SPACE SYNTAX AS A METHODOLOGY TO STUDY 'POWER' IN A SPATIAL PROGRAM IN CONFLICT SITUATIONS

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Abstract

In the broader attempt to understand the nexus between the elite and the non-elite, which many philosophers and sociologists have attempted for centuries, architecture and urban design also have their relevancy in this regard. Therefore, while it is perfectly reasonable to state that "Architecture is no commoner practice", it is also vital to understand that this nexus also has its presence in our day-to-day perceived, conceived, and lived experience (Lefebvre,1997). The Practice has a greater history of portraying eliteness and power with its spatial program and expression. With the change in the human being as well as the society, which transformed from dictatorial to democratic the use and the perception of the building or its Architecture is also subjected to change. This paper is an attempt to understand the social logic of space, the existence of power in it, and its transformation in a specific conflict situation; with the broader intention of finding possible ways forward in identifying some of the issues deeply embedded in our social structures. In this pursuit, the objective of this paper is to figure out the use of 'space syntax; analysis' by Hiller and Hanson (1984) as a method to spatially analyze a programmatic relationship between the structure and its associates. Therefore people, intentionally or unintentionally respond to sentiments. The study attempts to unravel the nexus between spatial logic and the social logic that existed during a conflict situation; with regard to the civil insurgence against the political establishment in Sri Lanka. An image review and videography of such events have highlighted similarities in terms of Architectural accountability. Hence the study is being developed to identify the existence of the above hypothesis in a real conflict situation.

Keywords: Space Syntax, Power, Conflict, Spatial Program, Structure, Spatial logic, Social Logic, Establishment, Non-member

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Introduction

This paper aims to figure out the use of 'space syntax' as a methodology to study 'power' in a conflict situation.

Space syntax can be identified as a set of techniques used to analyze spatial layouts and activities/activity patterns in buildings and in urban spaces analyzing spatial layouts and human activity patterns in buildings and urban areas (UCL Space Syntax, 2023). They indicate people and how they associate and move in space.

Though many months have passed since this significant occurrence in the political history of Sri Lanka, it remains an important learning curve for Sri Lankans. As noted by Rossi (Aureli, 2008), with the emergence of such political struggles and social conflicts, a necessity appears in all disciplines, including within the discourse of architectural and urban space, to find a cultural and conceptual renewal. In this quest, while acknowledging all the significant scholarly research that has been conducted, especially from a socio-political point of view, this study attempts a fresh approach; a spatial analysis through a specific theory. Such studies are expected to enrich the scholarly discourse mentioned before.

Architecture and political power have been closely associated with each other throughout human civilizations. Architecture has the ability to 'frame' space and thereby structure actions and construct meaning. According to Lefebvre, we perceive, conceive and live in this 'space' framed by architecture.

It is vital to know whether the purpose is achieved through an encounter of a programmatic behavior in the experience of a spatial program. Hence this study is focused on the 'Aragalaya' since it was a recent phenomenon experienced in Sri Lanka which surprisingly resembles similarities in terms of its spatial logic across the world; the insurrection of the Capital building in Washington DC in the United States on January 6th, 2022. The outcome of the study may reflect the spatially imposed yet psychologically bound logic to peoples' behavior with reference to power dynamics.

The selected socio-political situation, *'Aragalaya'*, took place in Colombo, Sri Lanka on April 9th, 2022 as a case study. In this event scattered protests coalesced at the precinct of the Presidential Secretariat at Galle Face Green, swelling and transforming into the largest unified protest movement in Sri Lanka (Ranaraja, 2022).

The use of 'space syntax' is the theoretical framework to investigate the relationship between spatial logic and power structures which are in association with the selected case study/socio-political situation, as means to understand the deep social logic. Image and video-based analysis were used in the selected situation against a theoretical framework. This intends to pave a forward both in terms of research and development to further expand understanding of the above eventually leading to a constructive discourse of 'power' as a whole within a democratic framework and the possible developments with public engagement.

Literature Review

Conflict
A conflict is an active disagreement or friction between two or more opposing persons or entities (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023). As noted by Oberschall (1978), a conflict results from 'purposeful

interaction among two or more parties in a competitive setting', which as per Deutch (as cited in Oberschall, 1978) implies opposition in goals. Furthermore, the two or more parties are interdependent. Therefore, when the probability of goal attainment of one-party increases, the probability of the other party decreases. A social conflict is a conflict between parties which are an aggregate of individuals rather than single individuals; crowds, groups, organizations, and communities.

As per the definition of the term hierarchy, which is a system in which people are arranged or stratified according to their importance (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023), the parties involved in a conflict may also be part of a hierarchy.

Power

The word power means the ability or the capacity to do something. It also influences or control; right or authority; and strength or force (Oxford University, 2014). Perhaps owing to these varieties of definitions, the word 'power' is often misunderstood. As per Dovey (2008), the word is misused widely rather than used. The potential danger in using this term word is that it can mean anything therefore nothing. Perhaps, this is due to the casual use of the term. The term "power" derives from the Latin word *potere*, which means "to be able" or the capacity to meet an end. Generally, it can be said that in human affairs, power refers to control "over" others. In an attempt to understand them further for the scholarly use of the terms, reference must be made to the distinction made by Isaac (1992) 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 one can influence things to go in the direction of one's interest". At this juncture, one must understand the notion of empowerment. According to Dovey (2008), empowerment means the capacity to imagine, construct and inhabit a better environment. This associate 'autonomy' and 'freedom'; a liberation from arbitrary forms of 'power over' us. Therefore, in an attempt to bridge power and empowerment, it can be said that "power over" others is driven mostly by the desire to harness the capacities of others for one's empowerment (Dovey, 2008).

While power over is noticeable, power to is taken for granted, creating an illusion that power over is primary. An illusion of opposition between power and emancipation. It is important to understand that oppression and liberation are two sides of the power coin. One entity's empowerment means the oppression of another entity (Dovey, 2008).

In practice, there is no clear distinction between necessary and problematic forms of spatial order through spatial coercion may be clear in intentional form. There are forms of coercion such as 'manipulation' which operate primarily by keeping the subject ignorant. The possibility of resistance is removed since the exercise of power is made invisible. The intent is concealed though the subject might be framed in a situation that resembles free choice. Barnes argues that the subjects "are well aware of the direct connection between their behaviour and possible sanctions, but unaware of the longer-range indirect connections … helps to constitute and sustain the feedback of coercion and sanctioning that control them" (Dovey, 2008).

The manipulation of civic spaces may serve two ends. One is that it tends to sanction the exercise of the power of the leadership and the other is that it may promote the continued quiescence of those who are excluded. The discomforting authoritarian messages and the reassuring civic messages seem to coexist in a cognitive coexistence (Vale, 1992). As Murray Edelman would

explain (Vale, 1992), anyone can recognize and believe both. The symbolic meanings facilitate the morals of the elite and make the non-elite who do not have any power to reject or change; to simply adapt and accept.

Hence, it needs to be understood that design manipulates a dual sense of alienation and empowerment at the same time at all scales of civic spaces. It would magnify the hierarchies (Vale, 1992).

Space

While Architectural space is a result of the intersection of three-dimensional horizontal elements and vertical elements. Without these instruments, which exist as a volume of space (Archifiller™, 2021), the notion of space in architecture is not entirely physical. Our everyday life consists of concrete "phenomena" (Norberg-Schulz, 1984), and the built form we live frames everyday life. It offers certain spaces for programmed action while it closes other possibilities on the other end (Dovey, 2008). Since architecture satisfies both the physical and physic needs of man (Norberg-Schulz, 1984), space has to be explored from a phenomenological viewpoint. However, despite phenomenology being a study of how things appear, the ontological domain should also be considered without being limited to the visual domain. For Heidegger, Gadamer, and Lefebvre, space is to be perceived as a lived experience rather than an abstract, neutral space. For Lefebvre, space takes a political twist too (Leach, 1997). Therefore, architectural space could be defined as the concretization of existential space (Norberg-Schulz, 1984).

Methodology

As per the aim of this study, the study uses space syntax analysis as the methodology of investigation. In this study, the Government will be referred to as the 'establishment' while the public who participated at the *Aragalya'* will be referred to as the 'non-member' hereinafter.

As per Hiller and Hanson, there is a deep social structuring that is not visible, and often architectural discourse has bypassed this due to its roots in representational critique. Therefore, Hills and Hanson put forward the notion of 'genotypes' of architecture. These are clusters of spatial segments structured in certain formations which have syntactic rules of sequence and adjacency. Hence, one should not misunderstand these with the 'types' and 'archetypes' which are often discussed in the architectural discourse. In most instances, certain building typologies such as schools, libraries, factories offices, and houses which are linked with a specific social institution are reproduced with forms of knowledge and production. This suggests that the genotypes are institutionally and epistemologically embedded. Therefore, Hills and Hanson suggest that the genotypes embody a 'social logic of space' (Dovey, 2008).

This study will adopt one methodology of space syntax analysis which is known as **gamma** analysis as pointed out by Dovey (2008). In this method, buildings can be mapped into a cellular structure using the external entry points as a base. Hence, one can identify three primary spatial structures as shown below in Figure 1; Enfilade/ Linear structure, Network/ Ringy structure, and Fan/ Branching structure.
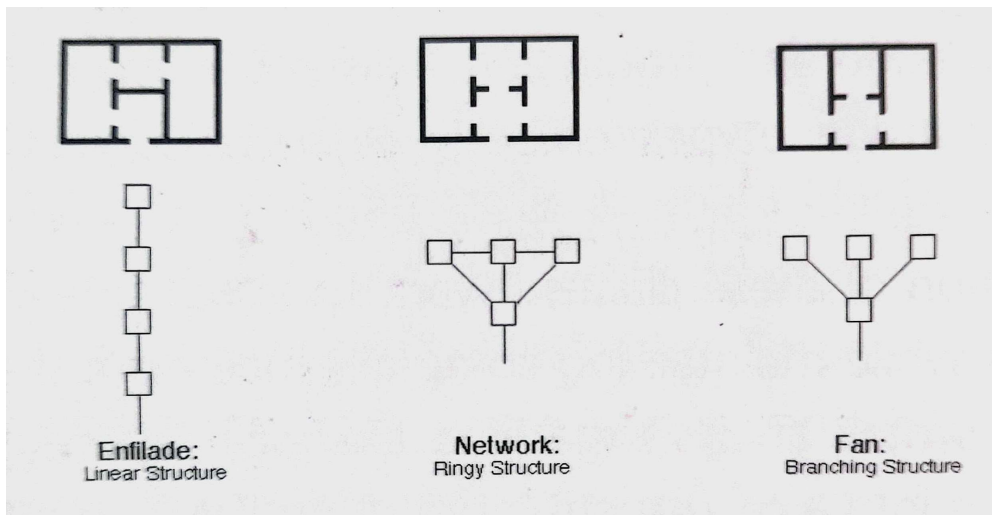
Figure1: Primary spatial structures
Source – Dovey, 2008

In this case, the building plan is translated into a structural diagram that frames everyday life within the building. In actual buildings, one may identify these in combinations. Out of the many properties identified by Hiller and Hanson, as noted by Dovey (2008), two aspects need to be studied which has social significance.; the 'depth' or 'shallowness' and 'ranginess' versus 'control'. These are very critical, to analyzing power structures within these spatial structures.

The depth of a segment from the external entry along with the overall depth of the structure shows the number of boundaries and points of control one crosses in penetrating a building. The linear structure has more depth than the other two. A deep structure will have many segments to pass through.

The degree of 'ringiness' versus the control indicates the interconnectedness of networked pathways as opposed to being controlled by a linear or branching syntax. The network structure has many lateral connections creating many possible pathways that one can take. This disperses the control. In contrast, the linear or the fan structure controls circulation and therefore the social interactions in key spaces. This means that one has to access a certain room to access another room or a cluster of rooms. Therefore, that particular room/ segment has more control over the flow of everyday life. In linear structures, every cell except the last has a strong level of control. A branching or fan structure gives multiple access to many segments from a single point, which can be identified as the point of control. The ring structure or networked structure offers many pathways and diverse encounters. Therefore, the flow of life through the spaces is loosely controlled (Dovey, 2008).

Further, Hiller and Hanson recognize two primary kinds of social relationships: those between inhabitants; and those between the inhabitants and visitors. As stated before, the inhabitant which is the Government/ kingship of the country will be referred to as the 'establishment' while the visitors who are the public who participated at the *Aragalya'* will be referred to as the 'non-member' in this study. This can be linked with the notions put forward by Vale (1992) described earlier on the manipulation of civic spaces which may serve two ends; the 'establishment' is the one who tends to sanction the exercise of power while the 'non-member', to whom that Vale refers to as the non-elite, is the other who is excluded; and the exercise of power by the

establishment may promote the continued quiescence 'non-member'. Further to the above distinction, the study recognizes the spaces/ buildings occupied/ controlled/ signified by the two entities to be referred to with the same terminology to avoid confusion. In this instance, the Presidential Secretariat is also identified as part and parcel of the establishment. Hence, the occupation of the Presidential secretariat symbolizes the occupation of the establishment.

Since the objective of the paper is to use the 'space syntax' theory as a methodology to analyze a selected conflict situation and the spatial and social relationship governed by the spatial anatomy. For the purpose of the study, it is vital to understand that 'space syntax' is used because, it is a representational critique that reveals deep structural programs, the way in which they are represented, and constructs 'experiences' of the place. As Dovey (2008) has stated, places are framed syntactically. Therefore, space syntax is a representation which is beyond the form of a plan (Fig 1). They are rather existing spatial segments which are named and given meaning. the conflict situation was studied through photographic, and video graphics evidence. patterned were identified and graphically represented to analyze against the space syntax theories.

Analysis/ Outcomes

As described by Amie Modin-Lundin (n.d.,), in early 2022, Sri Lankan citizens suffered from a severe shortage of necessities—including fuel, food, and medicine while ordinary citizens were angered by the continued extravagances of politicians and their families (all of which could be considered as the establishment), leading to frustration which peaked in March. Pockets of people across the island came onto the streets to voice their displeasure and dissent against the government. Power cuts lasted for 13 hours and prices of most items increased. However, the government did not address the worries of the public (non-members). As excessive economical struggles became normal….on the 31st of March a larger group of anti-government protestors (non-members) marched their way toward the President's private house in Mirihana. On Saturday the 9th of April, a massive crowd of protesters gathered outside the Presidential Secretariat in Galle Face, Colombo. Since the President and the Prime Minister refused to resign, the protesters occupied the area outside Hotel Shangri-La in Galle Face on The 9th of July, protestors stormed the Presidential Secretariat and the official residence of the President later. This became news around the globe and the Sri Lankans who were in favour of the *Aragalaya* felt that they had reached an important milestone (Amie Modin-Lundin, n.d., #).

The above description by Amie Modin-Lundin (n.d.,) sets the context in a broader sense. However, the focus of this study is on the events which took place on the 9th of April 2022, at Galle Face Green.

First and foremost, this situation needs to be understood as a social conflict in order for the analysis to proceed. As far as this study is concerned, there were two parties involved; the establishment and the non-member. The establishment comprises all leaders of the Government and the officials including and not limited to the staff at the Presidential Secretariat and Armed Forces. The public who was protesting can be identified as the other party involved in the conflict. The situation is essentially a social conflict since both parties involved were an aggregation of individuals as per Oberschall. While the non-member demanded the stepping down of the Government due to the difficult economic hardships and was in the intention of overthrowing the Government. The non-member claimed that the economic crisis they were suffering from was due to the mismanagement of governance and corruption by the establishment. The establishment on the other hand refused to step down with intention of

holding on to the power. If the notion put forward by Dovey on 'power over' is brought in, while the non-member wanted to have power over the establishment, the establishment wanted to maintain their 'power over' the non-member. Therefore, since one could identify two different parties with opposing views, the situation can be identified as a social conflict.

At the same time, it is important to understand the establishment has power over the non-member, which means that the two parties are organized in a hierarchy.

On July 9th, 2022, Sri Lanka witnessed an unprecedented event, where the public stormed into the Presidential Secretariat and occupied the premises for thirteen days until the security forces raided on 22nd July 2022. The Presidential Secretariat which is the office of His Excellency the President functions as a public administrative building. providing the administrative and institutional framework for the exercise of the duties, responsibilities, and powers vested in the President by the Constitution of Sri Lanka. It can be considered the keystone of administrative affairs in the country providing and coordinating administrative affairs with all government administrative entities around the world. This building was built in 1930 during the British occupation of Ceylon, the Presidential Secretariat originally served as the Parliament of Ceylon at Galle Face. This building is an edifice signifying the political progress of the island nation. The building resembles the 'Ionic order', one of the five Classical Greek architectural orders. It can also view as a resemblance to the Parthenon the hill of the Acropolis at Athens, the main temple for Goddess Athena (Presidential Secretariat of Sri Lanka, n.d.). This description of the Presidential Secretariat also depicts the monumentality of its architecture and its reference to the Parthenon may suggest its eternal existence. As Lefebvre (as cited in Leach, 1997) states, the most beautiful monuments are the ones that have an imposing presence in their durability and they appear to be beautiful due to they seem to be eternal.

At this juncture, it is vital to draw a connection to the notion of monumentality presented by Lefebvre (1997). While the establishment is represented by the grandeur and monumentality of the Presidential Secretariate, the non-members become a space of representation by its sheer volume number public presence, spatially juxtaposing the two in the landscape. Therefore, representing and signifying the monumentality in the spatial in the perceived, conceived, and the lived space.

This spatial confrontation of the establishment and the non-member almost draw an erotic dimension to the discourse, from an urban functionalist point of view. As Barthes (as cited in Leach, 1997) has stated, the Galle Face Green '*essentially and semantically*' became the place of meeting the '*other*'; *"the space where subversive forces, forces of rupture, ludic forces act and meet."*
The study analyzes the sequential occupation of the Presidential Secretariat during the '*Aragalaya*' in 2022 to understand the deep programmatic spatial logic claiming 'power over'.
The space syntax is analyzed in comparison to the preliminary spatial structures. The occupation of this significant building symbolizes the non-members 'power over' over the establishment.

Figure2: Protesters gathered outside Presidential Secretariat
Source – Published on Web sources

Figure 3: Security forces gathered on the Presidential Secretariat lawn
Source – Tamil Gaudian

Figure4: Protester storming and occupying Presidential Secretariat
Source – Author

The public occupied the 'Aragaya Boomiya at Galle Face Green originally allocated for public demonstrations and protests by the President at the time. On April 9th "Gotagogama" protest village was established at Galle Face Green demanding the resignation of the President and Prime Minister. The space syntax shows the sequential movement of the public from the '*Aragala Boomiya'*, breaking the security barriers at the Presidential Secretariat, the lawn, and into the inner cell of the Presidential Secretariat through the ceremonial staircase.
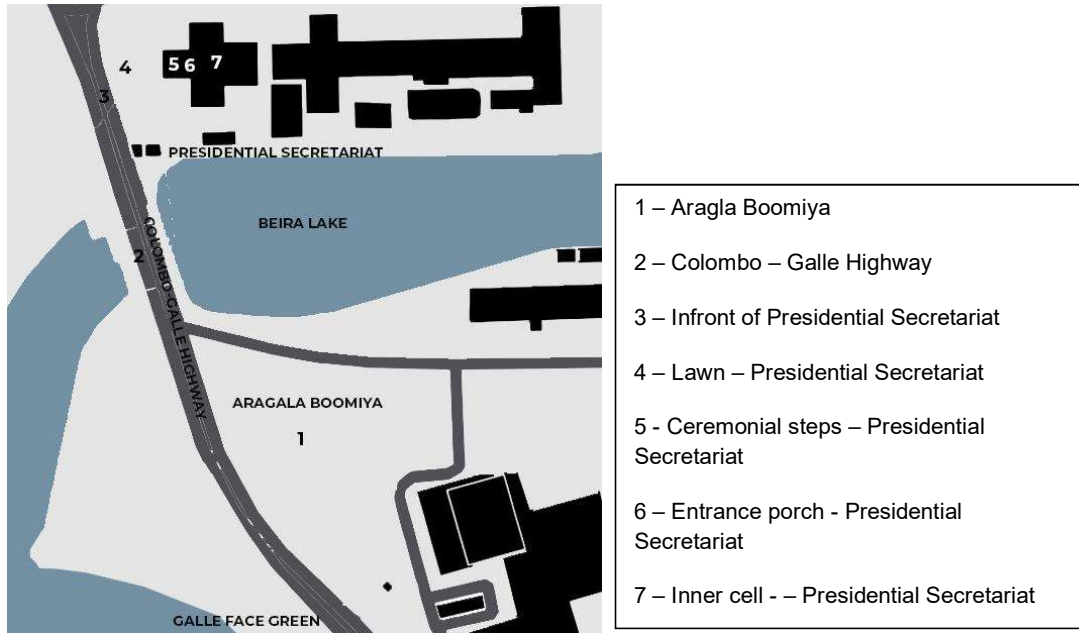

1 – Aragla Boomiya

2 – Colombo – Galle Highway

3 – Infront of Presidential Secretariat

4 – Lawn – Presidential Secretariat

5 - Ceremonial steps – Presidential Secretariat

6 – Entrance porch - Presidential Secretariat

7 – Inner cell - – Presidential Secretariat

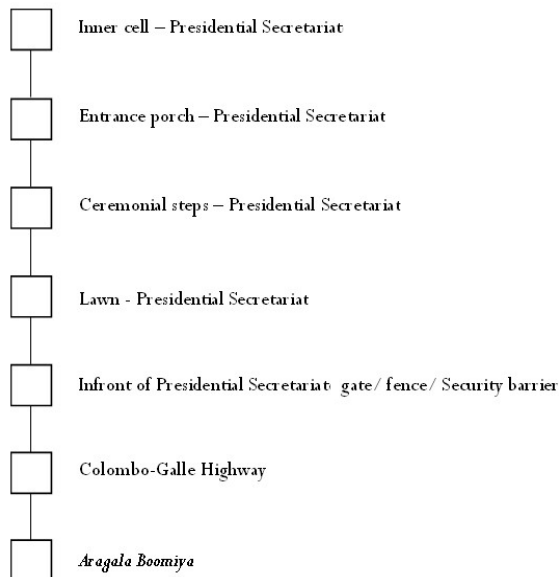**Figure 5:** Physical Layout at Galle Face Green
Source - Author

Figure 6: Space syntax diagram of *Aragalaya* at Galle Face Green
Source – Author

The space syntax (Fig.6) generated in this particular scenario, clearly indicates that it is a linear spatial structure. The cells of the space syntax are arranged in a linear structure since the sequence of events taking place within each space is a direct representation of each space from *Aragala Boomiya* to the inner cells of the Presidential Secretariat. Therefore, the occupation of each cell/ space is also a linear sequence. The fact that this is a linear structure implies that there is no other choice, establishing a strong sense of control/ authority. The sequence does not appear to have any 'ringiness' suggesting interconnectedness, which would have generated multiple choices. Hence, the structure has a strong control of circulation and social interactions. Each cell after the entry to the spatial sequence can only be accessed after successfully penetrating one cell/ segment at a time in a linear sequence. The occupation of each cell is an occupation of points of control in the entire structure.

The space syntax has a deep structure (overall structure) as opposed to being a shallow structure; therefore, the degree of control over the non-ember is greater, resulting in greater power to the establishment. Even though the main two spaces to be identified are the Galle Face Green and the Presidential Secretariate, it is important to understand that such depth is a result of the existence of multiple threshold spaces between the two spaces, generating multiple cells or points of control. In addition to the threshold spaces, the fact that there was physical resistance by the occupiers (security forces) at each threshold space, established both the existence of multiple cells and also the control associated with them.

In an attempt to understand, the depth and the ringiness of the spatial program in relation to power, the idea put forward by Foucault (as cited in Leach, 1997) on Panopticon, where power should be visible and unverifiable. While the spatial program may not directly resemble Bentham's Panopticon, the notion of visibility and univariable could be related in this instance. Visible: the non-member will always have the Presidential secretariat and the military before their eye. Unverifiable: the non-member never knows the depth that he must penetrate and what lies next ("…*must never know whether he is being looked at any moment, but must be sure that he may always be so..*"), while the establishment has the capacity to look at the movement of the non-member, giving the establishment power over the non-member. A ringed network structure would have reversed the effect where the non-member has a chance to appear unverifiable for the establishment.

One central issue that Hiller and Hanson raises is the depth to which the non-members are permitted to penetrate the structure. The deeper cells are occupied by the establishment and the shallow cells are/ could be occupied by the non-members. This establishes the positions of power as well as their status concerning both the establishment and the non-members; the establishment has power over the non-members as they occupy the deeper cells.

As Dovey (2008) has noted, "the linear structure produces a spatial narrative with a very strong level of control in all cells except the deepest". The key conclusion that one can derive from this is that, by the time the deepest cell with the inner cell of the Presidential Secretariat has been occupied, the non-member has gained control over the entire structure itself. This signifies people's 'power over' the establishment. At this very instant, the hierarchy of establishment also ceases to exist.

Therefore, at this point, where all the cells were taken over by the non-member, the linear cell structure (Fig.) with seven cells transforms and can be framed in to a one cell structure, despite the spatial segments that may appear to exist physically (in plan form). The spatial segments existed or could be identified only because there were clear physical and non-physical

demarcations. Before the non-member was held back and confronted by the establishment at each spatial segment. Each spatial segment had a meaning constructed based on the perceived, conceived, and the lived experience. However, Fig.4 shows how all the previous spatial segments physically operate as one single space, which truly represent the non-member's power over the establishment. Many individuals who (both who were physically present and not present at this particular moment) represented non-members, took this moment to share similar photographs as on social media platforms. Therefore, it is fitting to state that the perceived, conceived and the lived experience became one; a space without a structure; a hierarchy.

However, this state may have existed for short period after the occupation of the Presidential Secretariate until hierarchies (which pre-existed, yet were not visible) arose within the non-member from time to time, constructing new spatial segments with new meanings, or perhaps the same (Fig. 8).

Figure 7: New spatial hierarchies
Source – https://www.gettyimages.com/photos/sri-lanka-rupees

Conclusion

"*The most successful ideological effects are those that have no words, and ask no more than complicitous silence*". Bourdieu (as cited in Dovey, 2008, p.21)

On the declaration of the opening of the Presidential Secretariate, Sir Herbert Stanley said:

"It is the hope and prayer of us all that the deliberations which will be conducted within these walls may serve to weld the several communities and classes of the population together into an organic unity of national life and national progress, not by the suppression of varying traditions but by their co-ordination on a basis of mutual respect". (Legislative Council Debates (1930), vol.1)

Despite the study focused on a particular scenario that took place in space, the social logic of space which was evident within the space, also symbolically represents the social logic of 'Sri Lanka as a space, with respect to politics and governance, during the period in which these events took place. One of the crucial points that can be derived from this notion is that there has to be access to the non-members to the deeper cells of the structure for them to occupy any means of power over the structure. In fact, as per the analysis by Hiller and Hanson, a network structure, which will create many possible pathways to access deeper cells through multiple and lateral connections which will disperse control. At the same time, the design of public spaces and public buildings are hardly 'public' in their nature. Nevertheless, an extreme state of dispersed control and also the ceasing existence of the establishment discussed in the analysis, it is worth pondering on the possibility of a space without a structure; a hierarchy, which may have existed

for short period after the occupation of the Presidential Secretariate until hierarchies arose with-in the

This series of events was followed up by another series of events later, where the military forces took over the Presidential Secretariat, to which this study will expand. Nevertheless, since all these events were well documented and also with the analysis presented in this paper; it may appear to suggest that the establishment had a structural advantage in the spatial program over the non-member, which is a reasonable conclusion to arrive at. Hence, one could make a reasonable argument that there is a better chance that the non-member will get crushed due to the given disadvantage. Therefore, if such is to be reversed, one could argue that there has to be a structural change both in the social program and in the spatial program. After all, as Foucault (Leach, 1997) had said, everything is judged according to the framework of knowledge present at the time and therefore is ever-changing.

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