

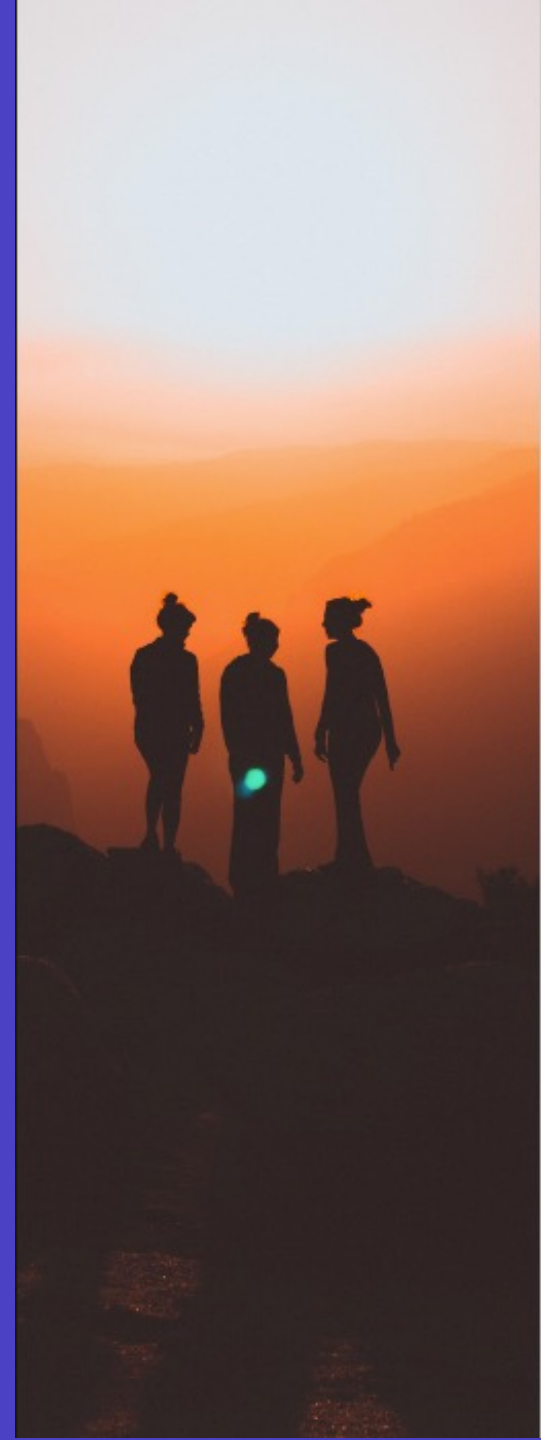
# **(Un)intelligible and (in)visible: queer refugees in Indonesian protection programs**

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# Outline

(Un)intelligible and (in)visible: queer refugees in Indonesian protection programs



- Research background
- Research questions
- Methodology
- Research planning
- Indonesia case study - emerging findings
- Implications

# Introduction



OfERR staff and Tamara at researcher training in Chennai, India (Photo credit: OfERR, 2019)



- Experience of conducting research in partnership with NGOs and refugee-led organisations for longitudinal study (2018 – 2021 ‘I’m Prepared’)
- Focus on women’s empowerment and gender equality
- Queer woman, Australian citizen
- Experience working/living in Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia
- PhD candidate at University of Sydney
- Senior Research Consultant at UTS - Institute for Sustainable Futures



# Research background and questions

(Un)intelligible and (in)visible: queer refugees in Indonesian protection programs



OfERR staff at researcher training in Tiruchirappalli, India (Photo credit: Tamara Megaw, 2017)

# Research background

- Queer refugees face even higher levels of discrimination and violence due to their diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression (SOGIE) (Rosenberg 2016)
- To access their rights and protection, refugees learn to turn their multi-faceted experiences into coherent stories based on their minority identity (Koçak 2020)
- Providing authenticity requires telling specific stories and performativity (Sari 2020)
- Erasure of complex life narratives and diverse sexual and gender identities as they attempt to make themselves intelligible to humanitarian actors
- Recognition of the fluid nature of sexualities and identities subjective to an individual, who may have had to hide or deny their identity
- Displacement and precarity of seeking asylum does not only disrupt, but also creates possibilities for renegotiation of gender roles and norms (Grabska 2011)



# Community- based protection



Refugee-led protection programs with a focus on self-empowerment, agency and collective decision-making.

The 'community' in community-based protection is not necessarily fixed but can be a "complex expression of identity, affiliation and association which is itself in a constant process of becoming" (McConnachie 2019, p. 19)

Meeting of Karen/Karenni refugees as part of community-based protection program (Photo credit: The Border Consortium, 2018)

# Working research questions

- In which ways refugee minorities **form their gendered and sexual identities**, in a 'process of becoming' within their experience of forced migration and oppression?
- To what extent do community-based protection initiatives **support sexual and gender minority refugees to (re)orientate** to their host countries?
- Can a **community-led approach** to protection provide fulfilment of **collective rights** for refugees, and **individual rights** for sexual and gender minority refugees, when **solidarity** is built on common lines of ethnicity, national identity or cultural values?

# Research focus

## Empirical

- **A place-based approach** to deepen empirical understanding of refugee-led initiatives for community protection
- Learning about **the extent of social inclusion** within community-based protection programs in Southeast Asia

## Theoretical

- Deconstruct **heteronormative frames of gendered knowledge** (McQuaid 2020), focusing on subjugated masculinities and femininities as well as beyond the gender binary
- Contributing to gender and migration studies



# Methodology



# Conceptual framework

## Intelligibility and visibility

- The identity of a body is interpreted by others through a 'matrix of intelligibility' that determines the limit of gender (McQuaid 2020)
- The role of colonialism, and globalisation in imposing cultural imperialistic ideas of sexuality, not taking into account non-Western cultures and histories (Hawley 2001)
- Certain queer refugee groups are visible, while others remain hidden (Moore 2018)

# Research planning

- Phenomenological methodology
  - Focusing on the life worlds of queer refugees and service providers
  - Qualitative methods - interviews and participatory photography
  - Case studies of community-based protection programs

<b>Scoping discussions</b>	<b>Queer community in Indonesia</b>	<b>Queer community in Thailand</b>	<b>Queer community in Malaysia</b>	<b>Regional discussions</b>
Co-designed workshop with refugee protection organisations in each of three countries	Case study  Sisterhood community	Case study  Equal Asia Foundation	Case study	'Member checking' with refugees  Sense making with NGOs and refugee-led organisations

# Indonesia case study





# Indonesian government response to refugees

- Approx. 13,000 refugee registered with UNHCR in Indonesia
- Presidential Regulation 125/2016 with a focus on rescue and shelter for refugees, removing the term 'illegal immigrants' (Prabaningtyas 2019)
- Delegation of some responsibility to municipal governments (Sadjad 2021)
- Lack of support for local integration, focus on resettlement as the durable solution (Olivia et al 2021)
- Still denial of many human rights of refugees



Photo credit: Zik Maulan, 'Indonesian fishermen praised for rescuing Rohingya travellers as pressure grows on ASEAN states to assist, ABC, 27 June 2020, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-06-27/aceh-fishermen-praised-rohingya-refugees-indonesia-australia/12400268>

# Social protection for refugees



- No access to social housing or social security
- Some accommodation is provided by IOM
- Limited access to primary health care (puskesmas)
- Some access to primary and secondary education, but not tertiary education
- Refugees are prohibited from working and earning income.
- Over a third of refugees in Indonesia are not registered with the IOM, and support themselves through informal work if they do not receive remittances.
- UNHCR coordinates with international and national NGOs concerned with refugee protection to provide assistance and distribute cash assistance to the most vulnerable refugees.
- There are approx. 13 refugee-led organisations that provide peer support to their communities (UNHCR Indonesia, 2023)

# Sexual and gender minorities in Indonesia

- Research with gender and sexual minority groups in Southeast Asia (Hegarty 2022; Loh & Luther 2019; Thajib 2022) and with gender and sexually diverse refugees in Malaysia and Thailand (Compas 2020; Rosenberg 2016)
- In Indonesia, while there has been gender and sexually diverse identities in traditional cultures, more recently LGBTQ+ people have been facing growing hostility and social intolerance.
- Based on the data collected by LBH Masyarakat (Community Legal Aid), there were 973 individuals who were victims of stigma, discrimination and violence based on diverse SOGIE in 2017 (Sarhini & Zakiah 2022).
- Transgender people particularly vulnerable to harassment.
- Queer refugees have a particular need for protection of their safety and connection with a supportive social network, health and legal services



# Emerging findings

## Invisibility of refugees from sexual and gender minorities

- Only a few refugees who have sought asylum based on their diverse SOGIE in Indonesia. In contrast to Thailand, where there are approximately 30 people seeking asylum based on their diverse SOGIE (Kompas 2020, p. 24)
- There are also individuals who have claimed asylum on grounds other than their SOGIE and may conceal their sexual and gender identities from their families or other members of their community, for fear of being marginalised.
- No specific outreach of protection actors to refugees from SGM, although UNHCR Indonesia is becoming more aware of this need
- SGM refugees came to be known through a formal referral from a protection service provider, or informal avenue of refugee to refugee, or queer activist network
- Limited service providers in Indonesia targeted to help SGM (safe houses, counsellors, health clinics) especially outside of Jakarta



## Unintelligibility of refugees from sexual and gender minority groups

- Members of one RLO had little understanding about LGBTIQ+ people and held some biased and harmful attitudes towards them that were rooted in religion and culture. Leaders wished to grow their awareness and steer their organisation towards becoming more inclusive and protecting SOGIE rights.
- Can be challenging for protection actors to report criminal cases about violation of refugee rights to the police, because of language issues and concerns police will be homophobic or transphobic
- Uncertainty if faith-based organisations would provide complete support for SOGIE rights of refugees, no evidence of direct discrimination
- Many human rights institutions in Indonesia have a binary view of gender equality, rather than an intersectional feminist approach

# Implications

## For refugees

- Challenge for queer refugees to be involved in leadership or co-design for community-based protection, given their need to keep a low profile
- Queer refugees have been successful in seeking out support from the queer community in Indonesia to survive and find solidarity

## For protection actors

- UNHCR Indonesia is prioritising processing of LGBTQ+ asylum cases and resettlement - yet perhaps queer people do not feel confident coming out to protection actors
- As with other areas of protection, need for more resources and expertise in addressing protection needs of LGBTIQ refugees
- Refugee-led organisations seeking support to better understand how they can include and support SGM refugees in their initiatives

## For research

- Sensitivity needed around involvement of refugees in research - as they may be exposed to risk if they were found out to LGBTIQ+ through connection with me
- Passive snowballing technique for sampling research participants, through established networks
- Explore tension between refugee protection for whole community and intersectional concerns for individuals/minorities



Protection and preparedness training (Photo credit: KNWO, 2019)

# Thank you

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# References

## Personal communication

Type of communication	Date
Workshop with UNHCR Indonesia; international refugee service organisation (4 participants)	September 2023
Interview with refugee-led organisation (2 participants) Interview with Indonesian civil society organisation (2 participants)	September 2023 September 2023
3 interviews with Indonesian academics	September 2023