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Tucker, Jason Edward

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PO Box 117
221 00 Lund
+46 46-222 00 00

Statelessness and Poverty Reduction through the Lens of Structural Violence: A Short Essay

Jason Tucker
Malmö University

To better understand and tackle poverty amongst stateless people it is proposed here that statelessness be considered through the lens of structural violence. While it is a contested termⁱ, when discussing statelessness here, I refer to someone ‘who is not considered as a national by any State under the operation of its law’.ⁱⁱ

There are vast inequalities within the world system depending on if one holds citizenship of a state or if one is stateless.ⁱⁱⁱ Paraphrasing Farmer *et al*'s seminal work, with this inequality in mind, statelessness could thus be considered a form of social arrangement that puts those affected by it in harm's way.^{iv} It is “embedded in ubiquitous social structures [and] normalized by stable institutions and regular experience”.^v “The arrangements are structural because they are embedded in the political and economic organization of our social world”^{vi}, and “[they] are violent because they result in avoidable deaths, illness, and injury; and they reproduce violence by marginalizing people and communities, constraining their capabilities and agency, assaulting their dignity, and sustaining inequalities.”^{vii}

The denial of citizenship of any state can render people disproportionately vulnerable. The right to a citizenship is not only a human right in and of itself, but the lack of any citizenship can amplify, facilitate, or multiply the violation of other human rights.^{viii}

The definition of harm caused by structural violence is a useful analytical lens when

discussing poverty reduction amongst stateless people. This is because harm is not only claimed to be caused by explicit violence against stateless individuals or communities, but also by states - as the ultimate authority in the regulation of citizenship - allowing for the creation and perpetuation of statelessness. Therefore, indifference towards resolving statelessness, or protecting those who are stateless, is not seen as a neutral position, (a position often justified as resulting from a lack of political will or resources), but one that maintains a structure of violence: It is a deliberate and active act of violence.

While the 1954 Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons^{ix} and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness^x are useful legal benchmarks, states' compliance with these should not lead to the assumption that the structural violence of statelessness has been resolved.

Taking structural violence as our lens facilitates analysis of the causes and consequences of statelessness at various levels, at different times and across spaces. This allows for a more contextualized understanding that shine a light on previously invisible structures and the political and economic organization of the social worlds within which the stateless live. Doing so is not only necessary for understanding statelessness, but also for addressing the poverty that arises as a result.^{xi}

In addition, this structural understanding allows for a greater appreciation of the

interrelated nature of the SGDs and how this relates to statelessness. For example, poverty reduction for stateless people cannot be achieved without removing gender discrimination in nationality, (under Goal 5), or ensuring access to a legal identity, (Goal 16.9). It also allows for statelessness to be addressed more sustainably by deconstructing the structures that perpetuate it at the local, regional, national and international level.

Seeing statelessness as a form of structural violence explains why statelessness is not normally temporary; indeed, it is notoriously difficult to resolve. Statelessness is largely

protracted, often indefinite^{xii} and intergenerational.^{xiii} While there has been some progress in solving some stateless situations, these are rare, and new cases are constantly arising.

In seeking to facilitate the agency of the stateless to access basic needs, by deconstructing the structures that constrain them, we would also be working towards a solution to statelessness. This is because challenging the structural violence of statelessness, reducing poverty and finding solutions to statelessness are all one and the same.

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- ⁱ Tucker, J. (2014). Questioning de facto Statelessness: By Looking at de facto Citizenship. *Tilburg Law Review*, 19(1-2), 276-284. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1163/22112596-01902026>
- ⁱⁱ United Nations Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons (adopted 28 September 1954, entered into force 6 June 1960) 360 UNTS 117, art 1(1).
- ⁱⁱⁱ Kingston, L.N., 2017. Worthy of rights: Statelessness as a cause and symptom of marginalisation. In *Understanding statelessness* (pp. 17-34). Routledge.
- ^{iv} Farmer, P., Nizeye, B., Stulac, S., & Keshavjee, S. (2006). Structural Violence and Clinical Medicine. *PLoS Medicine*, 3(10).
- ^v Winter, D. D., & Leighton, D. C. (2001). Structural violence. In D. J. Christie, R. V. Wagner, & D. D. Winter (Eds.), *Peace, conflict, and violence: Peace psychology in the 21st century*. New York: Prentice-Hall.
- ^{vi} Farmer *et al*, 'Structural Violence and Clinical Medicine'.
- ^{vii} Rylko-Bauer, B., & Farmer, P. (2016). Structural Violence, Poverty, and Social Suffering. In D. Brady & L. M. Burton (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Social Science of Poverty*.
- ^{viii} Tucker, J. (2013). The Humanitarian Side of Statelessness: Statelessness within the Framework of the Millennium Development Goals. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2220802>
- ^{ix} United Nations Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons 1954
- ^x Weis, P., 1962. The United Nations Convention on the reduction of statelessness, 1961. *International & Comparative Law Quarterly*, 11(4), pp.1073-1096
- ^{xi} Tucker, J. (2014). Challenging the tyranny of citizenship: statelessness in Lebanon (PhD dissertation, University of Bath). Retrieved from <https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:mau:diva-46683>
- ^{xii} Tucker, J. (2017). The Indefinite Statelessness of Refugees in Denmark and Sweden: Comparing the Impacts of the Temporary Asylum Laws. Retrieved from Malmö Institute for Studies of Migration, Diversity and Welfare (MIM) website: <https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:mau:diva-12950>
- ^{xiii} Al Barazi, Z. and Tucker, J., 2017. Challenging the disunity of statelessness in the Middle East and North Africa. In *Understanding Statelessness* (pp. 87-101). Routledge.