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## To the Reader

It is with great pleasure that I present to you the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of *The Grassroots Journal!*

I am constantly amazed and inspired by the diverse range of topics and high quality of writing that comes from our writers. For this issue, we tried to feature papers from a wide range of geographical locations; regions include the Middle East, Africa, Asia, as well as some commentaries about the discourse of development in the West.

This will also be the last edition of The Grassroots Journal that I contribute to, as I am graduating. I am so proud of how far the journal has come over the past three years. I am confident leaving it in the hands of a dedicated editing team, the support of Borderless World Volunteers, and the inspiring McGill academic community.

Sincerely,

Margot Frazier

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## Perception, Prejudice and Post-Development

By Robin Nyamekye

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The iconic French story *Tintin au Congo*, created by Belgian author Hergé, is presented as a comical children's story about a boy's adventure to a foreign land. However, controversy surrounds this supposedly innocent book, as allegations of blatant racism have been raised. Tintin, the European character, is depicted as educated and civilized whilst the Congolese people are represented as inferior and senseless. In response, the Commission for Racial Equality in Britain recommended bookstores remove the children's book from their shelves. In a public statement, a representative from the commission stated that the book contained "heinous racial prejudice:"..."the *savage natives* depicted in the book look like monkeys and talk like imbeciles." The commissioner advocating for the removal of the book did not realize that the representation of the Congolese people in *Tintin au Congo* had already influenced his own perception of the Congolese identity. After denouncing the problematic book for its racism, the commissioner called the very people he was meant to defend "*savage natives*." The book *Tintin au Congo* provides an example of how the representation of a cultural group published in writing can leave a lasting influence on societal views toward that culture.

This opinion paper will examine the implications of an oversimplified textual representation of a people—particularly in terms of

scholarly articles on the topic of development. I will argue that terms such as "poor" can have a multiplicity of meanings when presented in development articles, and that it is important for these articles to be deconstructed for a better understanding of reality. Finally, I will propose strategies to overcome this problem in development.

Portraying a group of people as a static people through a static representation is problematic because representations tend to develop into concrete identities overtime. In post-development discourse, the term "poor" is readily used as a term to identify groups of individuals—"the poor" living in "poor countries." In *The Anti-Politics Machine*, James Ferguson explains that the landlocked country of Lesotho was represented in development literature as a traditional subsistence economy secluded from the modern economy. The World Bank published a report describing Lesotho as "virtually untouched by modern economic development" and concluded that "Lesotho was and is still basically a traditional subsistence peasant society." Ferguson wrote that it suits development agencies' aims to portray developing countries in ways that make them ideal targets for standardized development packages.

The World Bank characterization of Lesotho was fundamentally based on the neoliberal argument that markets do not work for those who are poor because they are unable to participate in the modern market. This simple idea of "the poor" as being incapable of self-improvement and requiring only give-

outs to subsist is what Ferguson would argue to be a political characterization. The World Bank publishes “pro-poor” policies, which are ironic because of the “strangeness of conjunction” between the two words. The problem with the term “poor” used in development discourse is that this term, which once meant the lack of economic resources, now refers to a group of people who are in desperate need of *external* aid. The term “poor” has now become politicized and has resulted in groups of people reduced to the image of lacking in all aspects of life.

It is imperative to understand that textual representations carry more influence than spoken words. Post-structuralist Jacques Derrida developed the idea that an author of any published work can never produce completely objective work because an author tends to write about whatever he/she deems as important—there will inevitably be an underlying bias in writing. In terms of published works on development, it is especially important to deconstruct the ideas behind the texts, or one might apply the surface-based message presented in the text to actual development aid practices. People without previous knowledge about development look at scholarly articles from internationally recognized sources for instruction. Therefore, what those learning about development read can strongly influence how they, in turn, practice development.

Neoliberal publications generally encourage top-down approaches to development. Simon Harragan’s book about understanding local realities can explain the problem of the top-down approach to development through the example of the 1998 famine in Sudan. He explains that the case of Sudan displays the “structural weaknesses” in the ways people are seen and represented in conventional development discourse. The agency responding to the famine, Operation Life Sudan (OLS), did not research on, nor understand, the kinship system present in Sudan. Thus, food provided by the OLS intended for the most vulnerable was often divided and redistributed by Sudanese kinship leaders. Harragan proposes that only by understanding context and seeing situations through the eyes of local people can one understand how to provide adequate relief.

People living in developing countries deserve respect and dignity, but as long as we continue to describe cultures we are unfamiliar with as “savage” and refer to developing countries as simply “the poor,” development agencies will continue to treat people as such. Publishing development discourse using narrow-minded representations somehow legitimizes the continued degradation of the people portrayed. On that note, when reading articles on development we must re-examine the personal and institutional prejudices that lie in the way of an objective understanding of local realities.



## **Role of Children in the Sierra Leone Civil War: Is there Hope for a Return to a Normal Life?**

By Kathleen Rose Kennedy

“My childhood had gone by without my knowing, and it seemed as if my heart had frozen” (Beah 2007, 126). At the young age of 12, Ishmael Beah was one among the 17,000 other children who were abducted from their homes and forced to join the ongoing civil war in Sierra Leone (British Red Cross, 2011). This war lasted for over 10 years, leaving permanent mental and psychological scars on these children. They were forced to kill, take drugs and rape innocent people. Their journey of torture and abuse is unimaginable, in addition to the pain their families suffered. Can these children overcome the nightmare of being abducted and return to a normal life? With proper care, acceptance from their family and community, and continuing education, there is hope for these lost children to return to a normal life.

The year is 1991. Situated on the west coast of Africa, Sierra Leone is situated between Guinea and Liberia. This part

of the continent has dry seasons and poor soil; the traditional farming methods used in this country generally do not aid in growth of crops. However, Sierra Leone’s diamond industry is almost thriving (World Book, 1999). Corruption and violence started to arise after the death of Sir Milton Margai, the Prime Minister of Sierra Leone in 1964. Mismanagement and dishonesty continued for years and in 1987, Joseph Saidu Momoh, the President of the country at the time, declared a state of economic emergency (BBC, 2015). By 1991, the government established a constitution that legalized political opposition parties. This act enraged Sierra Leone’s dictator, Captain Valentine Strasser, as it would increase competition, decreasing his political power. The government was overthrown months later, resulting in thousands of deaths (World Book, 1999).

Like many other developing countries in the world, Sierra Leone has a weak economy and state institutions, and the country is prone to military coups and revolts. A factor that led to the growth of anguish in the looming civil war was

greed. Some would say having a diamond industry enhanced the Sierra Leonean economy, however many would argue it brought death and violence, referred to as the “Diamond Curse” (Jang, 2012). The lust for diamond fueled the war and sustained it for much longer than it should have. The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) was the rebel group that used these illicit diamonds as trade units, in exchange for arms and ammunitions between the government. Between 1991 and 1999, this military group made about 200 million dollars in profit from illegal diamond trafficking (Jang, 2012).

This is where the children became useful. The civil war lasted from 1991 to roughly 2002. During that time, nearly 80% of the soldiers in the Sierra Leone civil war were child soldiers, children who were abducted and forced to fight and kill (Martz, 2010). The average age of a kidnapped soldier was 10.5 years old and the duration of service as a child soldier was around 4.68 years (Betancourt, 2010). The younger these children are and the longer they spend with the military group, the more tenuous their memories of their families and their grasp of reality becomes increases their forgetfulness of their families and of reality. The reasoning for recruiting and training children, rather than adults, is simple: they are less expensive, and have limited ability to assess feelings of invulnerability, risks and shortsightedness. “Shooting became just like drinking a glass of water” (Barnett, 2012). Children can be easier to convince and indoctrinate, as their maturity and moral compass is not as developed as an adult’s (Martz, 2010).

However, taking advantage of their youth and inexperience is cruel and ethically wrong.

During the war, these children are exposed to sights they should never see or experience in their lifetime. “I had seen heads cut off by machetes, smashed by cement bricks, and rivers filled with so much blood that the water had ceased flowing” (Beah 2007, 49). So many of these youngsters experience the following situations: traumatic stress, acts of abuse, exposure to combat, torture of innocents or even family members, separation from family, inadequate shelter, lack of safe food and drinking water, rape and the list goes on (Martz, 2010). Child soldiers often have symptoms of depression, hostility, loneliness, overconfidence, anxiety and bipolar behavior (MacMullin, 2004). These youngsters are psychologically and emotionally scarred for life.

The two main aspects that the child soldiers miss out on are education and proper health care (Martz, 2010). By being part of the military, there are obviously no educational classes, therefore many of these child fighters fall behind in school, and are no longer motivated to learn. This makes it even more difficult for them to return to school once they have been released and can return to their community. On a similar note, they receive very little care and lack proper health care. They are malnourished, not given decent sanitation and not looked after (Santa Barbara, 2006). More than 93% of children were reportedly given insufficient food and 90% of children were regularly beaten, kicked, and

burned; they were never treated, thus they hardly ever healed properly (Martz, 2010).

The most alarming part however is the sense these young soldiers have of camaraderie and security once they have been fully brainwashed by the military groups (Betancourt, 2010). After being part of the rebel group for so long, some children are inculcated and become accustomed to their ways of living – they believe the rebels are their family and there is nothing left of the outside world. That is when it becomes dangerous and these children become killers. During that decade of war, over 70,000 civilians were killed, with over 2.6 million displaced people, therefore it is evident by the shear murdering and killing that these child soldiers had a part to play in this massacre (Kaldor, 2006).

On the other hand, what about the families that are left without their children? They feel as though they have abandoned their children and left them to death. Could they have done more? Could they have prevented the abducting? In most cases, the children are kidnaped on their way to school or even at school (Maclure, 2006). The parents know it is a lost cause. The thought of never seeing their child again is indeed a reality, unless they are released from the rebels or somehow escape. A good and over exaggerated example is present in the Hollywood film *Blood Diamond*. This film is centered on the greed revolving around the diamond industry during the late 1990s in Sierra Leone. We encounter a young boy who is kidnapped when his village is rampaged by a rebel group. His father,

devastated by the abduction, goes on a search to find his son, and eventually does. Although finding an abducted child soldier is very unlikely, it is quite plausible that most parents would try and recapture their child, but it is very improbable.

However, what happens to these young soldiers once they have either escaped or been liberated? Can they ever rejoin their families and communities? The experiences the children have witnessed can hamper their health and development and ability to fully function in society (Martz, 2010). In order for these released child soldiers to be a part of their community again, there are six methods that researchers claim bring about tremendous improvement in the children's lives. The first technique involves implementing programs for these returning lost children. A program of demobilization called Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) was used in Sierra Leone, incorporating various easy steps that released child soldiers can employ to make the transition back to their community a little easier. A few of these steps included leaving behind their weapons, finding their families and returning to familiar places they used to know, such as school, church or a playground (Betancourt, 2010). Obviously, these steps are easier said than done; however with enough volunteers and adequate funds, there is prospect for improvement.

The second method focuses on the family. Being surrounded by a loving family after being imprisoned for so long must be such a relief, however being accepted by your family is even

more important. “Acceptance from family members and friends has been indicated as an important post conflict determinant of psychosocial adjustment” (Betancourt 2010, 5). According to a study done by UNICEF in 2008, former child soldiers who received high levels of reception from their family reported having better social functioning and lower levels of emotional distress (Betancourt, 2010).

Family acceptance is so important for the well-being of a free child soldier: going back home and seeing familiar structures and places from your past brings a sense of peace for these children. That is why many NGOs and various local organizations worked quickly and efficiently to reintegrate and reunite families with their missing child (MacMullin, 2004). However, some freed child soldiers’ parents were killed while they were away. Then what? This is where the third method for helping child soldiers return to a normal life comes into play.

The third approach to make the transition back to their community easier for the child soldiers is similar to the second: community acceptance. This form of acknowledgement is just as important as the family’s acceptance. Although, it is normal if the community doesn’t accept the lost child at first, whether out of fear, hatred or revenge. The community knows about all the horrible acts that the child had carried out when he or she was part of the military. However, the people of the town also realize that most children had no choice but to commit the terrible crimes, unless they wanted to be tortured or killed (Williamson, 2006): “They threatened

to kill me if I made any attempt to runaway. I didn’t want to die so I joined them” (MacLure 2006, 124).

Another key factor the community has to offer is an area for development. The community holds the child soldier’s family within its vicinity, so it’s very important that the community accepts the return of the child, in order for the youngster to be able to make a full recovery from his or her traumatic experiences. In addition, the neighborhood has the capacity and manpower to set up certain care units to help released soldiers with their transition back home. These units are known as Interim Care Centers (ICCs). They help with tracing some children back to their families and aid with the minor’s transition process. These centers provide activities focused on the return back to a normal life, including classes, arts and crafts, chores, play, singing and relearning socially acceptable behavior (Williamson, 2006). In 2002, a study passed by the Displaced Children and Orphans Fund (DCOF) discovered that free soldiers that attended and participated in these centers had an easier time adjusting to the normal life in their community (Williamson, 2006). These children received psychological support that eased their journey back to a normalized life style.

The fourth and absolutely necessary factor is education. Sierra Leone’s education system was failing even before the brink of the civil war. Back in 1990, only 55% of children in primary school level were enrolled in school, and the older the students become, the higher the chances they would leave school before finishing

(Simmons, 2008). Several programs run by the government have proven to retain students in school for longer than prior years: in 2001, the Complementary Rapid Education for Primary Schools (CREPS) began with just over 2100 students ranging between the ages of 15 and 16. By 2005, over 9100 students were enrolled in school (Simmons, 2008). With the right resources and programs, active collaboration and enough funds, the education system would be better established, which is vital for the young children. Schooling is essential for a child's reintegration into the community – it builds self-esteem, confidence and provides social activities, including peer support groups and regular outings (Hill, 2003). Opportunities for learning and developing literacy skills have shown to aid reemerging former child soldiers and can act as a damper on the likelihood of re-recruitment (Betancourt, 2010).

Moreover, higher education and developed training skills increase the likelihood of getting employed in the years to come (Williamson, 2006). It also helps these young boys and girls to better understand what exactly happened to them: with higher literacy rates and increased comprehension, it will be easier to overcome the pain and continue to live. Being in school means these children will no longer see themselves as soldiers, but rather as students (Hill, 2003). Education can help encourage goal setting, as well as provide a number of short-term benchmarks for the former child soldiers. As a result, they can measure and keep track of their progress

directed in a positive attitude (Simmons, 2008).

The fifth approach to ease the path of reintegration into society for former child soldiers is religion. Not only is religion an important source of hope, but it is also a great way to form belief-based groups – similar to prayer groups or a friend groups. The Christian Children's Fund in Sierra Leone reported helping over 1,000 former soldiers by having cleansing ceremonies, in addition to support groups, where the youngsters could share their story and ongoing struggle (Williamson, 2006). Another program that used religious methods to relieve the pain felt by former child fighters was the Christian Aid for Underassisted Societies Everywhere (CAUSE). They focused on having numerous masses and group activities, including meditation and confession. These methods have reduced the cases of anger and violence in many children suffering from PTSD (Hill, 2003).

Many communities have embraced various rituals and prayers to help their former child soldiers to find peace and forgiveness. These services improve reconnection between children and their families. A young girl can vouch for these rituals: "I pray to God to help me forget about the horror and ask for forgiveness. Every time I think about the war, I pray to God to take it off my mind completely. I have joined a church. The sermons are helping me greatly" (Denov, 2010). Having a religious affiliation gave the child soldiers a sense of aspiration while they were in the military; therefore their faith can definitely help them through the path of reintegration into

society. A testimony from a male soldier tells us the story of his faith journey: "One Sunday morning, the corporal gives them the day off. He says, 'If you are religious, I mean a Christian, worship your Lord today, because you might not have another chance'" (Beah 2007, 115).

The final method that has helped children fighters return to a normal life has been music. It may seem rather elementary as a tool for these children, but it has shown to bring these fighters back to reality and keep them grounded. Ishmael Beah was a child soldier for most of his teenage years and a helpful remedy to forget the past involved "listening to various artists helped me recover from the trauma of being a child soldier" (Barnett, 2012). Another example of the importance of music is the simple gesture of being able to have your voice heard through singing. Rather than having to speak about the pain and agony, many former child soldiers, especially girls, find singing is a great way to finally talk about their feelings and their path to recovery (Burman, 2007). Including music classes in the education system has proven to be essential in a child's improvement.

Lastly, in order to ensure that these methods are followed through, someone in power needs to see it to completion: that is the government's responsibility. In the case of the Sierra Leone civil war, the government was extremely unstable and was overrun by military groups that were more invested in money than representing

the civilians. This is where the role of the UN was important: The UNDP aided with the recovery and peace-building program for the country, governance and democratic development, poverty reduction and human development (Kaldor, 2006). It is also crucial to realize the roles of NGOs in the Sierra Leone Civil War: they helped communities understand the pain and trauma the former child soldiers were forced to go through, and offered community sensitization. This helped pave the road to return the children back to the community, so they can live a normal life. Many NGOs and community organizations were at the forefront of reintegrating former child soldiers in society and played a huge role in their success (Williamson).

It is very possible for young former child soldiers to start a new life, starting with their return back to their family and community. After all, they are still children, regardless of how much they have seen or done. As a former child soldier, Ishmael Beah believes that any child can overcome the distress and anguish that was experienced in the war. He once said: "What I'm saying to them is that everybody has the capacity to find their own talent with the right opportunities to do something more with their lives, and everybody can walk their own path" (Barnett, 2012). Through aid from appropriate programs, care units, family and community acceptance, education, religion and music, former child soldiers can return to a normal life.



## **“Voluntourism”, “Slaktivism” and Sexy Development**

By Marilyn Verghis

The Millennial Generation has often been scathingly referred to as “Generation Me”; a term used to refer to children born in the 80s and 90s who are “open-minded [*and*] ambitious but also disengaged [*and*] narcissistic”. While the two sets of characteristics would seem to be in conflict, the unprecedented phenomenon of youth-driven development programs undertaken by this generation epitomizes an intersection between globalization and youth humanitarianism, with youngsters hoping to look beyond “Generation Me” to “We”. In examining this growing trend and booming industry through the lens of ideological hegemony of youth-driven development initiatives this paper will strive to illustrate how volunteer tourism, specifically as championed by the celebrity NGO

Free the Children (FTC), simultaneously constructs a false image of the developing world and reduces complex historical, social, political and economic issues to a sexy rhetoric of “cross-cultural exchange”.

There is no shortage of discourse on the developmental ineffectiveness of most volunteer tourism programs, but what is perhaps more insidious is the rhetorical shift toward the imperative of development to promote global citizenry through the interpersonal experiences of other cultures. The construction of a distinct and monolithic culture in host countries feeds the growing imperative for “cross-cultural awareness” in a globalizing service-based work force in the West, which serves as a new justification for continued unskilled development intervention by Western youth. Given the increasing permeability of social, economic and geographic borders in the wake of incredible technological globalization,

Western organizations construct an inorganic difference between the developed and developing world. One need only look so far as the MetoWe webpage to read imperatives like “Volunteer in a Free The Children community, explore a new culture, and trek through an exotic land—from the African savannah to the Amazon rainforest”, coupled with graphics such as that of a traditional Maasai woman with ornate beaded jewelry and stretched earlobes and emblazoned with captions such as “1000+ Mamas Employed in Free the Children Communities” to see how a peoples, culture, country, region or even continent can be constructed as entirely foreign and impervious to the rest of the world. In fact, these images of “tradition” represent only one small part of a complex and diverse range of experiences and lifestyles; these notions of “exotic lands” and “culture” fail to acknowledge the international exchange of music, media, news and technology. This particular youth-centered development initiative consciously overlooks the reality that Nairobi, Kenya *is* the throbbing center of national, regional, continental and international politics and finance, where the business pantsuit is just as common as traditional colourful fabrics and jewelry. Furthermore, this initiative does not acknowledge that even rural people live politically and financially

empowered lives, carrying cell phones and widely engaging in financial transactions via mobile money banking.

The construction of an unwavering and impermeable “exotic culture” creates a distinct “other” while simultaneously reducing the complexity of lived experience in the developing world by exoticizing poverty. This reductionist reading of complex historical and contemporary social, political and economic forces in the countries served are branded as an inseparable part of a “culture,” as the imperative for “cultural exchange” muddled with the language of development renders poverty, lack of access to health and sanitation, and most especially gender disparity as part and parcel of “cultural differences”. With Free the Children, youth can “learn first-hand about women’s empowerment, [...] walk in the footsteps of a local mama on a journey to collect water from a nearby river” and implicitly “local” becomes synonymous with the lack of access to running water, and gendered poverty.



Marketed as a cultural adventure, Western youth “embark on a water walk with a local woman” as if it is not just another activity of daily life for billions around the world, but an exotic and “traditional” experience. Selling this difference as if poverty and inequity do not exist in Canada, the US or the UK (where FTC operates domestically) and reducing the situation to a disingenuous “us/them” dichotomy only serves to perpetuate the need for this kind of youth-centered development effort. Rather than complicating prejudices and assumptions of these contexts, voluntourism can “be used as an opportunity for people to confirm, rather than question, previously conceived ideas”. By the branding and commercializing of poverty, disease, violence, many organizations strive to reduce extremely intersectional and complicated issues into palatable, comprehensible problems with two-week to two-month quick-fix solutions with the overarching agenda of promoting “cross cultural awareness”.

Privileged Western youth flying internationally to build schools, work with AIDS orphans or teach English, within the broader trend of mixing short vacations with charity work, has often been referred to at best as ineffective armchair activism, and at worst as exploitative of systemically and historically disenfranchised groups. While Free the Children most certainly does not hold a monopoly on this market, its celebrity status and widespread appeal in three of the wealthiest nations of the world make it as much a force for harm as for the good it purports. While the development sector has been quick to

challenge the economic and social good of such unskilled intervention, the subtler - and very dangerous - imperative of gaining “cross-cultural” perspective/ experience from such short stays is arguably merely a guise for creating and maintaining a market through the business strategy of ideological hegemony: cultural construction and reduction. While there is no doubt that meaningful cross-cultural exchanges can, and indeed do, take place all around the world in complex and diverse forms, the danger of voluntourists taking up the mantle of development under this problematic rhetoric does have powerful lasting negative impacts, despite the best of intentions.




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## **Child Sexual Abuse in the Philippines Western Visayas**

By Juliette Duval

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### **Introduction**

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is a worldwide health concern. It is a prevailing problem in all generations, socioeconomic strata and societies. In 2002, the World Health Organization estimated that globally, at least 150 million girls and 73 million boys under 18 years old had experienced forced sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual violence, though this is certainly an underestimate. Indeed, the magnitude of the problem is not known and information from authoritative studies is scarce (World Health Organization, 2011). CSA has often been ignored in international development discourse and agenda. Notwithstanding, child sexual abuse needs to be addressed, as its repercussions are not inconsequential, with ripple effects throughout society as well as future generations. CSA is also an important violation of the Rights of the Child.

This study, relying on the cases of 152 Filipino girls referred by the social services of the Western Visayas region of the Philippines to a local organization, CAMELEON Association, aims at understanding the context in which these sexual abuses take place, with the help of the ecological framework. It focuses on the case of the Philippines, as most of the literature on CSA has focused primarily on developed countries, bringing an additional and needed facet to this domain. Looking at CSA uncovers economic, social, and cultural factors that negatively shape child well-being in developing countries like the Philippines.

### **I. Defining Child Sexual Abuse**

Child sexual abuse is one of the four general categories of child abuse developed by research literature, together with physical abuse, emotional or psychological maltreatment and child neglect. As defined by Anderson (2008), CSA includes “sexual assaults, incest, genital fondling, and other activities, including exposure to indecent acts and involvement in child pornography, designed to lead to the sexual

gratification of a sexually mature person" (197-198). Defining child abuse is a challenging endeavor as standards for the appropriate care of children differ across cultures and historical periods. Thus, definitions of abuse must be placed within a given cultural and environmental context (Anderson, 2008). As a result, when looking at cases of CSA in the Philippines, I will use the Philippines Department of Justice definition which describes child sexual abuse as "the employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement or coercion of child to engage in, or assist another person to engage in sexual intercourse or lasciviousness conduct or the molestation or prostitution of, or the commission of incestuous acts, on a child".

## **II. Literature review**

Public policy interventions and scholarly attention about the maltreatment of children began during the nineteenth century in industrialized Western nations. Since then, international recognition of child abuse has furthered research efforts and public awareness around the globe. Since the 1990s, a number of nations and international organizations have designated child abuse as a major public health issue, affecting children around the world (Anderson, 2008). Recently, attention has focused on understanding the development of perpetration of CSA. Such work is critically important for the prevention and intervention concerning CSA. Most programs for the prevention of CSA have focused on potential victims, teaching them to avoid child molesters. Such programs are important, but they are only a part of the broader solution.

Broad prevention efforts for child sex offending must also include addressing the perpetrator's behaviour (Whitaker, 2008). Additionally, there are likely multiple factors and multiple pathways involved in the development of perpetration of child sexual abuse. Thus, individual perpetrators' characteristics reveal little about the etiology of abuse when considered in isolation from other potential causal factors. As argued by Heise (1998): "the task of theory building has been severely hampered by the narrowness of traditional academic and activists to advance single-factors theories rather than explanations that reflect the full complexity and messiness of real life" (262). Thus, a complete understanding of CSA may require acknowledging factors operating on multiple levels. In this spirit, I am adopting the ecological framework to conceptualize and analyze the risk factors leading to CSA. It is a multidimensional approach in which abuse is theorized to be influenced by individual, familial, neighbourhood and societal characteristics (Anderson, 2008).

## **III. Framework**

For the purposes of this paper, I have adopted the descriptive nomenclature used by Belsky in his 1980 article on the etiology of child abuse and neglect, also known as the ecological framework. Belsky's framework consists of four levels of analysis. The first level of analysis represents the personal history and biological factors that influence how individuals behave and increase their likelihood of becoming a victim or a perpetrator of sexual abuse. The next level, the microsystem, represents the immediate context in which abuse

takes place, usually the family or acquaintance relationship. The third level, the exosystem, encompasses the institutions and social structures, both formal and informal, present in the community, for example the neighbourhood or the workplace (Belsky, 1980). Finally, the macrosystem represents the general views and attitudes that permeate the society at large (Heise, 1998). The ecological framework treats the interaction between factors at the different levels with equal importance to the influence of factors within a single level (Violence Prevention Action).

#### **IV. Overview of Child Sexual Abuse in the Philippines and the Western Visayas**

Despite the increasing global awareness of Children's Rights, there continues to be numerous undocumented cases of child abuse in many countries, including the Philippines. According to the Filipino Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) Situational on Filipino Children, it is estimated that 5 children were victims of child sexual abuse everyday in the Philippines from 2011 to 2012 (CAMELEON Association, 2014). In 2011, the DSWD recorded a total of 5,691 cases of child abuse with 2,086 males and 3,605 females. Sexual abuse is the most common type of child abuse after child neglect. Among the 1,401 sexual abuse cases, 1,372 (97,9%) were female victims. Rape was the most common type of CSA, with 885 cases, followed by incest and acts of lasciviousness (Council for the Welfare of Children, Subaybay Bata Macro Monitoring System, 2012).

Acts of lasciviousness is a notable type of crime under the Article 336 of the Filipino penal code where (a) the act is committed using force or intimidation; (b) by deprivation of reason or consciousness; or (c) when the offended party is under 12 years old, even though (a) and (b) are not necessarily present (Acosta, 2014).

Statistics suggest that the majority of alleged perpetrators of abuse are familiar to their victims (Velayo, 2005). According to most of the studies on CSA in the Philippines, neighbours were the first perpetrators of sexual abuse on children, followed by relatives (Child Protection Network, 2014). For example, a retrospective study of Women and Children Protection Unit cases found that almost all of the alleged perpetrators were known or related to the victim. The male neighbor was the most common perpetrator (51%). Cases of incest were noted to follow with the father as the most common perpetrator (15%). A majority of the cases (68%) occurred more than once. Repeated victimization implies that the perpetrators had easy access to the victim (Terol, 2009).

The Council for the Welfare of the Children has highlighted that the Western Visayas was the third region in term of "children in need of special protection" with 1,002 cases in 2012. According to the Regional Women and Children's Police Desk, 420 cases of incest and rape were reported to the Filipino National Police in 2012 and 537 cases of incest and rape were reported the next year in the region (CAMELEON Association, 2014).

Despite the ratification in 1990 of the International Convention

of Children's Rights, laws protecting children's rights have been sparsely implemented in the Philippines. Strong and determined political action is needed to carry out the provisions, along with developed programs and facilities. While these are lacking, sexual abuse will continue to thrive and will hardly be eliminated.

## V. The study

*The sample:* The sample consisted of 152 cases of young Filipino girls under the care of CAMELEON, an association operating in the Western Visayas accredited by the Filipino Department of Social Welfare and Development, who arrived to the center between 1998 and 2014.

*Data sources:* Data sources include the files, called "intake sheets" and "annual progress reports" of the beneficiaries of the association. The files were based on (a) interviews of the girls with social workers, (b) interviews of the families of these girls by social workers, (c) additional inputs from the association's caseworkers.

*Data management and analysis:* Document analysis was implemented. This method involved the assessment of the girls' files for quantitative and/or qualitative data.

*Study strengths and limitations:* The sample of 152 cases of sexually abused young Filipino girls provides personal, detailed stories about the context in which those abuses took place. Although the sample is relatively small, similar patterns can be observed. However, this sample is limited to the region of the Western Visayas, and does not include any male victim of CSA. In addition, those girls were referred by social services to

association CAMELEON due to their low socio-economic profile.

## VI. Major findings

Between 1998 and 2014, 152 girls victim of sexual abuse were referred to CAMELEON by the Filipino social services. The majority of these girls came from the Western Visayas region. Table 1 shows the type of sexual abuse suffered by the victims. The most common type of sexual assault was rape (35.5%) followed by incest (32.2%). 18.4% percent of cases were broadly defined as "sexual abuse" by the social workers as the exact type of abuse could not be specified (often because of the length of time between the moment the abuse occurred and the moment the victim disclosed the abuse). Additionally, we can note that 20 cases of aggression (13%) were accompanied by physical violence.

17 of the rape and incest victims became pregnant. Six girls developed severe psychological disturbances including clinical depression, anxiety disorder and attempted suicide. Other social outcomes observed include poor school performance and rejection of these girls by their families.

Table 2 displays the age distribution of the abused girls. The highest incidence of sexual assault occurred in ages 9-14. The younger girl victim of abuse was 3 and the older was 18 years old. Victims disclosed a majority of abuses (61.8%) within a year; however, 19.1% of abuses lasted 1 to 6 years before being revealed. In the rest of the case the length before reporting is unknown (19.1%).

Table 3 lists the relationships of the sexual abusers to the victims.

Some victims have been abused several times by different perpetrators, resulting in a higher number of perpetrators than victims (184 perpetrators for 152 victims). The majority of sexual abusers were from outside the immediate household, with 15.2% of aggressors being neighbours and 13% being acquaintances of the victim. The category labelled 'relatives' includes brother, grandfather, cousin, and other relatives. Relatives represent 24.5% of the persecutors non-including fathers who alone represent 17.4% of abusers. Also not included in the 'relatives' category are uncles and stepfathers who represent respectively, 9.8%, and 7.6% of this study's aggressors.

Repeated victimization in 27.6% of the cases (42 out of 152) implies that the perpetrator(s) had easy access to the victim. The study also revealed that most abuse incidences take place at home while the victim is alone.

Table 4 shows the educational attainment of the abused children's parents. We can see that most parents (25%) have not finished elementary school. In this study, the average number of years of schooling of the abused child's parents is 5.5 years.

The victim's household composition is depicted in Table 5. Forty-eight percent of these households are composed of 6 to 8 members. The average number of person per household in this study is 6.9. Moreover, in 18.4% of the cases one of the two parents is deceased and 17.8% of the cases at least one parent had abandoned his/her children. In 19.7% of all cases, parents were separated.

## VII. Discussion

*Individual level:* Among individual factors being a victim of child maltreatment, psychological or personality disorders, substance abuse and a history of behaving aggressively or having experienced abuse heighten the risk for an individual to perpetrate sexual abuse (Belsky, 1980). The data accessed did not give information on any past history of abuse of parents or any psychological or personality disorders. However, 37 cases of substance abuses (24.3%) were referenced, with 34 cases of alcoholism. Indeed, many studies have found an association between heavy alcohol consumption and sexual and physical violence against women. There is also evidence that alcohol plays disinhibiting role in some types of sexual abuse. Many researchers, including Heise (1998) believe that: "alcohol operates as a situational factor, increasing the likelihood of violence by reducing inhibition, clouding judgement, and impairing an individual's ability to interpret cues" (272).

Another individual factor is mental retardation or disability. As highlighted by Terol's (2009) study of cases of sexually abused adolescent girls with mental retardation in the Philippines, individuals who have a condition of mental retardation are more vulnerable to sexual abuse. In this study, seven of the abused girls were diagnosed with mild mental retardation.

*Microsystem:* Family factors are strongly related to the perpetration of child sex offending (Whitaker, 2008). The presence of domestic violence between parents is an important risk

factor in the perpetration of CSA, as explained by Belsky (1980):

*“Since the parent-child system is nested within the spousal relationship, what happens between husband and wife has implications for what happens between parents and their children. Marital conflict and discord run high in abusive households families. [...] Families that use aggressive tactics (both physical and verbal) to resolve spousal disputes tend to adopt similar strategies in disciplining their children. Alternatively, stress and conflict resulting from marital discord may simply spill over into the parent-child relationship”* (326).

Indeed, 14 cases of domestic violence and wife battering were found in this study and 28 of the sexually abused victims (18.4%) experienced at least one instance of physical abuse within their household, most commonly by their father.

As exemplified by the case of Maria (name changed), the nature of the parent-child relationship is also a main factor, with the lack of affection and support playing an important role. Maria’s mother has been observed lacking maternal skills. She lacks affection and is not protective of her children whom she lets wonder around without knowing their whereabouts. Her mother has been identified as neglecting her children and is often absent from the family home, leaving Maria take care of her younger siblings, which has led them to have a tense relationship. Conflict with her mother eventually led Maria to run away and live in the streets, where she was subsequently abused by three individuals. She has expressed during

one interview with social workers that she did not feel love and care from her mother.

Although families in the ‘upper strata’ are by no means excluded, abuse occurs more frequently among families with lower socio-economic status (Trickett et al., 1991). As noted by Lapa et al. (2012): “parents coming from the low socio-economic status are least likely to reinforce safety concepts at home and children from low socio-economic status are least likely to trust their parents to provide protection” (79). Low socio-economic status was a common characteristic for all the 152 cases been referred to the association. The most commonly found occupation held by parents of the abused children of this study was farm labourer, domestic helper, and street vendor. Low school attainment can also be observed among the parents of those girls: the average number of years of schooling is 5.5 years, that is to say, less than elementary school which last 6 years in the Philippines. In 26.4% of the cases, both parents of the victim are illiterate.

Abuse has been reported to occur with disproportionate frequency in large families. On average, the victims of this study were living in families of 6.9 people. As economic and human resources become overextended in large families with many dependent children, it is likely that abuse results as tolerable levels of stress are surpassed (Belsky, 1980).

Family disintegration is another factor heightening the risk of CSA, notably with the presence of non-nuclear family structures and non-traditional living arrangements

(Samonte-Hinckley, 2004). In 21.1% of the cases the victims of abuse lived with a single parent, and in 7.2% of the cases the children were left under the care of relatives like their grandparents. This is due in part to the fact that in 18.4% of the cases under study, one parent is deceased and also because in 17.8% of the cases one parent had abandoned his/her children. In 19.7% of all cases, parents were separated, leading to family disintegration.

In 13.2% of cases the mother or father works away from the place of residence, commonly in Manila. Another household dysfunction is the presence of an incarcerated household member: in 3 cases the father was jailed when the abused occurred.

It appears that most incest occurs in households where there is an absentee parent and the victim is left home alone during the day (Nolido, 2004). It also appears that most incest occurs in households where there is decreased privacy due to living in one-room shanty-type houses. Most families of this study lived in these conditions, according to the social workers of CAMELEON Association.

*Exosystem:* We have seen that the most common perpetrators are the relatives and the neighbours. This result is consistent with other studies on CSA made in other regions of the Philippines like Acebes-Escobal's study of CSA in Cebu City. Why the incidence of these abusers? As explained by Lapa et al. (2012):

*"These are the people whom the parent(s) trust to spend time with their children. In modern times, due to higher costs of living in urbanized*

*areas, parents with children usually entrust the care of their children to an adult whom they think had their children's best interest in their heart. Thus the perpetrator is left to inflict his/her authority on the helpless child who is entrusted to his/her care"*(84).

This can result in the girls being subjected to repeated abuses. The study shows that 42 out of the 152 girls have suffered multiple abuses (27.6%), sometimes over the span of many years. In the Philippines, social support can usually be expected from the extended family system and neighbourhood. However, support from persons in the neighbourhood in cases of domestic violence may be inadequate because of the perception that family disputes are a private affair (Serquina-Ramiro, Madrid and Amarillo, 2004). This is further demonstrated by the reluctance of some victims' mothers to disclose the abuse and ask for help, as it would 'bring disgrace to the family'. Besides mistrust in police, social providers and hospitals have been observed among the Filipino society (Nolido, 2004). Families in which abuse occurs are often isolated from social support networks, although whether social isolations is a cause or consequence of abuse is currently difficult to determine (Anderson, 2008).

*Macrosystem:* In Filipino culture, although children are highly valued, corporal punishment is viewed as both acceptable and necessary, and discipline is severe. This can be traced back to the historical context of Spanish influences with strict adherence to authority, patriarchy and Roman Catholicism. The Filipino

education of children emphasizes unconditional obedience to their parents. Children are viewed as the extension of the parents and devoid of their own identity as individuals, their voice lacks value in the family (Nolido, 2004). As stated by Lapa et al. (2012), some Filipino parents see their children as: "items of property with which they can do as they please" (73). As sexual abuse operates under this context of power relations, Filipino families are more prone to abusive relationships (Terol, 2009).

Generally speaking Filipinos seem very aware of problems in the family however, these problems may somehow be rationalized as necessary or dismissed as irresolvable: "Although abuse in families is acknowledged, it is either seen as necessary and excusable or dismissed as fate, for lack of a better solution" (Nolido, 2004: 344). As a result a strong underreporting of CSA has been observed.

The reluctance to disclose abuse tends to stem from a fear of the perpetrator, who may have made threats, such as 'If you tell anyone I will kill you/kill your mother' (World Health Organization, 2003). This was the case in the majority of history of abused under the present study. Child victims may be reluctant to report maltreatment due to vulnerability in challenging an adult's credibility, fear of being blamed, insensitive service providers and legal procedures and fear of embarrassment from family and the community (Terol, 2009). In the case of young victims of sexual abuse, lack of awareness is cited as the reason for which nearly two out of ten children do not report the abuse. More

tragic is the fact that the abusers are often the people that children look up to and depend on for protection (CAMELEON Association, 2014).

In the majority of cases where the abuse is reported, children do not disclose the abuse immediately following the event. In this study, it was observed that in 61.8% of the cases the abuse was disclosed within a year, but still in 19% of the cases abuses lasted for 1 to 6 years before being reported to the proper authorities for intervention.

In the majority of the cases under study (48.7%) the victim beneficiated from their immediate family's support after disclosing the abuse, especially their mothers' support, and 13.2% were backed by their relatives (grandmothers and aunts mainly). However, in 32.2% the girls did not receive any support from their relatives, and 9 girls were pressured by their families to withdraw their legal case, often in cases of incest where a member of the family is the aggressor.

### **VIII. Conclusion**

In conclusion, this paper adds to the expanding literature on CSA and its risks factors. First, the results of the study revealed that the greater incidence of CSA in the Western Visayas region of the Philippines occurred most commonly for female children between 9 and 14 years old, mainly by acquaintances and relatives which is consistent with similar studies conducted in the Philippines. Secondly, the study pinpointed a number of factors heightening the risks of CSA: low socio-economic status, low education, household composition and density, substance abuse, domestic

violence, lack of affection and support from parents, absentee parents and family disintegration, among others. A very interesting and peculiar factor is Filipino culture, which can be conducive to CSA because of its emphasis on discipline, hierarchy, and secrecy when it comes to family affairs. Looking at CSA through the ecological framework uncovers economic, social,

and cultural factors that negatively shape child well-being in developing countries like the Philippines. However, acknowledging these factors in the etiology of abuse in no way exonerates the perpetrators of CSA. What this study tried to do is help researchers, policy makers and social workers understand and deal with the complexity of CSA

## Appendix

Type of Sexual Abuse	# of cases	Percentage
Sexual Abuse (undetermined)	28	18.4
Rape	54	35.5
Incest	49	32.2
Incest and Rape	6	3.9
Acts of Lasciviousness	6	3.9
Rape and Acts of Lasciviousness	3	2
Incest and Sexual Abuse	3	2
Incest and Acts of Lasciviousness	1	0.7
Acts of Lasciviousness and Sexual Abuse	1	0.7
Rape, Sexual Abuse and Acts of Lasciviousness	1	0.7

Table 1. Type of sexual abuse (N=152)

Age group	Number of sexual assault by age group	Percentage
3 to 8 years old	42	21
9 to 14 years old	129	64.5
15 to 18 years old	29	14.5

Table 2. Age distribution of the victims (N=200)

Perpetrator	Number of cases	Percentage
Neighbour	28	15.2
Acquaintance	24	13
Relatives	45	24.5
Father	32	17.4
Uncle	18	9.8

Stepfather	14	7.6
Multiple relatives	3	1.6
Multiple individuals	4	2.2
Other	13	7.1
Unknown	3	1.6

Table 3. Relationship of the perpetrator(s) to the victim (N=184).

	Number of households	Percentage
None	38	25
Elementary level	29	19.1
Elementary graduate	27	17.8
High school level	31	20.4
High school graduate	9	5.9
College level	4	2.6
College graduate	6	3.9
Unknown	8	5.3

Table 4. Educational attainment of the abused child's parents (N=152)

Number of household members	Number of cases	Percentage
None - Street child	2	1.3
2 to 5	42	27.6
6 to 8	73	48
9 to 11	27	17.8
12 and over	8	5.3

Table 5. Household composition (N=152)




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## **Comparative Insights on Democratic Consolidation in Northern Africa: the Cases of Egypt and Tunisia**

By George Ghabrial

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### Introduction

The Arab Spring sparked to life in early January of 2011. The self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi acted as a catalyst not only for Tunisia, but for the region of the Middle East and North Africa as well. In unprecedented numbers, citizens began to stage mass demonstrations, voicing their numerous grievances against their rulers. For reasons beyond the scope of this paper, the movement was highly effective with regards to regime change; just a few months into the calendar year, many states within the region became redefined. With the

rapid deposition of dictators from Tunisia and Egypt, the movement seemed at an early stage to be promising for the prospects of democracy. Now, however, when examining the implications that the Arab Spring has had upon the States in the region, the prospects for democracy are no longer as hopeful.

This paper will be primarily concerned with the dissimilar paths of two of these states, Egypt and Tunisia. Although both these states were initially subject to very similar conditions, the transitional processes they followed, as well as their current status, contrast vastly. Whereas Tunisia seems to be on a stable path towards democracy, Egypt continues to be in-flux. As of writing this in November of 2014, Tunisia has held its second consecutive Legislative elections—widely considered to be free and fair—and Presidential

elections scheduled for the upcoming weeks. In stark contrast, Egypt continues to experience popular resistance to the military regime, which regained control in June of 2013. The purpose of this paper is to explain why the paths of these States developed in such diverging directions. Utilising the transitional framework put forward by O'Donnell & Schmitter, Rustow, and others, this paper will analyse the dynamics of elite-pacts in the immediate post-revolution period in both Egypt and Tunisia, and will evaluate the extent to which these pacts impacted the prospects of democratic consolidation. By approaching consolidation from this transitional framework I argue that pacts based on elite-level compromise far increase the likelihood of democratic consolidation, whereas pacts based on elite-level conflict do not. Furthermore, I argue that it was the initial dynamics of elite-bargaining in the immediate post-revolution period and the contrasting transitional arrangements in the respective cases that explain the divergence in outcomes.

### The Literature on Democratic Consolidation

Finally, there exists a strand of literature which focuses on the mode of transition itself. In particular, emphasis is placed on the notion of pacted-transitions as increasing the likelihood of democratic consolidation. More specifically, there is a focus on the distinction between compromised and conflictual pacts. The scholarly focus on compromising pacts has a long-standing pedigree. Scholars such as Rustow, Schmitter &

Karl, O'Donnell & Schmitter, and Linz & Stepan have emphasised the role of cooperation in the consolidation process. Rustow argues that, in a transitional pact, democracy is developed upon a foundation of "great compromise" between political actors. (Rustow 1970) And that this compromise is "a deliberate decision on the part of political leaders to accept the existence of diversity in unity and, to that end, to institutionalise some crucial aspects of democratic procedure" (Rustow 1970, 355). This is also characteristic of what Robert Dahl labeled as "the democratic bargain" (Dahl 1972).

It is this notion of pacted transitions which lends itself most applicably to the cases of Egypt and Tunisia. Both States experienced similar political and economic history, both States embodied political cleavages along religious lines which also presented themselves in the political sphere, and both states experienced similar transitions from authoritarian rule. For these similarities, isolating our focus on the immediate-post revolution setting and elite-bargaining, the pacted-transition approach lends valuable insight in explaining the divergence of these States.

### Clarification of the Framework

Before going further I would like to clarify and define some concepts. Central to my thesis, it is important to clarify my independent and dependent variables. The independent variable here is O'Donnell & Schmitter's notion of pacted-transitions, and the dependent variable is democratic consolidation. Thus I

argue that there is a positive correlation between compromised pacted transitions and democratic consolidation; in the absence of a compromised pacted transition—in the case of Egypt, a conflictual transition—democratic consolidation is unlikely. As for Consolidation, I use Schmitter & Karl's basic procedural definition: “a system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens, acting indirectly through the competition and cooperation of their elected representatives” (Schmitter & Karl 1991, 76). Thus I utilise representation, participation, competition, and accountability as the constitutive definitions of both democracy and democratic consolidation.

Schmitter and Karl's voluntaristic theory of regime change characterises transitional pacts as negotiations between Hard-liners and Soft-liners within an authoritarian regime, as well as Moderates and Radicals within the Opposition. (O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986) Within this framework, transitional pacts provide a set of procedures that facilitate the transition without prompting the Hard-liners to reverse the process, and on the other end, without prompting radical demands from within the Opposition, maintaining compromise.

Furthermore, O'Donnell & Schmitter characterise the process of democratic consolidation as the “continuing disagreement over new rules and institutions” (O'Donnell &

Schmitter 1986, 82). They go on to write, “What counts is whether such parties are willing, however reluctantly, to play by the general rules of bounded uncertainty and contingent consent” (O'Donnell & Schmitter 1986, 71). Thus *prima facia*, a pacted consolidation process built on compromise, is far more likely to succeed than a consolidation process built upon conflict and the struggle for power. This is inline with Rustow's argument for “great compromise” between elites in transition.

That being said, given that in Egypt and Tunisia regime change initiated from below, the afore mentioned dynamic between political elites in the transition process was not as pronounced. Thus, in order to maintain O'Donnell & Schmitter's framework, a reformulation of the roles played by political elites in the transitions is required.

To begin with, regime soft-liners did not play a role in the transition because of the absence of a former regime. Furthermore, instead of a strategic interaction between regime hard-liners and soft-liners, the hard-liners were embodied by elites carried over from the previous regime who remained in control the coercive apparatus. Secondly, within the camp of the opposition, the radicals<sup>1</sup> and moderates can be analogously paralleled as the Islamist and non-Islamist parties, respectively. The Islamists embody the role of the Radical Opposition, in O'Donnell & Schmitter's sense, because they represented the only political actor

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Schmitter & O'Donnell's term  
“Radical” here is not descriptive of

theology, rather it purely describes the political agenda of elites in transition.

with the potential of providing a new political elite and an alternative political environment.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, the Moderate Opposition was embodied by the Secularists, who held no broader institutional or political agenda and simply disassociated themselves from the ruling regime. In this sense, the transitional processes were marked by three main political actors: military elites who controlled the coercive apparatus; radical Islamist political parties in opposition; and moderate, non-Islamists political parties in opposition.

Although O'Donnell & Schmitter's original framework has been slightly modified, the underlying dynamic remains the same, "At the core of a pact lies a negotiated compromise under which actors agree to forgo their capacity to harm each other by extending guaranteed to not to threaten each other's autonomies or vital interests" (O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986, 38). Thus pacts of compromise are characterised as elites resisting the tendency to monopolise political power in the longterm.

Applying this framework to the cases of Tunisia and Egypt, I argue that in Tunisia, the resolution of political conflict by way of competition for popular support was acceptable for all political actors in the transition process. Indeed, "elites thus *nolens volens* agreed to subject their interests to the uncertainty of a process

of negotiations in the framework of representative and later elected institutions" (Koehler 2013, 7). In Egypt, however, because the SCAF unilaterally initiated the transition process, a moderate balance-of-power arrangement between the Islamists and Secularists was prevented from emerging, and thus, consent and compromise were forgone. Moreover, at different stages during the transition process, both sides—the Islamists and non-Islamists—explicitly or implicitly allied with the military, and attempted to force their preferences upon the rival camp. (Sarquis 2012) Thus, it is the distinction between conflict and compromise that invariably sets the cases of Egypt and Tunisia apart.

#### The Initial Divergence

In order to understand this divergence, it is important to consider the similarities shared by Egypt and Tunisia in both the revolution, and the immediate post-revolution periods. Both Egypt and Tunisia experienced widespread demonstrations in January of 2011, and as a result, both states had their rulers quickly deposed. Immediately following the revolution, both states were quickly put on the path of constitutional reform. (Koehler 2014) In Tunisia, the post-revolution period was characterised by a process of inclusive deliberation and compromise, in which all political actors, including the Islamist Political Party Ennahda, entered into a power-

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that "the Islamists" here do not represent a single unified body. In fact, the Brotherhood in Egypt, like Ennahda in Tunisia, held a moderate political agenda. Rather it were the Salafis and

Wahhabis who were the most radical, and who's agenda was focused more on the establishment of Sharia law and other ultra-conservative measures in both States, respectively.

sharing arrangement. In contrast, however, the Egyptian post-revolution period was characterised by a strong military presence and balance-of-power struggles amongst political elites.

Given this context, this paper contends that the balance-of-power in the respective cases made a compromised elite pact likely to emerge in Tunisia, but not in Egypt. While in Egypt, the SCAF unilaterally initiated the transition process, preventing the arena in which political actors were required to deliberate and compromise upon transitional procedures. (Albrecht & Bishara 2011) In Tunisia, on the other hand, the military returned to the barracks and left the pact-making process to the relevant political actors. Thus, in Tunisia, no major political actor had the capacity to pursue maximalist positions, and political elites from both the Islamist and non-Islamist parties were forced to negotiate and compromise on an elite-pact in the form of a power sharing arrangement. (Murphy 2013) In short, the initial balance-of-power arrangements set the stage for the respective transitional processes in these divergent cases.<sup>3</sup>

#### The Transition in Egypt—Conflict

In Egypt, the immediate post-revolutionary period was characterised by firm military control. As Albrecht & Bishara point out, "...the military emerged as the most powerful political

actor in post-Mubarak Egypt" (Albrecht & Bishara 2011, 11). Furthermore, instead of the consolidation process emerging from a balance-of-power arrangement between the Islamist and Secular forces, the SCAF initiated the consolidation process by dissolving the 1971 Constitution, and replacing it with a Constitutional Declaration which was drafted "without any formal consultation with civil society or political parties", an action which "relieved Egyptian political elites from the need to compromise on fundamental rules" (Koehler 2014, 7). From the onset, the Egyptian transition seemed to run contrary to O'Donnell & Schmitter's framework. "The transition consists in inventing the rules for such a multilayered, tumultuous, and hurried game" (O'Donnell & Schmitter 1986, 68).

Shortly after introducing their Constitutional Declaration, the SCAF quickly announced an accelerated Legislative election timeline, so as to quickly establish civilian control of the Legislature from which, in turn, a Constitutional Assembly could be derived. The SCAF had initially defended their policy as crucially important, emphasising the need for civilian political control prior to the establishment of a Constitutional Assembly. However, "the declaration began to reveal that the military has preferences of its own regarding the

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<sup>3</sup> It is important to note the differing status of the Military in the respective States. In Egypt, the Military is an established, autonomous and respected institution; the Tunisian military, on the other hand, is less so.

This contributed to their divergent roles in the respective transitional processes. Any further analysis, however, would go beyond the scope of this paper.

conduct of legislative elections” (Albrecht & Bishara 2011, 7).

Unfortunately, the accelerated election timeline only served to polarise the Egyptian political scene. In Egypt, political society in the immediate post-revolution period lacked political organisation. (Krajeski 2011) Prior to the revolution, the only Party with the capacity to mobilise broad-based support was the New Democratic Party (NDP)—Mubarak’s former party, which quickly lost popularity after his deposition. Post-revolution, the only other nationally-organised political parties with the capability of mass mobilisation were non-secular—namely the MB (the Muslim Brotherhood) and the Salafi el-Nour Party. (Wickham 2013) Thus, by accepting the SCAF’s accelerated election timeline, the MB effectively made it impossible for other secular political groups to organise and effectively participate in the elections, exhibiting their “eagerness to ‘seize the moment,’ that is, to maximise its influence at a crucial early phase in the transition process” (Wickham 2013, 248). This is characteristic of the MB attempting to consolidate power unilaterally, without consideration or compromise with regards to other political actors.

As expected, The MB emerged from the elections with a resounding victory in parliament. Elections held in late 2011 and early 2012 resulted in Islamist parties winning vast majorities, with a combined MB and Nour majority of 66% in both houses of Legislature. (Sarquis 2012)

With a newly appointed Legislature, the next step in Egypt’s transitional process was the appointment of a Constituent Assembly, which occurred in March of 2012. (Wickham 2013) The political distribution of Constituent Assembly accurately represented the distribution of seats in the Legislature—namely, predominantly Islamic. With that being said, the established balance-of-power struggle quickly revealed its instability. After witnessing the polarising effect that the (un)representative Constituent Assembly had upon the Egyptian political scene, the Judiciary dissolved the assembly in April of 2012—citing it as unrepresentative—only months after its establishment. (Wickham 2013) The SCAF’s action in this instance was highly supported by non-Islamic political elites; the unilaterally-initiated election timeframe prevented the development of consensus among political actors with regards to electoral process, and instead, political actors allied with the military timeframe when it was most beneficial to their own interests. (Sarquis 2012)

This was a short-lived victory for the secularists in Egypt. The Presidential elections of May and June of 2012 led to a victory for the MB representative Mohamed Mursi. The results of these elections (also largely a result of the accelerated time-frame initiated by the SCAF) only further perpetuated the ideological polarisation of the population along the divide between Islamist and Secular groups on both the Civil and State levels. (Sarquis 2012)

The balance-of-power arrangement experienced further

conflict and breakdown of cooperation between the months of June and November of 2012. In June of 2012, shortly after Mursi assumed office, the SCAF announced another Constitutional Declaration, granting them prerogative Legislative and Constitutional powers. (Sarquis 2012) This proved problematic for consolidation because, as O'Donnell and Schmitter note with regards to the military, "...the success of the transition may depend on whether some civilian, as well as military, leaders have the imagination, the courage, and the willingness to come to interim agreements on rules and mutual guarantees" (O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986, 36). This attempt only undermined the authority of the MB in the transition process, and further provoked the MB to pursue maximalist positions. (Wickham 2013)

As expected, Mursi and the MB followed suit. In November of 2012, Mursi replied with his own Constitutional Declaration, declaring the Constitutional Process as well as Presidential Decrees as immune to the Judiciary. (Wickham 2013) In doing so, Mursi provoked the public opposition movement, which became known as Tammorod. (Wickham 2013) The movement's popularity and growth led to wide-spread demonstrations in May and June of 2013 calling for Mursi's removal from power. These demonstrations culminated in the Military's intervening once again, staging a Coup and deposing Mursi in July of 2013. In this sense, Egypt's transitional process—the zero-sum balance-of-power struggle—ultimately contributed to the reestablishment of

authoritarian control, backed by the Military, as well as an official terrorist-ban set upon the MB. Indeed, as Sarquis noted in 2012, "...[the SCAF] has never had any intention of subordinating itself or making itself accountable to a genuinely democratic government—still less one dominated by the Brothers and Salafis" (Sarquis 2012, 898)

#### The Transition in Tunisia—Compromise

In contrast to Egypt, I argue that the elite-dynamics that characterised the Tunisian post-transition period created a more favourable environment for democratic consolidation—namely, an environment of compromise. Firstly, however, it is important to note the history of cooperation between Ennahda—a moderate Islamist political party—and non-Islamist opposition groups against the former Tunisian head-of-state Ben Ali. This history of cooperation made the possibility of compromise amongst camps more likely in Tunisia relative to Egypt. (Shapiro 2003) As Rustow notes, "The essence of democracy is the habit of dissension and conciliation over ever-changing issues and amidst ever-changing alignments" (Rustow, 1970, 363).

In the immediate post-revolution period, in contrast to Egypt, no political actor had the capacity to dominate the transitional process, and thus, the transitional process was not initiated from above, and instead was formed by the decidedly-representative High Commission, wherein political elites deliberated and compromised upon the procedures of the transition. (Dalmasso & Cavatorta

2013) In this sense, sentiments of cooperation and inclusive deliberation were instilled early-on in the transition process. As one scholar notes “emphasis was placed on broader extension of formal political rights and equalities, as opposed to a polarising discourse of diverting interest and conceptions of the ‘common good’” (Murphy 2013, 12). Thus, there occurred an emergence of a power-sharing arrangement among the political elites, which safeguarded the interests of both the Islamists and non-Islamists. In stark contrast to Egypt, the Tunisian transitional process described thus far is much more akin to what O’Donnel & Schmitter prescribe for successful consolidation.

The above mentioned power-sharing arrangement distributed representation of the political actors among the branches of: the office of the President, the Prime Minister, and the Constitutional Assembly, with the aim of ensuring fair representation and continued cooperation. (Murphy 2013) As O’Donnel and Schmitter note, “...pacts based on a distribution of representative positions and on collaboration between political parties in policy making...is associated with ‘consociational’ solutions to deep-seated...religious conflicts, and tends to be regarded as a stable, quasi permanent form of democratic rule” (O’Donnel & Schmitter, 1986, 50).

Similar to Egypt, the Tunisian legislative elections, held in October of 2011, also resulted favourably for the non-secularists. Ennahda won 41% of seats in the legislature, with the runner-up winning just 13%. (Murphy 2013) However, although the elections had intensified

the divide between Islamist and non-Islamist groups within civil society, “polarisation was contained by the fundamental agreement on procedural rules” (Koehler 2014, 14). Moreover, civil dissensus does not necessarily detract from democracy, as O’Donnel and Schmitter point out, “...political democracy is produced by dissensus rather than consensus. It emerges from...strategic interactions amongst actors” (O’Donnel & Schmitter 1986, 82).

Thus in Tunisia, with the advent of a power-sharing arrangement oriented toward reform and compromise, the transitional process developed with the support of broad-based consensus. Moreover, these negotiations not only contributed to the establishment of procedures for Legislative and Presidential elections, but for internal Institutional reform as well. Koehler writes, “This process was extraordinarily successful. Not only were laws passed...less than a month after the High Commission’s first reunion, but all of the laws’ provisions were approved by more than 90 percent of the members [of the High Commission]” (Koehler 2013, 13).

This consensus did not mean that political conflict on the State and social levels were not present, but polarisation and the break-down of cooperation were prevented because of a shared fundamental commitment to the “rules of the game”. As Linz & Stepan note, “...if democratic consolidation is the goal, the crafters must take into careful consideration the particular mix of nations, cultures and awakened political identities

present in the territory" (Linz & Stepan 2001, 28).

Moreover, the history of conflict and cooperation between the Islamists and non-Islamists in opposition to the Ben-Ali regime stood as historical precedent to the possible success of a moderated power-sharing arrangement. In stark contrast to this, the MB in Egypt has a long-standing history of being subject to repressive policies under the previous authoritarian regime. (El-Gobashy 2005) With these restrictions placed upon them, the MB were never exposed to a "culture of deliberation", in Shapiro's sense, and thereby never moderated their policies or practices in accordance to a democratic system. (Shapiro 2003) This, coupled with the above mentioned factors, ultimately contributed to the divergence of these two States.

#### Conclusion: Conflict v. Compromise

Whereas in Tunisia there was a commitment to the tripartite arrangement by both secular and Islamist parties, in Egypt, on the other hand, the SCAF's control over the transitional process undermined the emerging Egyptian democracy by preventing the emergence of a moderated balance-of-power among Islamist and secular groups. Rather, the SCAF's influence initiated a zero-sum competition between political actors—continuous attempts to achieve extra-prerogatives while undermining those of the other. This not only undermined the efficacy of the Egyptian democratic transition, but also the legitimacy of the MB. The Egyptian transitional dynamics also inevitably

paved the way for the Tammorod movements, which conveniently framed the Military as "saviours" of Egyptian society. This broad-based support for the Military provided—and to an extent still provides—legitimacy for the reestablishment of authoritarian control.

In Tunisia, however, Ennahda and other political elites committed themselves to a power-sharing arrangement with an underlying commitment to cooperation. "This demonstrated an evolving elite consensus in tune with popular demands, that revolutionary change should be enacted through a negotiated path" (Stepan 2012, 9). This type of transition accurately tracks the set of prescriptions outlined by O'Donnell & Schmitter as regarding successful democratic consolidation. Indeed, by 2015, Tunisia will have gone through at least six peaceful transfers of power since the 2011 revolution, remaining within democratic procedures—a standing testament to the effectiveness of elite-compromise in regards to transitional pacts and democratic consolidation.



## The Strategic Identity of the Aravanis: A Third Gender Movement in the Tamil Nadu

By Haya Rizvi

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**Abstract:** This paper focuses on the aravani rights movement in the Tamil Nadu, which began to gain traction in the early 2000s. Over the past few years, the government has succumbed to several of the aravani's demands, offering substantial income assistance, housing, education, employment and health care, which has effectively created one of the most progressive institutional regimes concerning transgendered issues in the world. I argue that the aravanis of the Tamil Nadu used a strategically essentialized identity in order to garner public attention and support for their community. This identity is one that is religiously, culturally, and historically significant to Tamil society. Furthermore, this paper touches on critical theory works focusing on identitarianism and identity politics. Though the Tamil Nadu government has engaged in an impressive level of change in terms of welfare policies concerning the third gender, the rights based political achievements fail to create universal government support for the welfare transgendered Tamils.

### *Introduction*

In India, approximately half a million individuals identified themselves as the third gender in the last census (Nagarajan, 2014). Most lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) activists estimate that in reality the number is actually much higher. The level of rights granted to the third gender varies on a state-by-

state basis, as most welfare provisions are distributed and determined at the state level. In general, the third gender holds historical and religious significance, but remains highly marginalized in contemporary Indian society. Since the early 2000s, the government of Tamil Nadu has become a model for implementing some of the most progressive policies in South Asia concerning the third gender. In the Tamil Nadu the third gender generally goes by the name "aravani," in a Western conception, aravanis can fall under the umbrella term "transgender", they are considered less a part of the gender binary implied by the term "transgender" and rather are more widely accepted as a third gender (Saveri, 2013). In the next section, I will be reviewing literature focusing on the queer theoretical approach to identity politics, highlighting the post-colonial subaltern studies theory of Strategic Essentialism (Spivak, 1988). Then I will be providing a brief overview of the context of aravanis in Tamil Nadu, followed by an analysis of how they have created a culturally significant identity, which helped elevate their position. Lastly, I will look at the progress the Tamil Nadu government has made in addressing the needs of the aravani community. In this paper, I will be delving into the role that strategically essentialising the aravani (third gender) identity in the Tamil Nadu has played. Furthermore, I will be arguing that the essentialized identity that the aravanis projected helped them to create a movement, which achieved institutional success.

### *Literature Review*

Discourse on identity has been central to the academic study of critical theory literature. Theoretical works surrounding issues of queerness, which emerged in the early 1990s, have been grounded in non-identitarian and post-structuralist frameworks. The idea of deconstructing normative structures through sexual identity was brought to prominence by Hocquenghem (1978) in the 1970s. The works of the 1990s challenged the notions of fixed identity, particularly concerning gender and sexuality. Butler's (1999) work, particularly the 1999 book *Gender Troubles*, provided a foundational basis for much of the work that followed. Butler posits that one should not assume a preexisting identity, but rather, should embrace the fluidity of remaking one's identity. This idea was monumental for the non-identitarian movement within queer studies. It became widely circulated and cited as the queer approach gained legitimacy in the realm of critical theory. In this body of work, identity has been seen as a source of oppression, which could only be overcome by breaking away from that identity. "Queer" became subjugated as a non-identity-identity for the non-normative, whether that be spaces or people.

Yet, a non-identitarian perspective requires an analysis of the preexisting identity structures which society possesses, and consequently lends importance to the subject of identity politics in a more general sense.

In this paper, I focus on the side of identity politics arguing that the creation and adoption of an identity can empower a marginalized group. It

is hard to give credence to the theoretical underpinnings of the post-structuralist queer theoretical works when considering their lack of basis in lived experience. Though identity can constrain individuals, particularly when it is projected upon them by outside groups, throughout history social movements have achieved success by adopting more cohesive (often contrived) identities. Since its publication in 1988, Spivak's theory of "Strategic Essentialism" has risen to become a prominent work of post-colonial literature. Spivak (1988) posits that groups can essentialize themselves in order to create a temporarily "essentialized" identity, which can be advantageous to them in achieving certain social or political goals. Philips (2010) directly criticizes Spivak and the concept of "Strategic Essentialism." Stating how collective categories can mis-assign labels to groups of people, while also creating the presumption of a homogenized and unified group.

While Spivak's work on essentialism focused on the post-colonial subaltern, it prompted similar arguments to be made in queer studies, supporting the merits of embracing identity as a means to achieving political and social gain. Gamson (1995) calls attention to the two sides of identity politics, which contend with one another. He states how "fixed identity categories are both the basis of oppression and the basis for political power" (Gamson, 1995). Later, Bernstein (1997) builds on this idea, but instead looks into the dynamics of building identities. She argues that identities are determined by various interactions between "social

movement organizations, state actors, and the opposition,” which in turn produce a public identity (Bernstein, 1997). Furthermore, she contends that these identities are publicly cohesive, yet do not challenge or lessen the range of differences that individuals belonging to a certain identity experience in their private lives, applying this framework to four lesbian and gay rights campaigns. Eves (2004) looks at how femme and butch identities situate themselves spatially. Her analysis looks into how the creation of these identities is important in resisting heterosexual space, and creating a greater amount of visibility for lesbians. She points to the criticism of queer theory for its lack of attention to the everyday social lives of individuals.

#### *Background: The Culture of Aravanis and the Tamil Nadu*

Language is important in understanding the identity of transgendered populations in Tamil Nadu, as well as the rest of the Indian subcontinent. The term “hijra”, meaning “impotent one,” is commonly used in Hindi and Urdu across Pakistan and India to refer to individuals who are transgendered (Mukherjee, 2004). The word “hijra” is generally used to refer to individuals who are born biologically male or intersex, and take on a more feminine identity. They tend to be the most visible transgendered group, but there are others who are transgendered and do not belong to or identify with the hijra community. Hijras are more commonly referred to as “aravanis” in the specific context of the Tamil language and Tamil Nadu. In the rest of this paper, I will be referring

to this group as “aravanis,” as my analysis pertains more to the communities in the Tamil Nadu than elsewhere in India.

The visible entrenchment of aravanis in Indian culture is rooted in a religious-cultural background. They are mentioned in the Ramayan and Mahabarath, two of the seminal Hindu religious texts (Krishna and Gupta, 2002). It is widely believed in India that they have the power to bless or curse people. Throughout history they have occupied different statuses. During the pre-colonial era, they were thought of as the most trustworthy servants in the Mughal Empire, which provided them with a dignified position within society (Saveri, 2013). The marginalization of the aravani population took form once British Colonial rulers came to power. The Western codified ideologies they brought were much less accepting of a third gender, as their perspectives were defined by gender binaries and heteronormative sexuality. As a result, laws were introduced which marginalized the aravani population – they were listed as a “criminal caste” and had their land taken away from them (Saveri, 2013). During the colonial era, they were pushed out of society, forced to largely live in underground and isolated communities. The legacy of this carried on through the post-colonial era, but has recently been broken by moves of the government of Tamil Nadu to respond to the demands of LGBT movements in the state.

Tamil Nadu has a distinct history of social movements achieving changes in government policy. Some of those movements include the non-Brahmin, dalit, adivasi, and women’s

movements (Saveri, 2013). The state government responded to all of these movements by implementing numerous reform policies, which were favourable to the demands of the various groups. This can partially be attributed to the political dominance of the Periyar view within the state. The Periyar ideology is one that supports issues of the marginalized, particularly women (Saveri, 2013). The three major parties in the state tend to embrace a leftist ideology, focusing their policies on the disenfranchised. In recent years, the Periyar ideology has evolved from supporting women's rights to also supporting the rights of aravanis, which has largely been pushed by politically prominent women.

#### *A Distinct and Visible Essentialized Community: The Aravani Movement*

The transgendered community in Tamil Nadu has been able to improve their social condition in large part through a strategic essentialization of their identity. Although not a completely homogenous group, aravanis have produced a cohesive movement and a visibly defined community, which has allowed them to garner both attention and support for their goals. Strategic essentialism has played itself out as the aravani identity portrays itself as a homogenous one. Rather than looking at marginalization based on variations in caste, socioeconomic status, or location, they stress a simplified version of their sexual identity. Their identity is one that paints itself as an important part of Indian culture and history. Their creation of identity can be understood not only by looking at

the use of specific language labeling the group, which was discussed in a previous section, but also by considering this ritualistic and festive prominence of aravanis in Tamil Nadu.

Aravanis, in contrast to hijras, are much more integrated in urban society. Hijra culture in much of India outside of the urban areas of the Tamil Nadu lends itself more to isolation and marginalization, as they focus on their jamaats (family units), becoming less integrated into the fabric of society (Saveri, 2013). Though aravanis face discrimination, they have strategically created a culture surrounding themselves which empowers their position. Nevertheless, the matriarchal family structure of the jamaat allows aravanis a basis for community organization around their public identity.

The adoption of the name aravani itself is important to their identity as it is religiously significant. The name is drawn from the story of Aravan in the Mahabharatha. In this story, the Hindu deity Krishna assumed a female form for a night in order to marry the Lord Aravan (Saveri, 2013). With their name, aravanis seek to convey that they are the embodiment of this form of Krishna. This mythological origin of the aravanis provides them with permanent religious significance, which resonates with much of the Hindu population that forms a majority in Tamil Nadu. This particular part of the aravani identity is exemplified and publicized through the Koovagam festival. This festival, which takes place over 15 days, acts as a gathering point for aravanis across Southern India (Govindan and Vasudevan,

2008). They use the festival to commemorate the narrative of Krishna and Aravan. The festival effectively empowers their identity by rewriting and queering the religious text, and by creating their own narrative of it. Furthermore, in recent years, the festival attracted several mainstream NGOs, bringing a greater degree of attention to this cultural story of the aravanis in Tamil Nadu (Govindan and Vasudevan, 2008).

Aravanis are also of ritualistic significance. Most aravanis make a living through a combination of begging, dancing, and sex work (Saveri, 2013). Begging and dancing, as professions, both engage with the mythical power the aravanis possess. Sex work is not entirely relevant to this particular discourse, in that it lowers their status within the aravani community, as sexual behaviour is considered offensive to Bahuchara Mata, the goddess who most hijra communities worship (Saveri, 2013). It is widely believed in both Pakistan and India that aravanis and hijras have the power to bless or curse individuals. In particular, aravanis identify homes in which there are newlyweds or newborns, and seek out fees for dancing at their ceremonies, and subsequently blessing them. These rituals emphasize the sacred nature of the aravani in India. The focus on weddings, newlyweds and newborns in particular emphasizes the superstitious belief that aravanis are capable of bestowing fertility on one and one's family. Associations with fertility are what define the traditional ritual role of aravanis, who are considered to be impotent.

In India, aravanis have been mocked by society, faced violence from police, and fallen victim to verbal, physical, and sexual assault. Additionally, they face exclusion from social services, including the health and welfare systems (UNDP India, 2012). Aravanis and other transgendered activists went to local NGOs with these issues in mind. Much of the movement is rooted in the HIV/AIDS prevalence in the community, which garnered the attention of local as well as international NGOs like the World Health Organization. These larger international NGOs have worked in conjunction with smaller grassroots local organizations to increase the attention paid to aravanis and to increase their inclusion in society. The Tamil Nadu AIDS Initiative, which is based in Chennai was the first organization to bring attention to the issues of transgender rights in Tamil Nadu in a direct way (UNDP India, 2012). It began in 1995, receiving funding from two prominent international NGOs, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (UNDP India, 2012). However, even the TNAI did not find much public support until about 10 years later. The first group to receive funding from the Tamil Nadu government itself was the Tamil Nadu Aravanigal Association in 2001.

In the early 2000s, the movement began to gain traction, and set in motion demands for rights based changes. Aravanis wanted the recognition of their gender, the right to vote, and access to various welfare provisions. Over the past decade,

aravanis have made major gains through government policies and legislation. Their demands for certain services and recognitions have been met directly with policy initiatives implemented by the state government. In the next section of this paper, I will be discussing the recent successes of the aravani movement, which include gender recognition, welfare reform, education reform, and other social programs.

### *Institutional Changes*

At the end of 2007, a federation of NGOs organized a public hearing on the issues of aravanis. This hearing directly made recommendations to the government. In response to this, in 2008, the Tamil Nadu Aravanigal (Transgender) Welfare Board (or TGWB) was formed in order to address concerns with transgender issues in the state (UNDP India, 2012). The board itself is made up of the official representatives of various government bodies, but also individuals who are aravani community leaders and NGO leaders. With this institution they sought to address the five main areas that they considered key to the social protection of Tamil aravanis. These were income assistance, housing, education, employment and health care, which effectively created one of the most progressive institutional regimes concerning transgendered issues in the world.

One of the first initiatives of the TGWB was to account for the aravani population more accurately. Through 2008 and 2009, they screened and certified self-identifying transgendered individuals as aravanis

(UNDP India, 2012). The criteria they used was somewhat shallow – if an individual identified with one of three categories they would be certified as an aravani. The 3 categories were based on the attire they wear, their association with an aravani jamaat, or whether they have undergone sexual reassignment surgery (UNDP India, 2012). Notably, the criteria excluded any female to male transgendered individuals, limiting the identification cards to only aravanis, rather than trans-groups in a broader sense.

Though it has limitations, the identification card is one of several major steps that the government has taken in granting aravanis recognition as citizens of the state. One of the pre-existing state services that became accessible to aravanis since 2008 is the food ration card. Aravanis have the option of having a “T” on their ration cards, rather than “M” or “F” which were the only options before the reform (UNDP India, 2012). Though this seems mostly a symbolic gesture, having the option to identify as aravani, or trans, in official documentation is making a difference in the lives and citizenship of aravanis. Ration cards act as one of the only forms of identification which lower income groups have access to, which enables them to apply for things like bank accounts, passports, or driver’s licenses (Harrington, 2008). They are now able to identify as a third gender in their passports and voting forms as well. When these official documents adhered to the gender binary, it made it difficult for many aravanis to identify themselves. They were only able to identify as female had they undergone sexual reassignment surgery,

something that many who do not identify as male cannot afford. The confusion of gender identification caused many aravanis to have trouble with processing of their applications for various things, like passports (Harrington, 2008). Particularly in terms of passports, they had initially, in 2006, gotten the letter “E,” for “eunuch” to be issued, but this created problems as it held the implication that those identifying as “E” had undergone castration, which many aravanis had not undergone. Also notably, the third gender option on the passport is not limited to aravanis, but is open to anyone who does not identify as their biological gender (Harrington, 2008).

For a long time, aravanis were not able to rent housing units, as landlords and other tenants did not want them to live near them. Thus, long-term homelessness became a huge problem for aravanis in the state, most of whom left their homes after coming out with their gender identity, due to a lack of family acceptance (Saveri, 2013). The state provides three types of housing programs for aravanis. The first is a short-stay home, which is designed to provide immediate shelter in emergency type situations, in this case the trans individual must only self-identify, and does not need a TGWB ID card (UNDP India, 2012). They also provide subsidies and grants for constructing houses as well as free registered land. These two social housing mechanisms are less easy to access, requiring applications and the Welfare Board issued ID card, but at least provide aravanis with options which had not existed before (UNDP India, 2012). The situation is a clear

improvement from the era in which there was no public provision for aravanis, who were denied housing in the private market for the most part.

The government has also attempted to prevent aravanis from engaging in sex work and begging, two of the most common ways for aravanis to make a living, in large numbers. They have done this by creating alternative income options and through education provisions. In terms of education, the government has provided grants for aravani-identified youth in order to give them the opportunity to pursue higher education, opening up the option to go to college or university with a full scholarship (Saveri, 2013). In order to ensure the acceptance of aravanis into higher education institutions, despite high levels of institutional discrimination, the government has established quotas in public universities and colleges. The push at public universities has also influenced private institutions to do the same. In 2011, St Xavier's College in Palayamkottai stated that any transgender applicant with qualifying marks would be admitted if they applied, and the college would bear a portion of their educational costs (The Hindu, 2011). Three years later, the State Secretary on School Education announced that transgendered persons would be included in the provision that requires private schools to reserve a minimum of 25% of seats for “economically backwards” segments of society (Kishore, 2014). The attempt to increase education amongst the aravani population is a valuable one, but it does not ensure the livelihoods of aravanis, as there is still

widespread transphobia present in the workplace and in hiring practices.

As even educated aravanis have trouble finding work, the government has created alternative income programs in order to provide the community with options other than sex work and begging on the streets (Saveri, 2013). The TGWB has been providing self-employment grants for aravanis to start small businesses (UNDP India, 2012). Additionally, they have been providing vocational training projects, for skills such as sewing, which have been associated with grants for material support, like sewing machines. These opportunities fall under the Income Generation Programs (IGPs). One of the most notable IGPs from the government is the integration of aravanis into a paramilitary force, which assists the police. In 2014, six individuals recognized as the third gender were trained to be guards in the city of Madurai (Ramanathan, 2014). Many are given opportunities through the government supported program, which provides funding for the creation of Self Help Groups that help individuals who run them find employment. They also offer programs for group learning skills, like how to properly manage their money (Saveri, 2013). Together these programs attempt to provide a less economically precarious position for aravanis.

The government is also accommodating the desire of many aravanis to undergo sex reassignment surgery (SRS). The policy provides free SRS to aravanis, male to female transgendered individuals, after they undergo a physical and psychological test to determine whether they have

Gender Identity Disorder (UNDP, India, 2012). The screening process is made to certify them as transgendered, which clearly contains some problematic aspects, as the determination of their gender and the medical procedures they will be provided is left up to a subjective assessment. Receiving a free SRS could be life changing for many aravanis who struggle with their bodies, to the point where they often undergo unsafe castration procedures from non-medically trained quacks (Saveri, 2013). This policy is important in providing a safe and cheap health alternative for the aravanis who tend to be a very low-income group, but it is criticized for being a very slow process (Govindan and Vasudevan, 2008).

The stated goal of the state government is to end the social exclusion and marginalization of aravanis, but it is hard to evaluate the effectiveness of these policies since they have only been implemented over the past few years (UNDP India, 2012). Most of the gains that the aravanis have attained in the past few years have been very rights based, opening up certain services to certain groups of people. This progress remains problematic in that it tends to exclude certain individuals from the system. These reforms for the most part exclude large parts of the trans community, who do not adhere to their strict definition of aravanis; including only individuals who are born male or intersex, who present themselves as more feminine. Changes of this sort also do not necessarily influence the prevalence of social stigmas associated with groups that have been

marginalized for a considerable period of time. The aravanis still face discrimination, violence, and harassment in mainstream society.

Despite there still being prejudice and marginalization of aravanis, some positive change in their social acceptance is reflected in the media. In 2008, Rose Venkatesan was the first transgendered TV show host, hosting a show named *Ippadika, Rose* (Sekhar, 2008). Since 2010, Venkatesan moved onto radio and is directing and starring in a feature length film. A Tamil film named *Paal* in 2010 also featured the first transgendered lead. While in 2014, the Tamil Lotus New channel hired Padmini Prakash, who became the first openly transgendered news anchor in India (Qureshi, 2014). The growth of transgendered (male-to-female, at least) individuals being incorporated into mainstream media productions indicates a greater acceptance amongst some parts of society. The aravanis in the media also play a role in creating an essentialised vision of the aravanis, as they are conventionally more attractive and educated aravani.

### *Conclusion*

Tamil Nadu has acted as a progressive model, though it remains a model in which identity politics have played out clearly. The aravanis have portrayed a visible and cohesive identity, despite their differences internally. As a result, one can see the attention the government has paid to the aravanis versus other trans groups in the state. The aravani movement has demonstrated, contrary to non-identitarian queer theorizing, that if strategically implemented, identity can

play an instrumental role in the political and social gains. Throughout history, social movements have portrayed identities designed to be more legible to the elites in ways that have often resulted in their own benefits. One can see this in the civil rights, women's rights, and gay rights movements across North America. Perhaps the same will be said for transgender rights movements in the future.

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