

Shadow Schools—Tamil Educational Success in Norway

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Abstract

This paper considers Tamil educational success in Norway. Employing Bourdieu's cultural capital as a conceptual lens, the factors that drive Norwegian-Tamil parents' educational ambitions for their children are explored. In-depth interviews with parents and classroom observations reveal a distinct habitus secreted through a historical legacy that valorises learning coupled with a discourse that perceives Tamil culture as one facing an existential threat at the hands of more powerful neighbours. The findings, it is argued, draw attention to the salience of parents' educational backgrounds and ambitions for their children. Furthermore, it is argued the findings highlight important lessons to be drawn for mainstream educators in Norway, an egalitarian country that traditionally aims at "universalizing" such capital through mainstream educational institutions.

Keywords

Tamil, shadow schools, Norway, Bourdieu,

Introduction

The total population of Sri Lanka was just above 20 million in 2012 (Census of Population and Housing of Sri Lanka) and comprised mainly of three ethnic groups—Sinhalese (74.9 %), Indian and Sri Lankan Tamils (15.2 %) and Tamil-speaking Muslims (9.3 %) (categorized as "Sri Lanka Moor" in the Census. While the Sinhalese are Buddhists in the main, the majority of non-Muslim Tamils are Hindus with a minority adhering to the Christian faith. Recent decades have seen some tensions between the Sinhalese and Tamils with significant human rights abuses occurring (UN Human Rights Council, 2012; Jayasinghe, McNair, Usoof, & Ganepola, 2015).

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Historical National Background to Tamil Drive for Educational Success in Norway

This study is guided by the following questions: What role do Tamil parents play in the educational success of their children in Norway and how does the socio-cultural background and experience of these parents as Tamils in Sri Lanka affect the education of their children in Norway? It is argued that this study, which concerns itself with Tamil educational success in Norway, must take cognizance of three historical events in post-independence Sri Lanka because they have a positive impact upon Tamil success in Norway, according to the interviewees. These three are the proscription of the Tamil language, the curtailment of Tamil university entrants and the burning of the Jaffna Library in May 1981, when many ancient and priceless Tamil manuscripts were burned to ashes. These are fleshed out briefly below.

The Ceylon Independence Act of 1947 may have peacefully transferred power from British colonial rule to Sri Lanka, but escalating Sinhalese nationalism culminated in the 1956 Official Language Act championed by Prime Minister Solomon Bandaranaike that declared Sinhala to be the only official language. This Act “[...] would solidify in the minds of many Tamils the belief that Sinhalese leadership could not be trusted to uphold the rights of minority populations” (Amarasingam, 2015, p. 19). After the assassination of Bandaranaike, his widow formed a new government in 1960 and acquiesced to Buddhist demands for the nationalization of all private, mainly Christian missionary schools (Kearney, 1967) — an act that deliberately targeted Tamil education. A second issue that aggravated simmering ethnic tensions beginning in the 1960s was that of university admissions. Allegations were made against Tamil students claiming that they unfairly benefitted from biased Tamil-language examiners. A system of “standardization” was introduced in which the scores of Sinhalese students were upwardly adjusted to “balance” the perceived discrepancy. In a further humiliation, the Education Ministry introduced district quotas in 1974 that prioritized Kandyan and Muslim communities at the expense of Tamils (Richardson, 2005). According to de Silva (1978), the number of Tamil university applicants dropped by a third in a single year. He further contends:

None did more in radicalizing the politics of the Tamil areas in the north, and in particular the Jaffna peninsula, than this...for they regarded it as an iniquitous system deliberately devised to place obstacles before them (de Silva, 1998, pp. 130-132).

A third issue, etched into the minds of several of the respondents in this study, is the fateful burning of the Jaffna library in May 1981. For some, this event, intended to avenge the killing of two police officers assigned to election duty, “was part of a

Sinhala plot to obliterate Tamil cultural identity in Sri Lanka” (Richardson, 2005, p. 288). Tamils based in Canada, a country with the largest Tamil diaspora outside the Indian subcontinent, have referred to this incident as an example of a long-running “cultural genocide” (Amarasingam, 2015, p. 31). In what follows, a brief outline of the Tamil diaspora in Norway with a focus on their educational and employment status will be presented.

The Norwegian-Tamil Diaspora

As of January 1, there were 9109 individuals registered as Sri Lankans in Norway (Statistics Norway, 2017a). The numbers do not include children born in Norway. Statistics Norway does not demarcate demographics along ethnic lines, but Øivind Fuglerud, Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Oslo, and the doyen of Tamil studies in Norway, confirms that the lion’s share are of Tamil origin and settled in Norway in the mid to late 1980s (Fuglerud, 2014). From an educational perspective, it is significant that Tamils in Norway put down strong roots with about half having lived in the country for more than sixteen years in 2009. Engebritsen & Fuglerud (2009, p. 12) employ the Norwegian term *modningsgrad* (roughly “maturation rate”) in explaining the differential rates of success between Somalis and Tamils in Norway with respect to integration. They contend Tamils have had more time to mature and hence grapple with the challenges associated with the refugee experience as opposed to Somalis, the majority of whom have had comparably shorter residential experience in Norway and tend to be more mobile (see also Thomas, 2016). According to Engebritsen & Fuglerud (2009, p. 12), senior Tamils have taken up the mantle of mentoring and ameliorating the pains of transitioning into the Norwegian society for the younger generation. Fuglerud (2014) underscores the valorization of education among Tamils in Norway:

With the implementation of Sinhala majoritarianism and Buddhist nationalism in all sectors of Sri Lankan society from the late 1950s, migration became a way for the Tamil middle class to safeguard what they saw as central elements of their own culture, especially the value of education (Fuglerud, p. 149).

Commensurate with Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital, which will be explored in relation to Tamil educational aspirations in Norway, this aspiration did not materialize in a vacuum. As many of the interviewees proudly asserted, the current valorization of education has a long pedigree going back to the ancient period of Tamil Nadu (Tamilakam) when the great Tamil dynasties (e.g., Pandyas, Cholas and Cheras) ruled Southern India from around the 4th century BCE (Ali, 2007).

This respect for education is tangible in contemporary Sri Lanka despite the recent conflict.

Despite the ravages of a 27-year civil war that began in 1983 and ended in 2009, the country maintains some of the highest literacy rates in South Asia. . . Sri Lanka has the highest reported youth literacy rate in South Asia at 98.77 percent, as compared to 89.66 percent in India, and 83.2 percent in Bangladesh. Along with the Maldives, Sri Lanka is one of only two countries in South Asia recognized by the UN as achieving “high human development” (World Education News & Reviews, 2017).

Figure 1 below (Statistics Norway, 2017b) demonstrates that, in terms of educational attainment, people coming from Sri Lanka, along with Bosnia-Herzegovina, Iran and Chile, among other minorities settled in Norway, are clearly the highest achievers. The majority from these countries arrived in Norway broadly around the same time as refugees. The bar for “Sri Lanka” in Figure 1 more closely resembles that of the national average as opposed to the more skewed graphs for “Somalia” and “Afghanistan,” which have a conspicuous “no education at all” segment (brown). For instance, 31.2% of Tamils (registered under “Sri Lanka”) have completed upper secondary compared to 20.5% for Pakistan or 15% for Somalis. This is even more remarkable when compared to figures for Germany (25.1%) and USA (16.4%). The national Norwegian average for higher education (university and college education of four years or more) is 32.9%. Tamils are currently at 25% with figures steadily increasing annually. The latter is laudable given the formidable linguistic and other cultural hurdles immigrants must navigate.

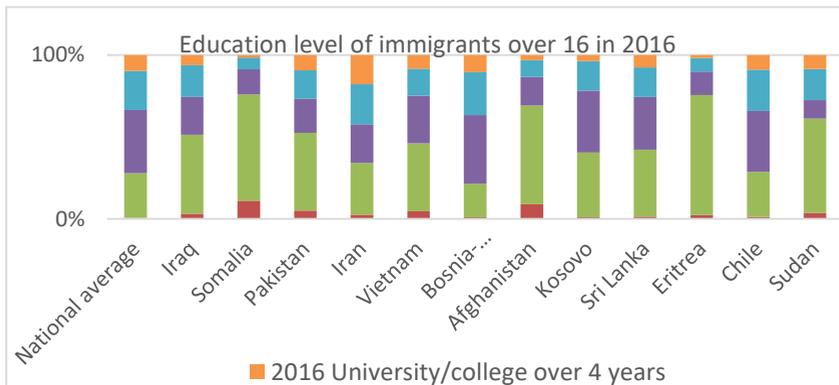


Figure 1: Comparison of educational institutional level attainment among some immigrants above 16 years of age

The figures for Sri Lankans (again, mostly Tamils) is even more significant when it comes to employment levels for 2016 (see Table 1 below) where the category “Sri Lanka” is ranked higher than that of ethnic Norwegians, western Europe and Africa, among others (Statistics Norway, 2017c). According to one researcher, who attributes the high rates of Tamil employment to this cohort’s “good reputation in society,” “Tamils have traditionally been called ‘super-immigrants’ in Norway precisely because of their high participation in the labor market among others” (Leon, 2013).

Country	% both sexes
Sri Lanka	68.8
Norway (no-immigrant category)	66.9
Western Europe	67.2
Africa	42.3

Table 1: Employment comparison for 2016 (Statistics Norway, 2017c)

Issues of Methodology for the Current Study

Access and main site.

The author’s interest in researching the Tamil community and the high significance they attach to education was piqued after a couple of Tamil families asked if their children could join in the weekly tuition lessons they knew was conducted in our home. A father of a child who attended worked for 16 years as a voluntary teacher and is currently a board member at Tamil Resource and Counselling Center (TRCC henceforth) in Rommen, Oslo, the largest Tamil-Norwegian foundation in Norway, established in 1992. This foundation collaborates with a Cultural Center called Annai Poopathi with branches in 10 counties in Norway.

Annai Poopathi provides a raft of activities for Tamils in Norway including extra tuition in Science, Mathematics, English/Norwegian, ICT, music and other fine arts such as Bharat Natyam, the Indian classical dance originating in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. With a membership of roughly 2200 Tamil children, the father, who acted as gatekeeper, was of the opinion that approximately 75% of Tamil children in Norway were registered members. He facilitated the interviews, classroom observations and procured some educational booklets and brochures which were published by local members. The research was conducted between August and November 2017. Relying on the father as gatekeeper and trusting his judgment in facilitating the research is commensurate with the objectives of purposive sampling, a feature of qualitative research, in which “researchers handpick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgement of

their typicality or possession of the particular characteristics being sought” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 114).

Interviews.

As this study sought to capture the views of Tamil parents in relation to the educational success of their children in Norway, interviews were deemed the most appropriate method. While fidelity to the worldview of the interviewees is the objective of phenomenologists, an effort was made to induce critical reflection or what Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p. 37) refer to as moving the conversation from “doxa” (opinions, experiences, desires) to episteme (questioning and justifying what they believe). A case in point was that of one male who initially denied any privilege that Tamils had enjoyed educationally in Sri Lanka, but later amended this to acknowledge that they were the beneficiaries of British missionary education and employment in the pre-independence era. Nine parents, four members of the administration of TRCC and three teachers were interviewed, in addition to the aforementioned Professor Fuglerud. Furthermore, two classroom lessons in TRCC—both in Science—were observed followed by interviews with the teachers. All interviews (except one conducted in English) and most of the documents were in Norwegian. All translations in this study from Norwegian to English are the author’s own. As mentioned earlier, the father-as-gatekeeper contacted the interviewees and arranged for the interviews to be conducted in the premises of TRCC. They were informed that the research was about Tamil education in Norway. A semi-structured interview guide was devised with a range of questions that fleshed out opinions on their educational backgrounds, the importance of TRCC and Annai Poopathi in providing education and mother-tongue/cultural services for the Tamil community and, finally, their perception of the conflict in Sri Lanka and its consequences for Tamils in Norway. With the permission of the respondents, the interviews, which lasted for an average of 50 minutes, were recorded and transcribed. Codes were assigned to categories derived from substantive statements using an analysis grid (Gillham, 2005, p. 136-143).

Classroom observations.

With a background as a teacher in mainstream schools, the objective behind classroom observations was to better understand whether there was a particular kind of pedagogical style applied by the Tamil tutors at TRCC. An 8th and 9th grade class in addition to an ICT class were observed. A non-participant, unstructured observation was employed with the aim of “developing a narrative account” (Bryman, 2004, p. 167) of Tamil educational focus. Classroom notes at TRCC sought to tease out the following questions: How does the teaching at the centre compare with what the students know from mainstream schooling? What makes this particular feature “Tamil?” and “Who are the teachers, and what philosophical

approach, if any, underpins their pedagogical style?” The seating arrangement, charts on the walls, differentiation in terms of gender and interaction between students and teachers were some of the features that will be elaborated upon in the findings section. Rhymes (2016, p. 8) argues that the “language in use” in the classroom cannot be dislocated from the multiple social contexts both within and beyond the classroom. As such, further questions derived from the observations were raised in the interviews that followed with the teachers.

Theoretical framework.

For Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), that capital which accumulates through engagement with education and culture is called cultural capital and crystallizes in three forms: embodied, objectified and institutionalized. Furthermore, in the *Forms of Capital* (1986), Bourdieu approached the theory of cultural capital as:

[...] a theoretical hypothesis which made it possible to explain the unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from the different social classes by relating academic success, i.e., the specific profits which children from the different class fractions can obtain in the academic market, to the distribution of cultural capital between the classes and class fractions (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 106).

Hence, a Bourdieusian framework necessitates an engagement with issues of “origin” and academic achievements that may be explained through social class distinctions and privileges emanating in the country of origin when applied to Tamil educational success in Norway. The first form of Bourdieu’s cultural capital is the “embodied state” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 107). Put differently, and relevant to this study, some individuals are the beneficiaries of a cultural upbringing that valorizes and inculcates certain dispositions of the mind and body conferring academic advantages. Bourdieu (1986) employed the term “habitus” to capture this elusive process. He speaks of the transmission of cultural capital as “the best hidden form of hereditary transmission of capital, and it therefore receives greater weight in the system of reproduction” (1986, p. 108). It declines and dies with its bearer (e.g., memory). In fleshing out the concept of habitus further, Bourdieu and Passeron (1997, p. 67) draw attention to an “organizing action” or “structure”—what they interchangeably also call “pedagogic action”—which manifests itself as a cultural-specific etiquette. Habitus is not coterminous with cultural expressions nor is it to be perceived as a reified generative force, but is malleable and susceptible to change depending on the commitment and effort of what they called “pedagogic authority” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). In other words, habitus is susceptible to the prevailing structural apparatus in the school, for instance, and develops in the

interstices between individual agency and legitimate (accepted) structure. For Bourdieu (1986), inculcating habitus often begins early and congeals over a number of years. While warning that habitus must not be reduced to “length of acquisition” alone, he goes on to state:

[...] allowance is made for early domestic education by giving it a positive value (a gain in time, a head start) or a negative value (wasted time, and doubly so because more time must be spent correcting its effects), according to its distance from the demands of the scholastic market (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 107).

Of significance is Bourdieu’s statement that acquisition of habitus comes at a personal cost. This personal cost or “socially constituted form of libido” entails some “privation, renunciation and sacrifice” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 107). This study also finds Bourdieu’s concept of “field” useful in grappling with the role played by the TRCC in Rommen, Oslo, and its cultural affiliate, Annai Poopathi. As explained earlier (see above “Access and main site”), Annai Poopathi is the overarching, national representative for Tamils in Norway while TRCC is the centre based in Oslo. A field is a structured social space and mediated by those who occupy it. In addition, it is in a state of flux as socio-historic forces and internecine power struggles impact upon it (Bourdieu, 1990). Of interest is the emphasis on doxa as the ruling principles of a Bourdieusian field. According to Grenfell (2007, p. 55), “The ruling principles of the field need to be seen as the “consecrated” forms of orthodoxy, or “legitimate” forms of social action. Orthodoxy, or doxa implies acceptance of the dominant principles and products of the field.” The manner in which TRCC and Anna Poopathi encapsulate and exert pedagogic authority/action through the doxa of a Tamil Eelam (i.e., Tamil aspirations for an independent Tamil homeland in Sri Lanka) will be explored in the discussion section.

The second form of cultural capital is the “objectified state” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 109). Habitus is often crystallized in the form of tangible materials such as books, paintings, monuments, dictionaries, machines and music instruments. The manner in which agents appropriate these objects is important.

However, it should not be forgotten that it exists as symbolically and materially active, effective capital only insofar as it is appropriated by agents and implemented and invested as a weapon and a stake in the struggles which go in the fields of cultural production (the artistic field, the scientific field, etc. (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 109).

The above underscores the discursive use that objectified cultural forms are often subjected to. Not only is there an “ontological complicity” (Wacquant, 1989)

between field and habitus—i.e., a “mutual reinforcement of a world endowed with sense and with value, in which it is worth investing one’s practice” (Grenfell, 2007, p. 59)—but Bourdieu (1990) considers the profitable value of objectified states, for instance, as “markets.” Thus, the habitus embodied in agents working within the field often produce objects that in turn confer both economic and symbolic privileges which wax and wane depending on an array of socio-historic contingencies.

The concept of “symbolic violence” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 13) is also germane to this study in making sense of the findings. When a dominant power forcefully imposes what Bourdieu & Passeron (1990) refer to as a “cultural arbitrary” upon a subordinated group (e.g., the Sinhala only policy of 1956), one can speak of symbolic violence. It will be argued, based on the findings in the TRCC and Anna Poopathi as a field—i.e., Tamil pedagogic action among the diasporic community in Norway—that this works indefatigably to counter the perceived systemic symbolic violence that was designed to “strip Tamils off their cultural capital” and relegate them to the margins of influence in a post-independence Sri Lanka. Hence, the mission of the field cannot be decoupled from the political objective of an independent homeland for Tamils in Sri Lanka or what the parents called “Tamil Eelam.” It is argued that any study of Tamil educational success in Norway must factor in this understanding. Furthermore, this focus on education is a “counter-hegemonic tool” (objectified state that Bourdieu refers to as an invested weapon) and is a feature that appears to be unique to the Tamil-Norwegian community—hence the salience of this study for educators working in the field of multicultural education. By this I mean if culture is a vital dimension of multicultural education—i.e., the need for education to recognize and be sensitive to group differences—then Tamils in Norway clearly operate as a distinct cultural group that deserves what multicultural theorists such as Charles Taylor and Bhikhu Parekh call “equal dignity.” Modood (2008) elaborates on the notion of “equal dignity”:

[...] individuals have group identities and these may be the ground of existing and long-standing inequalities such as racism, for example, and the ways that some people have conceived and treated others as inferior, less rational and culturally backward... The imperative for equal respect, the turning of negative group identities into positive ones, then, flows out of a commitment to equal dignity (Modood, 2008, p. 48).

Findings

Interviews

Educational aspiration and privilege.

The first question broached the issue of why Norwegian-Tamils valorize education. Professor Fuglerud shared that the North Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka, which are predominantly Tamil, were not arable enough to invest in agriculture. As such, Tamils had to consider other avenues of sustenance, among which were education-related undertakings. According to him, European missionaries set up schools in Tamil regions with the corollary of conversions to Christianity and proficiency in English. Furthermore, and pertinent to this study, is his finding that the lion's share of Tamils in Norway come from the middle and upper castes such as the landowning caste called Vellalars. Significantly, although agrarian landlords, they also were an elite, aristocratic caste who were patrons of literature in medieval times (Sen, 1999; Gough, 1998; Madavan, 2011). Fuglerud further stated the more affluent middle and upper castes had the financial resources to migrate and shouldered the financial responsibility for the lower castes left behind. Significantly, any talk of caste distinctions was non sequitur for the Tamil interviewees. Interviewees were adamant that the charismatic leader of the LTTE (Tamil Army: Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam), Velupillai Prabhakaran, had proscribed the caste system. A 55-year-old engineer, who had lived in Norway since he was 23, when asked about the community's focus on education, replied:

Throughout our history, we had to fight to gain admission to universities in Sri Lanka. My grandfather told me that the British misused education to convert Tamils to Christianity and so Tamils tried to counter with competing Hindu schools. Education became the ground zero of our battles with dominant groups, especially with the Sinhalese. Education liberates is our mantra. There is a hierarchy that has been inculcated in Tamils: first education, then the arts (dance, music) and then sports. For Tamils, status is also important, and education can confer status. Today, in Norway, all I hear from the young Tamils is that they want to score a six in every subject and study medicine and engineering.

A 31-year-old female, who came to Norway as a child and is now a postgraduate studying pedagogy, had this to say about the Tamil emphasis on education:

The first generation struggled with securing proper jobs in Norway so they put pressure on the children to take higher education. They are determined that their children will not have to clean floors. Obviously, the only way out of this conundrum is education.

Several have confirmed this parental consensus when it comes to investing heavily in the children's educational success in Norway. This can be captured in the words of one father who said, "Whether we can afford it or not, Tamil parents do everything in their power to accommodate the educational needs of their children. They can work odd hours and sacrifice." It was clear that several of the interviewees had internalized their parents' conviction that education was the only way out of a disadvantaged socio-economic situation. Although often tacit, their humble beginnings in Norway as refugees, has amplified this sense of vulnerability. However, for many, there was a palpable sense of "cultural loss" at the hands of the Sinhalese which seemed to provide the necessary fodder for educational aspiration in Norway.

I was only six years old when I moved to Norway, but my parents have shared with me about the trauma of an arson attack against the Jaffna Library. When they were university students, they used this library quite regularly. So they still feel the pain, and although I have not been there, I feel this is part of my narrative also (female, 31).

One interview at TRCC was with a Tamil father from Tamil Nadu. His views were of interest given the ethnic affinity between the Tamils from India and Sri Lanka. This 42-year-old father works for an international telecommunications firm and both his children (aged 12 and 7) attend Tamil language classes at TRCC. He began by stating that Tamils in India and Sri Lanka are the same people separated artificially by the British. He opined that Tamil valorization of education has ancient roots.

The great Tamil poet, Thiruvalluvar (4 B.C.) said that the best treasure you can acquire is education. We had a kingdom that ruled Southeast Asia and always stressed education. Contrary to the British, who linked education with Christianity, Tamils are a secular and syncretistic people. Tamils never gave up their tribal cultures. I have never been to Sri Lanka but came to Norway and interacted seamlessly with Tamils from Sri Lanka. I do not detect any substantive difference between the Tamils here at TRCC and in Tamil Nadu—our values and aspirations are the same. In the state of Tamil Nadu, if 20% of Indians opt for higher education, then Tamil Nadu is at 60%. We run the entire IT industry of India; Tamil Nadu is the number one medical destination for many Indians. Therefore, this emphasis on learning and excellence is not just among Tamils in Norway, but common to Tamils everywhere.

The role of TRCC and Anna Poopathi.

Fuglerud was also convinced that one reason for Tamil educational success in Norway, in addition to the relatively privileged backgrounds of Norwegian-Tamils, was the benign form of social control and organizational acumen of this community. According to the gatekeeper, who also sits in the administration, 2,200 children are registered as members in Anna Poopathi, about 75% of the entire population of children in Norway. This ability to recruit, represent and maintain such numbers over several years appears to be unprecedented among other comparable communities in the diaspora. Fuglerud attributes much of the success in terms of low crime rates and educational success to an amalgamation of factors, a few down to serendipity, but much because of TRCC's proactive role.

Fuglerud mentions “‘enforceable trust’ as a social capital generating mechanism” enhanced by the position of the LTTE, low divorce rates and hence stable nuclear families, and “solidarity among the marginalized” in the opportunity afforded to join what he refers to as “an imagined global Tamil community of suffering” (Fuglerud, 2018) as factors contributing to Tamil success in Norway. However, on the flipside, Fuglerud pointed to statistics that drew attention to the price of success. Citing from the report, *Young in Oslo*, 15% of Tamil girls and 14% of boys report “often or very often feeling lonely,” which is significantly higher than the non-western immigrant average. Additionally, 22% of Tamil girls report having tried suicide once or several times. He concludes, “These numbers point to a rigidity in community organization that represents a challenge to the generation now growing up” (Fuglerud, 2018, p. 16).

The Tamil parents interviewed, however, appeared to be highly appreciative of the work of TRCC. The structure and leadership were praised profusely. When asked to specifically highlight what they value about TRCC and Anna Poopathi, quality in education appeared to top the list.

When I came here as a six year old, the mathematics in Norway was just too simple. The standard of education is mediocre in Norway. In Sri Lanka, children begin school at the age of three. Here it was seven, but they recently changed it to six. In kindergarten here, all they do is draw, color, etc. Norway is a rich country and should do much better in international tests. I believe the problem lies in the fact that children begin too late and there are no demands made of them to do well academically. When I was in primary, the attitude was “Take it easy now, but you will need to step up a gear in lower secondary.” Why didn't we get this message earlier? Things would have been easier. At this center, some of these challenges are addressed (male, father).

Initially, some of the parents mentioned the need for their children to have extra tuition as the main reason for bringing their children to the center in the weekends. However, when confronted with the fact that Norwegian schools also provide extra tuition to children from immigrant backgrounds in particular, the issue of “mediocre” academic standards in Norway was often brought up. One 31-year old mother, who has a Bachelor’s degree from the UK, stated, “My parents and grandparents are used to having a rigorous approach to education. There is a cavalier approach to education here. The UK is more rigorous. For Tamils, education and discipline go hand in hand. The discipline here is too lax.” The aforementioned 55-year-old man, who came in the first wave of immigration, was highly critical of parents from other ethnic backgrounds who, to his mind, undermine their children’s education by spending too much time on religious activities. Concerning Anna Poopathi, he asserted:

The difference between the Norwegian schools and this organization is that here the parents can join the children and be a visible part of their learning—it combines valuable education with a home environment. There is a Tamil canteen and the teachers are from Tamil background—all this helps the children socially. Identity and familiarity are key factors. What others can learn from us is organization; take the initiative and organize yourselves. Vitaly, the fathers need to be participants. Our children have learned things here like theatre, music, and other performances that are difficult to find elsewhere. I have seen students automatically sit together after lessons here and continue to study; the atmosphere encourages them to.

In support of the above, another mother stated, “The main contribution to Tamils in Norway from TRCC is the Tamil language and culture; it is about identity—I read a research which indicated that children who know their identity and language, grapple better with the challenges of the host country.” While several were of the opinion that the work of TRCC is not contingent upon developments in Sri Lanka, the aforementioned father from Tamil Nadu had this to say:

My child learns Tamil literature here and this changes his personal convictions. Furthermore, he can interact with other Tamils anywhere. We bond together powerfully through this center’s efforts. Even Norwegians do not have this kind of amity and solidarity that we have for each other among Tamils. This center does more than educate—they create and shape good citizens for Norway. I feel that if there was no struggle in Sri Lanka, this center would never have been built. Thankfully, once built it, is sustained by the political energy back home,

although both Prabhakaran and this center had the sense to separate the political and the educational. This center has become the rock of the community.

In addition to enhancing the quality of education, another reason for the popularity of TRCC and Anna Poopathi is the cause of Tamil Eelam, which will be considered next.

Tamil Eelam and future concerns.

In the interview, Professor Fuglerud asserted that the dream of an independent Tamil homeland lives more strongly among the diaspora, such as in Norway, than in Sri Lanka. Referring to his research in Sri Lanka among Tamils in the Jaffna peninsula, he states that many appear to have grown weary of the war and just desire to get on with their lives. This is underscored by the views solicited during the interviews. Not once did the author come across any suggestions that the dream of Tamil Eelam was abandoned or even compromised. Significantly, the responses demonstrate the conflation between Tamil oppression and the drive for educational excellence.

Obviously, given our history, we invest more in education here in Norway because I have personally heard of Tamils who scored the best grades but were denied admission to university in Sri Lanka. We are motivated by the notion of Tamil Eelam—i.e., independence and sovereignty for Tamils in Sri Lanka (35-year-old father).

The 42-year old father from Tamil Nadu employed the analogy of cricket to explain Tamil Eelam and the drive behind educational success.

Tamils in Tamil Nadu loved the West Indies cricket team even more than that of India. In the heyday of Sir Vivian Richards, we used to rejoice whenever they beat the British. Why? Obviously, this transcends cricket—the entire history of British oppression in the Caribbean motivated the West Indies. There is something similar going on with the Tamil diaspora and the manner they apply themselves to education.

The 31-year-old mother with a UK degree shared that her parents enrolled her when she was just two years old, when TRCC was inaugurated.

The struggle for independence has definitely influenced me as an individual. Here, our motivation is interwoven with the struggles back home. The language is important to keep contact with relatives back

home. Keep in mind there are many Tamils in the West also and the only means of communication we have, for example between Tamil children in Germany and Norway, is through communication in Tamil (e.g., Germany, Norway). Even though I did not grow up in Sri Lanka, I was traumatized in 2009 because of the genocide. I will not be able to live freely in Sri Lanka because of the oppression.

Respondents were in no doubt about the importance the notion of Tamil Eelam has played in forging a focused and successful Tamil community in Norway. Significantly, while acknowledging the value of TRCC, many were candid in acknowledging the success came at some cost to personal freedom. In order to cohere and sustain the success achieved, deviation from the community's norms were frowned upon. When asked whether this was sustainable in light of the defeat of The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the militant organization fighting for an independent Tamil state in 2009, and contemporary challenges for a generation that is geographically dislocated from the homeland, several began to divulge personal opinions about their own upbringing and their concerns for the youth.

I was not permitted to go to town before I was twenty. If we control our children too much, they can rebel. I am second generation Tamil in Norway and I am not going to ban my daughter from going to town and socialize with her friends. I will advise her about consequences but she must make the choice. Our culture does not look too kindly upon youth who go to town and binge drink, have boyfriends, etc. We need a balance here. I am concerned about keeping our cultural traditions alive. I myself dance the kavadi during Pongal and other festivals (30 year old male).

I had a conservative upbringing, but my brother was given more freedom. Our parents were very afraid in regard to the Norwegian culture so they were very controlling. Fortunately, now that they know what going to a restaurant or club entails, they are more liberal. Girls are definitely more monitored; morals are important for Tamils. Since we are a tight-knit community, news spreads like a virus, but now the community is bigger and close monitoring is not possible. Still, though, one must behave carefully (31-year-old female).

Another father, reflecting on the crushing defeat of the militant organization, LTTE in 2009, stated, "There was a time, because of what happened in 2009, that I was very afraid that everything would be destroyed; there was talk of intelligence infiltration and fragmentation etc., but thankfully this has not transpired." Another

father was of the opinion that the world is yet to see the fallout from the events of 2009.

Other communities respond immediately and often with violence. Not Tamils. We wait, study the situation and, once we have the full facts before us, will respond uncompromisingly for eternity if necessary. We do not forget. We have not forgotten for centuries.

Classroom Observations

The classroom observations at TRCC were conducted to supplement the data gathered from the interviews with Tamil parents. In Norway, the notion of children attending schools on a Sunday is anathema. In addition, the fact that teaching was done on a voluntary basis without remuneration in the weekend is uncommon in Norway and needed further explanation. In addition, Norwegian education is highly centralized with a national curriculum, teacher certification and assessment of students among others. None of these factors were binding upon the teaching activities at TRCC. Furthermore, as the interviewees shared, they believed TRCC combined high quality education delivered through a Tamil ethnic lens. The above constitutes a kind of “alternative education” and, as such, it was felt that some data elicited through classroom observations would be salient.

While observing a 7th grade class in session in TRCC on a Sunday, one cannot fail to notice the walls filled with brightly coloured charts in Tamil. A 20-year old female teacher was teaching science along with a 25-year-old male assistant who sat beside a student obviously needing extra attention. Some of the charts carried themes familiar from Tamil education in Sri Lanka, such as Bharat Natyam, elephants and spices common in Tamil cuisine, while other charts depicted *The Scream* by Munch, *The Taj Mahal* and the *Mona Lisa*. This syncretic approach was reminiscent of one interviewee’s words: “Tamils are very tolerant. We are secular and visit the holy places of other religions.”

The teachers, although wearing casual attire, were very focused and determined to stick to the textbooks. The six boys appeared to be the only active ones in during the lesson with the seven girls attentive, but quiet. One boy asked, “Do we have real iron in the body?” When the teachers were later asked about the gender segregation during the interview, they replied that this was the choice of the students. Compared to some Norwegian classrooms, the discipline was commendable. Students took notes vigorously as the teacher wrote on the board much of the time. The topic turned to energy and calories which were calculated in kilojoules. When questions were raised about what happens during and after physical training, the male teacher stepped in. When asked why they sacrificed their free time on a Sunday teaching voluntarily at this center, both stated that they had been students at Anna Poopathi since childhood and feel that they “owe” the center

for some of their success. The female is an undergraduate studying nanotechnology at the University of Oslo while the male is pursuing a second Bachelor's degree in Economics. While both were aware of the oppression of Tamils in Sri Lanka, they were of the opinion that this does not drive their commitment to succeed in Norway. "The burning of the Library in Jaffna etc. belongs to the era of our parents. They seem very remote to our existence here" (female teacher).

In another 9th grade class in information technology, there were three students from non-Tamil backgrounds. The teacher, a middle-aged Tamil male with a Masters in pedagogy, later shared that these students were from Pakistan, Iran and an unspecified West-African country. After a lesson where students learned about the functions of diverse parts of the brain (hypothalamus, amygdala, etc.), the students went to the computer room where they were divided into groups and played a quiz game with revision questions about the brain. He also confirmed the author's observation that the non-Tamil students appeared to be more disruptive and often asked about the break. Tamil students, he believed had been taught from an early age to kowtow to Tamil cultural norms of behaviour in regard to people with authority, such as teachers, while this is relatively new for the others. There was the insinuation that contrary to mainstream Norwegian schools, where teachers struggle with behaviour management, Tamil students are well behaved and more time can be dedicated to teaching.

Discussion and Conclusion

Commensurate with Bourdieu's (1986) theory of cultural capital existing in, among others, an "embodied state" or habitus, the findings highlight the salience of Tamil-Norwegian parents' educational background in Sri Lanka. It is argued that this dimension of Tamil-Norwegian students' educational success in Norway is not sufficiently highlighted by scholars in the field of minority education. Bourdieu's reference to this dimension as "the best hidden form of hereditary transmission of capital" (1986, p. 108) is apposite. The differential educational outcomes among diverse Norwegians from minority backgrounds are without doubt a concern for the authorities in an egalitarian country that has dominated the United Nations Human Development Index (UN Development Programme, 2016). This study, it is hoped, contributes modestly to research that explores why some minorities do better than others in education. While the Tamil case in this study may appear parochial and with limited transferability, it is commensurate with the late African-American educator, John Ogbu's call for more research that adequately accounts for the differential results within and across minority groups (Ogbu, 1993). Ogbu states for instance that "Black Americans appeared to face severe challenges as a whole when compared to Africans from West Africa in the USA, or the Japanese Buraku, who perform poorly in Japan, but do well in the USA (Ogbu, 1993, p. 484). While none of the interviewees were willing to countenance notions of elitism or privilege, the

fact that nearly all stated that their parents had degrees from back home, prioritized educational achievements and influenced them to pursue degrees in Norway, is significant. Fuglerud's observation that many among the Tamil diaspora in Norway come from middle and upper class landowning castes, such as the Vellalars, is also pertinent.

In addition, Bourdieu & Passeron (1990) speak about "pedagogic authority" as the enduring effort applied in order to achieve a particular habitus. This habitus begins early and must be consistently applied over several years. With respect to the Tamil-Norwegians in this study, findings appear to suggest the inculcation of a specific habitus—one that instills early the narrative of a talented, but persecuted people through the efforts of TRCC and Anna Poopathi. This ethos is summed up in the words of the interviewee who stated: "Education became the ground zero of our battles with dominant groups, especially with the Sinhalese. Education liberates is our mantra." For educators, this perception of education as an "anti-hegemonic weapon" is significant, albeit not unique, when one considers the manner in which Fidel Castro's nascent revolution prioritized mass literacy and education. As Breidlid states with respect to Cuba:

1961 was termed "The Year of Education", aimed at eradicating illiteracy throughout the island. The literacy campaign transcended mere educational objectives. It was the intention of the revolutionary government to use education in the struggle against neo-colonialism and imperialism. (Breidlid, 2007, p. 621)

As the issue of Tamil Eelam and identity often punctuated the responses of the interviewees, it is argued that this identity must necessarily be demarcated as oppositional to the "oppressive" Sinhalese one that looms large in the background. The interviewees often referred to a litany of grievances the claimed Tamils suffered at the hands of the dominant Sinhalese. The burning of the irreplaceable Jaffna Library with ancient Tamil documents, the lack of access to university for Tamils and the 2009 military campaign against the Tamil LTTE—which the interviewees insisted was a genocide—are some of the reasons for demarcating their identities in opposition to the dominant Sinhalese one. It is argued, then, that the mission of TRCC and Anna Poopathi is, without being reductionist, one where education is recruited as a handmaiden of Tamil Eelam—the cherished dream of uniting Tamil people in one sovereign homeland. The center, perceived as a Bourdieusian field, is a social space tasked with disseminating the doxa of Tamil Eelam. Such a lens furnishes a powerful motive for concentrating the resources of Tamils and explains the substantive sacrifices parents and children are willing to make sitting for hours in classrooms on a Sunday in a country that has earned a reputation for sensibly balancing work and leisure. Norwegian society frowns upon

the idea of children sitting in classrooms on a Sunday. Commensurate with Bourdieu's observation, the acquisition of habitus comes at a personal cost. This loss of freedom takes the form of policing of gender roles and sending children to TRCC to sit in classrooms and learn in the weekends. This personal cost or "socially constituted form of libido" entails some "privation, renunciation and sacrifice" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 107). This cost is ameliorated by the tangible benefits TRCC can boast. One way to understand these benefits is to compare the Center's work to what Carnoy et al., (2007, p. 11) call "state-generated-social capital" in the context of Cuba. The Center, in other words, makes its considerable cultural capital available to committed members and brings its considerable cultural and social capital to bear in "universalizing" this capital.

That about 75% of Tamil children are enrolled in TRCC-related activities is a testament to the community's dedication and the wide support it enjoys. This study did not uncover anything to suggest that the crushing defeat of 2009 has dampened this ardour. Tamils have after all endured centuries of alternating states of uneasy truces and open conflicts vis-à-vis New Delhi (Indian Tamils) and Colombo (Sri Lankan Tamils). The interviews shed light on reasons for the Center's success such as the unstinting support of the parents. As one father stated, "The difference between the Norwegian schools and this organization is that here the parents can join the children and be a visible part of their learning—it combines valuable education with a home environment. There is a Tamil canteen and the teachers are from Tamil background—all this helps the children socially. Identity and familiarity are key factors." This point was underscored in the classroom observations where Tamil graduates taught Tamil students. The ambience—the "indigenized" charts and code switching between Tamil and Norwegian—make for a culturally sensitive pedagogy. The above observation is also amplified when considered in light of Bourdieu's (1986) statement that early domestic education, in addition to the positive values, has the additional effect of rectifying unwanted values. By this is meant that the Center takes on the role of a "parallel school" which not only remedies academic failings of mainstream schools, but inculcates values amenable to Tamil Eelam.

The work of TRCC and Anna Poopathi has not gone unrecognized among government officials in Norway. The author was shown a letter of commendation written by the then Prime Minister of Norway and current General Secretary of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg, congratulating TRCC on its 15-year anniversary. In the letter, efforts towards spreading Tamil culture, serving as a meeting point for Tamil parents and children, provision of tuition and relief efforts in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami were highlighted. The Center has received about 723,000 USD over the course of a decade from the authorities in recognition of their work.

While the example of TRCC is edifying from the perspective of multicultural education, the question of the transferability of such cultural capital to other,

struggling minority groups in Norway is limited. The educational success of Tamil-Norwegians has been buoyed serendipitously by the immigration to Norway of the middle and upper classes of the social strata. Furthermore, education is harnessed to not only empower students to navigate in the Norwegian educational landscape, but, crucially, is baptized by the parents in the ideology of Tamil Eelam. The aggregate of agents in this field (parents in particular) pool their resources and produce TRCC as an objectified state, with for example classrooms and textbooks in Tamil as the physical incarnations of Tamil Eelam in Norway. Other minority groups in Norway may possess some of these ingredients, but, overall, lack other crucial ones and, vitally, the indefatigable determination of Tamils in Norway to galvanize their members. The Somali community in Norway, the largest non-western minority, for instance (Thomas, 2016), may share several commonalities (e.g., religion and language) but has been unable to supersede the barriers erected by the political north vs. south divide. By this I mean the as of yet unresolved split between northern and southern Somalis in Norway has demonstrated the salience of harnessing a “home-grown” cultural capital similar to that of the Tamil community in Norway. This cultural capital has been adapted and honed through institutions such as TRCC and Anna Poopathi, which effectively serve as “shadow schools” ameliorating academic deficiencies and instilling Tamil culture. TRCC can be usefully perceived as an educational field working within the larger official educational field and “universalizing” the cultural capital aggregated through its members to the whole community.

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