

**The Discourse of ‘Slum-Free’ City: A Critical Review of the  
Project of City Beautification in Colombo, Sri Lanka.**

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**Abstract**

*This paper is a critical inquiry of the discourses of city beautification and slum clearance and the practice of resettlement of evicted urban poor in high-rise apartments. The paper results from a study conducted in 2013 in Mihindusenpura high-rise housing project in Colombo. The objectives of this paper are twofold: to critically engage the discourses of city beautification and slum clearance and to investigate the impact of high-rise living on the urban poor, evicted and resettled by development policy. The paper reveals that the discourses of city beautification and slum clearance are constructed and presented as necessary, beneficial, public-friendly, and nation building efforts by the state’s knowledge regiments. Drawing from neoliberal economic philosophy, drivers of these discourses and practices, successively create an image of an ideal city or ‘world-class city’, which serves the affluent class and interests of the capital. The audience is persuaded to accept the state’s development hegemony as the correct order of truth while concealing serious social pathologies such as forceful eviction and violation of human rights.*

**Keywords:** discourses, resettlement, city beautification, slum clearance, displacement, eviction

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## **Introduction**

In the early 20th century, the philosophy of city beautification emphasized the importance of improving the living conditions and civic virtues of the urban dwellers as a means of social engineering. The main assumption was that aesthetics was believed to create city dwellers with moral and civic virtue. However, today, restructuring cities and improving city beauty have become by way of contrast a widely accepted neoliberal economic practice (Carlino & Saiz, 2008, p.01). Studies on city beautification have attempted to elaborate the positive advantages of beautification projects, such as the psychological, economic, and environmental (Carlino & Saiz, 2008; Ayeni & Olalusi, 2012; Kamali & Tahmouri, 2013). Psychologically, city beautification is understood as a remedy for the psychological problems of the citizens using visionary tools (scenery). Planners believe that citizens need beautiful, fresh, and vivid urban spaces, which create a freshness of mind and motivation for living in cities (Kamali & Tahmouri, 2013). The main economic advantage of city beautification, according to some, is attracting domestic and foreign investments through development of urban tourism. Environmental concerns relating to city beautification are that the rapid growth of urbanization has adversely affected land use leading to poor environmental outcomes, especially, new constructions, refuse dumps, creation of new slums and squatter settlements. Hence, the eco-system can be sustained through landscaping and beautification (Ayeni & Olalusi, 2012).

Nevertheless, some scholars have criticized contemporary city beautification projects. Their main criticism is that, on the one hand, middle and upper-class residents redesign and rebuild their cities in order to improve the utility, appearance, and civic order of urban places for the betterment of their own life. On the other hand, beautification has produced a number of adverse impacts on the vulnerable urban communities such as the chronic poor, beggars, and ethnic minority groups (Fernandes, 2004; Bhan, 2009; Andrews, Batts & Silk, 2014).

In fact, in the neoliberal reconstruction of the attractive city, the urban poor are seen as a serious development challenge. Private property owners and urban planners depict slums as zones of incivility. Generally, the language employed within the discourse of city beautification to describe the slum people, such as ‘indecent people’, ‘people with deviant behaviors and life-styles’, ‘illegitimate’,

‘encroachers’ and ‘underclass’, by the middle class, political leaders, policy makers and judiciary, are loaded with prejudice that actually facilitate the state to take actions against the urban poor (Roy, 1993; Chatterji, 2005; Padhi, 2007, Ghertner 2011).

Finally, this dominant, stereotypical ideology directed at the urban poor legitimizes the cleansing of slums and shanties when they are considered a threat to the growing middle class and to the interests of the capital (Vedeld & Siddham, 2002; Batra & Mehra, 2008). In this exercise, modern urban architects and planners introduce the construction of high-rise housing for re-housing the slum and shanty dwellers as the best way to relocate evicted people. Meanwhile, a branch of scholarship has shown that, though it is debatable, high-rise housing is a more favorable option for the housing of slum and shanty communities. These studies point out that living in high-rise housing brings economic, health, and educational benefits to slum and shanty communities compared to their previous slum or shanty condition. Particularly, these studies highlight that the material quality of the life of the slum community improves after resettlement in high rise apartments (Gans, 1992; Currie & Yelowitz, 1999; Niriella 2005, Yuen, 2005; Allain, 2013, Herath, Lakshman & Ekanayake, 2017).

However, though high-rise housing is widely adopted for urban resettlement of slum and shanty -communities, it has been severely criticized by scholars since its origin. As these studies document, since the 1930s, the urban authorities firmly relied on the combination of modernist planning, architecture, engineering and administration when housing projects were designed (Bauman, 1974; Cohn, 1984; Fairbanks, 2006; Ascensão, 2013). Architects and engineers dominated the housing construction projects and they did not consider the social engineering aspect in housing construction because they were stimulated by the new advances in construction technologies (Turner, 1977; Cohn, 1984; Ascensão, 2013). Moreover, the construction of high-rise housing was to a large extent a response to cost pressures of liberal economic policies (Cohn, 1984).

Against this background, this paper is a critical inquiry of the discourse of city beautification and the practice of resettlement of evicted urban poor in high-rise apartments. The paper results from a study conducted in Mihindusenpura high-rise housing project, Colombo, in 2013. The objectives of this paper are twofold: to critically

engage the discourses of city beautification and slum clearance and to investigate the impact of high-rise living on the urban poor, evicted and resettled by development policy. A set of qualitative data collection methods including case studies (15), semi-structured interviews (30), and focus group discussions (5x3) were used to collect primary data. To collect secondary data, the study used written documents, including UDA (Urban Development Authority) reports, reports of housing management of Mihindusenpura housing scheme, relevant websites, newspaper articles, and news reports. The total sample of the study consists of 60 respondents. Out of those 60, 50 were re-settlers and the rest of 10 were officers involved in the CBP (City Beautification Project) and related resettlement projects. This article has two sections. In the first section, I explore how the discourse of 'slum free city' is constructed in the city beautification context in Colombo. The second section deals with the social reality pertaining to that discourse.

### **World-class city discourse of Colombo**

In the post-war development scenario, the government of Sri Lanka argued that economic growth that was slowed down due to the war should be regenerated in the post-war period to make Colombo an economic hub of the competitive world system. For instance, the state's policy document- Mahinda Chinthana Vision Future (MCVF) stated that it aimed to be an 'upper middle income' country by 2016. Further, with the overall development of the country, the government planned to double the per capita income from US\$ 2,000 to US\$ 4,000 and raise the GDP growth rate in excess of 8 per cent within a period of five years (DNP-MFP, 2010, pp. v-vi).

The state presented the view that cities are the driving force of economic growth today in relation to business and investment, and it was also the center of administrative and social services. Therefore, it is important to understand economic viability of cities in development. In this exercise, the government prepared comprehensive plans for the improvement of Colombo to match its high productivity level. According to GOSL (Government of Sri Lanka), poor land use pattern, growing slums and shanties, poor infrastructure, poor solid waste management, frequent flooding, and weaknesses in municipal administration are key obstacles to achieve the development dream (World Bank, 2012). Therefore, the CMR (Colombo Municipal Region) needs to be more competitive and reorient its capacity in

line with other Asian cities. In this sense, as the MCVF identified, improving the CMR's infrastructure, its citizens' quality of life, and its human resources through a close partnership with the domestic and international private sectors, are essential. In this sense, the government embarked on a CBP as the major tool of urban regeneration. According to the vision of the secretary to the Ministry of Defense and Urban Development (MDUD), the CBP aims to create a world-class city. The following extract reflects this situation;

All of us desire a better Colombo; a city that is **clean, green, attractive and dynamic**. Let us work together and work hard to achieve this. Together, we can transform Colombo **into a world-class city**, globally recognized as a thriving, dynamic and attractive **regional hub** that is the centerpiece of 21st Century Sri Lanka: **the Miracle of Asia**... (Secretary to the MDUD, 2012; emphasis added).

In the light of Foucault's views on discursive formation, the table 01 presents some rhetorical formations which I found in official documents related to CBP, which are used to contrast the status of Colombo before the project initiation and after its completion.

Table 01: Linguistic Formation of World-class City

<b>Imaginary status of Colombo</b>	<b>Status of Colombo before the project</b>
A better Colombo	A bad Colombo
Clean, green city	Dirty/polluted, environmentally poor city
Attractive/beautiful city	Unattractive/unattractive/unpleasant city
World-class city/ Globally recognized city	Globally unrecognized, less valuable city
Miracle city of Asia	Normal/ usual city
Comfortable city for all	Uncomfortable/congested city
Slum free city	Slum and shanty city

As the above extract and table reveal, rhetorical communication terminology, such as world-class city, regional hub, slum free city, beautiful city, Miracle of Asia are the lexical forms or 'mode of talking' of power agents about what is accepted as the truth or reality to be

achieved through CBP. At the same time, to construct this new order of truth, the status of Colombo city before the project is depicted as bad, polluted, congested, and unattractive with slums and shanties. As Ghertner (2011) notes, such discursive binaries (beautiful/ugly, visible/invisible, legal/illegal) are used to normalize the urban character by the knowledge camps, ultimately thinking of the desirability of world-class urban improvements; even those who oppose such developments would agree with the world class aspirations. This linguistic representation of a world-class city produces a stereotyped image of a utopian city that adheres policy and institutional norms.

### **Discourse of a slum-free city**

The state identified the sub-project of slum demolition and the resettlement of the displaced in high-rise apartments as one of the major tools of improving the city's beauty. In order to construct and establish this alternative reality, the existing slum neighborhoods are seen as dangerous and terrible places. In this effort, through media, the state frequently used some labels such as Koriawa, Somaliya, un-liberated areas and Apaya (hell) to introduce slums. The associated meanings of these labels are well-established in Sri Lanka society to depict some behaviors of socially excluded groups or to relegate them as terrible and pathetic. Particularly, the third label came into the lexicon with the war, which provides a very specific political meaning in legitimizing the state's intervention on disciplining the space. However, all forms of these labels depict the slums as undesirable and terrible places. Journalists and media outlets always sensationalize the negativity of Colombo slums by highlighting slums as breeding places of crime, drug dealing, underworld activities, and prostitution. Through this media propaganda, the development agents have campaigned to market this moral outrage as a developmental necessity. The aim of this campaign is to persuade us to see Colombo's slum and shanty people not as fellow human beings but as threats or challenges to development. Finally, the project leaders can win our silent consent for the slum demolition, so that the lands utilized by these citizens can be developed and sold.

Further, in emphasizing the negativity of slums, labeling slum and shanty people as UNP (United National Party) supporters has been capitalized by the state to legitimize the slum evictions in Colombo. They claimed that the UNP and other communal parties do not like to upgrade the lives of the slum and shanty people since they depend on

this vote bank. Therefore, these political parties resist any types of life upgrading programmes for these people due to this vote dependency. It is obvious that some political parties exploit the vulnerability of the urban poor in Colombo for their political survival. However, the government used this party affiliation of the urban poor as a discursive field to neutralize the social criticism directed at the government's project.

### **Showcasing advantages**

As Mele (2000) documents, showing the progressive consequences of urban restructuring is a discursive practice of development actors employed to define urban restructuring as normal and beneficial. Accordingly, the state frequently announced the advantages of shifting people from slum to high-rise apartments through printed, electronic and visual media campaigns. The key message of all forms of these communications is that the new houses will provide the urban poor an avenue for social mobility. Especially, being in high-rise apartments, the young generation will be benefited through the improvement of their education. At the opening ceremony of Mihindusenpura housing scheme, the President (Mahinda Rajapaksha) stated that the aim of the government is to build up a better tomorrow for the young generation living in shanties. The president expressed confidence that 'doctors, engineers and technicians will be added to the society from the residences in 'Mihindusenpura'. "I need your child to be a recognized learned individual in the coming society"... "Hence, we transform these people from shanty mind-set to a fresh living mentality". ... "We need your fullest support to achieve the set targets" (<http://www.slbc.lk/>).

As projected by the relevant authorities, the following are the benefits to be achieved by the resettlement programme;

1. **Economical benefits-** Legal right and prestige of being an owner of a house, entrepreneurship development among people, recognized job opportunities
2. **Social benefits-** Social recognition, a permanent address, better society, elimination of illegal activities
3. **Environmental benefits-** Good sanitary facilities, healthier, pollution-free environment, easy access to places in the city

- 4. Benefits to the next generation-** Children will have better access to proper education. Recognition in the society of better marriage prospects for females (<http://www.defence.lk/>).

Further, I draw the reader's attention to the following statement given by the secretary to the MDUD;

the project will provide these citizens a conducive living environment that would ensure the availability of basic facilities like safe drinking water, proper sanitary and health facilities, pre-schools and schools etc. To make that happen, first the slums and shanties that are scattered around the city should be removed (MDUD, 2013, p.01).

Drawing from the secretary's and the president's statements, the connection between providing a conducive living environment and slum demolition should be understood as a 'destructive and creative movement'. It means slum destruction comes first, then only conducive housing can be provided. Why cannot the government provide a conducive living environment for the poor within actually existing living spaces without demolishing?. It implicitly communicates that eradication of slums is spatial politics or a geographical strategy of neoliberal developers to liberate lands for market purposes. To realize this target, slums are seen as a 'dangerous situation'. Nevertheless, Sri Lanka had alternatives in order to slum clearance. For instance, the ex-president Premadasa's approach aimed at improving the housing and living conditions of urban poor in situ rather than uprooting them from their lands (Gunasekara, 2010). But the post-war urban regenerative ideology concealed these alternative approaches because of the neoliberal greed for Colombo's lands.

### **Housing sustainability claim**

Ensuring social sustainability has become a more attractive discursive framework for housing developers. Improving social sustainability by providing social infrastructure is stressed by development agents to legitimize neoliberal economic policies (Tennberg et al., 2014; Rahnema & Bawatree, 1998). The debate about sustainability in the urban context is not only deployed as an environmental concern, but also incorporates economic and social dimensions. Providing public facilities such as open spaces for social gathering, accommodation for different social groups, proximity



to work, homes and places where people spend their leisure time, availability of jobs, urban transport, townscape design, as well as the meeting of psychological needs such as security and a sense of belonging, preservation of local features can be seen as discursive practices of sustainable development in the urban development context (Tennberg et al., 2014).

The sustainable development discourses such as the UN's Millennium Development Goal on slums – to “significantly improve the lives of 100 million slum-dwellers by 2020” and UN-Habitat Agenda of 1996 -“adequate shelter for all” –explicitly represents the sustainable discourse of human settlements development in an urbanizing world particularly in the developing world. Following the principles of key figures of sustainable development discourse such as World Bank, UNDP, UN-HABITAT and other International Organizations, uplifting the living standards of the urban poor through providing a standard housing has been widely recognized by the GOSL as a necessity as well as a way of protecting the human right to shelter. To prepare for my inquiry, I used the report of “Sri Lanka’s Middle Path to Sustainable Development through ‘Mahinda Chintana - Vision for the Future’” (Country Report of Sri Lanka presented to United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development/(Rio +20) 20-22 June 2012, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil). The report acknowledged the government policy of high-rise apartments as the best policy option to ensure the provision for better housing for low-income people and releasing land for urban development. ‘The Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) is committed to create a conducive environment for the promotion of affordable quality housing for all and to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), in particular the Goal 7’ (Sustainable Development Division-Ministry of Environment, 2012, p.71). As the report states, the aim of the resettlement programme was to provide approximately 70,000 low-income families with adequate and affordable shelter by 2020. In this domain, the rhetorical presentation of ‘slum free city-2020’ is a symbolic representation of the sustainable development discourse.

As the policymakers stress, the CBP ensures two aspects of social sustainability. First, it improves the provision of social infrastructure such as public open places, the development of transport facilities, and job opportunities through developing market places to the wider urban community. Second, it provides housing facilities to uplift the lives of the urban poor. Here, the application of sustainable development

discourse into the CBP provides two advantages to the state. First, the state has a legitimacy to request more foreign aid. Second, it provides a sphere to implement the neoliberal economic agenda.

### **Media discourse of ‘hell to heaven’**

The discourse on the ‘slum free city’ and its coverage in the news media may be attributed to the rebirth of Colombo city. In realizing the dream of ‘slum free city’, project authors have launched a vast media campaign (particularly through the state controlled media) to get the public approval for slum demolition and resettlement. According to some scholars, slums and shantytowns are depicted as horrible places by middle class media depictions to flush slum people out of the city in the name of city development (Ghertner, 2011; Padhi, 2007; Roy, 1993). In this effort, linguistic presentations, media visuals such as advertisements, documentaries, and news play a vital role in creating a prejudiced mind in the audience towards slums. At the same time, these media events strongly propose that the solution is none other than high-rise housing. I have used the two following images of a media news event about Colombo slums and housing schemes to proceed with my argument.

A shanty settlement and new housing scheme



(Source:[https://www.google.lk/search?tbm=isch&q=+low+income+housing+in+colombo&ei=4N1WVd7xDc\\_-8QXPoYDQAg#tbm=isch&q=slum+relocation+in+colombo](https://www.google.lk/search?tbm=isch&q=+low+income+housing+in+colombo&ei=4N1WVd7xDc_-8QXPoYDQAg#tbm=isch&q=slum+relocation+in+colombo))

These visuals have repeatedly portrayed slums as ugly, unsuitable for standard living and therefore should be eliminated. Further, it should be noted that non-permanent housing structures (shanties) are shown with close-ups to depict their terrible condition as compared to high-rise apartments. Through that method, visual media producers strategically emphasize that the housing requirement of the

urban poor is homogeneous. However, the housing requirement of the urban poor is dynamic. It depends on the length of time they stay in the city, the security of their employment, and concern for status (Turner, 1977). In this media presentation, permanent and relatively good housing units are not captured and seen parallel to high-rise apartments. Then they provide beautiful and colorful visuals of high-rise apartments from many camera angles to emphasize that high-rise housing is the ideal solution for this problem. Therefore, some media presentations conveyed that moving from slums and shanties to flats as is like a journey from 'hell to heaven'. In addition to this visual communication, creative advertisements have been used to establish the state's development hegemony. For example, the following data segment, which comes from a TV advertisement emphasizing the psychological impact, creates sympathy towards the slum community. According to the advertisement,

There is a child, sleeping and dreaming on a decayed bed in a slum house. He sees beautiful houses with comfortable furniture and equipments, playgrounds, beautiful roads, peers who are going to school with clean school uniforms and shoes. Suddenly he got-up and opened his eyes, he sees there is a flood and mud water with dirty things running through his house. Then he is walking through muddy water with unhappy and thoughtful mood to realize the world saw was a merely a dream. The advertisement ends with the message that we should stand to make a beautiful future for this community (Source: Telecasted by National Rupawahina on 25/07/ 2012)

Ultimately these presentations legitimize the anti-slum policy of the government through getting public support and sympathy. As it is presented with visuals, the condominium housing brings a favorable social identity particularly for children and youth. In attending a TV programme, the president of the UDA stated that "these houses are well equipped with modern technology and facilities. In Singapore, these are middle class houses. That much these houses are advanced" particularly the media has allocated significant screening time to show the facilities given to re-settlers. The three following images come from a video documentary of high-rise housing which compels the viewer to believe that high-rise housing will bring them a good future.

Luxuries appearance of a new housing



(Source: 'Doramadalawa' TV programme themed 'Punarudayata Perawadanak' on 22nd October 2012, telecasted by ITN )

When viewing these images, the audience will feel that actually re-settlers will receive a luxurious house. Therefore, it implies that the public should support the project. However, as I realized in the fieldwork of the study, the furniture seen in the first and second pictures were hired from the Damro Company for the opening ceremony of the housing scheme. The president, Mahinda Rajapaksha, ceremonially opened the housing scheme by opening the door of the housing unit, which is shown in the first picture. After two days, the company took back their furniture. Nevertheless, this specific image was repeatedly shown in the media discussions and feature articles to show the quality and advancement of high-rise housing. In the lines of Foucault's (1972) conceptualization of power/knowledge, this is a strong evidence to demonstrate how knowledge/truth about slum resettlement is produced through planned actions of the project authors. Through these various discursive methods, the development actors have successfully created and legitimized the discourse of the 'slum free city' in the social body and embarked on the slum demolition project in Colombo.

### **Discourses versus social reality**

In this section, focusing on positive and negative consequences of the project of urban resettlement in high-rise apartments, I strive to generate a debate on whether the official development discourse is realized in the real world context.

### **Positive changes of high-rise living**

Involuntary resettlement programmes can, in some cases, provide socio-economic advantages to the society; however, at the same time those programmes create major issues for displaced communities. It means that while some may benefit by these programmes, others have to sacrifice (Cernea, 1997). The slum resettlement programme in Colombo has brought positive changes to two groups of re-settled community while others have been negatively affected. Features of the first group are those closely associated with shanty community as against those of a slum community. Slums are distinguished from shanty towns. Whereas inner-city slums are generally constructed early on as relatively stable communities living in houses/buildings constructed with permanent materials, a shanty town is one built quickly, using temporary materials with minimal or no infrastructure such as sanitation, water, electricity, or telephone services. When compared to other South Asian countries, Colombo's slums and shanty settlements were relatively small clusters. According to the national census in 2012, 68,812 families were living in slums and shanties. However, only 20,000 families were actually living in squalid conditions beside canals and railway tracks and other risk-prone areas. According to some interviews with residents, high-rise living has brought positive changes to people who were previously living in squalid conditions. They were suffering from frequent floods, unhygienic environments lacking in space, in addition to their poorest economy. Such households were satisfied with their new homes in the high-rise housing. The following statements of respondents reflect this situation;

As previously, we are not facing problems such as getting affected by mosquitoes and flies. When we were in *watta*<sup>1</sup>, we had to use public taps and toilets. We were waiting in front of toilets and taps in the morning and evening. When it was raining, dirty things were floating everywhere. We did not have tap water and electricity. Even dirty water came inside

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1 A cluster based slum settlement.

the house... Every year we had to repair the house since they were not permanent. But now we are happy. (Neetha, a woman resident, 34 years old).

I do not even like to be remind of that unpleasant life. I feel this is like a heaven compared to the previous house... when we were there, nobody visited our home, we were marginalized from society. But, now they cannot say, we are muddukku people. Now our relatives visit us. (Vinodani, woman, a resident 36 year old).

As these extracts reveal, the new house has provided an opportunity for them to overcome problems such as floods, sanitation and unhygienic environments that they suffered from generation to generation. At the same time the new house has increased access to public amenities such as water and electricity. In particular, the new home in the high-rise housing scheme has made a positive change in the lives of children of such families. To proceed with my argument, I will present the following views offered by some children as follows;

This is much better than our former house. We have lights, water and a beautiful home. Now I have a separate table to keep my books. In the previous house, we used a lamp to study but now we have lights. I am very happy to go to school every day (Achintha, male student, 11 years old).

Previously classmates in the school did not care about us. In the playtime, some children did not want to play with us. Even some teachers mistreated us since we were coming from *watta*. I am talented in sports but I did not feel happy going to school. Now my friends talk about our new home. I show them pictures of our home (Dushanthan, male student, 13 years old).

The second group of residents who benefited from the slum resettlement programme were people who occupied Railway Quarters in Dematagoda, Colombo. Although they are referred to as 'quarters', they were adjacent line-rooms. But they were relatively better off than other slum neighborhoods since they were working in the Department of Railway as labourers. Under the slum settlement programme, these quarters were demolished and the occupants have been re-settled in the Mihindusenpura housing scheme. These people are satisfied with their new homes in the high-rise apartment for several reasons. First, they receive a permanent house in Colombo. Otherwise, they have to

return to their quarters after retiring from the job. Second, the social network of this group was not critically affected since they all have been resettled in the same building block. Third, their livelihoods are relatively permanent since they are workers of the government railway department and were not affected by the resettlement programme. Due to these favorable factors, this group has adapted relatively well to high-rise living.

### **Victims of city beautification**

This section focuses on the adverse impacts of slum resettlement in high-rise living.

#### **No compensation, forced eviction**

Ensuring compensation is one of the necessary factors of successful housing resettlement programmes (Viratkapan & Perera, 2004; Yuen, 2005). As these studies document, the government can compulsorily acquire any land for public purposes, but the legal mechanisms should guarantee compensation that leads to the success of relocation projects. Cernea & Kanbur (2002) identify compensation as a way of evaluating the losses since development programmes create losers as well as gainers. Losers' situations would be worse if they are not adequately compensated. However, the present study found that the affected people under the resettlement programme were not compensated for acquired lands and demolished properties utilized by them for generations. Many respondents mentioned that they were agreeable to release of their lands and other properties such as houses and business ventures for city development, if they were adequately compensated. However, the government's response to this demand was that affected people were 'illegal occupants' or 'encroachers of government lands'. Therefore, the state should not compensate. Nevertheless, according to the 2012 national census, 25% of the low-income families had ownership rights. Therefore, the government's decision not to offer compensation cannot be justified. Further, as respondents stated, they were recognized as owners of their lands under the slum-upgrading programme of former President Ranasinghe Premadasa's regime. Moreover, they believe that they paid monthly electricity bills and water bills to the government, which offered sufficient proof of their property ownership.

When relocation of dwellers occupying private property is being done, it needs to be ensured that the procedure recommended

in the Private Property Rights Protection Act is followed. The land needs to be measured and valued, and compensation has to be paid accordingly. In addition, it's up to the inhabitants if they want to be relocated (Razick, 2014). Nevertheless, the government did not respect this law when acquiring private properties for Colombo's development. On the other hand, when it comes to evicting people from government owned property, the procedure that comes under the Recovery of State Property Act (RSPA) needs to be followed. The Act states that both parties should go to the magistrate's court and present their case. It is the magistrate who will then decide if the eviction should be carried out (Razick, 2014). Further, the government did not respect the National Involuntary Resettlement Policy (NIRP) in the land acquisition process in Colombo city. All affected people those with deeds or without—as well as those with registered and unregistered businesses, were entitled to compensation, had the government followed the NIRP (CPA, 2014). However, instead of following these humanitarian provisions, the mechanism followed by the government was to acquire land through forceful eviction. The state can easily apply this type of non-humanitarian action to demolish slums when the slum community is labeled as 'illegal occupants' or 'encroachers', because that legitimizes state actions. However, it should be noted that these labels are associated with the economic and the power structure of the society. As Roy (1993) and Ghertner (2011) document, these labels or stigmas are forms of policy actions of neo-liberal developers.

### **Issue of space and social identity**

Lack of space is a common issue faced by many households in a new apartment. The planners have defined slum and shanty neighborhoods as a homogeneous group and provided a stereotyped apartment for all. Size and the quality of their previous houses were not considered in constructing apartments in the high-rise apartments. Though slum and shanty populations have shared some socio-cultural characteristics, the housing requirements of slum and shanty neighborhoods are clearly different (Tunner, 1977). According to respondents' views, those who lived in shanties with minimal or no facilities are happy with the new apartments, but some are unhappy with the current space. The size of the housing unit is approximately 400 square feet. Some residents claimed that their previous house was twice as big or even bigger than the new housing unit. This has become a critical issue especially for large households.



Due to lack of space in the new houses many residents have sold or otherwise got rid of their furniture from their previous houses. When I conducted the field study, I observed that there are plastic chairs in many houses. As respondents mentioned, due to lack of space in the living room they use plastic chairs since they can be stored vertically to provide space for sleeping. The residents face many difficulties due to lack of space in the house when they have domestic functions such as puberty ceremonies, funerals, and weddings .

The main reason for the issue of lack of space is associated with the selection criteria and housing eligibility. According to the selection criteria applied by UDA to define housing eligibility, it is very clear that the eligibility was decided based on house basis but not on family basis. According to the guidelines adopted to define the household for eligibility are: (1) a housing unit should have a separate entity/exit door, kitchen, separate electricity-meter, and house number (assessment number); (2) internal partitioning made to separate an additional household will not be considered as a separate house; (3) if an additional family (those who have been registered as a separate family in the Voter Register) lives with the chief occupant, those additional family/families will not be eligible for a new house under this scheme; (4) each and every member residing in a house is not entitled for a new housing unit under this scheme (UDA, 2010). The issue here, on the one hand, is that the planners did not concern both the size of the previous house and of the family when they designed and constructed apartments. Arguably, the government could have ushered in genuine upgrading of the living standards of the poor had it also provided housing to the additional families, although this has important cost implications.

On the other hand, the way that the UDA defined a slum and shanty population has become a controversial issue. As I mentioned above, according to the 2012 national census, only 20,000 families were actually living in squalid conditions beside canals and railway tracts. UDA has considered the large figure of 68,812 housing units in underserved settlement as the base for the slum prevention policy, but not 20,000 families who were living under squalid conditions. It means that the social diversity or social stratification among the urban poor has not been taken into account. According to some residents, they do not like to accept the label of slum and shanty for themselves. Though geographically they were living in a nearby slum area, socio-

economically they belonged to different classes. Niriella (2014) documents that during the last two decades, the class structure of the urban poor in Colombo has changed due to economic changes and the welfare policy of the state. As he pointed out, a considerable number of urban poor are moving from lower class to lower-middle or middle classes. However, these class structures of the urban poor were not considered by the policymakers. It resulted in a status issue among the resettled community. I precede my argument with the following answer given by a key informant to the question I asked about their feelings regarding the new houses.

The main problem here is that we all have been given the same size houses in the same flat. It is very unfair. I came here from Slave Island. There were many people who had large houses with two [or] three floors. I had a two-storied house with four rooms, except living room, kitchen and bathroom. It was fully tiled, painted and furnished. When we just look at [it] from the outside, it seems like a slum house because adjunct houses were very small and looked like slums. But the inside of my house was not like that. I was shocked when we saw this apartment. This project is good for nobodies not for some-bodies. Now we have to live all together. We were not living in slums. We cannot even think what has happened to us (Silva, a resident 43 years old).

Thus, it is important to ask why the project leaders did not consider the diversity of the slum community, construct affordable housing, provide housing to the additional families and practice alternative options like slum upgrading. This is because the ulterior motive of the state was to liberate economically valuable lands in the inner city of Colombo to attract domestic and international private sector investments rather than upgrading the living conditions of the slum community. The government expected also to utilize liberated prime lands for mixed development activities such as high and middle income apartments, and recreational facilities and for urban transport development. In fact, the re-housing programme was targeting to liberate approximately 350 acres of prime land for commercial and mixed-use development. This is what political-economist and New Urban Sociologist, Henri Lefebvre (1991) conceptualizes as the 'abstract space' in his Theory of Space. The state and the capital investors concentrate on abstract qualities: dimension-size, width,

area, location, and profitability of space. They did not think about the social and cultural domains of the space. As Dayoub (2014) notes, the city planners perceived spaces of everyday lives as opposed to spaces of global and economic flows under neo-liberalism.

### **House ownership**

House ownership is a significant socio-psychological factor that determines housing satisfaction (Yuen, 2005). Nevertheless, house ownership in the high-rise apartment has become a critical issue. According to the eligibility criteria the recipients will be given the ownership only after completing their contribution to the housing. Construction cost per unit is approximately 3.4 million. Out of the total construction cost, the amount payable by recipients is one million. This amount should be settled in two steps. As an upfront payment recipients should pay 50,000 (registration fee of 5000+ another upfront payment of 45,000) to the UDA. Balance payment of 950,000 should be paid in monthly installments during a period of 20-30 years (DNP-MFP, 2012). Then only the recipients will receive the ownership of the house. It is important to note that some interviewed respondents stated that they had to borrow money from local moneylenders or to pawn/sell their jewelry to complete the down payment since they did not have saved money.

The UDA has strictly adopted this method for all affected communities, irrespective of whether people had legal titles to previous land and house or not. Actually there were some affected people who had deeds to occupied lands. On one hand, these people lost their properties and were not compensated. On the other hand, they also have to pay one million contribution cost for housing. Nevertheless, they will also be given the housing ownership after 20-30 years. Therefore, most of re-settlers are concerned about the housing ownership and many of them believe that now they become tenants of the government housing scheme. Some respondents mentioned that they will not live until the housing ownership is received.

From a bureaucrats' point of view, this method has been adopted to ensure two things,

1. To secure community participation in the housing project.
2. To promote self-employment and monthly income

earning opportunities.

According to the Condominium Act on apartments, if the house is given on a cost-free basis, the residents will not feel that they have contributed to their housing and think it is gifted by the government. When they are charged, they will be motivated to protect/keep their house in good condition. On the other hand, the maintenance of housing schemes for the urban poor could become a serious burden to the society. The claim that most had no proper income was only an excuse. Therefore, their children would be encouraged by the Condominium Act to find a job or become self-employed.

### **Break-up of Community Network**

The slum resettlement programme has seriously impacted on the social fabric of the urban poor. Social network of the urban poor is a wide research area in the urban social context. Some researchers point out that slum and shanty communities are organized in a cluster pattern, which increases social integration/social capital among its members (Silva & Athokorala, 1991; Kottegodra, 2004). Some have argued that the social capital of this community facilitates the violence and crime culture in the city (Sanidad-Leones, 2004). However, the discourse of crime culture in slum communities leads to policy discussions and action. When we clearly observe the slum resettlement process in Colombo and the actions of the state, there are enough factors to think that the state has deliberately broken up the social network of the urban poor as an effort to reduce crime.

According to respondents' views, the communities who lived as clusters in the previous residence have not been resettled in the same cluster patterns in the housing scheme, nor even on the same floor. For instance, Bekariya *watta* people in Narahenpita have been resettled in two housing schemes—Mihindusenpura in Borella and Lansandasevana in Wanatamulla. According to the UDA's officers, they had to take this action due to not having enough housing units in the same housing scheme. However, people believe that the UDA has deliberately fragmented previous clusters as a strategy to control the poor. The method of housing allocation followed by the UDA has also fragmented the social networks of the slum communities. Housing allocation was done based on a raffle draw system. Therefore, the families from the same community are now living in different places of different floors of the same housing scheme. The UDA followed

this method to avoid some practical issues, such as the over-demand for housing units from the ground floor. However, this method did not sufficiently address some sensitive factors such as disability and ageing when housing units were allocated.

The break-up of social network can be seen in terms of;

1. Impacts on neighborhood interactions
2. Impacts on peer groups
3. Impacts on elders
4. Impacts on community organizations

As respondents stated, they maintained close relationships with their neighbors in the previous residence. Neighborhood interaction in the previous place functioned as a safety-net to them. Especially, there was no insecurity problem for their children in the previous place since they went to schools and classes together with their friends. Though both parents went to work, child-caring was not a serious issue in the previous home, since neighbors assisted. One woman stated that in the previous residence they went to pick up their children from schools in a rotating system. It means that when she went to pick up her children, she picked up neighboring kids also, and the next day another woman did likewise. That system helped them to complete their domestic chores. Particularly it helped women who were self-employed in their houses. They shared food with their neighbors. Sometimes kids were fed by neighboring houses. But in the housing scheme they have lost this social assistance and protection since they are scattered. Therefore, the parents have to always be on alert about their children. One respondent mentioned that some women had stopped going to work due to the insecurity of children. In the new house, they used to keep the front door closed often, since they are strangers to each other. According to community views, they have become a 'gate minded community' in the new housing scheme.

Elders are the most affected social group in the high-rise housing (Cohn, 1984). This study also found that the elders have become a more vulnerable group due to the break-up of social network and the height of the building. According to aged respondents, they are worried about their present life in the housing apartment. As they commonly mentioned, now they have become prisoners of their houses. In the previous place, they visited neighboring houses and friends, went

to the temple with friends, and also were helped by the neighbors. Especially, in the day time, there was no anxiety due to neighbors' companionship. But now neighbors are strangers to them due to the housing allocation method. On the one hand, they did not know where their former friends were living. On the other hand, though they know, they cannot visit them due to physical weakness in managing the stairs. At the same time, some are afraid to use elevators. In the new home, they have to depend on their children if they want to go somewhere.

The resettlement process has impacted on community organizations such as funeral-aid societies and micro- credit organizations of the affected community. The functioning of such societies is disturbed because the members are fragmented between two or more housing schemes. For example, a community leader from Aramaya mentioned that there had been nearly a hundred members in their funeral-aid society and they regularly went once a month to the temple for meeting. Now, though the majority of members are living in Mihindusenpura housing scheme, a considerable number of members live in Laksandasewana housing scheme in Wanatamulla. As he noted, now only the office-bearers gather at the community hall at Mihindusenpura for meetings and other purposes of the society. The membership of some families who live in Laksandasewana was canceled since they are not attending meetings and do not pay their membership and other fees. As he clearly mentioned, now the unity of the society is at risk because of the fragmentation of the membership, which affects the sustainability of the association.

According to Kottegoda (2004), community based micro-credit organizations and informal financial supportive systems like *seettu* and mutual financial assistance play a vital role in the economic survival of the urban poor. They mostly rely on inter-personal and inter-household arrangements undertaken by women to meet their urgent money needs. These methods totally depend on mutual interdependency. However, the break-up of the social fabric has negatively impacted on such arrangements. As Vinodani (a re-settler from Aramaya Place stated, in the previous residence she joined a *seettu* (an informal community-based micro finance system) with her friends and relatives of neighboring houses and spent that money on domestic needs and buying jewelry and furniture, etc. Nevertheless, in the new house, the practice is not continued due to disruption of the social network. As she further mentioned, in the previous location, it was not difficult to find

guarantors when they requested micro-credits from such organizations. They were guarantors for each other. As Cernea (2000) notes, this is a net loss of valuable “social capital,” that compounds the loss of natural, physical, and human capital.

### **Impact on livelihoods**

As Cernea points out, people who are employed in enterprises, services, or agriculture, have to face unemployment or underemployment as a result of physical relocation, which increases their vulnerability (Cernea, 2000). The slum relocation project has seriously impacted more on the livelihoods of the urban poor than on all other aspects. Fundamentally, the urban poor are mostly engaged in self-managed low-wage jobs in the informal sector, such as street vending and selling, construction work, cleaning work, catering work, tailoring, driving and transport work, factory work, and personal services, etc. A very small proportion of them are also engaged in low paying employment in government or private organizations. On the other hand, the livelihoods of the urban poor are connected with the area they live in and around. Planners of resettlement projects must carefully assess these livelihood dynamics of the urban informal sector to minimize their impact on the livelihoods of the poor. However, as field data revealed, urban resettlement planners in Colombo did not pay enough attention to reduce the impact of slum resettlement on the livelihoods of the poor. Livelihood impacts made by the slum resettlement programme can be identified in terms of following variables.

1. Break-up the social network
2. Lack of space in the new apartment
3. Restrictions imposed by the housing administration
4. Distance from the original location or city centre.

In the previous section I discussed how the slum resettlement programme impacted the social networks of the urban poor. Disruption of community networks has adversely impacted livelihoods of the poor in several ways: loss of regular customers, loss of social support for business, and loss of mutual relationships between customers and sellers. In the previous settlement, neighbors and friends were the regular customers of those who had businesses such as small groceries, communications, salons, tailoring, and selling of bakery items. Now the merchants have lost their regular customers, which has decreased their

family income. Following Nimali's case-study strongly communicates how break-up of social networks has adversely impacted the livelihoods of the urban poor.

Nilmini is 36 years old and self-employed. Her husband is a storekeeper in a company and earns Rs.15000 per month. But that income is not enough to cover the monthly expenses of the family. Therefore, as a self-employed, she sewed baby and ladie's cloths at her home. Neighbors and her friends used to come to her place for such items. She explained that she earned at least Rs.8000 -10,000 per month and it was an additional contribution to the living costs of the family. For some months she earned more than that and saved some money. But now, as she said "nobody knows that I am sewing here" (Nilmini, a resident, 36 years old).

As a result of the break-up of social networks, some people lost their jobs or had to stop working. In the previous place some people did their jobs as members of a working group of neighbors or relatives. For instance, Malani stated that when they were living in *Bekeriya watta* three neighboring women ran a business jointly. They produced bakery items and sent them to the nearest canteens of government offices. As she mentioned, it was a very profitable business for them. But now they have to stop the business for three reasons. First, they are living on different floors which makes it difficult to arrange the business. Second, they have to bear an extra cost to transport their products to *Narahenpita*. Third, they used firewood as an energy source, but now they are not permitted to use firewood for cooking in the flat. It is interesting to note that, according to research findings, the most negatively affected by the slum relocation programme were self-employed women who engaged in providing food or other goods to shops close to their homes. In the previous residence they could easily offer their products to shops on foot or selling from their homes. However, now they have to travel 6-8 kilometers from *Mihindusenpura* housing scheme to the same shops. That has increased the transport cost and wasted their time. Further, when they were in the previous places, neighbors and relatives assisted women to look after children, which helped them attend to business or work. As a result of the break-up of community networks some women had to stop their jobs. The following extract of Kanchana's case study explains why she stopped her job.



Now I am not going to work because I have to look after my child and mother. In the previous place there were relatives surrounding us. They helped me to look after mother and child. In the morning I arranged everything for my mother and child. He was sent to school with my mother's younger sister and he came back with her. And my relatives and neighbors even helped my mother. But now they are in Wanathe (Wanatomulla housing scheme). There are some relatives and previous neighbors here, but not close to our home. Therefore, my husband asked me to stop going to work. Now we have to depend on husband's income. It is not enough to maintain these things at all. We have to pay nearly Rs 3000 for this home per month, in addition, Rs 2500 for electricity. If we had a place to go, we would have left sooner.

Kanchana's case study very clearly reveals that community network built strong social capital for the urban poor, which helped their socio-economic survival. From customers' point of view, break-up of the community network has made an impact on the lives of the poor. As respondents stated, some people used to buy their daily consumer items from some selected shops close to their previous residence, based on the promise of paying at the end of the month (*pothata ganna huruwela hitye*). This was based on the mutual understanding between the customer and the seller, since the seller was a neighbor or relative to the customer. Economically, it was a safety network to the poor to fulfill their consumer needs. Now they do not have that opportunity and they should have upfront money when they buy things from shops, due to the breakdown of the mutual customer-seller relationship.

Lack of space is also an issue, which makes it difficult to maintain the livelihoods of the re-settlers who took jobs in groceries, food processing, laundry service, bicycle repairing, salons, etc. in the previous place. On the one hand, they do not have enough space in the new apartment to maintain their business ventures. On the other hand, due to restrictions of the housing administration, they cannot carry on their business at home. According to the housing administration rules, doing business in the front or backside of the apartment or beside the roads and assisting such business is an offence. The following case study is a good example to understand how the livelihoods of the urban poor have collapsed due to lack of space in the new apartments and restrictions of the housing administration.

Prasanna is a motorbike repairer. When he was in Mayura Place, he had a small garage in his house. As he said, it went well enough to manage his family requirements. However, he lost his garage due to the change of residence. After coming to the housing scheme, he has requested a place to start the garage in the housing premise. But the housing administration did not permit it. As he mentioned, the officers have told him that waste oil will damage the concrete carpet of the housing scheme and noise will disturb others. Now he is working in a garage in Borella.

It is important to note that some people who conducted small businesses in the previous residence have set up their business in the available space of the new apartment despite these restrictions and some are using hand-carts to run their business.

A room of a new house is used to maintain the previous business



(Source: Captured by the researcher, 10 November 2013)

Self-employed people or casual workers were among the most affected in terms of employment. People who are engaged in permanent jobs in the private or government sector are not adversely affected. For instance, livelihoods of people who work as labourers in the Railway Department, Municipal Council, or other government departments, and people who work in some private firms such as cleaning services, hotels, security firms and other companies are not affected.

### **Regulating the Urban Poor**

The state has used the slum resettlement programme as an opportunity to regulate the urban poor. As a result of bringing the UDA under the Ministry of Defense, entire urban resettlement projects were administered by military officers. The state has used military officers not only for slum eviction but also for the housing administration. Three retired army officers have been occupied with the housing administration of the Mihindusenpura housing scheme. They directly supervise everything in the housing scheme and coordinate with the UDA's director for the resettlement project who is also an army officer. Application of military forces for the housing administration should not be simply seen as a way of using the labour of army soldiers for post-war development. Rather, it can also be seen as militarization of civil administration. In addition to the use of military forces for the housing administration, the state has established a police post in the housing scheme to directly monitor the behavior of re-settlers. Here, there is no doubt that having a police post in the housing scheme will ensure the protection of community. However, my argument is that the purpose of establishing a police post in the housing scheme should not only be seen as a security measure but also as a way of governing the slum and shanty community. For instance, as respondents reported, they are checked at the gate by police if they come after 10 pm in the night. In particular, police or army personnel are alert to middle-aged and young people. In the interview, one respondent stated, 'I feel, we are living here like prisoners, they always suspect us'. This shows how residents' personal freedom and privacy are controlled in the housing scheme. As respondents mentioned, housing administration followed this method as a mechanism to control problems such as prostitution and drug dealing.

Further, to control deviance, the residents' behavior is supervised in different ways. It is interesting to note a few examples to proceed with my argument. There is a small grass space with a few concrete benches in the west side of the housing scheme. In the evenings and holidays, young people go there to chat with friends and smoke. But police always keep an on eye these gatherings. One of the respondents explained his experience as follows:

When we were in *watta*, we met and got some fun. Nobody checked on us. We got our fun. After we came here, we lost

everything. One day, at around 7.30 we went to that bench and smoked cigarettes. Suddenly two policemen came and checked us. They might have thought that we were having Ganja. I got angry and thought to hit them. But I controlled myself. If we argued with them, definitely we would have been in the prison. They suspect us for just sitting and chatting. They think that we are talking about some deals. What is this life? We cannot talk, gather or at least we don't have a right to spit here... In the night also police come and visit each floor three or four times. To whom we should say this? (See the case study 14).

As the above evidence shows, the state has used the police to supervise the behavior of residents. The purpose of the use of police or any other types of security system for gated communities is to make the residents get a sense of security and a feeling that they are protected from external threats. However, here, the police are set to supervise or correct residents' behavior. As another supervision method, the state has used police mobile visits. As the housing management revealed, police are required to visit each floor without uniforms three times per night. It is obvious that the purpose of the police supervision is to control deviant behaviors of the residents.

Further, I continue my argument with my own field experience. When I was interviewing one of the housing management officers (he was retired from the army) he received a call on his mobile phone. Soon after the call, he phoned the police unit of the housing scheme and said that something was happening in front of the housing number 12 of the floor number 10. In the discussion, I realized that they have developed a network to receive information if something wrong happens. There are hand-picked pro-housing management people on every floor of the housing scheme. Through this network, the housing management office and police unit receive information whenever problems arise. I further inquired into this matter when discussing with the key informants. They also mentioned that the housing management uses the network to receive information. Not only that, further they mentioned that some people use this system to get revenge against their opponents. The housing management can easily apply this method, since individual house allocation has been done by a raffle draw system and as the previous social network of the residents is disrupted by the raffle draw system.

All of these are examples of the new regulatory mechanisms which indicate that the state targeted governing the space as well as persons in the name of beauty. This is what Foucault conceptualized as 'governmentality'. According to Foucault, the state's welfare programmes are methods of governing the society or power operation projects under the banner of welfare (Foucault, 1980). Particularly, from the middle class point of view, they wish to have more pleasing urban spaces such as shopping malls, plazas, sidewalks, leisure parks, pedestrian pathways, markets, bazaars to enjoy their life meaningfully. On the other hand, they wish to live in a crime and violence free and calm environment. Therefore, they see the slum population as a threat to the establishing of a crime and violence free and calm living environment (Roy, 1993; Padhi, 2007; Ghertner, 2011).

### **Conclusion**

This study reveals that the discourse of city beautification and related resettlement of the urban poor in high-rise apartments is constructed and presented as a necessary, beneficial and public friendly development work which should be welcomed by the public. This optimistic discourse successively created the beautiful or ideal city in the audience's mind and influenced them to accept the state's development hegemony as the correct and beneficial one. Indeed, as the study reveals, compared to the previous status quo, the urban resettlement programme improved the living standards of very few groups of the urban poor, or of shanty neighborhoods and those who were working as labourers in the Railway Department. Due to these positive gains, these two groups have adapted relatively better to the high-rise living than the other slum residents and they valued the CBP as a positive development work.

However, the state has manipulated these two groups' acceptance as the ultimate truth or reality of the CBP and related slum resettlement programmes. But serious social pathologies such as forceful eviction and violation of INRP and RSPA in the land liberation process including nonpayment of compensation, break-up of communities and demolition of their livelihoods are not seen. Though the state discursively presented the purpose of slum clearance as a project to improve the living conditions of the urban poor, the real objective can be defined as a process to liberate the valuable lands in the inner city of Colombo for market purposes in realizing the imaginary world class

city. Harris (2006) states that these new forms of urban governance serve to create a city for the elites, middle- class and corporate sector. Indeed, the leaders of the CBP have followed this agenda in order to achieve the ‘world class city’ or the ‘international financial centres’ driven by globalization and neo-liberalism.

We acknowledge that urban development can play a catalyst role in development and reduction of inequalities, including poverty and homelessness. However, developers should not merely focus on economic development by readdressing the way cities are planned, designed, financed, developed, governed and managed, which caters only to the middle and upper classes. Urban development policy in Sri Lanka should adhere to the UN Habitat New Urban Agenda, which emphasizes sustainable cities and human settlements for all and the integration of all facets of MDGs.

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