Urbanising disaster governance
The politics of risks in the foothills of Santiago
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Theoretical Framework: Reframing Urban Disaster Governance
2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a theoretical framework for my thesis. The objective is twofold: to revisit relevant concepts and the trajectory of my target field; and to develop an analytical lens for the thesis. I describe my particular approach to researching urban disaster governance, considering the power dynamics of urban and disaster risks together, which requires a framework of power, space and justice. The chapter is organised as follows: I begin with an overview of academic work on disasters and politics (2.2), before situating my work within ongoing research (2.3). Each subsequent section then focuses on one central concept: politics (2.4), space (2.5) and justice (2.6), which together form the analytical framework of my thesis (2.7).

2.2 DISASTER STUDIES AND THE (URBAN) POLITICS OF RISK GOVERNANCE

A central tenet of my thesis stems from the idea that disasters are contentious and deeply political (Olson, 2000; Pelling & Dill, 2010). Expanding on the social construction of risks, Tierney (2014) criticises Ulrich Beck’s notion of risk society, arguing that decision-making is always at their base, regardless of social structures and technological advancements. For Beck, despite recognition of inequalities in exposure, risks in the risk society are a leveller; in his own words, “poverty is hierarchic, smog is democratic” (Beck, 1992, p. 36, emphasis in original). According to Tierney (2014), however, social construction of risks also exists in epidemics and preindustrial disasters, which result from particular choices that drive risks unevenly across wider society.

The centrality of society in producing disasters has a particular social and cultural history. Etymologically, ‘disaster’ derives from the Latin ‘ill-starred’, meaning that misfortune is driven by the stars – the gods (L. Jones, 2018; Quarantelli, 2000). A ‘disaster’ thus denotes bad luck and a catastrophe owing to ‘supernatural’ forces – ‘Acts of God’ that render any preventive measure impossible. This shifted with the Enlightenment. Following the Lisbon Earthquake of 1755, Voltaire wrote a poem questioning the action of a benevolent God:

“What crime, what sin, had those young hearts conceived
That lie, bleeding and torn, on mother’s breast?
Did fallen Lisbon deeper drink of vice
Than London, Paris, or sunlit Madrid?”
(cited in L. Jones, 2018, p. 38).

12 On the construction or production of risks, see Sun and Faas (2018) and section 3.2.3.
In other words, what had the people of Lisbon done to deserve such punishment? The poem adopts a view in which ‘nature’ acts against society, setting a precedent for social scientific approaches (Dynes, 1999). The perspective concentrates on the physical component – disasters are ‘acts of nature’, phenomena beyond our control but against which we can protect ourselves through our actions (Quarantelli, 2000). Early disaster research maintained this ‘acts of nature’ view, as society’s response is to ‘adjust’ to disaster risks (White, 1945). In this formulation, the locus is on ‘external’ agents, as an ‘event’ disrupts a particular spatio-temporal order (Fritz, 1961). Disasters in this paradigm represent ‘convenient accidents’: low probability occurrences that unsettle everyday lives and societal functions (Hewitt, 1983b). This naturalistic or physicalist paradigm endured for decades to explain and address disasters (Pelling, 2001). As such, it prescribes the development of emergency-based actions often promoted by military and centralised governmental institutions, along with over-dependence on technical and managerial solutions, e.g., flooding defence infrastructure, zoning and “‘fail-safe’ artifacts” (Hewitt, 1983b, p. 6).

Against this agent-focused approach and its underlying functionalist character, researchers advanced towards recognition of the profound social and political nature of disasters, understanding them as ‘acts of men and women’ (Furedi, 2007; Quarantelli, 2000). Whether through Amartya Sen’s work on entitlements, the more Marxist approach presented by Hewitt (1983a), or more ‘integrative’ research focused on both human and natural factors (Pelling, 2001), acknowledgement of social dimensions of disasters advanced the field significantly (Tierney, 2007). A generally accepted definition of disasters is expressed by Kelman (2019):

1. disasters are social, not environmental, processes;
2. disasters are caused by vulnerabilities;
3. disasters are slow-onset;
4. natural disasters do not exist;
5. exceptions occur.

These axioms may be considered good entry points for research and practice. Ultimately, disaster risks are a function of hazards, vulnerabilities and exposure (Wisner et al., 2004, 2011), with vulnerability as the ‘cause’ and main social component of disasters. In summary (Wisner et al., 2004, p. 49):

\[ R = V \times H \]
Rather than a mathematical equation, this is a “mnemonic device” to incorporate vulnerability with hazards and thus correct a bias in the physicalist tradition (Wisner et al., 2011, p. 24). By introducing vulnerability, attention is brought to structural imbalances in disaster occurrences. The emergence of the concept of vulnerability over 40 years ago was linked to postcolonial research agendas (Gaillard, 2019). Proponents focused not only on challenging the technocratic, hazard-centric physicalist paradigm, but on bringing a critique of the Western epistemologies nurturing research (Gaillard, 2019). Since then, vulnerability has worked as a “boundary concept” (Marino & Faas, 2020, p. 33) that unifies scientific approaches aimed at evaluating people’s capacities to “anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from the impact of a natural hazard” (Wisner et al., 2004, p. 11). As a profoundly political ecological concept, vulnerability focuses on human–environmental relations, especially development patterns that shape “society and the destructive agent” (e.g., a natural hazard) – factors which are “mutually constitutive and embedded in natural and social systems as unfolding processes over time” (Oliver-Smith, 1999b, p. 30). The influence of social scientific knowledge on the factors driving vulnerability, its thematic dimensions, and how to measure it, is enormous (Adger, 2006; Greg Bankoff et al., 2004; Birkmann, 2013a; Gaillard, 2019; Kelman et al., 2016; Wisner et al., 2004). Vulnerability – or the “conditions determined by physical, social, economic and environmental factors or processes which increase the susceptibility of an individual, a community, assets or systems to the impacts of hazards” (UNDRR, 2017b, p. 44) – has become the de facto social approach to understanding disaster processes.

The concept of vulnerability is no ‘silver bullet’, however. Some critics address how an uncritical application of the concept treats vulnerability as an underlying condition of individuals and spaces rather than a manifestation of more profound social inequalities (Gregory Bankoff, 2001; Gaillard, 2019; Gibb, 2018; Webber, 2013). Work dedicated to vulnerability measurement reduces it to indexes and maps showing ‘hotspots’ that not only overlook governance processes (Birkmann, 2013b)\(^\text{13}\), but show statically the socio-demographics of a population, inferring their vulnerability (F. Jacobs, 2019). This approach lacks a processual understanding of vulnerability, although the abovementioned work of political ecologists who highlight its human–environmental dimensions is an exception (Oliver-Smith, 1999b; Pelling, 2003). It is thus impossible to understand why particular racial/ethnic, gender, class, etc. groups maintain a disadvantaged position regarding natural hazards if “researchers are concerned with statistical differences between groups rather than the pervasive social inequalities that produce measured difference to begin with” (Bolin, 2007, p. 117, emphasis in original).

\(^{13}\) Although interesting efforts include Carreño et al. (2007) and Birkman et al. (2013).
One drawback of an uncritical understanding of vulnerability is its implications. Gibb, in her critical analysis of vulnerability and its ‘Achilles heel’ as a paradigm, stresses that “its solutions rest upon a problematic reproduction of the nature–culture dualism” (2018, p. 333; see also: Van Riet, 2021). Such an epistemology not only supports a particular westernised scientific approach to disasters that overlooks local realities, but also legitimises and prefigures the same interventions that contribute to anti-political outcomes and the perpetuation of risks (Gaillard, 2019). As hinted in the previous chapter in relation to why DRC trumps DRR (1.3.2), and as argued by Gibb (2018, p. 332):

“There is a tendency in conventional disaster work to treat symptoms instead of causes because vulnerability is deeply rooted, yet any lasting solution involves political change, radical reform of the international economic system and the development of public policy to protect rather than exploit people and natural resources.”

Work on vulnerability maintains a central tenet of the physicalist paradigm: disasters remain technocratic issues that rely on naturalistic interventions and generate ambivalent depoliticising outcomes. Paradigmatic approaches to hazards and vulnerability that, on paper, are opposing, have ended up coalescing (Gibb, 2018; Hewitt, 1983b; Pelling, 2001; Sliwinski, 2017; Watts, 1983). The promising critical potential that vulnerability had decades ago has since diminished, which calls for renewed efforts to locate the transformative potential within the field (Gaillard, 2019; von Meding et al., 2020).

If the aim is to reduce disaster risks in cities and to avoid creating more, we must explore the extent in which urban disaster governance literature engages with this. My examination, however, requires a refined conceptualisation of the ‘urban’. On one hand, the urban is held as a spatial form expressed as units called ‘cities’, which are assessed quantitatively according to demographics. Urbanisation constitutes a descriptive measure of the rapid growth of population living in ‘urban’ settlements in comparison to ‘non–urban’ ones (K. Davis, 1955). A threshold was crossed in 2007, at which point over half of the world’s population was living in cities. This view of the urban exists in multiple policies: within the ‘urban’ challenge of growing cities in the 1987 Brundtland report (WCED, 1987), or as a defining feature of our age and its doubling by 2050 (UNDESA, 2014; United Nations, 2017). Regarding disaster risks and environmental questions, this conception implies an externalist and dualistic view in which city and nature are in opposition: the city works as a social space that contrasts with a wild outside – or what geographers call ‘first nature’ (Smith & O’Keefe, 1980).
On the other hand, a number of urbanists adopt a processual, relational or dialectical view to expand this dichotomic understanding of the urban (Brenner, 2013; Brenner & Schmid, 2015). This position includes a diverse array of thinkers developing theoretical approaches such as planetary urbanisation (Brenner, 2014), postcolonial urbanism (Robinson, 2006; Roy, 2009) and assemblage urbanism (McFarlane, 2011). The urban here is not a spatial form or a ‘bounded’ unit, but a process or social relation of socio-spatial configurations. Critically, the urban is not a social reality distinct from and external to a ‘natural’ one – as famously stated by David Harvey, “there is nothing unnatural about New York city” (1996, p. 186, emphasis in original). Instead, a city comprises intertwined social and natural elements, metabolised thorough arrangements not exempt from power relations (Kaika, 2005; Swyngedouw, 1996).

Urban disaster governance literature is growing and incorporating multiple themes and topics (Gall et al., 2014; Murray, 2017); offering detailed analyses of policy implementation, stakeholders, and participatory and collaborative governance processes; and working adaptive governance precepts into existing structures (R. Djalante, 2012; Riyanti Djalante et al., 2011; Driessen et al., 2016; Melo Zurita et al., 2015). Some research addresses issues of social capital and trust (Becker, 2018; Melo Zurita et al., 2018), building local capacities for emergencies (Kapucu, 2012), and the challenges, (in)effectiveness and inclusivity of decentralisation for reducing risks (Miller & Douglass, 2016; Rumbach, 2016a, 2016b). Many of these advances were unknown a few years ago (Gall et al., 2014), and this work is undoubtedly important. Consideration of the ‘urban’ in this literature, however, tends to describe disaster concepts (e.g., vulnerability, exposure, resilience) in cities and to incorporate formal institutions into the mix. As such, it tends to portray the former conception of the ‘urban’, reproducing the aforementioned dualism between nature and culture. As such, current work on urban disaster governance fails to engage with the aforementioned tensions of DRR/DRC by overlooking the underlying urban politics and spatialisation of governance. There are, however, important avenues of urban disaster governance research in which to incorporate more critical theoretical approaches.
2.3 ‘URBANISING’ DISASTER GOVERNANCE: SITUATING MY PERSPECTIVE IN CURRENT DEBATES

Faced with a trend of overly technical research, scholars are refocusing on the political nature of disasters. Figure 2.1 presents neither an exhaustive review nor a linear development of schools of thought, describing instead the diversity of approaches that address more in-depth and complex political issues. These include the role of wider economic ideologies ingrained in the state and governance, socioecological metabolic processes distributing disaster risks unevenly, and the predominant techno-scientific knowledges and sometimes colonialist approaches guiding research. The field of disaster studies in that sense has potential avenues for investigating the politics of disasters.

Figure 2.1 Trajectory of disaster studies

Within this growing agenda, many urban and critical researchers are engaging with the topic of disaster governance. Efforts include particular ‘urban’ approaches to risk recreation (Marks, 2015, 2019; Rumbach, 2017) and other theoretical elaborations. For example, Grove (2014) develops a critical perspective on the biopolitics of disaster management in Jamaica, describing it as a Deleuzean ‘machine’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) that relies on the innate power of local populations. Influenced by Neil Smith’s theory of uneven development (1984), Batubara et al. (2018, p. 1199) focus on flood
infrastructure in Jakarta, describing floods as processes leading to “differentiation and equalisation premised on the contradiction between labour and capital”, explaining the extent to which disasters mirror class. Meriläinen et al. (2019) discuss the distinct conceptions of the ‘right to the city’ embodied in neoliberal regimes and in the work of Lefebvre (1996) and Harvey (2008) to analyse the potential for more socially just governance that attends to marginalised urban inhabitants (see also 2.6).

In direct conversation with this growing politically-conscious agenda, I frame my thesis within a political economic perspective (see 2.7), focusing on the interaction of urban politics, economies and policies to determine the production of risks (Wisner, 2000; Gotham, 2016; Tierney, 2014). As argued by Tierney, this approach can demonstrate that “risk is quite often a byproduct of the pursuit of profit, enabled by too-pliable institutions that unknowingly or knowingly allow risk to expand” (2014, p. 9). Given the mix of material and immaterial factors influencing risks, the important question is how institutions, interests and values produce and legitimise hazardous conditions. Particular coalitions of urban actors engage in a “growth machine politics” (Tierney, 2014, p. 127) that defends models of economic development, which, while driving intensification of land uses, real estate speculation and resistance to governmental regulations, de-emphasise disaster risks and ultimately reproduce uneven and hazardous urban space (Gotham & Greenberg, 2014; Tierney, 2014; Wisner & Lavell, 2017). The same goes for cultural and discursive entities, particularly those with naturalistic interpretations of disasters (Collins, 2009; Mustafa, 2005). These include the media (Gould et al., 2016; Tierney et al., 2006), scientific frames (Arabindoo, 2016; de Vries, 2011), and ideological notions such as nationalism and neoliberalism (Harvey, 2005; Klein, 2007; Wisner et al., 2011). A political economy research perspective on urban disaster governance can ultimately expand upon the power-laden creation of vulnerability and the contentiousness of disasters. Disasters are clearly not natural, but addressing them as unnatural is not enough: their inherently political character must be brought to the fore (Huber et al., 2017).

To realise this in my thesis, I expand upon two relevant dimensions: the temporality of disasters and their root causes. Disasters are ‘event/process’ (Oliver-Smith & Hoffman, 2002). This duality is important, as discourses on vulnerability (de Vries, 2011) and the interests and values at play during emergency, relief and aftermath are political. How ‘exceptional moments’ are defined is therefore not trivial, as these determine permitted actions, their duration and, more importantly, who wins and who
loses (Agamben, 2005; Fariás & Flores, 2017; Gotham & Greenberg, 2014). From the urbanist perspective of the thesis, however, it is crucial to transcend this ‘eventness’ and expand upon the processual nature of disasters through their ‘social life’ (Sørensen & Albris, 2016), i.e., how particular disaster experiences, cultures and practices remain and reshape post-disaster settings. While relief actors and institutions eventually depart disaster-impacted areas, their repercussions resonate for decades through transformed environments and cultural practices. The relevance is, again, how such transformations address DRR or maintain processes of DRC in the long-term.

This brings me to the last point on disaster causation. If vulnerability emerges from power-laden relations in society, this must be explained with reference to a diverse chain of causation, connecting current conditions with underlying drivers of risk or root cause analysis (Oliver-Smith et al., 2016, 2017; Wisner et al., 2004, 2011). Two such efforts are the Pressure and Release (PAR) model and the Forensic Investigation of Disasters (FORIN). PAR explains the ‘progression’ of vulnerability by accounting for “three sets of links that connect the disaster to processes that are located at decreasing levels of specificity from the people impacted upon by a disaster” (Wisner et al., 2004, p. 52): progression from (a) spatially and temporally distant root causes (e.g., economic structures, political processes or ideologies limiting access to power and resources); through (b) more contemporary activities expressing these root causes as dynamic pressures (e.g., deficient or absent institutions, or macro-forces such as rapid urbanisation, deforestation or degraded biodiversity); to (c) particular unsafe conditions (e.g., settlements in dangerous locations, social groups with poor health and education, or a lack of disaster preparedness) (Wisner et al., 2004, 2011).

The FORIN framework promotes inter-disciplinary studies to understand disaster causation while providing “policy options and evidence-based prescriptions and alternatives” to improve DRR (Oliver-Smith et al., 2016, p. 14). Like PAR, it analyses elements such as the triggering physical event, the exposure and socio-economic structures of communities (including their vulnerabilities and resilience) and particular dynamic pressures. The actual forensic analysis, however, entails by definition a longitudinal consideration of how disasters “unfold over time”, resulting from causes that “are deeply embedded in societal history, structure and organization, including human-environmental relations” (Oliver-Smith et al., 2016, p. 32). Moreover, in regard to potential intervention in such root causes, the framework entails a critical theoretical position:
“This perspective presents a significant methodological challenge in that the roots of causality are real in a phenomenological sense, but may not be empirically observable. They do, however, operate as structural mechanisms with enduring properties that generate actual conditions that can be directly observed” (Oliver-Smith et al., 2016, p. 32)

A crucial idea, therefore, is that the unlikely direct intervention in a root cause should not exhaust its potential change in the long run. In other words, the causal explanation of disasters must incorporate systemic and structural transformations; reduction of explanations to immediate factors not only risks restoring a physicalist approach but abandoning potential political transformation. In this thesis I approach root causes as social, political and economic structures and ideologies that are spatiotemporally distant to an ‘event’ or to current at-risk conditions, but that are their ultimate explanatory driver. While distant, concrete institutions engender these spatiotemporal causes, including the relative value of DRR/DRC and its outcomes. In that sense, urban disaster governance constitutes a significant dynamic pressure to be brought to the fore, as it determines the arrangements that influence social protections and who remains at risk (Cannon, 2008; Wisner, 2016; Wisner et al., 2011).

2.4 POWER: UNCOVERING GAPS ON POWER IN URBAN DISASTER GOVERNANCE

Urban disaster governance research has paid varying attention to power issues. Many efforts reflect on the problems and limits of current forms of governance and, more importantly, development of ways to enhance them (Birkmann et al., 2010; Riyanti Djalante et al., 2011; Driessen et al., 2016; Melo Zurita et al., 2015). Central to these are questions of efficiency and inclusivity, especially regarding wider participation and collaboration from more diverse stakeholders. Nonetheless, as this kind of research operates within the bounds of current governance institutions, scant attention is paid to power relations between actors.

Other research focuses on the relationship between disaster risks and other development processes (Collins, 2018). Important questions here refer to the need to ‘mainstream’ DRR processes into urban planning and development agendas (S. Jones et al., 2014; Pelling, 2011a; Wamsler, 2006; Wamsler & Brink, 2016; Zaidi & Pelling, 2015). While these share the objective of solving the issue of more efficient and inclusive governance processes, this group tends to be more critical of the actual
processes impeding this, defining governance itself not as a technical issue but a profoundly political one.

Finally, a diverse group of researchers investigate the entanglement of power and disaster governance arrangements. Some question how urban politics influence disaster governance practices and how such arrangements contribute to urbanisation and risks, examining, for example, how vulnerability interacts with governance and showing that practices tend to impact marginal groups more negatively due to wider policy processes (Kammerbauer & Wamsler, 2017; Marks, 2015). Others question the legitimisation of inequalities and/or reproduction of disaster risks, addressing pernicious issues like clientelism (Coates & Nygren, 2020). Going beyond institutions and structures, some scholars focus on the role of knowledge, discourses and technologies, and on a wider comprehension of actors and actants in governing practices. Zeiderman (2012, 2016), for example, engages with governmentality (Foucault, 1982) to expand the role of technologies in power. Strands of science and technology studies (STS) are incorporated to properly understand ‘expert-led’ assessment of risk (A. Fraser, 2017). The concept of assemblage, stemming from the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), or Bruno Latour’s Actor-Network Theory (ANT), have also been applied to the case of disasters such as earthquakes (Angell, 2014) and floods (Marks, 2019).

Nevertheless, inattention to urban politics within urban disaster governance and the recreation of risks constitutes a gap in the literature. We need to know what kinds of power dynamics emerge through the operation of governance arrangements, especially since these can contribute to exclusionary outcomes. This kind of approach to governance exists in debates about resources such as water (Joy et al., 2014; Octavianti & Charles, 2019; Swyngedouw, 2013), in discussions about the functioning of cities (Choplin, 2016; Sweeting & Hambleton, 2020), and in some contributions concerning resilience (Kaika, 2017; Tierney, 2015; Vale, 2014, 2016). What these studies show is that when power is not addressed, governance can be reduced to a normative and technical set of solutions; as addressed by Jessop in regard to Neoliberal urban regimes, these make “no reference to popular movements, new social movements, grass-roots struggles, trade unions, or even political parties—good governance is, apparently, above party politics” (2002, p. 469, emphasis added). This echoes a discussion presented earlier (see 1.3.2) about over-emphasis on physicalist initiatives that serve to legitimise inequalities and naturalise the disasters discourse (Hewitt, 1983b). Hence, depoliticising socio-environmental issues is problematic because it inhibits more profound reflection on why they occur and how to change them.
2.4.1 FRAMEWORK: THE POST-POLITICAL AND THE DYNAMICS OF URBAN POLITICS

To address this power knowledge gap, I approach urban disaster governance by focusing on two concepts: post-politics and anti-politics. The former requires an abstract discussion given the need to question certain ontological assumptions.

Influenced by philosophy and the social sciences, researchers in the field understand disasters and extreme events as disruption of the ‘social contract’ (e.g., Aysan & Lavell, 2014; Pelling & Dill, 2010). This view connotes a degree of agreement between governor and governed that defines their mutual obligations—a position held in political philosophy for centuries (e.g., Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and, more recently, John Rawls). This contractualist position is criticised by multiple thinkers, however, who argue that society emerges not from general consent but from difference and conflict (Badiou, 2012; Mouffe, 1993b, 2005; Rancière, 1999, 2010). As Mouffe (1993a) stresses in relation to Rawls, what he develops is a ‘political philosophy without politics’, the latter being the domain of difference and not of contractual agreements. This critical position, which has been deemed ‘post-foundational politics’ (Marchart, 2007; Swyngedouw, 2011), is rooted in the ontological distinction between ‘the political’ (or ‘le politique’) and ‘politics’ (or ‘la politique’). While ‘the political’ refers to “the dimension of antagonism that is inherent in all human society” (Mouffe, 1995, p. 262) and is therefore grounded in multiple expressions of disagreement and dissensus (Rancière, 1999), ‘politics’ refers to the “ensemble of practices, discourses, and institutions which seek to establish a certain order and to organize human coexistence” in conditions that enter into conflict with the ‘properly political’ (Mouffe, 1995, p. 262-63; Swyngedouw, 2009).

The notion of post-politics or the post-political refers to the democratic deficits of formally elected institutions, particularly in the current phase of global neoliberal capitalism (see 1.3.1). Critically, the post-political relates to conditions that foreclose any kind of contestation and dissent. In Erik Swyngedouw’s words, “Post-politics...”

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14 There are, of course, different meanings of the social contract. For Hobbes it prevents a hypothetically violent state of nature; for Locke it is a way to ensure property; for Rousseau it concerns submitting our individual will to a general one that guarantees freedom and equality; for Rawls it emerges from a Kantian universalism that gives form to his theory of justice. See Friend (n.d.).

15 The distinction is grounded in strands of ‘continental’ philosophy (see Marchart, 2007).
refers to a politics in which ideological or dissensual contestation and struggles are replaced by techno-managerial planning, expert management and administration” (2010a, p. 226). This discussion helps to situate power by focusing on the logics through which particular modes of governing emerge to manage social differences. On top of the logic of consensus toppling dissensus, the post-political condition transforms governmental action by reconceiving it as “a managerial function, deprived of its proper political dimension” in which “the conflict of global ideological visions embodied in different parties which compete for power is replaced by the collaboration of enlightened technocrats” (Zizek, 1999, cited in Swyngedouw, 2010, p. 226). Critically, inequalities and injustices remain unaddressed and are thus legitimised, foreclosing the possibility for those excluded to protest these as ‘wrongs’ (Rancière, 1999). Finally, urban and environmental issues represent important spaces in which the post-political emerges (Davidson & Iveson, 2015; Dikeç, 2005; Swyngedouw, 2007, 2009). It is in ‘post-political cities’ where the managerial logic of late capitalism reigns, particularly by framing “a common and consensual language of competitive creativity, flexibility, efficiency, state entrepreneurship, strategic partnership, and collaborative advantage” (Swyngedouw, 2007, p. 60). Ultimately, the evacuation of politics regarding disasters is critical, as narratives of powerful actors tend to claim that victims were in the “wrong place at the wrong time” (Marks, 2015, p. 625), neglecting their own role in (re)creating risks in the first place.

While the literature on the post-political condition describes the wider logic in which urban power operates nowadays, it is too abstract to describe the ways in which policy implementation and governance remove agency and deliberation ‘on the ground’. I draw upon work on the dynamics of re- and de-politicisation and anti-politics as topical ways of understanding the current modes in which power operates. Depoliticisation refers to the ‘tactics and tools’ that displace deliberation and their outcomes in disaffecting the public (Fawcett et al., 2017). In doing so, these obscure the profound political nature of the problems to be solved. Hence, removing that veil and asserting social differences and injustices would represent a move towards re-politicisation. These concepts are thus in conversation with the post-political condition, although more focused on the processes of neutralising social inequalities. Anti-politics, according to Fawcett et al. (2017, p. 6), “overlaps with depoliticization in referring to public disengagement, manifested in declining public participation in elections and parties, as well as acquiescence to dominant paradigms of public policy”. In that sense, anti-politics refers to the emergent sentiment associated with increased separation between governor and governed.
Nevertheless, my approach to anti-politics and governance is influenced by particular works within anthropology of development (Ferguson, 1994; Li, 2007; T. Mitchell, 2002).

Ferguson’s (1994) seminal anthropological endeavour questions the development ‘apparatus’ in place by *decentring* its work in practice. For this, one must “locate the intelligibility of a series of events and transformations not in the intentions guiding the actions of one or more animating subjects, but in the systematic nature of the social reality which results from those actions” (Ferguson, 1994, p. 18). This strand of anthropology, critically inspired by Michel Foucault’s work (1991), puts forth the notion that humanitarian and development projects have a number of effects that can only be addressed when their associated plans and initiatives are reconsidered. For Ferguson, to focus on the efficiency of development projects in regard to their explicit outcomes (e.g., poverty alleviation, expanding agricultural productivity) is wrong, not only because projects would be understood as ‘failures’, but because they have other productive outcomes associated with the exercise of power. Ultimately, the development apparatus generates a system of institutional and bureaucratic state power that has the “conceptual or ideological effect of depoliticizing both poverty and the state” by *suspending* politics through “a neutral, technical mission to which no one can object” (Ferguson, 1994, p. 256). This kind of approach is further expanded by Li (2007) in her anthropological account of improvement schemes in Indonesia. There she shows how governmental practices are ‘rendered technical’ by the expert-led prognosis of those improvement projects, effectively excluding and containing any challenge to the status quo. This allows her, echoing the aforementioned political ontology, to distinguish a ‘practice of government’ (i.e., politics) from a proper ‘practice of politics’ (i.e., the political).

If state power is not an ‘essential’ entity but an emergent one, then it is critical to understand how it emerges and how to describe it. Gupta and Sharma (2006) review how anthropology approaches the state, especially since globalisation supposedly means weaker state forms. They contest the idea that the state is a ‘discrete’ element, a “clearly bounded institution that is distinct from society”, instead addressing how the state “comes into being” and, critically, “what effects this construction has on the operation and diffusion of power throughout society” (A. Gupta & Sharma, 2006, p. 8). More than an abstract or institutional form, the state “is constituted through everyday social practices”, occupying a vertical position of authority and working as a “super-coordinator of the governance of social and individual conduct by these
other institutions” (A. Gupta & Sharma, 2006, p. 9). Analysis of the practices of state bureaucracies reveals them as technical or ‘apolitical’ through their appearance as routinary, repetitive and ordinary. Regardless of the premise of ‘from government to governance’, this approach to state power can be expanded to governing practices. In this regard, my power framework follows researchers that have approached the process of governance as a question to be unpacked through everyday practices, following urban political ecology (Gabriel, 2014) and other critical urban perspectives (Cornea et al., 2017). Therefore, my perspective analyses the post-political (i.e., the predominant logic that foregrounds consensus as the chief objective of governance) and the anti-political (i.e., the concrete tactics and tools through which initiatives are rendered technical) by attending to which actors, rules and resources are in place, and how their associated practices and discourses engage with extant social inequalities.

2.5 **SPACE:**

**DELINEATING SPATIAL GAPS IN URBAN DISASTER GOVERNANCE**

My analysis of the urban disaster governance literature revealed three main types of engagement with space: applied geographical work involving differing criticisms on space; research on the spatial nature of vulnerability and governance; and work on scale and decentralisation.

Accounting for the geographical specificities of certain cities has been a promising avenue of disaster governance research. Here, contributors analyse certain concepts relating to governance in a particular geographical context, drawing conclusions on the progress and setbacks of that case (Becker, 2018; Flower & Fortnam, 2015; Garschagen, 2015; Lassa, 2013). For example, they expand on how disaster governing arrangements and their goals (e.g., trust, transparency) develop over time in relation to disaster-related issues (e.g., vulnerabilities, resilience, risk management) in countries (e.g., Lassa, 2013) and cities (e.g., Becker, 2018). An omission from this descriptive work is a reflection on space: disasters and disaster risks are analysed against an urban or rural **backdrop**, while space itself remains unquestioned.

Secondly, researchers have addressed the role of geographies in the (re)production of vulnerabilities. Which spaces remain at risk and who lives there is the result of neither nature nor an abstract entity such as ‘the market’, but a combination of actors,
policy arrangements and discourses (Gotham, 2016a; Watts & Bohle, 1993). Moreover, authors have expanded the spatial notion of landscape (e.g., hazardscape or riskscape) to encompass spatial (and temporal) processes in risk production (Bohle, 2018; de Vries, 2011; Mustafa, 2005). However, risks also influence space: if society and space are the causes of risks, it is important also to consider how risks themselves transform society and space. This has been addressed by November (2008) in her approach to the spatiality of risks, by Rebotier (2012) in his framework for territorialising risks according to their performative outcomes, and by other urban and disaster scholars (Gotham & Greenberg, 2014; Pelling, 2003).

Finally, given the growing importance of enhancing DRR and DRM at multiple institutional levels, some research focuses on scale and decentralisation. The increasing number and diversity of actors participating in horizontal and vertical arrangements is well known in the literature (Murray, 2017). Relevant questions address the existence of uneven capacities for governing risks, especially in lower tiers such as urban governments (Daly et al., 2017; Marks & Lebel, 2016; Miller & Douglass, 2015, 2016; Rumbach, 2016b; Sandoval & Voss, 2018). In the context of years of power devolution from the national to subnational level, authors have identified ‘incomplete’ decentralisation processes (Blackburn, 2014; Marks & Lebel, 2016), highlighting the inherent inter- and multi-scalar relations in risk governance and the focus on the shifting responsibilities of city and local government.

Joint consideration of formal and informal aspects of urban disaster governance constitutes a persistent gap in this literature. Although ‘governance’ concerns the complexity of arrangements that go ‘beyond government’, in practice the majority of research limits analysis to formal state institutions, private sector agents and established NGOs. This “bias in disaster governance (…) tends to uncritically favour official institutional responses to state-recognized disasters over bottom-up and informal reactions and adaptations in the long term” (Huang, 2018, p. 384). Instead, disaster researchers should move away from the sole analysis of disaster-related documentation (plans, legislation, policies, etc.) and focus on how hazards and disasters are managed in practice, including “the broader societal contexts that influence disaster management” (Tierney, 2012, p. 358). There are some exceptions. Tafti (2017) studies housing reconstruction in Iran and shows that, due to arbitrary definitions of ‘formal’ and ‘informal’, disaster recovery leads to marginalisation through the reproduction of ‘informality’. Van Voorst (2016) shows that the presence of ‘effective’ decentralisation
does not in itself enhance inclusive flood governance given local features unaccounted in formal processes. Research avenues such as these are promising in terms of the spatial character of disaster governance and requires a different theoretical approach.

2.5.1 FRAMEWORK: THE PRODUCTION OF SPACE IN URBAN DISASTER GOVERNANCE

Many scholars promote the idea that space is more than merely the container of society (Low, 2017). To comprehend urban disaster governance in practice, an alternative approach to the production of space is needed (Lefebvre, 1991; Low, 2017), which I develop based on work from geography and spatial theory.

Human geography and related disciplines have developed multiple strategies to describe the ontological character of human-environmental relations. This includes work such as the ‘socionature’ thesis (Castree, 2001), the more-than-human character of cities (B. Braun, 2005), and lately work by Moore (2015) on the notion of oikos. Another relevant approach to disaster studies is urban political ecology (UPE) (Villar Navascués, 2017; Wescoat Jr., 2015). Following two sets of literature16, the seminal work of Swyngedouw (1996) on ‘the city as a cyborg’ brought together ecological thinking, political economy, urban studies and critical social and cultural theory to coin UPE. This body of work asserts that environmental and social changes co-determine one another, making socio-spatial conditions not only social, political and economic processes, but also physical, chemical and/or biological ones (Heynen et al., 2006; Ranganathan, 2015). They are transformed through metabolic processes that enable or disable certain outcomes, which are never neutral because they operate in social power relations that are either “material or discursive, economic, political, and/or cultural” (Heynen et al., 2006, pp. 10–11).

A number of spatial theorists also address the profound politics of space (Elden, 2007; Lefebvre, 1991). An important distinction here is to transcend understanding of space as an ‘object’ in the Cartesian sense (i.e., as a passive container that can be objectively comprehended), instead revealing its profound active properties. Authors like Lefebvre (1974), Harvey (1973, 2006) and Soja (1989) draw upon Marx to criticise the mainstream (bourgeois) idea of space as devoid of social and political character, developing instead

16 On one hand, Marxist thinkers such as Lefebvre, Harvey and Neil Smith, and on the other, post-structural and Actor Network Theory, particularly in the works of Bruno Latour and Donna Haraway.
its complexity through particular typologies of space. Lefebvre (1991) developed the conceptual triad of spatial practice, representations of space, and representational space. For Harvey (1973, 2006), the idea of space as a container – as a “thing in itself” (1973, p. 13) – is correct, but only in one of its dimensions, which he calls the ‘absolute’ space. He further complements this with two categories: ‘relative’ space, inspired by Einstein and other non-Euclidean geometries, highlighting the importance of the observer’s standpoint through, for example, spatio-temporal flows or processes; and ‘relational’ space, which draws upon the work of Leibniz to propose that processes do not occur in space but “define their own spatial frames” through their internal relations (Harvey, 2006, p. 123). For Harvey, space is all three, “depending on the circumstances”, thus recentring the role of human practice (1973, p. 13).

Based on this discussion, my focus is on the spatialities of governance. The dialectical relationship between space and society involves the historical-geographical processes that generate the conditions for disaster risks, including the logics of urbanisation, creation of urban public spaces, and development of protective infrastructures. As asserted by Harvey: “Urbanization should, rather, be regarded as a spatially grounded social process in which a wide range of different actors with quite different objectives and agendas interact through a particular configuration of interlocking spatial practices” (1989, p. 5, emphasis added). It is therefore crucial to research the spatial practices associated to governance in detail, referring to those everyday activities of producing and reproducing socio-spatial configurations (Lefebvre, 1991; Yarina, 2019). Understanding the social production of space and its associated politics also involves their inherent contestations, as different spatial projects are in tension and contradiction (e.g., between use value and exchange value in Marxist theory). Finally, the open-ended nature of space means that that which is deemed ‘formal’ never fully contains the intended objectives and interventions in space, but that some level of informality affects both their processes and their outcome (Koster & Nuijten, 2016; McFarlane, 2012; Roy, 2005; Yiftachel, 2009).

2.6 JUSTICE: QUESTIONS FOR A NEW CONCEPT IN THE DISASTER FIELD

Justice is a complex issue that is virtually impossible to review comprehensively. I acknowledge the multiple valid perspectives of western approaches to justice from philosophy, legal studies, politics and social science (Pomerleau, n.d.). My
review focuses on social and environmental justice to connect related discussions with disasters in general, and disaster governance in particular. The unjust nature of disaster is well established. Elaborating upon their theory of ‘marginalisation’ in the context of disasters, Susman et al. (1983) describe the role of global political economy in delineating processes of exploitation that benefit wealthy countries and elites at the expense of the poor. Following a Marxist interpretation, they argue that “the international division of labour among rich and poor countries, and market forces within the poor underdeveloped capitalist economies of the Third World, cause the poorest of the poor to live in the most dangerous places” – an issue of social justice in space according to the allocation of national surplus and local spatial economies (Susman et al., 1983, p. 278, emphasis added). While this view expresses the politics of development and underdevelopment at the global scale in terms of over-economisation, the work undoubtedly places the question of inequity within the field of disasters.

A view of disaster vulnerabilities as mirroring socio-economic structures raises discussions of justice. Those who create and perpetuate vulnerabilities seldom have to endure them, although they can potentially be harmed by them (Kelman, 2020). As such, disasters are generally negative and unjust processes. This thesis is concerned with the extent to which vulnerabilities arise from governance mechanisms, that is, the link between particular conditions of risks and the functioning of institutional governance, and how these ‘intersect’ and legitimise inequalities and/or reproduce disaster risks (Coates & Nygren, 2020; Nygren, 2018; Nygren & Wayessa, 2018). Researchers have examined how post-disaster governance practices impact marginal groups more negatively due to the design of policy processes (Kammerbauer & Wamsler, 2017; Marks, 2015). Many other authors focus on the role of claims made by vulnerable communities, such as disaster justice (Huang, 2018; Rumbach & Németh, 2018), the right to the city (Meriläinen et al., 2019), and the potential for the construction of a just and resilient city (Paidakaki & Moulaert, 2017; Paidakaki & Parra, 2018).

There are many possible avenues of research on justice in the context of disaster issues. In this thesis I address a particular gap in the disaster justice literature, not necessarily related to the extent to which vulnerabilities emerge from social inequalities, but to how urban disaster governance processes are currently contributing to both reduction and

17 There are exceptions. Agrawal (2011) describes the positive economic development that resulted in post-disaster Honduras.
perpetuation of risk. Planning literature has asserted that climate change adaptation initiatives have a profound equity dimension (Anguelovski et al., 2016; Shi et al., 2016). Crucially, many inequities are unintended – the outcome of unequal power relations within the city. Similarly, disaster governance should be connected to other urban processes, with consideration given to how risk initiatives are implemented in cities. This would link DRR governance to questions of inequality and injustice, both of which remain underexplored in disaster studies (Douglass & Miller, 2018; Reid, 2013; Rumbach & Németh, 2018). Douglass and Miller (2018, p. 278) state that the emergent notion of ‘disaster justice’ (Verchick, 2012) can address certain “anthropogenic sources of environmental crises” that “are routinely obscured in the politics and structures of governance”.

If inequalities and injustices are to be avoided, research must engage with the multiple injustices intertwined with disaster governance processes. The challenge, however, is to delineate the specificity of justice in relation to disasters, addressing justice beyond a purely legislative issue as one with wider social and political concerns.

2.6.1 FRAMEWORK: TOWARDS MULTIPLE DISASTER (IN)JUSTICES

The social science perspective taken in this thesis requires to review two related but distinct conversations: first on a philosophical level on social justice, and then on the specificity of justice for disasters.

From liberal to critical perspectives
The notion of justice poses questions of normativity and ethics. It is a contentious concept by definition and requires reflection on what is good, fair, accepted and intended, and on how to achieve these outcomes. Debate concerning the universality of certain principles is centuries-old, ranging from Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle to more recent thinkers like Rawls. His book *A theory of Justice* (1971) is a milestone of modern justice. Building upon the perspective of social contractualists (e.g., Locke, Rousseau, Kant), justice for Rawls involves a question of the distribution of individuals’ life-prospects, beginning with certain principles of justice that society agrees to define if “an initial situation (…) is fair” (Rawls, 1971, p. 11). The question, therefore, is: Which principles are used to assess the unequal
distribution of social and economic advantages as just? From a Rawlsian perspective, this involves, first, equal rights and an extensive scheme of liberties, and second, that inequalities be “arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone’s advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all” (Rawls, 1971, p. 61). Policy and the practice of justice therefore aim to advance towards a fair allocation of resources following what he calls the ‘veil of ignorance’.

Harvey (1973) applies Rawls’ view of justice, extending it to urban issues. His book *Social Justice and the City* (Harvey, 1973) is divided into two parts: what he calls ‘liberal’ and ‘Marxist’ formulations of justice. The former portrays a Rawlsian view and describes the concept of ‘territorial social justice’, which focuses on the distribution of income in cities. In the Marxist half, however, he observes that the liberal formulation of justice entails a particularly idealist and positivist epistemological position, identifying ‘object’ and ‘subject’ as separate entities that may be observed and evaluated independently. This allows the distillation of particular universal moral principles and assessment of situations as just or not. Nevertheless, Marx’s epistemology is a critical one, in which subject and object exist in a dialectical relationship; as such, his conceptual apparatus seeks not to describe the world but to change it\(^\text{18}\) (Marx, 1888). Harvey denies this separation in justice discussions, asserting that a sole focus on distribution of a certain issue – e.g., income in cities – fails to account for the realm of production, which is the main engine of capitalism and the driver of inequality.

The significance of this critique for my thesis is twofold. First, the distribution of disaster risks is relevant, but cannot be separated from the (re)production of those risks; second, it is unlikely that the definition of a universal conception of justice would apply to the case of disasters. Relevant here is the work of two feminist philosophers: Iris Marion Young and Nancy Fraser. Young (1990) is a central figure in political philosophy for her critique of Rawls’ justice paradigm. In her view, it is important to depart from universalist principles and advance more context-specific analyses, which assess something not as just per se but as unjust based on the functioning of institutional systems. She criticises efforts to theorise outside society, which many philosophers do in their theories of justice. To theorise and take positions outside social institutions and social relations is, in her view, “too abstract to be useful”, and instead, reflections about justice and injustice “must contain some substantive premises about social life” (Young, 1990, 3.2.3 for a discussion on my epistemological positioning.)

\(^{18}\) See 3.2.3 for a discussion on my epistemological positioning.
p. 4). The situated and concrete practices through which social movements make claims about justice – which involve reflection derived from critical theories of emancipation – invoke something that is not there, that is desired. This, ultimately, is “an expression of freedom” in that “it does not have to be this way, it could be otherwise” (Young, 1990, p. 6). Justice and politics are thus intimately entwined.

According to Young's political philosophy, Rawlsian justice has two problems. First, it focuses on the allocation of material goods and social positions while ignoring the structures and contexts that determine such patterns. Second, when it address nonmaterial social goods, it assumes them as static and not as functions of society. In contrast, “social justice means the elimination of institutionalized domination and oppression” (Young, 1990, p. 15), which are the main aspects of justice. In her view, (a) domination relates to those “institutional processes which prevent some people from learning and using satisfying and expansive skills in socially recognized settings, or institutionalized social processes which inhibit people's ability to play and communicate with others or to express their feelings and perspective on social life in contexts where others can listen”; and (b) oppression refers to the “institutional conditions which inhibit or prevent people from participating in determining their actions or the conditions of their actions” (Young, 1990, p. 38). Both notions are not universal but particular to certain socio-institutional realities; moreover, they extend a purely distributional view of justice to incorporate recognition.

This last matter is especially important in the work of Nancy Fraser. Also from a feminist perspective, Fraser (2005a) offers a reflection that expands the question of the contents of justice. She is also critical of the view of justice in exclusively distributional terms given the pure social or economic denotation of such justice. Based on the trajectory of feminist movements throughout the twentieth century, Fraser (2005a, p. 305) describes the different claims developed in each phase and unpacks a “three-dimensional politics” that encompasses distributional, recognition and representational dimensions. Based on this triad, she aims to bring economic (redistribution) and cultural (recognition) injustices together with political injustices (representation) in order to add a more ‘ordinary-political’ domain of injustice (N. Fraser, 2005b).

Ultimately, this overview reveals a trajectory of justice that moves away from liberal views and towards critical perspectives. As Young (1990, p. 5 emphasis added) stresses:
"...critical theory is a normative reflection that is historically and socially contextualized. Critical theory rejects as illusory the effort to construct a universal normative system insulated from a particular society. Normative reflection must begin from historically specific circumstances because there is nothing but what is, the given, the situated interest in justice, from which to start."

I incorporate this body of work into this thesis by stressing the difficulty of defining universal principles without a social and institutional counterpart, while expanding on a three-dimensional approach to justice. This approach consists of: (a) distribution (i.e., the allocation of amenities and resources, specifically economic and environmental); (b) recognition (i.e., frames and discourses differentiating status, producing hierarchies, and their impact on devaluing some groups and spaces); and (c) representation (i.e., the ability of at-risk groups to engage substantially in public matters, voicing wrongs and organise collectively). My framework, however, requires a more central consideration of disaster-specific discussions.

From environmental to disaster justice

A number of twentieth-century judicial cases in the US led to the definition of a particular environmental dimension of justice (Bullard, 1990). This work emerged from the realisation that the burdens of capitalism in terms of waste, toxic materials, hazardous environments and so on are not only unevenly distributed but affect a certain social group more negatively: poor black communities. Relatedly, a relevant agenda emerged to understand the racialised nature of legal regulations and environmental policies (Holifield et al., 2010; Walker, 2010; Walker & Bulkeley, 2005). Despite the existence of debates on hazards/disasters within environmental justice work (Schlosberg, 2013), a proper conception of ‘disaster justice’ has only emerged since 2010. It is closely connected, and even overlaps, with environmental justice; however, temporality constitutes an important difference, as “disasters reveal environmental injustice in the fast-forward mode” (Pastor et al., 2006, p. 9). In other words, disasters reveal certain hidden unjust structural processes to the public within a compressed timeframe. Complementarily, Douglass and Miller (2018) address three reasons for the specificity of disaster justice, differentiating it from environmental or climate justice. These are (1) what they call the ‘excessiveness’ of disasters, as there is by definition a degree of disruption to normality that implies a complexity to pursuing justice concerns through regular channels; (2) ‘compound effects’ of disasters, as their impacts are not only immediate but also long-lasting in socio-spatial terms;
and (3) the increasing recognition of disaster justice as a standalone field with its own claims and field of practice.

The legal scholar Robert Verchick (2010, 2012) presents a comprehensive work on disaster justice, starting from the realisation that social justice invokes a particular question in the context of disasters. This is based on what he calls the ‘social turn’ of disaster research, which concerns the recognition that social structures are important when dealing with disaster risks – mirrored in the review presented in 2.2. He argues that the proper reduction of risks concerns not only *good engineering* but also alleviation of “the burdens of social vulnerability” (Verchick, 2012, p. 67). Building upon a capability-based approach (particularly Judith Shklar and Amartya Sen), he states that “building resilience—and thus (...) reducing social vulnerability19—is more than a politician’s kind turn, more than charity; it is the obligation of a free society. To fail to provide it is an injustice” (Verchick, 2012, p. 67). As such, he describes the inadequacy of the polity to protect vulnerable groups not as bad luck, but as a failure of the law: it is “not just unfortunate, but also unjust” (Verchick 2012, p.25). While this renders the concept of justice highly relevant to disaster discussions, it is still too focused on issues of the law.

Hence, to transcend purely legislative avenues, greater attention must be paid to politics and governance, as these (re)create disaster vulnerabilities. According to Douglass and Miller (2018), there are three dimensions relating vulnerability and disaster justice: the distribution of disaster risks and vulnerabilities; procedural processes associated with decision-making regarding disasters “before, during, and after they occur”; and the distribution of “fair and equitable access to disaster resources” (Douglass & Miller, 2018, p. 277). In their view, efforts to understand procedural justice have received “the least genuine attention” (Douglass & Miller, 2018, p.277), which is important because it opens up processes and practices associated with managing disasters. A more just way of dealing with risks involves practices that are not “subordinated to expert-driven forms of disaster management” (Douglass & Miller, 2018, p.277), but instead to inclusive governance processes. There is a political need to address this, as dominant representations of vulnerable individuals and communities assume them to be fixed subjects that are marginal and submissive. This is problematic because it does not interrogate “their agency to pursue justice” (Douglass & Miller, 2018, p.278).

19 For discussions on the opposition between vulnerability and resilience, see Twigg (2007), Manyena et al. (2011), Pelling (2011).
On the contrary, the way individuals and communities organise and mobilise based on justice claims, or how they interact with different institutions towards equitable recovery or fair reparations, can, for instance, help to clarify the myriad ways in which governance structures depoliticise the initial conditions of disaster risks. Progress requires enquiry into local narratives and risk representations, particularly those that invoke claims relating to disaster justice that oppose hierarchical approaches (Marks et al., 2019). This means that simply attending to the institutional work of disaster risk-related organisations is insufficient; instead, a focus on communities and their everyday experience with risks is important (Allen et al., 2017). Disasters are a realm of policy with no ‘public’: as Tierney (2014, p. 246) argues, “the general public is not actively engaged in the policy process surrounding disaster risk and few interest groups have developed around the issue”. Returning to Young and adopting a similar spatial perspective to mine, Huang observes that disaster justice “is about acting against injustice as resulting from Anthropocene disorder without theorizing justice as decontextualized normative claims, which urges us to address the crisis of agency and scale by understanding disasters in adequate temporal/historical spatial contexts” (2018, p. 384, emphasis added). The frame of justice adopted in this thesis reasserts this, expanding upon the multidimensional approach described.

2.7 CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A SPATIAL POLITICAL ECONOMY OF DISASTER GOVERNANCE

In this final sub-section of my theoretical chapter, I bring the conceptual review together to sketch an analytical framework that I call a spatial political economy of urban disaster governance. The concept of ‘spatial political economy’ has roots in a number of theoretical lineages, many of which began with Marx (1976). Lefebvre, for instance, conceives a ‘political economy of space’ whose object is the production of space – that is “no longer concern[ed] (…) with things in space” but rather with how space is produced (1991, p. 104, emphasis in original). Harvey (1982), in his The Limits to Capital, also hints at this by re-reading Marx’s Capital through a geographically-lens, attending to the spatial dynamics of use and exchange values. More recently, Morton (2017) uses the notion of spatial political economy to expand on the political-economic character of cities, building up from the work of Lefebvre, Walter Benjamin and Antonio Gramsci. But the concept is not solely associated with Marxist lineages. For instance, sociologist Harvey Molotch
(1993, p. 30) follows a different critical strand influenced by Karl Polanyi (2001) in order to focus on the ‘substantive’ organisation of societies through “particular configurations of power, authority, and culture”. This kind of work has been previously addressed in disaster studies (e.g., Tierney, 2014), offering a useful link between the economic-growth engines of capitalism and the production of uneven vulnerabilities.

This framework, as I conceive it, however, is not purely structural but also incorporates other conceptual elucidations. Influenced by strands of urban studies (Cornea et al., 2017; Fairbanks, 2012; Lawhon et al., 2014), my framework develops a geographically situated analysis of urban and disaster risk processes rather than a purely formal analysis of policies20. In that sense, my theoretical approach is grounded, geographically emergent, and consistent with my decision to prioritise the perspective of the inhabitants of post-disaster contexts. Throughout the empirical chapters of my thesis I stress and focus on specific dimensions of the three concepts covered here in connection to the 1993 disaster in Santiago. The analytical lens applied in each of the empirical chapters is, therefore, directly connected to the discussion presented here (see also 3.2.2).

Based on the theoretical discussions presented in this chapter, I summarise my conceptual framework in the following four points, which correspond to my sub-questions:

(a) Power: to understand the de- and re-politicisation dynamics in urban disaster governance, I use theories on the post-political context and anti-political character of policies. This entails analysis of actors, rules, resources, practices and discourses in post-disaster urban contexts.

(b) Space: to understand the dual formal/informal nature of spatial interventions to manage risks, I use theories on the social production of space and their related spatial practices and contestations. This entails analysis of the historical and everyday spatial initiatives, the spatial arrangements in place, and the regularly contrasting interests and discourses within spatial projects.

(c) Justice: to understand urban (in)justices in connection to disaster governance, I use spatial and feminist theories to approach justice, transcending purely distributional dimensions (of economic and environmental goods and harms) and incorporating recognition and

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20 This has methodological implications that I expand on in section 3.1.1.
representation, which entails a focus on contextualised claims about (in) justice and their relation to disaster processes.

(d) **Joint Urban Disaster Governance:** to understand the interrelation of power, space and justice in post-disaster urban contexts, I expand on the possibilities of resisting the creation of disaster risks through alternative governing processes. This entails analysis of the discourses and initiatives relating to disaster risks that criticise and contest the ongoing trend of development, and potentially prefiguring different modes of community participation.

I put these ideas together visually in Figure 2.2, incorporating the concepts, analytical lens to apply on urban disaster contexts – along with my operationalisation – as the unit of analysis.
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 2.2: Conceptual framework of spatial political economy of urban disaster governance

Spatial political economy of urban disaster governance

**POWER**
- Post-political context
- Anti-political character of governance

**SPACE**
- Social production of space
- Spatial practices and contestations

**JUSTICE**
- Transcend distributional dimensions
- Focus on (in)justices

- Actors, rules, resources, practices and discourses that render technical contentious issues

- Historical and everyday processes
- Formal/informal arrangements
- (contrasting) interests in urbanisation

- Allocation of economic and environmental goods and harms
- Frames and discourses
- Ability to voice claims and organise collectively

- Housing recovery
- Spatial Planning
- Disaster memory
- Risk management

Source: Author

Conceptual framework | Key concepts and definitions | Analytical lens | Unit of analysis | Operationalisation (urban/disaster risk interfaces)
---|---|---|---|---
54