



Imagined Statehood: Wartime Rebel Governance and Post-war Subnational Identity in Sri Lanka

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Summary. — This paper investigates the link between the wartime governance of rebel groups and post-civil war civilian identity. Focusing on Sri Lanka, it explores why and how individuals' wartime experience continues to influence their affinity to subnational entities in post-war society. Analyzing original survey data with Structural Equation Modeling, the results show that civilians' consciousness of rebel statehood has a positive effect on the formation of a subnational identity in the aftermath of civil war. The legacy of rebel governance persists and retains an impact on civilian identity in the post-war context. The findings suggest that those charged with the task of post-war reconstruction need to take into account the long-lasting influence of rebel statehood in order to successfully rebuild integrated communities. A post-war regime cannot simply implant a new national identity if it dismisses this influence because post-war identity is a consequence of civilians' experience of governance by non-governmental but de facto state actors.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Post-civil war reconstruction is the highest priority on the agenda for political leaders, international donors, and local communities in war-torn societies. As many post-war societies seek to restore peace and stability, they often suffer from political fragility and economic stagnation. In addition to these issues, another problem that makes post-war reconstruction difficult is the diversification of identity. The aftermath of ethnic conflict, for instance, is marked by an identity split along ethnic lines. The disunion of subnational groups and communities is likely to occur due to a trust deficit in which people trust their co-ethnics more than out-group members (Whitt, 2010). Ethnic conflict, in itself, may reinforce these social divisions by polarizing those cleavages (e.g., Kalyvas, 2003; Kaufman, 1996, 1998; Wood, 2008). Once activated, ethnic polarization persists for long periods of time (Simonsen, 2005).

Previous studies note that civilian identity is diversified in war-torn societies because violence generates fear, which increases distrust and intolerance among individuals and social groups (Colletta & Cullen, 2002; Halperin, 2008; Massey, Hodson, & Sekulić, 2006; Posner, 2004; Rohner, Thoenig, & Zilibotti, 2013; Widner, 2004). The perception of threat derived from the negative experience of war hinders psychological integration across groups (Gibson & Gouws, 2001) and inter-ethnic friendship and engagement (O'Loughlin, 2010; Varshney, 2001) in multi-ethnic societies. These patterns are presumed to be transmitted to successive generations and to form ideologies of antagonism (Bar-Tal, 2003; Staub, 1999). However, empirical findings are mixed. Strabac and Ringdal (2008) indicate that civilians' exposure to violence has little effect on their antagonism toward out-groups (see also Bakke, Cao, O'Loughlin, & Ward, 2009). It is likely that the violence thesis of post-civil war identity misses the point that not all civilians living in a conflict-affected area experience violence personally (Bakke, O'Loughlin, & Ward, 2009).

To reveal why the diversification of identity persists in post-war societies, this paper sheds light on an unidentified vari-

able, rebel governance, in particular where the governance is tied to subnational entities. The findings of this paper are based on a questionnaire survey administered in the north and east of Sri Lanka where the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) established a governance system of control. The data are analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) that enables the relationship between constructs, rebel statehood and subnational identity, to be estimated. Empirical analysis suggests that an alternative identity to nationalism remains strong after the war if individuals are cognizant of the rebels' wartime statehood.

This paper makes theoretical and empirical contributions to emerging literature on rebel governance (Arjona, 2016; Arjona, Kasfir, & Mampilly, 2015; Huang, 2016; Kasfir, 2005; Mampilly, 2011; Metelits, 2010; Weinstein, 2007). Although it is recognized that the consequences of civil war on civic life should be examined with attention to wartime institutions (Justino, 2013), the effect of rebel governance has been neither theorized nor examined sufficiently. This paper explores rebel governance in the expectation that its wartime institutions have a long-lasting influence on post-war society. Methodologically, a micro-level approach is taken in order to explore civilians' experience of rebel governance, and disaggregated observations of civilians' wartime experience are closely examined (see Arjona, 2014).

Because of its highly developed governance system, Sri Lanka is a suitable case study for exploring rebel governance and its consequences. Findings of this paper challenge the view shared by broader scholarship of identity politics that pre-

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conflict division of identity deepens through either civilian interaction or elite manipulation during armed conflict and then persists after the end of the conflict. The conflict in Sri Lanka was complicated not only by the Sinhala-Tamil bipolarity but also by various divisions based on region, partisanship, and ideology (Orjuela, 2008). These cleavages played an important role in forming both wartime and post-war identities. However, a new line of identity emerged in response to rebel governance during the civil war. The LTTE governance engendered and reinforced a popular identity by fostering a civilian consciousness of rebel statehood. Long after the LTTE's defeat by government forces, the legacy of rebel governance continues to influence the identity of civilians who remember the wartime institutions.

To stabilize post-civil war society, state leaders will seek to create a national identity. To do this, they often rely on the "official nationalism" (Anderson, 1991) already evident within the population, emphasizing common history and culture. The leaders can also encourage nationalism by integrating various parts of its subnational societies. Yet, the difficulty in creating such a nationalist identity lies with the unique characteristic of post-war society; wartime confrontation between militant groups deepens the fragmentation of local societies and makes it difficult for state leaders to wield their influence on the formerly rebel-controlled communities in the aftermath of the war. As this determines that the locally driven approach rather than the top-down approach is more successful in generating an integrated identity (Debiel, Glassner, Schetter, & Terlinden, 2009), an exploration of locally rooted identity would help us understand why official nationalism fails to prevail over all parts of post-war societies.

Identity is the affinity for a social category in which an individual member can take pride or views as having socially desirable attributes (Fearon & Laitin, 2000, p. 848). National identity is based on a national entity that individuals are proud of and to which they consider they belong. In contrast, subnational identity is based on subnational categories, such as locality and social group. In the post-civil war context, individuals' wartime affiliation will have a greater impact on their identity formation than demographic characteristics would (Aiken, 2008). In other words, espousing the idea of rebel statehood leads civilians to embrace an identity that is based on non-national entities.

2. REBEL GOVERNANCE

What is rebel governance? A polity of territorial control by a political leadership that lacks international legal recognition has been described as a *de facto* or unrecognized state (Bahcheli, Bartmann, & Srebrnik, 2004; Caspersen, 2011; Caspersen & Stansfield, 2011). This type of statehood is premised on a dyadic relationship with the state: although belonging to a recognized country, it exerts substantial control over territory inhabited by a populace and often seeks separation from that country (Florea, 2014). As a "state within state" (Kingston & Spears, 2004) is often made possible through the military independence of rebel groups in the civil-war context, this type of rule has been understood as "guerrilla governance" and a "rebel counterstate" (Vega, 1969; Wickham-Crowley, 1987).

Rebel government is currently recognized as a political authority that exerts power over civilian populations (Péclard & Mechoulan, 2015) and institutions to manage relations between civilians under its control (Weinstein, 2007). It reflects rebels' "conscious effort of creating an apparatus of control"

(Berman & John, 1992, p. 5). Rebel groups often seek to gain exclusive clout through territorial control because it not only gives access to provisions and material goods but it also allows them to obtain the collaboration of the population for their collective action. Even when a rebel group is not capable of offering sufficient material incentives to local people, their seizure of a society may enable them to secure civilian collaboration through everyday interaction. Thus, control of subnational territory in which civilians reside is a minimum requirement for the existence of rebel government (see Kasfir, 2008).

In contexts such as state collapse or failure, rebel governance may be instrumental in correcting existing defects in government institutions (Ghani & Lockhart, 2008; Grynkewich, 2008; Milliken, 2003; Zartman, 1995). While the system of rebel governance often includes the executive, legislature, and regional councils, and a court or semi-formalized legal system, it also functions as a machinery that provides public services including law-enforcement, security, education, health, welfare, economic well-being, and banking (Arjona, 2016; Arjona *et al.*, 2015; Florea, 2014; Kalyvas, Shapiro, & Masoud, 2008; Mampilly, 2011; Raeymaekers, 2010). The research on rebel governance has recently started investigating the effects of service provision on the activities of rebel organizations. For instance, rebels' service provision may be connected to particular forms of violence such as suicide bombing, attacks on civilian targets, and other highly lethal attacks. As carrying out these attacks requires the organizational competence of rebel groups, those that are strengthened by communal support are most likely to be able to pursue such strategies (Berman, 2011). In a group that has specialized units for the provision of public services, some members are dedicated to the administration of service provision in the community, and the group's violence appears to be intensified by other members exempted from public service and who have ample time to undertake violent activities (Heger, Jung, & Wong, 2012). Furthermore, rebel groups that are capable of providing public services are likely to succeed in recruiting more members by increasing their support for the community (Flanigan, 2008) and deter members from defecting by creating club-structured organizations (Berman & Laitin, 2008). Despite these studies, however, the literature has dismissed the influence of rebels' service provision on civic values. As institutions affect individuals' values and behavior (Jackman & Miller, 2004; North, 1990), those through which rebels provide public services are thought likely to affect the ways that civilians think.

3. SERVICE PROVISION, REBEL STATEHOOD, AND IDENTITY FORMATION

Rebel leaders may rely on a coercive manner of governance instead of contract. However, coercive governance is counter-productive in the long run. As civilians become engaged in rebel rule, they come to develop their own perception of political rights, order, and institutions (Huang, 2016; Kasfir, 2005). This political awareness can generate intolerance toward the leadership that relies on coercion. If the rebel group is dependent on the productive activities carried out by its subordinates, it could lose much from their desertion through a loss of popularity, including a decline in economic productivity as well as a decrease in tax collection. Therefore, in exchange for maintaining the productive activities of civilians, the rebels feel obliged to establish institutions that provide civilians with basic services (Arjona, 2014). One aim of rebels' service provision is to develop long-lived institutions with good reputations

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