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Dennis B. McGilvray and Michelle R. Gamburd, (Eds.). *Tsunami Recovery in Sri Lanka: Ethnic and Regional Dimensions*. London: Routledge. 2010.

The 2004 tsunami that devastated the Indian Ocean region has generated a great deal of scholarship on disaster, recovery, and the intersection of state, donor, and beneficiary. This slim, edited volume contains seven essays examining the post-tsunami recovery efforts in Sri Lanka from multiple perspectives and an introduction by the editors that situates the chapters in relation to each other and to the broader body of literature on the tsunami and its effects.

In Chapter One, political scientist Alan Keenan explores the political context in which tsunami recovery took place. Keenan briefly fleshes out the various political parties and ethnic factions and the history of the civil war between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) before describing the contents of the controversial Post-Tsunami Operational Management Structure (P-TOMS) agreement and the anti-NGO political rhetoric that has circulated in the region post-tsunami. Keenan argues that the P-TOMS agreement was primarily a foundation from which to establish cooperation between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE for the purpose of aid distribution and, consequently, give shape to a more stable peace process. Despite cooperation across factions in the immediate aftermath of the disaster, however, long-standing distrust between the predominantly Sinhala Sri Lankan state and the LTTE, coupled with a centralized, ad hoc administration that suppressed local initiative, fueled the perception of biases favoring one ethnic group or region over another. While large numbers of Sri Lankans in general came to see recovery efforts as corrupt, many Tamils and Tamil-speaking Muslims additionally experienced them as ethnically biased. Keenan concludes, cynically if correctly, that the international out-pouring of aid to Sri Lanka highlighted existing ethnic tensions and "strengthen[ed] habits of zero-sum political calculation and ethnicized governance...help[ing] 'build back better' the pre-tsunami conflict" (p. 36).

Randall Kuhn's second chapter provides a demographic study of risk and vulnerability by comparing antecedents, recovery efforts, and outcomes at the two lowest levels of administrative organization in the Sinhala-dominated South Province and the Tamil and Muslim dominated Eastern Province. He describes variations in objective and subjective measures of tsunami recovery based on ethnic and regional differences in order to demonstrate that the vast majority of aid administered in Sri Lanka had political consequences. Kuhn documents a greater emphasis on recovery in the Southern Province over the more heavily affected east and north, which he attributes to several factors, not least of which is political/ethnic bias but which also include "tarmac bias"—or the ease of delivery to the more developed and heavily populated south—and the challenges of delivering assistance to conflict zones in the north and east. And while Kuhn's study does not show substantial differences in the scale or effectiveness of relief efforts between Muslim and Tamil communities in Eastern Province, he does show that distribution failed to take into account the greater vulnerability of Tamil communities.

Michelle Gamburd's "The Golden Wave" examines the reception of aid in a Sinhala-Buddhist village in Galle District where negotiations over aid focused not just on meeting the physical needs of food and shelter but also the social need for status and respectability. Gamburd's chapter offers an analysis of the performative and agentic functions of critiques of distribution and reception of aid to suggest that "discussions about entitlement and debates about morality are strategic action" (p. 65). She documents a series of critiques that center around, on the one hand, the generalized corruption and favoritism of NGOs towards one or another set of

recipients and, on the other, the (im)morality of taking unneeded aid from those more deserving. Gamburd suggests that such narratives reveal a dual-level strategy to get more aid from donors via accusations of cheating or sponging supplies and to enhance the status of one's family or oneself by refusing aid. She concludes her chapter with a description of post-tsunami iterations of the Vihara Maha Devi myth, the telling of which she argues serves to reinforce certain ideas about Sinhala-Buddhist identity.

In "The Sea Goddess and the Fishermen," Patricia Lawrence uses vivid narrative to piece together a picture of contemporary religious belief in a Tamil fishing village in Batticaloa District. The residents of Navalady, a mixed Catholic and Hindu community, seemed both baffled and angered by the inability of their traditional Tamil *amma* (mother) deities to protect them from the tsunami. Nevertheless, Lawrence demonstrates that despite this anger, all religious responses to the disaster shared a cultural allegiance to the protective powers of the feminine, either in the force of Hindu *sakti* or in the form of the Catholic Virgin Mary. Lawrence notes, too, how the tsunami offered residents of Batticaloa an opportunity to speak openly of death and trauma, a freedom barred to them prior to the tsunami because "to speak knowledgeably and frankly about the human-made deaths of the civil war was to endanger one's life and the lives of other family members" (p. 102).

Lawrence joins with Dennis McGilvray in Chapter five to discuss the effects of tsunami reconstruction on the matrilineal household and dowry system found in the eastern Batticaloa and Ampara Districts. "In the haste and confusion associated with the provision of temporary shelter," they write, "the fact that mothers, wives, and daughters had traditionally held sole title...to domestic dwellings in Tamil and Muslim communities was largely overlooked" (p. 106). Despite the almost universal granting of ownership rights of donated houses to men, the authors describe the processes through which families in affected communities developed strategies to reassert traditional, matrilineal practices of ownership and dowry giving, often in the span of a single generation.

In Chapter six, disaster studies expert Timmo Gaasbeek provides from an insider's perspective an account of the operation and recovery efforts of NGOs in the aftermath of the tsunami, which he describes as a *masala* movie: "primarily a chaotic and colorful jumble of a large number of standard elements" (p. 125). While Gaasbeek agrees broadly with this characterization, which he borrows from an interview he conducted with an Indian government official, he argues that the initial response in Sri Lanka was not chaotic at all. After decades of nearly annual flooding and twenty years of civil war, local mechanisms for the coordination of emergency resources were already in place and ready to be activated by aid organizations at the local level. These mechanisms worked as intended in the initial days of the recovery until supplanted by overseas experts unfamiliar with the historical and cultural situation on the ground. Many well-meaning administrators, he contends, failed to understand local dynamics or efficiently use available resources. These shortcomings, coupled with the need of many international NGOs to curry reputations at home, resulted in the inefficient and improperly directed delivery of disaster relief. Gaasbeek offers a cutting critique of generalized aid delivery in local contexts and underscores the importance of approaching disaster recovery with ethnographic sensitivity.

Georg Frerks' final essay, "Principles Ignored and Lessons Unlearned," gives the reader a final review of the recovery efforts in Sri Lanka along four trajectories common in disaster studies literature: (1) sensitivity to the complex nature of disaster and political context, especially in conflict zones, (2) notions of vulnerability and resilience, (3) local narratives and discourses of

disaster at local and national levels, and (4) the impact of the culture of (local) governance and patronage. The chapter offers a close reading of this "cluster" of issues in the context of the disaster studies literature before placing each in the context of the Sri Lankan recovery. Like Gaasbeek, Frerks sees positive, cooperative, and truly altruistic behavior in the early stages of recovery but critically concludes that the tense political dynamics of the long conflict between the Sinhala majority and Tamil-speaking minority resulted in an "ethnicized, politicized, and communalized distribution of aid based on politically charged patron-client relations" (p. 162). McGilvray and Gamburd tie together the threads of the preceding chapters in a brief concluding chapter.

Because of its format and varied disciplinary approaches, this book might be difficult to use as a textbook, but overall, it offers an excellent overview of the recovery in Sri Lanka from multiple perspectives. Surveyed in its entirety, the volume does suffer somewhat from a lack of editorial direction: for example, three of its seven essays begin with what have become boilerplate rehashings of the devastation of the 2004 tsunami, and one wonders if Frerks' essay might be better placed in the beginning. Notwithstanding these very slight complaints, this book will be found to provide course readings for a variety of classes in the social sciences—from disaster studies to political science to development to anthropology and beyond—and the references alone are worthy of study for anyone interested in the study of disaster, recovery, and development. In the words of its editors, this book is meant to "offer a well-rounded, triangulated, multidisciplinary overview of the island as it was before the tsunami, during the events of the tsunami, and during the relief and reconstruction process that followed the disaster" in order to explore the degree to which "culture matters" (p. 11), and largely it succeeds.

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