Negotiating recovery

Collaborations, power, and the everyday in post-tsunami Sri Lanka

Master thesis:

Cultural anthropology:

Multiculturalism in comparative perspective

2013, Utrecht University

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Supervised by Katrien Klep

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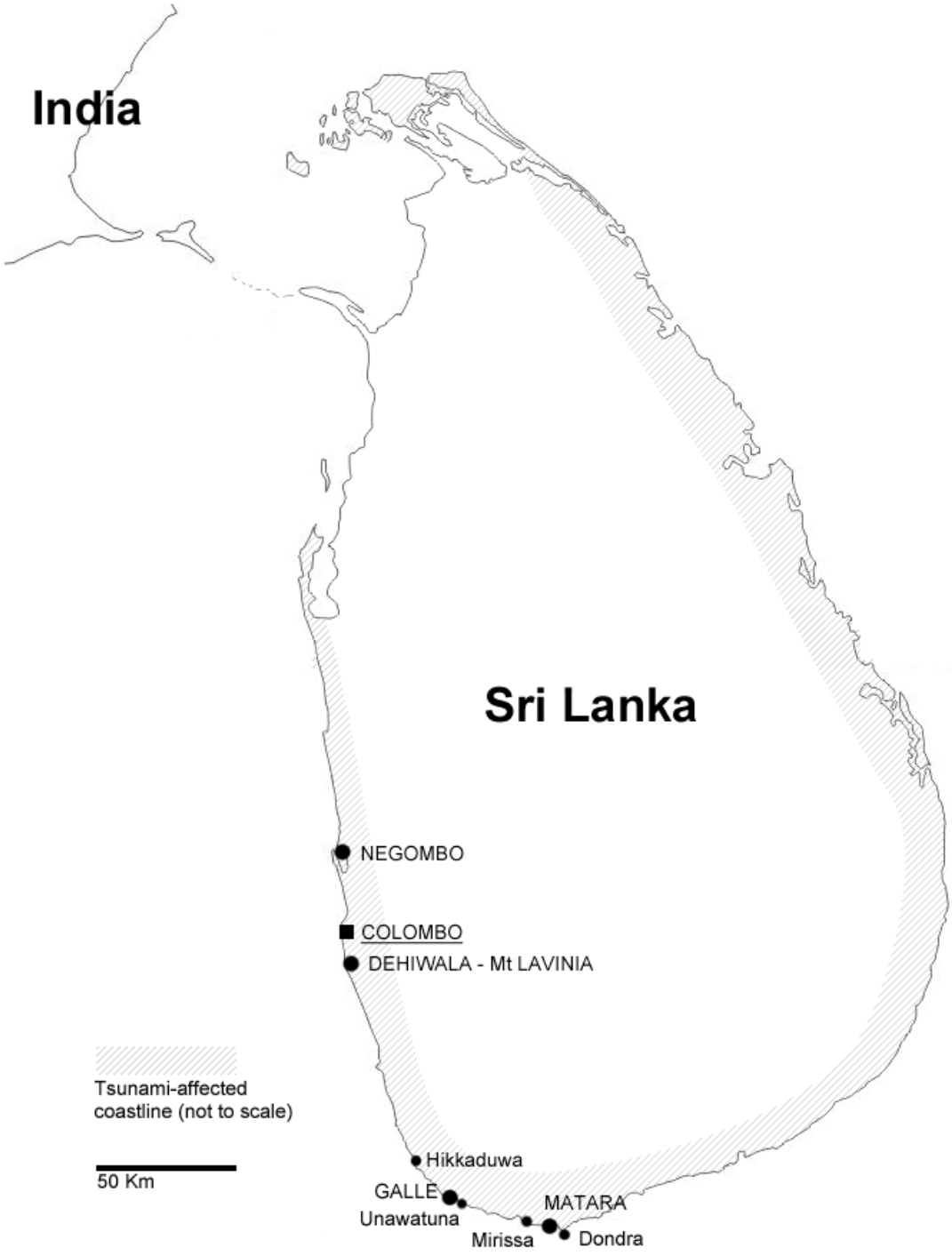
Field map



Map of Sri Lanka, marked with the major fieldwork locations (Image based on Google maps © 2013; Tsunami-affected coastal areas based on data from the UNHCR GIS Unit Sri Lanka (in De Silva 2009); Map design by the author).

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Thank you.

1. Introduction:
disaster and global connections

On December 26, 2004, an earthquake near the coast of Sumatra, Indonesia, triggered a tsunami that flooded large areas and the communities that live along the Indian Ocean coastline. From Thailand to Somalia, deaths and destruction were reported. Sri Lanka was also one of the countries severely affected by the tsunami. Coming from the east, the waves diffracted on the Sri Lankan coast. They bent around the island causing not only the eastern but also the northern, southern and south-western coast to flood (see field map). Early 2005, the Sri Lankan government reported that over 30,000 people lost their lives, and over 800,000 people were left homeless. The costs of material damage were estimated to rise up to 1.5 billion US dollars (Ministry of Finance and Planning 2005a). This massive disaster triggered a worldwide response of an unprecedented scale. From all over the world, resources were mobilised and assistance was sent to the affected areas (e.g. De Silva 2009; Gamburd & McGilvray 2010; Karan and Subbiah 2011). A process of recovery emerged in which people with most diverging backgrounds collaborated. Recovery was and is still characterised and marked by connections that cross distance and difference.

'The tsunami' is a story of local villagers whose homes, families, and livelihoods were destroyed and who rebuild their lives as well as possible. But it is also a story of the Sri Lankan nation-state that was in the middle of a protracted ethnic conflict when waves flooded the coast. It is a story of the Indian Ocean and all the affected communities that surround it. It is a story of the thousands of international assistance workers and organisations who went to the affected areas. It is a story of those who followed the development of the disaster in the news all over the world, and those who gave donations. And it is the story of technicians, scientists and scholars who study disaster prevention, development, and recovery. Therefore the story of the tsunami is a story of scales, collaborations, frictions and global connections. This research aims at finding how these kinds of collaborations facilitate, limit, and generally give shape to recovery in the everyday in southern Sri Lanka.

Anthropological debates on 'disaster' and 'the global'

A short decade after the tsunami, a relatively stable situation has emerged from the chaos of disaster, but this situation is far from devoid of negotiations and struggles. Most INGOs have moved on and directed their attention elsewhere. However, their influence on the recovery process was, and continues to be enormous. I investigate the politics of distribution and assistance after the

tsunami, and its significance in the present. Central to this thesis are also the coastal 'buffer zones' that were installed by the government after the tsunami. The buffer zones prevent people from rebuilding their houses along the coast, but allow the establishment of hotels and resorts. A conflict over coastal resources between fisheries and tourism results. Many people have been displaced, away from the coast to housing schemes inland, and others have gained the possibility to start a hotel business. By investigating these dynamic situations, I focus my attention on the continuing power struggles that take place in recovery.

As part of the process in which the world recovers from a disaster that crossed national and continental boundaries, a vast amount of literature has already been published on the tsunami. Scholars put an effort in understanding its dynamics from various angles and disciplines, while government bodies and (I)NGOs sought ways to design, implement, and report on mitigation programs. Much has also been written on the Sri Lankan case in particular, expressing the regional, ethnic, religious, gendered, and political dimensions of its recovering society. From the field of anthropology, I enter a discussion that takes place at the crossroads of disaster studies and globalisation studies.

At the basis of my understanding of disaster, lays the work of Oliver-Smith and Hoffman (2002). In their view, disasters should be seen as processes rather than events. Disasters, they state, are "embedded in natural and social systems that unfold as processes over time" (2002: 3). While the tsunami struck the Sri Lankan coast in a matter of minutes, the disaster encompasses physical, social, cultural, political, and economical, dynamics before, during and after the tsunami. War, ethnic and regional disparities, national development projects, political alliances, class, caste, and global inequalities, all contribute to that disaster we call 'the tsunami'. In this line of thought, I state that we cannot speak of a pre-disaster or post-disaster situation, for the onset and conclusion of the disaster cannot be defined. We can speak of a pre- and post-tsunami, since the tsunami – the actual flooding – was, though enormous, limited in time and space. This distinction is useful because it leads us to the questions of what is recovery. Where do we locate recovery in time and space? At what point does recovery start, and at what point is it not an applicable term anymore; where does it end?

Oliver-Smith and Hoffman (2002) draw attention to the disruptive force of disasters, which can affect individuals, (family) networks, and communities in their livelihoods, security, and culture. As they create a situation of chaos, disasters lay bare the social structure of a society. Such disruptions, they argue, can provide exceptional though unequal opportunities for social and structural change. While some may find their livelihoods destroyed, others may find business prospects or possibilities for structural change (Hastrup 2011; Klein 2007; Oliver-Smith and Hoffman 2002). Carolyn Nordstrom states that where meaning and sense are destroyed, "people strive to create it" (2010: 254). Recovery, as I use it, interferes at this point, where people face the disruption of the disaster and

simultaneously engage it through the possibilities their positioning allows for. In Frida Hastrup's (2011) view, a disaster does not simply disrupt daily life on the ground but becomes part of it. The disaster becomes integrated in already existing and emerging social structures. In this argument she states that it becomes hard to even identify long-term effects as being caused purely by the disaster, exactly because in recovery, people incorporate the disaster into their daily lives; the disaster process becomes interwoven with other processes of the everyday (Hastrup 2011).

Oliver-Smith and Hoffman also emphasise the social character of natural disasters and the importance of understanding vulnerability as a social construct. In Sri Lanka, the ways in which people were affected by the disaster were defined through social inequalities based on geographical positioning, gender, age, class, ethnicity and other axes (Ministry of Finance and Planning 2005a; 2005b; World Bank 2005). Thinking through the concept of vulnerability can explain precisely why and how certain people were or were not affected by the tsunami. It also points to the differential possibilities of the survivors in the process of recovery. It gives rational explanations for disasters. However, vulnerability does not provide insight in the creativity with which people engage the disaster and recovery. In this thesis I look for this creativity and engagement.

Keeping an eye on disruption, possibilities and creativity, I approach recovery as a frontier (Tsing 2005) in which social relations are not (yet) regulated. Conceptualising recovery as a frontier contributes to an understanding of how people (re)take control over their livelihoods and how they redesign their daily lives, within the newly emerging structures of society. In this approach to recovery, Anna Tsing's (2005) conceptualisation of collaborations is very useful. I depart from the general acceptance that cultures are shaped, at least in part, by long-distance connections like networks of trade, transmigration or activism, while globalisation emerges from a local level (e.g. Appadurai 2000; 2008; Inda and Rosaldo 2008; Tsing 2005; 2008; Nordstrom 2004; 2007; 2010). From this point I also approach recovery: not as something that can be contained within a single place or community, but as a process that takes place in the daily practice of interactions, negotiations, and connections. This unregulated character of the post-tsunami, and the re-negotiation of social structures and access to resources are the focus of this analysis.

Actors with divergent backgrounds and interests collaborate in this process, which does not mean they pursue the same goals or work together as equals. Indeed, collaborations, Tsing (2005) makes clear, are not always to everyone's benefit. Tsing (2005) stresses that collaborations are uneasy and composed of, and dependent on misunderstandings, inequality and friction. Given the inequality of collaborations, power becomes an important point of interest. In other words, this thesis is concerned with social interactions and therefore inevitably with power relations. I use a Foucauldian notion of power (e.g. Burchell et al. 1991; Taylor 2011), which allows for a focus on the negotiations

between actors at different layers of society. In Foucault's words, power "takes place when there is a relation between two free subjects, and this relation is unbalanced" (quoted in Taylor 2011: 5).

In this research I investigate the collaborations and power struggles that give shape to recovery, and how they do so. I focus on the south-western coast of Sri Lanka, and more specifically on the interaction between tourism, fisheries, government and (I)NGOs. The everyday is the frame in which these dynamics take place. It is the site where experiences are formed and where knowledge is built (Brooks 2007). Veena Das and Arthur Kleinman contend, it is thus *not*, "the site of the taken-for-granted, the 'uneventful'" (2001: 1). With this focus I aim at exploring the following research question: how do the tsunami and global connections relate and become expressed in the everyday lives of people in south-western Sri Lanka?

Ethnographic frictions

Data collection took place during three months of ethnographic fieldwork in Sri Lanka. Even with time-space compression in mind, the world is by far not 'small' enough to explore the full complexities of global connections in disaster recovery in just three months, if such a full complexity can ever be grasped at all. To overcome these issues, ethnographic research on global connections requires *multi-sited ethnography*, and what Tsing (2005) calls *patchwork ethnography*, methods by which the ethnographer follows the lines of the stories that emerge in the field and the multitude of perspectives on them. These types of ethnography do require some serious compromises, in comparison to the classic holistic anthropological study. However, Ulf Hannerz states "the ethnographer may be interested in the embeddedness of a particular line of belief or activity in a wider set of circumstances, but this hardly amounts to some holistic ambition" (2007: 364). Placing myself in the translocal network of relationships, as Hannerz suggests, does not provide me with a comprehensive image of a certain community, but with a complex image of a daily life of (global) connections and negotiations.

My choice to focus on the southwest[1] was influenced by several circumstances. Even though one cannot study Sri Lankan politics without taking the war and its aftermath into account, I do not study the war or ethnic disputes and differences. The less war-affected south was therefore a suitable region to conduct fieldwork. The enormous influx of aid in this region also triggered my interest. Furthermore, tourism is on the rise everywhere on the island but the southwest is still a leading region. To understand the relationships between tsunami recovery, the distribution of aid, the government, and the tourism and fisheries sectors, the southwest is fitting. The most practical

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[1] See field map for the main research locations

reason however, came when I was already in the field. I met Herman Kumara[2], a political activist and founder of the National Fisheries Solidarity Movement (NAFSO). He arranged that I could go with his team to Matara the next day to attend a fishing community meeting. During this meeting I got into contact with the people from the Southern Fisheries Organisation (SFO) who became key informants and my access point to the local fishing communities. This opportunity to get access in the field made me decide to stay in Matara. It also proved to be much easier to travel between Colombo, Galle and Matara than to move further east. My aim to conduct multi-sited fieldwork was facilitated by the region's infrastructure.

A central feature of this research – which in turn does reflect classic cultural anthropological studies – is that I have studied daily life in the present. Even though the tsunami happened a decade ago, this is not a study of historical events. Historical explanations are necessary at times to understand the present, and the stories people tell with regard to the tsunami and recovery, often concern the past. Most interesting though, I find the *expressions* of stories and experiences as ways of going about recovery in the everyday. Similarly, objective truth, if there is such a thing, is of less importance than people's constructions of truth and their subjective experiences. In the field, I did not seek to verify the stories people told me, but instead sought to find the discursive strategies behind these stories. What did they tell me, and why?

I have done research among people with various backgrounds, connecting their stories as different approaches to the disaster and recovery. I have spoken with fishermen and fisherwomen, youth and elderly people, local and international NGO workers and coordinators, local and regional government representatives, large hotel and small guesthouse managers, tourists and expats, a building contractor, a harbour construction engineer, and Sri Lankan and foreign academics. Most of my informants, though, were people living in the housing schemes. Each of these people had stories to tell about the tsunami and recovery, about the negotiations that take place in this process, and about their expectations and views of the future. They all present different and sometimes conflicting standpoints. Herein I agree with Abigail Brooks that each standpoint "presents a unique lived experience and perspective *and should be valued as such*" (2007: 72, original emphasis). Each of these experiences, Brooks continues, "tells us something different and valuable about society" (2007: 73). In this thesis, I strive to preserve the value of difference.

During our visits to the housing schemes, people often invited us, Maduka – who became my guide, translator, key informant, and friend – and me, into their house or offered a refreshment on the veranda. Our visits to these villages were a great opportunity to speak with people in their homes. The home, methodologically speaking, is a place where people's living conditions can be

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[2] Most informants have been anonymised for privacy reasons, except for public spokespersons.

observed, as well as their efforts to change or preserve these conditions. I consider settlement, where one chooses or is forced to live, to be an important part of the recovery process. The home is also inseparably tied with everyday life, and therefore important in understanding an individual's standpoint, their "unique perspective on reality" (Brooks 2007: 73). In addition, these visits provided a possibility to speak with women, who were often at home when men were out working. Also through the microfinance programs of the SFO, I got into contact with fisherwomen's self-help groups that were founded in response to the tsunami, where I attended several meetings. And I participated in a 1st of May labour day protest march, in which many fisherwomen took part.

For in-depth contacts with fishermen and fisherwomen I was mostly reliant on the networks of the SFO and NAFSO, two allied NGOs advocating the rights of Sri Lankan fisher folks. The organisations have been extremely helpful in introducing informants and in translating during interviews, so I am grateful for their efforts. Their point of view, however, is politicised and their networks are mostly limited to their members who are likely to share their opinions. Someone who opposes the organisations politically is not likely to be a member. Perhaps a slight leftist bias in the accounts presented in this thesis results, although I also spoke with many people outside the mediating influence of the NGOs. Building close contacts with fishermen and fisherwomen proved to be challenging without the help of these organisations. This challenge formed in the language barrier between me and the fishing communities. Without the presence of the translator, who stood in a position between me and the informants, people were also more inclined to ask money in exchange for information. Given the touristic environment, I could only avoid financial transactions with informants with variable success.

When working with a translator, much of the subtlety of people's statements gets lost. Some things may be found untranslatable from the standpoint of the translator for political or ethical reasons, and some things are simply not translatable. I cannot check if people meant to say what was translated to me and vice versa. In the same way, I cannot check to what extent people understood the purpose of my presence and questions, which challenges the feasibility of informed consent. By engaging in dialogue instead of questionnaire, and by encouraging people to ask questions during our conversations, I have tried to work around these issues. In a more abstract sense, the translation between languages, and more importantly between cultures, is essential to ethnography. It is also in line with the central theme of this thesis, the collaborations that take place in recovery. Many misunderstandings can rise from translations and cross-cultural interactions. Fieldwork too, in this sense, is about collaborations and friction – translation is, though partial, always necessary and productive in ethnography. The anthropologist acts between people and their lived experiences in 'the field', and the audience 'at home', which may both be global. This thesis emerged from this friction, cultural diversity made it possible.

Structure

This thesis is an account of the disaster as a process that is still unfolding. While the waves of the tsunami are long gone, their impact is still evolving as people negotiate their interests in everyday life. Each of the following chapters illustrate how recovery takes shape in the complexity of relations between different scales. Chapter two discusses recovery through the use of disaster opportunities in state policies through the notion of governmentality on the one hand, and the everyday engagement of these policies on the other. Chapter three considers the request, distribution and acceptance of aid, and focuses on the roles played by brokers in the negotiations and translations between languages, cultures, and power in the global connections that shape recovery. Chapter four examines how villagers, as they go about recovery, engage experiences, knowledges, information, policies, and expertise and transform these into calculations of risk and safety that make sense in everyday life. Focussing on recovery and how it takes shaped in global connections, this research takes a snapshot of ongoing processes, and like a photograph, it might freeze sometimes awkward expressions and movements. Therefore I hope to present this thesis as a "drawing", or a "patchwork", to use Ingold's (2011) and Tsing's (2005) terms respectively, in which open ends can be left open, and in which the fluidity of movements I witnessed in the field can be preserved.

2. Power: negotiating the buffer zones

One of the earliest and most contested measures taken by the Sri Lankan government in response to the tsunami is the implementation of so-called buffer zones.[3] Initially, the buffer zones were defined as the areas 200m or closer to sea in the east, and 100m or closer in the south and west. Later they were reduced to 65–125m and 35–60m respectively (Kuhn 2010). The arbitrary disparity between south-western and eastern areas fed grievances in the east as people saw the unequal treatment of the coastal areas on top of long-standing ethnic struggles and the civil war between Tamils in the north and east, and Sinhalese in the south and west (Keenan 2010; Kuhn 2010). Throughout the country, the buffer zones were installed to prevent people from re/building close to the ocean. The government does not give permission to build houses within the buffer zone. This means the families who used to live in these areas were forced to move further inland. This chapter investigates recovery by taking a closer look at the buffer zones. How are they implemented, and how are they challenged? How does their implementation reflect local and global inequalities? And what does this teach us about recovery?

Opportunities for control

The economic landscape of Sri Lanka has since independence witnessed drastic changes. Like many newly independent states, Sri Lanka faced the challenge to reorganise its economy and politics, while enduring the struggles of the cold war. Some analysts even dubbed the country an economic laboratory which, in Nithiyanandam's words, "experimented with an array of economic policies, ranging from a controlled to that of an open economy" (2000: 283). Initially, the organisation of Sri Lanka as a generous welfare state fostered popular support for the political elite but eventually became economically unsustainable. The Sinhalese government resorted to discriminatory policies based on ethnicity which fed the protracted ethnic conflict (Keenan 2010; Nithiyanandam 2000; UCDP 2013). A policy switch was made in which Sri Lanka became "a country fully committed to a market oriented policy package" (Nithiyanandam 2000: 296; cf. Gunewardena 2008; Klein 2007). The opening of the economy occurred simultaneously with the violence of the 1980's and 1990's. However, the promise of growth these policy changes implied could not be kept as the island sunk deeper into its violent political climate. Some saw in the tsunami an opportunity to boost Sri Lanka's

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[3] Not only Sri Lanka, but most affected countries around the Indian Ocean implemented buffer zones after the tsunami (see Klein 2007; Telford and Cosgrave 2006).

fumbling economy. This idea was sparked, first by the almost surrealistic amount of aid and money that entered the country, which is also referred to as the 'golden wave' or the 'second tsunami' (e.g. De Silva 2009; see also chapter three). Second, opportunities were seen in the devastation and disruption caused by the tsunami, which allowed for a reorganisation of the coastal areas.

Disasters lay bare the social structure of a society and simultaneously create a situation of chaos. From this unregulated situation new and unexpected opportunities rise (Hastrup 2011; Klein 2007; Oliver-Smith and Hoffman 2002). Frida Hastrup (2011) discusses at length how people grasp opportunities for relief and improvement in disaster situations. Oliver-Smith and Hoffman point at "the role of hazards and disasters in mobilizing forces of structural change" (2002: 9). They also excitedly discuss the variety of research opportunities disasters provide. And after hurricane Katrina in New Orleans a lively debate emerged on "the opportunity that recovery from Katrina offered for correcting long-standing problems of urban blight, crime, and […] education" (Anthony Paredes 2006: 642; cf. Klein 2007). Indeed, if a disaster provides opportunities, why not take them? To restore the pre-tsunami situation would be, as one local NGO worker pointed out, to miss valuable opportunities for improvement. However, as we acknowledge that disasters provide opportunities, we need to ask, opportunities for whom? Who can grasp the opportunities, and who cannot? Plans to 'build back better' may be appealing, but what does 'better' mean and to whom does it apply?

As the tsunami physically disrupted large parts of the coastline, Sri Lanka was suddenly confronted with the vulnerability of its coastal populations. The Sri Lankan government installed the buffer zones to address this vulnerability in the case of a future tsunami (e.g. Steele 2005). Therefore they can be seen as a way of managing risk. In chapter four I will discuss the entwinement of risk with the everyday in more detail. At this point I do not seek an answer to the question whether or not the measures taken by the state actually serve to protect the population, but rather point at the 'governmentality of risk' (Ewald 1991; Castel 1991; Lupton 1999). Foucault understands governmentality as the 'art of government' (Foucault 1991; cf. Taylor 2011), whereby government is "the conduct of conduct" (Gordon 1991: 48). While governmentality can refer to control of individuals and the self (discipline) and control of populations (biopolitics) (Taylor 2011), I use it here in the latter sense. Governmentality refers to techniques of control, power, and influence.

Deborah Lupton states that "risk may be understood as a governmental strategy of regulatory power by which populations and individuals are monitored and managed" (1999: 87). This perspective, through which the notion of risk can be observed as providing a justification for the implementation of the buffer zones, becomes pressing considering the inequality with which the buffer zones were actually put into practice. While people who lived in the coastal areas are prevented from returning to, and from re/building their houses in, the buffer zones, an exemption was made for 'commercial purposes'. Now, building for commercial purposes is allowed, so in

practice the coastal land becomes only available for hotels and resorts. People who are not interested in or capable of starting their own business are left with little choice but to sell the coastal land they used to live on to tourism.

This is where disaster opportunities come into view, as the tsunami became a catalyser through which the development of tourism could speed up. For a long time, the tourism industry had been waiting to flourish. The eagerness of Sri Lankan politicians and economists to make the country's economy grow – partly through tourism – was obstructed by the status quo: the war blocked foreign investment and settlements on the coast blocked the development of 'clean' tourist beaches. The tsunami brought the opportunity to solve the latter, as it literally cleared the beaches. It swept away all structures that were built on or near the beach and left behind a field of debris. Suddenly there was the possibility to redistribute the coastline among its stakeholders. The implementation of buffer zones intervenes exactly at this point of redistribution. Through this policy, the state took control over the opportunities provided in the disruption of the tsunami. The buffer zones, then, are not only a matter of dealing with risk. Rather, they reflect interests and forms of regulation. As Herman Kumara, founder of the National Fisheries Solidarity Movement (NAFSO) put it, the buffer zones were justified "*in the name of security*" and resulted in the "*displacement of many fishing people.*" In this way, the buffer zones were installed to protect people against future tsunamis – the assessment of risk – but also served as a means to regulate the coastal population – the governmentality of risk.

Naomi Klein (2007) identifies the buffer zone policy as 'disaster capitalism'. In doing so, she characterises it as "orchestrated raids on the public sphere in the wake of catastrophic events, combined with the treatment of disasters as exciting market opportunities" (Klein 2007: 6). In her view, the Sri Lankan government took the chaos of the disaster as a chance to further open the economy and boost privatisation. In other circumstances, she claims, this policy would have been blocked by popular protests. She also points at the involvement of foreign, mostly U.S.A. based capitalists who helped design and implement this strategy. Klein states that the buffer zones made it possible for entrepreneurs and investors to profit from post-tsunami developments at the expense of the tsunami survivors. In the same line of thought, Nandini Gunewardena criticises Sri Lanka's adoption of "neoliberal conceptualisations of national development" (2008: 70). Tourism, in her view, is used to attract foreigners, both tourists and investors, to boost the economy and the position of Sri Lanka vis-à-vis its neighbours around the Indian Ocean. The rise of tourism, she states, goes hand in hand with the displacement of coastal communities.

In these conceptualisations of disaster capitalism, it is seen as emerging from the collaborations between international finance institutes, the government, and national business leaders. In Gunewardena's words, "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" (2008:

87). Whether these actors collaborated as equals, and if the results of these collaborations are in accordance with their goals is not important to the anti-capitalist authors. What matters to them is that local communities and civic organisations were left out of the process of 'planning recovery'. Investigating recovery through the concept of disaster capitalism exceeds a simple identification of the opportunities that rise in disasters. Instead it points at structural and deliberate changes, made under influence of national and international agencies by specific people who would profit from these changes, in the unregulated and disrupted circumstances of the disaster. Their analysis highlights that collaborations can be exclusionary, and that social inequalities can prevent some from participating in important collaborations that shape the recovery process.

When I asked a divisional secretary why building for tourism is allowed inside the buffer zone, he answered, "*tourism is no problem, because tourists like to stay near the sea. And tourists stay only for a short time. Before people lived close or on the beach and polluted them. We like our beaches, we want to keep them clean.*" This answer refers not to notions of risk, but to who, in his view as a government representative, should be allowed to use the beach. In their functioning, I argue here, the coastal buffer zones can be understood as "mechanisms of social ordering based on spatial regulation" (Merry 2001: 16) and thus can be further studied using the concept of 'spatial governmentality'. On spatial governmentality, Sally Merry states the following:

> "Spatial forms of regulation focus on concealing or displacing offensive activities rather than eliminating them. Their target is a population rather than individuals. They produce social order by creating zones whose denizens are shielded from witnessing socially undesirable behavior such as smoking or selling sex. The individual offender is not treated or reformed, but a particular public is protected. The logic is that of zoning rather than correcting." (2001: 17)

To follow this line of thought, the target population of the buffer zone policy is the people living near the sea, and those who use the beaches for activities other than leisure, most notably fisher families. The denizens of the buffer zones are tourists, whom it shields and protects from the sight, sound, and smell of fishing activities as well as from the presence of coastal slums. The 'offensive activities', or 'undesirable behaviour', however, are daily activities such as settling and fishing. These acts themselves are not criminalised or illegal. On the contrary, Peter Flanagan notes, "the excluded individual need not engage in criminal activity, nor even be suspected of it. Rather, it is the individual's mere presence in a particular area that offends" (2003: 329). Thinking through the notion of governmentality thus sheds light on how disaster opportunities – exemplified here by a sense of risk and spatial disruption – can become tools for control. In the following section I zoom in on some of the implications, as well as how challenges are posed to the buffer zones as a governmental strategy.

Zones of contestation

The tsunami triggered a contested reconfiguration of maybe Sri Lanka's most important resource: the sea and its coastline. The coast is a place where many different interests and dynamics converge. To name a few, coastal villages and cities, salt production, agriculture, the development of nuclear and off shore energy, ports, industrial zones, and the use of lagoons for water plane landing, as well as erosion and coral bleaching all constitute 'the coast' as a lived and contested place and resource. Here I focus on tourism and fisheries, two industries relying on this resource. After the tsunami and the civil war, the tourism industry is finally ready, willing, and able to exploit Sri Lanka's paradise beaches. Sri Lanka is supposed to be home to some of the best beaches in the world, but to benefit from this advantage these beaches need to be *clean*. This means there should be no rubbish, no fishing boats or nets, no settlements, and where possible no Sri Lankans (!) on the beach. Small-scale fishermen, on the other hand, live with the ocean. It is their income and often their identity. Furthermore, they need the beaches to land their boats, dry and untangle their nets, and store their equipment. They also need space to sort, clean, and auction their catch. Sunbathing and blood gutters do not go well together.

Commenting on this conflict, the disaster capitalism perspective portrays a dichotomy between tourism and fisheries. Similarly, advocates of fisher's rights use this dichotomy in their struggle against the buffer zones and other forms of land grab and exclusion. The Food Sovereignty Network South Asia, for example, titled one of its reports on northern Sri Lanka: *Tourists' dream or fisherfolk's nightmare!* (Roy 2011). However, such a strong line between tourism and fisheries cannot be drawn. Despite the differences in mobility and capital, the overlap between tourism and fisheries must be acknowledged, and so must the internal struggles and strengths of both the tourism and fisheries sectors be taken into consideration to come to a more nuanced understanding of this field of negotiations. Here I do not mean to downplay the importance of recognising and addressing inequalities and vulnerabilities. Instead I want to stress that instead of emphasising binary oppositions, a more nuanced view is necessary when discussing the complex negotiations that take place in recovery.

Besides the struggle for access to the beach, fisher families face many issues. Fisher families as well as other people in society consider fishing itself a dangerous enterprise, especially diving activities. The currents and weather can be unpredictable, but it is also a financially unstable living. In the field, fishermen would often talk about one thing: their declining harvest. They see overfishing as the major cause of this decline, although some would also blame climate change. This causes tensions between fishing communities. Some avoid the use of environmentally harmful fishing gear, to protect their harvest in the future, while others do use these gear, to protect their harvest in the present. Then there is a conflict between Sri Lankan and Indian fishermen which takes place in the

Image 2.1 'Fishing Trips': Fishing activities or tourist service?

waters between the two countries. It is a conflict in which civil, diplomatic, and military actions as well as reports of arrests and disappearances on both sides reach the media (Scholtens et al. 2012). Furthermore, fishing communities engage in bumpy relationships with the Sri Lankan government, which they need for facilities and amenities but which does not seem eager to listen to or to alleviate their concerns. "*The fisheries minister is a doctor*", fishermen complain, "*what does he know about fishing?*" Indeed they also do not expect much from their government. Gradually, it becomes harder to make a living as a fisherman. The sea is running out of fish in the face of competition, inflation and rising fuel prices. The profits of fishing barely outweigh the costs. These issues demonstrate that for fisher families, the buffer zone and the rise of tourism are, though serious, not their only concern. Fishing families engage in many local, national and international alliances and struggles to secure their livelihoods.

Fisher families also seek ways to creatively profit from the increasing presence of tourists. During fieldwork, numerous times fishermen offered me diving lessons or a 'boat safari'. For a negotiable price fishermen take tourists out to sea to join them on fishing trips and to spot sea turtles and other special sights. Some fishing boats that were in fact distributed by NOGs after the tsunami, have been equipped with roofs and benches and now serve as tourist boats. Traditional stilt fishers habitually

ask money for photographs taken of them. In addition, tourists consume fish which can be freshly bought from local fishing communities at auctions and markets. Tourism and its spatial exclusion are certainly threatening to the livelihoods of fisher families, but it also provides alternatives in the face of overfishing, international fishing conflicts, and steadily declining harvests.

The Sri Lankan coast is a place where huge resorts and hotels seem to be sprouting from the ground. Large patches of land are being marked by fences and signs, indicating the future presence of luxury hotels. Such projects are the work of investors hotel chains, not the local population. However, small scale guest houses are emerging just as rapidly. It becomes clear the coast is not only a livelihood resource but also a commodity in the exchange between locals and tourists. Indeed, tourism is a growing sector that should be reckoned with, especially now the government promotes the development of tourism on the coast, expelling local communities. However, the tourism industry is often portrayed as a single, solid, and overpowering force (cf. Dixit and Halim 2011; Gunewardena 2008; Klein 2007; Roy 2011;). This depiction is misleading in the sense that it ignores the differences and inequalities within the tourism sector, as well as its frayed and liquid boundaries. Tourism thrives, but is not hegemonic or homogeneous.

The people who used to live in the areas now designated as buffer zones, observe the development of resorts, hotels, restaurants, lodges and guest houses with dismay. Many of these people now live in housing schemes further inland. Some were eager to move away from the sea after the traumatic experience of the tsunami. Others were forced to move when the government refused to give them permits to rebuild their houses in the buffer zones. In chapter four I will discuss the implications of living in these housing schemes in further detail. Here I would like to draw attention to the everyday challenges these people can pose to the buffer zone policy.

In one of the housing schemes, for example, Maduka and I spoke with a mother and daughter on the veranda of their house. The older woman explains she and her husband and children were nominated for the housing scheme because their previous house was partly destroyed by the tsunami and it was located in the buffer zone. Because of the distance between their new house and the sea they refuse to sell their old land, despite various offers made by hotel project developers. Her husband is an independent fisherman and he needs to be at sea at the times that bring the best harvest. Very often the fishermen have their best catch at night. The distance to the ocean makes it difficult to get to the sea at these precarious hours. To overcome this problem, her husband sometimes sleeps in their old house. It is partly repaired without government permission. Officially it is not allowed, but the government has not taken action against it yet. But their decision not to sell the land has another reason. By the time the children, who are now 6 and 10, grow up and marry, the housing scheme will not provide the space to house them anymore. They will need their land on the coast in the future! A strong view to the future and the need to secure the wellbeing of the

family in the present as well as in times to come, made the family decide not to give up their coastal land but instead to use both houses.

Then the woman adds with some irritation, "*many hotels are built, so why can we not build?*" This is an important discursive approach in the sense that it reminds people of the unequal and in their view unjust application of the buffer zones. It also challenges the assertion that the buffer zones are meant to protect the coastal population from a possible tsunami. Indeed, are tourists and hotel owners not at risk? The narrowed definition of the buffer zones also raises the question to what extent they still contribute to the safety of the population. A 5m high tsunami wave easily bridges the 35m distance in a matter of seconds. Such discrepancies could be seen as what Ulrich Beck calls "organized irresponsibility" (1999: 6) which refers to the "denial of risks within […] cultural and political structures" (Elliott 2002: 296). To put it in other words, the buffer zone policy was allegedly designed to address the vulnerability of the coastal population while its implementation reflects a politics that denies and underestimates the same risk. As villagers question these inequalities and inconsistencies, it strengthens their determination *not* to sell their land to the tourism sector even now the prices of coastal land are rising fast.

Other challenges posed to the buffer zones can be found inside them. For example, Maduka and I spoke with Ranuga, a fisherman who had resettled with his family on their land inside the buffer zone. After the tsunami they did not move to an emergency camp but instead stayed on their own land in a temporary shelter. Even though the land is located within the 35 metre zone, the local government allowed this on the precondition that they would leave as soon as a permanent house in one of the housing schemes would be available. It took two years before they could finally move into their new house. Ranuga could however not accept the distance to the sea and decided to rebuild his house in the buffer zone. As soon as he could he moved back to the coast, and left the house in the housing scheme. He and his wife now live on this location illegally and their daughter lives with her family in the housing scheme.

However, moving away from the housing schemes and into the buffer zones is not easy, and not everyone is able to do so. Villagers often complain they cannot officially sell their houses in the housing schemes because they do not own the land on which they were built. Instead, the housing schemes were built on government land. An employee of the Matara District Secretariat told me they are trying to hand land ownership to the beneficiaries now living in the housing schemes. This process is very slow: the request goes through many committees at divisional, district, provincial, and national levels, before it can be signed by the president himself. Only he has the power to hand government land to the people. The District Secretariat is currently waiting for the requests to be granted – if they ever will. Despite this obstacle, some people do sell their houses off the record. Some rent them out, and others have moved away from the housing schemes leaving their houses

empty behind. However, in some villages people cannot leave their houses for longer than thirty days, otherwise the local government will prevent them from returning and will hand the house to another family. The lack of ownership in the housing schemes thus limits the villagers in their mobility. Ranuga could evade these problems because his daughter continued to live in the village after the fisherman moved back to the coast. Officially then, the family still lives in the tsunami village and the Grama Niladhari[4] (GN) does not report their absence. Using it as dowry, they do not have to abandon and thus lose it, and they also do not have to illegally sell or rent it to other families.

As I explained above the buffer zones function to keep out unwanted settlers. As I observed the area, I noticed that the land this family lives on is surrounded by a large and busy fishing village. The beach and bay are full of fishing boats, and there are auction and storage buildings nearby. All in all, it is not a suitable place for tourism. In this village, the buffer zone is clearly implemented less strictly than in other areas. This family found the possibility to rebuild within the buffer zone, because their land is located in this larger fishing village. The fisherman tells us he rebuilt his house without permit, and was lucky to be able to use the electricity, water, and sewage connections that remained from the destroyed house and the temporary shelter. The local government in turn decided not to remove the illegally built house. Instead it stated not to be responsible if anything would happen to the house or the family. If anything would happen, the fisherman says, they can no longer count on the government for help. Similarly, the GN of this coastal village has warned them they fall outside his realm of responsibility and representational power. So only by ignoring the warnings posed by the government and by assuming full responsibility for the wellbeing of himself and his family, and with the opportunity to do so, this fisherman managed to return to his home inside the area from which he was officially excluded.

Still, perhaps the most persistent form of resistance to the buffer zone policy actually conforms to its regulations. As explained above, the Sri Lankan government only gives building permits inside the buffer zones for hotels. With that in mind, it becomes interesting to see that in some places there are as many, if not more hotels than there are tourists. Perhaps these places anticipate the growing number of annual tourists, but there is more at stake. One hotel owner, locally known as Mr Luke, a wealthy entrepreneur from Berlin, bought land[5] on the coast a few years before the tsunami came. After the tsunami, he wanted to rebuild a house on that place, but encountered the same bureaucratic obstacles as other people trying to return to the new buffer zones. He could only return to his land if he would build a hotel. So, together with a local architect and contractor, they decided they would build a hotel. Now, Mr Luke lives in a majestic hotel with closed gates: none of the rooms

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[4] Village headman, or village chief: lowest level of government representation, below the divisional secretary.

[5] Foreigners cannot actually buy land in Sri Lanka by law, so often a structure is created in which the foreigner pays a befriended local to purchase and register the land for him.

are rented out. Of course, such an undertaking requires a lot of capital. Furthermore, to counter such clever solutions, the government set some requirements, like a minimum number of rooms, for a building to be qualified as a hotel. With these requirements, not everyone can simply build a 'hotel' to live in. Nevertheless, the distinctions between private house, guest house, and hotel cannot easily be made.

In the three examples above people challenge the exclusionary function of the buffer zones. In Foucauldian terms, the buffer zones can be seen as an exercise of power at a macro level. The target population however, meets these governmental strategies with micro level tactics. People act "with a view to the future" (Hastrup 2011: 115), they make use of different types of capital, and they engage in discourses and counter-discourses. Through these expressions of agency they prove that the buffer zones, as a tool for social and spatial control, are not hegemonic. They prove that, as Richard Lynch put it, "if power relations are in fact best understood as a necessarily ongoing battle, then the battle is never utterly lost" (Lynch 2011: 24). The examples also demonstrate that people engage in power relations with the government from their own positioning. This positioning both provides and limits the possibilities from which they can act. It is thus also important to note that many people have not been able to return to their homes in the buffer zones.

The governmentality of disaster and recovery

Taking a closer look at the tourism and fisheries sectors reveals that there is no strong dichotomy between them. Rather, the 'conflict' between these industries, consists of many interwoven negotiations. The protagonists of these struggles are people trying to make a living in various ways, and as it happens, they resort to the same resource: the Indian Ocean and its coastline. The disruption caused by the tsunami provided opportunities through which the access to this resource could be renegotiated. At this point the disaster capitalism perspective recognises structural and deliberate changes. It helps to identify how the process of recovery is stained by inequalities to the extent that some recover at the expense of others. Disaster opportunities, it turns out, are fundamentally unequal and inevitably political.

As I have elaborated above, the Sri Lankan state seeks to control the coastal population through spatial politics. The question to ask here is, may disaster "be understood as a governmental strategy of regulatory power by which populations and individuals are monitored and managed" (Lupton 1999: 87)? In other words, can we speak of the governmentality of disaster? It goes too far to state that disaster *is* a governmental strategy. This would imply the disruption and suffering are brought about intentionally. But disaster may very well be *used in* governmental strategies. In recovery, but also in the prevention and course of disasters, the profound disruption caused by disaster can be employed as a mechanism of social ordering. The implementation of exclusion zones along the coast

at a moment of disorder and confusion illustrates this point. Disaster causes disruption from which individuals and communities need to recover, and which provides opportunities that influence the directions of recovery. The buffer zones also indicate that recovery can be planned, shaped to certain goals, and used in governmental strategies. Recovery, in this sense, is a social project (Tsing 2005) in which social order can and must be renegotiated and redesigned to overcome disruption and chaos. Disaster, disruption, and recovery can be instrumentalised, can be strategies of control.

However, it would be incorrect if we only see recovery as a process of control and regulation. This would undermine the creative approaches to disaster by the affected people. The challenges posed to the buffer zones underline that locals will participate, even though they may be excluded from decision-making or planning. They are the ones who live the disaster and recovery, and who engage it from their particular positioning. Through acts of resistance, negotiations, and discursive strategies, they undermine the regulatory power of the central government, and remind us that this power is not hegemonic. Recovery, I argue here, is a field of unequal negotiations, contestations, and ultimately, power.

3. Collaborations:
the politics of assistance

The beach of Mount Lavinia, one of Colombo's southern suburbs, is always busy with people. It is a lively place where people from other parts of the city come to relax, enjoy the weekend, or the admirable sunsets. Many foreign tourists use this place as a starting point for exploring Colombo and the rest of Sri Lanka. The southern end of this beach is marked by the white high-end Mount Lavinia Hotel. Walking towards the north, the number of restaurants slowly decreases, and one crosses the invisible border between Mt. Lavinia and Dehiwala. Here, the lodges and restaurants make place for fishing boats and slum dwellings. Only few people venture out onto the beach here as most seem to prefer the shadow of the beachfront palm trees. A young man in shorts approaches me, he sells sweet popcorn. Unquestioned, he starts telling me about the tsunami, how he saw the water coming, how he lost his house on the beach, and how his wife and his two children were taken by the sea. He notices my interest, and invites me to take a look at what is left of his house. We arrive at a concrete slab in the sand and he says "*this was my house*", while he makes a gesture to indicate where the walls must have been. He appears, given the circumstances, relatively untouched as we move further into the neighbourhood. From between the wooden shacks rise the grim, skeletal remnants of concrete buildings and sanitary facilities – uncleared debris. The maze of narrow alleys shows open spaces where remaining broken-tiled floors render the ground useless for building. We enter a small hut made of wooden poles and boards. Aside from a small table, a plastic curtain and some boxes the room is empty. "*You see I am poor now. My life was good, and now it is going down*".

As we walk back to the beach, two young children see me, and shout "*money, money!*". The people here know only too well that tourism goes hand in hand with capital, the question is how to extract it. After telling me he wants to fix the roof of his shelter, he says "*I showed you my house, now you help me*". Even though I expected this to happen, I am surprised to find that this man seems to be somehow using his story of the tsunami to make money. I have no means or desire to validate his story, and this tour was definitely worth a little money since it allowed me to start constructing an image of how the people live here, and it opened my mind to a whole new way of looking at recovery. He explains to me that every year two German men come as tourists to Mt. Lavinia, and they give him money for his house. This man had definitely found an interesting way of incorporating the disaster into his daily life.

The story of the tsunami is a story that sells, and it sells well to tourists who are looking to experience the exotic, the imaginary. Did the story of the tsunami then become a story of

orientalism, to end up in a list of tourist attractions, among the temples, beaches, elephants and sex? The story, in this example, is used to trigger compassion and to animate flows of financial aid. This chapter is about what Erica James calls "compassion economies" (2010: 26) and how these are part of the recovery process. She defines compassion economies as "the finite flows of beneficent material resources, knowledge and expertise, technologies, therapies, and other forms of exchange circulating between the aid apparatus and its clients and between the aid apparatus and its donors" (2010: 85). In this definition compassion economies revolve around 'the aid apparatus': a conglomeration of "human rights, humanitarian, development, and other advocacy organisations and institutions" (James 2010: 81). However, as I make clear in this chapter, the recovery process is an assemblage of divergent agents and agencies, each with its own goals, means, and positioning. The first section sketches the chain of relationships between donor and client and the practices of translation and brokerage that are essential to the post-tsunami compassion economy. In the second section I address the frictions between INGOs and recipients of aid by discussing issues of consultancy and responsibility.

A need for brokers

In order to trigger a response from possible donors, the needs of individuals and communities have to be communicated to them. In the weeks and months after the tsunami, images and narratives of suffering spread out across the globe. Commenting on the Haitian context, Erica James sees such images and narratives as "iconic representations of victimization that evoked pity and alarm intended to engender intervention to alleviate suffering" (2010: 81). Indeed, media reports of the tsunami, as well as outright calls for donation triggered an unprecedented amount of aid. In this process, James recognises the commodification of suffering. Representation becomes an important issue: how can the situation of survivors be translated into appealing images and narratives? INGOs in search for funds, James argues, tend to victimise their clients in the communication with donors, and "represent their objects of intervention in ways that tend to reduce the complexity of identity and experience" (2010: 85). Even survivors themselves may learn that their stories of suffering can be key to receiving aid (James 2010). The encounter at the Mt Lavinia beach indicates that the commodification of suffering can continue long after INGOs have left the country.

While the images and narratives of the tsunami are used to stimulate compassion, the factual situation in the target areas becomes less important. INGOs are required to translate the demands of their donors into useful aid in the disaster areas, and translate their relief efforts into appealing images for the donor. This is reflected in the choices of distribution. For example, in some areas more people received a boat than there had been boat owners before the tsunami. Who was and who was not a fisherman and thus who was entitled to receive a boat was difficult to define. Disagreements

rose, as fishing communities had to construct a new equilibrium between boat-owners, the use of landing places on the beach, and positions on the market. The distribution of boats, however, looked good to donors who demanded tangible results for their donations (De Silva 2009; James 2010; Stirrat 2006).

Characteristic to economies of compassion is, James (2010) argues, the highly unstable and impermanent supply and demand of the humanitarian market. The tsunami caused an enormous demand for short and long term assistance across the Indian Ocean. The collaborations I describe here triggered a substantial response to this demand. Many people have portrayed the post-tsunami as a period in which the aid industry descended upon Sri Lanka along with an unimaginable amount of goods and money that needed to be distributed, sometimes regardless of the need (Stirrat 2006). This massive amount of aid became known as the 'golden wave' and even 'the second tsunami': a metaphor that refers to the scale, the speed, and the disruptive force of this humanitarian *blitzkrieg* – a force that came and went and in which supply from time to time overruled demand. In this situation, aid organisations often struggle to find a balance between avoiding imperialism in the field on the one hand and conforming to images and demands from the donating actors on the other (Stirrat 2006; Nygaard-Christensen 2011).

While INGOs took a position between donors, who demand accountability and sensitivity, and the people they intend to help, power brokers translated the needs of survivors to INGOs. According to Oscar Amarasinghe (interview, 2013-05-07), who was active in the communication between government, NGOs and recipients, the Sri Lankan government could not provide sufficient information to (I)NGOs in the chaos of the disaster, because no grassroots level information was available. Furthermore, the communication between the government and INGOs was complicated by language barriers. Many government officials did not speak English very well, and neither did NGO workers from non-English speaking countries. INGOs bypassed the control of the state. "*The NGOs did what they wanted*" Amarasinghe stated. Furthermore, there was little coordination between and among NGOs and the government (Stirrat 2006), although some government officials claimed during interviews that "*there was good control.*" What I want to point at is that INGOs conducted their own assessments, and for these assessments they were dependent on Sri Lankans who could speak English. Particularly, they were people who had enjoyed a certain level of education, or who had a long-term experience of working with foreigners, for example in the tourist industry. Sometimes they were local government officials – whereby Georg Frerks' comment, that "access to state services, control over state machinery, and proximity to central state authority are powerful entitlements in Sri Lanka" (2010: 155), is an important one. These people came to stand in a powerful position in the gap between the distributors and recipients of aid. From this position, power brokers could easily

manipulate the lists of people entitled to aid, the expression of needs, and the practice of distribution.

A common argument expressed in Sri Lanka, was that the presence of brokers contributed to unfair distribution and corruption. From the friction between diverging actors in the compassion economy, together with the huge amount of aid available and its unequal distribution in a chaotic situation, many persisting stories of corruption have emerged. In these stories, that may be found both among donors and clients, a lot of money is said to have "disappeared". Very often when I spoke with villagers about the post-tsunami period, they accused their neighbours of immoral actions, usually accepting aid they were not entitled to, and their political leaders of favouritism and accepting bribes (cf. Gamburd 2010). While this may have been the case in some situations, I would like to emphasize that brokers are also necessary. INGOs are under pressure to act sensitively to the cultures and customs of their clients. Therefore they need locals who can translate between languages and cultures. Similarly, locals need brokers to express their needs to the INGOs. Just like the translation from client to donor executed by INGOs is necessary, those who stand between the INGOs and the recipients of aid are essential to the flow of compassion economies. As donors, distributors, and clients collaborated in and negotiated the paths of recovery, they were dependent on brokers. Without brokers the gaps between them could not be bridged.

In this system of brokerage and patronage the distribution of aid ran along many lines of difference and stratification. Aid was gendered, and often reinforced traditional roles of men and women. To name an example, female-headed households could not apply for a boat, since fishing was regarded men's work (Leitan 2009; Samarakoon 2010). Similarly, houses were distributed to the male head of households, disturbing women's domestic property rights (McGilvray and Lawrence 2010). Ethnic and regional inequalities ensured that from Colombo, aid was channelled mostly to the south-western provinces, and less to the north and east of the island. This was due to, and aggravated the ongoing ethnic conflict (Gamburd 2010; Keenan 2010).[6] Systems of favouritism also resulted in the "political party-based distribution of entitlements" (Gamburd 2010; Kuhn 2010). Furthermore, the distribution of aid was coloured by concerns of class and caste[7], whereby receiving

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[6] As Alan Keenan states, "the Indian Ocean tsunami burst onto a fractured and deeply divided political landscape in Sri Lanka" (2010:17). Parts of the north and east were under LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) control when in 2004 the tsunami took place. On the one hand, the conflict severely complicated the provision of aid, and led to a differential treatment of the eastern and the south-western provinces (e.g. Keenan 2010). On the other hand, the huge amounts of aid fuelled the conflict. The tsunami, causing displacement, disruption, and disputes over resources, became an integral part of the evolution of Sri Lanka's protracted conflict, while the conflict became an integral part of the post-tsunami recovery efforts. See Höglund and Svensson (2009); Keenan (2010); Sivanandan (2010); Sivasundaram (2010); and UCDP (2013) for more information.

[7] Sri Lanka knows three parallel caste systems: Sinhala, Sri Lankan Tamil, and Indian Tamil. However, according to the International Dalit Solidarity Network and the Indian Institute of Dalit Studies it has become a largely hidden and not openly discussed system of social stratification and discrimination (Silva et al. 2009).

aid was associated with lower class and caste status, "within the South Asian understanding of higher caste or politically central patrons as gift-givers and lower caste, marginal clients as recipients" (Gamburd 2010: 71). Giving and receiving, in this sense, are linked with social status and network ties, and therefore handing out, as well as receiving or refusing aid, are political acts.

Friction and engagement

Maduka and I were walking through a housing scheme after we had spoken to a few families, when we came across the village library. The building was in decay, the windows were dusty and broken, and inside were useless bookshelves. A proud plaque with the name of the INGO that furnished this place was mounted to the wall. The childcare centre was similarly deserted. The gate, that contained names and logos of INGOs, did not have a lock, but the garden was so overgrown that no-one will try to enter it. "*The people don't use it*" is Maduka's simple but crystal clear explanation.

This is only one instance in which the well-intended distribution of aid shows unplanned outcomes – outcomes which are the result not of plans made by organisations or institutions, but of the interaction between donors, brokers, and clients. Many houses have been abandoned. Instead of living in the houses themselves, some families have left the housing schemes to live elsewhere. Some have sold their houses, others rent them out, and often the houses are used as dowry (McGilvray and Lawrence 2010). Many examples of how people do not passively accept but rather actively engage aid can be observed in the housing schemes. In this section I discuss consultation, local knowledge, and responsibility. I analyse the frictions, as well as local engagement of economies of compassion.

In principle, each affected family would get one house – that is how the government planned and still portrays the distribution of houses. In practice, the number of destroyed houses was taken into consideration and not the number of people or families that lived in these houses, or how big it was. It is quite common for a son to extend his parent's house when he gets married. When the means and space are available he might also build a separate house. In this way extended families come to live together on the same land. The houses built in the new villages are much smaller. Typically they consist of two bedrooms, a living room, a bathroom, and a small kitchen. Their design is clearly based on nuclear families, not extended families. Furthermore, the land on which the houses are built is between 8 and 10 perches (200m^2 to 250m^2) and leaves no room for expanding the house. When these families get a single house as compensation for their destroyed one, a serious problem of size rises. Many houses are overcrowded.

For example, I met a family of eight who all lived in a single but large house. The family consists of a mother, her daughter with her two children, and her son, his wife and their two children. The family lost their house in the tsunami and were able to move to the house in which we are having the conversation. They sold the land they used to live on to have a hotel built on it. They needed the

money at the time, otherwise they would have waited for the value of the land to rise, they explain. The daughter, who is a single mother, continued to live with Mother while her brother got married and started his own family. Due to financial difficulties they are however not yet able to build their own house. It goes without saying that the house with two bedrooms and a living room is overcrowded. In contrast, I was introduced to a woman in her late forties who lived by herself in a housing scheme. Her daughter used to study at the University of Ruhuna in Dondra and wanted to be a music teacher, but after the tsunami her body was found in the field behind their former house. She lost her daughter in the tsunami, and soon her husband died "*because he could not accept she was gone*". During our entire conversation the woman stood besides the framed pictures of her late daughter and husband and silent tears flowed down her cheeks – the tears of someone who is used to them. After her husband died she moved with her son to the housing scheme. Now her son is grown and has moved to Colombo to work in a dining place. In this way he can provide for her. She is left alone in this house, which has a leaking roof.

In the chaos of the disaster and her loss, moving to the housing scheme was the only option. In retrospect she regrets this, because of the poor quality of the house as well as the design. The building is home to two families, which is very uncommon in the rural areas of Sri Lanka. Like this woman, many people I encountered told me they came from a separate house, surrounded by a garden and sometimes a gated wall. They experience moving to a semidetached house with little space around as a huge drawback. When we discussed this topic with two befriended neighbours, one of them said, "*When I have a discussion with my wife the neighbours can hear us.*" Upon which the other jokingly answered, "*Yes, at night I can always hear you talking*." They laughed suggestively at the word 'talking'. Regardless of such jokes, these people complained about a loss of privacy. The housing schemes are usually planned so that the buildings stand close next to each other. Even when the houses are built separately these problems persist. "*Sri Lankans don't like to live in flat buildings, or too close together*," one divisional secretary explained to me, "*they like to live in separate houses. It is our culture.*"

Such a claim of cultural specificity and identity, as well as claims of deterioration of living conditions, provide insight in the points of view of recipients of aid. Again, truth is not important: I have no means or need to compare their current living conditions with pre-tsunami situations as to validate these claims. What matters is that people refer to a disruption of their view of how they, as a family, should live. A view that was disturbed first by the tsunami and then by policies, designed by foreign NGOs or project developers who did not manage to bridge the cultural gaps between distributors and recipients of aid. The problems of size and privacy in the housing schemes also refer to a lack of sensitivity and consultation by INGOs and government officials. Such a lack of consultancy

Image 3.1 Example of immured branding in a housing scheme.

points at a devaluation of local knowledge. However, as I elaborated in the previous section, it also draws attention to the precarious position of the INGO between donor and client.

With very few exceptions, the houses in the housing schemes carry a plate on the wall next to the front door (see image 3.1). They display the names and logos of the NGOs and donors that built the village. Even though the NGOs have left the villages or even Sri Lanka years ago, their nameplates continue to emphasise their role and importance in the housing schemes. However, for the villagers, whose houses are visibly marked, the plates are very ambiguous. Most people living in these villages told me they never met the NGO workers. The process of distribution of houses was organised and executed by the district secretariat. In some cases, the NGO was present at information meetings, but in many cases the interaction between the NGO and the villagers happened through the local government. Similarly, many inhabitants found that after moving to the villages the NGOs did not come to check on them to see if they needed anything. If the villagers encountered a problem with the house or the facilities in the village, they had no means to contact the NGO. They could only approach the local government which in its part claimed not to be responsible for the work done by NGOs. Considering that most interactions happen through local government officials, the plates represent something, or someone the villagers have never met. Still most of them do not choose to

remove or paint over the plates. They do feel awkward that NGOs put their names on their houses, especially because of their absence in the time they have been living here. This way of branding is a daily reminder to the inhabitants that they received their house from someone generous, which has a patronising effect. On the other hand, the NGO did help them by building this house, they are grateful, and they feel obliged to leave the plate as it is.

This way of immured branding becomes even more peculiar considering the low quality of the houses. The differences between the villages are enormous, and sometimes the differences between houses in the same village are just as big. Not the types of houses change that much – they are all built according to similar designs – but the way in which the building plans are executed. Some houses show hardly any problems, while others are on the verge of collapse. In some cases this remains limited to an odd choice of building materials, such as the use of concrete instead of wood for window and door frames. In other cases however, the quality of the houses is so low that they will need to be rebuilt within the next five to ten years. There could have been a scarcity of high quality building materials since the entire coastline along the Indian Ocean demanded so much rebuilding at once. The cost, and with it the strength of cement used for the construction of buildings was likely compromised by adding too much sand. However, such explanations cannot cover the condition in which the housing schemes are today. In the visions of the villagers with whom I discussed the quality of their houses, they are not poorly constructed simply because no decent building materials were available, but by the human choice to save, or even make money.

During our visits, villagers often showed us their houses, and pointed to many problems. Tiled roofs are leaking, the walls show large cracks, support beams are broken. The wood that was used was often not painted or lacquered when the houses were built, so rotting window frames are now a common sight. Furthermore, the clay ground is not secured by stone or brick walls. When it rains heavily, and tropical storms are quite regular, the water just runs down the hillsides and washes the clay. This only makes the houses subside and break apart even further. And to make matters worse, some villages suffer from poor drainage and sewage systems. If one family bathes, washes clothes, or even flushes the toilet, the water flows to the neighbours further down the hill. One village had a serious drinking water problem. There is no running water because the water tower is actually located below the village. This means the villagers need to walk down the steep hill to fill their tanks, and then carry them back up to their houses again. There is only one bathing well in the village which is very inconvenient for women and girls. The villagers told me the divisional government promised more facilities, both for the individual families, like water tanks and sanitation, and in infrastructure. However, as they said with some sarcasm, "*they saved the money*".

The low quality of the houses and the infrastructure of the housing schemes raises concerns about responsibility. Who is responsible for the condition of these houses? The government that

ordered the building of the housing schemes, and if so, which level of government? The INGO that came up with building plans and slapped its logo on walls and cornerstones? The local contractor that accepted the task of building the houses for the INGO? Or, in some way, the villagers themselves? Crucial in this situation is that no-one *takes* responsibility. As one villager put it, "*there is no-one who will come to see these failures and take responsibility for them.*" The government shifts the responsibility to the INGO, stating the division of tasks was such that the district secretariat would make land available and the INGO would build the housing schemes. The INGOs in turn delegated the construction to local contractors, who built weak houses. The contractors have largely disappeared from view, protected by the impermeability of INGO procedure reports and their relative anonymity.

Of course, the villagers complain, and not just to the occasional visiting researcher. One of the ways in which the local government still deals with the effects of the tsunami, is by handling the demands of villagers for better living conditions. In their defence, government officials explain they have no money to construct the proper infrastructure the villagers need. The INGOs, on their part, are largely unreachable for villagers and thus immune to their complaints. Even though INGOs often have their names screaming on the walls of the houses they are impersonal, distant, and hidden behind vagueness. Many have moved away from the area or even the country, some do not even exist anymore. Those that remain, even or especially for a researcher like myself, appear fortified: ready to keep out any curious or critical questions. Because of the enormous difference in mobility and capital between INGOs and poor villagers, villagers cannot bridge the gap between them. Putting the blame on the INGOs that never took responsibility for the poor quality of their aid would leave the villagers with empty hands: the INGO is often but a faceless and unreachable name screwed to their wall.

When discussing the quality differences between the villages, the common argument uttered by the villagers was: "*the difference is the local people.*" The poor quality of their houses is not the fault of the NGO, they say, but of the locals who were ascribed the tasks and powerful positions of construction and distribution. Some did good, others did wrong. Only a few times did villagers state that the INGO should have appointed people to check the quality of the construction and materials being used. More often, people chose to emphasise the generosity of the NGOs that built their houses. Indeed, they are still very thankful for receiving a house and other types of aid. Blaming the local government and contractors however fits the popular image of locals being corrupt, acting in favour of themselves and theirs in a system of patronage. The position of the local contractor becomes similar to that of the 'brokers' I discussed above and likewise, the contractor becomes a more tangible focal point at which villagers can direct their discontent. It keeps grievances and disputes within the grasp of local life.

Collaborating in recovery

This chapter shows that the responses to disaster are not only defined by those who were 'affected', the survivors of the tsunami. Instead, this response takes shape in the interactions between people at different levels of society, locally and globally. Asking who is then affected by the disaster leads to a dead end: in a way, we all are. However, looking at economies of compassion, in which all of these actors participate, shows that recovery takes shape exactly in these interactions and collaborations. Following Anna Tsing's (2005) conceptualisation of collaborations, and as can be observed in the Sri Lankan context, the interaction between different stakeholders in the post-tsunami is uneasy and unequal. The villagers made clear they are thankful for receiving a house, but they have no-one to be thankful to. They are angry at its weakness, but no-one seems responsible. Meanwhile the NGOs put their names on the walls of the houses and at the village entrance roads to ensure their continued presence long after they have left. What the INGOs have left behind is a vivid mix of resentment and appreciation in a remarkable system of patronising-in-absence. Money and goods were *donated*, supposedly free of charge. However, the Sri Lankan situation sometimes painfully underscores that assistance is never free.

The economy of compassion, as I observed it in Sri Lanka, is not just a matter of giving and taking, but rather a system of sometimes uncomfortable collaborations and power struggles over the distribution of capital. However, the different people that collaborated in the economy of compassion shared a certain goal: that of recovery – regardless of how divergent their conceptualisations of recovery might be. Accordingly, recovery does not take place on an exclusively local level. Instead, having examined the economy of compassion in post-tsunami Sri Lanka, I argue it is characterised by connections and collaborations that cross space, time, and scales. These interactions between scales are characterised by translation and representation, as well as mutual dependence between donors, distributors, clients, and in the gaps between them, brokers. Although there are power differences between these actors, there is agency in the distribution, acceptance, and utilisation of aid.

4. The everyday: living with uncertainty and risk

"*Do you think it will happen again?*" Ravi asked.
"*I hope not,*" I replied, "*do you think it will happen again?*"
"*We don't know*", he said.

This conversation with Ravi took place while we were swimming in Mirissa. I had decided to take a 'day off' from fieldwork: I would not be looking for data that day and I would not ask anyone anything related to the tsunami. Ravi had asked if I wanted to go swimming, and I agreed. We took his *tuk-tuk* three wheeler to Mirissa beach. The endless waves rolling onto the beach were high and strong that day. Ravi and I had been dodging and diving through them for a while when he said, "*on the tsunami day, the waves were very high.*" He explained to me how he had been drinking the night before the tsunami since it was a holiday. He had a hangover when he went to the beach where fishermen hang out the next morning, and then the tsunami came. "*I had a headache, and I was running from the water*" he said half jokingly, half serious. When this conversation took place, I realised I should have known there would be no such thing as a 'day off' from fieldwork – when studying the everyday, data is everywhere and always. What struck me most however, was how the waves that lifted us high and put us back to our feet during the conversation, continued to remind him of that day when they had been so extraordinarily high. For a fisherman like Ravi, whose job it is to swim and dive on a daily basis, to associate the ocean with the uncertain possibility of destruction seemed counterproductive, even paralysing to me. Yet it was not: he continued to like swimming and fishing, indeed he loved the sea. So what place does this uncertainty take in the lives of those whose lived experience is marked by it, and what does this tell us about recovery?

Very often when I spoke with people about the tsunami this question came to the surface: Will it happen again? And, What do you think? An important argument in the discussion that followed these questions, is that it never happened before. A tsunami never occurred in the recorded history or memory of Sri Lankan society before 2004. If the last thousand years were tsunami-free, how likely could it be that another similar catastrophe will occur in our, or our children's lifetime? On the other hand, it did happen, and it came unpredicted from outside the awareness of those who were affected. If a simple though strong earthquake could trigger a disaster of this scope once, why not twice? In dialogue, people tried to address the uncertainty and to calculate the probability of a future tsunami. Some people resorted to the first argument, while others held on strong to the second.

However, "*we don't know*" somehow remained the most salient answer, because it underwrites the existential truth that uncertainty persists regardless of any calculation of risk. Almost ten years after the tsunami, many people continue to experience the possibility of reoccurrence as a threat.

During a fishing community meeting organised by the National Fisheries Solidarity Movement (NAFSO) in Matara, I spoke with Nimal, an independent fisherman and boat-owner who told me his experience of the tsunami:

> *"My friend and I went to the beach to go fishing at seven in the morning. Then we saw the waves coming, so we ran away. We ran very fast. I wanted my family members to come out of the house. Then I saw some people go, under the water. Later we took people to the temple. We went to the harbour, on the pier. Other friends were also there. We saw there was no water, it was far away. They thought, it is now ok. I said, 'do not go down to the sea, we do not know what will happen'. But they did not think about that. Three of them got down, then the second wave came, very quickly. The water took them, and I ran again."*

Nimal describes the tsunami as a violent disruption of the everyday. Like Nimal, every survivor has a story to tell in which the destruction of houses and homes, the sight of drowning neighbours and loved ones, the fear of dying, and attempts to save others, all mount into an experience that is, to say the least, incomprehensible for those who did not witness it. The idea that the unimaginable actually happened – and might happen again – gives an extraordinary intensity to the sight of palm trees, houses, lodges, and restaurants, as well as the fishermen, beach vendors, and tourists who all live their lives in, around, and with the ocean. The thought of another tsunami makes the mind shiver, and it can influence people's choices profoundly. This chapter looks into such choices, and engages the question posed by Arthur Kleinman: "When there is real uncertainty about what to do and when the level of danger is high enough to threaten what really matters to us, what kinds of decisions do we take?" (2006: 3)

On vulnerability and risk

A massive relocation took place after the tsunami. Some people moved away from the coast voluntarily, others had little choice not to because of the exclusionary function of the buffer zones. Even at the time of fieldwork, many of the people living in the housing schemes were fishing families. Most fishermen lived close to the sea when the tsunami struck, so they are also the ones relocated through the buffer zone policy (see also chapter two). Besides fishermen, the housing schemes are populated by carpenters, guides, three-wheeler taxi drivers, small scale merchants, and people

working day-to-day jobs. Noteworthy is that these occupations all correspond to lower classes and castes in Sri Lankan society. This observation confirms the lack of possibilities that comes with lower financial, social, and political capital. Those who have the means to buy land or a social safety net to catch them if they fall, simply did not have to wait years in refugee camps, and did not have to move to the housing schemes. The importance of financial and social assets, and the differential ability to employ such resources cannot be stressed enough to understand disaster and recovery.

People dwelling near the coast were obviously more vulnerable to the physical forces of the tsunami than people living on higher grounds or further inland. However, the ways in which people were affected were also defined through social inequalities based on gender, age, class, ethnicity and other axes.[8] I borrow this line of thought from Anthony Oliver-Smith (2002), who states that the conditions of vulnerability are both environmentally and socially constructed. The people now living in the housing schemes, in this sense, were not only vulnerable to the tsunami as a natural hazard, but also to social and political aspects of the disaster, among which the practice of displacement. Even in the face of disruption the 'middle classes' were far more mobile and capable to choose where they wanted to settle. However, this differential vulnerability to disaster tells us little about the construction and calculation of risk and its role in recovery and daily life. So how do vulnerability and risk relate?

Risk and vulnerability are often used as synonyms, in the sense that 'to be at risk' equals 'to be vulnerable to' (cf. Lupton 1999). On the contrary, I argue they are not interchangeable. Vulnerability, as I use it here, is about inequality: the differential ability to make use of resources and to employ social, financial, educational, and political capital, as well as unequal human geography. Risk, on the other hand, is about perception. Risks are not solid facts, but are perceived by individuals and societies. In the words of Robert Paine, "how one views risk is culturally constructed" (2001: 68). In this sense, people continuously weigh the probability of a certain threat, and hence the risk they take by acting in certain ways. The question whether there is a 'real' threat that could justify the perception of risk becomes obsolete, for the perception of risk justifies itself. To be at Risk is a matter of reflection on one's positioning in relation to society, environment, and certain hazards. Vulnerability too can be seen as culturally constructed, in the sense that it results from constructions and representations of categorizations like class and gender. For example, in Sri Lanka men and women do not engage equally in swimming activities, which allegedly contributed to a higher death toll among women (e.g. Gamburd and McGilvray 2010). Differential vulnerability within a society may influence the idea of being at risk, while acting upon a sense of risk may alleviate or strengthen one's

● notes

[8] See for example the reports published shortly after the tsunami by the Ministry of Finance and Planning (2005a; 2005b); and the World Bank (2005); and the writings of Rajamanickam (2006); Samarakoon (2010); Leitan (2009).

vulnerability. Similarly, attempts to reduce one's vulnerability may serve to mitigate the sense of risk. To continue the previous example, one local NGO organised swimming and tree-climbing lessons for women after the tsunami to reduce their vulnerability in the future. According to the organisers, it helped women to feel more secure if they knew how to deal with, and escape the water.

Everyday uncertainties in the housing schemes

In the housing schemes, most people expressed a feeling of comfort that comes with being away from the ocean. In general, people told me, one "*should not live too close to the sea*". Living at a large distance from the sea means being protected from a possible tsunami in the future. The issue of safety – not to be at risk – turns out to be very important for people's perceptions of their living environment. However, being 'away from the ocean' is not the only aspect by which people calculate their sense of risk and safety. Allow me to illustrate this point through three issues that were brought to my attention by the inhabitants of the housing schemes: the distance between the housing schemes and the urban coast; the quality of the built environment; and an instance of neighbourhood violence.

To understand the issue of remoteness in the housing schemes, one needs to know that moving from a village on the coastline to a village inland, means moving from an urban to a rural area. The villagers now living in the housing schemes, were often used to the busy market life of Matara and its surrounding towns and the proximity of commercial, religious, and administrative centres. In chapter two I already stressed the importance for fishermen to be close to sea. Sitting by the coast, surveying the weather, the sky, the wind, the waves, they can tell when and where to go out to sea. They are close to their boats, the core of their livelihoods. Living in the housing schemes has made life as a fisher family harder, and more insecure than it already was. Fishermen can no longer see when to go fishing from their homes. One fisherman explained to me he goes to Matara, where he used to live and which is 15 km from the housing scheme, every day to fish. However, he cannot estimate when would be a good time to go, he cannot improvise. Sometimes a friend calls him to say when the time is good, but it takes one and a half hours to get from his house to his boat, and the moment may be gone. After moving to the housing scheme, he saw his income decrease considerably. "*But*," he says, "*we manage…*"

Often, the practice of fishing demands that both men and women come to the beach early in the morning or late at night – these are the times fish can be harvested, collected and prepared, to be sold at local markets. Because many do not have private transport, and there is no public transport available to them at night, they have to walk in the dark through rural areas. This is difficult but can also be dangerous. Especially women are limited by this because of their vulnerability to sexual violence. Fisherwomen are often the ones processing their husband's harvest. Drying and preparing

fish at home for the local market is one of the ways in which fisherwomen contribute to the family's income. Yet living up to 10 km away from the sea, many women lost this type of self-employment. Some have found other ways to make some money, for example by making ropes out of coconut fibre for farmers, but in the absence of available land around their houses, and with the problem of transportation from and to the home such self-employment possibilities are very limited.

While both women and men I spoke with complained about getting to sea, women also mentioned the difficulty of getting the children to school. These differences reflect traditional roles ascribed to men and women but they also indicate that the distance affects the entire family in finance, education, and religion. Like so many facilities, most schools are located in and around the towns on the urban coast. Similarly, not every village has a temple nearby. This means religious habits of visiting a temple regularly had to be revised, as well as the possibilities to attend Sunday school. The distance to sea affects entire fishing families and is more than an inconvenience. Especially for small scale fisher families, it can be an outright disruption of their livelihoods: the men suffer from a declining harvest while the women are having difficulties to perform their tasks in the pre- and post-harvest sectors. The lack of private and public transport in many housing schemes aggravates the threat to livelihoods and access to resources.

It is common for villages to be located inland, and sometimes in places difficult to access. Many Sri Lankan villagers live in remote areas and experience the difficulties of getting from and to urban centres. Villagers throughout the country share the problems that come with remoteness encountered by the inhabitants of the housing schemes. In this sense, the issue of distance is nothing new in Sri Lanka. Yet the people in the housing schemes do not just experience problems with the distance to work, shops, schools, or temples. For them, it is also a matter of disruption. The habitat they were used to has become difficult to maintain.

The second issue is the quality of the houses. In Chapter three I already pointed out that many houses were built with low-quality materials and roads and drainage systems are often inadequate or even non-existent. Usually, the villagers were eager to tell me about these problems. During these conversations it became clear that leaking roofs, cracked walls, broken windows, and clogged sewers are all daily matters for those living in the housing schemes. Such inconveniences contribute to villagers' lived experiences of the disaster on a long term. They pose challenges for the inhabitants on different levels. Financial means need to be employed for repairing, political means are necessary for government support, social relations are stressed when neighbours argue about scarcity of water, and health becomes compromised by humid houses and sewage floods. Many housing schemes were built on hillsides. The clay ground visibly suffers from erosion and gets very slippery when it rains. This situation can be dangerous for elderly people and those who are physically less mobile, and it aggravates the problem of transport and mobility I discussed above. Some houses have especially

weak roofs, with wooden beams sagging under the weight of the tiles. Poor fisher families have little resources to repair the houses themselves and lack the political influence to demand support. Though what I want to point out here, is that the low quality is not only annoying and frustrating, it is also a source of fear. As one villager put it, "*we were saved from the tsunami but when this house collapses we are still dead.*"

The third issue I want to point at here is the sense of community in the housing schemes. As a result of the buffer zone policy, many people were displaced from the coastal areas. In some cases, people from a certain village all moved to the same housing scheme. In other cases, people from different villages, but from the same area came to live together. And some housing schemes are completely comprised of 'leftovers', people who were in need of a house when other villages were already full. In any case, some form of community building had to take place in these brand new villages. In most housing schemes the villagers were positive about their social environment, stating that there were no major issues or unrest. They had formed new neighbourhoods, and during our visits, I sometimes found it hard to believe that these close communities only existed for five or six years. Some villages experienced minor conflicts between neighbours. And then there were a few villages in which people complained about drug and alcohol abuse, theft, and violence.

It was in one of these villages, that Maduka introduced me to a befriended fisherman. Maduka had called him to make sure we could visit, so we would not have to wander the village looking for informants – "*a little danger*" we had to avoid. The fisherman made a downtrodden impression. Only when his toddler son waved at him from the yard a smile appeared on his face. The living room was empty apart from a cabinet and five plastic chairs. Only a calendar was pinned to the wall. Thinking of the housing schemes I had seen before, I asked about the quality of the building. It is good, he said, no problems with the house. He explained it is by far better than the house they used to live in before the tsunami. They had a wooden house on a small piece of government land. Now they have cement walls and a tiled roof. Still, he does not like living here. The distance to the sea, 4 km, is a problem, but what is worse is the neighbourhood. There are only 45 houses in the village but the fisherman complains about alcohol abuse, drugs and violence*. Every time I go out fishing*, he says, *I fear for the safety of my wife and children.*

What good does it do to live in an assigned 'safe environment' without fearing a tsunami, if this built, social, and natural environment has its own dangers to cope with? An individual's calculation of risk, these people show us, is not limited to that of the tsunami. Living in the housing schemes also requires the villagers to estimate the probability of (sexual) violence on the night's walk to the beach, the costs of getting the children to school and the drawback of not enjoying education, the uncertainty brought by sub-standard constructions and neighbourhood violence, and a very fundamental breach in the family's livelihood. The disaster involves a disruption that reaches far

beyond the physical forces of the tsunami. It has affected families in their social, financial, and educational capital. Therefore recovery, in Hastrup's definition "the gradual interweaving of the disaster and the ordinary" (2011: 99), addresses each of these issues and not just the physical disruption of the tsunami.

In *What really matters*, Arthur Kleinman writes: "We tend to think of dangers and uncertainties as anomalies in the continuum of life, or irruptions of unpredictable forces into a largely predictable world. I suggest the contrary: that dangers and uncertainties are an inescapable dimension of life. In fact, […] they make life matter. They define what it means to be human" (2006: 1). What follows from this line of thought is that the disaster may be an 'anomaly' in its scope and disruptive force, but that risk and uncertainty are not limited to that of the tsunami. People can be vulnerable in many ways and to many threats. Therefore risk is, and I argue, can only be, constructed and calculated in relation to other aspects of daily life.

Engaging risk on the beach

For those that continue to live close to the ocean, its unpredictability nourishes a deep sense of uncertainty. The fear of a tsunami comes forth from the lived experience of the disaster and the awareness that there is such a thing as tsunamis, something the Sri Lankan population was generally unaware of before 2004. The question that rises is, how do these people recover from disruption and deal with uncertainty in daily life?

One of the measures taken by the state in response to the tsunami is the implementation of the buffer zones, of which I discussed the implications in chapter two and in the previous section in more detail. Another measure taken by the state, is the installation of early warning systems, and the organisation of what one INGO worker called 'mock drills'. The early warning systems operate on a global scale, and are supposed to be activated when an earthquake that might trigger a tsunami occurs in the Indian Ocean. Through cell phone messages and sirens placed along the coast, people at all levels of society will be notified as early as possible. Furthermore, emergency bags are distributed, and escape routes are marked. Every year the alarm systems are tested during mock drills. Nimal, who continues to live just outside the buffer zone, explains:

> *"The Disaster Management Centre has given the training. When the alarm sounds, we have one hour. We have this small bag in the house, it was given by the government. They said we should put the jewels and the legal documents in it, and the birth certificates, some very important things. Then we should get the bag, and run away. That is the plan we have now."*

Nimal pointed out that the way he faces the risk of a possible tsunami, is by being prepared, knowing what to expect and how to act should it happen. The government facilitates and encourages this kind of preparedness, while the systems are also dependent on global monitoring systems and expert knowledge. According to Anthony Elliott, "it is societal intervention – in the form of decision-making – that transforms incalculable hazards into calculable risks" (2002: 295). As I see it, the organisation of mock drills and the presence of early warning systems, makes the risk of a tsunami calculable. They give the impression that one can be prepared, that the uncertainty of living near the ocean can be managed and controlled. However, this 'calculable risk' is mediated by experts (Beck 1992; Hanlon 2010; Lupton 1999). In this view, people build on, and enter into dialogue with, expert knowledge for their calculation of risk. Experts tell people in what ways they are, and are not at risk, and people may choose to adopt these views based on their own lived experiences (Hanlon 2010). For Nimal and many others living and working near the sea, the idea that they can be warned – by experts and the state – if a tsunami would come has entered their calculation of risk. It has made the undertaking of being at the coast a little less precarious.

During fieldwork I have not been able to witness a mock drill, but for what I have heard they invoke images of the tsunami, and re-ignite a sense of fear. Sanuthi, a woman in her forties who lives close to sea in the Matara district, barely survived the tsunami. She told me about the way in which the tsunami continues to be a source of fear. She goes upstairs every time she hears news reports of earthquakes in the region, and when the alarm sounds, she flees away from the house to higher ground. She tells me the mock drills are chaotic because people are scared. Even though there is no actual tsunami, the chaos and confusion is like it was that day in 2004. She goes on to tell me that during the mock drills 'bad people' loot the empty houses and rob people of their 'red bags' containing their valuables.

It seems that the sense of risk that comes with proximity to the ocean is reinforced by such mock drills and false alarms; the presence of an emergency bag in every house emphasises the need to be alert and ready to leave at all times. The calculation of risk, and the comfort of knowing what to do, that the mock drills seek to install, are compromised by the fear of looting and by the sense of insecurity that comes with the warning systems themselves. Following this line of thought, the measures taken by the state may not directly fuel fear and the sense of being at risk, but they influence how individuals calculate the risk of a tsunami as an unpredictable and unreliable hazard. The fear can be focussed at certain points such as the sound of the alarm, and it can be leashed through the idea of being able to escape quickly with one's most important possessions, along an outlined route. However, the ability to calculate risk also means that it can be calculated as a threat that might descend upon society at any time. In other words, making risk calculable does not lessen it.

Sanuthi tells me that she survived the tsunami because she managed to climb up on the roof where she waited for the water to pull back. As she and her husband reconstructed their home, they added three floors to the building. Ever since the water rose up several metres and as far as two kilometres inland in this area, height has become associated with safety. Many houses in the area now have two or more floors. While most houses are fully used, some people have left the top floors empty or even unfinished: they are a bare concrete stairway to safety. Others, although this is rare, have seemingly lifted their house on concrete stilts. Sanuthi also tells me about her neighbours next door. They all work as servants, so they do not have the resources to add a floor to their house, she says with a pity. To 'build back higher' is a way in which people actively take control over their sense of risk and, in so doing, a way of "making the everyday inhabitable again" (Hastrup 2011: 44). However, it has also become a sign of status. It is not common in Sri Lanka to have houses "*with an upstairs*" since most people simply cannot afford it. After the tsunami however, people living near the coast often received aid from (I)NGOs to re/construct their houses and they started adding floors. Those of higher status could not stay behind, and found in the practice of adding floors to their house a way to re-establish their economic and social superiority that had become questionable by the overwhelming force of the tsunami. To build back higher serves to engage the sense of risk at the coast, but it also worked to visualise the power relations in the village: he who has the highest tower, is the richest, the safest, and the most powerful.

However, the practice of adding floors to one's house to create a sense of safety does not work the same way for everyone. Maduka and I visited what seemed to be yet another housing scheme. However, as we spoke with Sathi, a woman aged 63, this turned out not to be the case. While all of the houses were built by an INGO, the woman explained, they were built on the land already owned by the beneficiaries. The entire village was built between the 35 metre buffer zone and the main road at 200 metres from the sea. The people who lived within the buffer zone moved to housing schemes, the woman is able to tell us. The INGO told the villagers the houses were constructed especially to endure a similar disaster, and with rooms upstairs to provide safety in the case of a tsunami, but Sathi is not enthusiastic. She used to live with her mother who died in the tsunami, and she also lost relatives elsewhere in the village. "*I think about them"*, she says. Clearly, the brand new house could not compensate her grieving. When I ask if she feels safe, she knocks with her fist on the wall before answering confidently that she does not trust the building can withstand a tsunami. Maybe the NGO was right, Sathi argued, but the local contractors may not have constructed it well. Apparently the INGO claimed to use innovative building techniques to provide the new houses, but these are undermined by suspicions of local irresponsibility or incapability – floating stories which may or may not be grounded. Sathi does not take the promises of safety that came with the building

Image 4.1 'Multiday boats' afloat in a natural harbour near Dondra

for granted. Again, calculations of risk do not necessarily follow official policies or expert's knowledges.

As explained in chapter two, some people have managed to return to live inside the buffer zone. I discussed the situation of Ranuga and his family who continue to live at a stone's throw from the ocean, but outside the rule and protection of the state. After they explained the bureaucratic aspects of their living conditions, we discussed the issue of safety and uncertainty. Even though their village was located on flat land and close to sea, none of the houses had a first floor. When I asked why the family rebuilt their house on ground level, Ranuga, fisherman and head of the family, pointed to the 8m long multi-day boats that floated calmly in the bay (see image 4.1). The choice not to add a floor to the house was not based on financial limitations, he explained. With a tsunami, these boats all come to land and they will crush the brick walls of any house easily. In that situation it makes no difference to be upstairs.

I asked Ranuga if he feels safe living on the coast. He answered he does feel the housing scheme is a safer place, especially now the state has explicitly turned its back on him. Safety however, is not so easily defined. As the fisherman says it, "*the village may be safer, but there is no food. If I am far away, how can I get to the beach? How can I go fishing? So that is why. I have to face that challenge! That is why I decided to stay here.*" Fishing is how he makes a living, and as a fisherman, he states, he needs to be close to sea. The fishermen I encountered who continued to live close to

sea or even in the buffer zone all calculated one risk as being greater than the other – for them the risk of losing income is more substantial and more worrying than the risk of tsunami occurrence. Furthermore, they often expressed the argument that they *are* fishermen, and therefore need to be at sea. Engaging risk, as Lupton emphasises, "may also be important to people's sense of self-identity as part of a social group or sub-culture" (1999: 112), and may function as a "unifying force" (1999:113). Fishing is more than an occupation, it is also about a social role, occupying a niche in society: being a fisherman, among fishermen.

At first, I was struck by how easily, almost indifferently Ranuga spoke of the risk of a tsunami. Then it struck me that by 'squatting' inside the buffer zone, the family negotiated the buffer zone policy, the regulatory power of the state, and the *perception of risk itself*. For this fisherman, safety was not just about being away from the sea, or being able to flee upstairs when a tsunami comes, but about being able to make a living – to make ends meet *as a fisherman*. It goes to show that, in the words of Lupton, "alternative rationalities, often portrayed by experts as inaccurate or irrational, often make sense in the context of an individual's life situation" (1999: 111). This fisherman engaged the expert knowledge and chose not to adopt it as it was presented to him, but to weigh it along other aspects of daily life.

Risk and recovery

After the tsunami, people faced many uncertainties, among which the possibility of reoccurrence. The examples above demonstrate that the recalculation of risk and safety is an important move in recovery. It turns out that feeling safe is far from solid or static. It is rather a weighing of many different aspects: the actual distance from the sea does matter, but possibilities to make a living do too, just like the quality of one's house and popular discourses all influence this calculation of risk. One may live high and dry, but if that means there is no running water, and if the area is prone to landslides, and the house one lives in is on the verge of collapsing, the feeling of safety that comes with the distance to the sea becomes easily compromised. Vulnerability cannot be confined to a single hazard, and involves access to resources on many levels such as health, education, employment, social services, markets, and religion. Therefore calculations of risk must be diverse, maybe inconsistent and contradictory.

What I want to point at here, is that people can have their own conceptions of safety and risk, which are grounded in their social, economical, political and environmental positioning. As they go about recovery, people do not perceive the risk of a tsunami separately from their daily life. Paraphrasing Macgill, Lupton states that "people's perceptions and understandings of risk are established over a lifetime of personal experiences as well as their location within social milieux and networks of communication" (Lupton 1999: 112). Linking these thoughts to the disaster, I conclude

that, rather than forming an independent risk, the disaster becomes integrated into everyday calculations of risk. As such, the calculation and perception of risk is integral to recovery. Building on Hastrup's (2011) conceptualisation of recovery as the process of folding the disaster into the ordinary, I state that: recovery involves the creation and readjustment of perceptions of risk, through the subject's positioning and disaster experiences and in negotiation with other knowledges and perceptions, and the incorporation of these perceptions into the everyday. To formulate this differently, in recovery, people calculate and perceive risk in ways that make sense in their daily lives.

5. Conclusion: negotiating recovery

In this thesis, I have sought to shed light on the crossroads between globalisation and disaster by analysing the collaborations between tsunami survivors, organisations, government, and other stakeholders in southern Sri Lanka. To explore how the tsunami and global connections relate and become expressed in the everyday, I have aimed at demonstrating how these collaborations facilitate, limit, and generally give shape to recovery. Where Hastrup states that recovery is the process of "gradually folding the tsunami into the ordinary" (2011: 129), I would argue it is that and more. This definition focuses on recovery at a local level, while recovery, as I see it, continually crosses scales. Oliver-Smith and Hoffman also recognise this, and state that:

> "disasters also display and articulate the linkages between the local community and larger structures. The substance and expression of normal relations between community, region, state, and nation are measured as formal and informal agreements and alliances are called upon to mobilize resources and support in stressful conditions." (2002 : 10)

Based on my observations in Sri Lanka I would go even further and state that recovery is possible not in spite, but because of cultural diversity and the "creative friction" (Tsing 2005) this produces. The interactions between stakeholders across scales facilitate recovery precisely because they are marked by difference, misunderstandings, translations, and power struggles. These interactions contain gaps that need to be bridged through practices of translation and brokerage, but that also provide room for creativity and agency. Recovery is a process consisting of confrontations and negotiations; a frontier in which social relations are not (yet) regulated. Precisely through these confrontations and negotiations, people engage this unregulated character and seek to establish and engage new forms of social order – the recovery from disruption. Focussing on collaborations reveals that recovery is both process and project. Process, because it is a continuous course of actions and changes, evolving and unfolding in multiple expected and unexpected ways. Recovery is also a social project, not in the sense that it is organised, regulated, or even limited in time and space, but because it can and will be planned, strategized, and directed to certain goals or purposes. Different people and organisations come together and actively contribute to its creativity and evolution. Recovery, in this sense, is a collective effort and is continually negotiated.

In the introduction to this thesis I posed the question, where to locate recovery in space and time? I have demonstrated throughout the previous chapters that recovery happens in the negotiation between actors at different scales. It involves the incorporation of the disaster in the

everyday, but the everyday and the disaster are both characterised by global connections. It can thus not be pinpointed to a specific place or be confined to 'the local', but rather should be located in the interactions between scales. On the temporality of recovery, I have shown that the anticipation of a future tsunami is as much a part of recovery as the overcoming of the last one. Hastrup states that "recovery in the aftermath of the disaster has entailed a creation of a durable present and a possible future prospect as much as a retrospective coping with a past historical event" (2011: 130). In this light I state that people recover *from* the tsunami, not *after* the tsunami. Recovery is "process, not arrival" (Tiffin 2006: 99).

I have also sought to provide insight in the creativity with which people engage the disaster and recovery. The reality of, rather than a rational explanation for, recovery can be found precisely in this creativity (cf. Nordstrom 2010). The reality of recovery is embedded in the lived experiences of all actors involved, the stories they tell, and the actions they take. It is with this creativity that people challenge their exclusion from the buffer zones, that they bridge the gaps between donor and client, and that they incorporate uncertainty and disruption into their daily lives. Following Hastrup (2011) and Das and Kleinman (2001), I have approached the everyday as 'daily life in the present', or 'the ordinary'. However, these authors assert, the everyday is not 'uneventful'. On the contrary, daily life is the site of the strategic and the creative, where people actively deal with the past and anticipate the future (cf. Hastrup 2011: 115), where politics is played, and where choices are made. The conversations I had with people in Sri Lanka continually made me realise how inextricably the tsunami is interwoven with individual life stories, lived experiences, and daily life, but also with political processes, national histories, and global flows, movements, and connections.

It must be noted that global connections are characterised by inequality, instability and awkwardness (e.g. Appadurai 2008; Inda and Rosaldo 2008; Nordstrom 2004; 2007; 2010; Tsing 2005; 2008). I have shown that global inequalities, manifested for example in the differences in mobility and access to resources between tourists and fisher folks, have a profound influence on the courses recovery can take. Recovery, to use Nordstrom's words, is "a highly contested process. The situation at the local level is complex and contradictory" (2010: 254). The unregulated character of the disaster does not provide absolute freedom. On the contrary, recovery is also limited by the collaborations at hand and their fundamental inequality. It takes shape according to the negotiations that are, so to speak, its back bone. This concern with inequality draws attention to the issue of power. It is useful to approach disaster and recovery as instruments of disciplinary power, because it helps to understand the policies and challenges that unfold in disruption. Recovery seeks to overcome disruption and chaos caused by disaster from which it emerges, but in this process it can disrupt even further precisely because of the power struggles at play. The process of "gradually

folding the tsunami into the ordinary" (Hastrup 2011: 129) is necessarily uneasy and unequal, and not always to everyone's benefit.

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