexico, Morocco, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and the United States.

The launching of these two resorts in the aftermath of the horrific devastation and displacement caused by the 2004 tsunami, and

the still unresolved resettlement struggles of low-income coastal communities, suggests a callous disregard of the plight of the people affected. As of this writing in April of 2006, the ongoing demand for humanitarian assistance has been considerable, with 350,000 individuals still needing food aid (provisioned under the United Nations High Commission on Refugees Vulnerable Group Feeding Program), and 54,000 families still housed in transitional shelters (World Bank 2006b), while others still remain in cramped and crowded temporary shelters, such as Buddhist temples and school houses. The manner in which tourism has been reestablished throughout the tsunami-ravaged region illustrates the superior financial resources at the disposal of the global tourism industry, deployed for profit even in the face of disaster. Inequities set in motion by the globe-spanning leisure economy allow indulgence for some but augurs indigence for others, aggravating the vulnerabilities of socially and economically marginalized populations, and further entrenching the root conditions that compound such vulnerability.

In what appears to be a dismissal of the hardship endured by these communities, alluring marketing descriptions make sweeping refer-

ences to history and nature in gestures of erasure that gloss over their poignant implications for local populations.

Sri Lanka's post-Tsunami renaissance has been propelled by the recent opening of two Aman properties. The Fortress, in Galle, 70 miles from the capital of Colombo, is sure to add to the already building buzz. The sprawling resort pays homage to the UNESCO-preserved Galle fort and promises to bring modern sophistication to the misty 2,000-year-old merchant's port town. ... Singapore's C&C design [firm] chose a soothing aesthetic: simple lines, Burmese teak-paneling, a Dutch vaulted entrance, and expansive garden colonnades that draw the eyes toward panoramic vistas of stilt fishermen casting their lines in to the Indian Ocean (*Travel and Leisure* 2006:272).

Suggestive of a protective barricade, the resort, with its euphemistic name of The Fortress attempts to recreate history, albeit by romanticizing the implications of colonial history, as it claims to duplicate the architecture of the famed 17th-century Dutch fort in the southern city of Galle. A brochure describing the sister resort of Amangalla provides an unabashed and uncritical account of the colonial history of Sri Lanka:

In 1640, the Dutch captured the fortress of Galle and, to protect their presence, they needed a garrison—hence the fort. Galle Fort was built by 1663 with great ramparts and bastions, but not fully completed until 1715. In 1684, the headquarters for the *commandeur* were built on the corner of the present Church and Middle Streets, the start of what now comprises Amangalla (Kershaw 2006).

Tourist brochures entice prospective visitors with the well-manicured “verdant gardens,” seven-by-seven-foot super-king beds, state-of-the-art entertainment systems, spa treatments, yoga, water sports, a gym, and other fitness/sports/leisure excursions. Yet, this advertising material makes no hint of the contrasting post- as well as pre-tsunami deprivation evident in the living conditions of surrounding low-income communities. Consider, for example, that garden spaces are rarely available to low-income coastal com-

munities, and that in nearby rural areas many home gardens augmenting meager local diets have been destroyed by the inundation of tsunami-driven salt and marine sediment. Consider that the entirety of the dwellings of local low-income populations measure seven feet by seven feet, the same as the beds in the resorts that await well-heeled visitors, and how many of these shacks were reduced to matchsticks by the force of the waves. Consider locals' virtual lack of access to amenities such as electricity, water and sanitation systems prior to and long since the tsunami, and finally, that none of this seems to be of any consequence to the tourist industry.

In a country where less than 60 percent of the population have access to safe water and sanitation systems, tsunami damage has aggravated the situation by destroying water wells and latrines, and by contaminating many sources of fresh water. That the ocean is represented as a pleasing and placid canvas spread across the horizon, solely to be imbibed by the tourist, avoids any reminder of the violence it has wrought months before. Such depictions obscure the pragmatic meanings and relationships vested in the ocean for artisanal fishing communities who wage a daily battle with the sea in an effort to secure their livelihoods.

Tourism as a boon to national revitalization is an idea that was expressed well before the 2004 tsunami. In 2002, a representative of the Sri Lanka Tourist Board, referred to the purchase of the former site of The Fortress as “one of the biggest investments in this sector since the peace initiative of 2001” (BBC News 2002).

This paper focuses on the concerted effort to reposition tourism as a disaster recovery strategy in the aftermath of the December 26, 2004 tsunami that struck the island nation of Sri Lanka—one of the worst hit places along with Banda Aceh, Indonesia. My concern is to examine its problematic implications for low-income coastal communities, many of whom at this writing in April of 2006, were still languishing in transition camps, uncertain of their future many months after the disaster. While the tsunami caused direct damage to housing, infrastructure, and the loss of lives, many consider the relief and resettlement strategies of state and donor agencies akin to a subsequent and far more destruc-

tive wave. The purpose here, then, is to examine how the strategic and symbolic significance of tourism for bolstering national pride, boosting development, and as a source of foreign revenue has relegated to a secondary place the needs and concerns of disaffected low-income, subsistence-oriented, artisanal fishing communities. Since global tourism operations are concentrated primarily along the southwestern coastline, and since much of the worse ravaged eastern coastal belt is still within inaccessible war-torn territory, my paper is limited to an examination of the southern region (see Figure 1 for a map of Sri Lanka, its major regions, and referenced towns). I explore the implications of the preeminence accorded to the tourist industry, framed within neoliberal conceptualizations of national development. I discuss the controversial benefits the latter confers, as it caters to the global leisure class in the face of a dramatic decline in the livelihood base and an unraveling of the social fabric of low-income coastal communities.

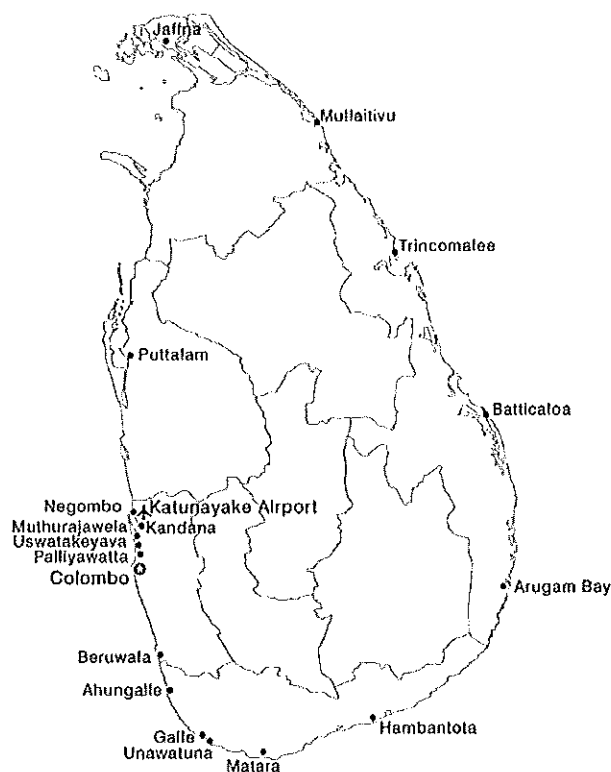


Figure 1. Sri Lanka has a population of more than 20 million people living in an area slightly larger than the state of West Virginia. Map illustrated by Ravi Gunewardena, Escher-Gune-Wardena Architects, Inc.

Critical to my discussion is the 100-meter buffer-zone, introduced by the government in the aftermath of the tsunami. The tourist industry has largely been exempted from this rule and granted "economic immunity" from its stipulations, while artisanal fishing communities barred from rebuilding their homes along the coastline, recently dubbed "the 100-meter refugees," experience the buffer zone policy as an intrusive and constraining verdict. Presented as a protective device to prevent a similar calamity in the future, the 100-meter rule appears to have hastened a second wave of displacement for socially and economically marginalized coastal communities effectively suspended in the limbo of personal tragedy and bureaucratic indifference. As a point of illustration, in December 2005 a year after the tsunami most displaced families were still living in makeshift camps. While the marine fishing industry has made some recovery, of the planned construction of 32,000 permanent houses paralleling the coastline, only 4,299 have been completed, with 10,707 under construction. By contrast, local and global business news reports and the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) reports about an 80 percent recovery of the hotels in Sri Lanka (Cropley 2005). Meanwhile, media portrayals of the Buddhist calm and resignation displayed by grief-stricken individuals from coastal communities downplay their struggle to rebuild and reclaim their lives.

Disasters represent a multitude of dilemmas for humanitarian agencies, national and local governments as well as affected communities. As analyses inform us streaming in from recent national disasters such as Hurricane Katrina impacting New Orleans, Louisiana, USA, disasters bring to light the often hidden interplay of preexisting social and economic marginalities that aggravate the vulnerabilities of those most adversely affected by such calamities (Oliver-Smith 2005). In addition to the terror, grief, disorientation, and loss of loved ones individuals often experience in a disaster, the immediate aftermath poses a range of daunting challenges. These include survival needs, uprooting, displacement, loss of shelter, fragmentation of the social fabric, livelihood losses, and the culmination of these factors in social and economic

disempowerment, particularly for impoverished communities.

The anthropological literature on disasters has long moved away from conceptualizing disasters solely as acts of nature, and a concern with tracing the interactions between human behaviors and natural events is now commonplace (Hewit 1983, Oliver-Smith 1986, Emel and Peet 1989, and Blaikie et al. 1994). Political economy approaches to disaster generated in the 1970s (see Meillasoux 1973, Baird et al. 1976) emphasized the inequitable power relationships between the developed and developing world that propelled processes of impoverishment, exacerbating the vulnerabilities of marginal populations in the global south. In an effort to overcome the determinism implicated in these arguments, Blaikie and others (1994) put forward the *pressure and release* model (PAR) as illustrative of

the intersection of two opposing forces: those processes generating vulnerability on one side, and physical exposure to a hazard on the other (Blaikie et al. 1994:22).

This vulnerability model identifies the interaction between root causes, such as economic, demographic and political processes, and what they refer to as *dynamic pressures*. They define these as

processes and activities that 'translate' the effects of root causes into the vulnerability of unsafe conditions (Blaikie et al. 1994:24).

As Anthony Oliver-Smith says,

this more complex understanding of vulnerability enables researchers to conceptualize how social systems generate the conditions that place different kinds of people, often differentiated along axes of class, race, ethnicity, gender, or age, at different levels of risk from the same hazard and suffering from the same event (Oliver-Smith 2006:3).

Fishing communities in Sri Lanka are for the most part affiliated with the *Karave* or fishing caste. Although all *Karave* are by no means socio-economically marginal, individuals engaged in artisanal fishing are among the most impoverished in the community, often repre-

sending the urban underclasses. Thus, the social contours of Sri Lankan coastal communities encountering the 2004 tsunami are shaped by the vulnerabilities induced by their caste and socio-economic marginality.

Two additional forces unforeseen in the cited literature above compound these root causes. They are globalization and associated policies of structural adjustment that Sri Lanka has been entangled in over the past three decades. These entail the incursion of transnational corporations as part of the recipe of foreign direct investments (FDIs) imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for privatization and trade liberalization that have meant drastic cuts in the social sector budgets for health, education and welfare. In addition, deepening national debt has trapped the state in arduous repayment obligations. In effect, this macro-economic situation burdens the government with the task of generating foreign revenue, and hence its reliance on the tourism sector as a source of potential lucrative earnings. Regardless of whether the tourism sector has in fact been able to generate the needed foreign exchange earnings, the confluence of the above-mentioned processes in combination have further compromised the subsistence security of low-income populations. Implicit in the over-reliance on the tourism sector for economic recovery is the unintended consequence of replicating colonial hierarchies, placing foreign tourists' concerns over those of marginalized locals.

### Mining the Myth of Paradise Isle

Sri Lanka, resplendent isle, serendipitous, the new Bali, call it what you will, Sri Lanka is one of the most beautiful countries on earth. This pearl at the end of the Subcontinent's necklace offers culture, history, friendly people and some of the most magnificent and empty beaches on earth (Kershaw 2006).

Since time immemorial, the island of Sri Lanka has enchanted travelers from Arab mariners, Portuguese voyagers, and British planters to millennial voyagers with its unsurpassed natural beauty and serene, unhindered vistas of endless, tropical, green and gold colors of sea and sand. Euphemistically referred to as *Paradise Isle*, Sri

Lanka is often heralded as reminiscent of the Biblical *Garden of Eden*. This image has been instrumental in marketing a fantasy of escape that caters to human desires for exotica. That reference of course has been tainted in recent years by the brutal violence of civil war that has marred the nation's social and physical landscape, and, perhaps equally violently, overturned by the tsunami that struck on December 26, 2004. The imperialist appeal of travel has been replaced in the 20th century, and now the 21st century, by the emergence of tourism as an indulgence for the elite and an escape for the middle and working classes harried by the pace and pressures of capitalism's demands. Yet, the events unfolding in post-tsunami Sri Lanka and elsewhere are instructive of another deployment of empire—the extension of capital as beneficence in redressing disaster situations.

### Paradise Disrupted: The Impact of the First and Second Waves

In commemoration of the birth, enlightenment, and death of the Buddha which occurred on a full moon day, such days (*Poya*) are observed as sacred by Buddhists in Sri Lanka. Because it was a Sunday and a Poya day, the so-called 'panoramic vista of stilt fishermen casting their lines into the Indian Ocean' (mentioned in tourist brochures) was absent along the southern coastal belt on December 26, 2004, as many were busy with visits to local temples.

Nonetheless, locals concerned with avoiding the heat of the mid-day sun had made early morning visits to the beach. They were swept away violently by the two 30-foot waves (5- and 6.5-meter wave surges) (United Nations Environmental Program 2005). The tsunami had begun traveling at a speed of 500 miles per hour from the site of origin, Banda Aceh, Indonesia and struck the island nation of Sri Lanka at 8:40 in the morning (United Nations Environmental Program 2005). It crashed in with an apocalyptic effect on two-thirds of the coastline from the northeast to the southwest as well as portions of the southern coast ravaging 1,000 kilometers of the 1,585 to 1,660 kilometer-long Sri Lankan coastline.

Estimates range from 31,000 to 39,000 people killed by drowning and the sheer force

of the water or debris thrown against them as the waves crashed in and receded. Of the dead, 107 were tourists. Another 6,000 people went missing, of whom 65 were tourists. The majority of fatalities were among low-income fishing communities residing along the coastline. About 20,000 were from the predominantly ethnically Tamil north and east, while low-income Muslim communities along the southeast coast were also severely affected.

In addition, the number of individuals displaced by the tsunami is estimated at half a million people, of which 90,000 are from fishing communities. The United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) estimates the tsunami destroyed 99,500 houses and damaged another 46,300, in the affected districts, considering the typically flimsy, makeshift, cajan-palm-thatched homes fishing communities occupy (United Nations Environmental Program 2005:11).

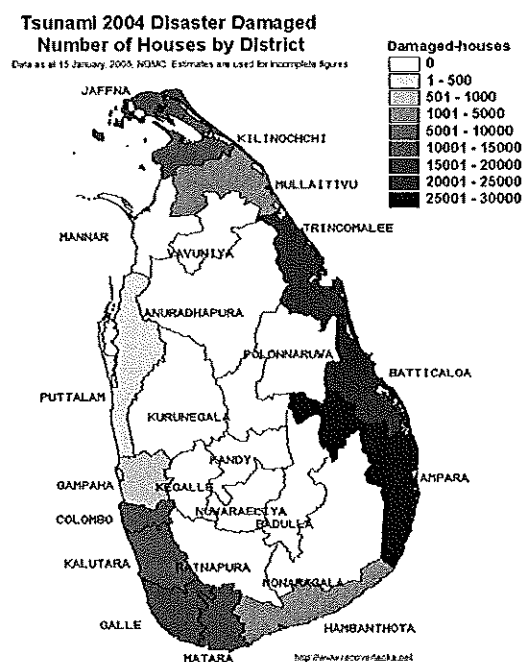


Figure 2. Tsunami damage to Sri Lankan homes was concentrated in the east coast's central and southern districts. Map courtesy of The Foundation for Environment, Climate and Technology, Digana Village, Sri Lanka. Accessed online at <http://www.recoverlanka.net/>.

Other damage included destruction of town marketplaces and transportation networks such as roads and a railway line that straddles the coastline. A passenger train heading south was overturned, killing most of its 1,400 passengers. The damage to banks and other commercial

buildings, public institutions including 44 hospitals, clinics, dispensaries, and healthcare-delivery vehicles. In addition, an estimated 182 schools and four university campuses were severely damaged.

When the tsunami struck, there were 17,000 tourists on the island with 6,000 holidaying along the affected coastal areas. Fifty-three out of the 242 large hotels were destroyed, and 248 small hotels and lodges were in a shambles. Of the 242 star-class hotels along the southern coast, 48 were badly damaged, 31 of which are again operational, partly courtesy of a duty-free importation scheme established by the government allowing such facilities to be reconstructed or refurbished (Sharma 2005). By contrast, an estimated one million of the 5.32 million coastal population (approximately 28 percent of the country's total 19 million population) were offered no such concessions. The majority of the affected communities reside within 1 kilometer of the sea in makeshift housing that is perennially vulnerable to tropical storms. This was evidenced by the fact that half of the tsunami damaged housing was within the 100-meter buffer zone (International Labor Organization 2006), as shown in figure 2.

In terms of the impact on the national economy, the worst-affected sector in Sri Lanka was the marine fishing industry, including related small-scale food processing facilities. The total damage to the marine fisheries, including marine structures and service facilities is estimated at \$97 million (Asian Development Bank et al. 2005). About two thirds (65 percent of 29,700) of the country's fishing boats were destroyed or significantly damaged. This number includes 594 multi-day boats, 7,996 motorized day boats, and about 10,520 traditional non-motorized boats (United Nations Environmental Program 2005:14). The tourist industry was also severely affected, incurring an estimated suspension of 9,500 directly related jobs and the suspension of some 27,000 jobs associated with the industry. The estimated damage to tourism property was in the amount of \$30 million.

Although the direct damage to the tourist industry was less than to the marine fishing industry and its coastal communities, the government's perception of tourism as a major

source of foreign revenue contributed to the uneven and inconsistent application of recovery measures. According to many reports, thousands of Sri Lankans are still living in temporary camps and dwellings facing an uncertain future amidst slow and poorly coordinated progress for resettlement. One recent source, the February 10, 2006, Hansard Text of the United Kingdom Parliament (the record of the floor proceedings in the House of Lords) notes with concern that only 10 percent of those who lost their permanent homes have regained permanent accommodations (Lords Hansard Text 2006). These discussions reflect the concern registered by many global leaders about the displacement of fishing communities not only because of the havoc created by the tsunami, but also about the way the needs of fisher folk were pushed aside in favor of promoting tourism development. Related concerns include the fact that although an estimated 9,000 boats have been repaired and more than 12,000 have been replaced, those without their tools, equipment and crafts, not to mention other essentials have been unable to return to their previous occupations (Lords Hansard Text 2006). Furthermore, some transitional shelters have been covered with tin roofs, holding unbearable heat under the searing tropical sun. Termite infestation is apparent in some of the wooden homes built by some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and through donor funds, adding to the health risks in these shelters. Field visits by Refugees International document at additional concern:

Some housing sites are in areas that normally flood during the rainy season, which is about to start in the east. The fear is that the monsoon season in the east will create secondary displacement due to the poor quality and location of some of the shelters. (Refugees International 2005:1).

The loss of personal documentation has further encumbered the recovery process. These include birth certificates, national identification cards, marriage certificates, land deeds, and bank books essential for not only affirming one's formal identity, but also for reestablishing one's place in society, and reconfirming a sense of self. However, the policy that the affected populations

have regarded as the greatest encumbrance in restoring self-worth and community identity has been the introduction of the conservation buffer zone that prohibits home rebuilding within a 100-meter zone along the coast.

### **Peddling Paradise?**

#### **The Formula of the 100-Meter Rule**

The government formulated the 100-meter rule as a protective effort in the immediate aftermath of the tsunami, at a moment when high-level government officials hastened to address the multiple dimensions of devastation the nation faced. However, contrary to its intended effect, the 100-meter rule has been experienced as yet another devastating "tsunami wave" by a nation shaken with shock and grief. Its social psyche fragmented by nearly three decades of a long and protracted civil conflict, an already traumatized nation struggled to comprehend the gravity of the situation. Pondering the enormity of relief and shelter needs, the daunting task of cleanup, and the long-term strategies for recovery, civic groups and local philanthropic organizations mobilized to launch collective efforts.

Amid the confusion over which administrative/institutional mechanisms would be established, questions were also raised about the absence of an *in situ* early warning system. According to the Sri Lanka Meteorology, Oceanography and Hydrology Network and the Earth Institute at Columbia University, the earthquakes that set off the tsunami could not have been predicted in advance. But once the earthquake had been detected, it would have been possible to give about three hours notice of the approaching tsunami, if such a warning system had been in place in the Indian Ocean as it is across the Pacific Ocean. Perhaps as a way of dissipating the charges surrounding this serious oversight, the 100-meter buffer zone was presented as a no-resettlement, no-reconstruction policy necessary for "protecting the coastal regions and the residents who live there from Tsunamis" (Rice and Haynes 2005). Essentially, the 100-meter rule prohibited construction of homes and businesses within 100 meters of the average sea level (in some areas 200 meters). Attempting to project an image of protective, yet forward-looking "constructive development,"

this rule also included clauses that appeared to be sensitive to the socio-cultural and environmental implications of tourism. For example, that a sustainable form of tourism development would be ensured and that coastal conservation would be assured. Nonetheless, the brunt of the 100-meter rule would be borne by low-income fishing communities, who for generations had been residing along the coastline, albeit as squatters without any legal title to the coastal land, and now would be unable to rebuild their homes within 100 meters from the beach. Moreover, this rule represents a survival dilemma for fishing communities who find that compliance imposes serious impediments to their subsistence activities, since artisanal fishers tether their fragile crafts along the coast for convenient castoff at dawn.

As such, this hasty device of the 100-meter rule appears more to be a face-saving measure for the state, seemingly meant to redeem its credibility in the eyes of the nation, the donor community, and the world at large. It may also be interpreted as a tactic to circumvent the mounting questions about the lapses in government response. Furthermore, it appears that the enormous outpouring of support by the global public (i.e. private individuals) and pledges for relief and resettlement by the international development community had lulled the state into a level of complacency. Hitherto unseen amounts of support were committed for these efforts by NGOs and other non-profit and humanitarian agencies such as Doctors Without Borders, Save the Children, and various United Nations agencies. Paradoxically, donor agencies and international financial institutions, seemingly poised for just such a moment, have devised long-term recovery formulas framed within the logic of neoliberal economic rationale that contravene the immediate concerns of resettlement.

In the wake of these developments, local community groups and NGOs have brought allegations that tsunami rehabilitation is being used to promote big business and tourism at the expense of the local communities. They have argued that the buffer-zone measures are not aimed at ensuring the safety of the fishing communities but are intended to clear land for large hotel complexes. In fact, the construction of new

hotels within the buffer zone has continued unabated as with the Aman properties. Other international hotel chains such as Sheraton, Hyatt, and Banyan Tree are proceeding with new coastal hotel developments. Damaged hotels have been allowed to rebuild, and the reconstruction of popular tourist spots, such as Unawatuna (another famed tourist site along the southern coast) has occurred without hindrance (Kurusulasuriya 2005).

Meanwhile, tens of thousands of displaced coastal residents have been pressured to relocate away from the coast, often by heavy-handed methods. Several instances of police intervention to prevent house rebuilding 75 meters inland by fishing communities have been reported by Herman Kumara, founder and coordinator of National Fisheries Solidarity (an organization of over 7,000 fisher-people around the country). The challenges of finding unoccupied land have narrowed the options available for resettlement and confounded the resettlement prospects of these further impoverished and displaced coastal communities, as discussed in the next section.

### **Poverty in Paradise: The Hidden Face of Serendipity**

Fishing communities in Sri Lanka have long settled on stretches of beach sandwiched in between the sea and a railway track built in the British colonial era that runs along the western coastline. Since much of the coastline is considered freehold government land, few in these communities hold legal title to the land, further complicating their resettlement prospects. Their homes are typically flimsy, cadjan-roofed (coco-nut palm thatched) makeshift homes that are severely compromised each monsoon season, while few, if any, of the communities have safe water and sanitation systems. Many use the beachfront and the rolling sea waves for toiletry purposes. Residents of these poor coastal communities rely extensively on kin networks for social and economic support. Given that large portions of extended families have been wiped out by the tsunami, the emotional toll on these communities is inestimable, not to mention the economic implications of the loss of the mutual financial support that would have been available from extended family members for their long-

term survival. In the wake of the tsunami, the social fabric of these communities has come unraveled by yet another factor. Vague promises of resettlement, uncertainties about relocation to rural or forest sites further inland, disinformation campaigns, and the inconsistent and uneven distribution of aid have created tensions and rivalries among community members.

The majority of the coastal communities are made up of non-commercial, small-scale fishermen who eke out a living from selling their daily catch. Often referred to as artisanal fishing, this type of fishing is undertaken in small wooden boats, usually family-owned and operated, by populations who are amongst the poorest communities in the South Asia region. By contrast, industrial fishing is based on large-vessels, often using trawlers, heavy-duty equipment, and salaried crews. Many artisanal, small-scale fishermen in Sri Lanka, and elsewhere in South Asia, still do not even have motorized boats. They navigate the rough seas of the Indian Ocean in hand carved *oru*, precarious wooden boats whose design dates back thousands of years. The sea is their livelihood. This is so despite their vulnerability to monsoon rains and winds that shape the precarious nature of their existence. They have few assets other than their boats, nets and other tools of the trade, now lost to the tsunami. Most individuals also lack any form of equity, savings, financial reserves and formal banking arrangements that would allow them to cope with this kind of disaster.

The day begins at dawn in these fishing communities, when fishermen push off in their narrow boats, moored at night aside their equally precarious one-room dwellings on the beach. They return by mid-morning if the catch is good. If not, they remain on the water, venturing further off to sea, only returning by late evening. Proximity to the sea is critical to enable the fishing expeditions with ease, as well as to secure the safety of their boats. Some communities are engaged in salting and drying fish—typically women's work—requiring access to the beach where the salting and drying operations take place. Fishing is not merely an occupation, a source of livelihood, but also a way of life for these communities with its own traditions and values.



Poverty is endemic among coastal fishing communities in Sri Lanka, as with other coastal fishing populations in the South Asia region. According to United Nations estimates, between 25 and 33 percent of the people in the affected districts live below the poverty line (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2005:104). As an urban underclass, many in these low-income communities also face various forms of social exclusion, as a result of their social (caste) and economic marginality. Most Sri Lankan fishing communities are affiliated with the *Karave* caste (*Karaiyyar* in Tamil), that holds a secondary position to the agricultural (Govigama among the Sinhala, and Vellala among the Tamils) in the caste structure. Unlike elsewhere in South Asia, caste hierarchy is not as entrenched in contemporary Sri Lanka where caste mobility as well as caste elasticity is common. For example, some Karave groups thrived during colonial rule, are credited for their entrepreneurial skills, and are economically well off. Yet, for the most part, small-scale fishing communities in particular tend to be at a low-income level. The rate of alcoholism is high, and gender violence is a common problem. In this context, their vulnerability has been heightened not only by the direct impact of the tsunami, but also by the indirect effects of ineffective recovery strategies, as elaborated in the next section.

### **Recovering *Serendib*: The Tourism Industry's Bounce-Back Strategy**

No more than a month after the 2004 tsunami hit Sri Lanka, while traumatized coastal communities were filtering through the rubble of homes and other community buildings, shuttling back and forth between temporary shelters and camps, attempting to comprehend and come to terms with the tsunami's devastation, the Sri Lankan Ministry of Tourism launched a *Bounce-Back* campaign. Underscoring the ironies of prioritizing the tourism sector, rather than focusing on restoring livelihoods and infrastructure to displaced fishing communities, together with the Sri Lanka Tourist Board, the Ministry of Tourism outlined restoration plans aimed "to rebuild Sri Lanka as a world-class tourism destination" (Sri Lanka Board of Investment 2003). Funded partly by a USAID grant of \$3 million, the

Bounce-Back campaign targets key international markets in the United States and the European Union to woo tourists back to Sri Lanka with assurances of safety (United States Agency for International Development 2006). USAID funding was specifically for a geared-up advertising campaign, euphemistically called the Tourism Communications Project, to help counter the misperception that Sri Lanka was so overwhelmed by the tsunami that its tourism industry would not be able to accommodate vacationers. Managed by USAID subcontractors Nathan and J.E. Austin Associates, this project exemplifies the quandary of "tied-aid"—the reality that aid dollars disproportionately benefit donor countries as projects are contracted out to donor country subcontractors. The Sri Lankan Tourism Board and Sri Lankan Airlines launched their own advertising campaign of \$2.1 million in late May of 2006. They are partnering with the Tourism Communications Project on this campaign in something that the firm of Nathan and Associates (n.d.) claims "will result in a 60 percent increase in media coverage, penetration, and frequency."

Echoing the sentiments that have accorded it a pre-eminent place in the national economy, one Tourist Board director, in his appeal for the return of tourists, described tourism as a lifeline for the nation, an ironic pun under these circumstances. To provide some perspective, tourism ranks fourth among the sources of foreign revenue generation in the country, over \$350 million in 2004 in foreign exchange earnings, accounting for about two percent of gross domestic product (GDP). This is slightly less than the fisheries sector, which contributes 2.8 percent to GDP. Yet, given its symbolic role in bolstering national pride, albeit within what I will call neo-orientalist caricatures of island exotica, tourism holds a favored place in the national imaginary. The Bounce-Back campaign was not only framed as a recovery measure, but also cast as an opportunity in the face of tragedy. One posting on the Tourist Industry web site brazenly declared the following:

In a cruel twist of fate, nature has presented Sri Lanka with an unique opportunity, and out of this great tragedy will come a world

class tourism destination. The Sri Lanka Tourist Board has requested and received approval from the Sri Lankan Government for various duty concessions to be offered to the hoteliers and tour operators who are rebuilding their businesses (Sri Lankan Tourist Board n.d.).

The manner in which the tourism sector took this first Bounce-Back step is indeed revealing of its superior financial resources. This is in contrast with low-income fishing communities consisting of independent, small-scale fisheries entrepreneurs who barely bring in incomes above the poverty line, and subsistence-fishing individuals who hover along the national poverty line of approximately 4000 Sri Lankan Rupees (the equivalent of about \$400) per month.

Notwithstanding the 100-meter rule, pre-tsunami plans to develop luxury tourism in Sri Lanka have proceeded at full speed, including a spa, multi-national hotels, a yacht marina and other facilities catering to up-market clients, as per the tourism master plan. The redevelopment of the tourism sector moreover, has been facilitated by special mechanisms to enable access to capital and imports of refurbishing material by registered hoteliers and tourism businesses. Underscoring the position of the favorite assumed by the tourist industry, the then minister of tourism pledged to provide 'all possible relief and concessions to hoteliers,' including low-interest loans. These included a post-tsunami loan scheme of LKR 10 million (the equivalent of \$95,000) at a concessional interest rate of seven percent with a one-year grace period, that have only been made available to registered hoteliers and tourism businesses. A tax waiver scheme for imported goods has been established that would also enable these hoteliers to bring in furnishings and other necessities to restore hotels, at a 100 percent duty waiver. Ironically, these concessions are only available to the larger tourism outfits that had the sufficient capital to register their businesses, but not to small, unregistered hotels unable to access any commercial loans. A further irony is that the insurance coverage secured by the tourist industry allowed most of the tsunami-damaged hotels to submit claims to recover most of their losses. But low-income

fisher people have only each other as social insurance and cannot rely on any savings given their marginal cash reserves, while the only assets they relied on (their boats and equipment), were destroyed by the tsunami.

In this manner, the tourism sector in Sri Lanka has benefited disproportionately via the extension of government support and capital. As elsewhere in the region, the tourism industry has been able to overcome the tragic blow dealt by the tsunami fairly quickly. Its vast entrepreneurial know-how about tapping into global markets, sophisticated technological access, communications infrastructure (reflecting the digital divide), and organizational capacity have contributed to its recovery successes. It now appears that the tourism industry in fact perceived this moment as a golden opportunity not only for rebuilding, but also for expanding its footing along the coast. To understand the differential application of the 100-meter rule, it is instructive to examine the symbolic significance of the tourist industry for bolstering national pride, and furthering national development.

### **Regaining Serendib: Tourism as Symbolic Terrain**

In 2003, a year before the dreaded Tsunami, the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) made a bid to reposition itself as the ideal tourist destination by launching a *Regaining Serendipity* campaign that harked back to Sri Lanka's mythic role as *paradise island*, the legendary Garden of Eden. Recalling the magical qualities attributed to this island nation in legend and myth, and referring to the ancient name *Serendib*, given to the island by Arab mariners, signifying a sudden, accidental, and fortunate discovery and experience, the Regaining-Serendib campaign entailed a process of restructuring Sri Lanka's tourism sector. The primary task was to develop "a new strategic initiative that would make Sri Lanka the most sought after destination in the Indian Ocean," as stated by Mr. Hari Selvanathan, chairman of the committee appointed by the prime minister to restructure Sri Lanka's tourist industry:

While offering authentic experiences in a unique setting, we will leverage our human

and natural resources to transform Sri Lanka into the region's centre of excellence. We are home to a cultural rainbow of humanity living ordinary life in extraordinary ways. This new approach to tourism will restore pride in local culture, raise living standards and promote social contentment. In so doing, Sri Lanka will become a recognized up-market destination catering to niche markets. This new face of Sri Lankan tourism presents a dazzling array of possibilities. World Heritage sites, vibrant Buddhist culture, tropical wildlife, unspoiled beaches, traditional healing therapies, wind surfing, whale watching, diving, fashionable shopping and dining are just a few of the attractions that distinguish Sri Lanka as a destination for our visitors (Sri Lankan Tourist Board, n.d.).

Scholars who characterize nation states in the global south as post-colonies discuss the dilemmas inherent in moving beyond the territorial claims of the state (see Appadurai 1996). At the same time, as many have documented, while allegiances to the nation-state as a bounded territorial and symbolic unit intensify, we also see efforts by new (post-colonial) nation-states to project themselves as homogenous and unified entities. This is part of the task of asserting historical and political legitimacy. The Sri Lankan state is no exception, as evidenced, for example, in its intense opposition to the claim for a separate Tamil homeland. More relevant for this paper is its effort to craft and disseminate a particular image of an idyllic and exotic island nation of immense appeal to the escape fantasies and consumption capacities of North American and European audiences. The images of exoticism projected by the state make a spectacle of the indigenous in promotional photos, as shown in figure 3, echoing a Gauguin painting. This image was used in a promotional presentation by the chairman of the committee appointed to restructure Sri Lanka's tourist industry.

Such images of exoticism betray the orientalist stereotypes to which the Sri Lankan elite subscribe. They also suggest an unquestioning acceptance of neoliberal development formulas that rely on sectors such as tourism that put

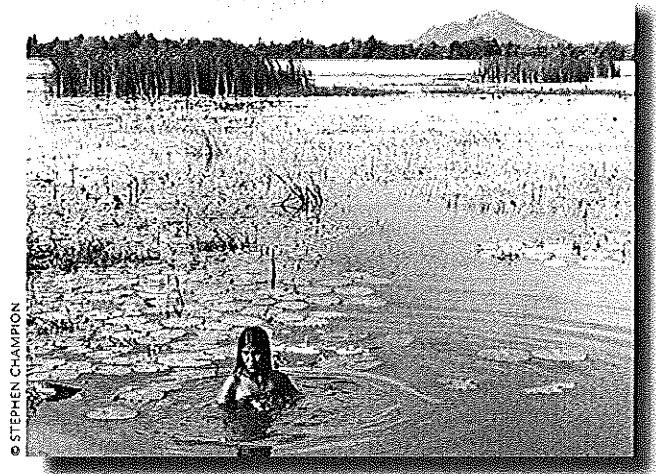


Figure 3. Girl immersed in village tank depicted in tourism promotion campaign. Courtesy Stephen Champion, who has been documenting the lives of rural Sri Lankans for over two decades and does not concur with the interpretation of this image as used by the *Regaining Serendipity* campaign.

foreign investors' interests first while marginalizing and exploiting indigenous populations for their very supposed backwardness.

Tourism and the promotion of tourism permits the nation, in my view, to accomplish the following. It is a way to affirm the value of Sri Lanka in the schema of global consumption as a desirable commodity, appealing to a transnational class of individuals who wish to imbibe in their escapist fantasies. Unfortunately, this also entails peddling indigenous/native culture and heritage. Marketing the country as a tourist destination relies on advertising that crafts an idyllic image of the country able to capture the imagination and desires of a transnational consuming class. This approach avoids any references to the poverty, strife, and social marginality experienced by many local communities. The prioritization and promotion of tourism for the sake of national development accrues benefits to foreign investors, while the seemingly banal, but tragic socio-economic realities of local communities remain unresolved.

### **Reclaiming Serendib: The Tourism Industry's Role and Appeal for National Development Agendas**

According to a 1999 report produced jointly by the World Travel and Tourism Council and the International Hotel and Restaurant Association (WTTC and IHRA respectively), the travel and tourism industry is the largest generator of

jobs within and across national and regional economies (1999:2). It accounts for 200 million jobs in the world economy across a range of sectors, including retail, construction, manufacturing, telecommunications, and direct work in the hospitality sector itself. It also claims tourism as one of the most effective drivers of development for regional economies, albeit shouldered largely by the work of populations of color, primarily women and youth. Critics of the hospitality industry (see Gray 2004, Katz 2003) note the concentration of racialized and marginalized groups in the low-wage ends of this sector. They cite by contrast how white males or lighter skinned individuals are placed at the sought after *front-end work* that requires interaction with clients. They also document the increased pattern of income polarization in the service sector. Yet, the World Travel and Tourism Council and the International Hotel and Restaurant Association continue to brag about tourism's tremendous successes in creating jobs and wealth.

Sri Lanka's efforts to rely on tourism as a development strategy dates back to the 1960s when the first tourism plans were drafted. There were speculations about its possibilities as "an export industry of enormous proportions, offering unlimited prospects as a growth resource" (Ceylon Tourism Plan 1967:27, quoted by Crick 1994:28). The rising number of tourist arrivals and the revenue generated during the decades that followed (Crick 1994:37) confirmed that the tourism industry was a viable source for generating revenue for public expenditure (Crick 1994:38). One source notes that Sri Lanka ranks currently as the seventh best tourist family holiday attraction in the world (Fernando n.d.). Nonetheless, the tourism industry in Sri Lanka bears witness to many of the conflicting patterns in the operations of global/corporate capitalism. As Crick illustrates, expectations about the growth generating possibilities of the tourism sector in Sri Lanka were over-optimistic and led often to contradictory outcomes.

As with other developing nations that rely on tourism, disproportionate benefits have accrued to countries of tourist origin (the First World), while existing structural inequalities between the Global North and

the Global South and within the latter are reinforced or in many instances exacerbated (Crick 1994:94).

Local elites aligned with the interests of international/corporate capital have benefited most from tourism, further aggravating socio-economic inequities and divisions in the society. By contrast, those who have not been able to benefit from tourist cash flows have grown increasingly frustrated (Crick 1994:65–66), complicating local social cleavages.

The tourist industry has piggy-backed on the state's expectations and has carved out its vision and mission statement in the following words:

[Vision] To become the foremost Tourist Destination in Asia. [Mission] To build up Tourism as an industry capable of playing a significant role in the economic advancement of the country whilst preserving the country's cultural values, ethos and its rich natural endowment thereby winning the hearts of both the local populace and the international community (Sri Lank Board of Investment 2003).

### **Paradise Displaced: Symbolic Upstaging of Local Communities in the Aftermath of the Tsunami**

To better understand the motivations that bolstered the significance of the tourist industry in the Sri Lankan state's post-tsunami interventions, while the priorities of local, low-income communities were downplayed, I provide an uneasy contrast. The intense and profound meanings and emotions invested in the ground where the twin towers once stood in New York City in the aftermath of the 9/11 twin towers destruction serves as an instructive comparison. *Ground Zero* has been invested with symbolic capital as a site of memory and mourning in the national and global imaginary. Interestingly, unlike *Ground Zero*, tsunami stricken areas have not been invested with such symbolic load. Instead, as the tourist industry's Bounce-Back campaign suggests, the focus has been more on *moving on* rather than lingering long in the memory of loss and displacement. The political and economic import of the twin towers as the

emblematic site of the pinnacle of capitalism may be one reason that Ground Zero has continued to hold the attention of the nation and remain a public spectacle (see Sturken 2004). By contrast, the coastal fishing communities affected by the tsunami have largely stood at the margins of the society, and as such, outside the short-term empathy it generated, without long-term rituals of grief and mourning, except by surviving community members.

The political capital offered by the World Trade Center site has far more "official" value for the United States as a nation than its emotive value as a place of residence and work, as Sturken suggests. Likewise, its central role in the Sri Lankan state's national development plans confers a similar value to the tourism industry. Simultaneously, it offers an arena for the display of a peculiar form of neocolonial nationalism, one that feeds into orientalist versions of island exotica as an idyllic getaway paradise. The latter relies on romanticized depictions that gloss over the realities of the grueling life led by artisanal fisher communities, and other grim, unresolved dilemmas facing the nation (i.e. the ethnic conflict). As such, it is the tourism industry that has been imbued with credibility for grief and loss on the global stage as the saga of losses of life to tourist families is played out on the international media, where local mourning only forms a mere blurred backdrop. McLagan clarifies this tendency in the following way: "In today's globally mediated world, visual images play a central role in determining which violences are redeemed and which remain unrecognized" (2006:191).

As suggested earlier, long before the tsunami, prime beaches along the southern coastline had been fenced off, privatized, and developed for tourist consumption, overlooking their importance as a livelihood resource for coastal communities. The displacement of artisanal fishermen from the coastal areas thus dates back many decades prior to the 2004 tragedy. As such, the only contender to low-income coastal residence in Sri Lanka, the tourist industry, because of its capital-intensive nature, and its symbolic power on the global stage has upstaged the significance attached to place by poor fishing communities. With its conversion to a tourist landscape, the coastline's importance in sustaining the liveli-

hood needs of poor fishing populations has thus been subverted. The sandy beaches, the coconut trees and the warm currents of the Indian Ocean are placed at the consumption beck and call of the tourist, while the local as a figure whose historical presence along the coastline is replaced, and often erased has become constructed as the intruder. For example, when the occasional, itinerant peddlers of seashells, hand-dyed batik sarongs, and other tourist consumables wander on to the beach area bordering a tourist hotel, the staff and clientele of tourist hotels react with a general sense of unease and discomfort. Large hotels post a security guard at the edge of the waterfront, primarily to "protect" tourists from robberies and other threats to the escape fantasy of an idyllic landscape of leisure marketed by the tourist industry. Local flavor is introduced to tourists only in a structured manner via the pre-arranged and highly managed cultural programs that bring occasional classical dance troupes or by popular local calypso-style *baila* musicians. The tourist industry as a whole thus casts the local landscape of ordinary life in to the shadows, rendering them invisible and immaterial.

### **Paradise Compromised: The Role of International Financial Institutions in Promoting the Tourism Sector**

The neoliberal policy doctrines promoted by international financial institutions, such as the World Bank and the International Finance Corporation, along with the donor community, emphasizes economic growth as the primary strategy for improving development prospects for Sri Lanka. This formula is predicated on the adoption of free markets, liberalization of trade, emphasis on export production, foreign direct investment, and privatization. Tourism is considered a vital part of the growth strategy, based on calculations of the foreign exchange it is expected to generate. Often considered a mainstay of the nation's economy, a key industry, and a major employer, the tourism industry generates foreign exchange revenue to the tune of \$340 million a year (in 2003). It provides employment for approximately 46,633 individuals, although some estimates, as in those quoted at the beginning of this paper are more conservative (United

States Agency for International Development n. d.). By contrast, artisanal and small-business fishing operations provide livelihood operations for up to 100,000 individuals (International Labor Organization 2006).

Key stakeholders in the development industry, such as the United States Agency for International Development, subscribe wholly to this formula, and have stepped in to restore the tourism industry in Sri Lanka, while fishing communities are left to be helped by charitable, humanitarian organizations. Two USAID programs illustrate the ironic contradictions in the prioritizing of restoring tourism rather than restoring livelihoods for low-income fisher communities. One, the Tourism Communications Project, discussed above, and the other, a cash-for-work beach cleanup program pays workers \$3.50 per day to restore a 15-square kilometer area of beach in Beruwela, a scenic and desirable tourist destination. Beruwela has approximately 75 hotels and guest houses with more than 4,000 rooms to accommodate tourists. Comments by project director David Dwyer on the "project's goal as one intended to speed [or hasten] the industry's recovery" further betrays the marginality accorded to low-income fishing communities within the framework of a neoliberal economic rationale. Echoing the litany of prophecies about the tourist industry, he has also commented, "the disaster provides the opportunity to move Sri Lanka's development forward, in this case through tourism, a key industry" (United States Agency for International Development 2006).

An even greater irony is USAID's self-serving and apocryphal assertion concerning the protective role of tourism outfits during the incursion of the tsunami:

The big tourist hotels literally saved many residents of the surrounding villages. Their multi-storied u-shaped configurations bore the brunt of the Tsunami, protecting the homes of hundreds of hotel servers, housekeepers and gardeners who live in nearby neighborhoods (United States Agency for International Development 2006).

One indication of USAID's faith in the significance of macro-economic strategies in Sri Lanka's disaster-recovery process, (including the lead role

assigned to the private sector) is the funding provided for the Bounce-Back campaign in the tune of \$3 million. USAID has also facilitated major policy reforms that "essentially gave the industry a free hand in plotting its own destiny" (United States Agency for International Development 2006). As noted in the USAID news brief on the latter, the increase in tourism arrivals is expected to lead to "more investment and more employment for Sri Lankans in the growing tourism sector" (2006). This is credited to a USAID-sponsored initiative, The Competitiveness Program (TCP), which is claimed to have

planted the idea for more self-reliance and private sector leadership, leading to the new legislation and convincing the government of the benefits of private sector leadership and professional accountability for promotional spending (United States Agency for International Development 2006).

### **Peddling Paradise: Government Interventions in Tourism Promotion**

One example of the government's disregard and detrimental action toward low-income fishing communities prior to the tsunami is evidenced by the 2001 events surrounding an expressway from the Katunatyake free-trade zone to Colombo harbor, financed by World Bank loans. Despite a previous pledge by the state highways department and Kiangnam and Boskalis, a Dutch construction company, no compensation has been paid to local fishermen whose livelihoods have been disrupted by the operation. Police are reported to have killed three persons in the process of dispersing protestors of the large-scale excavation of sand from the local beach. The charge raised by the protestors was that the removal of sand disrupted fishing activity by destroying fishing gear, including broad nets, driving out fish, killing fish spawn, and damaging the environment along a six-kilometer beach from Uswatakeyyava to Palliyawattta. The government has suppressed a report on the damage by the state-run institute that studies environmental effects that notes a two-year lapse before conditions for coastal fishing are partially restored. Local residents have also been affected by the operations of oil giant Shell, which pumps

gas and petroleum to storage tanks in nearby Muthurajawela from four kilometers offshore, violating an agreement with the government not to pump from less than nine kilometers.

It appears thus that the state, the tourism sector and key players in the international development community are colluding in the task of capitalizing on catastrophe in Sri Lanka. Post-tsunami reconstruction in Sri Lanka has furthered the ambitions of neoliberal development agendas shared by the Sri Lankan state, the donor community, and the international financial institutions who are ever-ready to finance capital-intensive ventures. The extent to which marginalized indigenous communities suffer further social, economic and political disenfranchisement is immaterial to these ambitions. As such, the end result of the 100-meter rule is a reshaping of the local social and cultural landscape as prized coastal zones are palmed off to the tourism industry.

## Summary and Conclusion

In the aftermath of the tsunami, the critical unresolved issue that has beleaguered state authorities, civil society organizations, and the disaffected populations has been the issue of resettlement. Even under ordinary circumstances, development related involuntary resettlement has entailed excessive human costs as induced, for example, by the construction of large dams such as the Narmada Dam in India, the Three Gorges Dam in China, and the infamous Gezira scheme in the Sudan (Scudder 1982; Colson 1971). Scholars who have studied these processes discuss the socio-cultural stress evident among resettled populations by virtue of the disruptions to the local social organization, the alteration of local leadership structures, and the emergence of new forms of dependency as government officials become the new source of community authority. Scudder (1982) has documented the immense trauma that resettlement represents for populations in the throes of that process as manifested by what he calls the "grieving for a lost home" syndrome. The associated physiological stress, he argues, has led to altered morbidity and mortality rates, complicated by the risks of epidemic diseases like dysentery and malaria as population density is increased in resettled villages.

Populations in many social contexts facing impending resettlement have thus shown tremendous resistance to relocation, associating it with hardship and death. Cernea (1997) has identified eight risks associated with resettlement encountered by populations subjected to this process: landlessness, joblessness, homelessness, marginalization, increased morbidity and mortality, food insecurity, loss of access to common property, social disintegration. Oliver-Smith (2005) provides insights on the sense of displacement, loss of identity, impoverishment risks, and the resulting decline in living standards involving economic, social, health, nutrition, and cultural-alienation variables that resettlement has wrought. The failure to consider the social dimensions of resettlement in past efforts, and mechanistic planning approaches that attempt to match people to places may be identified as part of the problem. For example, studies focusing on post-disaster recovery processes, primarily from a policy and planning perspective, (Haas et al. 1977, Rubin et al. 1985, Johnson 1999) put forward strategies useful for city and national planners involved in community recovery (see the phases of recovery outlined by Haas et al.). Yet, their lack of coordination and collaboration with affected communities has led ultimately to the application of such strategies in ways that are detrimental to the success of resettlement projects.

If resettlement processes unassociated with a calamity raise such a bewildering array of concerns, disaster situations present even graver resettlement challenges, as previous events have illustrated. These include the challenge of verifying the legitimacy of claims for relief, as populations other than disaffected ones may attempt to garner some of the benefits of disaster assistance. Determining the amount of cash or in-kind compensation poses its own challenges, apart from the establishment of channels for distributing compensation in a manner that prevents funds from being diverted to those who are not affected by a disaster. Other concerns include the illicit appropriation of relief consignments (see Dommen 1996), the need to establish mechanisms and measures for equitable distribution of assistance and just compensation, the related issue of eminent domain, and questions sur-

rounding how best to determine the capacity of affected households/populations to bear some of the expenditure related to resettlement.

Eminent domain represents one of the tricky aspects of resettlement since it entails a legal framework for determining eligibility for just compensation. On previous occasions, sudden increases in the population deemed eligible for just compensation has occurred when people learn of the sizeable compensation package, and somehow find a way to establish themselves as a part of the population eligible for just compensation.

Lewis (1999), for example, cites the 1982 instance of rehousing projects in Tonga after hurricane Isaac when the requirement of a 25% financial contribution by recipients clearly exacerbated pre-existing vulnerabilities, further marginalizing those unable to participate. While participatory approaches to development have been heralded in the ethnographic literature as a means to mitigate some of the more dire consequences of resettlement (see Oliver-Smith 1986, Berke et al. 1993, Scudder 1982), little in the way of avoiding the personal and social disruption human beings encounter in circumstances calling for forced relocation has been identified to date.

In this paper, I have focused on yet another dimension of resettlement that has imposed further stresses and strains for disaster-affected populations—disaster recovery interventions that are constructed in such a way as to promote the interests of corporate capital, whether intentionally or not. I have argued that the preoccupation with restoring the tourism industry, and the emphasis on tourism earnings as a source of foreign revenue has convoluted the priorities of disaster recovery in Sri Lanka. The absence of collaboration with civic organizations and participation by community representatives in the discussions on the recovery planning process, coupled with that responsibility charged to a group of prominent national business leaders has transformed the restoration process in to a corporate venture. In May 2005, for example, a Development Forum meeting convened by the government to discuss post-tsunami reconstruction included around 200 delegates from government ministries and other bodies, international donor agencies, including JICA (Japan Bank for

International Cooperation), the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and the World Bank, and major international NGOs (non-governmental organizations) such as OXFAM and World Vision, but failed to include representation from local civil society organizations except for one national NGO, Sewalanka, whose work has been allied with World Bank funded projects.

Civic organizations have charged the government with overlooking the needs of small-scale fishing enterprises and similar subsistence oriented ventures while favoring high-end tourism, large-scale and export oriented fisheries and agriculture (see for example the comments by Sarath Fernando, secretary general of Sri Lanka's movement for National Land and Agriculture Reform (MONLAR) in Rice and Haynes 2005).

The differential application of the 100-meter rule to coastal communities as compared to tourism outfits is but one example of this trend. The concessions made to the tourism industry in the form of low-interest loans (in the absence of credit extended to coastal populations), the efforts to push pre-tsunami plans to develop high-end tourism (international spas, luxury resorts and a yacht marina along the southern coast) have combined to leave local community members feeling doubly victimized.

The plight of Sri Lankans affected by the 2004 tsunami must also be viewed in the context of a nation scarred by political and ethnic violence for over three decades, as well as the symbolic violence inherent in processes of social subordination and political domination. The past three decades of conflict in Sri Lanka involves the "political" violence enacted in the two youth insurgencies, including the state responses that entailed brutal means of suppression, and the violence that has occurred as a part of the ethnic conflict between the Tamil and the Sinhala populations. The massive displacement caused by the ethnic conflict was further exacerbated as the tsunami added an estimated 570,000 to the existing number of those internally displaced living in refugee camps, temporary shelters, and among host groups. While the tendency to highlight their resilience resonates in many essays on the daily lives of those affected by these forces, this analysis finds no comfort in the glossing over of various forms of terror they



have experienced by citing instances of so-called Buddhist calm or rituals of solace (see Lawrence 2003).

In assuming such a stance, my concern is that we may be abdicating our responsibilities and absolving the accountability of the state and the international community to those whose lives have been destroyed. Resolving the resettlement and livelihood-restoration dilemmas faced by those affected by the 2004 tsunami requires an analysis of the various forms of vulnerabilities they have been subjected to over time. This task also calls for strategies that would reduce such vulnerability in the long run. As Sen (1994) argues, vulnerability is conferred not merely by the onset of a disaster, but is more a condition rooted in the deprivation of capabilities. Such deprivation amounts to the inability to attain various components of a decent quality of life, given societal mechanisms that rob them of the *potential* to attain these capabilities. As such, vulnerability to a disaster is clearly different for populations at different socio-economic levels.

Sen (1994) formulates the fullest attainment of human capabilities as the proper criterion for gauging the effectiveness of social welfare and the objective of policy interventions. In his view, capabilities allow substantive human freedoms or opportunities. Sen's concept of capabilities is thus parallel to those outlined by Blaikie and others (1994) in formulating their understanding of root factors. For Sen, the capability perspective allows us to look not only at the means to achieving a quality of life (e.g., income), but also to look beyond income to the ends that one is able to achieve. These include freedom from hunger, freedom for high literacy and educational attainment, and freedom for longevity.

Individuals whose social positioning is marginal because of their income levels, ethnicity, gender, race, caste, indigenous origin etc. may find themselves more vulnerable in times of natural disasters because of their limited access to formal mechanisms and assets/capital to cushion them from such a crisis. They live close to the margin of survival and their vulnerability is thus aggravated in disaster situations. Moreover, in addition to the emerging evidence from the tsunami stricken areas of the disruption of social networks resulting from the loss of

extended family members and displacement, it is important to consider the pre-existing factors that may have already set in motion a dismantling of such systems of social support. As Field (1993) reminds us, traditional redistributive mechanisms and social supports are often eroded as social relationships become defined and shaped increasingly by market-based transactions, particularly as a result of economic globalization. The challenge in post-disaster assistance is not only to reckon with the differential levels of vulnerability that influence the varying extents to which a disaster impacts diverse populations, but also to honor the principle objective of social equity outlined in Agenda 21 of the 1992 Rio Declarations.

This paper has attempted to show how post-disaster assistance and interventions couched in the logic of neoliberal economics employed in Sri Lanka in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami have contributed to the further disempowerment of impoverished coastal communities. As argued in the literature on natural disasters (Sen 1994, Blaikie et al 1994, Oliver-Smith 1986, 2006) low-income coastal populations in Sri Lanka who have long survived at the margins of subsistence security have been made even more vulnerable by the tsunami as the worst natural disaster the nation has experienced. Their vulnerability has been exacerbated by a combination of factors. Their limited access to capital and other resources is one. Other factors include the erosion of social support networks, particularly in a social context where the incursion of globalization processes has subjected even social life to the dictates of the market, while the specific recovery strategies employed in the aftermath of the tsunami have favored corporate interests over those of local, low-income communities. These factors in concert have compromised their ability to overcome the effects of the disaster. Oliver-Smith notes that the outcome of a disaster "is usually not the result of the agent alone, but rather government response" (2006:7). By focusing on the revitalization of the tourism industry, recovery strategies have advanced the interests of corporations over those of the restoration of the livelihoods of affected low-income communities. In this case, since the tourism industry relies extensively on the idyllic beaches that the island

nation of Sri Lanka has to offer, it has also meant the conversion of its natural resources to a commodity form. Nature is being increasingly produced and marketed as a commodity (Castree 1995; Harvey 1996; Haraway 1997; Katz 1998), and I would add that nature is increasingly being *consumed* as a commodity. The challenge ahead of us is how to avert the pauperization of local communities inherent in making nature a commodity. How do we safeguard the relationships of local communities to nature as a means of subsistence, security, and survival? ○

## Notes

1. The term *serendib* is an Arabic word from which the English *serendipity* is derived and is used here to refer to Sri Lanka as a sudden, accidental, and delightful discovery.
2. The appearance of Nandini Gunewardena's article here in *The Applied Anthropologist* represents an effort symbolic of possible future cooperation between the National Association for the Practice of Anthropology (NAPA) and the High Plains Society for Applied Anthropology (HPSfAA) in the publication of this journal.
3. Nandini Gunewardena's Ph.D. in anthropology is from the University of California at Los Angeles. She is a member of the faculty of the Department of Human Services at Western Washington University. She may be reached there care of her department at 1600 Chester Avenue, Bremerton, Washington (WA) 98377-1699 USA. She may also be reached at 360-475-7265 by telephone and at **Nandini.Gunewardena@wwu.edu** by e-mail. Her work in applied anthropology spans action-research, project implementation, monitoring and evaluation, beneficiary assessments, and policy reforms. She has worked with a number of agencies, including the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the World Bank. Her ongoing work focuses on various aspects of poverty in Sri Lanka.

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