NARRATION ON DEMONSTRATION OF POLITICAL POWER THROUGH USE OF ARCHITECTURE IN POST-CONFLICT COLOMBO

Rajitha Katugaha⁎, Prasad Botejue
University of Moratuwa, Katubedda, Sri Lanka

Abstract

Architecture and political power have associated each other throughout the history. It is vital that architects have understanding on this nexus since they along pose the academic training and capacity in shaping the built environment. According to Lefebvre(1991) it is in this 'space' created by architecture, that we perceive, conceive and live. The study was intended to investigate on post-conflict Colombo in an attempt to understand the nexus between architecture and political power. The study intended to investigating 'how' architecture demonstrate political power and 'what' they intend to mean, thereby derive new learnings. The research was done in stages. First a theoretical framework was established in order to obtain a proper understanding of the subject. The next step was a literature survey to understand the context which was essential to understand the case study analysis. Furthermore, historical international scenarios where political power has been strongly evident were studied. The case study which was post-conflict Colombo (2009-2015) analysed in comparison to the theoretical framework, literature review and with broad range of evidence gathered through interviews, newspapers, magazines, videos, photographs, reports and many more. The study was broad and multi-disciplinary by its' nature. Hence, the research had to be carefully narrowed down without compromising its' very nature. Furthermore, since the research is investigating into social-physical phenomena which took place in a specific period of time in history, the analysis is conducted on narrative format, with the intention of describing it in holistic form. Following major facts were identified as conclusions; existence if a strong context or a situation; demonstration of power was through both the process of building and built form; symbolic representation had multiple identities.

Keywords: Built form, Process, Place, Representation, Identity, Urban illusion, Beautification

⁎ Corresponding Author: Rajitha Katugaha; E-mail- xxxyyyzzz@yahoo.com

Introduction

The study was about investigating the nexus between architecture and political power. Architecture has always associated power and it has been used as tool in many ways to demonstrate political power throughout history in an attempt legitimize.

First part is an overall introduction to the study, which gives an overview of the research. Aims and Objectives and Scope and Limitations are discussed as well.

Second part is the literature review. The main theoretical framework will elaborate on certain theories under four concepts; power, program, representation and place. This will bring forward the use and misuse of the concept of power. This will set the background to understand specifics such as practice of force, authority, seduction, legitimation and manipulation. These will be spoken in relation to practice of such practices in space. Next, the study exploreed theoretical bases for interpreting architecture and urban design, in terms of representation. Forms of representation can construct desirers, identities and oppositions. This will help to understand how arbitrary meaning are naturalized and the discourse of power is rendered benign. Finally, focus is on theories of 'place'.

Further, extracts from known publications were specifically studied; The social construction of urban meaning from Urban Sociology, Capitalism and Modernity (Savage & Warde, 1993) and Identity from Architecture, Power and National Identity by Lawrence Vale (1992). Yet it is important to know that these are not the only sources and topics which are to help in understanding this study. Finally, power relations in the world with architecture are discussed.

The data/evidences on case studies in post-conflict Colombo will be collected, organized, evaluated and narrated in a circular process with reference to the theoretical framework in order to derive the conclusions.

Research Objectives

Short Term

(1) How architecture is used to demonstrate political power and what they mean in deeper sense in terms of cultural, psychological, social.
(2) Thereby, create a foundation in understanding nexus between architecture and urban design and power by analysing a selected case study (Colombo).

Long Term

(1) It is important that as designers have an understanding on these, since it is the architects and urban designers themselves are the ones who has the capacity and academic training in creating the built environment. Therefore, this understanding is vital certain that in order for an architect to fulfil their role and responsibilities in the society.
(2) Setting up a foundation for further research on this field of study
(3) Thereby, contributing to the architectural discourse

Scope and Limitations

The case study will be post-conflict Colombo (2009-2015). It is important that to look at transformation of Colombo as whole rather than picking individual works of architecture (buildings) in order to understand role of architecture as a demonstrator of political power. As

Jameson (1997) put suggests, none of the individual projects that makes up politics has the supreme value of the whole collective activity. Furthermore, if such limitations were taken into considerations, the value of the research will not able to be achieved fully.

First and foremost, the reader needs to be fully convinced that the research does not intend to judge politics, governments or political personalities nor it tries to judge whether they were right or wrong. The intention was to understand how political power was demonstrated through use of architecture and what they mean.

Yet, due to the time restrictions and to the fact that the study is a multi-disciplinary and broad in nature, the research will accommodate certain limitations as far as an academic research is concerned.

(1) The research viewed post-conflict Colombo as whole as a public space and will only be focusing on projects initiated directly by the State (Urban Development Authority -UDA).

(2) The focus was on renovation projects which were turned into uptown shopping malls, urban parks and development of streets for a certain extend out of the all state initiated projects.

(3) Adopted a narrative research format and thereby incorporating wide range on evidence and literature from publications, interviews, web articles, videos, photographs, newspaper and magazine articles, public lectures and discussions and reports.

(4) The published reports were expected to fill in the gaps created by the difficulty in conducting surveys covering large portion from the public (to ensure justice for the case study) and the fact that this research is done in a much later period in time (the research looks into development in immediate post-conflict Colombo from 2009 to 2015).

Literature Review

Main Theoretical Framework

Power

The word power is used and rather misused widely. It refers to a variety of different capacities. The potential danger in using this term word is that it can mean anything therefore nothing. The term 'power' derives from the Latin word potere, which means 'to be able' or the capacity to meet an end. Generally, in human affairs, power is control 'over' others. Isaac (1992) states that the distinction between 'power to' and 'power over' or in other words between power as capacity and as a relationship between people, is fundamental (Dovey, 2008). According to Rorty (as cited in Dovey, 2008, p.11) "Power is the ability…to define and control circumstances and events so that on can influence things to go in the direction of one's interest".

Everyday life experiences have seemingly given awareness of 'power over' while 'power to' is taken to granted. Therefore, this could be identified as an illusion which creates an opposition between power and emancipation.

The distinction between power over and power to is important. Power over is the power of one agent (an individual or a group) has over another. Power to ensure the compliance of the other with one's will. The distinctions between terms such as coercion, manipulation, force, authority

and seduction are important. These forms rarely appear in isolation. In fact, often in a complex mix of them in architecture and urban design (Dovey, 2008).

There is a question whether exercise of power over is mostly transparent to its agent. Nietzsche says that civilized life is really a cover for an all-consuming 'will to power'. Machiavelli had said that all forms of legitimation are masks for the individual 'will'. Either self-deceit or hypocrisy is necessary to the effective pursuit of power, since naked 'will to power' cannot be legitimized as an end itself. Self-deceit is what Orwell terms as 'double think', where two contradictory beliefs are held within and thereby deliberately service one agenda while justifying it with the use of another. Self-deceit is important to the discourse of aesthetics (Dovey, 2008).

Powerful symbolic use of physical environment which is a form of political power (Vale, 1992) has a strong say in the political space. This is due to the capacity it poses to stabilize identity and symbolize a 'grounding' of authority in the landscape, nature and 'timeless' imagery. It is clear that architecture is called regularly to legitimate power in a crisis (Dovey, 2008).

Programme

There are some main social theories which would help to understand how the power is mediated through spatial planning and spatial practices. The Theory of Structuration by Anthony Gidden is one such. Yet, at this point, the study will only touch upon only on certain parts which can be related to understand this nexus between architecture and political power, since these theories are vast bodies of knowledge which addresses a broad range of social phenomenon.

Representation

This part of theoretical study is on representation will help to understand the ways in which ways the meanings of places are constructed in text. These theory systems are largely from social theory. The language is not a transparent medium and it is through the language that we view the world, rather the language is what construct the experiences (Dovey, 2008). The city is a discourse which is a language. The city would speaks to its citizens, we peak our city simply by living in it (Barthes, 1997). Concepts such as culture, identity, nature and community are social constructions. Therefore, the central role of agency is questioned. Human being as an agent is replaced by the 'subject' who is constructed and enmeshed in the discourse, through which meanings are communicated. The built environment is a major form of discourse just as speech, food or fashion. In this sense, power relations are naturally entangled with the discourse since the subjects are constructed with certain interests. It includes the interest of the state in maintaining social order and power; private interests in stimulating consumption; and dominant cultures, classes and groups interests in maintaining privileges. Desire, identity, fear and joy are created from representation and discourse., which would create oppositions between the normal and the deviant (Dovey, 2008). As Dovey (2008) say, the real becomes a social construction.

Place

'Place' can be viewed as an experiential phenomenon as opposed to 'space'. It is a location which is experienced as meaningful in a larger spatial context. The concept of 'place' is linked with terms such as identity, community, character, home which play major roles in everyday life. However, these are the terms which resonate in different scales from local to global; neighbourhood, city, region, nation and global. Places construct and frame programs and representational narratives (Dovey, 2008).

Related Literature

The social construction of urban meaning

Based on Savage, M., & Warde, A. (1993). *Urban sociology, capitalism and modernity*. Hong Kong: The Macmillan Press (Ltd).

Lefebvre (1991) describes relationships between three elements of space; spatial practices, representation of space and space of representation. He also terms them as the experienced, the perceived and the imagined. The social construction of space involves the alterations in peoples actual experience of places, not just a discursive process from which places are valued differently.

The notion of a 'created space' is something that both Anthony Giddens and David Harvey adopted from Lefebvre's work. Harvey (1988) says that signs, symbols and signals in the urban environment are very powerful influences. Giddens (1981) takes it further claiming that dominance of created spaces is a distinctive element of contemporary societies. Raymond Williams (1973) suggests the countryside is always presented as an image of the past and the city as an image of the future. Countryside image associate more human and natural ways while the image if the city is about progress, modernization and development. Such constructed images are misleading. The cultural construction of places tends to lose the persistence on the dialectic with experience suggested Lefebvre.

The process of symbolization involves selecting few symbolic representations and marketing them as the city itself. Both Williams (1973) and Strauss (1961) emphasis the disjuncture between the image and the 'reality' retaining the distinction. The reality or the real seeing of the city does not live up to the promises or expectations which he terms as phenomenon of disappointment. The imaginative impact of the symbol which is conclusive and overwhelming might be rather disappointing in the actual perspective and detail of a city.

The idea that urban cultures are constructed around a series of symbolic marker was presented by Gerald Suttles in 1984. He identifies three main sources to which he terms as 'city images'. They are representation of city founders, notable entrepreneurial leaders and the use of local artefacts, especially artefacts which are enshrined in museums. Suttles use the term 'museumization'.

At this point, Rob Shields notion of 'spatial socialization' offers a remedy. He describes (1991) this notion as, "to designate the ongoing social construction of the spatial at the level of the social imagery as well as interventions in the landscape". This notion would define particular places as good or bad. Through social spatialization, places are constructed meaningfully. Place-myths are constructed with the use of mass media, novels, advertising and so forth. Places are defined discursively by broader cultural media rather than merely as a by-product of the built form and they have very little reference to their physical attributes or qualities.

Identity

Based on Vale, L. (1992). *Architecture, power and national identity*. London: Yale University Press.

Symbolics of city building a nation building have often seem to synchronize despite the fact that not all cities, especially capital cities were constructed in the aftermath of independence or civil war or such situation. It seems that in most instances it can be connected to an attempt by the

rural elites to build national unity and groom national identity in the face of diverse contending groups located in rival urban centers. In this course of building, national identity and national unity, many successful movements in the last half-century have attempted to use architecture and urban design and planning to advance their status. Governments and heir leaders have tried to define a sense of national identity by carefully manipulating the built environment, especially through designs of entire cities or designs of capitol complexes.

Processes after independence or civil war or a situation of such nature need more than a political change in government. There raises the need for a broader alteration in the social and cultural consciousness. As Geertz (1973) points out, the nationalism which drove the revolution is not the same type of nationalism needed in the aftermath of the revolution to define the self that is been freed. As Geertz notes, national identity has to be internally fostered, among individuals and groups of the post-conflict (new) state, rather than oppositionally.

The concept of national identity is entangled with other concepts such as nation and nationalism. Nationalism, as Ernest Gellner describes in *Nations and Nationalism* (1983) (Gellner's theory of nationalism), is the 'theory of political legitimacy'. He suggests that both political and national unit should be in harmony. Most historians are under impression that it is nationalism which would bring forward the existence of nations and not vice-versa.

Dimensions of national identity in architecture

In assemblage of national identity, architecture and acts of urban design assume a peculiar place. Not only they associate individual statesman, yet they too get infused with symbolism of the state/ government and such association with symbolism remain powerful.

Capital cities and parliament buildings in particular are seeming to convey or rather sell the idea of national identity, since they are built to serve and symbolize the state. However, their sittings and appearance are decided by the political leadership than by the people. Thereby raise the question whether they resemble true national identity or if so to what extent. Architecture is used as a tool to promote national identity. However, most dimensions of this notion of national identity still remain unarticulated.

These influences are sometimes predilection of individuals; the politician and thee designer. They intend project the nation that they seek to build. Design decisions are made by certain individuals while they too may have certain group affiliations.

Architecture and Political Power in the World

Architecture can be understood in different ways. When trying to understand transformation of cities and particular work of architecture created by the direct and indirect involvement of the state, it is vital to understand them in different dimensions of political point of views. One needs to understand them in terms of the political and cultural context that helped to bring these factions into power. Transformation of built environment needs to be studied and analysed parallel to the political structure of the state and its' evolution.

The built space is what we perceive, conceive and live (Lefebvre, 1973). Aristotle once said that man is a political creature. Therefore, the built environment or space is created and lived by the man is essentially political. The buildings and their contexts are symbols of political presence and economic power.

Having stated that, it is clear why political idols have closely associated architects and have been conscious on built environment throughout the history across the globe. Unlike any other forms of art Architecture is can be identified as the single most dominant instrument of demonstrating political power (Jameson, 1997)

There are quite a number of cities, monuments and contexts which can be studied as precedents. The City Beautification Movement in Chicago, New Delhi, Berlin and Moscow during 1900-1945, is one such. The City Beautification movement had its origins in the nineteenth century which was on the promenades and boulevards in Europe. The two classic examples were the construction of Paris by Haussmann under Napoleon III and the construction of Vienna Ring Strasse. However, the twentieth century manifestation were seen in other parts of the world and cultures. One such was in western and middle America, where civic leaders wanted to overcome collective inferiority complex and boost business by building (verb). The other fine example was in British colonies, where British civil servants were commissioned to plan the newly designated capitals of the Empire, which were meant to express and showcase the imperial dominance and racial exclusiveness. Then again in 1930s, the city beautification came to its spiritual and geographic location; Europe. The totalitarian dictators who were largely interested in the powerful use symbolic use of physical environment (Vale, 1992), wanted to impose their megalomaniac vision of glory on their capital cities (Hall, 2001). As Hall (2001) suggests, there are strange similarities in the outcomes with disquieting implication, despite the superficially different contexts.
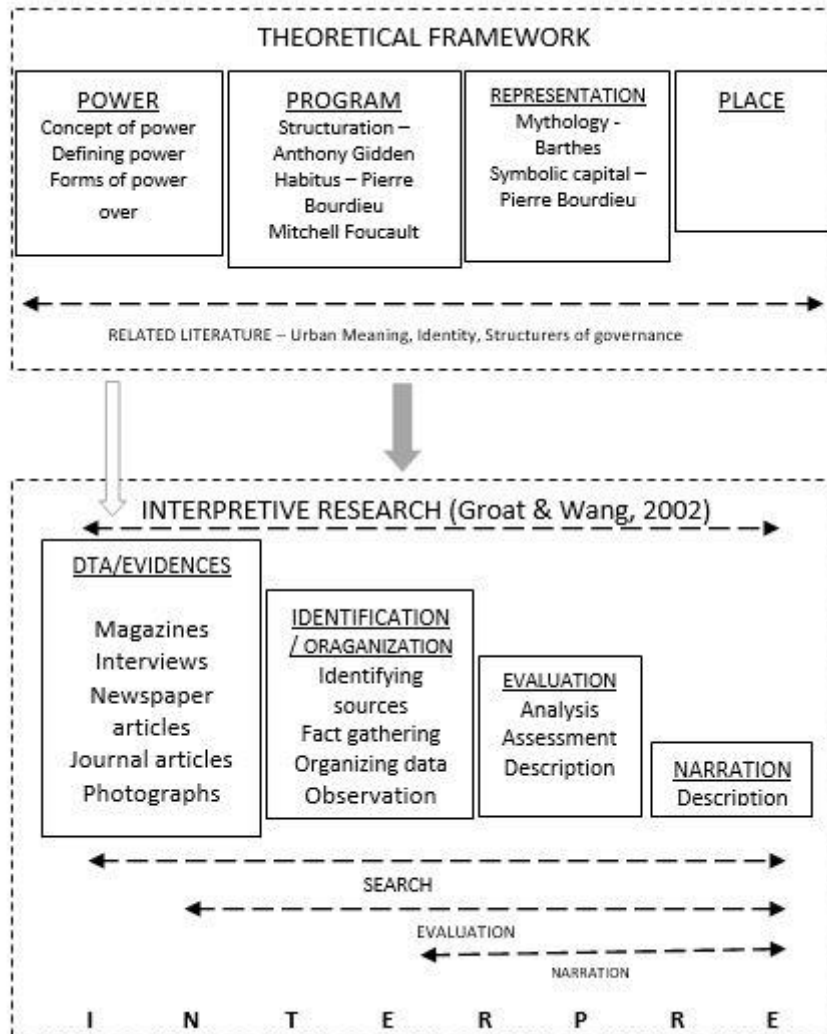

Figure 1: From L to R – Model of Germania, Cathedral of Light, Painting of Palace of Soviets, Painting of Chicago Center ;Source: Author

Methodology

The research was done according to Interpretive Research where typically evidence is drawn from archival and artifactual sources. This was due to the fact that these types of research are primarily focuses on a setting or circumstance from the past. Imperative Researches are specifically investigating into social-physical phenomena within complex contexts. With a view toward describing and explaining those phenomena in a holistic narrative form (Groat & Wang, 2002).

With this theoretical framework being set in the previous chapters, the data/evidences on case studies will be collected, organized, evaluated and narrated in a circular process. The analysis is done under two sub-topic namely, Power in building process and Power in built form. Though this chapter is sub-divided, it is very important to understand such clear distinction cannot be made between built form and process of building. It is done only with intention to conduct and elaborate the analysis in scientific manner. Data will be collected through newspaper articles (Ex - Raavaya, Daily Mirror, The Sunday Times), journal articles (Ex - The Architect), interviews with scholars, books, exhibition catalogues, photographs, drawings, websites, observations and etc. Interviews were conducted with Architects, Artists, Sociologists, Journalists and other scholars as a part of not only gathering information, yet as form of validating the gathered information. . Interviews were conducted with (1) Prof. Chandraguptha Thenuwara who is an artist, scholar and a Professor at University Visual Arts, Colombo; (2) Archt. Madura Premathilake, a scholar and a practicing architect; (3) Mr. Boopathy Nalin Wickramage, a journalist, script writer and an architectural

critique and with (4) Archt. Varuna De Silva, a Senior Lecturer at University of Moratuwa and a practicing architect. Prof. Thenuwara has been critical of these developments and had been aligning his art exhibition with the evolution of the conflict. Archt. Premathilake who is again critical on this matter, has expressed his views on discussion, publication and in public lecturers.

With this theoretical framework being set in the previous chapters, the data/evidences on case studies will be collected, organized, evaluated and narrated in a circular process. The analysis is done under two sub-topic namely, Power in building process and Power in built form. Though this chapter is sub-divided, it is very important to understand such clear distinction cannot be made between built form and process of building. It is done only with intention to conduct and elaborate the analysis in scientific manner. Data will be collected through newspaper articles (Ex - Raavaya, Daily Mirror, The Sunday Times), journal articles (Ex - The Architect), interviews with scholars, books, exhibition catalogues, photographs, drawings, websites, observations and etc. Interviews were conducted with Architects, Artists, Sociologists, Journalists and other scholars as a part of not only gathering information, yet as form of validating the gathered information. Interviews were conducted with (1) Prof. Chandraguptha Thenuwara who is an artist, scholar and a Professor at University Visual Arts, Colombo; (2) Archt. Madura Premathilake, a scholar and a practicing architect; (3) Mr. Boopathy Nalin Wickramage, a journalist, script writer and an architectural

critique and with (4) Archt. Varuna De Silva, a Senior Lecturer at University of Moratuwa and a practicing architect. Prof. Thenuwara has been critical of these developments and had been aligning his art exhibition with the evolution of the conflict. Archt. Premathilake who is again critical on this matter, has expressed his views on discussion, publication and in public lecturers. Most of these external events other than the interviews were referred (Ex- the public lectures which were attended by the author). Data and information from public lectures by Dr. Nihal Perera are too incorporated. The collected data will be structured in order for better analysis and assessment. The evidences will be further discussed in relation to the theories mentioned at first and applied into spatial analysis techniques. Reports published by Centre for Policy Alternatives and Centre for Poverty Analysis during the post-conflict period, are incorporated since they are published in public, debated publicly and covers a large number of people.

(1) Centre for Policy Alternatives. (2014, April). Forced evictions in Colombo: The ugly price of beautification. Centre for Policy Alternatives.

(2) Centre for Poverty Analysis. (2018). Towards re-imagining infrastructure and urban development. Presented at the CEPA Research Symposium 2015, Colombo.

(3) Sangapala, P. (2015). Gotabization of Colombo: Creating a World Class Disciplined Space. – Presented at 14th Centre for Poverty Analysis Symposium, Colombo.

Modes of validation

The validation was based on three factors;

1. The theoretical framework and other literature

2. International case studies discussed in heading 3 (Architecture and political power in the world).

3. Evidences – interviews, magazine articles, newspaper articles, video documentaries, web articles, public surveys and reports, photographs, advertisements, research papers etc.

Case Study Selection

Key reasons to select post-conflict Colombo as the case study are,

1. Colombo has been the capital city Commercial Capital at present) since British Imperial Rule and post-independence Ceylon and it continues to be the center of attraction.

2. Governments over the years have shown keen interest in developing Colombo.

3. Post-conflict Colombo development was the most recently witnessed out of the different eras in Colombo development such as immediate post-independence (1948) phase, introduction of Republican constitution (1972) and the phase after the introduction of Executive Presidency and open economy (1978).

Case-study Analysis

"City is really about consolidation of power (Kostov, 1991), by a ruler, a political regime or the expression of economic power."

Powell, 2016: 95

Architecture has long roots in the broader quest for identity, power and legitimacy. Therefore, as Dovey (2008) writes, the question is never about whether these particular works of architecture and urban design partook symbolism, but the scale at which they did. Yet to determine that it is important to investigate on how it was done and what they intended to mean/ signify.

According to Lawrence Vale (1992), there forms of power by which power is evinced. They are a charismatic leadership, an indomitable military presence, and entrenched bureaucracy, imposing network of laws and status and the powerful symbolic use physical environment. The analysis will elaborate on the powerful symbolic use of the physical environment in post-conflict Colombo. In fact, it will make you aware that, these forms are intertwined. It is an extension of the post-conflict Colombo is still what we perceive, conceive and continue to live in this very instant.

According to the UDA, the transformation of Colombo had few phases under the Urban Regeneration Project (UPR), which accelerated both beautification and regeneration of the city (Rodrigo, 2014).

1. Waste management.
2. Beautifying Colombo, which in fact is kind of the larger picture behind all other phases.
3. Urban parks such as Viharamahadevi Park, Diyatha Uyana, Independence Square and Fort and roadside development (paving).
4. Renovation projects noticeably focused only on colonial architecture. The three main renovation projects were Dutch Hospital, Racecourse and Arcade-Independence Square.
5. Turning markets into an eye-candy state.
6. Relocation of informal settlements in the city (slums and shanties according them) which according to the UDA were on illegal and unauthorized land.

This research was mainly focused on (2) Beautifying Colombo, which was focused on public spaces. Yet, it touched upon other phases as well as mentioned before, since they are essential to understand this transformation as whole rather than picking individual works of architecture (buildings), or else if not the study will not reach the intended depth. As Jameson (1997) notes, "None of the individual projects that makes up politics has the supreme value of the whole collective activity".

There is no denial on the fact that architecture and political power has been closely related throughout the globe ever since human society was formed. Political leaders and architects have always been keen on this nexus. Hence, the study was not trying to raise the question whether architectural space is political or not, or should it be political or not, but how and what architectural spaces have become political. When posing such questions, one needs to be clear that the study itself is multi-disciplinary, therefore can be interpreted in multiple ways which might even contradict each other. The study was very much qualitative and is based on different social and political theoretical interpretations. Therefore, it is open for debate, by all means.

Post-conflict Colombo as public space witnessed a variety of architectural and urban design projects. Having stated that, the study was focused only on projects initiated by the state. In this instance, mostly by the UDA. Public spaces were mainly considered, while not degrading the other projects such as social housing projects.

One of the first things to be noted is that, the military defeat of the LTTE in 2009, after three decades of conflict has naturally created new social and economic aspiration. Moreover, it became a milestone demanding interpretation for long standing issues, some which had been the

root causes for the armed conflict, such as national identity. Hence, it can be said that there was a strong incident or a context which has given and raised a great deal of significance to the nexus between political power and architecture.

When trying to understand 'how' political power has been demonstrated by the use of architecture and urban design, or the powerful symbolic use of physical environment suggested by Vale (1992) to be precise, which would evince power. It is evident that itis achieved by means of architecture/ building as an object and then building as a process. When by means of an object, or in other words through the built form, power is demonstrated either by design or by default. Nevertheless, they can be attributed to the location, architectural language, architectural semiotics, orientation, access (physical or psychological), scale, geometry, aesthetics and so forth as seen in places such as Arcade-Independence Square, Racecourse and even in and parks such as Diyatha Uyana. It is vital to understand that they are not only determining ways of expression and that they used and operated in collectively. Hence, it proves the fact suggested by Krier (as cited in Dovey, 2008, p.74), "that architecture is not political; it is only an instrument of politics".

Next to touch upon the process of building expressing political power. This is evident by means of militarization (force and authority), forced evictions as witnessed in incidents such as Mews Street and ceremonies and parades (seduction) in Colombo public spaces. These processes create a 'spectacle' in the eye of the society and moreover acts as a symbol of different forms of power as well.

Figure 2: Cultural shows and light shows at Arcade-Independence Square; Source: Author

Figure 3: Lion statues at Arcade Independence Square; Source: Author

Figure 4: Diyatha Uyana jogging track; Source: Author

Figure 5: Forced eviction at Mews street; Source: Author

When considering public statements of collective identity, it is understood that they take many forms and use many symbols. Despite whether it is a capitol complex or a military parade or in guise of a constitution, they add value and significance to the state. The production of the notion of 'we' involves objects, events, monuments and ceremonies and many more. Flags, icons of those leaders who were instrumental in the creation of state, logos, slogans and party emblems are visible forms of national identity. Often, they are used in combination of indigenous flora and fauna in coins, bills, currency and stamps, simply because they do not relate to any particular historical even to be commemorated.

Irrespective of whether power was demonstrated by built form or by process, one could say that both these create a spectacle or an image, by which the political power is legitimized. At the same time, they become important parts of the day to day space we dwell in; space is in this case is not only physical yet a complex mixture of social, cultural, political and psychological dimensions.

Hence, the powerful symbolic use of physical environment both as objects and as processes, in fact contribute to a greater extend to the other forms which Vale (1992) had suggested, from which power is evinced. National identity is something very difficult to formulate. Yet, it always

relates to the past. This why political leaders and architects put forward a conscious effort in this attempt create a national identity through means of architecture. There can be three frames of references and each of them has its own implication on cultural production and architectural form. These three are highly relevant in producing symbols for the capital city. The first is the subnational group allegiances and preferences of the sponsoring regime. The second is architects' priorities in his long-term design agenda. Third and the final is the interest of the state/ government to pursuit international identity which in fact entwined with economic development (Vale, 1992).

Despite how difficult it is to formulate cultural identity, it has always been subjected to the dictates of those who are in power, whether it in architectural form else. It is evident that the production of architecture highlights the identity of the dominant group in a plural society. This is the reason that the search for national identity in architecture of a state is closely related with the political structure of that particular state. Even the selection of symbols may reveal social, economic and structural tensions in the society despite the search for common unifying symbol.In attempt to state 'what' they mean, it yet again a complex mixture of identities; individual identity, national identity, class identity and ethnic identity, political ideologies and cultural and economic phenomena. Yet, by all means they undoubtedly establish power and help those in power to locate them in time and space.

According to the essay 'The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States', by Geertz, there are six kinds of divisions which would derive symbols of national identity despite whether it is architectural or otherwise. They are assumed blood ties, race, language, region, religion and custom. The signified might be unity, yet the symbols chosen to represent that unity are products of elite who have their own preferences.Capital cities and national buildings, especially in a post-conflict/ post- independence context were designed as a visual evidence of the rightful existence of the new state or political leadership. The very nature of the study enables many other interpretations to be brought into the discourse, while raising questions such what degree these architectural spaces are political and how effective they were in demonstrating political power than to another.

Figure 6: Lotus Tower illuminated at night-local newspaper; Source: Author

It is understood that there is nothing wrong in the nexus between political power and architecture (place) or that there is an ideal way to design. In fact, place and power are strongly linked to each other, which suggest that designers should not design with a blind eye towards this nexus.This study touched upon some of the practices of political power in the built form. But they are not complete nor discrete. Power has many faces. The its' practice and mediation are slippery and hidden. These cannot be severed completely, since "we are always already engaged in its practice" (as cited in Dovey, 2008, 18).

Conclusion

When trying to understand all these developments as a whole, the notion of 'Urban illusion' suggested by Lefebvre (1970) is very useful. This idea of urban illusion should not be casted away from other illusion. It is vital to have the understanding that the word 'illusion' has no negativity attached to it. It should not be viewed as a personal insult or as a criticism of argument against

anyone in particular. Everyone is in an illusion. The most effective illusions are of class. They are distant and higher than intellectual or individual errors (Lefebvre, 2003).

The way we perceive urban practices and process of urbanization impact our perception of these activities; simultaneously art and science, technology and understanding. However, this unitary character is illusory. Thereby we can identify several types of urbanisms; defined by humanists, developers and by the state and its technocrats. The state in contrast to others, disassociates into will and representation, institution and ideologies. The state illusions are part of a bigger/ colossal and absurd project (Lefebvre, 2003).

The practice of political power in built form   discussed ae not discrete nor complete. As Dovey (2008) suggest, the practice and mediation of power has many faces like the nine headed water serpent 'Hydra'. They are slippery and hidden. Even if the heads are severed, we can be never be sure when and how they will re-emerge.

References:

Balasuriya, M. (2011). *The rise and fall of the LTTE,* Colombo, Sri Lanka: Asian Network on Conflict Research.

Barthes, R. (1997). *Semiology and the urban. In Rethinking architecture: A reader in cultural theory* (pp. 166–172). New York: Routledge.

Dovey, K. (2008). Framing places: Mediating power in built form. Oxon: Routledge.

Hall, P. (2001). Cities of tomorrow: An interllectual history of urban planning and design in the twentieth century (Updated Edition). Massachusetts, USA: Blackwell Publishers.

Leach, N. (1997). Rethinking architecture: A reader in cultural theory. New York: Routledge.

Perera, N. (1999). Colonialism and national space; Representation of Sri Lanka. In Conflict and community in contemprary Sri Lanka; 'Pearl of the East' ot the 'island of tears'? (pp. 23–48). New Delhi, India: Sage Publications India Pvt Ltd.

Savage, M., & Warde, A. (1993). Urban sociology, capitalism and modernity. Hong Kong: The Macmillan Press (Ltd).

Vale, L. (1992). Architecture, power and national identity. London: Yale University Press.

Jameson, F. (1997). 'Is space political. In Rethinking architecture: A reader in cultural theory', New York: Routledge. pp. 255–269.

Lefebvre, H. (1997). The production of space (Extracts). In Rethinking architecture: A reader in cultural theory (pp. 139–145). New York: Routledge.

Powell, R. (2016). 'The grid and the ancient city'. The Architect, Vol. 117, no.1, pp. 95.

Urban Development Authority. (2014). 'Making Colombo a safe and livable city'. The Architect, Vol. 115 no.3, pp.