

Summer Semester 2022

SDAC Guest Lecture Series

Indigeneity, Nation, and the Strategic Enactments of Belonging: Becoming Waria in West Papua, Indonesia

Terje Toomistu
University of TartuMonday
20.06.22
18-20:00 c.t.
In Person

*The lecture will be held in the ZMTP seminar room: Henkestr. 91, Erlangen



Dr. Terje Toomistu (www.terjetoomistu.com) is a Post-Doctoral Research Fellow at the University of Tartu's Department of Ethnology. She has been a Fulbright Fellow at the University of California Berkeley and a visiting researcher at the University of Amsterdam. Her doctoral research focused on the Indonesian community of waria (transgender women) from the perspectives of feminist anthropology. The thesis was awarded the 1st prize at the Estonian national contest for university students in the area of Humanities and Arts in 2020. She is also a recognized documentary filmmaker with a filmography including "Homing Beyond" (2022), "Veins of the Amazon" (2021, co-directed with Alvaro Sarmiento and Diego Sarmiento), an award-winning "Soviet Hippies" (2017) and "Wariazone" (2011, co-directed with Kiwa). Contact: terje.toomistu@ut.ee

Similar to other Southeast Asian societies, Indonesia has a long history of practices and identities that exceed gender-normative behaviour. In this talk, Dr. Toomistu focuses on waria – male-bodied individuals who feel and express themselves as women in a country that is also home to the world's largest Muslim population. Different from other parts of Indonesia, waria are a relatively recent phenomenon in West Papua. Since the region's incorporation into the Indonesian state during the 1960s that was followed by widespread migration, waria from other Indonesian islands have travelled to Papua – the rapidly developing yet culturally most distant region in Indonesia. During the past decade, the number of indigenous Papuan waria has significantly increased in the waria communities at Papuan urban centres.

Since waria often go through migration, in which they sever relationships with their families, longing to belong is a widely shared sentiment among waria. As a result of, and in response to, their social exclusion, waria actively seek self-expression, pleasure and a sense of belonging at those places and times that are available to them.

However, the quest for belonging also shapes the perceptions of embodied beauty. In Papua, the image of success tied to the imagined West as the locus of progress, and to the imagined community of Indonesia, permeates perceptions of what is considered a progressive, successful or beautiful look. Specifically, waria draw from meaningful symbolic resources in their practices of beauty to create a sense of belonging on the transnational or national scale in order to strive for belonging to their local communities. Through these imagined reaches waria make their lives more liveable. Dr. Toomistu argues that bodily forms and transformations hold a significant capacity to provide or withdraw access to categories of belonging, which in turn influences the feelings of worth. Dr. Toomistu's contribution seeks to challenge the stable notions of transgender positionality and instead, it brings forth the significance of strategic bodily enactments and dialogic performative processes on various levels.

This event will be held in person.
Please contact Prof. Dr. Viola Thimm to register
(viola.thimm@fau.de).