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“At-Risk” or “Socially Deviant”? Conflicting Narratives and Grassroots Organizing of Sex/Entertainment Workers and LGBT Communities in Cambodia

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Abstract: Cambodia has experienced rapid economic development and increased globalization in the last two decades, which have influenced changes in sexual attitudes and politics. Yet deeply embedded patriarchal structures that promote adherence to traditional values, gender binaries, and sexual purity of women impede progress in the recognition of the rights of sex/entertainment workers and LGBT communities. Using the framework of sexual humanitarianism, this paper outlines the ways in which these constraints are compounded by two dominant conflicting narratives that place these groups as either at-risk and vulnerable or socially deviant, and deemed in need of interventions that protect and control. Drawing on over a decade of empirical research on the sex/entertainment industries, and broader gender/sexual landscape in Cambodia, as well as current social activism of the authors, this paper also describes the ways LGBT and sex worker communities are engaging in shared organizing and self-advocacy as strategies to address their needs and the consequences left in the wake of sexual humanitarian interventions. In order to contextualize their deeply-rooted legacy in Cambodia, the paper also provides an overview of past and contemporary gender/sexual norms and diversity, and concludes with a call for governments and policymakers to expand support for grassroots movements and to listen more closely to the voices of LGBT and sex worker communities so that the political and social needs of these groups can be addressed.

Keywords: LGBT communities; sex/entertainment workers; sexual humanitarianism; grassroots organizing; Cambodia

1. Introduction

Cambodia has experienced rapid economic development and increased globalization in the last two decades, which have influenced changes in sexual attitudes and politics. Regular exposure to new technologies and social media, coupled with urbanization and economic developments have served to, at times, challenge sex- and gender-defined norms that typically discourage gender diversity, same-sex relations and sexual exchange/commerce. Yet deeply embedded patriarchal structures that promote adherence to what are deemed “traditional” Khmer values, social morality, heterosexual male-privilege, the male/female gender binary, and the sexual purity of women continue to impede

progress in the recognition of the social and political needs of groups who do not conform to the status quo, such as sex/entertainment workers and LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender)¹ communities.

These sexual and gender constraints are compounded by two dominant conflicting narratives which place these non-mutually exclusive groups as either at-risk and vulnerable or socially deviant (Knibbs and Price 2009; Fletcher 2011; Sandy 2015) and designated as in need of various sexual humanitarian interventions (Mai 2013). The at-risk trope is most often epidemiologically-driven and employed by the public health sector (made up of government agencies and local/international NGOs), which constructs sex workers and non-heteronormative people (namely MSM or men who have sex with men) as both vulnerable victims and disease vectors of HIV, and as such, collectively labeled MARP (most at-risk populations) (Fletcher 2011). In this framing, individual agency is ignored, sexual behavior is decontextualized, and competency undervalued.

Within the socially deviant model, on the other hand, gender nonconforming people and sex/entertainment workers are framed as immoral and “un-Cambodian” (despite that the country has had a rich history of divergent sexualities). This framing is often promulgated by the government (Bun 2009; Hun 2010) and/or within the abolitionist anti-trafficking sector, which aims to abolish all forms of prostitution due to its apparent associations with trafficking and crime. Ben-Yehuda’s conception of deviance as “problematic behavioral acts, which take place at the realm of the seams, where boundaries of different symbolic-moral universes meet and touch ... and which involve challenges (use or abuse) of power and morality” (Ben-Yehuda 1990, p. 3) is useful here for understanding the ways in which groups deemed immoral and deviant are managed.

In an effort to protect and/or control through the deployment power and morality, sexual humanitarian interventions are carried out by the government, law enforcement, the public health sector, and the anti-trafficking sector, particularly in the management of sex workers and transgender women. As defined by sociologist Mai (2013) in the context of anti-trafficking, sexual humanitarianism is a form of governance (Cheng and Kim 2014) that emerges through the strategic definition of targeted social groups as specifically vulnerable in relation to their sexual identity and behavior, and operates through the parallel production of moral panics² (Weitzer 2007) legitimizing related humanitarian social interventions. Sexual humanitarianism is also an epistemology recreating the notion of a unified, hierarchical humanity based around essentialized and moralized understandings of gender and sexuality (Mai 2013). The production of sex/entertainment workers and LGBT communities as specific at-risk or deviant categories drives particular kinds of paternalistic humanitarian interventions that result in what anthropologist Tiantian Zheng would consider a depoliticization of their livelihoods and subjectivities (Zheng 2010).

These interventionist strategies by Cambodian government and public health NGOs can be evidenced in the creation of policies and the rolling out programming that monitors, surveys or treats MARP (NCHADS 2004; PSI 2006; Chhorvann and Liu 2008; Liu and Chhorvann 2010; National AIDS Authority 2008). Such approaches focus solely on physical health, disease, and contagiousness and ignore the social, emotional, economic and political needs of these groups. Sex workers—conflated with both victims of trafficking and prostitutes engaged in criminal activities (particularly in abolitionist framings of this group)—are subject to raid and rescue efforts, which result in detention in shelters or

¹ The term LGBT is used here—as opposed to other iterations of the acronym—because that is the term most commonly used in Cambodia (in everyday interactions, but also in the media, in grey literature, and in academic writings on non-heteronormative and gender nonconforming people and groups).

² Here “moral panic” refers to the casting of a social issue/problem as a particular “social evil” due to its apparent gravity, prevalence, and immorality. According to Ron Weitzer (2007), moral panics are often described and typified in highly dramatic terms through the use of unverified claims with the intention of alarming the public and policy makers about the magnitude of the problem, and thus justifying draconian and moralistic solutions to it. In this paper, non-heteronormative sexual behaviors, gender nonconformity, pornography, sex work, HIV and trafficking could be viewed as moral panics, which then legitimate the sexual humanitarian interventions implemented in order to control and contain them.

government-sponsored rehabilitation centers where they experience violence and violations of their human rights (Human Rights Watch 2010; Hoefinger 2013; 2016).

Despite these odds, LGBT and sex worker communities are finding ways to collaboratively engage politically (Majic 2014c). This paper outlines the ways in which these groups take part in shared grassroots organizing and self-advocacy as strategies to resist sexual humanitarian interventions (Mai 2013) and to fill in the gaps in support that are left by the dichotomous approach of the public health and anti-trafficking sectors. In order to contextualize not only the gendered constraints that affect the experiences of queer and sex-trade involved individuals, but also their deeply rooted legacy in Cambodia, the paper begins with an overview of past and contemporary gender/sexual norms and diversity. The paper concludes with a call for governments, policymakers and public health bodies to expand their support for grassroots movements and to listen more closely to the voices of LGBT and sex worker communities so that the social, economic and political needs and desires of those groups are met.

The data and insights in this paper are taken from a larger longitudinal ethnographic study on the gender and sexuality of sex/entertainment workers that was conducted by Hoefinger (2011; 2013; 2014) from 2003–2010, and then subsequent follow-up field visits from 2011–2015. The original research was focused primarily on the intimacy and relationships that develop between Cambodian sex/entertainment workers and their western partners in the context of hostess bars, but other areas of inquiry involved identity construction, agency and decision-making, changing gender and sexuality norms, behaviors and expectations, new emerging sexualities, multiplex subjectivities, alternative kinship, subcultures, mobilities, discursive resistance, and community solidarity.

Both the original and follow-up research were carried out in three tourist-friendly regions of Phnom Penh: areas known as the Lakeside, where budget backpackers and many professional girlfriends and sex/entertainment workers lived; the Riverside, which caters to more mature tourists and expatriates with bigger budgets; and Street 51 (also known as “The Strip”) in the center of the city, which is a bustling street for nightlife, lined with popular tourist bars, restaurants and clubs. Methods included in-depth ethnography and participant observation with those involved in the hostess bar scene³, as well as semi-structured interviewing with professional girlfriends and sex/entertainment workers, and their foreign and local male partners and customers. Key informant interviews were also conducted with government employees, academics, and representatives from NGOs. Between 2003 and 2010, there were a total of 115 women, 124 men and 42 key informants, for an overall total of 281 participants involved over the seven-year period.⁴

Follow-up ethnographic field visits then took place in 2011, 2012, 2014, and 2015, each lasting 3–8 weeks. Research was conducted in the same three regions⁵ of Phnom Penh, in many of the same hostess bars, along with some newly opened establishments. Ethnographic conversations took place with many of the same participants for the purposes of tracking changes in their lives over time, as is common in longitudinal ethnography. In addition, in 2012, one of the female bar owners expressed that many of her female bar staff were newly identifying with the English term “lesbian”. In an effort to embrace the fluidity of ethnographic research, Hoefinger began having conversations with bar workers who specifically identified as “lesbian”—and variations, thereof. These include “sbian” (lesbian), “LG” (femme), “LB” (butch), “tom” and “tomboy” (transman). Conversations were also had with gay men (“33” & “69”), transwomen (“srey sros”) and bisexual persons (“sim 2”—a reference stemming from having two sim cards in one phone).

³ Hostess bars are bars that cater to foreign men, where mainly cisgendered woman and some transgendered women act as hostesses.

⁴ A complete description of methods from the 2003–2010 research can be found in Chapter 2 of Hoefinger (2013).

⁵ In 2011, the lake in the area known as the Lakeside was filled in as part of a large urban development project and many of the guesthouses where Hoefinger conducted research had been demolished. A few participants still remained in the guesthouses that were spared, so research there continued. For more information, see Chapter 2 in Hoefinger (2013).

In each follow-up field visit between 2011 and 2015, Hoefinger had conversations with many of the original participants from the larger study. In 2012, she had additional dialogues with 9 cisgendered⁶ women who identified as lesbians, and 1 transwoman—all of whom were hostess bar workers. In 2014, conversations were had with six NGOs working on LGBT, HIV, or mental health issues, as well as with 2 transmale activists, 1 gay-identified cis-male activist, and 7 lesbian-identified bar workers. In 2015, Hoefinger spoke with representatives of three of the same NGOs from 2014, as well as one additional international public health NGO, 2 lesbian bar workers and 3 transmale activists (one of whom she'd met in 2014).

In addition to Hoefinger's research, this paper is also informed by the ongoing advocacy work of Srom Srun which centers on the rights of marginalized populations including LGBT communities, sex workers, drug users, women and girls living with HIV/AIDS, women and girls with disability, widows and single mothers, elderly, indigenous, and other ethnic populations (CamASEAN 2015), as well as research he carried out in 2012 with his co-researcher Vicente Salas on the exploration of social exclusion of LGBT persons in families and communities and their ways of coping (Salas and Srun 2013) That study took place in Phnom Penh and in two rural Cambodian villages. Methods used were a survey, focus group discussions and key informant interviews. The survey sample consisted of 149 persons who self-identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.⁷

The arguments and data presented below draw from the aforementioned studies and ongoing academic and activist work of both authors in an effort to add to the broader scholarship on sex, gender, and shared grassroots organizing among marginalized and often understudied groups in Cambodia. Although the interview data presented here is not representative of all individuals who identify as LGBT and/or work in the sex/entertainment sectors, it provides a snapshot into the lived experience of some of those persons affected by the stereotyping and conflicting narratives outlined in the paper.⁸

2. Sex-and Gender-Defined Norms

Before outlining the conflicting narratives of sex workers and LGBT communities and the resulting sexual humanitarian efforts in place to control and protect them, some historical and contemporary context around sex and gender are necessary. Cambodia is a country with deeply engrained sex-and gender-defined norms that place heterosexual men at the apex of the social hierarchy, and women in a structurally inferior position to men. These norms have their roots in the *Cbpab Srei* or "Women's Code", versions of which were written at the end of the 18th and throughout the 19th century by elite men and monks, and refer to appropriate conduct, appearance and comportment required of women (Brickell 2011; Jacobsen 2008). Once recited by schoolchildren, their general precepts continue to pervade the Cambodian psyche, while reinforcing the notion that only complete obedience and servitude towards the husband will ensure the good reputation of the traditional heteronormative male-dominated family unit, and ultimately, society as a whole.

These heavily embedded patriarchal structures permeate sexual attitudes/practices, which are generally conservative and gendered, as well. Any practices that fall outside of the married heterosexual framework (e.g., same-sex practices, commercial sex) are discouraged and considered immoral. Young people are required to adhere to certain social and sexual norms, including abstaining from sex before marriage. However, gendered double standards that permeate social discourse dictate that it is more socially acceptable for young men to engage in "harmless" premarital sexual experimentation—both with sex workers and to some degree each other (Tan 2008; CCHR 2010)—yet, a woman's sexual activity or loss of virginity before marriage can result in familial shame and

⁶ Cisgendered refers to self-identification with the gender assigned at birth.

⁷ For more on methods from Salas and Srun's study, see Salas and Srun (2013).

⁸ Ethical approval for Hoefinger's research was granted by Hunter College, City University of New York; Goldsmiths, University of London; and the Institute of Southeast Asian Affairs. Srun's research was approved by and conducted on behalf of the Council of Ministers, Government of Cambodia.

“loss of face” (Derks 2008; Hoefinger 2013). Within this dichotomous understanding of gender, two of the most significant factors contributing to the experiences of LGBT persons and sex workers today are (1) this emphasis on gender norms and the sexual purity of women/girls; and (2) the importance placed on the traditional heteronormative male-dominated family unit. Individuals, genders, behaviors, relationships or family formations that do not conform to these tenets are often openly discriminated against (CCHR 2010).

3. Historical Evidence of Divergent Sexualities and Practices

The contemporary stigma against non-normative genders, sexualities and sexual practices, must be understood alongside the noteworthy evidence of divergent sexual behaviors and gender identities in the Cambodian past. According to an account written by a Chinese observer named Daguang who visited the Angkor Wat area of Cambodia in 1296–1297, the presence of young Khmer men dressed in women’s clothing while seeking sexual exchanges date back over 700 years. He recounted, “in this country there are many catamites [pubescent boys in pederast relationships] who hang around everyday in the market, in groups of ten or more. They are always trying to lure Chinese men in return for sumptuous gifts” (Daguang 2007). In a recent interpretation of the *Cbpab Srei* written c. 1800, there is a reference in lines 184–186 of “malicious” women suffering punishment from the “four hells” as being reincarnated as *kathoe*⁹ (a historically derogatory term used to refer to transgendered women or “third sex”) (Jacobsen 2016a; Tarr 1996). There was also a 19th-century prohibition on young men bedecked with flowers and colorful *sampot* (cloth worn along the lower body) from entering the palace walls (Jacobsen 2008)—again illustrating stigma against gender-nonconforming people—much of which continues today (as demonstrated below).

The historical record is also dotted with references to same-sex practices. Historian Trude Jacobsen explains how the French wrote extensively about lesbians behind palace walls during the French Colonial Period of Cambodia (1863–1953) (Jacobsen 2008). There also exists some information about surveys and studies of same-sex activity between men in the 1950s and onwards (Catalla et al. 2003; Tan 2008) and a newspaper article described recollections of a transgender women in Cambodia from the 1970s (Gharbi 2010). Anthropologist May Ebihara made reference to a possible lesbian relationship between two unmarried women in her 1970s account of Khmer village women (Ebihara 1974).

In addition to Daguang’s above reference to effeminate young males engaged in transactional sex with Chinese men in the 13th century, there is other evidence of transactional sex and prostitution dating back to at least the 17th–18th centuries. Female slaves became commodified during this period and were both offered as gestures of hospitality to household guests, as well as sent outside the household to engage in commercial sex with European merchants and ship crews (Jacobsen 2008). Prostitution and *filles publiques* (public women) during the French Colonial Era have been well-documented (Derks 2008; Sandy 2015) and in 1885, the French metropole instituted the first anti-prostitution decrees in Cambodia, which gave colonial police the power to arrest prostitutes and close brothels, despite that those very men were avid consumers (Jacobsen 2008). This contradictory practice continues today—those supposedly there to enforce the law are many times the biggest offenders, with authorities carrying out raids and arrests while simultaneously owning brothels, collecting bribes, and purchasing (or demanding for free) the services of sex workers (Hoefinger 2013; Hudgins 2005).

There is also evidence in historical record that describes other transactional forms of sexual customs. Debt bondage, or the practice of pledging the labor of oneself, or that of a relative’s in return for cash, goods, or service has been present since the beginning of the historical record in

⁹ There is no standard Romanization of the Khmer language, therefore, the word *kathoe* is transliterated differently in different texts. In this paper, both the spelling *kathoe* and *kteuy* are used, dependent upon the source from which the term was cited.

Cambodia (i.e., third century C.E.), and quite often, that labor was sexual (Jacobsen 2008; 2014; 2016b). In addition, arranged marriages of girls have been documented in Cambodia as far back as third-ninth centuries C.E., whereby virgin daughters were betrothed to foreign diplomats in order to secure land tenure, for example. These marriages also helped with the formation of important social/political alliances, and were often spurred by desires for bridewealth (or payments made by a groom to the bride's family in order to ratify marriage) (Hoefinger 2014). While the custom of bridewealth is still regularly practiced and accepted today, but transactional gift-based relationships (namely between entertainment workers and older men) and commercial sex are considered immoral and socially frowned upon (despite their similarities), all three practices have deep roots in Cambodian history.

Jumping ahead to the earliest post-conflict study on youth sexuality in the 1990s, anthropologist Chou Meng Tarr found that 14% of the young men surveyed had admitted to penetrative sex with other men (some of whom were described as *kteuy*), and that other young men had enjoyed different forms of same-sex activity (Tarr 1996). Her research was viewed by the government and general public as controversial because she was both researching youth sexuality—a topic considered taboo, and because it was culturally inappropriate for a “respectable” Khmer women to be conducting such research. Interestingly, the study did not document any sexual activity between young women, but Tarr concludes this was largely due to the bias of the female peer interviewers who did not believe that sexual encounters between women were even possible, and so did not ask (Tarr 1996). Both the vicarious stigma experienced by Tarr, and the absence of female same-sex encounters due to researcher bias speaks to the sex and gender-defined norms above, which require sexual purity/naivety and complete obedience to men—to the point that the female peer interviewers were unable to even fathom the existence of anything outside those parameters, and Tarr was shunned for overseeing sex research of this kind.

Nevertheless, it is clear that diverse sexual practices, orientations and genders have been present in Cambodia for hundreds of years, and are not western imports—as they are sometimes constructed in contemporary public discourse and policy (Bun 2009; Hun 2010). It has been argued that their association as such stems from the postcolonial era (Jacobsen 2008). In the 1950s, after 90 years of French colonialism (1863–1953), a new form of Cambodia nationalism emerged among the disgruntled youth and educated Khmer elite. In a quest for their own national identity, and as a form of resistance to foreign imperialism, Cambodians turned back to the pre-colonization literature and the *Chpab Srei*, which was seen to represent “traditional” gender roles which they thought reflected real patterns of behavior rather than merely guidelines for it (Jacobsen 2008). It was at that point that any behaviors or relationships outside of the heteronormative male-dominated family unit (which represented traditional Cambodian values) were deemed immoral, “un-Khmer-like”, and associated with the west.

However, this brief review reveals that throughout history, gender-nonconforming people have been stigmatized and constructed as a category of “others” who deviate from sanctimonious and heteronormative understandings of gender norms. In a linear trajectory, their contemporary counterparts (and any others who deviate from social and sexual norms) are thus subject to forms of sexual governance and humanitarian interventions in efforts to moralize, contain and control.

4. “At-Risk and Vulnerable” or “Deviants and Threats to Tradition”

Though historically extant, there was a raised awareness around sex and sexuality in Cambodia in the 1990s, mostly driven by public health concerns and moral panics around MSM, sex work, and the global HIV epidemic. Thereafter, a variety of sexual and behavioral studies were implemented in Cambodia and broader Asia (NCHADS 2004; Swe and Rashid 2013; Wirawan et al. 1993; Jung 2013; Phrasisombath et al. 2012; Lawless et al. 1996; Le et al. 2010), which resulted in the framing sex workers and LGBT persons as victims, potential disease vectors, social deviants and delinquents. In reference to her work on Myanmar, Gillian Fletcher explains how, in at-risk approaches to HIV prevention, there has been a construction of “otherness” based around assumptions of “good” and “bad” types of people rather than types of behaviors, contexts or power inequities (Fletcher 2011). In this case, sex workers

and those in LGBT communities are deemed the latter in Cambodia because of their defiance of sex and gender norms.

In an effort to easily target specific at-risk groups of people, a plethora of acronyms were developed in the public health literature such as MSM and MARP (which are groups considered to engage in behavior that places them at higher risk for HIV, and also include sex workers, and people engaged in “sweetheart” or transactional, gift-based relationships) (NCHADS 2004). MSM is often problematically used to refer to men engaged in sexual activities together—even if one or both parties identify as *kathoey*, female, transgender, or third sex. The term is not typically used to self-identify, however (aside from by those who are heavily exposed to public health/HIV programming).

Young and Meyer problematize the term by pointing to the ways in which MSM obscures the social dimensions of sexuality, implies an absence of community, undermines self-labeling of lesbian, gay and bisexual people, does not sufficiently describe variations in sexual behavior and same-gender pairings of non-sexual behavior, while adding to a history of scientific sexual labeling that inadvertently advances heterosexist notions (Young and Meyer 2005). And until recently, MSM and transgender individuals in Cambodia were often treated as a homogenous group in public health analysis, which ignored their specific needs. However, when transgender-specific HIV rates were found to be 4.2% (FHI 360 2014)—which was higher than rates of MSM (2.2%) (Liu and Chhorvann 2010)—the need to separately address high-risk transgender populations became a priority (UNDP/USAID 2014).

Increased efforts and funding were focused on sexual humanitarian interventions in the form of surveillance, tracking, testing and monitoring of MSM and transgender populations by the Ministry of Health and National Center for HIV/AIDS, Dermatology and STDs (NCHADS) (NCHADS 2004; Chhorvann and Liu 2008; Liu and Chhorvann 2010; FHI 360 2014; Mun et al. 2016), and the National AIDS Authority (National AIDS Authority 2008). NCHADS routinely conducted behavioral sentinel surveillance (BSS) and HIV sentinel surveillance (HSS) in the form of mobile HIV testing and computerized surveys (Liu and Chhorvann 2010). This surveillance involved parking mobile HIV testing busses in areas they termed “hot spots” (namely entertainment establishments or MSM venues), where “at-risk urban Khmer men” (Liu and Chhorvann 2010) could get free rapid HIV tests and participate in behavioral research via interviews and surveys. Despite claiming this “non-invasive” method allowed for more discretionary participation in the research, the publicly visible association between MSM/transgender populations and HIV circulated within and throughout public discourse, which has led to the general stigmatization of these groups as “disease vectors” in need of protection and control (Mustanski et al. 2011).

Studies by the Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR 2010, 2016), the United Nations Development Project (UNDP) (UNFPA 2014), and Salas and Srun (2013) all highlight that gender nonconforming people seem more likely to experience higher rates of overt stigma, discrimination, stereotyping, bullying, harassment, and arrests, as well as higher rates of exclusion from jobs, families, schooling, and healthcare than do cisgendered persons who identify simply as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Yet, as the studies point out, the general exclusion and discrimination faced by many LGBT-identified individuals, overall, works to exacerbate poverty, violence and vulnerability for these communities, often resulting in homelessness, hunger, unemployment, increased mental health issues, depression and suicide ideation (CCHR 2010; Salas and Srun 2013; UNDP/USAID 2014).

Due to these various forms of discrimination resulting from their non-normative sexual orientation and gender identity/expression, many LGBT people—particularly transfemales—turn to sex work as a form of gender-identity validation and economic survival (CCHR 2010; Salas and Srun 2013). Because economic and educational opportunities are generally lacking in Cambodia—regardless of sexuality or gender identity—many cisgendered women choose employment in the sex and entertainment sectors, as well, since the work is often considered more lucrative than other available options for low-skilled women, such as garment factory work, street-trading or domestic work (Derks 2008; Hoefinger 2013).

Sex and entertainment workers (including “sweethearts”) are often considered the embodiment of MARP due to their numbers of partners and high risk for HIV—despite that in 1998, Cambodia

implemented the 100% Condom Use Programme whereby owners and managers of all entertainment establishments had to enforce condom use as a condition of commercial sex, which resulted in sharp declines of HIV (Rojanapithayakorn 2006). HIV prevalence among female entertainment workers (FEW) with more than 14 clients per week was estimated at 13.9% in 2010, and FEW with less than 14 clients per week was 4.1% (UNDP/USAID 2014). Because of their potential as “disease vectors”, they are also continuously monitored, tracked and tested (i.e., NCHADS 2003; PSI 2002, 2006; Chhorvann 2010). Despite that the main mode of HIV transmission continues to be unprotected heterosexual contact, (UNFPA 2014) it is most often the female sex workers who are put under the lens of public health scrutiny and blame—rather than male sex partners (which is, again, evidence of the deeply embedded gendered hierarchies and double standards at work in Cambodia).

Similar to MSM and transgender populations, surveillance of “at-risk” sex/entertainment workers takes the form of tracking studies carried about by international NGOs such as Family Health International (FHI) and Population Services International (PSI) (PSI 2002, 2006), and BSS carried out by the Ministry of Health and NCHADS (Chhorvann 2010). As part of the national surveillance system, Cambodia has been conducting regular BSS on sex/entertainment workers since 1997 (either annually or every few years) (NCHADS 2003, 2012). More recently BSS and HSS have been combined into the Integrated Biological and Behavioral Surveys (IBBS), which include an HIV or STI testing component (National AIDS Authority 2015). The personally invasive behavioral variables that are tracked include the age at first sex, the number of sexual intercourse per month, the type and number of sexual partners, the consistency of condom use, condom use at last sex, and health seeking behavior for vaginal or urethral discharge (NCHADS 2003). In BSS V, the research was conducted by NCHADS “surveillance units” and carried out in cities deemed “pockets of high risk behaviors”: Phnom Penh, Battambang, Siem Reap, Sihanouk Ville and Kampong Cham (NCHADS 2003). Interviews were conducted face to face by gender-matched interviewers who were staff from either the Provincial AIDS Office or the Provincial Health Department (NCHADS 2003). In these highly clinical surveillance contexts, sex/entertainment workers are ultimately reduced to their behaviors and test results. Their other social and political needs are unaddressed.

The “high-risk women” targeted in sexual humanitarian interventions such as these are viewed as highly vulnerable to disease and in need of protection through programming (Ohshige et al. 2000), while, at the same time, morally and socially reprehensible for causing both the spread of sexually-transmitted disease, and the proliferation of sexual immorality and pornography (which are considered corruptive and originating from the west) (Lawless et al. 1996; Bun 2009; Hun 2010). For example, in a speech at the Asia Pacific Regional Conference on Primary Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children in Siem Reap in 2009, the Prime Minister’s wife, and honorary Chair of the National Committee for Upholding Cambodian Social Morality, Women and Families Values (NCSWF), Lok Chumteav Bun Rany Hun Sen cited the “flow of inappropriate foreign cultures resulting from rapid development in information technology through telecommunication system, internet, cable T.V.” as causing youth to search for “new identity and culture on their own will” (Bun 2009, p. 3). In response, she suggested using legal frameworks and regulations to “eliminate all forms of violence or pornographic pictures in the press, Internet, Television and Video” (Bun 2009, p. 3).

In a similar tone, at the keynote address for the 99th anniversary of International Women’s Day in Phnom Penh in March 2010, Prime Minister Hun Sen blamed globalization for its negative effect on “culture, tradition and national identity” and cited pornographic pictures as “instantly affecting” youth attitudes and immoral acts (Hun 2010). In response, the morality committee began holding regular meetings in 2010 to review websites featuring “racy images of Khmer women” in order to consider the blocking of access to those sites deemed in conflict with national values (David and Lewis 2010). And in 2015, Cambodia passed the Telecommunications Law that increased the government’s authority over the industry and granted officials overarching surveillance powers to block websites showing pornography or sexually explicit images on moral grounds (Freedom House 2016).

These examples are evidence of the government's clear associations between tradition and morality, and between sex work, immorality and globalization. State-sponsored initiatives of this sort influence public opinion as well as the practices of the public health sector, and promote the notion that sex work is "bad" and sex workers and "racy women" are thus in need of control via sexual humanitarian interventions.

An equally dichotomous framework that is often problematically imposed upon sex workers by the government and the anti-trafficking sector is that of the duped/naïve sex trafficking victim in need of rescuing versus the immoral criminal or delinquent in need of arrest and detention for breaking the law. Until 2008, the legal context of sex work was unclear. In response to pressure from the US to tackle the apparently prolific sex trafficking problem, the government passed the Law on the Suppression of Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation (LSHTSE) in 2008 which made illegal nearly all aspects of sex work including soliciting in public, procurement, managing prostitutes, maintaining a brothel, and distributing pornography (Hoefinger 2016).

However, under the law, prostitution and trafficking are conflated and there is no distinction made between people who actively make the decision to sell sexual services to relieve poverty and unemployment versus people who are controlled by third parties (via force, fraud, deception or coercion) to sell sex against their will. In attempts to tackle trafficking, this problematic conflation under the new law has led to a backlash whereby sex workers have experienced illegal arrests, detention, physical and sexual abuses by law enforcement (CACHA 2009; Women's Network for Unity 2012).

Borrowing political scientist Samantha Majic's term, this "victim-criminal" (Majic 2014b) subjectivity is also employed by powerful abolitionist anti-trafficking organizations in Cambodia. Victims are often "saved" during raid and rescue operations on entertainment venues carried out by police and certain anti-trafficking NGOs in the name of implementing the anti-trafficking law. Many of these victims (read: criminals) are then rehabilitated (read: punished) by being detained and forced to learn how to sew at various anti-trafficking shelters, after which the women are sent to work in the garment industry—often considered more dignified employment despite the equally or more exploitative working conditions of the garment factories (Hoefinger 2016). Other raid-and-rescue casualties are sent to government-run rehabilitation centers where they face a number of sexual and human rights abuses (Human Rights Watch 2010; Hoefinger 2013).

Some of these rescue organizations have come under scrutiny lately for exploiting such victims for their own financial gain. (Marks 2014; Hoefinger 2016) A high profile example is the case of Somaly Mam. The self-declared "sex slave" built her reputation as a "modern-day hero" through regularly using her own personal descriptions of sexual abuse and the stories and images of young female victims to drum up global funding for her anti-trafficking organizations, which have a record of participating in raid-and-rescue missions with police (Hoefinger 2016). Her abuse story, juxtaposed alongside images of child sex abuse victims and media portrayal of raids, worked to catapult her onto the world stage as a champion of anti-trafficking through touching on various humanitarian themes of suffering that enabled her to expand and personally profit from her rescue work and reputation (Hoefinger 2016). Both she and Cambodia became a model for how anti-trafficking work could (and should) be done. However, in a disturbing turn, it was revealed that her personal victim script was allegedly fabricated, as were the abuse stories of some of the young women she used publicly in her campaigns (Marks 2014).

Despite these revelations, and the fact that Mam used poor women and fraudulent stories for her own gain and international prestige in the name of humanitarianism, she continues her work through another organization and the support of loyal followers and US celebrity funders (Hoefinger 2016). She has created a persuasive visual vernacular of trauma (Hesford 2011) that resonates strongly with western viewers who feel they have the power to bestow justice, benevolence, morality and freedom upon powerless, victimized "others" through buying into Mam's brand of sexual humanitarianism (Hoefinger 2016). Here, Mai's notion of sexual humanitarianism as a hegemonic epistemology grounded in inequalities is useful for understanding how Mam has been able to maintain

momentum despite being discredited, and the role that Cambodia—and poor Cambodian women, in particular—play within the global sexual humanitarian imagination.

In addition to the problematic raids and predatory practices of certain aid organizations seeking to capitalize on the renewed focus on trafficking, some organizations and academics have criticized the anti-trafficking law because of its negative effects on HIV programming (in relation to condom confiscation during raids, for example) (Maher et al. 2015; Ministry of Health 2009), and because of the structural violence and human rights abuses of consenting adult sex workers (Human Rights Watch 2010). A recent study published by Lisa Maher et al., documents how trafficking prohibition efforts related to the law are infringing on the health of female sex workers in Phnom Penh, who have been displaced out of brothels and into the streets and guesthouses. This displacement disrupts their peer networks, decreases access to condoms and services, negatively impacts their ability to negotiate safer sex, and increases their exposure to violence (Maher et al. 2015). A 2009 Ministry of Health and NCHADS report even cites a 46% increase in the number of women working on the street, a 26% reduction in women seeking STI services, and a 16% decrease in HIV testing following the law's implementation (Ministry of Health 2009). The colliding forces of the disciplinary regimes of morality and sexual humanitarianism have resulted in a system of discipline and control whereby essentialized and othered "victims" are further marginalized and victimized by a law that was meant to protect them (Mai 2013).

Yet this "criminal/delinquent" label is not unique to sex workers. LGBT sexualities (and the rights' movement attached to them) are implied as being western imports, and within this "moral panic" narrative, non-heteronormative citizens are perceived as threats to "traditional" heteropatriarchal Khmer culture, and as such, are deemed potentially deviant, and pre-judged (transgender people, in particular) as criminals, gang members, or even thieves (Salas and Srun 2013). For example, the Village Commune Safety Policy is meant to be enforced in the name of public order and the elimination of crime, but instead, has been used by local authorities to target people whom they deem suspicious—such as LGBT persons congregating in public, who are often profiled and arrested as sex workers (CCHR 2014; UNDP/USAID 2014).

And regardless of filial remittances that sex/entertainment workers contribute to their families, cis- and transfemale sex workers experience extreme stigma and violence, in some cases, because they defy the *Chpab Srei*. Leaving their families, moving to cities, drinking alcohol, wearing provocative (western) clothing, staying out late, and having pre-marital sex (often with strangers), they are deemed the epitome of "bad women" (*srei krup leakhana*) or "broken women" (*srei kouc*), and viewed as homewreckers, or even subhuman in some cases (Hoefinger 2013). In addition to social exclusion, they are targeted by police in street sweeps and often bear the brunt of police violence, as illustrated above (Ditmore 2014).

While cis- and transgender women are often targets of law enforcement, public health, and humanitarian efforts, transmen are often invisibilized and left out of conversations and interventions. Yet they experience comparable gendered social stigma, exclusion and violence at home, work, healthcare setting, and society in general. As one transmale participant from Srun's 2012 research explains:

After they knew who I am, my family often argue and threaten me. I don't get economic support from them. They used to kick me out from home too. They still cannot accept who I am and my wife. At work, mates said they are ok with me but I know that with their eyes and gesture, they still discriminate me. In other cases, some work place doesn't recruit LGBT. My friend, transman, he went to interview and interviewer found reasons to reject him. Because of those problems, LGBT have to poverty and migration.

In terms of law and public, I used to experience stigma from a group of monks when I joined peace demonstration. In another case, a transman was charged with criminal offense by family in order to break their relationship with partner. Transwomen are arrested and

assaulted, sexual harassment and raped by customer and police. They do not get equal access to legal document such as legal marriage, or ID card.

With health, I use to get bullying from doctor to me and my family. As transgender, we are not comfortable to access those services, and that bring serious health problem especially sexual reproductive health.

(Trika, transman, LGBT activist)¹⁰

Another transman from the Srun's 2012 research shares his experiences of being bullied by the principal at his school:

I was at cleaning session with other classmate. I was dressing in skirt as all schoolgirl, but only the cleaning session I wanted to be who I am—as a boy. But my principal saw me and came to me and asked me to change my clothes or he will kick me out of school. He also asked other students to not make friends with me if I still dress like this.

(Hea Touch, transman, student)

This interview data reveals the structurally embedded discrimination faced by trans-identified individuals within most social institutions. The focus on disease and deviance among LGBT and sex worker communities has meant that many of these other issues they face have been overlooked. As Trika highlights, in addition to stigma and economic/social marginalization, the gender-based violence experiences, and sexual reproductive health of lesbians, for example, are often ignored in policy discussions due to the relentless focus on HIV. For transgender individuals, issues around gender-affirmation surgery, hormone therapy, use of medications for gender transition, and complications resulting from self-administered silicone (and other) injections have been similarly sidelined (UNDP/USAID 2014). Accessible mental health services for LGBT-identified individuals are extremely limited, and usually cost prohibitive. Beyond health-related needs, there is also a lack of attention to housing and homelessness, unemployment, and other social, economic and emotional needs, such as hunger, poverty, family conflict, and mental health issues (UNDP/USAID 2014).

And as Trika further explains:

As LGBT, we just want to get rights as general humans and as Khmer citizens without discrimination. We need rights to access school, with policies and mechanisms to protect student and teacher equally. In social affairs, we want to be comfortable, to have marriage legally, to get work based on our capacity. We want to get protection from law and authority, and political and social participation.

In addition to the fact that women's agency and decision-making to sell sex or engage in transactional gift-based relationships is regularly ignored (Hoefinger 2013), the persistent focus on HIV/STI prevention among sex/entertainment workers has meant that many of their other needs have been neglected. The continual social stigma they face—which is the cause of much of the housing, employment and other forms of discrimination experienced—remains unaddressed by the public health and development sectors. Cis-female sex/entertainment worker, Veata, (from an interview with Hoefinger in 2010) describes the social stigma she experiences:

My village, every one say I bad girl because I work in bar. They give me many problem. They want fight me. I say I not bad girl. I help my family. I work so I take care my baby. But every one look bad to me.

(Veata, cis-female, hostess bar worker)

¹⁰ All participant names are pseudonyms.

The criminalization of prostitution, and resulting violence, rape, extortion and police brutality is also sidelined. Beyond access to condoms, sex workers are calling for their work to be decriminalized, for public education around the consequences of the stigmatization they face, for viable economic alternatives to poverty, for access to legal and immigration assistance, to healthcare for their overall needs (including substance use, mental health and gender-based violence), and to education (not limited to reading and writing, but also computer literacy, foreign languages, accounting, legal rights, legal documentation, other vocational skills training, as well as strategies to resist coercion and report violence). In response to a question about desires for the future during a conversation with Hoefinger in 2014, cis-female sex/entertainment worker Sochua explained her hopes for better working conditions and further education so that she could one day open her own business:

I have many problems with police and security in bar. They taking money and talking bad. I want work no problems. I good worker at bar. I don't want problems from customer or police.

I want go school for English and computer. One day I want working my own business. Selling small things. I want my daughter go school for English and computer. I smart girl. But every day working working in bar make money. No time for school.

(Sochua, cis-female, hostess bar worker)

Sexual humanitarian interventions that frame sex/entertainment workers and LGBT people as at-risk for disease and/or socially deviant tend to obfuscate more nuanced understandings of vulnerability and resilience. In addition, as Nick Mai points out, the livelihoods and subjectivities of these individuals are often disrupted by interventionist practices, and entitlements to rights and social justice for these groups remain largely ignored and unattended (Mai 2013). In an effort to mitigate the negative consequences that are left in the wake of conflicting stereotypes, pathologization, moral panics, and resulting sexual humanitarianism, marginalized groups of sex worker and LGBT communities are coming together to address their needs through grassroots organizing and self-advocacy.

5. Grassroots Organizing and Self-Advocacy

Shared movement building among sex workers, LGBT communities and other marginalized groups is not new. There is a vast literature on sex worker rights activism that describes shared grassroots organizing efforts that have achieved varying success. In the US context, for example, Majic discusses the ways in which sex worker organizations have linked their community interests with groups fighting for HIV/AIDS awareness and reproductive justice (Majic 2014a). Melinda Chateauvert maps the early movement building among sex workers, queers, and transgender people that began in the 1960s and was led by trans sex workers Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson (Chateauvert 2013). Throughout history, these movements have run parallel to each other, but often, as the LGBT movement pursues and gains "respectability," it distances itself from sex workers—as happened in the United States, post Stonewall (Chateauvert 2013). In 1973, for example, Rivera had to fight to speak at a gay pride rally as gay liberation groups were reluctant to support active sex workers and transgender people due to the movement's emphasis on middle-class respectability (Chateauvert 2013).

In the Cambodian context, however, the movements remain integrated, as many of the community-led groups working towards the recognition and empowerment of marginalized populations tend to serve overlapping communities of gay, gender-nonconforming people, and sex/entertainment workers in their pursuit of social inclusion, sexual/gender rights, and destigmatization. There is an interconnectedness due, perhaps, to the overlapping subjectivities of the community members, and the sharp stigma and collective discrimination they face as citizens existing in different symbolic-moral universes from the rest of respectable Khmer society in their blatant defiance of strict sex-and gender-defined norms. They have unified around the theme of "human rights"—which, borrowing Chateauvert's definition, has enabled and empowered the disenfranchised to "create the conditions in which marginalized people can speak their truths and craft their own solutions

to the problems they identify” (Chateauvert 2013, p. 17). In joining forces, sex workers and LGBT communities in Cambodia are articulating their own liberation strategies.

The beginning of LGBT/sex worker rights recognition in Cambodia can be traced to the first MSM HIV/AIDS Program in 1997, (UNDP/USAID 2014) and the formation of the Cambodian Prostitutes Union (CPU) in 1998 (Sandy 2013). However, these early efforts were heavily associated with disease prevention and HIV, and led by the public health sector, rather than community members themselves. In an attempt to assert their agency and self-determination and contest the at-risk disease vector trope, a group of sex workers set up Women’s Network for Unity (WNU) in 2000, which still functions today as Cambodia’s sex worker union with over 6500 participants of all genders and sexualities.

The first annual “Pride” celebrations were then held in Phnom Penh in 2003, organized by both Cambodian and international LGBT activists (many of whom were transfemale sex workers) and in 2006, the first MSM and transgender network called Bandanh Chatomuk was developed (although still very much the creation of funders/NGOs working on HIV) (UNDP/USAID 2014). Pride continued to grow, and by 2009, it culminated in a weeklong event that attracted over 400 attendees (15% of whom were heterosexual supporters, according to organizer, Srorn Srun). Attendees participated in workshops, films screenings, pagoda blessings, public awareness actions, art exhibits and community networking events, and following its success, Rainbow Community of Kampuchea (RoCK) was informally established with the purpose of strengthening the existing LGBT community. RoCK’s initial focus was on lesbians, who, up until then, had been invisible (CCHR 2010). RoCK was formally registered in 2014, and recognized as Cambodia’s first LGBT organization. Pride events continue to grow in size and momentum to this day.

Other grassroots groups, such as CamASEAN Youth’s Future which (founded by Srorn Srun) was formed as a result of the ASEAN Grassroots People’s Assembly in 2012 (when Cambodia was the chair of ASEAN—Association of Southeast Asian Nations), are currently working on fighting discrimination against LGBT communities, people living with HIV/AIDS, sex workers, drug users, people with disabilities, widowed/single mothers, elderly, indigenous and other ethnic peoples in Cambodia. Here, the overlaps between LGBT/sex worker community organizing are striking. In 2013, a local Cambodian coalition led by RoCK, CamASEAN, WNU, Community Legal Services (for sex workers), and Cambodia Network of People with HIV—made a joint submission on LGBT rights to the Universal Periodic Review of the UN Human Rights Council. Their request was ignored, but their collaboration helped strengthen the growing sexual rights movement in Cambodia (UNDP/USAID 2014). And in December 2014, CamASEAN organized the event, “My Voice, My Story” with the goals of raising awareness among “parents, friends and the public” about “voiceless communities” (CamASEAN 2015). The objectives were to train youth activists through rights-based workshops; there was a special workshop on how to use Information & Communication Technology to bring about positive social change.

These strategies have directly helped to build confidence, self-determination and practical organizing skills of community members. As Trika (transman LGBT activist) explains in an email to Hoefinger and Srun in 2017:

I participate in CamASEAN because I know about spirit of nature of human beings, and the respect, diversity and freedom of CamASEAN team. I start with bravery to accept and respect my true nature of love. And I get support from my team. I can also get knowledge with learning by doing.

The Internet, social media, and smartphone technology have changed the landscape of grassroots organizing. There are increasing numbers of Cambodian youth networking on social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook (with one LGBT group containing over 31,600 members), and other sites offering rights-based information. The Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR) hosts a program called the Rainbow Khmer Portal (<http://sogi.sithi.org/index.php>), which provides news, resources and national directories for LGBT youth, and CamASEAN also offers online counseling and legal support (www.cambodialgbt.wordpress.com).

For sex and entertainment workers, in particular, both CPU and WNU provide information, as well as drop-in centers in Phnom Penh. WNU is part of a larger network called the United Sisterhood Alliance (Us) which also includes Social Action for Change (SAC) (trains young women activists involved in grassroots movements); Messenger Band (established by garment workers and uses songs/performances to raise workers rights awareness); and Worker's Information Center (WIC) (offers drop-in centers in garment factories). Us is part of an even larger network of cross-sector associations called the Cambodian Grassroots Cross-Sector Network (CGCN), which includes RoCK, and many other civil society groups. Us (WNU, SAC, WIC, MB) and RoCK also share the same office building.

The physical location of Us and RoCK in a shared building in the outskirts of Phnom Penh is what Majic might refer to as a "safe space off the streets"—illustrative of how "activists may use the processes of institutional building and maintenance to advance their oppositional politics." (Majic 2014a, p. 55) In that shared symbolic and physical space, the community groups engage in the "claims-making activities" of knowledge production where they conduct and publish research and analysis to inform public and policy makers of their constituents' needs, as well as engage in policy advocacy (Majic 2014a). As Majic further highlights, "these claims-making activities constitute acts of resistance against societal and governmental institutional practices towards sex workers [and LGBT communities], and thus the broader moral-legal regime that regulates [their lives]" (Majic 2014a, p. 95).

As a result of the overlapping grassroots organizing among LGBT and sex worker communities, many positive changes have taken place at the social/policy/governmental levels. More young queer people are interacting/sharing information on social media, which is ending some of the social isolation they experience. Media One, an independent NGO working to foster positive social change by elevating underrepresented voices through mass media programming, training, and direct community outreach, has initiated a program titled "We Are the Same", which is striving to improve access by LGBT persons to critical information, resources and support, strengthen capacity of the movement, implement effective communications and advocacy strategies, and promote changes in discriminatory social norms/practices (<http://mediaone.org.kh/wearethesame/>).

At the national level, LGBT people were recognized for the first time in the 2014 Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) "Cambodia Gender Assessment", and the second "National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women" mentions violence against LGBT persons. The UK, Swedish and US embassies in Cambodia have supported Pride activities, with the UN flying a rainbow flag during recent celebrations (UNDP/USAID 2014). Advocacy groups are working hard to get LGBT issues on the platform in the upcoming Commune Council Election in 2017 and National Election in 2018.

Because sex work is viewed as a morally reprehensible social problem, sociologist Crystal Jackson points out how those who challenge these assertions struggle to acquire credibility, voice and support (Jackson 2016). Yet, despite the powerful abolitionist anti-trafficking contingent in Cambodia, the sex worker rights movement has progressed in advancing visibility and recognition, as well. In 2008, WNU held an Open Day of Action to highlight the abuses related to the anti-trafficking law implementation, which was attended by representatives of MoWA and other policymakers (as well as Hoefinger). In response to the Global Economic Crisis in 2010, which saw a migration from factory work to entertainment work, both sex workers and garment factory workers marched through the streets of Phnom Penh in a joint action to express solidarity. In addition, in 2012, WNU worked with the CGCN and the Cambodian Grassroots People's Assembly (CGPA) to have sex worker voices heard at the ASEAN Grassroots People's Assembly (AGPA). Amid police intimidation, all the groups within AGPA/CGPA marched through Phnom Penh and delivered their Joint People's Statement (which listed each groups' demands) to the Cambodian National Assembly.¹¹ Us, WNU and RoCK also annually

¹¹ Heidi Hoefinger participated in this march alongside the sex worker groups.

collaborate together for big events such as Pride, International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOT) and International Human Rights Day (IHRD).

In 2017, a tragedy occurred within the sex worker rights community, which galvanized renewed energy in the movement. On 1 January 2017, a female sex worker named Pen Sokunthea (who was doing street-based sex work in order to support her 5-year old polio-afflicted son) died while fleeing from security guards in Phnom Penh. In attempting to escape to avoid arrest or having to pay bribes, she slipped from a boat into the Tonle Sap River and according to witnesses, bystanders were prevented from rescuing her by the security guards, and she drowned (Sen and de Bourmont 2017). Social justice activist Pisey Ly highlights that while dealing with grief over Sokunthea's unjust death, "WNU used her case as a trigger for structural and systematic change for sex workers' rights and dignity" (Ly 2017).

Director of WNU, Polet Pech, describes the course of action that took place immediately after the tragedy:

In response to the current situation of sex workers in Phnom Penh, in particular Ms. Pen Sokunthea . . . we immediately called to our members, partners, networks over 110 people to discuss and make an advocacy plan to respond to this crucial threat to sex worker's rights and women's rights in Cambodia. We had released a joint open letter to seek an intervention from relevant ministries and institutions in the late January, which was endorsed by 32 community network, activist, organization and federation. We held bi-lateral meetings, and we had sent out our meeting request to Ministry of Women Affair (MoWA) and Cambodian Women Parliamentarians caucus under the objectives of (1) have a discussion and consult on Pen Sokunthea's case, (2) Continue the collaboration on promoting women's rights in Cambodia. (Although there is no response yet from those two ministries, there will be more relevant ministries to submit the letter to) (Pech 2017).

Despite these efforts, and a push by the opposition party for an independent probe, the authorities denied any wrongdoing in refusing to help Sokunthea, and the case was considered solved less than a month later after the family—due to extreme hardship and doubt in the justice system—accepted a monthly "donation" of \$300 USD from the government to support the son until he is 18 years old (Sek and Hawkins 2017; Kong and Touch 2017).

Although WNU and other rights groups do not feel justice has been served, Polet Pech explains they are continuing their struggle to seek justice by:

. . . collecting and making analysis of existing documentary, case study, reports, video and law (how that law affect sex worker's lives) . . . We are mobilizing our members and allies to be on the same page and getting up-to-date on the current situation on sex workers' rights so that any advocacy work can be well coordinated and other women's rights activists and organization can feel part of our wider campaigns and unity for sex workers' rights including our existing networks . . . We are also developing an article about Prey Speu 'Correction Center' to critique the government on sex workers rights abuses as a result of raids and arrests (Pech 2017).

These efforts are evidence of the claims-making taking place in Cambodia, and the ways in which grassroots advocacy groups are joining forces to fight for their individual and collective rights in an effort to resist the moral-legal regime that continues to deny them justice.

Although there has been some progress at the state and NGO level in acknowledging the needs and rights of these communities, much more needs to be done. In a recent report by Stanford Law School (International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic and Stanford Law School 2015), Jacobsen a bottom-up approach to the Kingdom's NGO sector is called for, whereby international donors are encouraged to support the agency of the communities they claim to represent, and alter their strategies to foster the independence of grassroots initiatives at the local level. The report highlights, as has been done with this paper, that rather than large NGOs and public health bodies—who tend

to be more concerned with monitoring, tracking, surveying, and rescuing—community initiatives, themselves, are more successful at striving to meet the particular needs of their constituents.

6. Conclusions

Despite a long history of divergent genders and sexualities in Cambodia, a mix of growing concerns over HIV since the 1990s, and deeply embedded heteropatriarchal gender ideals have resulted in dichotomized stereotypes of LGBT-identified individuals and sex/entertainment workers as either at-risk or socially deviant. These framings have led to various sexual humanitarian interventions in the form of tracking, monitoring, surveillance, raid, arrest, rescue and detention that ultimately invisibilize the many other health, economic and social needs of these communities, and impede their access to gender, sexual and human rights. This paper contributes to the emerging literature on sexual humanitarianism by demonstrating the ways in which moral panics around sexuality, gender nonconformity, pornography and sex work have legitimized these social and legal interventions, which are based on essentialized and moralized understandings of gender and sexuality, and result in a depoliticization of LGBT and sex worker subjectivities.

Yet, in an attempt to repoliticize their identities, and address community needs and gaps in service, grassroots LGBT and sex worker groups are organizing at the ground-level, and self-advocating for their own rights and needs. Key areas of shared organizing involve promoting a sense of self-respect and pride in who they are and the decisions they make, as well as public awareness around the issues they face beyond HIV. Community groups continue to work with family members to sensitize them about the effects of discrimination against their LGBT children or family members who sell sex. They fight for the elimination of moralism and oppressive gendered norms that exacerbate inequities and stigma. They use technology to participate in global dialogues/campaigns about issues that affect them, and they persist in their efforts to lobby the government to revise laws/policies so that the rights and needs of LGBT communities and sex workers are not only protected, but that their self-determination, social contributions, and individuality are recognized and valued in a rapidly changing “modern” Cambodia.

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