

**The Biopolitics of Desire: Exploring the Axis of Sexuality during the 2004 Indian  
Ocean Tsunami in Thailand**

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**Abstract:** *Drawing on previous academic literature regarding the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) community in Thailand, this paper frames this groups pre-disaster situation through the dominant, marginalizing ideology of compulsory heterosexuality in Thai society. By illuminating the pre-disaster discrimination this group faced, this paper frames their marginalization through the sociological concepts of human, economic, and social capital. By highlighting the LGBT community's unique vulnerabilities, this paper ultimately argues that the disaster further marginalized this group from the dominant society. Further, the concluding discussion proposes that the invisibility of this community's lifestyles and needs carries strong political messages regarding which lives are worth saving during a disaster, and which lives are not valued. This paper calls attention to the axis of sexuality during crisis and aims to instigate further research and policy developments in order to keep non-dominant sexualities within a frame of visibility during a disaster.*

## Introduction

This research project will examine the effects of an undersea earthquake that occurred in the Indian Ocean on December 26<sup>th</sup>, 2004. The earthquake is reported to have had a magnitude of 9.0 on the Richter scale, which produced a subsequent tsunami that affected more than a dozen countries in Southeast Asia and beyond (Tuicomepee and Romano 2008). I will specifically focus on the events and effects of the tsunami on the country of Thailand, in which the tsunami is reported to have affected six southern provinces along the Adaman Sea coastline (Berke, Chuenpagdee, Juntarashote and Chang 2008). The Indian Ocean tsunami caused an estimated death toll of 152,565 people, with 141, 955 people reported missing, and is estimated to have displaced over 1.1 million more (Tuicomepee and Romano 2008). In Thailand, it is reported that approximately 5300 people perished in the tsunami, and 21,000 households were affected (Berke, Chuenpagdee, Juntarashote and Chang 2008). The Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami of Boxing Day 2004 is considered one of the deadliest natural disasters in recorded history.

The tsunami was a consequence of an under-sea earthquake that occurred in the ocean, and because of this I feel it falls under the definition of an environmental, or “natural,” disaster. If we examine Kai Erickson’s (1976) definition of a disaster, then we can conclude that the earthquake and subsequent tsunami were sudden and ferocious events which occurred with a temporal beginning and an end, and which ruptured the natural occurrences and processes of life leaving human and material damage in their wake. The death toll and the damage to property, businesses, and communities are all

evidence of the damage the tsunami made in its path, and the tsunami ruptured the natural processes of life for those living in and visiting Thailand.

While numerous articles, journals, and media stories have been written about the tragedy of the tsunami a more thorough analysis of its effects on certain groups within Thai society is required. Very little, if any, literature captures what the experience was like for members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) community in Thailand, and no literature exists on how the LGBT community coped with the tragedy or how aid was distributed or provided to them. Through a theoretical analysis of how the LGBT community in Thailand exists within a culture of compulsory heterosexuality (Rattachumpoth 1999), I hope to capture the marginalization of this group pre-disaster, and argue that their class-based social vulnerability would differentiate their experience of the 2004 tsunami as seen through their limited access to human, economic and social capital.

Limits in capital add complexities for individuals and groups during disasters and often policies and aid decisions are developed to assist those marginalized groups. However, as will be explained, the unique vulnerabilities and special needs of the LGBT community in Thailand remained invisible during the 2004 tsunami and such an invisibility carries political messages regarding which lives are valued, and which lives are not. Giroux's (2006) concept of 'the new biopolitics of disposability' captures how those who are marginalized in society because of their racial or class positions have to fight for their existence and are expected to do so while maintaining their invisibility, and this invisibility justifies some lives being privileged while others are not. By keeping the experiences and needs of the LGBT community "in the closet" during the 2004 tsunami, I

argue that the Thai government sent a political message that lesbian, gay and transgendered members of society are not valued, visible or worth helping, and for this reason I argue that group experiences during disasters needs to be academically analyzed within the axis of sexuality.

### History

The country of Thailand is situated in Southeastern Asia and consists of 76 provinces, with a popular tourist and fishing coastline stretching 3,219 kms. The primary economic resource for the country as a whole is agriculture, but for the southern provinces of Thailand livelihood is heavily dependent on tourism and tourist services (Central Intelligence Agency 2010). In their research of the tourist and fishing destination of Khao Lak, researchers Calgao and Lloyd (2008) report growth in tourism accounting for a jump from 100 rooms available to tourists in 1996 to over 5300 rooms available in December of 2004. With the increased availability of rooms to tourists, a spike in service communities were observed as well, as many Thai people moved to the area to work as tourism employees or to build small businesses to cater to the tourists. On the morning of December 26th, 2004, when the tsunami hit the Thai coastline, a diverse mosaic of people were in the areas affected by the waves. There were wealthy tourists visiting from many destinations, fishermen whose livelihoods depended on the area, migrant workers from other regions of Thailand who were servicing the tourist industries, and both legal and illegal migrants filling labor jobs that Thai nationals no longer wanted to fill (Rigg, Grundy-Warr, Law and Tan-Mullins 2008).

While tsunamis are considered common in the Pacific Ocean, in the Indian Ocean they are far less frequent, and may only occur once every 100 years to varying degrees of

strength (Deluged without Warning 2005). The cause of the Indian Ocean earthquake was the moving of geological plates. The Indo-Australian and the Eurasian Plate had years of pressure built up between them and this pressure was suddenly released on December 26th, 2004 in the form of a major earthquake below the Sumatra fault line (Andaman Association 2005). Using the tourism community of Khao Lak in the southern Phang Nga Province as a time line, it is recorded that at 7:58 a.m. the under-sea earthquake ruptured off the West coast of Sumatra, measuring over 9 on the Richter scale. At approximately 9:35 a.m. the sea line receded around 100 meters and the shoreline was exposed along the Andaman coast for approximately 5 minutes. At 9:38 a.m. a large wave struck the coast, and at 9:43 a.m. the first tsunami hit measuring approximately 6-7 meters in height. At 10:03 a.m. a second tsunami hit measuring approximately 10 meters high. At 10:20 a.m. the third tsunami hit measuring 5 meters in height. At approximately 12:00 p.m. the sea level returned to normal and the devastation of the tsunami began to be recorded (UN 2005). According to statistics provided by the United Nations of Thailand, the tsunami left 5,395 people dead in its wake, a reported 2,817 missing, and figures from 2005 claim that 1,650 bodies still have not been identified.

The Thai government has been criticized in research for its lack of disaster awareness and preparedness of the tourist destinations in Thailand. The criticism claims that the Thai government withheld information and warnings about the tsunami from the coastal regions for economic reasons, as the ramifications upon tourism flows were thought to be too costly (Calgaro and Lloyd 2008). Further, economic and political decisions surrounding the building of tourist destinations are accused of being negligent, as many

decisions for development were approved based on financial gain and without much thought into the protection from coastal threats.

In narrowing the scope of this research project to include the unique social vulnerabilities that members of the LGBT community in Thailand face it is important to highlight the historical marginalization of this group from the rest of Thai society. Thailand is usually thought of as being a sort of paradise for sexual diversity and a place where sexual minorities lead happy, normal lives in society. However, homosexual men, lesbian women and the unique transgendered community, termed locally as 'kathoei', face prejudice, criticism, ostracism and discrimination based on their sexuality. Their sexuality is socially constructed as a sickness, and the consequences of this construction can be seen through such discriminations as their public denunciation, job discrimination, and interferences in both their private and working spaces (Rattachumpoth 1999). While members of the LGBT community are tolerated in Thai society, for example through their visibility in the media, they are not accepted by the larger Thai culture and face unique discriminations and exclusions from the larger society (Jackson 1999).

This brief historical account of the events of the tsunami framed from a political, financial, geographical and cultural perspective make it difficult to pin point the largest contributing factor to the devastation of the tsunami, however many factors other than the "natural" phenomenon of the earthquake and subsequent tsunami can be seen to contribute to the amount of lives lost and physical and social damages incurred. More specifically, framing the tsunami through the axis of sexuality offers insights into how sexuality differentiates experiences in disasters for those who are not part of the dominant group.

### Risk and Vulnerability

There was little warning that a tsunami was about to hit the Southern coastline of Thailand. According to the documentary “*The Day the Wave Came*” (2005), a government seismologist in Bangkok, Thailand, monitored the earthquake that occurred off of Sumatra, but claims he did not have an inkling about the tsunami because no historical records existed that documented tsunamis in the area. Because tsunamis are not as common in the Indian Ocean as they have been in the Pacific Ocean, and because they only occur approximately once every century, there is little lived experience with tsunamis that can be used in preparation or planning. Research into public assessment of risk shows that public perceptions of risk and vulnerability are influenced more by personal and historical experiences with disasters and must be placed within individual cultural contexts (Peacock 2005). In other words, the probability of a tsunami hitting Thailand was likely perceived as a low risk. However, in hind-sight, using Clark’s (2008) theory of possibilistic thinking may have helped the Thai population, as possibilistic thinking examines not only the likelihood of an event taking place, but the possibility or the question of “what if?” an event did take place.

The lack of possibilistic thinking being utilized before the tsunami can be connected with economic and political strategies to increase profits from tourism at the expense of safety planning and development, as well as the previously mentioned factor of warnings not being sent out to avoid disruptions in tourist dollars (Calgaro and Lloyd 2008). A congruence between policy decisions and disaster planning, warnings, and recovery plans would not have stopped the tsunami from happening; however, it could

have lessened the devastation of the tsunami on both the people and infrastructures on the southern coastal region.

Little awareness of the signs of a tsunami can also be captured in the documentary, as interviews with locals to the area remember the shoreline receding and tourists actually wandering closer to the sea in a state of awe over what they were seeing. Further, one resident of Khao Lak remembers seeing local and migrant fishermen go down to the receding shore line to collect fish that were caught on shore when the water pulled back. From videos collected from that day in Phuket, Thailand, an observer can hear hotel officials blowing whistles and shouting at the tourists and fishermen on the shore line to stand back or to run for land, but unfortunately it is too late for these people to find safety (The Day the Wave Came 2005). This lack of local knowledge and risk awareness being shared with both tourists and locals is, according to Calgaro and Lloyd (2008), a part of “ignorance fostered by the routine suppression or official denials of hazard predications and warnings.” Although a warning of the tsunami risk in the area was printed in local Phuket and Phang Nga newspapers in 1998, it is reported that the Thai government refuted the warnings in hopes of not disturbing tourism in the area.

Many factors contributed to the vulnerability of both Thai and foreign populations on the day of the Indian Ocean tsunami. Because of the ferociousness and the physical strength of the tsunami pre-existing social structures were affected and certain processes contributed to a social phenomenon taking place as well. As previously stated, a mixture of people from different socio-economic backgrounds, ethnicities, and social positions populated the affected southern coastal regions of Thailand. Because of the physical science behind the tsunami, there is clearly a physical vulnerability to persons nearest to



the coastline. Proximity is not the only factor that affects human vulnerability during disaster, and in the following analysis I will capture how sexuality is an axis that increases vulnerability during a crisis. The specific vulnerabilities and unique consequences for members of the LGBT community need to be examined and academic literature needs to generate knowledge regarding the unique experiences of this community during times of crisis.

### Analysis

The Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 has been academically examined through political, environmental, economic and gendered lenses; however, there is a lack of knowledge regarding how the axis of sexuality played a role in both pre- and post- disaster accounts. According to Rodriguez, Quarantelli, and Dynes (2007), sexuality is not a dimension of human experience that has been studied significantly during or after a crisis. After the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 the LGBT community in New York was not a priority in the distribution of aid and services, and it is important to look at what the particular vulnerabilities of this community are. Further, if Thailand is known internationally as being one of the most tolerant countries in the world towards the LGBT community, I think it is important to generate knowledge around how they experience social phenomenon differently, including the tragedy of the 2004 tsunami, in order to understand how sexuality effects disaster situations.

My analyses first must be framed within the cultural context of compulsory heterosexuality that is a dominant ideology in Thai society. Stephanie Olson (2004) defines compulsory heterosexuality as the cultural assumption that the partnering of men and women in heterosexual relationships is an innate aspect of social life.

Heterosexuality is therefore accepted as the natural and universal aspect of sexuality and participation in this ideology assigns privilege and power to its members over those who deviate from the norm. The acceptance of this ideology has real consequences for people who do not identify within its binary categories of male and female, or who do not identify as heterosexual, and often members of the LGBT community are discriminated against through intolerance or invisibility of their lifestyles and needs. The institutionalization of compulsory heterosexuality in society leads to an institutionalized inequality of power between those who comply and those who deviate from its norm.

In the following analysis, I argue that the dominating ideology of compulsory heterosexuality in Thailand had consequences for the LGBT community both leading up to the tsunami of 2004 and after the disaster occurred. The cultural acceptance of this ideology in Thai society meant that the LGBT community faced unique obstacles before and after the disaster. To better understand how this marginalization played out, I will frame the inequality of power and privilege through the sociological concepts of human, economic, and social capital. I will provide a sociological discussion of how these dimensions of capital were both infiltrated and perpetuated through the discriminations of compulsory heterosexuality.

### ***Human Capital***

Human capital can be understood as the specific skills and abilities that an individual has within them that they can use to contribute and gain from their interaction with the social. Human capital includes such skills as education, training, and special talents that are valued and rewarded in society (Yico 2003). Human capital is an important concept to consider in the examination of the LGBT community in Thailand, as

institutional discrimination can be argued to have limited skill development and employment achievement for homosexual and transgendered people in Thailand. While gender re-assignment surgery was legal in Thailand at the time of the tsunami, specific laws prohibited those who had re-assignment surgery from changing documents to their newly assigned sex (Armbrecht 2008). This lack of legal recognition carries unique consequences for transgendered people in Thailand, as their lack of proper identification often leads to difficulty obtaining employment, and can sadly leaves them to work in cash grab industries catering the tourist populations, as well as within the sex trade (Armbrecht 2008). Further, homosexual and transgendered people in Thailand are associated with such stereotypes as being irrational, violent, jealous, threatening and psychologically ill (Rattachumpoth 2009). These culturally held stereotypes greatly influence members of the LGBT community in the building of human capital, as they are often marginalized from educational institutions, and refused long-term, beneficial employment due to their perceived lifestyle choices.

Individuals within the LGBT community often lack building human capital, and such a lack habitually places them in vulnerable places of work, like cash-grab tourism businesses or the sex trade, and it is important to acknowledge the influence this had on their proximity to the coastal regions affected by the tsunami. Both the sex trade industry and businesses that cater to tourists in Thailand are heavily concentrated along the areas affected by the tsunami. Therefore, I argue that the historical and political practice of compulsory heterosexuality marginalized this community into physically vulnerable places at the time of the tsunami. Further, compulsory heterosexuality played out in discriminatory practices of individuals not being able to build the human capital

necessary to establish and maintain good quality, high paying jobs (Rattachumpoth 2009), which often equates to members of the LGBT community living in poverty. Human capital is finely intertwined with other sources of capital, such as economic and social, and for the purpose of this analysis I will examine each of these categories separately, however it is important to recognize their intersectionality that creates the human experience of a disaster.

### *Economic Capital*

For the purpose of this analysis, economic capital can be understood as the financial assets one has in relation to both their income through paid wages as well as their individual wealth. Individual wealth can be understood as a person's value of assets minus their debt and includes such financial resources as real estate, life insurance, employment benefits, inheritance, bonds and investments (Davies 2009). Further, economic capital is an important concept during a disaster in regards to people being able to access financial aid in times of crisis.

Members of the LGBT community face distinct challenges in securing economic capital, which is relational to their difficulty building human capital and obtaining solid and respectable employment. Further to this, it is important to acknowledge that at the time of the Indian Ocean tsunami, same-sex marriage was not recognized under Thai law and same-sex couples did not qualify for the same spousal benefits that heterosexual couples did, such as tax benefits, social welfare and insurance benefits (Rattachumpoth 2009). Further, if same-sex marriages were not legally sanctioned, it may have carried financial consequences regarding inheritance and life insurance, and it is important to question what the financial consequences were when death occurred in same-sex

relationships, as that partner's assets and any individual wealth would not have been dispersed to their homosexual partners, as it would have in legally sanctioned heterosexual relationships. The institutionalization of compulsory heterosexuality can therefore be seen to financially honor and benefit members of society who adhere to heterosexual coupling while disadvantaging those who do not comply, and further consequences can be seen in the distribution of financial assistance before and after the tsunami disaster of 2004.

Similar to Western cultures, in Thailand compulsory heterosexuality is at the core of social life. Those who are termed "sexually deviant" face social stereotypes that stigmatize them from the dominant group and associates them with qualities that threaten the social order. Because of this, their distinct group needs are often over-looked (Rattachumpoth 1999). According to research done by Rakkitt Rattachumpoth in 1999, it was found that not one Thai dollar, or *Baht*, was spent by the Thai government to fund social welfare or social services to the specific needs of homosexual and transgendered people. If social and welfare services were denied to the LGBT community prior to the devastation of the tsunami, it would be logical to assume that the distribution of foreign aid and financial assistance from government officials for their specific needs would likely not have been a priority after the disaster occurred.

When the Thai government was criticized for their lack of support and funds available to sex workers in Phuket, one Thai official said the lack was likely due to the sex workers not being registered as residents. One Thai official is quoted, "To get government help they must prove that they have local residency and provide that they were affected (Macan-Markar 2005)". This quote provides insight into the

marginalization that the LGBT community in Phuket faced, as they may have had difficulty in applying for and establishing financial aid post-disaster. The first problem that arises relates back to transgendered members not being able to legally change their identification to match their newly assigned sex, which presumably would make it very difficult for them to apply for financial assistance, as their government IDs would not match their current gender. Further, if members of the LGBT community were marginalized into working in the sex trade, which is illegal in Thailand, it would be difficult to justify a loss in income due to the deviant nature of their work and therefore prove that they were financially impacted by the tsunami.

At the time of the tsunami, one NGO was set up in Thailand to assist the sex trade workers of tourist destinations, EMPOWER, which reported that sex workers in resort areas suffered due to the plummeting of foreign clients in the area. According to a representative of EMPOWER, there were many documented suicides in the sex trade industry due to long-term financial losses and a lack of hope for rebuilding (Roper, Utz, and Harvey 2006). While EMPOWER worked specifically with sex trade workers, there is no evidence of social welfare agencies which catered specifically to the needs of the LGBT community in Thailand. The first transgendered counseling and support service, *Sisters*, was set up in Pattaya in 2005 and currently caters exclusively to the transgendered community (Pisuthipan 2007). However, at the time of the disaster no such organizations existed. In a report published by Grantmakers Without Borders (2006), it was documented that while relief efforts had the intention of reaching as many members of Thai society as possible, there was a tendency for relief to go directly to “official” community leaders. Often official community leaders do not necessarily

represent the interests of all groups in a community or region, specifically the needs and priorities of marginalized groups, as they are not typically represented by local power structures (Roper, Utz, and Harvey 2006).

The marginalization of the LGBT community through the ideology of compulsory heterosexuality likely lessened their connection to official power structures within Thai society at the time of the tsunami, which likely led to their further financial marginalization post-disaster. As journalist Jonathan Watts wrote just weeks after the disaster, the transgendered community "...are too much of an embarrassment to the authorities to merit much support from the government, particularly at a time when the world's attention is focused on the search for foreign victims of the disaster (Watts 2005)." Economic capital is another social dimension that during a disaster situation needs to be further explored with the axis of sexuality in visibility.

### ***Social Capital***

Social capital differs from human and economic capital as it is not simply an individualistic quality, such as education or skills associated with human capital, or financial resources related to economic capital. Instead, according to Dynes (2006), social capital refers to the relationships and important bonds that are formed between and among members of a community and can be considered one of the most important resources in response to emergency and disaster. According to Putnam (as cited in Elliott, Haney and Sams-Abiodun 2010), social capital can be further broken down between two network types, that of "bonding" social capital and also "bridging" social capital. Bonding social capital emerges from the relationships formed within networks of socially similar types of people that reinforce group identity at the exclusion of others,

which helps capture the types of bonds likely found within the LGBT community.

Bridging social capital comes from the outward relationships formed from networks with people who are socially different types of people, which the LGBT community may not have had access to due to their social marginalization.

Further, ties can have spatial attributes such as ‘local’ or ‘trans-local’, which ultimately affect what networks and bonds can achieve based on proximity to the area in danger and people’s ability to activate these ties. According to Elliott, Haney and Sams-Abiodun (2010), local ties can be especially important in the early stages of disaster because they are locally accessible and can be utilized on short notice. However, when dealing with the long-term consequences of a disaster, including evacuation and displacement, it is trans-local ties that provide important social support. Trans-local ties are located outside of an affected area and are ties that will likely be in a better position to provide assistance because they are not physically in danger themselves. It is important to keep these distinguishing features of social capital in mind when examining the effects of compulsory heterosexuality on the LGBT community in Thailand as their social marginalization may have provided them access to only local, bonding ties which could have limited their ability to evacuate or establish themselves in safer positions after the disaster.

The LGBT community in Thailand faces unique challenges when forming social capital ties. Within the family and networks of friendship, often homosexual men, lesbian women and ‘kathoey’ who “come out” to family and friends are ostracized from their family and kin ties (Rattachumpoth 1999). This is important to acknowledge when examining the experiences of the LGBT community during the tsunami of 2004, as it



may have socially isolated members of the community from family and kin support. As Dynes (2006) states, socially isolated people tend to be marginalized during a disaster because they are less likely to be rescued, less likely to seek medical assistance, and are less likely to be offered shelter from others.

Less-advantaged networks, such as the LGBT community within Thailand, may have further lacked important trans-local ties due to lack in economic capital and being able to access these ties or establish them in the first place (Elliott, Haney and Sams-Abiodun 2010). The consequence is that being in a less-advantaged social position may mean that the bonds and ties that members of the LGBT community have are solely bonding ties, or ties with people who are “in the same boat” financially, emotionally, and spatially. Therefore, their social capital may not have been able to cushion the effects of an emergency situation. For example, Marwann Macan-Marker (2005) examined how sex workers in the tourist areas dealt with financial losses communally by pooling nightly earnings together to financially assist those in similar situations, even a year after the tsunami.

It is important to frame social capital through the ideology of compulsory heterosexuality as it may have led to unequal access to local/trans-local and bonding/bridging ties, and these inequalities in social capital would have differentiated the experience of the disaster for members of LGBT community from other groups experiences. As Elliot, Haney and Sams-Abiodun (2010) argue, “...social capital not only “binds” and “bridges” groups; it also reinforces and reproduces social inequalities that separate and define them” (627). I argued that compulsory heterosexuality in Thai culture marginalized those who did not comply with heterosexual norms and forced

certain groups to live on the social margins due to their identification with non-dominant sexualities. Limits in social capital that members of the LGBT community experience in disaster situations need to be further researched by academics in the disaster studies field to capture how the axis of sexuality changes experiences during a crisis.

### Conclusion

Framing the disaster of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami within the sociological concepts of human, economic and social capital begins an important discussion regarding the experiences of the LGBT community prior, during, and after a disaster. The preceding analysis highlights the importance of framing the human experience within an axis of sexuality during disaster studies, as no academic literature exists to capture the unique disadvantages members of LGBT community face and their subsequent invisibility during time of crisis. The dominant ideology of compulsory heterosexuality in Thai society assigns privilege and power to those who comply and devalues those who deviate from the norm. LGBT community members face challenges in establishing human capital due to institutionalized heterosexism, and this limit to human capital has consequences for their ability to generate economic capital. Further, social capital is largely tied to both human and economic capital, and as Bordieu (as quoted in Elliot, Haney, and Sams-Abiodun 2010) asserts, social capital is not simply tied to the amount of ties or the size of the network, but is tied to that networks' access to other types of capital, such as human or economic. In other words, access to social capital and the validity of that capital is dependent on what those within that network have available to them.

In the instance of the LGBT community, ties may have only been with others who were marginalized within Thai society. This could have played out for lesbian, gay or transgendered members who relied on their social capital for help during or after the tsunami as having access to ties that were in socially similar situations, and therefore the ability for their social network to assist them may not have been successful due to its own lack of access to resources. It is important to acknowledge the intersectionality of human, economic and social capital, and to examine these dimensions of human experience within the framework of compulsory heterosexuality in order to capture the consequential lack of privilege and power that the LGBT community experienced during the disaster.

Institutional compulsory heterosexuality can be found within Thai society through the laws in place that do not honor same-sex marriages and laws that inhibit post-operative transsexuals from changing their sex on their ID cards. Further, as Rattachumpoth points out, the government spent no money on social welfare or social services for the LGBT community in Thailand, even though they face institutional discrimination and live socially isolated lives due to stereotypes and culturally held stigmas that limit their ability to develop human capital. The pre-disaster social structures which marginalized members of the LGBT community can be seen as being further exacerbated by the tsunami disaster, and a lack of support being set up to help this marginalized group proves the extent to which this group is discriminated against.

Henry A. Giroux (2006) uses the term the 'new biopolitics of disposability' to capture the invisibility and lack of assistance that the black community in New Orleans received following Hurricane Katrina. Giroux's concept captures how those who are

marginalized in society because of their racial or class positions have to fight for their right to exist, and are expected to do so quietly so as to maintain their invisibility from the dominant society. Further, the consequences of such marginalization are that some lives are privileged while other lives are not. Using Giroux's concept of the new biopolitics of disposability in the examination of the LGBT community in Thailand, I argue that the Thai government privileged members of society based on their compliance with compulsory heterosexuality, and by doing so certain policies and reactions to the tsunami of 2004 carried consequences of power. This power decided who should have the best chances of survival and who could be disposed of. I argue that the lack of social assistance that the LGBT community received prior to and after the tsunami of 2004 carries political messages that these members of society are not valued, visible, or worth helping, and that their social marginalization was only enhanced by the crisis of the disaster. The preceding analysis calls attention to the axis of sexuality during disasters and I hope that it instigates further research and policy developments that keep non-dominant sexualities within a frame of visibility during times of disaster.

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