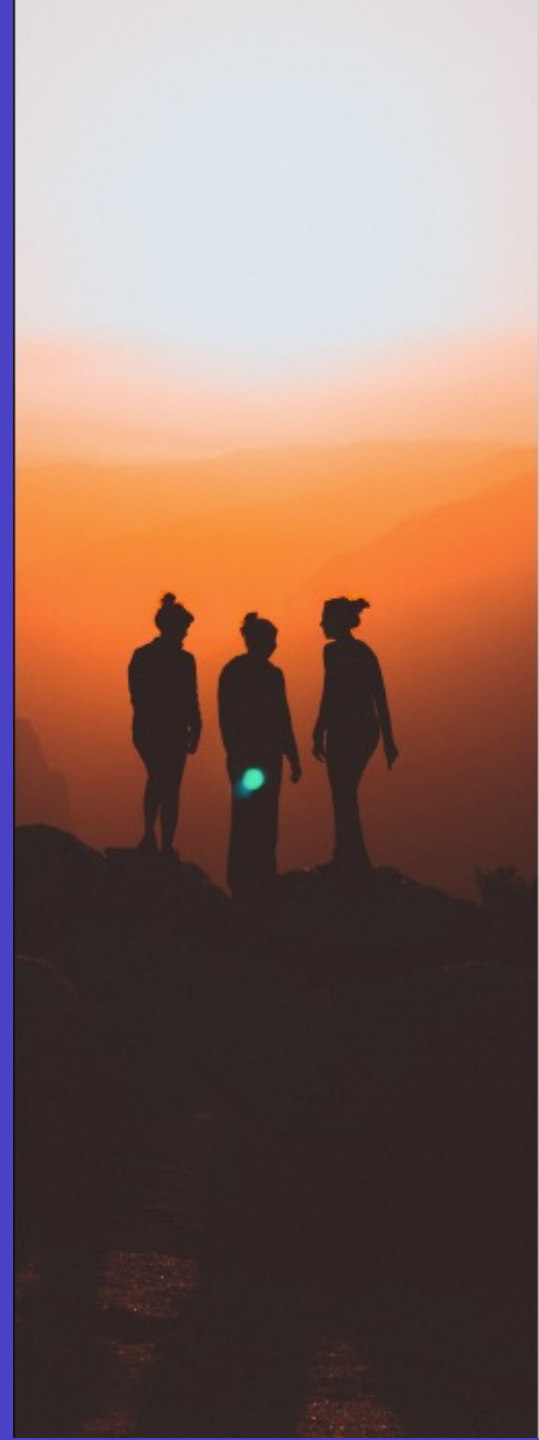


Queer experiences of orienting and belonging within refugee communities in Southeast Asia

Tamara Megaw (she/her)

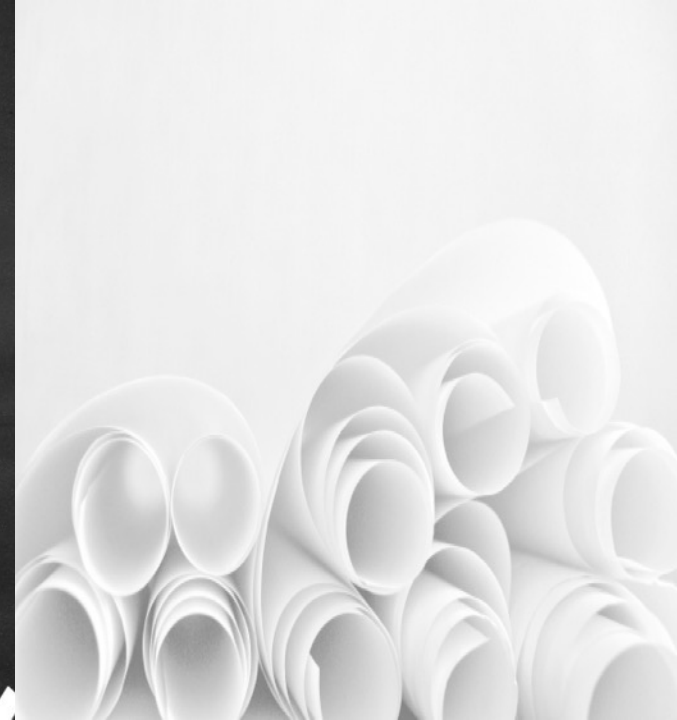
Queer Displacements conference, Western Sydney University

22 February 2023



Outline

Queer experiences of orienting and belonging
within refugee communities in Southeast Asia



- Research background
- Aims
- Research questions
- Conceptual framework
- Research planning

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)
- Focus on women's empowerment and gender equality in return-reintegration contexts
- Queer woman, Australian citizen
- Experience working/living in Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia
- PhD candidate at SSEAC, University of Sydney
- Senior Research Consultant at UTS - Institute for Sustainable Futures

Research focus and questions

Queer experiences of orienting and belonging within refugee communities in Southeast Asia



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

Research background

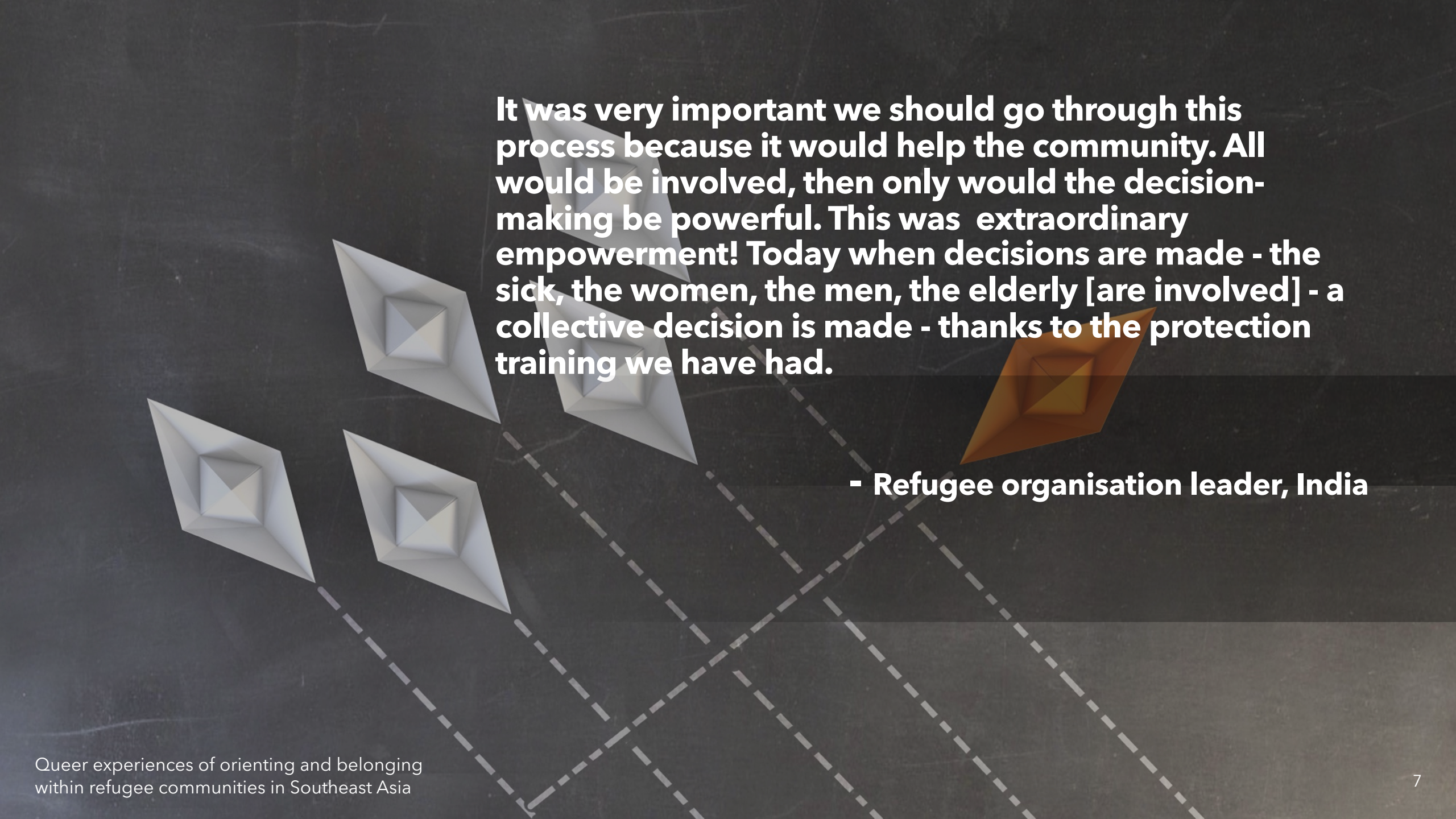
- Queer refugees face even higher levels of discrimination and violence due to their diverse gender identity, presentation, or sexual orientation (Rosenberg 2016a)
- To access their rights and protection, refugees learn to turn their multi-faceted experiences into coherent stories based on their minority 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



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)



It was very important we should go through this process because it would help the community. All would be involved, then only would the decision-making be powerful. This was extraordinary empowerment! Today when decisions are made - the sick, the women, the men, the elderly [are involved] - a collective decision is made - thanks to the protection training we have had.

- Refugee organisation leader, India

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

Conceptual framework

Orienting and belonging



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)

Orienting framework

- Believable visions of a good life that one can believe they may integrate in their life (Schuhmann & Knibbe, 2019)
- Orientation processes are complex in a globalising world
- Finding moral orientation helps to form identity, and it is possible to build a richer, multi-faceted and multi-layered self

Orientation of queer refugees to the...

Reconstituted community

- Connection to an ethnic group from their country of origin, with gender relations and roles in flux
- Identities are not static, rather identity is the course of becoming in a context of impermanence and constant socio-political change (Hoffman, Tierney & Robertson 2017)
- Do queer refugees take up non-traditional leadership and economic roles?



Zahra dan Marziye, di Makassar.
(Photo credit: Nicole Curby, 2021)

Host community

- How do queer refugees find affiliation and solidarity with LGBTIQ+ organisations?
- Status as non-citizens and refugees usually means certain exclusions and limitations
- Situated encounters with refugees have motivated assistance and kindness that might offer a shift in host community-refugee relations (Sadjad 2022)



Orientation of queer refugees to the...



"I'm Prepared" partners in gender equality discussion group at mid-term learning event (Photo credit: Tamara Megaw, 2019)

Humanitarian actors

- Challenging for humanitarian organisations to administer protection while cooperating with governments whose policies and laws put LGBTIQ+ refugees in danger
- Lacking understanding about distinct protection profiles of each sexual and gender minority group (Moore 2008)
- How can queer refugees safety become intelligible and visible to refugee protection agencies?

Research planning

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

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

Summary

This study will investigate how sexual and gender minority refugees can safely become intelligible and visible to refugee protection agencies in Southeast Asia to access services and have their rights recognised.



Eelam refugee women's self-help groups, India (Photo credit: OfERR/ ECHO Arjun Claire, 2012)



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

Thank you

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