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ARTICLE

Re-Gendering the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction: Experiences of Gender Diverse Groups from India and the Philippines

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Abstract

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 (SFDRR) has been a guide for disaster risk governance globally. With the popularization of the vulnerability paradigm, gender has been established as one of the social determinants of disaster risk. However, it is often used interchangeably with "women" based on the binary categorization of gender identity that dominates, including in the Western world, reducing it to a demographic variable denied of any voice, context, or history. This article explores gender beyond the binary in the SFDRR, disaster risk reduction (DRR), and the broader risk governance mechanisms through examples of *hijras* from India and *baklas* from the Philippines. It delves into a discussion on the influence of dominant Western discourses in the creation of gender categories and their non-Western realities through a post-colonial lens. The article deals with questions on hybridity of identities, power, control, resistance, leverage, and the unique capacities of gender diverse groups at the time of disasters and beyond, while investigating the space of such groups within global frameworks like the SFDRR.

Keywords Disaster risk reduction · Gender · Governance · Post-colonial · Power relations · SFDRR

1 Introduction

The reduction of disaster risks and strengthening of people's capacities to deal with disasters are directly linked to a country's governance structure. Disaster risk governance is one of the four priorities of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 (SFDRR). It focuses on strengthening governance across sectors and levels of administration, indicating that there are multiple actors and stakeholders that are a part of the governance mechanisms (UNISDR 2015). Tierney (2012, p. 344) defined disaster governance as "the interrelated sets of norms, organisational and institutional actors, and practices (spanning predisaster, transdisaster, and postdisaster periods) that are designed to reduce the impacts and losses associated with disasters." Hence, the meaning of disaster risk governance expands beyond government agencies, to include actors from the private sector, civil society organizations, and the people experiencing disasters, who all also contribute to disaster risk reduction (DRR) activities (Tierney 2012).

Governance systems in general, including those for disaster risk, are constantly shaped by different social, economic, and political factors and change along with the global geopolitical situations (Ahrens and Rudolph 2006; Tierney 2012). Since the 1990s and with the popularization of the concept of vulnerability, gender has been established as one of the social determinants of disaster risk (Fothergill 1998; Bankoff and Hilhorst 2004; Phillips and Morrow 2007; Gaillard et al. 2017). To that end, addressing gender concerns in reducing risks has become an imperative for governing bodies, which also need to be reflected in their laws and policies (Sharan 2023).

There remains a noticeable discomfort with regard to including sexual and gender diverse groups beyond the binary categories of male and female with regard to policies and actions (Knight and Sollom 2012; Baumann et al. 2022). Many scholars have discussed that such groups have

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been neglected in governance mechanisms leading to lack of guidelines and protocols to address their concerns and enable them to avail of relevant services (for example, Rushton et al. 2020; Gaillard 2021; Sharan 2023; Seglah and Blanchard 2024). For example, what constitutes a "family" and consequently a "household" is usually determined by a heterosexual framework of gender and kinship, which excludes certain marginalized groups outside the binary gender categories (Rich 1980; Wittig 1992; Ariyabandu and Wickramasinghe 2005).

Disaster studies has witnessed the development of literature and awareness on the experiences of sexual and gender diverse groups in disasters since the 2010s (Gaillard 2021). The approach towards the inclusion of these groups in disaster risk governance is largely a (re)production of Western assumptions and discourses under the broader umbrella of the "LGBTIQA+" identities and categories (Rushton et al. 2019; Gaillard 2021). Over the years, these categories have also been imported into countries beyond the West[1] where diverse non-binary individuals are defined and their experiences are understood with reference to their Western definitions (Rushton et al. 2019; Gaillard 2021;Sharan 2023). Although gender diverse groups are increasingly recognized as one the "vulnerable groups" within disaster scholarship, there is also a tendency to homogenize these groups (Fordham 1999; Rushton et al. 2019). The specific practical and strategic concerns of different gender groups are therefore overlooked. They are often identified as "victims" and denied of any agency (Kabeer and Subrahmanian 1996; Seglah and Blanchard 2024).

With this background, this article explores gender beyond the binary in the SFDRR and broader disaster risk governance mechanisms through the examples of the experiences of *hijras* in India and *baklas* in the Philippines. It talks about the influence of dominant Western discourses in creating gender categories and their non-Western realities in these regions through a post-colonial lens. This article is an endeavor to expand "gender and disasters" beyond what is "known" as the "universal truth" with regard to sexual and gender diverse identities in disasters and DRR.

The theoretical framework used for this article is located in post-colonial studies, especially in the works of G.C. Spivak, H.K. Bhabha, J.N.C. Garcia, and P. Chatterjee. Even though they draw from Western thinkers like Foucault, Derrida, and Marx in their respective works, their writings on post-coloniality also challenge these thinkers and are well contextualized to better understand South and Southeast Asian societies (e.g., Spivak 1985, 1986, 2005; Bhabha 1986, 1994, 1997; Garcia 2000, 2012; Chatterjee 1998, 2004, 2011). Concepts like "othering" and "hybridity of identities" have been used to analyze the data presented in this article from a social constructivist approach. The authors of this article are researchers who have lived and worked extensively in India and the Philippines respectively and are aware of and familiar with the social and cultural contexts of these regions; yet they are "outsiders" to the groups being represented in the subsequent argument. Therefore, their intention is to re-present, rather than represent, to the best of their ability the voices of *hijras* and *baklas* they have been working with and supported over the past 15 years.

2 Gender in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction

Like its predecessor, the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005–2015 (HFA), the SFDRR continues the dialogue on inclusion and recognition of social differences in risk reduction processes (UNISDR 2015; King 2022). A human rights based multisectoral approach is indicated in the document that calls for including people who are excluded and disproportionately affected by disasters (Seglah and Blanchard 2024).

The approach towards gender is still based on a binary framework (King 2022). For example, under Priority 4 of the SFDRR, it is stated that, "women and persons with disabilities should publicly lead and promote gender-equitable and universally accessible approaches during response and reconstruction phases" (UNISDR 2015). Such a statement indicates an intention to achieve gender equity in risk governance but does not provide an inclusive idea of the same. With no definition of gender provided, the SFDRR implies that gender is understood based on sex traits, focusing only on the vulnerabilities of women and girls (Zaidi and Fordham 2021; King 2022). Hence, it excludes men, boys, and diverse sexual and gender groups (Seglah and Blanchard 2024).

In addition, Section V of the SFDRR, which serves as a basis for the inclusion of six different groups in DRR, including women and girls, makes relevant points about both the vulnerability and capacities of people who stand at the margin of society and hence who disproportionally suffer in facing disasters. This section of the SFDRR is apolitical in that it does not recognize that the underlying factors of vulnerability of the said group are rooted in the unequal distribution of resources and power within society.

[1] It is our contention the "West" refers to a historical, rather than geographical, construct developed through dominant discourses over a period of time, representing a process of natural differentiation against the "other," that is, in this case, non-Western societies (Hall 1992). This representation has predominantly been adopted in popular discourses around governance and in academia. The discourse on "the West and the rest" does not represent "encounter between equals" (Hall 1992, p. 89). There is always power involved (Hall 1992).

As a result, the SFDRR does not provide clear mechanisms or recommendations as to how to foster the inclusion of these so-called vulnerable groups in DRR. The guidance for governance, including policy and practice, is therefore vague and superficial and does not prove very useful beyond providing a rationale for funding and subsequent upward accountability.

Recently, Seglah and Blanchard (2024) have brought attention to the recognition for the inclusion of "gender-diverse persons" in the 2023 Mid-Term Review of the SFDRR. While this is a positive step towards recognizing gender diverse groups in DRR, a mere tokenistic inclusion of the same in the already existing governance mechanisms can uphold the heterosexual-focused status quo and reproduce inequalities, stereotypes, and discriminatory practices against these groups (Gaillard 2021; Seglah and Blanchard 2024). This reiterates with Chatterjee's (2011) argument that the Western ideas of normative political theory still have their influence on the rest of the world. According to Chatterjee, the modern political life does not abandon the "norms," but keeps on accumulating exceptions and improvisations through laws and policies (Chatterjee 2011). In the following section, we explore why the SFDRR claims to foster inclusion while they continue to exclude groups, including gender minorities, whose identity does not conform to Western categories.

3 Gender, Western Categories, and the Imperative of Inclusion in Disaster Risk Reduction

Inclusion as per the injunction of the SFDRR draws upon a threefold assumption: (1) there are clearly distinct groups whose existence stands outside or at the margin of society; (2) these groups are supposed to be more vulnerable and to hold fewer capacities in facing hazards; and (3) we need to pull these groups back to within a putative center to reduce their vulnerability and enhance their capacities. This dialectic of the inside and outside, of the center and the margin, has been a powerful one. It divides society in halves, imposing a binary view of the world that further reflects in the definition of categories or groups of people, especially in the context of gender (Gaillard 2021).

In the SFDRR, there are six groups of people that are singled out: women, children, persons with disabilities, older people, migrants, and indigenous people. The delineation of these groups mirrors a taxonomic view of the world that the West has imposed as an absolute necessity to sustain the modern form of government inherited from the Enlightenment, that is, a liberal approach to governing people and resources that Foucault (2004) coined "governmentality." Indeed, defining distinct categories of people, based on biological and/or social characteristics, is one of the most important processes that allows for a better apprehension of the world and rationalization of resources, as per the injunction of the SFDRR to prioritize those most affected and hence most vulnerable in facing hazards.

Delineating such categories of people contributes to reifying and fragmenting the reality of their existence and experiences within a reductionist understanding of the world (Spivak 1974; Butler 1995). This understanding of the word is Western in that it is informed by Eurocentric and dualistic epistemologies founded in the precepts of the Enlightenment wherein groups are defined in binaries (Shohat 1992). This is the case for all six groups identified in the SFDRR whose existence requires the dialectical presence of another more powerful one whose living sits at the putative center: women versus men, children versus adults, people with disabilities versus people without disability, older people versus younger ones, migrants versus locals, and indigenous versus non-indigenous people.

The woman-man binary is one of the most powerful of these dualisms that drive the discourse on inclusion in DRR. The dominant discourse on gender in disaster draws on the biological distinction between male and female, that is, dimorphism (Mead 1961). It is based on the biological differences between female and male, that is, "women" and "men" are socially constructed as gender identities. Rubin (1975, p. 159) refers to "a set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied." This social construction is always dialectical as per de Beauvoir's (1949, p. 244) foundational statement: "*la femme est exclusivement définie dans son rapport avec l'homme*."[2] In the dominant discourse on gender in disaster and DRR, this dialectical relationship polarizes men and women's experiences in dealing with hazards.

Indeed, the women-men binary, as well as other binaries that inform the identification and categorization of groups singled out in the SFDRR, imply that those at the margin are more vulnerable with usually fewer capacities than those who are the center (Gaillard 2021). The distinct and dialectical existence of these opposing groups are hence intimately associated with a process of labelling, which is "an act of valuation and judgment involving prejudices and stereotyping" (Wood 1985, p. 348). In the SFDRR, labels associated with marginality and vulnerability are disempowering and stigmatizing and a re-presentation of people's conditions and identities based on inherent asymmetrical power relations between the labellers and the labelled (Moncrieffe and Eyben

[2] "Woman is exclusively defined in her relation to man," from the translation by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier and published by Vintage Books in 1991, p. 196.

2007). As such, “labelling refers to a relationship of power in that the labels of some are more easily imposed on people and situations than those of others” (Wood 1985, p. 347).

It is not our intention in this article to challenge the existence of these groups, including women and men, and the reality of the hardship and suffering that they experience in dealing with hazards. Our concern is rather “which labels are created, and whose labels prevail to define a whole situation or policy area, under what conditions and with what effects?” (Wood 1985, p. 349). This question is essential because the existence of vulnerable groups underpins the discourse on inclusion and justifies the intervention of outside stakeholders expected to pull those at the margin of society in or towards the center. The SFDRR suggests that this process of inclusion or recentering is mechanical rather than political despite the obvious evidence that the vulnerability of those at the margin of society mirrors the unequal distribution of power and resources within society (Wisner et al. 2004).

In following the injunction of the SFDRR, stakeholders of DRR thus draw upon the alleged existence of distinct vulnerable groups at the margins of society to guide and prioritize their actions. Politically charged concepts such as vulnerability and marginality have been normalized and are a matter of marketing strategies: labels applied to “vulnerable” groups have become boxes to tick and requirements in project proposals and reports (Gaillard 2021). In such apolitical and mechanical processes of inclusion, categories and labels play a crucial role as they serve both “classificatory and regulatory functions” (Moncrieffe and Eyben 2007, p. 1) as per the expectations of the governmentality of DRR that the SFDRR embodies (Gaillard 2021). This is very much the case in the context of gender and the imperative to foster the inclusion of women (and men) in DRR; a very worthy endeavor but one that should not overlook the existence of multiple other gender identities.

4 Empirical Vignettes from India and the Philippines

To further elaborate and support the argument presented on categories and labels, we present some empirical accounts of experiences of gender diverse groups in disasters from India and the Philippines. These vignettes portray the intricacies of gender, vulnerability, and capacity beyond their Western understanding.

4.1 Experiences of *hijras* in India

Hijras are known to be the oldest non-binary group in India, with mentions in historical records dating back to 4,000 years ago (Gayathri and Karthikeyan 2016; Mal 2018; Ramos 2018). The term *hijra* is derived from the Urdu word *hijjar*, which refers to “a person who has walked out of his tribe or community” (Ramos 2018). The presence of *hijras* throughout different historical periods and under different types of governance systems prior to British colonization shows that they held some important positions in local socio-political structures, including distinct cultural roles such as for *badhai* (Sharma 2000; Sinha 2016).

The British colonizers had their own interpretation of their identity and translated “*hijras*” to “eunuchs” or “hermaphrodites” to categorize them as people having a “deficient body” (in this case, an irregularity of the male genitalia) and not conforming to the two biological sexes (Sarada 2016; Khan 2019). As a result, *hijras* were officially criminalized under the Criminals Tribes Act 1871, which marks the start of their marginalization as a “category” in the Indian social structure (Sinha 2016; Hinchy 2019). Their present situation is a result of this colonial legacy and post-colonial reproduction of stereotypes and prejudice against *hijras* (Bhabha 1994; Hinchy 2019). In the disaster space, there is scarce literature available on the experiences of *hijras*, except for Pincha (2008) covering accounts of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. It has been a relatively recent phenomenon that reports on *hijras*’ experiences in disasters have even been published in some news portals, indicating their marginalization outside the academic world as well (Murthy 2009).

With that background, a critical ethnographic study (Sharan 2023) was carried out in Puri, Odisha on the eastern coast of India to explore the experiences of *hijras* in disasters. The data for this qualitative research was collected in December 2021. Puri is prone to multiple hazards, mainly floods and cyclones, that occur annually (Mishra and Ojha 2020).

Eleven in-depth semistructured interviews were carried out with members of the *hijra* community, along with six interviews with individuals working with the government, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and a local academic institution. The participants from the *hijra* community talked about their life stories and their horrid experience of the 2019 Cyclone Fani, which they considered as the worst disaster that they had faced. Even though the data were collected during the COVID-19 pandemic, the participants did not perceive it as a disaster. For the participants, it is the lockdown during the time that created more difficulties for them, not the pandemic itself.

The findings of the research (Sharan 2023) suggest that *hijras* were “othered” in direct and indirect ways. During

evacuation, eight of 11 *hijra* participants could not access the cyclone shelters because they were not let in by the officials. This was primarily because the shelters were demarcated for men and women and the officials had no guidelines on how to accommodate non-binary people. Nine out of 11 *hijra* participants lived in kutcha and semi-pucca houses. After the cyclone hit the coast of Puri, water flooded their homes located in the low-lying areas and they became temporarily homeless almost immediately. They had no access to food and clean drinking water for days (with irregular distribution of biscuits) and some of them had to stay outdoors at the railway station that was also severely impacted by the cyclone.

Those who were able to get into the cyclone shelters were not kept in as priority but left at the goodwill of the people who shared their relief goods with them. This is because the relief goods were allocated according to number of men and women in the shelters. The participants from the NGOs suggested that the use of the toilets was the main issue, as they were ridiculed when they stood in the male-female demarcated queues to use the toilets at the cyclone shelters. Even during the distribution of relief, *hijras* were largely excluded as support came for a designated number of men and women or households. Only four of 11 participants were able to receive some financial relief (not the full proposed relief amount), that took four to five months after the cyclone through additional provisions made by the government officials on a case-to-case basis. This is also based on their registration in the government records, which suggested that only 34 transgender individuals were identified in the entire Puri district as compared to 400–500 to a couple thousand estimated by the participants.

One of the reasons for the inaccessibility of aid was the lack of official government identification documents required to claim these services. Also, in practice, they are not considered a part of a "household" because of the heterosexual understanding of what constitutes a "family." For example, a person identifying as a *hijra* and living with their brother do not get the benefits from the government as do other households with conventional family structures. Similar accounts of discrimination have been discussed by Pincha (2008) in her report on the experiences of *aravanis*, also known as *thirunangais* (a regional variation of *hijras* in Tamil Nadu) at the time of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami.

The inaccessibility to public services can be linked to the everyday lives of *hijras*. Their life stories suggest that from very young ages, they are othered—by family members, neighbors, teachers, and the government. With little social support, they have to fend for themselves very early on in their lives. Some of the ways in which othering happens is through using derogatory terms like *maichia*, *chhakka*, stopping them from going to schools, forcing them to cut their hair, forcing them to wear "male" clothing, and physical and verbal abuse. Similarly, discrimination in employment and the lack of opportunities to make a living force some *hijras* to engage in begging and sex work for survival. These can be seen as their already existing vulnerabilities that are exacerbated at the time of disasters, leaving them with negligible resources to cope.

Despite these vulnerabilities, *hijras* showcased their agency during and after Cyclone Fani. They helped people get to safety when the water levels increased and redistributed a portion of the relief that they received as charity from the local hotel owners and later by NGOs to people in much direr situations like older people and children experiencing homelessness. As a collective, *hijras* have a very strong network locally and across the country. They derive their power and support from the solidarity within their community.

4.2 Experiences of *baklas* in the Philippines

The experiences of *baklas* in the Philippines present a similar picture. The term *bakla*, which is originally a contraction of *babae* (woman) and *lalaki* (man), refers to people who are biologically male but who claim a feminine identity (Tan 1995; Garcia 2008). It is a fluid gender category with shifting boundaries (Tan 1995; Manalansan 2006; Garcia 2008, 2012). It dates back to precolonial time and identities known as *babaylan* (in the Visayas islands) and *katalonan* (in Luzon), whose role was that of priests or shamans (Salazar 1991). As such, the identity of those who now identify as *baklas* has never been limited to sexual behavior. It is rather characterized by roles they perform in society and the ability to shift from what are roles usually attributed to men or women.

The contemporary perception of *baklas* within society and their experience of everyday life have been greatly influenced by colonial discourses that have altered the precolonial identity of *babaylan* and *katalonan*. The Spaniards, who ruled what is now the Philippines, introduced the Catholic religion and its strict understanding of gender within the woman-man binary. Eventually, the American colonizers, who took control of the archipelago in the first half of the twentieth century, imposed a biomedical understanding of gender that further essentialized identities based on dimorphism, hence excluding those who do not identify in conformity with their biological sex. As a result of both regimes of colonization, *baklas* have been marginalized and come to suffer daily discrimination that contrasts with the high position their *babaylan* and *katalonan* ancestors used to hold in society (Garcia 2008).

In time of disaster, *baklas* face discrimination. For instance, in Irosin, Sorsogon, Luzon (Gaillard 2015) they are often asked to clean up the dirty mess after recurrent flash floods and carry out other odd jobs. This includes

fetching firewood and water amidst deep floodwater. A general reluctance to stay in the evacuation centers is also observed due to potential discrimination and harassment (Gaillard et al. 2017). Similarly, *bakla* couples, who were not seen as conventional "families," faced unfairness during the distribution of relief good following Typhoon Yolanda in 2013 (Ong 2017). Another study by Dacles et al. (2015) discussed the experiences of *bakla* teenagers in disasters. In Quezon City, they experience trauma during cyclones that hit the city three to four times in a year. They also face discrimination and challenges such as the inaccessibility of basic resources and relief. Similar observations were made following two consecutive cyclones that hit Quezon City in 2009, where some *baklas* were not prioritized and left to eat last (McSherry et al. 2015).

On the other hand, Dacles et al. (2015) highlighted *baklas*' psychological resilience through an organic support system comprising their peers and family members. These strong and wide social networks also prove useful to collect and distribute relief goods among their peers and beyond (Gaillard et al. 2017). Furthermore, *baklas*' ability to perform a wide range of roles and activities beyond expected gender roles make them vital resource persons during disasters. For example, they were able to leverage support from international organizations and local NGOs after Typhoon Yolanda (Gaillard 2021). Unfortunately, these capacities are not acknowledged by the government and larger society as national policies' reference to gender is limited to women and girls (Gaillard et al. 2017).

5 The Colonial Underpinnings in Gendering Disaster Risk Governance

International frameworks like the SFDRR attract global traction with regard to gender mainstreaming in DRR, putting pressure on its signatories to show how they stand. This process is highly political—that is, political decisions are guided by the broader governance systems of a country based on the different social, economic, and political factors and various global phenomena. Additionally, the historical background of a country determines how gender is included in a country's DRR plans and policies. As explained in the previous sections, many countries in South and Southeast Asia, like India and the Philippines, were colonies of Western powers. Colonial discourses on gender have had a significant influence on how sexual and gender diverse groups are recognized in these societies and how they experience disasters (Spivak 1985; Garcia 2012; Sarmento 2012). Gender-neutral disaster-related policies, therefore, sit on the residues of colonial rules and regulations (Spivak 1985; Garcia 2000; Gaillard 2021; Baumann et al. 2022).

For example, in the context of India, *hijras* have been recorded in traditional and precolonial Indian historical and religious texts (Sharma 2000; Gayathri and Karthikeyan 2016; Sinha 2016; Mal 2018). One of the earliest mentions of *hijras* is in the Hindu epics *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* and the Vedic texts. Even outside of India, *hijras* have been mentioned in the histories of Assyria and Israel and other Mesopotamian civilizations (Sharma 2000). While some eras viewed *hijras* of a low social status, for other historical periods like that depicted in the *Ramayana* and the Mughal era, *hijras* held important political and social positions. The social status of *hijras* have therefore kept changing over thousands of years, but they have always been recognized as a distinct cultural group (Sharma 2000; Kalra 2012). With British colonization, however, colonial laws criminalized the very existence of *hijras* as a method to counter their perceived anomaly from the heterosexual framework of gender (Hinchy 2019). As a result, *hijras* have been forced to align with the normative gender categories because of the stigma and stereotypes created and institutionalized over the years through various socio-political processes, for instance, through exclusionary laws, social behavior of discrimination towards *hijras*, and so on (Hinchy 2019; Raju et al. 2024).

Similarly, in the Philippines, *babaylan* and *katalonan*, among whom were found transvestite ancestors of contemporary *baklas*, held prestigious status within their community prior to the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors (Salazar 1991). Transvestite *babaylan* and *katalonan* were shamans and composed one of the three main sectors of precolonial society alongside the *datu* (chiefs, in charge of economic and political issues) and *panday* (the masters of technology and arts). *Babaylan* and *katalonan* were respected as "*ang pinakasentral na personahe sa dating Lipunang Pilipino sa larangan ng kalinangan, relihyon at medisina at lahat ng uri ng teoretikat at praktikal na kaalaman hinggil sa mga penomeno ng kalikasan*"[3] (Salazar 1991, p. 6). These roles were eventually challenged by the colonizers and the import of Western science and medicine (Garcia 2000, 2012). As a result, gender identities and roles within society, including those of contemporary *baklas*, as hybrid descendants of the precolonial *babaylan* and *katalonan*, have been reinterpreted and changed over the years. The colonial inheritance is therefore "inescapable" when looking at gender categories and roles in South and Southeast Asian contexts (Garcia 2012).

The imperialistic background of the binary framework of gender leads to a skewed understanding of the vulnerabilities

[3] "A specialist in the fields of culture, religion, medicine and all kinds of theoretical knowledge about the phenomenon of nature" from the translation by Proserpina Domingo Tapales and published by the University of the Philippines Center for Women's Studies in 1996.

of gender diverse groups (Spivak 1986; Bankoff 2001). Although there is an increasing dialogue on the inclusion of sexual and gender diverse groups in DRR, there is still some unease when it comes to the inclusion of sexual and gender diverse groups in mainstream governance mechanisms related to DRR (Baumann et al. 2022; Seglah and Blanchard 2024). Even after decades of dialogue on including gender in DRR, the tokenistic approach to gender still prevails in the ways plans and policies are drafted, understood, and implemented (Fothergill 1998; Bankoff 2001; Kelman et al. 2015; Gaillard et al. 2017).

To move forward and transgress colonial heritages, including their influence on international policy documents such as the SFDRR, a post-colonial lens is important to look at the experiences of historically marginalized groups such as sexual and gender minorities (like *hijras* and *baklas*) in disasters (Raju et al. 2024). Post-colonial scholars have challenged Western feminist and queer perspectives as modes of intellectual imperialism on the non-Western world (Spivak 1986; Omvedt 2005; Menon 2009; Dhawan 2016). The mainstream discourses on gender and sexuality also often paint the West as "sexually enlightened and tolerant" and the rest of the world as a "site of queer oppression" (Dhawan 2016, p. 53). In India, for instance, understanding the term "queer" is complex due to the presence of intersecting factors like caste, class, religion, and ethnicity that determine an individual's position in the social structure and goes beyond just sexuality (Mohanty 2003; Menon 2009). A post-colonial approach in that respect allows focusing on voices that may not fit in the moulds of Western categories. It allows looking at the plurality of histories and hybrid futures to include diverse marginalized groups in disaster risk governance—which is very much an acknowledgment of their everyday lives (Gaillard 2021; Sharan 2023; Raju et al. 2024). Similarly, the SFDRR has been developed based on Western framings and meanings of "disasters," "vulnerability," "risk," and "capacity," which may not be consistent with certain cultures and histories as presented through the cases of *hijras* and *baklas* (Manyena 2016; Gaillard 2021). Hence, a post-colonial lens is required to look at the SFDRR, to understand what it means in the local contexts and how the national governments can best implement the framework in their respective countries including such gender diverse groups that are left out of the SFDRR.

6 Hybrid Identities and Resistance

The cases of *hijras* in India and *baklas* in the Philippines portray groups who can hardly be categorized under a single social category as per the injunction of the SFDRR. The traditional identities of *hijras* are tied to sexuality, religion, and their social roles, which cannot be assimilated within any Western categories like "transgender" (Sharan 2023). Similarly, *baklas* have fluid or liminal gender identities that are not tied to the fixed and binary gender roles of Western identities (Tan 1995; Manalansan 2006; Garcia 2008, 2012). This reality results in the co-existence of Western categories, in policy such as in the SFDRR, and indigenous identities as seen through the examples from India and the Philippines (Sharan 2023).

Bhabha (1994) calls this a hybridity of identities, which cannot be denied in post-colonial contexts (Garcia 2012). According to Bhabha (1994, p. 6), postcoloniality "enables the authentication of histories of exploitation and the evolution of strategies of resistance." Any encounter that goes beyond the normative set of expectations or boundaries of a given social identity is a sign of resistance. Through different processes like "colonial mimicry," subjugated groups, such as non-Western sexual and gender diverse groups, use their hybrid identities as a camouflage to create their own niche in society. As Bhabha (1994, p. 121) suggested how "moments of civil disobedience within the discipline of civility: [are] signs of spectacular resistance." Similarly, the hybridity in identities of sexual and gender diverse groups denotes forces of resistance against dominant groups (Bhabha 1994), for instance, the government or the members of dominant social groups in society as expressed in the framing of gender in the SFDRR around the sole experiences of women (which is obviously important nonetheless).

For social groups who do not fit into the normative "governable categories" emphasized in the SFDRR, a more deep-rooted understanding of their hybrid identities and social roles/behaviors is required to address their needs and concerns at the time of disasters. It is particularly important to understand how these marginalized groups negotiate with dominant groups to exercise their agency (Chatterjee 2011). Bhabha (1994) suggested by mimicking the processes of discrimination that marginalized groups try to align themselves with the mainstream. At the same time, they maintain their unique characteristics and space in the social structure. Hence, their hybridity can be seen as "the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects" (Bhabha 1994, p. 112). Through this process, *hijras* in India and *baklas* in the Philippines have survived through years of marginalization while maintaining their cultural identities. They remain at the edges of the social structure but have the ability to showcase their agency in times of hardship. This can be observed by looking at their experiences of disasters as well as shown in the previous case studies of *hijras* and *baklas*.

Butler's (1990) idea of gender performativity can be explored in this context. For *hijras*, the adoption of

Western terms has enabled them to articulate their wants and rights and negotiate with the governing authorities in a more coherent way. The passing of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2019 is a testament of the agency of gender diverse groups in India. Even though there are contestations about some of its clauses and definitions, it can be seen as a first step towards the inclusion of non-binary groups in mainstream governance in India (see Sharan 2023). Hence, aligning themselves with the Western categories has been fruitful but at the same time, they continue to carry out their traditional roles like *badhai* (ceremonial dance in weddings and childbirth) associated with the identity of being a *hijra* (Sharan 2023). Although, there exists no similar legislation in the Philippines, *baklas* have achieved some recognition on the political scene, notably through the opportunity for the *Ladlad* (that is, "coming out" in Tagalog) party list to run for elected positions since 2010. Furthermore, Garcia (2012) has shown how "drag" performances of *baklas* are not just the mimicry of heterosexual gender attributes but also a way to protect their space in the society. As a result, gender diverse groups in activism, political platforms, cultural performances, and forms of art and literature have been increasing the past few years in the Philippines (Garcia 2012). Such negotiation process has yet to happen at the international level so that the unique hybrid identities of gender diverse groups could be considered in policy frameworks such as the SFDRR.

Such actions of resistance against dominant groups demonstrates the different kinds of capacities of the subjugated groups in disaster and beyond. In disaster studies, capacities may be referred to as "the set of diverse knowledge, skills and resources people can claim, access and resort to in dealing with hazards and disasters" (Gaillard et al. 2018, p. 863). Capacities are used to resist against, adapt to, and cope with hazards. Similarly, in their everyday lives, marginalized groups make use of their capacities to survive as a part of the larger socio-political structures. Capacities of groups such as *hijras* and *baklas* are often attributed to their "community" or "collective" over individual capacities. These collective attributes include their unique set of skills, knowledge, and resources that they share and exhibit at times of crisis in their everyday lives and by extension in disasters (Gaillard et al. 2018; Sharan 2023). Hence, the resistance exercised by these groups by employing their hybrid identities are a display of their diverse capacities.

The unique capacities of gender diverse groups are yet to be captured in DRR related plans and policies and further in global frameworks like the SFDRR (Gaillard 2021; Sharan 2023). The SFDRR outlines different kinds of capacities, like capacities of individual persons, scientific capacities, research capacities, administrative capacities of authorities from local to global levels, and capacities of health workers. In that regard, for gender specifically, the SFDRR highlights the "capacity-building" to empower women and secure alternate means of livelihood with little indication of how this would be done (UNISDR 2015). It does however state that, "there is a need to address existing challenges and prepare for future ones by focusing on monitoring, assessing and understanding disaster risk and sharing such information and on how it is created; strengthening disaster risk governance and coordination across relevant institutions and sectors and the full and meaningful participation of relevant stakeholders at appropriate levels" (UNISDR 2015, p. 11). It is indeed important to understand the root causes of the vulnerabilities and risks of marginalized groups such as *hijras* and *baklas* and many more sexual and gender diverse groups around the world, acknowledge them as stakeholders, identify their capacities, and advocate for their meaningful participation in the governance mechanisms and decision making related to DRR. Hybrid identities of gender diverse groups also resist the binary interpretation of gender and contest the perceived homogeneity of such groups (Bhabha 1994). To this end, the following section aims at understanding the complexity of power relations, political will, and the question of inclusion of sexual and gender diverse groups in disaster risk governance.

7 Conclusion: Navigating and (Re) distributing Power

The negotiations that sexual and gender diverse minorities have to entertain with dominant social groups clearly indicate the presence of unequal power relations. Indeed, both the subjugated and dominant groups negotiate power to cater to their respective agendas (Bhabha 1994; Gaillard 2021). These negotiations thus help in reclaiming parts of history that are hidden within discourses of colonialism, as expressed, for instance, in the SFDRR (Spivak 2005; Garcia 2012). Such is the complex nature of gender and the experiences of sexual and gender diverse groups in their everyday lives, including at the time of disasters.

When "vulnerable" categories are created, they reflect the convenience of dominant groups in terms of how they wanted the "vulnerable groups" to be (re)presented in DRR (Gaillard 2021; Sharan 2023). In a framework such as the SFDRR, multiple categories are created and frequently adjusted to fit changing social norms, as per the move over past decades to consider gender as a critical dimension of vulnerability to hazards. These categories continue to reflect a taxonomic worldview inherited from the Enlightenment (Hinchy 2019; Gaillard 2021). Categories are, as Derrida (1972, p. 218) put it, "*une des manières pour l'"être" de se*

dire ou de se signifier."[4] They are represented as "categories of 'truth'" that determine their visibility within the political scene nationally and globally (Spivak 1974, xxii). While some groups get enough attention for them to be adequately visible in policies and governance frameworks such as women in the SFDRR, others get excluded from the same. As a result, these groups eventually tend to get invisible or "represent an outside beyond the boundaries of political society" (Chatterjee 2008, p. 61).

This implies a lack of leverage on the political scenes that influence policy decisions and consequently disaster risk governance mechanisms. Those who do not get access to these political platforms and networks get excluded from the mainstream opportunities. Hence, the discourse and practice of inclusion is ultimately one of exclusion and further "marginalization" (Gaillard 2021). Rather than empowering and promoting solidarity among vulnerable groups, it encourages competition struggling for rights, resources, and government services (Wood 1985; Chatterjee 2008; Gaillard 2021).

The question of leverage is critical while looking at the experiences of sexual and gender diverse groups in disasters and how they have been represented in global governance frameworks like the SFDRR. The categories that are named in the SFDRR and their representatives, especially nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) or civil society organizations (CSOs), to some extent presumably expect to receive support—both politically and financially—from governments and donors (Gaillard 2021). As Fraser (2000, p. 109) recognizes, "properly conceived, struggles for recognition can aid the redistribution of power and wealth and can promote interaction and cooperation across gulfs of differences." Hence, leveraging power and advocacy for recognizing the agency and concerns of vulnerable categories is extremely significant.

Foucault (1978) suggested that discourses are culturally influenced and manipulated by power relations that is reflected in how categories and labels are created. Crenshaw (1991, p. 1296) also talked "about the way power has clustered around certain categories and is exercised against others." It is not our intention to question the existence of categories itself. Rather, our goal is to emphasize that these categories cannot be essentialized nor be taken for granted. As such, categories such as those created for gender in frameworks like the SFDRR need constant critical scrutiny and reconsideration to cater for the concerns of those whose voices may be unheard or silenced. Our intention is also to challenge the essentializing characteristics and stereotypes attributed to these identities, including sexual and gender diverse groups, that lead to the subjugation of these groups and others at the same time (Crenshaw 1991; Bhabha 1994; Gaillard 2021).

It is, therefore, important to acknowledge that categories, which in this case are "vulnerable groups to hazards" (as is everyone) are just creations of political powers and that they need to be critically understood as such. Only then can DRR initiatives targeted towards these groups be truly inclusive (Gaillard 2021; Sharan 2023). As Butler (1995, p. 51) suggested, we must "continue to use them [that is, concepts and categories such as gender and gender identities], to repeat them, to repeat them subversively, and to displace them from the contexts in which they have been deployed as instruments of oppressive power."

[4] "The category is one of the ways for 'Being' to say itself or to signify itself," from the translation by A. Bass and published by the University of Chicago Press in 1984, p. 183.

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