# From Deviant to Bakla, Strong to Stronger: Mainstreaming Sexual and Gender Minorities into Disaster Risk Reduction in the Philippines

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Published online: 07 Nov 2014.

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# From Deviant to *Bakla*, Strong to Stronger: Mainstreaming Sexual and Gender Minorities into Disaster Risk Reduction in the Philippines

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Disaster risk reduction (DRR), and indeed development at large, has traditionally been reluctant to acknowledge and accept the issue of gendered and sexual diversity in its mainstream policy design and practice. Recent forays into mainstreaming gender and sexual minorities into DRR have, however, highlighted the crucial role that these minorities play in bigger development aspirations of participation and empowerment. This debate article explores the notion of 'queering development' in DRR, and by drawing upon a recent DRR project in a rural area of the Philippines that is at high risk of natural hazards, we suggest a new framework for conceptualizing and 'doing' DRR.

**Keywords:** sexuality; gender; disaster risk reduction; participation; queer theory

## 1. Introduction

Disaster risk reduction (DRR) to date, along with countless other mainstream development initiatives worldwide, has traditionally treated issues of gender and sexuality as meaningless and somewhat inconsequential to development debates. Associated almost exclusively with societal transgression, but almost never with individual identity, emotion and role within society, gender and 'sex has been treated by development agencies as something to be controlled and contained', rather than something to be embraced, celebrated or indeed acknowledged as central to the human experience (Jolly, 2007, p. 7). The onset of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the 1980s did, to a certain extent, break old taboos and silences, and begin to open up space for the recognition of how central sexual and gender rights are to human wellbeing (Jolly, 2007, p. 7). People who were previously thought to be 'sexually deviant' and actively confined to the edges of society (that is, anyone engaging in non-heterosexual behaviour or transgressing conventional gender boundaries) are gradually 'coming out of the closet' and moving beyond prevailing essentialised sexual and gender stereotypes towards social acceptance. In this way, the development industry is slowly moving

towards an era where dominant heteronormative and polarised (between men and women) categorisations of gender and sex are starting to be deconstructed, (re)defined and (re)negotiated as inextricably linked components of wider issues of empowerment, participation and poverty alleviation (Armas, 2006; Cornwall and Jolly, 2006). This movement, which some scholars have recently started referring to as the 'queering of development', considers both sexual (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, transgender and intersex people) and non-Western gender minorities who do not identify themselves based on particular sexual practices or physical attributes (Browne and Nash, 2013; Browne et al., 2010; Herdt, 1993). However, there is still a sense of reluctance in the mainstream development rhetoric to acknowledge, accept and promote this sexual and gender diversity. Binary logic prevails and taboos associated with the issues do still exist, and their endurance reveals the convoluted reality of the implicit and explicit conservative power relations, largely manifested via modes of cultural imperialism filtered down from the Global North to the South; the 'developed' to the 'underdeveloped' (Escobar, 1995; Garcia, 2013; Tan, 1995b). This debate explores some of these issues with specific reference to the mainstreaming of a non-Western gender minority, known as *bakla*, into one dimension of development planning, i.e. DRR, in the Philippines. Drawing upon some experiences from an actual DRR project undertaken in Irosin, Sorsogon, Philippines, which worked to foster dialogue between *bakla* youth and the rest of the Irosin community on issues surrounding DRR, we highlight some capacities of the *bakla* community and contend that there is indeed space for the inclusion of this social group that has hitherto been overlooked when it comes to disasters and DRR. It is also pertinent to add that this debate therefore provides first-hand empirical contribution to the field, rather than a conceptual one.

## 2.  The 'queering' of development

The development industry, a global project of bettering the 'undeveloped regions of the world' that largely emerged in the Post-WWII era and was led by post-war USA (Escobar, 1995, p. 3), has long identified and drawn attention to the dangers and risks of sexual and gender transgression, as matters of sex and sexuality are predominately informed, defined and negotiated 'through a view of gender which stereotypes men as predators, women as victims, and fails to recognise the existence of transgender people' (Jolly, 2007, p. 10) and non-Western gender minorities (Herdt, 1993). Powerful development discourses surrounding the expectations of women and men (and nothing in between or elsewhere in the world) have created the heteronormative and polarised foundations for understandings that 'underpin and are institutionalised throughout theoretical and practical applications in the field' (Gosine, 2009, p. 26). As attested by scholars such as Mohanty (1991) and Escobar (1995), discourses of 'development' and the 'Third World' have been filtered through histories of colonisation, which define people and issues in the Global South in a homogenous fashion that is largely a construction of the Western imagination (Jolly, 2007), including for sexuality and

gender (Balgos et al., 2012). Both one's gendered and sexual identity (that is, one's bio-logical nature of being male *or* female, and the subsequent socio-culturally constructed desires which interact with such biological predispositions), however, must be situated within theoretical underpinnings that take into account the nature not necessarily of the biological, personal desires of the individual in question, but rather the wider precon-ceived perspectives and discourses surrounding heteronormativity that exist within the wider society.

Some theorists, spanning a myriad of social science disciplines, have indeed started to examine the contexts that shape such constructions, and continue to contribute to the burgeoning field of 'queer theory' that aims to deconstruct gender and sexuality as fixed social categories, thereby demonstrating their fluidity and even at times claiming how one's 'true gender' is in fact 'performed', both consciously and subconsciously, in a 'tacit collective agreement to perform, produce and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions' (Butler, 1990, p. 179). In her ground-breaking book on queer theory, *Gender Trouble*, Butler (1990) also goes on to contend the implicit and sometimes explicit punishments one can suffer for not agreeing to believe, perform or sustain such essentialised gender stereotypes. Conceptions of gender and sexuality are thus often still bound within powerful heteronormative discourses that pervade social psyches worldwide, with dire consequences to any who dare to trans-gress such social boundaries (Butler, 1990; 1993).

Despite developments in queer theorising, a gap between academic understandings of gender and sexuality and those within policy and development practice remains, and issues surrounding sexual and gender liminality in the Global South are still arguably confined within the conventional Western conservative conceptions, where 'sexuality continues to be treated as a problem which needs to be contained rather than as an inte-gral part of the human experience; a source of joy and pleasure as well as suffering and pain' (Cornwall and Jolly, 2006, p. 1). Here, traditional non-Western gender identities are increasingly associated with deviant sexual practices and condemned under the growing influence of the Western heteronormative paradigm brought through globali-sation, and arguably 'development' processes (Schmidt, 2003). Sex, similar to 'poverty' in Escobar's (1995) *Encountering Development*, is actively problemitised in Southern contexts, providing development agencies and subsequently, the local communities themselves, with justification for either the stigmatisation or the complete exclusion of any person that transgresses heteronormative and polarised boundaries (Herdt, 1993; Jolly, 2000).

The global HIV/AIDS epidemic has played a significant role in the development of such discourses surrounding 'bad sex', and while on the one hand, this has opened up a new platform for issues of sex and gender to be discussed, on the other, it has created the need for scapegoats within society (Tan, 1995a). As in almost all instances, scape-goats for such 'social problems' are located and sourced from the outer fringes of society, thus further disenfranchising them from empowerment and participation – ideas that are inherent to effective and 'good' development (Armas, 2006; Gosine,

2009; Jolly, 2000). Scapegoats, who are blamed for social deviance or other problem (which in this case come to represent the members of sexual and gender minorities), thus merge to form an entire class of marginalised people within a society, often lacking in legitimacy to stake claim or access to certain resources and power within the social structure (Balgos et al., 2012).

Not fitting into the socially prescribed heterosexual matrix 'is to belong to a marked sexual category' (Parker and Gagnon, 1995, p. 9), where overt processes of exclusion and the creation of stereotypes have come to produce extremely real consequences (Armas, 2006; Tan, 1995b). This is particularly the case in the Global South, where traditional non-Western gender minorities are being marginalised even though 'sexual relations with men (in the case of biologically male individuals) are seen as an optional consequence of gender liminality, rather than its determiner, prerequisite, or primary attribute' (Besnier, 1993). Indeed, due to its location outside of the dominant heterosexual gender binary, homosexuality along with other forms of gender transgression has been constructed as a primary reason for many social problems, perhaps most notably, the spread of sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS (Lewis and Gordon, 2006; Tan, 1999). The idea that homosexual people are flippant with and have 'no qualms about sex' (either paid or unpaid) has filtered down through the sparse academic and popular writing that 'tends towards sensationalism' (Tan, 1999, p. 241). Tan (1999, p. 241) goes on to discuss how discourses and connotative descriptions such as these 'distort the picture, with serious implications for public policy and interventions', for they homogenise entire social groups, affixing harmful stereotypes on all those engaging in non-heteronormative behaviour, regardless of any other social attributes or characteristics they may possess. Such views, however, are immensely normative and behaviourally deterministic, and as emphasised by Butler (1990), a new constructionist theory serves as a more beneficial lens in which to examine the issue. Focusing upon the complex, socially constructed nature of gender and sexuality within the wider context of one's social status in a variety of Western and non-Western societies is thus imperative to fostering enabling environments for identity acknowledgment, consciousness and optimism, which is no doubt the best and most effective condition for DRR and other development work to be carried out in (Browne and Nash, 2013; Browne et al., 2010; Herdt, 1993; Schmidt, 2003). Engaging and bringing together queer and wider development debates is thus advantageous to both fields, as by acknowledging one, there is a provision of space in the other for increased understanding and tolerance of the coalescing forces that dictate the currently normative perspectives that dominate each individual body of theory.

The case of sexual and gender minorities to date, however, is convoluted, and the prevailing heteronormative discourses that pervade society push the members of sexual and gender minorities further into the 'social closet', stigmatising them with gendered and sexual labelling that they do not necessarily identify with. This leads to varying levels of, as Garcia (2000, p. 265) presents it in the case of the Philippines, 'performativity . . . through an orientalising gaze'. Sexual and gender minorities are still placed

within a stigmatised and excluded position in society and consequently fulfil stereoty-pical roles based upon heteronormative social expectations. This means that they are often forced 'to circulate within "shadow" sexual networks where sexual encounters are necessarily anonymous and casual', guiding them into a vicious cycle where there is lack of accessibility to open social networking and a lack of legitimacy within society, which inevitably results in higher risk to any events or phenomena that may amplify hardships within daily life (Hain, 2013; Tan, 1999). For members of non-Western gender minorities, this means losing their traditional roles within the society and/or access to important social and cultural resources (Balgos et al., 2012; Schmidt, 2003). Conceiving sexuality and gender is therefore as much an individual battle for self-expression as it is inextricably linked to the overarching social context in which such individuals live.

Such discourses permeate all levels of society, creating homogenising assumptions about gender and sexuality based solely on sexual practices, despite the various roles, desires, motives and realities behind them (Tan, 1995a). This is particularly the case in the context of DRR, where Western ideas for understanding people's vulnerability and reducing the risk of disaster have dominated for decades (Bankoff, 2001; Hewitt, 1983). Members of sexual and gender minorities have been socially excluded and sometimes discriminated against in both the assessment of disaster risk and DRR (Balgos et al., 2012; Dominey-Howes et al., 2013) despite a growing recognition that those people who are marginalised in society are often the most vulnerable in facing natural and other hazards (Wisner, 1993; Wisner et al., 2004). The following sections explore the particular case of the *bakla* in the Philippines, a country that is often affected by disasters (Bankoff, 2003; Gaillard, 2011).

## 3.    The socio-historical context of heteronormativity in the Philippines

*Bakla* are genitally male individuals who claim a feminine identity, engage in gender-crossing and desire intimate relations with men (Garcia, 2008; 2013). Originally, the identity of the *bakla* did not refer only to a particular sexual behaviour but rather it expressed the specific roles within the household and society or an ability to swing from male to female tasks and responsibilities (Garcia, 2008). This is evident in the term *bakla* (noun), which is actually the contraction of *babae* (woman) and *lalaki* (man). When used as an adjective, *bakla* further means uncertainty or indecisiveness (Tan, 1995a). However, nowadays, under the increasing pressure of globalisation, the term *bakla* also applies to men claiming a gay identity with masculine attributes as in the West (Garcia, 2008). This is because, as in many societies across the world, terms describing different categories of sexual orientation (that is, 'homosexual', 'bisexual' or even 'heterosexual') do not exist in the Filipino language, and the word *bakla*, despite its traditional specificity in describing the 'effeminacy' of men, as evi-denced in the original but hence obsolete Tagalog word *binabae* (like a woman), has been appropriated and 'dominates public discourse, lumping together homosexuals,

transvestites, transsexuals, and hermaphrodites' (Tan, 1999, p. 88). The origin of such an evolution in the use of the term but also in the larger society's view of gender identities and sexual behaviours traces back to centuries of Western domination (Garcia, 2013).

The Philippines has endured 2 consecutive eras of colonisation (Tan, 1995b). The first extended over 3 centuries under the ruling of Spain – a period in Philippine history 'described as the domination of the Cross and the Sword, with Roman Catholicism introduced as a major form of social control' (Tan, 1995b, p. 33). It was during this time that the Spanish introduced the powerful Roman Catholic gender and sexual ideology of *machismo*, which laid the foundations for modern day misogyny and homophobia (Tan, 1995b). In 1898, Spain relinquished rule of the Philippines to the USA, which maintained control of the islands until 1946. This early twentieth century US occupation introduced secularism to the nation; however, the American biomedical approach to gender (based upon Freudian psychiatry and sexology) emphasised biological attributes and sexual practices over indigenous understandings of gender. Same-sex sexual behaviour was then tagged 'with a new label – that of "sickness" – to replace the old one of "sin"' (Tan, 1995b, p. 33).

In the contemporary era, over half a century since regaining independence, Filipinos still carry equivocal views towards non-heteronormative and liminal sexual and gender identities, with many people (Filipinos, foreigners and even certain academics) arguing that there is overall tolerance of sexual and gender minority behaviours in the Philippines – often pointing to the *bakla*, 'identified mainly as cross-dressing effeminate males from lower-class income groups' (Tan, 1995b, p. 34). *Bakla*, as Garcia (2000; 2008; 2013) points out, are widely visible and often mainstreamed into Philippine society as one of 4 different gender categories – 'male, female, *bakla*, and *tomboy*'[1], however, the social acceptance of *bakla* and indeed *tomboy* is not as straightforward, as development agency reports (UNDP and USAID, 2014), policy analysis (Lim and Jordan, 2013) and public opinion data indicate (Manalastas and del Pilar, 2005). Though not criminalised like in neighbouring postcolonial countries like Malaysia or Singapore, as Tan (1995a; 1995b, p. 33) and Garcia (2000; 2008) argue, a man who is *bakla* is only tolerated within society 'if he remains confined within certain professions: hairdressers, couturiers, and to some extent, the entertainment industry'. Those who are *bakla* are thereby only socially accepted if they perform certain roles, and as with constructions of gender and sexual categorisation within the development industry at large, those who transgress such social boundaries run the risk of being ostracised, stigmatised and eventually excluded from society. In this way, tolerance of *bakla* in the Philippines is apprehended in a strictly patronising manner within wider heterosexual (and to a certain extent, socio-economic class) and polarised (men–women) norms, and 'appreciated only for camp value' (Tan, 1995b, p. 33).

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[1]'Tomboy' in the Philippine context meaning lesbian.

When it comes to issues surrounding sexual orientation and gender identity, contemporary Philippine society arguably locates *kabaklaan*, or *bakla*-ness, within societal tensions of normalised yet conditional social acceptance and the notion that *bakla* is a possibly temporal, amusing but ultimately tragic, lower-class subjectivity, inextricably linked within traditional heteronormative discourses built around the gender binary. Such ambivalence suggests that being *bakla* is an identity actively appropriated as a matter of nurture rather than nature, deviant but believed to be possibly 'correctable' (UNDP and USAID, 2014) and thus something, as Jolly (2007, p. 9) says of wider sexual discourse, which 'can be contained and controlled'.

## 4.  *Bakla* and DRR

In light of this historical context and despite the contested discourse surrounding the term *bakla*, academics and development practitioners are beginning to recognise *kabaklaan* and gender liminality as a resource that can be useful for some development work (Gaillard, 2011; Garcia, 2000; 2008; Tan, 1993; 1995a; 1995b; 1999). Most notably, the way in which *baklas* can elide and switch from socially ascribed male to female roles, and thus establish more extensive social networks during various situations, is being seen as a significant advantage for the ordinarily marginalised group and, subsequently, to Philippine society at large (Gaillard, 2011). Advocates of the *bakla* community are increasingly revaluing such social positioning as a resource to be celebrated, rather than scorned, making way for a new era where sexuality and gender can start to be reconceptualised, redefined and renegotiated within wider development paradigms (Garcia, 2008; Jolly, 2000). *Kabaklaan*, by blurring and bridging traditional gender and sexual boundaries, can in fact prove useful as a conduit between male and female dialogue, particularly in times of disaster (Gaillard, 2011). In this way, their liminal gender identities can theoretically allow them to serve as key and effective envoys in society, thus showing that rather than a gay man's purported stereotypical characteristics, it is his social connections to his family and wider community that construct his role within a DRR context. This goes to say that if even one of the most diligently marginalised social groups can realise their power and voice in facing a development quandary, then so too can other similarly socially ostracised groups. Including community members who are *bakla* in wider participatory activities thus has the potential for fostering greater bottom-up action within development, which has real, tangible outcomes for society at large (Gaillard, 2011).

This, however, is still not widely accepted and promulgated within discourses and constructions of national identity. While *kabaklaan* may be visible and unremarkable in the everyday Philippine context, during disaster times and their aftermath, *bakla* and other sexual and gender minorities elsewhere in the world become increasingly invisible to and unheard of by the dominant society (Balgos et al., 2012; Dominey-Howes et al., 2013; D'Ooge, 2008; Knight and Sollom, 2012; Knight and Welton-Mitchell, 2013; Ozawa, 2012; Pincha and Krishna, 2008; The International Gay and Lesbian

Human Rights Commission, 2011). As Gaillard (2010) argues, times of disaster, rather than being rare and unexpected events, are in fact merely amplifiers of the conditions of daily life, and the general reluctance of *bakla* to stay in temporary shelters during evacuation for the fear of facing discrimination and sexual harassment tells us much about the current plight of sexual and other gender minorities in the Philippines.

Generally, community members who are *bakla* openly claim their identity and are often recognised for their ardour and initiative when it comes to planning and instigating community projects (Tan, 2001). Yet simultaneously, they are affected by much discrimination from heterosexual male and female peers, particularly in rural contexts. Both discrimination and community initiatives persist in times of disaster. In Masantol, located in the delta of the Pampanga River, *bakla* teenagers were asked to look after young children and do the laundry at home and also to fetch water and firewood amidst deep flood water after a powerful cyclone in 2011, thus contributing greatly to their family coping with the event (Balgos et al., 2012). In Quezon City, Metro Manila, some *bakla* youth were left to eat last and least when their households were affected by 2 back-to-back powerful cyclones in late 2009. However, *bakla* groups simultaneously activated their strong and wide networks of peers to gather relief goods from different sources, reinforcing the importance of everyday social networks in times of disaster. They ended up in the mayor's office to seek assistance for distributing this aid to affected families, which they received through Army vehicles (Balgos et al., 2012).

Throughout the country, when evacuated in crowded churches or public buildings, the specific needs of *bakla* individuals are never recognised. They suffer from lack of privacy, some being uncomfortable with either women or men. Their personal grooming habits are also made fun of by men in the male rest rooms where they are assigned. Furthermore, they are often the objects of sexual harassment and gender discrimination (Balgos et al., 2012). When asked to present documents or identification cards to be able to get their share of relief goods from government institutions, disaster-affected *bakla* are ridiculed because, in many cases, the presentation of their selves do not match the documents they present. Similar circumstances have been reported in India and Nepal (Knight and Sollom, 2012; Knight and Welton-Mitchell, 2013; Pincha and Krishna, 2008). Such was the dilemma faced by some *bakla* evacuees after Typhoon Haiyan hit central Philippines. In such instances, community members who are *bakla* are placed in a double bind. They were not given relief goods without documents, and when they had their documents with them, relief goods were given to them but not without some of them experiencing ridicule and harassment.

Such a context is evident in the village of Macawayan, located in the midst of the Irosin plain, in the province of Sorsogon. The Cadac-an River passes through the village and provides for the main agricultural activity of rice production. Local people along the river are often forced to evacuate their homes during the cyclone and heavy rain season, when livelihoods are greatly affected as the majority of

people rely upon rice production to make a living (Gaillard, 2011). In Irosin, young *bakla* are usually forced to do the 'dirty chores' and clean the house in the aftermath of flash floods (Gaillard, 2011, p. 65). At the same time, young *bakla* often spontaneously walk around the village to collect and distribute relief goods amongst their neighbours. Along with this, *bakla* youth usually care for younger children and cook meals for their family or in temporary shelters. In spite of these contributions, when evacuated to those shelters, *baklas* must endure a lack of privacy, reporting discomfort being isolated amongst either women or men in gender-insensitive settings (Gaillard, 2011). They are often the target of verbal harassment in the men's bathrooms where they are usually assigned. Consequently, for many young *bakla* in Irosin, disasters turn out to be an even more stressful and demanding time than for heterosexual men and women (Gaillard, 2011).

As Wisner et al. (2012) assert, the social, emotional and physical well-being of people in evacuation centres should not be overlooked in disaster management, for it is human solidarity, regardless of social divisions, that brings strength and empowerment to communities facing adversity. It was in the spirit of this that a DRR project was conducted under the leadership of the Integrated Rural Development Fund (IRDF), an NGO involved in rural development, along with one of the authors, in January 2010. The project was initially designed to establish DRR within local development planning. Many stakeholders from community, provincial and national levels participated, including the Barangay Disaster Coordinating Council, the Municipal Government of Irosin, the Provincial Government of Sorsogon, the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (PHIVOLCS), IRDF, the Centre for Disaster Preparedness, the University of the Philippines Diliman and the local elementary school community. The core DRR activity revolved around a participatory 3-dimensional map (P3DM) of the area (Gaillard et al., 2011). It consisted of building a 2.74 m × 2.74 m 3D map that spanned a land area of 333.33 hectares. The map was designed as a tool to enable participants to plot natural hazards, vulnerable assets and people's vulnerabilities and capacities. Upon viewing overlapping hazard-prone areas, along with community vulnerabilities and capacities, people are able to make a palpable appraisal of their disaster risk in their immediate environment (Gaillard et al., 2011). In making disaster risk tangible, P3DM eventually facilitated the community planning of actions to reduce risk, including actions to lower people's vulnerability and enhance people's capacities in the face of natural hazards. *Bakla* youth were involved in this process – both as a part of a singular focus group discussion and as part of the community group at large. *Bakla* participants, within the presence of the wider community, identified their houses on the map to allocate areas where each of them was to collect relief goods in times of emergency. The potential contribution of the *bakla* sector to the life of the community during evacuation was also discussed and contributed to the recognition of their capacities during disasters, which ultimately helped in minimising discrimination and anti-*bakla* harassment in Macawayan Village, Irosin.

In a context where DRR actions remain predominately top-down in approach, inclusion of marginalised communities such as *bakla* youth and other sexual and gender minorities is fundamental to the larger goals of achieving overall effective and 'good' inclusive development (World Bank, 2013). Initiating dialogue between *bakla* youth and the rest of their community, and later between said community and government officials, school representatives and scientists using P3DM were perhaps the most significant and unique contribution of the project. P3DM provided a tool for mainstreaming and inclusion in discussions about DRR with the larger community of Macawayan and outside stakeholders. It was an opportunity for the wider community to not only acknowledge the capacities of their *bakla* neighbours, children and family members but it also allowed for the assessment of their particular needs and well-being as a subpopulation during disasters. The success of the project to include *bakla* community members was indeed reflected the following year when a consultation was conducted with neighbouring village authorities regarding the possibility of extending P3DM for DRR to all villages in the municipality. The head of Macawayan then instantly and spontaneously mentioned the case of the *bakla* youth who made significant contributions to their local activities the previous year (Gaillard, 2011).

Despite this success in Irosin, however, there is still relative ennui for the inclusion of and advocacy for *bakla* community members' capacities during disasters at the national level. This stems largely from the persistent heteronormative discourses that still pervade Philippine society today coupled with the belief that sexuality, sexual orientation and gender identity play little or no role in development work or in DRR. Nevertheless, community-based organisations continue to engage in the championing of the rights and contributions of sexual and gender minorities, including those who are *bakla*. Notable examples of this could be seen during the aftermath of cyclones Ondoy and Pepeng in September and October 2009, where Manila-based organisations raised support for the survivors without discrimination based on their gender or sexual orientation and then formed a group named LGTBI (Lesbians, Gays, Transsexuals, Bisexuals, Intersex) Pinoys for Calamity and Disaster Victims which promoted the inclusion of *bakla* voices and concerns in DRR initiatives. In this regard, their extensive social networks prove highly useful again for DRR, notably to quickly mobilise wide support not only within the *bakla* communities but also amongst men and women friends.

## 5.    Conclusion

Contemporary Philippine society is, to a certain extent, straddling a complex development dichotomy. Strong Roman Catholic traditions paralleling decades of US occupation and 'virtue' have made way for an important and informative context that highlights wider global discourses surrounding gender and sexuality in the development industry. Indeed, such issues have, for the large part, been actively sidelined in mainstream paradigms of development, as the dominant behavioural deterministic

perspective has left the constructions of sexuality, heteronormativity and gender identity typically unquestioned or unconsidered (Cornwall and Jolly, 2006; Jolly, 2000; 2007). It is vital, however, to address these factors and address matters of gender and sexuality in a head-on manner if development is to realise its full potential in terms of fulfilling wider goals of empowerment, participation and poverty alleviation (Armas, 2006; World Bank, 2013). One's gender and sexuality remains integral to one's personal identity and quality of life, and if this is left disavowed and stigmatised within society, then the same goals of empowerment and participation that are central to development cannot be achieved with full integrity (Armas, 2006; Cornwall and Jolly, 2006). It is therefore crucial to unpack and reconsider the powerful discourses and taken-for-granted truths about gender and sexuality that we have come to accept in development rhetoric: What 'makes' development? Who are the actors bringing such discourses into existence? And what are their consequences? (Escobar, 1995; Mohanty, 1991).

Philippine society is perhaps a rather tame example of sexual and gendered marginalisation. The last decade and a half has witnessed a gradual 'coming out' and coming together of many *bakla* Filipinos and other members of sexual and gender minorities (Manalastas and Torre, 2013). Their capacities as 'social agents' are proving to be multi-faceted and multi-purpose, particularly in an era where disasters and disaster risk are being flagged as such imminent and pressing global development issues (Wisner et al., 2012). However, this is not to say that Philippine society is exempt from the patriarchal gender discourses that pervade development theories and practices, and *bakla*, as people and as a term, are still bound within powerful restrictive heterosexist norms (Garcia, 2008). The current positioning of *bakla* and other sexual and gender groups within the Philippine governance framework highlights just this – where there is, to a certain extent, everyday tolerance of *bakla* within Philippine society yet also an inherent lack of understanding of the capacities that sexual diversity and gender liminality can offer. Community projects, such as the DRR initiative conducted in Irosin, are beginning to highlight the capacities of minority populations like *bakla* youth within Philippine society. However, to date, movements towards accepting gender liminality and sexual diversity within development initiatives in the Philippines are small, remain loyal to the 'bad sex' paradigm and, on the whole, reinforce homogenous global discourses about heteronormativity and gender dualism (Jolly, 2007). While the ramifications of rigidly constructed binaries of gender and sexuality indeed extend beyond the case of *bakla*, the socio-historical context of the Philippines, embedded within an arguably high disaster risk environment, highlights a telling example of the capacities sexual and gender minorities may in fact bring and deploy. If we are to move forward into an era where sexual development and freedom is realised, then the first step is to reconsider the way we conceptualise and negotiate the gendered and sexualised constructions of some of our most personal actions and identities.

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