Protest against Sexual Violence and NGO Activism: Disruptions of Female Solidarity

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Abstract: This article examines the mobilisation of protest against an aggravated sexual assault of women from the urban poor in Chennai, South India. All women who participate in the protest are organised in a local women's rights NGO but their attempts to mobilize the NGO for the protest remain without success. By reference to narrations of women who organise and/or participate in the protest as well as the NGO director and staff, the article interrogates previous works about dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in practices of political mobilisation in India. The guiding question is, with reference to which moral and normative backgrounds the instance is rendered into an issue worthy of public intervention by women and how this definition of the situation is put into doubt by the NGO. On the basis of the empirical findings and literature about civil society and the public sphere in India as well as literature about development cooperation, I argue that the mobilisation of protest cannot be understood as a process of 'translation' (of concepts relevant in the NGO). Instead, women refer to a common form of female lamentation to render the incident into a 'women's issue'. Subsequently, I argue that the missing cooperation between NGO and women is not a result of this missing translation into a language that is accepted among civil society actors. Instead, it is useful to understand it as an outcome of situational processes of the actualisation of necessarily always vague normative ideas. I show how, in these processes, diverse, and sometimes conflicting, moral and normative references intersect to lead to practices of inclusion and exclusion in protest mobilisation.

During 2014 and 2015 I frequently visited an urban slum called Arangkarai[2] in South Chennai, to collect data for my PhD project.[3] In February 2015, I once again was heading towards Arangkarai, together with Padmavathy, my research assistant, and Sarvitha, who lived in Arangkarai and had become my friend. Just turning off the main road towards Arangkarai, we met a group of five women on their way home. They seemed agitated and stopped Sarvitha to talk to her. It transpired that an aggravated sexual assault had been committed in Arangkarai, provoking the women to anger. They just came back from the hospital, where they had visited the victim of the assault whose name was Vasantha. Women were frustrated and angry that the perpetrator – another woman named Preethi – was not yet under police arrest. They decided that Sarvitha should get in contact with an NGO that frequently organised women's rights programmes and trainings in Arangkarai to discuss what could be done.[4] A few days later, my phone rang. I picked up and Sarvitha started speaking to me in an excited tone, I heard the sound of the hustle and bustle of the road and other women discussing and shouting in the background. She related that Vasantha had died in the previous night and that they currently were blocking a junction nearby Arangkarai with a couple of women to protest against the sexually-violent assault and its consequences. She asked me to send the current phone numbers of the NGO staff and director, whom she wanted to ask to support their protest.

The next day, I headed to Arangkarai with the aim to find out what exactly had happened. All women I talked to gave me a somewhat similar account of the sexually-violent assault and its antecedents. Preethi and Vasantha were known in the area for having been very close friends in the past. It was 'a well-known truth' (*potu uṇmai*) that Vasantha conducted an affair with Preethi's brother-in-law (Arun). They had this affair while her husband was

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[2] All names of persons, organisations and places used in this paper are pseudonyms.

[3] The present article analyses material collected during the field research for my PhD thesis in 2014 and 2015. The project involved 7 months of field research – preceded by 10 months of internships and field research for my Master thesis, stretching over a period from 2009 to 2012 – with women's rights NGOs in Tamil Nadu. The interviews have been conducted in Tamil and were simultaneously translated to English. Afterwards, I produced exact translations of the Tamil parts of the interviews with the help of native speakers. The quotes analysed in the present paper stem from these exact translations.

[4] This NGO served as my conduit to Arangkarai and Sarvitha had been a local staff earlier.

still alive (he died some years back) and he was aware of it. Two years back, for reasons that are not clear, a conflict started between Vasantha and Preethi. People from Arangkarai witnessed a couple of fights between them, one including Preethi's neighbours (a so called 'pipe fight'[5]). They knew that Preethi and Vasantha had gone to the police station frequently to settle their fights. A year back, people from Arangkarai had filed a complaint against Preethi and Vasantha at the local police station because of their constant public fighting. The police officer advised Preethi to move away and she did so, moving to the nearby Housing Board block.[6] People thought – mistakenly, it transpired – that the conflict was resolved. Arangkarai's women report that Preethi started to accuse Vasantha of having an affair with her husband. These accusations escalated into aggravated sexual violence: Vasantha was beaten up, kicked in her genitals and violated with a rod by Preethi, Preethi's husband and other relatives of Preethi. After an unsuccessful attempt to file an FIR[7] at the local police station Vasantha immolated herself using kerosene[8]. She was hospitalised and the events I described above kicked in. Three days later she died in hospital. The following day, women organised the spontaneous protest at a nearby junction.

In the following two months, I continued visiting Arangkarai, remained in contact with Vasantha's family, and talked to women who were willing to discuss with me about what had happened, how they evaluated the incident and about their participation in the protest. The present article is an attempt to understand how the protest became possible. It is also an attempt, to understand why the NGO did not pay heed to the request of the

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[5] Women refer to the term 'pipe fight' when they talk about (small) fights in the neighbourhood. They explain that the origin of the term are small fights occurring when women wait for their turn at the public water pipe.

[6] The Housing Board of Tamil Nadu is the administrative unit which is responsible for publicly funded housing programmes all over Chennai. A lot of former slum settlers have already shifted or been forced to shift to such Housing Board blocks. The larger settlements of the Housing Board are referred to as resettlement areas and are located at the outskirts of Chennai.

[7] The filing of a First Information Report (FIR) is the necessary first step to initiate a police investigation and file a court case. Cases which are seen as less serious offences, domestic violence matters being an example, can be filed in the Community Service Register (CSR) as being potentially solvable by mediation and compromise (Kethineni 2009: 24).

[8] To fully understand the background of this incident, it seems important to know that female suicides are horribly regular amongst slum women in Chennai (Kapadia 2014: 242-3). Also, Roberts notes that 'the most common method of female suicide was tīkkuḷittal ("bath of fire"): the woman doused herself in "Krisna oil" (kerosene) and lighted a match' (Roberts 2016: 81).

women. Such insight into the mobilisation of protest amongst women from the urban poor seems promising for providing a new outlook on dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in practices of political mobilisation in India. Since women try to make the NGO responsive to their protest, the case also allows to draw conclusions about relationships between NGOs and their 'target groups'. In a first part, I describe the setting in which the incident took place – Arangkarai – more detailed. Subsequently, the argument will be developed in three steps. In the first, and longest part, I ask how women frame the incident (in contrast to most men and some women) as matter worthy of public intervention by looking at their narrations about the incident thoroughly. Behind this approach lies the intention to understand which moral and normative justifications enable the mobilisation of protest against a sexually-violent assault in the present case: How do women render the incident into a 'women's issue'? In a second step, I describe how the NGO reacted towards the queries of women to support the protest. Finally, and with the aim to draw conclusions, I contrast the present case with literature about the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in the public sphere and civil society in India as well as literature about hierarchies in development projects.

THE SETTING

Most of the women I talked to participated in programmes of a women's rights NGO which organised regular meetings and trainings in Arangkarai. The centrepiece of the NGO's work are diverse programmes for women's empowerment, e.g. vocational trainings, as well as trainings aimed at sensitising for women's rights. Whereas the women who form the 'target groups' of the NGO are part of the urban poor, the organisation's founders and most of its social workers live in middle class districts of the city. A majority is educated to Master's degree level. The NGO also employs area staffs who are residents of the areas in which it operates, mostly urban slums or resettlement areas for the urban poor in the outskirts of Chennai. The head office of the NGO is located in a mixed (lower) middle class area in South Chennai.

As Arangkarai is adjacent to richer, middle class districts, the slum's female residents have opportunities to seek various paid domestic positions:

Most of the women clean several houses or offices each day, some cook for a family or do all the chores in one household, some women work as old people's nurses in private households. Other women own small roadside stalls, selling vegetables or flowers, some (additionally) tie flower garlands in the evening or do small manual tailoring jobs. Their husbands mostly work on construction sites as day labourers, some clean sewage and channels on a daily paid basis or as low-ranking government employees. It is noticeable that a large number of the women organised by the NGO live without their husbands, being widowed or separated from their husbands (e.g. because their husband married a second time[9]). Thus, in most cases, women are crucial to the family income. Nearly all of the families in Arangkarai belong to the *vaṉṉiya (nāyakar) jāti* which is listed as MBC.[10] A lot of the women involved in the protest were living without their husbands and thus felt free to share their opinions. It was more difficult to talk to married women about the incident, possibly due to the scepticism and influence of their husbands. Importantly, Sarvitha remained my close contact in Arangkarai during this time and had a specific position in the organisation of the protest: She is a former NGO staffer and handled the interactions with the organisation, as well as contacts with most other official agencies. All the other women who participated in the protest were more or less regulars in local meetings of the NGO. All except two of the women whose accounts I refer to in this paper are (distant) relatives of one or other of the main parties to the conflict, who both belonged to the same *jāti*: Preethi, who is identified as the perpetrator, and Vasantha, the victim who later committed suicide. The fact that they are (distantly) related is not very surprising since the neighbourhood is socially quite homogeneous and most of the families have lived in Arangkarai for 30 years or more.

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[9] Polygamy is illegal according to Hindu family law. However, most of the marriages in Arangkarai are not officially registered, proving the marriage thus can be a painful procedure.

[10] Jāti is a term that is widely used for 'caste' in India. Due to the reservations for discriminated communities that exist in India, all jāti have been classified into Forward Castes, Other Backward Classes and Scheduled Castes. By referring to the term Most Backward Classes, I use the systematisation of the Tamil bureaucracy which diverges from the systematisation used by the Government of India.

HOW A SEXUALLY-VIOLENT ASSAULT BECOMES A PUBLIC MATTER

Before I start answering the questions posed above by referring to the narrations of women from Arangkarai about the assault and the protest, it is important to note that the basis for the analysis I provide in this article qualifies as gossip.[11] This is not meant to devaluate the narrations of women. As the anthropologist Max Gluckman argued, gossip and scandal are essential for the maintenance of group unity and the upholding of morals and values esteemed in that group, possibly in distinction from the morality of other groups (Gluckman 1963). Criticising that Gluckman exaggerates the harmonising consequences of gossip, Sally E. Merry assesses that 'gossip circulates around ambiguous situations: those with multiple rules, conflicting versions of the facts or undetermined facts, and uncertainty about the application of moral rules' (Merry 1997: 53). Looking at how the women relate the brutal assault and the subsequent suicide of the victim seems a fruitful way to understand which multiple norms and (maybe conflicting) versions of morals are at stake and make their protest possible and meaningful.

Sexual relationships as 'stomach business' or prostitution

All narratives ponder upon the question of whether Vasantha and Preethi were 'good' or 'bad' women. This became especially virulent since both women were known in Arangkarai for having (an) affair(s)[12]. In the following I will ask how Vasantha's affair(s) are described and briefly contrast these with narratives about Preethi.

    In early reports about what had happened – on the day Vasantha was admitted to hospital – women told me that there was a conflict between two women who were related. Later inquiry revealed that they had re-

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[11] For the present analysis, I refer to eight interviews, in which Padmavathy – my research assistant and translator – and I talked to nine people, six of them female residents of Arangkarai, one male resident (the victim's elder son-in-law), the leader of the NGO and an area staff of Arangkarai, who is not a resident. Apart from that, I am referring to my field notes for non-recorded conversations. I do not have access to official documents regarding the case apart from a newspaper article.

[12] Adultery is punishable under Indian law (Section 497, Indian Penal Code). However, only men are punishable and consensual intercourse of a married woman with another man with the consent of her husband is not punishable.

ferred to it as 'relation' because of the affair Vasantha had with Arun, Preethi's brother-in-law. This initial confusion sets the tone for the narration of Vasantha's relationship with Arun:

> Sarvitha: There is an aunt to Arun who stays in the main road. She's also Preethi's aunt, small mother-in-law. Vasantha used to go there and make garlands. While she went there for making garlands, she got to know Arun and they started meeting and speaking in the neighbourhood. That's how they got to know each other and that's how the affair started. She'll speak with a friendly, smiling face. She doesn't speak angrily at all. If she gets angry, her face looks like this and she'll leave it. She won't even remember that she was angry. As she spoke with a smiling, friendly face that's how the affair started. Her husband himself didn't mind at all. When the husband himself doesn't mind, who else will bother to question her? That's why everyone stayed silent. He [Arun – JV] also got married. His wife also knows it. His wife questioned him but the fight stayed within themselves. Also, she didn't hand over her husband or Vasantha to the police. If she had done this, we could have blamed them publicly.

Vasantha's affair with Arun is explained by reference to Vasantha's 'good character': She is described as a pleasant, friendly, smiling woman. Those characteristics are also referred to, when women underline that she was a good woman: She didn't quarrel, she didn't get angry, she didn't complain, she didn't say any hurtful words against others, she didn't involve herself in fights. These attributes which mark Vasantha as the 'good' woman closely resemble upper-caste/class[13] discourses: obedience, patience, softness as opposed to disobedience, impatience, and loudness or aggressiveness (Kapadia 1995: 173). Her sexuality, however, totally fails to fit into rigid upper-caste/class norms.

Interestingly, women talk about Vasantha's affair in a way which is not, predominantly, sexualised. Instead, they emphasise that the affair was a 'well-known truth' (*potu uṇmai*) in Arangkarai and that even Vasantha's

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[13] In this paper I use the notation caste/class to point to deep interferences between social inequalities due to caste and class. Far from being only a theoretical subtlety, this notation seems to resonate with definitions of people who experience discrimination due to caste/class (Roberts 2016: 54-80).

husband knew about it when he was still alive and didn't care. They indicate that the affair could have been a matter of public condemnation – if Arun's wife had complained to police – but that it never acquired such a status. The ambivalent reference to Vasantha and Preethi as relatives in the beginning becomes understandable in this setting: The relationship between Arun and Vasantha was silently tolerated, even though they were not married and even though Arun was officially living with his wife.

When women talk about Preethi's allegation that Vasantha had an affair with her husband, the narrations take a different turn. This affair, most definitely, was not a 'well-known truth', women are not very sure whether the accusation is true. Those who consider that it might be true argue that 'having affairs' is a means to feed oneself and one's children:

> Sreeha: God only knows whether they are good people or bad people. Till today she never even opened her mouth to say a hurtful word [*paṭukkuṉu*]. Even if you ask whether something is wrong, she will just smile and go away. She will never speak about it. She is doing it just as a stomach business [*vayattu poḻappukku*]. It's you who should keep your husband under control, what do you think?

Sarvitha addresses Vasantha's daughters in her relation of the incident. She talks about the (alleged) affair(s) as a mistake Vasantha made for her daughters' sake, without a clear reference to Arun or Preethi's husband:

> Sarvitha: Will all the children stay silent like you? The mistakes she did were for your sake and not for her luxurious life! It is for her daughters' sake that she earned in that way. It was for her daughters that she earned. When you don't even take up the responsibility of defending the rights [*urimai*] of your own mother, you are worthless being a daughter!

Whereas the anthropologist Nathaniel Roberts made the observation in a slum in North Chennai that husbands or other men are a crucial source of financial support since waged work for women is generally not available (Roberts 2016: 87), the situation differs significantly in Arangkarai, as I described above. Thus, it is not very clear whether Vasantha's motivation for the affair had been to seek male support to fill her, and her daughters', belly. One factor against this explanation might be that the same women

who argue that Vasantha engaged in affair(s) for financial reasons also state that Arun frequently threatened Vasantha publicly, harassing her for money. Nonetheless, more importantly, the assumption that affairs can be 'stomach business' is based on the common ideal that women have to be provided for by men, ideally husbands or close kin (see also Still 2014: 195).

The argument that one sacrifices everything for the sake of one's children is very common, especially among women living without their husbands. Most often, the argument will be made in reference to the hard work one has been doing and the difficult life one has in general. The view that affairs are 'stomach business' has to be understood in reference to this discourse: a specific lower-caste/class discourse about women (living without their husbands) and the different types of 'difficulties' (*kaṣṭam*) they face in making ends meet and being good mothers to their children. Kalpana Ram argues that the discourse about repeated sufferings in a woman's life (after marriage), is part of the genre of female lament in Tamil Nadu which extensively feeds into biographical narratives of women (Ram 2013: 205). According to Ram, the suffering originates in an inconsistency between idealised representations of the female life-cycle and actual experiences of women (ibid.: 202). Whereas women in idealised representations are assumed to achieve *cakti* (Sanskrit: *śakti*, translated as ability, energy, power) through the following of specific life cycle rituals which culminate in being a child-bearing, married woman, the experience of women is rather that of a premature confrontation with the burdens of marriage (Ram 2007). Women mourn the premature ejection from their natal home and the inability of their marital family to fulfill their role as provider and safe haven (Ram 2013: 205; see also Ram 2007). Ram argues that these 'narratives provide little warrant for drawing a distinction between injustices specific to family life and those that might be explained by social class and labor exploitation' (Ram 2013: 205). I would argue, however, that the discourses which women refer to in order to partly legitimise Vasantha's affair as 'stomach business' are definitely class-specific. The framing of non-marital relationships as something women do only for the sake of their children seizes on the discourse of a whole lot of difficulties lower caste/class (and especially 'single') women face in seeking to survive.

Some women also consider that Preethi's accusation is a lie intended to sully Vasantha's reputation before the police.

> Sarvitha: Lot of people were there. Preethi and her husband were complaining to the *police*[14] man near the *jeep*: 'Sir, she is not allowing me to be peaceful at all. She is disturbing me even when I sleep by calling me to sleep with her. I didn't say anything to my wife, Sir. While I was coming back from work once, she beat me up, Sir.' The *police* man threatened Vasantha by saying: 'He is a guy. Would he even lie in this matter?' and he lifted a wooden log to beat her. […] Preethi and her husband said she [Vasantha – JV] set up people to rape their daughter. […] Just after giving this *fake complaint* Preethi beat her up. She did it so that even if Vasantha gives a *complaint*, the *police* won't accept it. She also gave another *case*, as Vasantha chased her husband everywhere and asked him for money, asked him to give her a life [as a second wife – JV].

While I'm not able to trace this way of interacting with the police detailed here, it is interesting that (falsely) accusing a woman of 'asking' for sex with another woman's husband is thought of as effective in influencing the police and their procedures. Two things become clear from this quote: First, even though women argue that Vasantha's affair(s) were to some extent tolerated, the public discussion of affairs seems to put women in a very vulnerable position, in which their 'righteousness' can be questioned easily and with dramatic effect. Second, another woman, Preethi, is described as the active party in the assault on Vasantha, her husband merely figures as passive supporter, ridiculing himself in front of the police.

The affairs of Preethi are described very differently to both the (alleged) affairs of Vasantha. The men Preethi had affairs with don't have any names, they are 'a police guy', 'a *pāppan̲*'[15], 'a lawyer', 'a crip'. Preethi's affairs are often paraphrased as 'men she's having under her control', some women refer to her as a demon (*rākṣasī*[16]). The following quote gives an example of how her affairs are described:

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[14] English words which are emphasised in italics in the transcription were originally used in English.
[15] Pāppan̲ is a derogatory term used for Brahmins in Tamil Nadu.
[16] *Rākṣasī* is the female form of demons in Hindu mythology.

> Kirusha: She [Preethi – JV] worked in a house of a lawyer. She has this lawyer under her control. There is a guy in house number 7 who limps. She's also having him under her control. She will fuck [*aṭikka aṭikka paṇattu*] him in the middle of the night. She goes secretly, wearing a Purdah. She will climb the wall and jump inside the backyard to fool money out of him. Look, how arrogant this whore [*tēvuṭiyā*] is. So self-centered. Shouldn't she be giving commission to the person who got her this guy?

The narratives extensively refer to the sexual behaviour of both women and seek to link these behaviours directly to their 'bad' or 'good' 'character'. There seems to be a spectrum of – more or less – tolerated types of sexual relationships apart from an actual marriage, legitimised by the tying of the *tāli* (a necklace that the groom ties around the bride's neck). However, these 'affairs' are not per se tolerated, sometimes they become conflicts negotiated at the local police office. In academic discourse, it is commonly assumed that lower caste/class women in some sense enjoy greater freedom, since they most often do work outside their own home and thus enjoy greater mobility (Kapadia 2002: 3). Women themselves don't frame the 'mobility' related to their work as a possibility to get access to the 'outside world' and achieve new knowledge or meet new people (like some women do with reference to the activities they pursue being part of the NGO). Instead, it is seen as one in the series of difficulties and sufferings women face, as a necessary and wearying 'mobility' which is caused by a neglect of sufficient familial and spousal care. The reference to the narrative form of lamentation, however, seems to help partly legitimise a broader spectrum of sexual relationships in portraying a woman who has (an) affair(s) as good mother who is committing a 'mistake' to make ends meet.

In most of the narratives, Vasantha is clearly established as 'good' – always, to some extent, 'even though' she had an affair. This reading did not, however, win universal acceptance in Arangkarai. The men we met during our visits to Arangkarai were mostly wary of or hostile towards us if we started to ask about Vasantha. Of course, there were exceptions: We talked for example to a close friend of Vasantha's family and to her sons-in-law, who helped to file a court case against Preethi. Sarvitha narrates that there were no men involved in the protest: 'Men don't get involved in this matter

at all. Some men don't open their mouths at all. Some men say: "The dead woman is just a whore [*tēvuṭiyā*]."' This comment also seems to suggest a connection between Vasantha's reputation and the merits of an official pursuit of her case. I will come back to this point below.

Moral policing and female suicide

What would have been a proper reaction to fight against these cases of (alleged) adultery by Preethi or Arun's wife? Why was Preethi's reaction not legitimate? And would there have been any opportunity to prevent the severe sexual violence against or the suicide of Vasantha?

'The public' (*potu makkaḷ, ūr makkaḷ*) had already intervened in the dispute between Vasantha and Preethi: People in Arangkarai filed a complaint because of their frequent public fights and the police asked Preethi to move house. Preethi did so and is now living in a nearby area. Women argue that they didn't interfere between Vasantha and Preethi because they were unaware of the revival of hostilities. Generally, women say that it was only after the sexual assault that they learned of the earlier beating that Preethi had inflicted on Vasantha. Sarvitha argues that Vasantha didn't complain about the beating because she did not want Preethi's accusations to become public knowledge, which would have compromised the life of her daughter who had recently married in a nearby area.

All women assume that the violence Vasantha suffered was related to her (alleged) affair(s):

> Darnika: They [Preethi and Vasantha – JV] were very close friends it seems. Wherever they went, they used to go together. Uh [...]. They say she [Vasantha – JV] had a *touch* [an affair – JV] with her [Preethi's – JV] brother-in-law. Even if that's the case, will one beat and kill for this? Tell me! [T[17].: You're right.] They are saying so many things, not just these. [...] She was bleeding from the uterus because of the beatings, it seems. When she was hospitalized [...]. Will someone beat to that extent? Aiyoyo [expression of distress – JV]. They have beaten her up with rod it seems. That's so painful for me to think. What can you do for that?

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[17] The questions and comments of Padmavathy, my research assistant, are marked with 'T' for translator.

> The mistake is also on his [Arun's – JV] part. If you beat her, why do you spare him?
> Sarvitha: That's what we are questioning. If you are a righteous person and if you are beating your husband […]. If you are beating your husband because he has an affair or burn yourself in anger, we will question. [...] When I do the same mistake of having an affair, how can I go and beat the woman who has an affair with my husband?

It becomes clear that women especially condemn the extent and shamefulness of the violence and question why Preethi only beat Vasantha and not her husband or Arun. Whether beating as reaction to adultery should be condemned per se seems to be not clear, though women question the appropriate choice of object as well as the legitimate extent of the violence.

Also, Sarvitha argues that the legitimacy of your actions depends on your own 'righteousness' (relative to the person you judge and punish). Other women don't stress this point directly. However, the police did not take up Vasantha's complaint because Preethi filed (fake) complaints against her, accusing her of adultery. As I argued above, this shows that engaging in non-marital relationships makes women potentially vulnerable to questioning regarding their 'righteousness'. Thus, the discussion of the 'character' of a woman seems to have an influence on the evaluation of a crime amongst women in Arangkarai, amongst the police and to some extent even in legal procedures (see also Prasad 1999: 492-4).

Whereas the beating is not per se seen as an illegitimate reaction by every woman, and not every woman is so concerned with the question of whether Preethi was in a position to beat Vasantha or not since she herself had affairs, the severity of the beating as well as the sexualised, shameful nature of it are commonly seen as having caused Vasantha's suicide. This is what qualifies the incident as a murder. Not only Darnika (see above), but all women slip between 'suicide' and 'murder' in their narrations. Some women say that after Vasantha's death, they got to know from her daughters as well as the police that Preethi had beaten up Vasantha before. However, in their eyes the incident which led to her suicide stands out:

> T.: Then did she immolate herself not being able to tolerate the pain?
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> Bala: I mean […]. They have beaten her up all over her body, on places which one can't even describe!
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> T.: Oh my god!
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> Bala: First, they've beaten her up on her head. Here [pointing at body part – JV], they stabbed her with a pipe […].
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> Sarvitha: She got beaten up for so many days but never disclosed it to anyone. She used to corner her and beat her till her rage pacified. It's not just once. Only this time she had beaten her up so shamefully [*avamāṉam*] to the level that she had lost her clothes and her honour [*māṉam*].

The women – as well as Vasantha's son-in-law Bala – frame the incident in a way that the severity of it lies especially in its sexual character. The sexual violence caused her 'to lose her honour' (Sarvitha). Importantly, although women blame mostly Preethi, it becomes clear in the narrations that it was Preethi's husband (and thus a man) who committed the most serious part of the violence: the violation with the rod. Apart from the pain, Vasantha was not able to bear the shame: She has been beaten on body parts 'which one can't even describe' (Bala). The descriptions contain much more detail than the few quotes I chose to refer to here. Most of them underline the brutal and sexual character of the crime.

Women also relate that Vasantha tried to reach the hospital after the violation. On her way to the hospital, the police apprehended her because of (false) accusations Preethi made at the police station (she allegedly set up people to rape Preethi's daughter, she allegedly badgered Preethi's husband to have sex with her, Preethi also filed a complaint that Vasantha owed her one lakh Rupees). There seems to have been a confrontation between Preethi and her husband and Vasantha in front of the police. The police did not believe Vasantha and refused to take up her complaint (FIR) against Preethi and it is not very clear what happened afterwards:

> Kirusha: When she [Vasantha – JV] was taken to *hospital*, *police* caught her. The *police* threatened her: 'Are you enacting a play?' and beat her up near the liquor shop. Is there any honour [*māṉam*] left for us? […] Both, female and male *police* hit her in that place.

> Sarvitha: Because she did all this [register false complaints – JV], they didn't take up the *complaint* from Vasantha it seems. Preethi also gave money in the *police station*, it seems, and so they beat them up heavily when they came to give a *complaint*. [T.: All the police people?] A woman *police* beat them up. She has beaten so much and sent them back. Vasantha's daughter itself asked, it seems: 'Instead of you living, you can die. Why should you live when your honour [*māṉam*] is damaged so much?' She could have naturally said that in anger. The *police* woman said that even her daughter asked her like that. In anger, every woman could ask like that. If my birth mother would be shamed like this, even I would ask. Even my daughter would ask. It's not a big thing.

None of the women condemn the violence of the police directly. Vasantha is pitied for the violence she faced from the police, which is also referred to as the final reason which provoked Vasantha to suicide: With the police ignoring her complaint and beating her again, 'there was no honour left' for Vasantha. However, Preethi is seen as perpetrator in this incident, she is also the one who 'caused' the police to beat Vasantha by handing in fake complaints.

Although some of the women I talked to interfered before – in a less 'delicate' matter –, they didn't or couldn't prevent the sexual violence Vasantha faced. It is not very clear whether the incident could have been seen as legitimate if it had been less shameful and brutal and/or if Preethi had not had affairs herself. Women agree, however, that Vasantha made a 'mistake', just as Arun or Preethi's husband. They also agree that the limits of acceptability were definitely passed by the brutal sexual character of the incident. This shameful character caused Vasantha's suicide and makes Preethi and her relatives guilty of homicide in the eyes of the women.

Sexual violence and the negotiation of its public or private character

Since the incident occurred in public, the question of witnesses becomes a common topic in the narrations: If people witnessed the beating, why didn't they intervene? All women who suggest that people were present and watched Vasantha getting beaten up reason that Preethi asked people not to interfere by saying that it is a family matter. Sarvitha, for example, relates: 'If someone questioned they said: "It's our family matter, don't inter-

fere. We don't have any enmity between us. Don't interfere.''' Women narrate that Vasantha's attempts to solicit help were unsuccessful. Sarvitha says: 'Vasantha pleaded someone: "Please inform my daughter or my sister." She even fell down at their feet. Preethi threatened everyone around: "If you inform them, you will face the same situation."' Kirusha relates: 'She sought safety by entering into a guy's house. They shouted at her to get outside, pushed her outside and locked the door.' Sarvitha further states that when a man at one point interfered, the beating stopped: 'Only one young man asked boldly in a threatening tone: "Why all of you are beating a woman like that? Just go away!" Then they stopped. So many people were watching silently.' Sarvitha also explains that she herself was present at the time when the incident took place and saw a group of people at the end of the road. She says that since she saw a man who was involved in another fight, she thought that this fight was going on and didn't realise that Vasantha was being beaten up.

Several points follow from these narrations. 1) Violence and fights in the public area – it's important to have in mind that in a slum a lot of things easily become subject to public surveillance since there is little space for privacy – are not necessarily seen as a reason to interfere. 2) One reason is that those fights can be framed as 'family matters' which do not allow a 'public' interference. 3) It is reasonable to assume that whether or not 'common people' / 'the public' (*potu makkaḷ, ūr makkaḷ*) intervene in a fight depends on how an incident is negotiated on the spectrum of public and private.

If asked directly, women argue that the incident became a public matter since it happened in the public area. However, the question of the public or private character of the incident seemed not to be so easily resolved and was not uncontentious in Arangkarai. Interestingly, Vasantha's daughters insisted that the road was empty when Vasantha was beaten up. Vasantha's son-in-law ended the conversation abruptly when we asked him about people who witnessed the incident: [T.: Everyone was witnessing it, right?] Bala: 'No, everyone there went to attend a function, there was a marriage. They did this when the road was empty. Ok, I have some work…. [leaves].'

What difference does it make whether the road was empty or not? If the road was empty, the incident didn't have the character of a public humiliation of Vasantha and thus would have been less shameful and less 'damag-

ing' for her 'honour'. If it was empty, there would also be no room for accusations against 'the public', who failed to help Vasantha. In order to understand what reason might be responsible for this striking difference in the stories, I want to look at how exactly it became possible that women protested at a nearby junction on the day of Vasantha's death.

The narrative form of lamentation as premise of female solidarity

Instead of the incident being a public matter simply because it happened in the public space, it is actively made a public matter by the way women frame the incident. For the women, the incident was obviously public and worthy of intervention: 20 to 30 women spontaneously blocked a nearby junction on the day Vasantha died, asking the police to conduct a proper investigation and arrest the perpetrators. The police beat them and drove them from the junction, promising to arrest the culprits. I narrated above how they were agitated already before, when Vasantha was still alive, and how they discussed with Sarvitha – the former area staff of the NGO – that they ultimately should find a way to put an end to these things happening in their area. The success in framing the incident as public matter amongst women becomes apparent in narrations, which frame the participation in the protest as a 'requirement' or argue that not participating would cause social harm:

> Paavai: [...] If they come to our house and say that one person is required and if we don't go, they will think bad about us. If we don't go now, then no one will come for us. [T.: Aren't you scared that you face trouble?] P.: I can tell *directly*. We are not scared. It is necessary that we go together. They called one person from each home. 'We need to go.'
> Priya: A lot of people went and so I too went along. That's all. [...] Since everyone went, I too joined. What will you say?: 'Why didn't you come? Everyone came [...].' Ok, I will come. Sh! If everyone dances *ṭappāṅkutu*[18], you have to dance *ṭappāṅkutu*. You can't complain about that to anyone. I went to avoid those kinds of talks.

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[18] A dance commonly danced (by men) during funeral processions in Tamil Nadu.

How did the suicide of Vasantha achieve such a status among women in Arangkarai?

First, it might be helpful to understand why Vasantha's family didn't support the protest. The incident got established as something that couldn't be explained with reference to Vasantha's 'bad character'. Instead it got established as illegitimate questioning of and assault on Vasantha's 'righteousness' which led to her suicide. Women frequently slip between 'murder' and 'suicide' in their narrations. The incident got established as homicide by emphasis on the shameful character of the crime: the brutal sexual violence it included. To underline the shameful character, women extensively relied on narrations about reactions of witnesses. Sarvitha's statement and the reactions of men towards my research assistant and I suggest that women established this understanding of the situation against the understanding of (some) men who referred to Vasantha as a whore, as well as Vasantha's family, who denied that there were any witnesses. To sum up, women made Vasantha's case a public affair by extensively discussing Vasantha's character 'as a woman' – and thus discussing her affair(s) and Preethi's accusations – as well as explicitly narrating the sexual underpinning of the crime. Probably, this way of rendering the incident public gives insights into the reason why Vasantha's family tried to keep the incident from being a 'public affair'. Sarvitha assumes that Vasantha didn't talk about the repeated assaults of Preethi, trying to avoid the public discussion of her allegations. Also, Vasantha's family has been the main source for a newspaper article, which does not mention the (alleged) affair(s) or the sexual character of the crime. In some way, rendering the incident 'public' repeats the humiliation Vasantha faced initially through the public character of the sexual violence.

Secondly, the question is how exactly the above said transforms the incident into a matter worthy of public interference for women. Vasantha's affair(s) are partly legitimised as 'well-known truth', or as a 'stomach business', a 'mistake' which Vasantha made only to fill her and her daughters' belly. Her affair(s) are thus seen as part of the continuous series of sufferings and difficulties poor ('single') women face during the courses of their lives. With this way of narrating the incident, women refer to a common female form of narrative which is not necessarily caste/class-specific: The lament, pondering

upon the many instances in a woman's life where an idealised representation of female life cycles is not even a distant possibility and sharply contrasted by actual experiences of women, due to neglect, violence, or harassment by family or spouse or – and here it becomes caste/class-specific – due to social status. This way of describing the incident makes it a 'women's issue' and thus a matter of public import for women: In general, it becomes possible that every woman – who is a 'good woman', struggling to run a life without familial or spousal support – could get into a situation where her 'righteousness' is questioned with disastrous effect.

This specific way of framing the incident as a 'women's issue' renders a tension in Sreeha's narration understandable. At the beginning she distances herself from the agitations around Vasantha's suicide, she argues that her son doesn't want her to 'involve in such a big fight uselessly', that she minds her own work according to the wishes of her son and that she faces enough difficulties as a widow in attempting to marry her son off. Then, her narration takes a totally different turn:

> T: Why did you go there [to the protest – JV]? Sreeha: Suicide! One life is lost. She is also a woman like each of us. That's why we went with the intention to *help*. *Police* people […]. Vasantha's daughter also asked us not to interfere. That's why we are remaining *silent*. [T.: Who gathered all of you? Who brought all the people?] We came by ourselves. No one was required to gather. We are also *ladies*, tomorrow we will also face the same situation. Do you agree? God only knows whether they are good people or bad people. Till today she never even opened her mouth to say a hurtful word [*paṭukkuṉu*]. Even if you ask whether something is wrong, she will just smile and go away. She will never speak about it. She is doing it just as a stomach business [*vayattu poḻappukku*]. It's you who should keep your husband under control, what do you think? [T.: Yes, yes] Once they were so close to each other and had so much fun. Today this is the situation! If you ask me, the same will be the situation for us tomorrow! […] [T.: Is this the first time? Haven't you done something like this before?] No. For us, this is the first time. Things like this should not happen in our area. Good or bad, we should adjust with all things. A family should not live [peacefully – JV, *vāḻak kūṭātu*] after immorally [*ani-*

yāmā] killing a life. Tomorrow they will do the same to us whatever they did to her. If they are not questioned, they will start feeling that they can do whatever they want [*uṭampula tuḷir viṭṭup pōyṭum*] [...] Room should not be given for that.

Sreeha makes a very direct reference to the incident as something that could happen to every woman. Can this formulation of the incident as a 'women's issue' be understood as a reference to the feminist idea of sisterhood, which might be transported via the NGO? Since Sreeha addresses me as part of the NGO, the reference to 'women' – especially since she often uses the English term 'ladies' – could be strategic and aimed at convincing the NGO (me) to take up the case, or also merely a polite way to address the topic in front of me (a researcher who apparently likes to talk about 'women'). Irrespective of this, I argue that the solidarity between women Sreeha refers to has a specific foundation: Whereas the first part of her account is built upon common forms of narrativization of life among Tamil women (the female lament), the second part then transforms this common narrative into a source of solidarity between women.

The possibility of female solidarity is not self-evident. Research in Chennai's slums revealed that women often play a key-role in morally controlling their peers, a fact which reminds us 'that patriarchy is usually enforced *by women themselves* – not by men. [emphasis in the original – JV]' (Kapadia 2014: 239; see also Vera-Sanso 1999). The sexual violence dealt with in this paper obviously supports this assumption: It is a woman who uses brutal, sexual violence to police the 'sexual behaviour' of another woman. Nonetheless, as Ram argues, the female lament is a very common form of narrativization of life amongst women and thus a commonly available potential source of female solidarity (Ram 2013: 202-5; Ram 2007). To activate this source of solidarity, however, women obviously need to extensively discuss and prove the 'righteousness' of the respective woman as well as the severity of her sufferings: The acceptance of a repeated series of sufferings is exactly the premise onto which a notion of female solidarity can become meaningful. In this sense, the actual death of Vasantha – although this sounds disillusioning – might be a prerequisite for the protest.

NGO ACTIVISM AND LOCAL PROTEST

Having detected the normative and moral backdrops which render the protest possible, it is time to come back to the question of relationships between women and the NGO. As I related above, the women wanted the NGO to support the protest at the nearby junction in the name of the NGO or get the allowance to conduct it in the name of the NGO by themselves. Vasantha as well as most of the women who engaged in the protest were participants in the regular meetings of the NGO. They thought that conducting the protest together with the NGO would give it more authority and greater public acknowledgment. (A local newspaper reported about the incident the day after the protest but media attention immediately dropped thereafter.) Raji, the director of the NGO, didn't participate in the protest or in Vasantha's death rituals (Dushana, the local area staff, did). She also didn't agree to support the protest or conduct a protest in the name of the NGO. She helped, however, by formulating a petition which she advised to hand in at different state commissions, for example the Tamil Nadu State Commission for Women, and high-ranking representatives of the police. She insisted on formulating the petition in the name of the 'common people' instead of the NGO. Women did what Raji recommended but felt betrayed by her reaction and faced suspicion by officials when they handed in the petitions. Sarvitha narrates: 'But the *police* in the *CM cell* questioned us suspiciously: "Someone is behind you, it seems. You have lodged *complaints* everywhere so courageously. Is it a real *case* or is someone kindling you to give this false *complaint*?"'

When I asked Raji directly why she doesn't interfere, she argued that 'there are a lot of secrets […] between two families.' She also indicated that there has been an affair and that she doesn't know what really happened. Dushana, the local area staff, reasoned in the same tone that it would be necessary to talk to Preethi's family as well, to understand both sides of the conflict. In a long conversation we had during another occasion, Raji seemed indecisive how to evaluate her observation that there is 'no value system' in lower class families compared to middle class families. She reasoned that this would allow lower class women to walk out of abusive marriages and engage in new relationships, but that it would also impair their

readiness to compromise to keep the family intact. Also, she remarked, the men lower class single women had 'connections' with, potentially sexually harassed these women's daughters if they got a chance to catch them alone in the house. Accordingly, in local meetings with girls and women, the staff of the NGO frequently discussed non-marital relationships (and sometimes even second marriages) as a safety hazard for daughters of the respective woman and advised women not to let new partners stay in their houses. All these examples show a specific stance of the NGO towards women who live without their husbands which diverges from the narrations I re-iterated above. It is a stance which draws on rather rigid middle-caste/class dis- courses of sexuality that prove to be sceptical towards re-marriage and ostracise women who choose to engage in sexual relationships outside the formal institution of marriage (for differences between upper- and lower- caste/class discourses of sexuality in Tamil Nadu see Kapadia 1995: 163-78; Kapadia 2014: 238-40).

CONCLUSION

I suggest that the present case confronts us with two surprising twists: First, nearly all of the women took part in programmes of an NGO which advocates women's rights and they frame the sexually-violent assault as a 'women's issue'. However, moral justifications which provide the background to act against the violence as well as to claims to solidarity between women are not deriving from ideas of (women's) rights transported via the NGO. Second, the formulation of the case as 'women's issue' seems to be a downright invitation to the NGO to take the case up as a women's rights issue. Nonetheless, the NGO refuses to pay heed to the claims of women and only supports them formally. What can these surprising twists tell us about gender, protest mobili- sation amongst women from the urban poor and dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in civil society and the public sphere in India?

The academic discussion provides ample and profound controversies about the role and functioning of civil society in (pre)colonial and postcolo- nial India. Apart from positive and hopeful accounts of the promises of ac- tive citizenship (see e.g. Bhargava 2005), there is also a tradition of a rather critical and skeptical debate. The political scientist Neera Chandhoke argued that the public sphere is an exclusionary place, where 'the languages of

women in a male-dominated society, the languages of the so-called lower castes, or the languages of racial minorities' (Chandhoke 2005: 346) do not provide access to practices of negotiation, mediation or challenge which are attached to the often so positive myths of the public sphere (Chandhoke 2005). Access to the public sphere – and thus to negotiations in civil society – would thus be depending on translations into the 'dominant language', the language of 'legal and political modernity which constitutes the domain of the public sphere of civil society' (ibid.: 338). However, so Chandhoke, some languages defy such translations, because 'meaning systems underlying the two languages are incommensurate' (ibid.: 339).[19] In a similar tone, Partha Chatterjee reasoned that actors in civil society form 'a closed association of modern elite groups, sequestered from the wider popular life of the communities, walled up within enclaves of civic freedom and rational law' (Chatterjee 2004: 4). At the same time, so Chatterjee, the vast majority of India's 'public' agitates in political society with distinct forms of mobilisation: the advancement of claims through political mobilisation or alliances with other (e.g. religious) groups rather than by demanding adherence to law or confronting the police; the involvement of violent means respectively the transgression of law and the invitation of authorities to declare exceptions to the rule of law instead of asking them to change the law (Chatterjee 2011: 11-21). Both scenarios invite a specific critique of middle class dominated NGOs which involve in concerns of the urban poor as excluding their 'target groups' as active agents (e.g. Harriss 2007), viewing them as belonging to a still-to-be enlightened 'rest of society' (Chatterjee 2011: 84). Both scenarios make one feel that the failure of Arangkarai's women to mobilise the NGO for their protest is not surprising. However, I suggest that they neither are helpful to understand the process which led to the mobilisation of the protest by women nor provide a full explanation of the NGOs rejection to support it. Chandhoke does not theorise a 'sphere' from which people who do not possess the language of civil society could possibly enter some sort of political mobilisation (see also Bhattacharyya 2003). And Chat-

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[19] In the present paper, I intentionally do not take into consideration the debate about the translation of human rights in social anthropology which yielded numerous publications (see e.g. Merry 2006; Bachmann-Medick 2014). I suggest that the finding that we are not dealing with an instance of translation holds true for these conceptions of translation as well.

terjee himself believes that 'political society [...] tends to be a masculine space' (Chatterjee 2011: 20).

At this point, a different, empirically informed perspective will be useful. Tanya Jakimow and Aida Harahap argue in another cultural context that 'scenes of development' may offer 'possibilities for self-becoming', as they put it (Jakimow et al. 2016). One of the interesting points they bring forward is the realisation that these programmes provide spaces where women attain new self-imaginaries. They argue that this possibility is vital for women since they 'have fewer opportunities than men to engage in civic life' (ibid.: 268). However, Jakimow and Harahap find that in their new self-imaginaries, women draw heavily on Islamic terms which, in short, means that their work in these organisations is a possibility to attain godly conduct (*taqwa*) (ibid: 267-9). I suggest that the way Jakimow and Harahap describe the process in which these programmes become relevant for women, cannot be adequately described as processes of translation into the 'dominant language' of civil society: Women neither use the vocabulary the programmes provide (like self-help etc.) nor do their new self-imaginaries become meaningful on the background of the values which are transported via development programmes. Yet there is no sense of exclusion but the programmes do become meaningful for women. Smooth cooperation – in Jakimow and Harahap's case between Islamic forms of ethical conduct and (neoliberal) development programmes – seems to be possible *despite* different moral justifications and normative backgrounds.

On the background of Jakimow and Harahap's findings, the protest of women in Arangkarai can be read as a – maybe rare – situation where the NGOs programmes and normative messages indeed do make sense for women: They claim that *this* matter *is* a 'women's issue'. This being said, the moral and normative background onto which they render the idea of female solidarity meaningful is not a liberal notion of rights. Instead, it is a common, inherited[20] narrative form which addresses discrepancies between idealised representations of female life cycles and the actual experiences of (lower

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[20] The argument that inherited social norms and moral assumptions can provide the basis for protest mobilisation (especially if they are violated) is well-established since Thompson's notion of moral economy (e.g. Thompson 1971).

caste/class, 'single') women.[21] Nonetheless, far from avoiding the realms of 'rational law' – as e.g. Chatterjee's distinction between political and civil society would make us assume –, the women try to make the police and the NGO responsive to their own vision of women-specific problems.

Referring to Chandhoke's reasoning above, one could assume that women are not successful in claiming the support of the NGO (a civil society actor) because they use the wrong language: They do not frame the incident as a rights issue, a language which, one assumes, would enable participation in the public sphere. However, Jakimow and Harahap's findings taught us that such cooperation can function smoothly even though no processes of translation take place. Also, the way Arangkarai's women discuss the sexually-violent assault seems to offer a convenient docking point for the NGO to accept the incident as a women's rights issue. There are many explanations for the NGOs hesitation to support the women that come to mind immediately: The case does not fit the male-perpetrator versus female-victim narrative in which instances of sexual violence are preferably positioned. The victim is not a 'good victim' – a helpless child, a young, virgin woman – but a woman who had 'an affair' (see also Prasad 1999). Also, women disregard the common hierarchies of development projects and become active claimants of support in a situation which *they* define as women-specific problem. All these aspects might be relevant to disrupt cooperation. However, to focus the analysis, I suggest to look again into the reactions of the NGO I described above. The reactions show that Raji as well as Dushana don't accept the framework women in Arangkarai set to render the suicide of Vasantha a matter of public interference: They don't accept the framing as a 'women's issue' and as a general matter of security for

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[21] I want to clear up a possible misunderstanding that could evolve due to this article's focus on moral and normative justifications: It would be plausible to assume that even if it seems a little overstretched to argue that moral and normative justifications women refer to are translations of normative ideas that became relevant through the NGO, there could be an instance of translation with regard to the practice of protesting itself. However, the exact way in which women organise the protest – the blockade of the nearby junction which is a central traffic node – does rather resemble other protests of (male and female) inhabitants from Arangkarai than the protests organised by the NGO. I heard of two incidents in which people from Arangkarai blocked the junction in exactly the same manner: When they did not receive the TV sets which were distributed after the 2006 elections as fulfillment of an election promise by the then chief minister Karunanidhi, and when the reparations after the floods in December 2015 were not distributed as promised.

('single') women in Arangkarai. They frame a case which women in Arangkarai strongly framed as 'injustice' (*aniyāyam*) and homicide and thus asking for legal consequences, as a 'conflict' between 'families' which is open to the possibility of compromise and mediation. Obviously, the NGO renders the incident into a matter that is *not* worthy of public intervention.

The normative endeavors the NGO engages in, which are variously described as achieving women's rights, solving women's problems collectively, or empowering women, are vague enough to stand for many things. In their vagueness lies the potential to collective action – as the women's attempt to win the NGO for their protest shows – but also the potential for disruptions and exclusions. With reference to the US women's liberation movement, one of the early organisers of the movement, Jo Freeman, points out that a vague standard of sisterhood can 'be shifted with circumstances to exclude those not desired as sisters' (Freeman 1976). She also assesses that the standards which are set through such exclusions often resemble 'very traditional ideas about women's proper roles' (ibid.). In short: The vagueness of normative ideas (here: of women's empowerment, solidarity between women, and the achievement of women's rights) requires them to be actualised in concrete situations. In these actualisations, diverse, sometimes contradicting, moral and normative principles may become relevant at the same time. The above mentioned moral discourses about 'single' women thus help to explain why the NGO does not support the framing of the incident as matter worthy of public intervention. The convenient retreat to formalized procedures of legal proof and reasoning (e.g. the emphasis on the necessity to talk to both sides of the conflict) does come with an indirect moral condemnation. While women in Arangkarai talked about the affair as a 'common truth', the director of the NGO talks about 'secrets between […] two families'. She incidentally mentions the affair of Vasantha to cast doubt on who is victim and perpetrator in this case – a case where one of the two women had experienced aggravated sexual violence and committed suicide afterwards.

The NGO provides help to women in Arangkarai by making accessible higher units of the legal arena than local police cells. Not only the knowledge of a former staff member (Sarvitha) but also the infrastructure of the NGO – the weekly meetings of women – might take part in enabling

the protest mobilisation. Nonetheless, the NGO dismisses the women's call for legal intervention and argues that arbitration would prove more useful. As the accounts of Chatterjee and Chandhoke suggest, the NGO produces exclusions by reference to caste/class-specific discourses. These exclusions, however, do not only stem from a reasoning which refers to 'civic freedom and rational law' (Chatterjee 2004: 4) or the adoption of a 'dominant language' (Chandhoke 2005: 338). Instead, differences between caste/class-related discourses of sexuality result in shifts and fractures of visions of women-specific problems between the NGO and women in Arangkarai. The result is a disruption of ambitions of female solidarity.

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