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What are the factors that lead to the disengagement in activism over an individual's lifetime in the Global South?

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Abstract

In light of the limited social movement literature, this paper aims to hypothesise the reasons why individuals in the Global South disengage from activism, making activism unsustainable over a lifetime. The paper analyses the reasons put forward by scholars to explain initial activist participation, inferring from this that four lenses are vital to utilise in order to understand why disengagement may occur. Through these four lenses: (1) the political economy of activism; (2) the socio-cultural pressures of the Global South; (3) the issue of identity construction and (4) a post-structuralist lens to further examine the importance of the construction of identity and collective action frames, it is demonstrated that particular structural and cultural pressures exist in the Global South which limit individuals from sustaining activism over their lifetime. It is concluded that activism in the Global South should be regarded with caution. Rather than assuming that activism may lead to change, it should be considered more soberly, taking into account the considerable barriers that individuals face in the context of the Global South.

Key words: Activism, social movements, sustainability, civil society

Author



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Introduction

When the call for change resounded across Tunisia in January 2011, the world was hopeful. The optimism that resulted in the so-called Jasmine Revolution that ousted President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali spread throughout the Arab world, encouraging the belief that individuals could engage with street politics and activism despite the risks and obstacles they might face and bring an end to the draconian rule many citizens in the region suffered under. Reflecting on the repercussions of the Jasmine Revolution, Yassin-Kassab (2011) wrote “revolutionary momentum is still carrying Tunisia... and now it’s rolling through Egypt. If the coming days show sustained and spreading protest, the crack that has appeared in Egypt’s order will rapidly expand”. The level of political engagement and activism that Yassin-Kassab describes so positively was not limited to the Arab world but has been a feature of each of the global 2010+ movements where rights-based demands have been at the forefront of demonstrations across a range of political landscapes (Biekart and Fowler, 2013; Glasius and Pleyers, 2013).

These episodes of contention have been studied widely, from the Occupy Movement (Ishkanian and Glasius, 2018; Ishkanian and Ali, 2018) to the Arab Spring (Bayat, 2013; Droz-Vincent, 2011). However, what is missing from this literature – and from social movement literature as a whole – is an examination of the factors that limit the sustainability of activism for local activists and leads to their disengagement over the course of their lifespan. The reasons for participation in protest and activism have been analysed and frameworks created, yet there is no analysis of the extent to which an activist may sustain or not sustain their engagement in light of cultural, social, economic and political pressures in their own country. It is easy to conceptualise an activist who is engaged, passionate and has a vested interest in bringing about political or social change; what is often overlooked are the forces that may cause an activist to disengage and abandon their commitment to an organisation or cause. With a specific focus on the Global South, this dissertation aims to fill this gap.

Sustained Activism and Protest

Sustained activism involves personal investment and commitment over time. My concern is with those individuals who engage personally with street politics within their own communities and are often seen on the frontline of protests, who challenge their governments and specific policies and actions with which they disagree. As such, this dissertation focuses on individuals who are active in their own communities in the Global South and does not concern foreign workers in the development sector who travel to Southern countries to advocate on behalf of others. Neither am I going to analyse as a separate group those who progress from street activism to become professional advocates, working for larger organisations. Although the transition of these individuals is relevant to the issue of activism and sustainability, Glasius and Ishkanian have previously found that there is a blurred relationship between professionalised and street activists, coining the term ‘surreptitious symbiosis’ to describe their relationship as one of collaboration (2013, pp.2622). It is true that some activists choose to commit themselves to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and advocate for political and social issues rather than disengage from activism; however, the frameworks outlined in my dissertation will demonstrate there are structural and cultural factors which become barriers to sustaining even this form of activism. The section in which I examine the shrinking space of civic society and the repression of activism will further highlight this. Additionally, when referring to activism throughout this thesis, I will not include online activists; although this is a level at which many may legitimately engage in activism, I suggest that for those who physically attend rallies and demonstrate continued political and social engagement there are more salient factors at play and risks to consider.

In my literature review, I will outline the arguments offered by social movement scholars in relation to why and how individuals participate in activism. I will seek to address a gap in the literature, hypothesising the factors that may reduce an individual's engagement with activism over their lifetime. I will infer, from the analysis provided in the literature, that in order to create a hypothesis of why activism cannot be sustained, the issue should be viewed through four different lenses. I will then develop these further to form a general typology that can be used to help analyse the reasons why specific individuals within their context in the Global South withdraw from activism over their lifetime. The four lenses which I use to examine the question are: (1) the political economy of activism; (2) the socio-cultural pressures of the Global South (3) the issue of identity and (4) a post-structuralist lens through which I will further analyse how the construction of collective action frames and identity can also lead to a disengagement from activism. I will then draw conclusions from my analysis and demonstrate why it is important to highlight the temporality of activism within the Global South.

The result of viewing the question of activist disengagement through these four lenses has enabled me to form my hypothesis of why activism in the Global South is not sustainable over a lifetime, yet this hypothesis may also be helpful and relevant globally. The reasons this dissertation focuses exclusively on the Global South are twofold: firstly, the pressures individuals face there and the environments they are exposed to are more acute, impacting more severely on the possibility of activism being sustained through an individual's lifetime and secondly, to move away from the Northern-centric focus of social movement theory that currently exists (Della Porta and Diani, 1999; Della Porta, 2011).

Methodology

To examine the factors that cause individuals in the Global South to disengage from activism over their lifetime, this paper takes an analytical approach to the existing social movement literature. I firstly examine social movement theory published in academic books and peer-reviewed articles and use this to hypothesise four main frameworks that I believe to be instrumental to influencing sustained engagement in activism. Each framework presented includes theoretical analysis which is then applied to examples. News articles and grey literature are also used when discussing the impact of each framework on activism and policy more generally. Rather than using a specific case study, this paper looks at pressures in a range of contexts in the Global South in order to create a broad hypothesis of the reasons why individuals disengage from activism.

Limitations

Basing this dissertation on literature rather than qualitative data limits my analysis to an extent; in order to capture an individual activist's story, semi-structured interviews should be undertaken to provide insight into how each framework has impacted an individual's engagement with activism over their lifetime. It is also reasonable to assume that such qualitative interviews would highlight other reasons that cause individuals to disengage from activism that this dissertation overlooks. It is the aim of this paper to outline a general typology based on the limited relevant social movement literature; however, I acknowledge that further research would be beneficial in order to create a more comprehensive theory.

Literature Review: Social Movement Theory

Within social movement literature there is a clear omission: an examination of the factors that lead to the end of activist participation during an individual's lifetime. With the exception of Klandermans

(1997); Klandermans and van Stekelenburg, (2014) and Corrigan-Brown (2012), social movement scholars have largely focused on the reasons for and the causes of activism (Della Porta and Diani, 1999; Della Porta, 2011), rather than addressing what may lead to an individual abandoning activism altogether. In this literature review, I will outline the relevant existing literature, highlighting factors that may be applicable to my research question. In order to hypothesise the factors that may influence withdrawal from activism, the literature examined suggests that it is helpful to utilise four lenses through which to examine the issue. These four lenses will then be considered individually, providing insight into why activism is not sustainable over the lifetime of individual activists in the Global South.

Contentious Political Activity

Coined by Tilly in the 1970s, contentious politics is a theoretical attempt to move beyond the exclusive evaluation of individual case studies of social movements, to a framework that highlights the broader processes and mechanisms of contention in a dynamic political process (Tarrow, 2015). For example, the Arab Spring epitomises Tilly's contentious politics as it signifies several periods of civil unrest, involving a range of actors in differing contexts (Ibid). By creating a framework that focuses on the relational mechanisms – those mechanisms that shape or alter relations between actors or groups within fields of contention - allows for an analysis of the dynamics between periods of unrest and the various actors in them. Instead of limiting analysis to the normative concept of social movements – that of a certain sector of civil society versus the state - Tilly created a broader framework that encompasses “all occasions on which some set of people make collective, public, visible claims on other people” (Tilly, 1997, p56). In tandem with the definition of activism set out in the introduction, I will refer to contentious politics throughout to address episodes of civil unrest that do not necessarily fit into the normative concept of a social movement.

A Shift Away from Rational Choice Theory

The introduction of a social psychological understanding of why individuals engage in activism has been beneficial to explaining what may lead to disengagement with activism. Since its development, there has been a shift in social movement literature away from Rational Choice Theorists to a more nuanced framework that highlights both the role of emotions and of collective identities (Jaspers, 2017; Goodwin and Jaspers, 2004; Klandermans, 1997). Rational Choice Theorists claim that engagement in activism is a strategic, rational choice, ignoring any emotional and cultural factors that may influence the individual's decision to become an activist (Jaspers, 2017). Yet, actively engaging in political and social issues through street politics, formal mechanisms such as social movement membership or in new social movements – those not characterised by a shared class position, such as protests about the environment or women's rights – involves costs and risks (Melucci, 1995; McAdam, 1986). It follows that the social dilemma of sustained engagement in activism is that an individual may pay the cost of participation without being certain whether a collective good will be established or a collective bad eradicated. And if either is secured, the individual would reap the benefits regardless of whether they participated in the protest or not (Olson, 1963; Klandermans, 1997). It may be assumed that a rational actor would not participate in sustained contentious political activity as the benefits of activism can be enjoyed by the majority. If the rational actor thesis is correct, therefore, nonparticipation would be widespread. However, this is clearly not the case, suggesting that the rational actor thesis does not explain engagement in contentious political activity (Ibid). Rather, an analysis of the role of emotions and individual perception of collective action frames is more helpful when looking at why individuals participate in activism and what may lead to their disengagement.

Collective Action Frames

The construction of collective action frames is essential for participation in and engagement with activism. Activists are agents whose engagement leads to the creating of meaning for other participants (Benford and Snow, 2000). Through the use of framing, events and contentious episodes gain meaning and motivate others to action; they are a tool for mobilisation. As Powell (2011) has argued, frames can be used to recruit participants as well as maintain commitment to the group and its cause. By tapping into potential members' emotions, ideologies and experiences, framing brings the individual into a group. Here, the role of emotions is evident as links are created between the individual and the group to create a collective identity. It can be concluded, then, that identity constructions are an inherent feature of the framing process and vice versa (Snow and McAdam, 2000). Framing also has a key role in how actors perceive issues in relation to their own identity, shaping understanding through cultural contexts which then determines how an actor may define themselves (Powell, 2011). The construction of frames, then, is central in sustaining activism as it begets individual as well as collective notions of identity and creates emotional attachments to a certain cause. However, if there are barriers to this process, where individuals cannot identify with certain constructions, or where contestation around the construction of frames occurs, activism is likely to suffer (Powell, 2011).

Participation in Activism

The initial four steps to participation in social movements consist of 1) demonstrating potential for mobilisation; 2) becoming the target of mobilisation attempts; 3) becoming motivated to participate and 4) overcoming barriers to participation (Klandermans and Oegema, 1987). If an individual undergoes each of these steps, sustained participation should occur. The more rewarding it is to participate in a movement, the greater an individual's effective commitment; this suggests that activists are such because they believe that the rewards and benefits of their actions will outweigh the costs and sacrifices they make and the stronger their commitment to this belief, the longer their participation (Klandermans, 1997). The political economy of activism, then, must be one where the benefits outweigh the risks, costs and sacrifices that activists may make, otherwise regression will occur.

A sympathetic disposition from activists towards the issue they support is required; a lack of sympathy will create disengagement and cause individuals to defect (Klandermans, 1997). Indeed, this creates an "erosion of support", thus creating a context where the ratio of costs to benefits becomes less favourable over time and where grievances may no longer be salient enough to act on (Klandermans, 1997, p7). As Klandermans later argues, those who participate in collective action and maintain a sympathetic disposition are from milieus that approve of their advocacy (Klandermans and van Stekelenburg, 2014). Klandermans and van Stekelenburg build on McAdam's theory of "biographical availability", alluding to the tension that may arise between an individual's desire to identify with a cause and engage in sustained activism and the socio-cultural pressures that may inhibit this desire, for example the pressure for education, marriage and employment (McAdam, 1986, p70). Limited biographical availability due to such socio-cultural pressures may create an environment where activism and contentious political activity are disapproved of, leading to individuals deciding they have no choice but to abandon their activist involvement due to familial or cultural expectations. The idea that, for sustained activism to occur, an approving socio-cultural environment is required reflects Passy and Giugni's thesis highlighting the importance of the social networks an activist establishes and the overlap of activist activities with other areas of his or her life (2000). Their argument is mirrored by Eder, building on the work of Durkheim who proposes that collective sentiment is instrumental in producing collective action (Eder, 2015). Both arguments

assume that social networks and social relations are a prerequisite for sustained contentious political activism. Corrigan-Brown would agree, arguing that relationally, it is harder to leave a group of advocates who are committed to and sympathise with a particular political or social issue (2012). Frequent and intense social interaction creates strong and persistent ties; in cases where this does not occur, it becomes easier for disengagement to happen. However, for Corrigan-Brown, withdrawing from activism does not mean abandoning it altogether (2012). In her secondary longitudinal analysis of a sample of U.S. high school seniors conducted in 1965, Corrigan-Brown demonstrated that many activists follow a pattern of abeyance. Sawyers and Meyer (1999) argue that during an individual's period of abeyance, the values, identity and political vision of social movements can be sustained through a number of activists who are at a more committed stage of their engagement. However, although social movement abeyance is relevant when examining how activists remain engaged outside episodes of contention, it is the aim of this thesis to explore the reasons why activism is temporal and the reasons for individuals initially disengaging with activism in the context of the Global South.

The relevant social movement literature outlined above provides insight into the factors that lead to participation in activism; furthermore, one may also draw inferences from it as to what may make activism unsustainable. A sympathetic disposition is needed towards a cause to allow for an individual to participate in activism, yet certain socio-cultural pressures can limit an individual's biographical availability to both identify with and sustain engagement in the cause. Similarly, a delicate balance exists between the perceived risks and costs of activism versus the benefits. If the political economy of activism becomes too costly, it is likely that disengagement will occur. An individual must also identify with the collective action frame that is being utilised to incite mobilisation, which will also have a substantial effect on the creation of collective identities. Consequently, if an individual does not or cannot identify with the collective action frame, sustained engagement over a lifetime is unlikely to occur. The following three sections will develop these inferences into frameworks that can be applied to analyse why activism is not sustainable in the Global South. I will then use a post-structuralist framework to further examine how the construction of identities and collective action frames can lead to activist disengagement.

The Political Economy of Activism

Social movement literature argues that in order for activist engagement to be sustained, an individual must be sympathetic towards the cause that is being acted upon and also have a positive perception of activism itself (McAdam, 1986; Klandermans and Oegema, 1987; Melucci, 1995). Since there is a delicate balance between the perceived costs and risks of activism versus the potential benefits, it is reasonable to assume that disengagement from activism will occur when political and economic structural processes exist that create high risks and costs, leading to a negative perception of activism. In this section, I will add to the existing literature by building on McAdam's (1986) theoretical framework to demonstrate the importance of such structural factors in influencing an individual away from activism, as well as the role an individual's ideological disposition plays. As part of my hypothesis, I will use the lens of the political and economic costs of activism to show that activism carries risk, creating an environment where sustained engagement may become undesirable.

Hirschman's (1970) exit-voice contention is also relevant here; the high costs and risks of activism, coupled with the overwhelmingly evident shrinking space of civic space, results in exit from activism, using Hirschman's paradigm. Of course, this is not exclusive to the Global South: there are examples throughout the world where structural factors cause the political and economic costs to be too high for activism to be sustainable over a lifetime. However, I argue that the pressures activists are

exposed to within the Global South are more acute. The political and economic costs of activism, therefore, are crucial reasons why an individual may abandon their activist identity. Indeed, in some of the contexts outlined, it can be concluded that the pressures are so strong that it is not a question of sustaining engagement in activism, but that individuals may not be able to participate at all. Individuals may aspire to be committed advocates for certain issues, but may be prevented from doing so because their perception of the costs and risks of being associated with a certain collective action frame and identity are higher than the perceived benefits of activism.

Author High-Cost/Risk Activism and the Voice-Exit Contention

In response to previous scholarship such as that of Snow and colleagues (1980), which focuses exclusively on structural factors that lead to participation in activism, McAdam (1986) provides a framework that highlights the importance of both societal structures and also individual motivation. Taking this into consideration, along with McAdam's definition of costly activism (the expenditure of time, money and energy) and risk (the anticipated dangers of engaging in a particular type of activity), enables a clearer analysis of how the political economy of activism can lead to disengagement (Ibid). In a context where there are high costs and risks for activists, it is reasonable to conclude that withdrawal will occur. In this case a dual process occurs: one at a structural level and the other at a personal level, both processes contributing to disengagement. Where the costs of activism are high, an individual will be faced by particular structural barriers and eventually recognise that they prohibit the continuation of their activist identity.

Hirschman's (1970) schema of exit, voice and loyalty provides clarity on how high-cost/risk activism can lead to disengagement. His commercial paradigm describes consumer reaction to deteriorating organisations – be it a business, a nation or other forms of grouping. 'Exit' refers to the flight of an individual from that organisation and can be applied to social movement participation in the sense that economic and political costs can push an individual away from activism (Ibid). In a context where activism is met with attempts to repress it and is therefore more costly to the activist, the reality of exit becomes more likely. Exit may also help to cement the political control of the government if the number of those leaving is high enough, diminishing the power of the activists. Hirschman rightly claims that the exit option will be chosen if engagement is too costly, or if reform is uncertain, but that such exit can also weaken the power of voice against the government (Ibid). Exit in the sense of geographical mobility (moving out of the oppressive context) may be the ultimate sign of defiance and demonstrate the magnitude of discontent. However, as Pfaff and Hyojoung have concluded, this is only likely to happen if an individual perceives protest to be completely ineffective (2003). In each of these cases where exit from activism is chosen, an individual's desire to protest has been undermined by the political and economic context, demonstrating that sustained engagement is doubtful.

It is possible that the political and economic costs of activism may not lead to outright exit as Hirschman's defines it, but instead lead to a reshaping of the protest. Focusing on the context of China, Lagerkvist (2015) argues that activism will only occur if there is a shift in activist discourse that allows activists to demonstrate an apparent form of tactical loyalty to the regime. The Wukan protests of 2011 demonstrate that, even in a totalitarian state, activists were able to sustain activism rather than being forced to exit by using a façade of words, which suggested patriotism and loyalty, to mask their underlying protest. In order to oppose the state, protest had to be reshaped in light of the perceived costs and risks of being seen to be disloyal - what Pye refers to as 'feigned compliance' (Pye in Lagerkvist 2015, p147). Similarly, Hildebrandt and Chua's (2017) analysis of lesbian activism in China and Myanmar adds to the argument that activists have agency that enables them to work around structural barriers. Restrictive rules in Myanmar, such as Section 377 of the Penal Code,

criminalising homosexual conduct, hinder lesbian activists from exercising their civil and political liberties to form recognised advocacy organisations in Myanmar, but Hildebrandt and Chua found that, instead of exiting from activism, lesbian activists chose to enter the wider discourse of the larger LGBT movement that is part of the global human rights discourse (Ibid). The structural conditions in Myanmar do, however, continue to constrain local collective mobilisation around LGBT issues and create an environment where activists are not comfortable in openly voicing their protest. Although some activists may be able to negotiate the structural factors that cause in/visibility, the majority “come and go” from advocacy, reinforcing the conclusion that the political and economic costs prevent them from being able to sustain activism (Hildebrandt and Chua, 2017, p655). Even in the case of the Wukan protest, reshaping activism in a show of counterfeit loyalty to the state destabilises the innate power of civil society to challenge the state and create a counter-hegemony, and as such undermines contentious political activity altogether (Gramsci, 1971).

The Repression of Civil Society

An analysis of the effect of the political and economic costs of activism on an individual’s ability to sustain their engagement must take into account the impact of the shrinking space for civil society. According to a CIVICUS survey, only in 22 countries does the state both enable and safeguard the enjoyment of civil society space for all people (Orlam and Doane, 2017). Globally, a range of repressive measures have been implemented by governments that constrain freedom of assembly and the practising of civil-political rights, as well as enforcing limitations on NGOs that receive funding from international donors. The shrinking space for civil society has involved a tightening up of the freedom of speech; increased monitoring and harassment by police and military forces; the criminalisation of open protest and the restriction of where civil society organisations (CSOs) are allowed to operate (Ibid). In the context of this global push to restrict the power of civil society, the delicate balance between the potential benefits and costs of protest is disrupted and activism becomes more dangerous.

In Ethiopia, the crackdown against civil society has reduced the sustainability of activism as the costs of advocacy have increased. For female activists in Ethiopia, the situation is worsened by the gendered notions of their prescribed identity: their role is seen solely as a mother and home-maker (Burgess, 2013). Following the establishment of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia in 1995, discrimination against women was being tackled and basic democratic principles recognised, highlighted by the work of a prominent CSO, the Ethiopian Women’s Lawyer Association (EWLA), which advocated for women’s rights. But, from 2000 onwards, public opposition to the regime began to grow: rallies were organised, most notably in Meskel Square in 2005 where reportedly 4 million protesters were met with aggression from the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) (Freedom House, 2012). More than 193 protesters were murdered and 4,000 activists imprisoned (Ibid). From this point, under the Zenawi regime, repression of civil society increased. In its 2017 World Report, Human Rights Watch detailed the human rights abuses against activists in Ethiopia (HRW, 2017). Even after the death of Zenawi, the EPRDF continue to suppress violently any form of protest and punish suspected supporters of the opposition. The torture and sexual assault of protesters by military forces and disguised security officials has been documented, as has the use of military camps (HRW, 2017). In addition, the 2009 Charities and Societies Proclamation limits the work of NGOs and completely prohibits work in human rights and advocacy if organisations receive more than 10% of funding from foreign sources (HRW, 2017). As a result of the continued suppression of both institutionalised advocacy and street protests, the Director of the EWLA fled Ethiopia in 2010 fearing persecution (Burgess, 2013). The brutal crackdown is evidence that activists in Ethiopia are seen as a political threat, limiting their motivation to engage in contentious politics.

Since the Arab Spring of 2011, the Egyptian government has also become increasingly repressive in a bid to suppress both peaceful and violent dissent, under the guise of protecting national security: under the Mubarak regime and with the succession of President El-Sisi in June 2014, human rights defenders have been portrayed as sympathisers of terrorism and a threat to national security (Lofty, 2018). Additionally, the Anti-Terrorism Law of August 2015 required the closure of all independent human rights CSOs and the Protest Law and Law on Associations makes the existence of human rights organisations illegal (Ibid). Many activists have been in pre-trial detention for more than two years, exceeding the maximum legal period according to Egyptian law (Ibid). Structural conditions of states such as these in the Global South make it exceedingly difficult for activists to engage in sustained advocacy. The push to restrict and outlaw the practice of activism in the form of protests and institutional advocacy is clearly a major factor why individuals disengage. The political risks associated with activism in the Global South clearly contribute to the fact that activism is temporal; although protest does occur, the repression and brutality of some states makes it dangerous and undesirable to identify as an activist, reducing the probability that an individual will identify as such throughout their life.

Author Socio-Cultural Pressures and Biographical Availability

If sustained engagement in activism is to be possible, an individual's socio-cultural context must be conducive to activism. As outlined in the literature review, McAdam's theory of biographical availability highlights that socio-cultural factors may influence an individual's ability to participate in activism (1986). When biographical availability has been used as a framework to test whether it does indeed provide a useful indication of the sustainability of activism over a lifetime, however, the evidence has been inconsistent (Beyerlein and Hipp, 2006; Xiao and McCright, 2014). Although it is inconclusive whether this framework is adequately comprehensive when used in research, the notion of biographical availability is a useful theoretical tool for examining which socio-cultural pressures may lead to disengagement from activism. This section of my thesis will demonstrate that there are socio-cultural pressures and certain expectations of individuals that are more acute in the Global South that limit the biographical availability of an activist to sustain engagement throughout their lifetime.

Biographical Availability

The theory of biographical availability suggests that an individual's socio-cultural context in which they exist determines the ability both to participate in and sustain activism (McAdam, 1986). McAdam defines it as "the absence of personal constraints that may increase the costs and risks of movement participation, such as full-time employment, marriage, and family responsibilities" (1986, p70). If an individual has a multitude of "personal constraints", there are more obstacles to sustained engagement. As Snow and colleagues argue "some individuals will be more available for movement exploration and participation because of the possession of unscheduled or discretionary time and because of minimal countervailing risks or sanctions" (Snow et al, 1986, p793). The dominant literature, which has a Northern and Western-centric focus, has evaluated this in the context of student protests, finding that students are more likely to engage in activism due to a lack of personal constraints (McAdam, 1986; Petrie, 2004; Oberschall, 1973). When this theory is applied in the context of the Global South, it is clear that individuals are exposed to a range of constraints that make activism more difficult and thus can lead to disengagement.

Women, Activism and the Global South

The gender inequality evident throughout much of the Global South has created a social and cultural context that constrains female participation and sustained engagement in activism over a lifetime. The practice of child marriage is prevalent throughout the context of many developing countries: an OECD report focusing on gender inequality in West Africa, found that 30% of girls aged 15-19 are either married, divorced or widowed (Bouchama et al, 2018). Customary and religious laws that dictate cultural practices allow for early marriage to continue in countries such as Gambia, Ghana and Nigeria and socio-economic factors play a crucial role in continuing the practice. In Benin, for example, girls in rural areas are two-and-a-half times more likely to be married before the age of 18 than girls living in urban areas (Ibid). The practice is seen as a mechanism to improve the financial and social position of the girl's family and therefore continues to be favoured in certain cultures. (Bouchama et al, 2018). The impact of this on the lives of women can be seen in Burkina Faso where 44% of the population support the marriage of girls before the age of 18, while only 4% believe it is acceptable for a boy (Bouchama et al, 2018). Just as child marriage has a negative impact on secondary education enrolment and completion rates, it is also valid to hypothesise that it has a substantial impact on the biographical availability of any girl or woman firstly to engage in activism and then to sustain this engagement (OECD, 2014).

Indeed, cultural norms and practices often limit women's decision-making power; consequently, the civil rights of women are largely ignored. The 2014 OECD study classified eleven countries in West Africa as demonstrating high to very high levels of restricted liberties for women. In Burkina Faso, 91% of the population accept the requirement for a woman to have her husband's permission to leave the house, creating a serious barrier to a woman's biographical availability to engage in and sustain activism (Bouchama et al, 2018). Coupled with the fact that women engage in the greatest share of unpaid care work, activist activity will be near impossible. Patriarchal cultures in these contexts create an environment where women are perceived as lesser, giving rise to negative attitudes towards women as political and community leaders resulting in a lower participation of women in politics.

Men as Breadwinners and their Availability as Activists

While patriarchy and gender expectations have a limiting effect on women's political participation and on their ability to participate in or sustain activism, there are ramifications for their male counterparts. With the restrictions on women, men must take seriously their duty as breadwinners (Labeodan, undated).

Fierce competition between families in Nigeria has been demonstrated in displays of wealth, material possessions and family achievements (Ibid). This puts pressure on the patriarch to provide finances to maintain status and respect, and also on the rest of the family. Children and young people privileged with primary, secondary or tertiary education, for example, are expected to focus on studies rather than engage in activism, which would be seen as a distraction from what is important socially. It can be assumed then, that social and political activism cannot be a priority for a male with family responsibilities as the expectation for them to act as breadwinner limits their biographical availability.

Expectations of Children

Other expectations of children can create more socio-cultural barriers to engagement in activism. In a study of social expectations of childhood in Dangla in Ethiopia, Kassa (2016) found that children

were expected to take on work responsibilities from the age of five. Within this rural community, boys tend cattle while girls collect dung and firewood (Ibid). Although this work is not allowed to interfere with schooling, it is clear that societal norms prioritise other aspects of life leaving no space for children to cultivate their own interests; this is exacerbated in Simalta as between the age of 12 to 15 years old, children are expected to show particular obedience to the wishes of their elders. Kassa found that for children of this age-group, leisure is seen as wasteful and disrespectful, with activities such as fishing even frowned upon (Ibid). Clearly, then, the socio-cultural expectations do not give space for young people to engage in contentious political activity as their biographical availability for sustained activism is limited.

Biographical situational factors, then, can play a substantial role in influencing the demise of activism over a lifetime. Telešienė and Balžekienė (2015) claim that this is a global phenomenon and universally unspecific. They argue that time constraints on activism due to factors such as parenting or employment status, should be applicable regardless of context. Indeed, it is true that each context will experience similar socio-cultural pressures that limit biographical availability for activism, but it is inaccurate to claim these are universally unspecific. Through looking at socio-cultural pressures specifically in the Global South, there is clearly a range of constraints that fundamentally limit an individual's engagement in activism over their lifetime.

Identity

In this section, I will explore how the construction of identities impacts sustained engagement in activism. I will start by providing an overview of the literature that explores the role of identity in an activist context and then develop my analysis by adopting a post-structuralist lens to further examine how the construction of categories and the discourse subsequently created may influence an individual's disengagement. It will be clear that the analysis in the following sections is not limited to the Global South but is relevant to studying why any individual may disengage from activism. The examples provided, however, demonstrate that the harsh political, social and cultural contexts in the Global South particularly, ensure that activism cannot be sustained over a lifetime.

Collective Identities

An activist identity is entirely constructed: it has been described as 'an act of the imagination, a trope that stirs people to action by arousing feelings of solidarity with their fellows and by defining moral boundaries against other categories' (Jasper and McGarry, 2015, p1). For an individual to become an activist he or she must identify with a cause or collective action frame and also with other like-minded people who hold the same ideological sympathies (Oberschall, 1973; Jasper, 2014). The construction of this collective identity creates an environment where engagement in advocacy is more likely to be sustained and the lack of it, or the breakdown of an existing collective identity, may contribute to the demise of an individual's engagement.

The importance of collective identities within the context of social movements and contentious political activity has its roots within the Marxist ideology of class-consciousness. Touraine and Melucci, however, abandoned this focus on class position and instead emphasise the identity of the movement itself, the identity of opponents and the totality of the struggle (Touraine, 1981; Melucci, 1980). In this new paradigm, the activist identity is constructed through feelings of belonging that are either reinforced or weakened, creating an actor that sees itself as part of a wider group (Ibid). This emphasis on collective identities has been developed in response to earlier rationalistic explanations for activism, outlined in the literature review (Flesher Fominaya, 2010). Individuals who choose to participate in activism do so because it correlates with their perception of themselves and

is intrinsically appealing, reinforcing the role of emotions in strategic choices around engagement in activism (Polletta and Jasper, 2001; Jasper and McGarry, 2015).

The Identity Dilemma

As constructing a collective identity involves establishing a “congruent pattern of norms for actions, emotions and efficacy”, it would seem reasonable to assume that, within a protest group, there would be a collective consensus on collective action frames (Thomas, McGarty, Mavor, 2009, p195). However, this is not always the case; Jasper and McGarry coin the phrase ‘identity dilemma’ to describe what happens when not every member of the group fits the collective identity of a group to the same degree (2015). In the construction of gays, lesbians and trans as a single LGBTQ community, for example, the complex differences of sexual identities within the community are overlooked (Gamson, 1995). In her article, *Why it’s time to take the T out LGBT*, Glover argues that members of the American trans community reject an LGBTQ identity, claiming that transition is not the same as being homosexual and has created dissension within this larger group (Glover, 2015). As McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly argue, social networks can create the illusion of consisting of unified political actors, whereas the reality of internal contest and debate can limit the creation of, or lead to the breakdown of, a sustainable collective identity (2001). Consequently, contestation about the nature of a specific collective identity may be a factor for some in disengaging from activism and contribute to the lack of sustainable activism.

As collective identities are instrumental in influencing activist engagement, it follows that the efficacy of a group will determine whether activists sustain engagement over a period of time. Corrigan-Brown builds on existing studies demonstrating individuals are more likely to engage in activism if invited by a friend, suggesting that social ties can predict recruitment as well as sustained engagement (Corrigan-Brown, 2012; McAdam, 1986). As a result of the shared internalisation of a cause, group members form a collective identity on the basis of their common attachment (Goodwin, 1997). Goodwin draws on Freudian theory to demonstrate the importance of shared ideals in group formation: powerful ties of empathy and shared ideologies bring people together and contribute to their social capital which encourages their sustained engagement (Ibid). The process of depersonalisation in belonging to a group increases identification with that group and the likelihood of participating with that group in activism: when an individual’s collective identity becomes more significant than their personal identity, sustained activism is more likely (Klandermans, 2002). Durkheim asserts that moments of contentious political activity are in fact rituals where a group comes together and participates in activities that erase each individual’s sense of separate identity to the extent that they are subsumed into the collective identity (Durkheim in Eder, 2015). If social bonds and friendships are ever broken within the group or if, for other reasons, personal identity becomes more significant than a collective or activist identity, there will be a negative impact on group efficacy (Corrigan-Brown, 2012); individuals are then less likely to identify with the group, possibly withdrawing from it completely, leading to their disengagement from activism.

Multiple Identities

It is well documented that individuals hold multiple identities (Della Porta and Diani, 1999; Oberschall and Kim, 1996); however, less studied are the tensions that occur when these various identities come into conflict and the impact this has on an individual’s engagement in activism. If an individual holds multiple identities because they belong to multiple groupings, it is necessary to question what happens when these identities come into conflict. If it is assumed that multiple identities exist in a hierarchy of significance, it is reasonable to expect that the position of any particular identity (such

as an activist identity) in that hierarchy helps determine which activities an individual will participate in (Corrigall-Brown, 2012).

Individuals in the Global South are exposed to socio-cultural pressures that may mean an activist identity comes into conflict with social and cultural expectations. If a woman, for example, is expected to provide the majority of unpaid care work, societal pressures force her to prioritise this identity. When these pressures take priority, an individual's biographical availability is limited and their ability to be committed to their activist identity is threatened. Managing an activist identity in relation to other identities then, can play an important role in the ability of an individual to sustain activism over their lifetime.

Activism through a Post-Structural Lens

Using a post-structuralist lens to critically analyse the role of the construction of collective action frames and of identity politics will further demonstrate their fundamental importance in influencing the sustainability of activism over a lifetime. A Foucauldian approach will reinforce that the creation of frames that cause activists to mobilise is inextricably linked to the creation of collective identities. By building upon the analysis in the previous section on identity, I will highlight that disengagement may occur due to the way in which truth regimes can cause individuals in certain contexts to become excluded from a collective identity. I will use the example of homosexuality to demonstrate that if a collective action frame and an identity construction cannot be adopted by an individual due to their biographical availability, or due to the costs and risks that are associated with activism, that individual is likely to disengage from activism.

Post-Structuralism in the Context of Activism

Post-structuralism is a theoretical framework used to interpret the self and the surrounding social context (Namaste, 1994). Rather than the emphasis on rationality and intentionality of, for example, Cartesian philosophy, post-structuralism highlights the importance of social relations (Ibid). As described by social movement theory, the shift away from Rational Choice Theory highlights the importance of relocating the individual within a complex network of socio-political and cultural factors (Jasper, 2014). Post-structuralism goes further, claiming that any focus on the individual as an autonomous agent should be contested (Namaste, 1994). In the context of activism, post-structuralism critically investigates the social ramifications of the construction of categories and the discourse used within them. As has been noted throughout, action frames are fundamental to the construction of collective identities. These constructions may have an inclusionary nature or may also exclude; the focus of this section will be on the latter in order to demonstrate why exclusion from a collective identity may result in activism becoming unsustainable for particular individuals.

Homosexuality, Activism and Post-Structuralism

The creation of the category of 'homosexual' in the nineteenth century is an example of a case whereby individuals who had previously felt excluded from society now belonged to a group that gave them a sense of collective identity. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault recognises that although same sex relations existed before their categorisation as 'homosexual', it was not until the introduction of this new terminology that the social identity of homosexuality existed (Foucault, 1976; Namaste, 1994). In this way, as both Foucault and Butler claim, language can serve to construct collective identities that enable inclusion (Seckinelgin, 2009). As well as providing inclusivity, a newly constructed category, such as 'homosexual' may also then become a reference point for collective action (Ibid).

Fuss (1991) points out that while the public adoption of a homosexual identity by many individuals allowed for the proliferation of civil rights, at the same time it created the notion of the 'closet' – creating a divide between those who identify as homosexual and those who wish to keep their sexual orientation private and setting up an identity dilemma in relation to homosexuality. Individuals who 'came out' and became visible as homosexuals became part of a community that engaged collectively in activism related to their civil rights and to issues around HIV/AIDS. Yet, the creation of this community of visible homosexuals ipso facto excluded a particular group – those who chose to remain in the 'closet'. Seckinelgin (2009) has shown that similarly, the global discourse of LGBT and MSM has, on one hand, opened up spaces for activism, while at the same time closing down the possibilities of activism for those who do not wish to identify with such categories. These individuals are unlikely to be able to sustain activism outside the collective identity of those groups as they are excluded from this discourse.

As this thesis has shown, in particular cultures, the socio-cultural barriers may mean that an individual can no longer or indeed never adopt a certain identity. In the context of the Global South, many countries maintain strong homophobic attitudes which ensure that 'coming out' is a harrowing experience that deters many from identifying as homosexual and becoming involved in or sustaining any level of activism. In Morocco, for example, an LGBT activist was forced to relocate to Europe following death threats because they identified as homosexual (HRW, 2018). In Jordan, the act of 'coming out' creates familial conflict, with families terminating any relationship with a family member who identifies as homosexual (HRW, 2018). Kotze and Bowman (2018) argue that in South Africa, despite legislation aimed at mitigating the violence homosexuals are often exposed to, the dominant patriarchal, homophobic society prevents many from coming out. It is clear, then, that, in some contexts, the construction of a homosexual identity carries such negative connotations that, although individuals may recognise themselves as belonging to this category of homosexual, there is a reluctance to identify as such. In this case, the perception of the risks associated with the actual identity, rather than risks associated with related activism, is a limiting factor that causes individuals to distance themselves from any engagement in activism.

As demonstrated earlier, constructions of certain identities are not universal and those who identify within such constructions should not be assumed to be an entirely homogenous group. Analysing the context of gays and lesbians in Israel, Ritchie (2010) shows that other identities can take precedence over that of sexual orientation. He observes that there is a refusal by the Israeli gay community to recognise and include gay Palestinians, who also live in Israel, in the discourse of homosexuality. Ritchie infers that this happens intentionally as a way of containing what Israel views as politically threatening (Ritchie, 2010). This political act of excluding homosexual Palestinians from the Israeli construction of homosexuality supports a Foucauldian perspective that discourse is a manifestation of power (Foucault, 1971). Since the politics of recognition require that activists must be positioned within a larger collective action frame, gay Palestinians, prevented from participating in this particular collective action frame, are forced into creating an alternative discourse. The specific construction of an Israeli gay identity, then, upholds a regime of truth that deliberately excludes some gay members of the population because of the political situation there. Even though gay Israelis and Palestinians may seem to share the identity of homosexuality on one level, the political and social forces at play do not allow for gay Palestinians to participate in the discourse of homosexuality constructed by Israel and thus cannot advocate for issues that affect homosexuals globally, further highlighting the exclusionary nature of identity constructions which can limit the sustainability of activism.

Concepts of Civil Society

The post-structuralist lens also challenges the normative conception of episodes of contention as civil society versus the state. The example of gay Palestinians and Israelis, as well as the case described earlier of Myanmar and the arguments put forward by Gamson (1995) that conflict occurs within the LGBT community, demonstrate that civil society should not be seen as homogenous and unified due to the contestation and debate around identities and collective action frames. From a Gramscian perspective, civil society does have the power to create a counter-hegemony and rebel against the state as is evident through the numerous successful social uprisings that have taken place (Gramsci, 1971). However, since many categorisations within civil society – such as homosexuality – are characterised by diversity and debate, the neo-Tocquevillian view that civil society represents a homogenous space that is crucial for the promotion of democracy must be challenged (Putnam, 1994). By focusing on the construction of identity, and the discourse that this creates – both inclusionary and exclusionary – it is clear that it should not be assumed that civil society is positioned uniformly against the state in episodes of contentious politics. The contestation within identities and within collective action frames leads to a more nuanced reality than once thought. This conception of civil society also adds to the reality that activists are not always working in harmony with each other against the state, but may face conflict within or between groups. Such conflict adds to the probability that an activist will not sustain their engagement in activism but may withdraw due to pressures created by that conflict.

Implications for Policy

When reflecting on the impact of the Jasmine Revolution on Syria in 2011, Yassin-Kassab was optimistic, epitomizing the general feeling towards the activism of the 2010+ movements. Yet, five years later the rhetoric had changed: in 2016, Yassin-Kassab stated: “Since 2011 I have learned to distrust the grand pre-existent narratives of both left and right [and] to fear the dead(ly) ends of identity politics” (Yassin-Kassab, 2016). Similarly, in 2011, Ahdaf Soueif borrowed Obama’s 2008 campaign slogan “Yes We Can” to capture the zeitgeist in Egypt and yet in 2016 he remarked: “the euphoric hope generated by Ben Ali’s swift departure from Tunis has been replaced by horror ... people feel they have tried what is available – revolution, political Islam – and nothing has worked” (Soueif, 2016). The particular structural and cultural conditions of the Global South outlined in this dissertation are instrumental in causing this shift in an individual’s initial optimism and participation in activism, to their withdrawal, demonstrating the temporal nature of activism over an activist’s lifetime. Rather than presupposing that activism in the Global South may cause sustainable change – as the rhetoric suggested in 2011 - it must be acknowledged that the pressures and barriers in the Global South dictate that activism cannot be sustained. A more sober account of the impact of protest movements and activism will allow for a more realistic account of what may follow in the years following the initial uprising.

Expectations of Activism

This paper has not attempted to argue that activism cannot lead to sustainable change. Instead, it has called into question the paradigm of activism that so many adopt – one of continued hopefulness and optimism. Rather than taking that position, this paper encourages people in both the North and the South to analyse and examine what pressures exist that challenge this normative assumption. Individuals may show ideological commitment to a cause, which may lead to engagement with street politics and advocacy work, but underneath the initial engagement lie pressures that ensure sustained activism is difficult. Assuming that an episode of contention will lead to a change in political or social policy is too simplistic and naïve: it ignores the force of

structural and cultural factors in the Global South, cementing the normative view that activism should always be viewed optimistically. Instead, a broader understanding of the forces that may threaten the sustainability of activism is needed to ensure expectations of activism in the Global South are managed.

Advocacy Building Programmes

If certain structural and cultural factors create significant barriers for an individual to sustain their activism over a lifetime, organisations that engage in advocacy building programmes must be cautious. Countless NGOs advocate on behalf of individuals in the developing countries, for example Oxfam's 'Make Trade Fair' campaign and CDD-Argentina's advocacy for women's abortion rights; but of concern here are advocacy building programmes designed to increase the capacity of individuals to engage in activism. In order for policies and programmes to be successful, organisations must examine the pressures that may lead to an individual feeling it necessary to disengage from activism. Analysing the costs and risks associated with activism, for example, would provide insight into local perceptions of the balance between the benefits of activism versus the risks. Additionally, tackling the gender inequality within a certain context would enable women to engage in activism and sustain their participation over their lifetime.

From 2011-2015, the Dutch Consortium for Rehabilitation (DCR) implemented the MFS-II Pamoja programme, aiming to empower local individuals in six fragile states in Africa. This programme not only focused on advocacy capacity building for local NGOs, but was also committed to looking at the broader environment that created barriers to individual political and social activist engagement. In order to mitigate the hierarchy between the peasant and the educated in Burundi, the Pamoja programme introduced community parliaments that allowed for the inclusion of all people (DCR, 2015). In Uganda, the DCR ensured that empowerment programmes were delivered to women in addition to the advocacy building programmes, in order to overcome the structural and cultural norms that discriminate against them.

Organisations that implement policies aiming to increase the advocacy capability of individuals in the Global South, must therefore analyse the broader factors that are set out in this dissertation that may decrease the likelihood of activism being sustainable. A focus on empowering individuals within their local contexts will be a crucial step in mitigating against the threat these frameworks.

Concepts of Civil Society and Social Movements

Using the post-structuralist lens to examine why individuals disengage from activism has revealed that civil society should not be conceptualised as homogenous. A neo-Tocquevillian perspective of civil society is one that assumes unity, rooted in the New Policy Agenda of the 1990s, which saw civil society as capable of building democracy and implementing a neoliberal agenda globally (Kaldor, 2003). But as has been shown in this paper, civil society should not be viewed as homogenous: the debate around the construction of identities and the discourse that is generated from such constructions highlights that individuals within civil society can come into conflict and a Gramscian depiction of civil society is more realistic (Gramsci, 1971). Individuals may disengage from activism due to disagreement with certain language constructions attached to a particular identity, highlighting the exclusionary and inclusionary nature of identity politics. Concepts of civil society must therefore align with a Gramscian perspective, acknowledging that contentious politics is not limited to state versus civil society, but that conflict can also exist within the civic space.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to provide a conceptual hypothesis of the reasons why individuals in the Global South disengage from activism, making it unsustainable over a lifetime. It has done so by using four separate but interconnecting frameworks that highlight certain pressures and barriers that exist which can threaten sustained engagement in activism. By using the existing relevant social movement literature, the reasons why and how participants engage in activism were clarified. From this, it was concluded that four frameworks could be used to hypothesise why activism cannot be sustained as a lifelong commitment. Through examining the risks and costs of activism in the Global South, it has been shown that engagement in activism is regularly met with political oppression and violence. The civic space for individuals and organisations to practise advocacy is being suppressed globally, giving rise to a hostile environment that fundamentally challenges activism. Additionally, the socio-cultural pressures that are apparent in the Global South can limit the biographical availability of an individual to participate in activism. Thus, cultural expectations and social norms combine to make it increasingly difficult to adopt an activist identity throughout the entirety of a life. At a more abstract level, it has been demonstrated that there is a range of issues with the construction of collective identities that can cause individuals to exit activism or be dissuaded from continuing their role in contentious political activity. The post-structuralist lens further highlights this, demonstrating that the construction of discourse that creates collective action frames can have both an inclusionary and exclusionary nature. Rather than assuming that activism can be sustained over an individual's lifetime, my dissertation has demonstrated that there are a range of pressures in the Global South which create an environment that ensures activism is temporal.

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