

Beyond men and women: a critical perspective on gender and disaster

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Consideration of gender in the disaster sphere has centred almost exclusively on the vulnerability and capacities of women. This trend stems from a polarised Western understanding of gender as a binary concept of man–woman. Such an approach also mirrors the dominant framing of disasters and disaster risk reduction (DRR), emphasising Western standards and practices to the detriment of local, non-Western identities and experiences. This paper argues that the man–woman dichotomy is an insufficient construct with which to address the gendered dimensions of a disaster as it fails to capture the realities of diverse gender minorities in non-Western contexts. The paper presents case studies from the Philippines, Indonesia, and Samoa, where gender minorities display specific patterns of vulnerability associated with their marginal positions in society, yet, importantly, also possess a wide array of endogenous capacities. Recognition of these differences, needs, skills, and unique resources is essential to moving towards inclusive and gender-sensitive DRR.

Keywords: capacity, disaster, gender identity, gender minorities, vulnerability

Framing disasters

This paper critiques conventional frames for considering gender in the disaster sphere, as often applied in the Global South by practitioners and researchers, by drawing attention to the importance of local gender identities that transcend and challenge the normative Western man–woman binary concept (Johnston, 2005). In particular, it assesses whether such a dualistic understanding of gender contributes to the neglect of non-Western gender minorities in comprehending people's responses to disasters, as well as excluding them from policies and practices geared towards reducing the risk of a disaster. The argument relies on three brief case studies of original empirical data documenting the experiences of *bakla* in the Philippines, *waria* in Indonesia, and *fa'afafine* in Samoa. These are gender minorities to which the man–woman construct prevalent in thinking and policy does not apply (Johnston, 2015).

Disasters have long been viewed from the dominant perspective of the West. This means that they are frequently seen as extreme and extraneous events beyond the normal conditions of society (Hewitt, 1983; Gaillard, 2010). In this sense, discourses on disasters have often underscored the extraordinary dimension of natural hazards affecting regions of the world believed to be 'over-populated', 'under-developed', 'un-informed', 'un-planned', and 'un-prepared'. A clear and brutal border is manufactured therefore between regions of the world that are supposed to be safe—that is,

the West and its allies—and those regularly struck by harmful events—that is, the rest of the world. Consequently, disaster risk reduction (DRR) policies have long been designed using the experience, knowledge, and expertise of the West and imposed on the rest of the world (Bankoff, 2001), often with the support of local elites. Such policies involve top-down and technocratic solutions that are geared primarily towards preventing natural hazards occurring or affecting neighbouring communities. These solutions include developing sophisticated monitoring and warning systems, building protective infrastructure, and raising people's awareness of hazards (Gaillard, 2010).

The increasing occurrence and the mounting impacts of disasters over the past century serve as testimony that this approach has largely failed to address the needs of those who are affected by such events on a recurring basis, especially the most marginalised groups in society, such as gender minorities (Gaillard et al., 2010). In response to the failure of the aforementioned hazard paradigm to diminish the risk of disaster worldwide, a vulnerability approach emerged in the 1970s based on experiences and ideas from what is now called the Global South, penned by both radical Western scholars and local practitioners (see, for example, Copans, 1975; Glantz, 1976; O'Keefe, Westgate, and Wisner, 1976). This approach underscores the hazard-independent, 'root' causes of people's susceptibility to the effects of natural hazards. According to this viewpoint, vulnerability reflects people's inability to access the resources and means of protection that are available to those with more power. It is embedded in cultural, economic, political, and social structures, which lie beyond the reach of those who are vulnerable (Wisner, 1993; Wisner et al., 2004). The proponents of the paradigm further contend that those who are most vulnerable still utilise a wide array of diverse endogenous and local resources, knowledge, and skills to confront natural hazards and disasters, including herbal medicine, traditional architecture, and intricate social networks (family, friends, and neighbours), which together are called 'capacities' (Gaillard, 2010; Wisner, Gaillard, and Kelman, 2012). These capacities have to be fostered through context-specific, community-based DRR policy and actions, constituting a radical departure from the standardised top-down methodology associated with the hazard paradigm.

The vulnerability approach has been gaining significant ground in academic, policy, and practitioner circles since the 1990s. It has become so popular that Western science and associated policy institutions have managed to take it over and are mainstreaming the concept of vulnerability to the detriment of its political, social, and structural 'original' nature. Nowadays, in fact, people's vulnerability, as well as their capacities, are frequently considered from a taxonomic and quantitative standpoint (Wisner, 2004) in direct relation to natural hazards, through the use of related concepts such as 'exposure' (to natural hazards) and indicators like demographic data. Among the latter, gender elicits prominent attention. This paper argues that taxonomic and quantitative approaches to vulnerability and capacities, including their gendered dimensions, still does not capture fully the reality of all people's lives and experiences in facing disasters in the Global South.

Gender and disaster

The gendered dimensions of disasters have been attracting significant scholarly attention since the 1990s (see, for example, Fothergill, 1996; Enarson, 1998; Fordham, 1998). Interest in gender stemmed from the vulnerability paradigm, as it had become obvious that disasters affect women disproportionately, along with other marginalised social groups such as children, the elderly, and people with disabilities. Indeed, numerous studies have emphasised that, in many places and societies, women are deprived of access to means of protection from natural hazards, which are available to men because of unequal power relationships at the local and international level (see, for example, Enarson and Morrow, 1998; Phillips and Morrow, 2008; Enarson and Dhar Chakrabarti, 2009). In that sense, the study of gender and disaster has focused almost exclusively on the particular vulnerability and capacities of women. Gendered studies of men and disaster are limited (but are starting to emerge) despite the fact that they ‘face their own socially constructed roles and expectations which may also place them at risk’ (Fordham, 2012, p. 428; see also Fothergill, 1996; Mishra, 2009; Enarson and Pease, 2016).

Strong advocacy by the proponents of the vulnerability paradigm has made gender a major component of DRR in the twenty-first century. It has been underlined that the specific vulnerability of women must be considered in policies and practices aimed at reducing the risk of disaster (Enarson and Fordham, 2001). Attention also has been given to the role of women, based on their capacities, in actual DRR (Fothergill, 1999). Many international institutions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have taken these arguments on-board, integrating gender—specifically, women-sensitive components—into their agendas (see, for example, United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, United Nations Development Programme and International Union for Conservation of Nature, 2009; OXFAM GB, 2010). Henceforth, challenges remain for including gender in governmental policies on DRR. With the exception of a very few countries where there has been timid mention of women’s vulnerability and capacities, such as Indonesia and the Philippines, most national legal instruments to lessen the risk of disaster overlook gender.

This encouragement to recognise the importance of women in disaster studies and their role in DRR springs mainly from European and Northern American feminist ideas—for summaries see Fordham (2012) and Bradshaw (2014). However, these ideas have received swift and wide support from a broad array of scholarship and feminist advocacy movements, which have emerged in the Global South owing to the growing momentum behind the vulnerability paradigm (see, for example, Kafi, 1992; Begum, 1993; Valdés, 1995; Khondker, 1996). Despite an assortment of different approaches among these feminist movements, from liberal and socialist to radical and post-modern feminist theories (Enarson and Phillips, 2008), gender has been conceived consistently as ‘a categorical distinction between men and women’ (Pratt, 2009, p. 268) based on sexual difference in interaction with cultural and political forces that shape the roles of men and women in society. Although it is widely recognised that men and women are not homogenous groups, and that significant

differences exist across ages, ethnicities, and other social stratifiers, this approach has been criticised for fostering ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ (Rich, 1980), where those who do not fit into this gender binary are stigmatised on the basis of sexuality and gender identity (Browne and Nash, 2013).

In fact, a growing number of reports highlighting the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people in disasters have appeared over the past few years (Dominey-Howes, Gorman-Murray, and McKinnon, 2014). Since ‘LGBT’ spans a range of non-normative sexual and gender identities, these studies are important for drawing attention to the implicit heterosexed gender binary that underpins much DRR policy and practice globally. They emphasise that hetero-normative values and norms in both everyday life and during disasters make non-heterosexual people particularly vulnerable in the face of natural hazards. Accessing resources and means of protection only designed for ‘men’ and ‘women’, understood in Western-based terms of heterosexed gender, has been shown to cause difficulties and discomforts for various LGBT people—for instance, evacuees in Nepal have to be recorded as either men or women to access shelters (Knight and Sollom, 2012), and financial compensation for the loss of a partner is only available to spouses and husbands in Japan and the United States (D’Ooge, 2008; Ozawa, 2012). These studies show that, in recent disasters in various countries, LGBT people often are discouraged from accessing counselling services, evacuation centres, or relief goods owing to the presence of discrimination, harassment, and stigma when attempting to do so, as, for example, in Canada (Cianfarani, 2013), Haiti (The International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, 2011), and Japan (Ozawa, 2012). Ultimately, LGBT vulnerability is reinforced by the consistent lack of consideration of their needs and concerns in DRR policies and practices (Dominey-Howes, Gorman-Murray, and McKinnon, 2014).

While certainly welcome and insightful, these emerging LGBT studies are insufficient for painting a complete and nuanced picture of gender and gender identities in disasters. This is because their approach to sexual and gender identity continues to reference and apply Western perspectives, as the very nomenclature ‘LGBT’ demonstrates. Although they are underpinned by a paradigm that attempts to stress diversity and recognise local differences and viewpoints, this objective has not yet been realised fully. Pincha and Khrisna (2008, pp. 41–42) underlined this gap in their report on the Aravanis of India, who were affected by the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004, and who ‘see themselves as neither women nor men’ and ‘whose gender category cannot be explained using a two-gender framework’. Nor can it be explained or addressed by a particular Western ‘LGBT’ approach, which arguably accords prime importance to sexuality over other roles and identities in the society. Gender studies of disasters thus face challenges similar to those of larger studies of vulnerability and capacities in the non-Western world, that is, people’s experience of disasters cannot always be understood using standard criteria and methodologies designed by outsiders (Bhatt, 1998). Interestingly, similar challenges in comprehending the everyday lives of a wide range of people who do not fit the man–woman binary have been

stressed in gender studies, especially those assessed via the lens of transgender and queer theories, beyond the specific context of disasters (see, for example, Herdt, 1994; Towle and Morgan, 2002; Doan, 2010).

Investigating the disaster experiences of gender minorities

Here, there is a critical need to consider gender beyond the man–woman dichotomy, including their sexual orientations within and across those categories. This is essential in regions of the globe, such as Southeast Asia and the Pacific (that is, the Austronesian world), that host significant minorities who share gender identities beyond rigid categorisations of ‘male’ and ‘female’—for instance, the *fakaleiti* of Tonga, the *mahu* of Hawaii and Tahiti, and the *whakawahine* of Aotearoa (New Zealand). Most are biological males who perform different and specific cultural roles in their societies. For those minorities, sex and sexuality matter less than gender in defining their identity (see, for example, Besnier, 1994; Schmidt, 2003).

This paper concentrates in particular on the *bakla* of the Philippines, the *waria* of Indonesia, and the *fa’afafine* of Samoa—groups with which the authors are familiar or of which they are members, yielding both an insider and an outsider perspective. The discussion provides vignettes of their experiences, based on exploratory fieldwork conducted in all three locations between 2010 and 2013. In the Philippines, data collection relied on four focus groups convened with three to five *bakla* participants of DRR projects led by local NGOs in urban and rural locations regularly affected by cyclones and floods. In Indonesia, the study draws on 11 interviews held with *waria* during and after the eruption of Mount Merapi in 2010 as well as participant observations of relief activities by a *waria* organisation in evacuation centres. In Samoa, the data come from participant observations during DRR projects and relief operations following the tsunami of 2009 and Cyclone Evan in 2012, as well as two focus groups, with five and six participants respectively, and 10 interviews with *fa’afafine*. Additional materials were collected through interviews with DRR stakeholders in all three countries and a review of relevant academic and policy literature.

The subsequent sections argue that the forced inclusion and marginal position or invisibility of these gender minorities in a Western man–woman approach to gender in disaster and DRR reinforces their vulnerability and overlooks their intrinsic capacities to deal with natural hazards. The analysis is particularly grounded in and primarily contributes to the literature on gender and disaster, but it is also informed by queer (see, for example, Garber, 1992; Nash, 2010) and transgender (see, for example, Namaste, 2000; Doan, 2010) theories and their critiques (see, for example, Roen, 2001; Towle and Morgan, 2002). It is important to note that, given the scoping nature of the studies and the small number of informants, this paper offers a preliminary and suggestive reflection on gender minorities in disasters, rather than a definitive assessment.

***Bakla* and disasters in the Philippines**

Bakla is a colloquial term, the contraction of *babae* (woman) and *lalaki* (man). It refers principally to biologically male individuals who claim a feminine identity, which is captured in the more formal Tagalog word ‘*binabae*’ or ‘effeminate’. If most dress, apply makeup, and do their hair like women, *bakla*’s identity is socially constructed and constantly negotiated by both those who claim such an identity as well as by other members of contemporary Philippine society (Tan, 1995a; Manalansan, 2006). Consequently, the term *bakla* is neither a rigid nor an uncontested social grouping reflecting a unique ‘native’ gender. For instance, straight men and women frequently apply it to people claiming a gay identity with masculine attributes, although many gay individuals distance themselves from the term *bakla* because of its alleged derogative association with particular occupations, such as a beautician (Benedicto, 2008; Garcia, 2008).

The identity of the *bakla* does not refer only to a particular sexual behaviour; rather, it expresses their roles within the household and society, and an ability to shift from male to female tasks and responsibilities (Garcia, 2008). Contemporary discrimination of *bakla* identity can be attributed to the heterosexual and patriarchal nature of Philippine society, which is a visible remnant of its colonial past. Tan (1995b) explains that *bakla* are only socially accepted if they confine to certain roles and professions, such as beauticians and couturiers. Those who transgress such social norms are at risk of being ostracised and excluded from society. Within the family, young *bakla* are often tasked with demanding house chores that span the usual responsibilities of both boys (such as fetching firewood and water and fishing) and girls (such as caring for children, cleaning the house, and doing the laundry). Many effeminate *bakla*, who are the prime focus of this study, openly claim their identity and are recognised for their leadership and initiative in community activities (Tan, 2001). Yet, regularly they suffer discrimination and mockery, especially in rural areas.

These everyday forms of discrimination of the *bakla* are reflected during disasters, as are the skills and resource sets on which they draw in their daily lives (Gaillard, 2011). In Irosin, a small town located at the southern tip of Luzon, young *bakla* who contributed to the focus group are often asked by their parents to do the dirty chores, such as cleaning up the house after recurrent flash floods. In Masantol, situated in the delta of the Pampanga River, *bakla* teenagers who participated in the focus group used their wide range of household skills to look after young children and to do the laundry at home, while also being asked to undertake demanding tasks such as fetching firewood and water amidst deep floodwater after the powerful cyclone of 2011 (see Figure 1). In Quezon City, Metro Manila, *bakla* who took part in this study reported that some of their fellow youth were left to eat last and the least when their households were affected by two back-to-back powerful cyclones in late 2009. In all three locations, focus group participants lamented that their specific needs are never recognised when they have to evacuate to crowded churches or public buildings. They suffer because of a lack of privacy, some feeling uncomfortable being around either women or men. Their personal grooming needs are also the object of

Figure 1. Young *bakla* reflecting on their experience of cyclones in Masantol, Philippines, in December 2011



Source: authors.

jokes by men in the male bathrooms to which they are assigned. Furthermore, they are regularly the target of gender discrimination and sexual harassment.

At the same time, the *bakla* also display significant capacities in confronting disasters and hazards (Gaillard, 2011). They rely on endogenous resources and activities that reflect their everyday role within national culture and society. These resources mirror particularly their ability to shift from male to female tasks and responsibilities as well as their sense of initiative and leadership. *Bakla* from Irosin who contributed to the focus group spontaneously walk around their neighbourhood to collect relief goods following flash floods. In Quezon City, young *bakla* who participated in the focus group and their friends organised larger relief operations in the aftermath of the back-to-back cyclones in 2009. They requested support not only from their neighbours but also from the local chief executive who provided them with relief goods and logistical assistance. In evacuation centres throughout the country, the *bakla* who took part in this study often are those who care spontaneously for babies and young children. Some do the cooking and the cleaning.

Although the Philippines is one of the very few countries where recent laws acknowledge the particular needs of women and other marginalised groups during disasters, there is no official recognition of the particular vulnerability of gender minorities. Similarly, their capacities are systematically overlooked in DRR practices so that activities planned by the authorities or NGOs frequently prove redundant given what *bakla* do instinctively to reduce the risk of disasters.

Waria and disasters in Indonesia

In Indonesia, the dominant gender minority is called *waria*, a contraction of *wanita* (woman) and *pria* (man). *Waria* are biologically male individuals who adopt distinctly feminine features and identity. Yet, *waria* identity is subjective, historically constructed, and nowadays intersects with Western gay identity (Boellstorff, 2004). It reflects both the views of those claiming such identity and outsiders. *Waria* are in fact stereotyped as entertainers and sex workers, although many of them are actually employed in the beauty industry, operating salons even in remote rural areas. In addition, the prevailing social norms that are shaped by the dominant religion view being 'gay' (in Western terms) and being Muslim as incompatible (Boellstorff, 2005). Most *waria* dress, apply makeup, do their hair, and now even resort to silicon injection to look like women, yet some also wear men's clothes or mix men's and women's items of dress to avoid being teased in public spaces (Boellstorff, 2004). *Waria* thus does not refer to a homogenous social group, although Kortschak (2010, p. 141) notes that *waria* usually share 'a cohesive subculture with strong social links between members'.

Many *waria* living in Yogyakarta and neighbouring villages on the slopes of Mount Merapi were affected by the most recent eruption of the volcano between October and November 2010 (Balgos, Gaillard, and Sanz, 2012). Most of them were invisible, however, in the numerous evacuation centres set up to shelter those who experienced the disaster. A *waria* leader interviewed as part of this study remarked that, generally, *waria* chose not to stay in temporary shelters, but instead to seek help from and stay with friends for fear of facing discrimination and hostility in the evacuation sites. In fact, this situation is compounded by their institutional invisibility, in which official guidelines for staff managing evacuation centres recommend that they only list evacuees as women, men, girls, or boys. In this context, there is no political space for *waria* to claim appropriate recognition of their distinct vulnerability.

Despite being invisible in the evacuation centres and in official documents, *waria* did not remain passive 'victims' during the disaster. Members of People Like Us (PLU), a *waria* NGO, visited the evacuation sites in Magelang, an area that received little assistance from the government and other NGOs. A *waria* respondent narrated that, although they wanted to give money, it was something they did not have. As a result they decided to do what they know best: provide haircuts and makeup services to the people in evacuation centres (see Figure 2). For several days, more than 20 PLU members took part in the activity, observed during this study. More than 200 evacuees (men, women, and children) benefited from the group's free haircut and makeup services. The emotional, physical, and social wellbeing of people in evacuation centres should not be overlooked in a disaster (Wisner, Gaillard, and Kelman, 2012). The action of the *waria*, although short term, addressed an aspect of human need.

Initially, evacuees were reluctant to let *waria* volunteers into the evacuation centres and even laughed at them. Eventually, though, as one of the *waria* informants

Figure 2. *Waria* providing free haircuts to people in an evacuation centre in Magelang, Indonesia, after the eruption of Mount Merapi in 2010



Source: authors.

recalled: ‘the group left the evacuation site with the gratitude of the evacuees and the appreciation shown to us provided a sense of fulfilment and hope that people would change their perspective and attitude towards us’.

In addition to the free haircut and makeup services offered to evacuees during the Merapi crisis, the PLU also staged a ‘drag queen’ contest a few days after the event. By dressing up and impersonating Western celebrities for a night, as observed during this study, the group collected a considerable amount of money from friends and fellow gender advocates who attended the show. According to a *waria* leader interviewed as part of this study, the amount collected enabled the group to reach more evacuation sites.

The significant and specific disaster-related capacities displayed by *waria* are unrecognised by governmental and non-governmental institutions engaged in DRR in Indonesia. For instance, the otherwise progressive 2007 legal framework for reducing the risk of disaster in the country does not contain any mention of either the capacities or vulnerability of the *waria*.

***Fa’afafine* and disasters in Samoa**

Fa’afafine literally means ‘in the manner of a woman’ and refers to biologically male individuals who claim a feminine identity in Samoa. *Fa’afafine* usually dress and apply

makeup like women and are well accepted and integrated into traditional Samoan society. Their ability to perform male and female tasks in everyday life makes them crucial actors in households and communities (Sua'ali'i, 2001). At the national level, some hold senior positions in governmental agencies, while Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi is the patron of the Samoan *Fa'afafine* Association (SFA). In fact, their leadership in organising community and national events is widely recognised. However, the recent impact of globalisation, and the associated importance accorded to sexuality as compared to gender roles in the mind of many Samoans, have led *fa'afafine* actually to suffer 'very real social marginalisation' (Schmidt, 2003, p. 418). Western influence also has brought changes in *fa'afafine*'s expression of identity: a few have undergone sex-change operations while some now dress as men. Thus, *fa'afafine* identity now is neither homogenous nor static (Schmidt, 2005).

It is the ability of *fa'afafine* to switch from male to female tasks that proves most significant in a time of disaster. During the tsunami of 2009 and Cyclone Evan in 2012, which both affected the country severely, *fa'afafine* spontaneously placed themselves at the forefront of rescue operations. For instance, Carol, 49 years old, pulled 12 dead bodies from the water in the immediate aftermath of the tsunami—a task that men usually are expected to perform. Other interviewees and focus-group participants reported fetching firewood or harvesting taro to provide food for their families; at the same time, many *fa'afafine* respondents also reported doing household chores that typically are female tasks, such as caring for babies, cooking, and doing the laundry. The multiple skills acquired in daily life proved essential at the community and household level to alleviate the hardship associated with the disasters. In addition, unlike other adult household members, the *fa'afafine* who contributed to this study noted that they do not have children to look after, giving them more time for extra community and household activities. When Cyclone Evan struck, for example, some *fa'afafine* who contributed to the focus groups aided their neighbours, especially children and elderly people, in evacuating their flooded houses. Despite this significant contribution to alleviating disaster impacts, many *fa'afafine* participants who had to evacuate to public shelters following Cyclone Evan felt discriminated against. They were particularly uncomfortable using shower and toilet facilities where they felt rejected by both men and women.

At the national level, leaders and members of the SFA who contributed to this study acknowledged that the organisation was a crucial driver of the relief operations conducted after Cyclone Evan. *Fa'afafine* came together to collect and distribute relief goods in affected villages. Interviews further suggest that they were supported by a tight network of *fa'afafine* holding positions in governmental institutions, such as the Disaster Management Office, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Women and Social Development, and the Samoa Bureau of Statistics (see Figure 3). The close relationships among *fa'afafine* all over the country and within the government also proved critical in coordinating emergency operations after the 2009 tsunami. *Fa'afafine* holding governmental positions interviewed as part

Figure 3. *Fa'afafine* staff of the National Disaster Management Office assisting people affected by Cyclone Evan, 2012



Source: Samoa Natural Disasters: Community, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/515003281873556/photos/a.516218258418725.118419.515003281873556/516224751751409/?type=3&theater> (last accessed on 29 June 2016).

of this study recognised that friendship and trust were used to overcome lengthy bureaucratic procedures to acquire relief goods and other urgent items. For instance, sign-off procedures were postponed to secure quickly water supplies or ink needed for office printers.

The interviews demonstrate, too, that *fa'afafine* play an active role in everyday DRR activities. The annual *Miss Fa'afafine* pageant of 2011, organised by the SFA, focused on protecting the environment. Some contestants performed acts geared towards raising awareness of DRR. The impact of this show is very significant in Samoa and it is viewed by thousands of people every year. In this way, *fa'afafine* were able to encourage DRR during a regular cultural event that matters to the larger community.

The capacity to organise and participate in DRR are not formally recognised in the National Disaster Management Plan of 2009. Since this legal instrument does not discriminate against any gender groups, though, *fa'afafine* are regularly invited to contribute to DRR activities and discussions. In addition, the SFA is a member of the Samoa Umbrella of NGOs, which sits on the national Disaster Advisory Committee. *Fa'afafine* thus have a wider political space in which to express their needs and to contribute their DRR capacities than do *waria* in Indonesia and *bakla* in the Philippines.

Beyond men and women: critical reflections on gender and disaster

All three case studies challenge both the dominant man–woman binary and the Western-based LGBT approach to gender and disaster. Neither their biologically-determined sex (that is, male or female) nor their sexual orientation is relevant in explaining the disaster experiences of *bakla*, *waria*, and *fa'afafine*. What matters most is their broader, everyday gendered position and their role in the community and household. *Bakla*, *waria*, and *fa'afafine* are all biologically male individuals who regularly perform tasks usually conducted by women in their respective societies. However, they are able to fulfil male-oriented responsibilities when needed, such as in a time of disaster, when they shift from one role to another.

In this sense, *bakla*, *waria*, and *fa'afafine* constitute unique and distinctly 'liminal', in the words of Besnier (1994), gender groups or minorities in their own societies. In a globalising world, where Western standards tend to dominate, including in the field of disaster studies and DRR, gender relationships are most often polarised around men and women, while those who differ from the norm are increasingly regarded from the standpoint of bisexuality, homosexuality, and transsexuality (Altman, 1996). Such an approach has been challenged recently in the West (see, for example, Doan, 2010). In many places in the Global South, as in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Samoa, outsiders associate non-male or non-female gender identities with deviant sexual practices strongly condemned by Christian and Muslim societies. Yet, as Besnier (1994, p. 300) states, 'sexual relations with men are seen as an optional consequence of gender liminality, rather than its determiner, prerequisite, or primary attribute'. In this context, non-Western gender minorities such as *bakla*, *waria*, and *fa'afafine* are progressively being marginalised by the rest of the society as well as by governmental policies (Schmidt, 2003). In return, marginalisation often leads to vulnerability in the face of natural hazards (Wisner, 1993; Gaillard, 2010).

Indeed, the forced inclusion and marginal position or invisibility of these gender minorities in a dominant man–woman framework for considering and addressing gender in the disaster sphere make them vulnerable. At worst, they are discriminated against, mocked, and deprived of access to resources and the means of protection available to men and women. The *waria* of Indonesia lack access to evacuation centres, while, in some instances, the young *bakla* of the Philippines are deprived of enough food. At 'best', their specific needs, such as with regard to the employment of policies in evacuation centres that would prevent discrimination or sexual harassment when using toilet facilities of their choice, are unrecognised, as with the *bakla* in the Philippines and the *fa'afafine* in Samoa. In these three cases, the root causes of gender minorities' vulnerability to the consequences of natural hazards are grounded in both the changing structure of the society and the burgeoning impact of global ideologies, as commonly emphasised in the disaster literature (see, for example, Wisner et al., 2004; Wisner, Gaillard, and Kelman, 2012), as well as in a homogenising Western approach to gender in DRR policy and practice. By way of example, the most recent version of the universal *Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian*

Response has not yet considered gender minorities and continues to specify that, during a disaster, resources (such as toilet facilities) be provided on the basis of the man–woman construct (The Sphere Project, 2011).

This dominant framing of gender in disaster constitutes a powerful example of understanding and practices according to Western standards and values to the detriment of local realities. It is imposed on non-Western societies of the Global South and underpins homogenising DRR policies, which continue to foster a transfer of knowledge and experience from the West to the rest of the world (Hewitt, 1983; Bankoff, 2001). Consequently, in many instances, practitioners in regions most affected by disasters have come to include gender programmes as a sign of accountability to Western donors, which require ‘gender-sensitive’ DRR. The Indonesian National Action Plan for Disaster Risk Reduction 2010–2012, for instance, supported by the World Bank’s Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery and the United Nations Development Programme, claims to ‘mainstream gender’ (Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Bencana, 2010), yet, in practice, *waria* continue to be disregarded, if not discriminated against. This approach epitomises the standardised interpretation of vulnerability, skewed away from the original, radical ideological understanding that emphasised local practices and realities (see, for example, Baird et al., 1975; Wisner, O’Keefe, and Westgate, 1977).

Such an approach to disasters and DRR also results from overlooking the capacities of gender minorities to respond to disasters and natural hazards—the extension of everyday practices and roles within the society. The ability of the *bakla* and *fa’afafine* to organise community events in daily life accorded them community leadership skills and an ability to arrange relief operations and evacuation centres during disasters. Similarly, *waria* have relied on resources and skills that reflect their everyday role and position within Indonesian society, notably raising money through a drag-queen contest and providing hair and makeup services. Comprehending the capacities of gender minorities requires a fine-grained knowledge of local settings and their diversity. This is at odds with the dominant standardised and homogenising approach to disasters as well as with short-term and often rushed DRR practices (Gaillard and Mercer, 2013; López-Carresi et al., 2013), especially when gender components do not provide any space for considering gender beyond the Western man–woman binary.

Recognising gender minorities is, however, essential, and reemphasises the need for an approach to disasters that is culturally and geographically grounded. Gender minorities such as the *bakla*, *waria*, and *fa’afafine* claim identities that stem from unique cultures independent of Western perspectives. Yet, these non-Western gender identities are neither homogenous nor static or uncontested, particularly in an increasingly globalised world. They should not be romanticised (Towle and Morgan, 2002), therefore, and nor should women in the dominant discourse on gender and disaster (Arora-Jonsson, 2011; Bradshaw and Linneker, 2014). Rather, gender minorities’ identities, as well as their hazard-related vulnerability and capacities, reflect diverse and complex cultural, historical, political, and social constructs, which frequently are very difficult for an outsider to grasp. Thus, gender-sensitive DRR should be

viewed as beyond the experiences of men and women and from a local perspective that fosters the participation of vastly diverse members of gender minorities.

Fostering gender minorities' participation in DRR

DRR must be inclusive, not exclusive (Gaillard and Mercer, 2013). Gender minorities should be fully integrated into activities, along with a wide range of other very diverse and unequally powerful stakeholders, including faith groups, governmental agencies, international organisations, NGOs, schools, scientists, the private sector, and all segments of local communities, including other marginalised groups such as children, the elderly, and people with disabilities.

The participation of minority groups in DRR has long been recognised as a viable alternative to the shortcomings of dominant technocratic and top-down Western practices that overlook the vulnerability and capacities of those most at risk (see, for example, Maskrey, 1984; Anderson and Woodrow, 1989). Participation refers to 'a voluntary process by which people [. . .] influence or control the decisions that affect them' (Saxena, 1998, p. 111). This means that diverse gender minorities should be able to define their own needs and determine potential solutions for DRR, alongside outside stakeholders such as governmental agencies and NGOs. In this sense, participation should aim to empower through the sharing and redistribution of power among people and across social groups to address the root causes of gender minorities' vulnerability and to foster the use of their capacities in confronting disasters and natural hazards. Unfortunately, once again, participation often is skewed to serve the interests of (frequently Western) external actors who need to justify the 'involvement' of locals in activities they have designed beforehand (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; López-Carresi, Lucas, and Pasteur, 2013). In fact, participation often is conceived as an outcome where accountability is to Western funding agencies, rather than a process where accountability is (downward) to those who participate (Cornwall et al., 2000; Brett, 2003).

Fostering the participation of gender minorities in a multi-stakeholder approach to DRR requires, therefore, dialogue and trust, which, more often than not, does not exist in current practices, including those that encourage a tokenistic form of participation (Gaillard and Mercer, 2013). Dialogue and trust are essential for all stakeholders to recognise, value, and integrate the vulnerability and capacities of diverse gender minorities into comprehensive DRR policies and practice. Most marginalised groups, including gender minorities, are aware of their needs and resources for tackling disasters and hazards. The issue for these groups usually is to make their vulnerability and capacities tangible and to have them recognised by others. Frequently it is insufficient, therefore, for DRR practitioners to work only with a particular marginalised group, such as gender minorities, in isolation from the larger community. All members of gender minorities should interact with those with power within the community or larger society, otherwise DRR initiatives remain clustered and fail to address unequal power relationships.

Fostering dialogue across gender and social boundaries is, of course, difficult. Political and social will is required to recognise and value the contributions and needs of gender minorities in disasters. In addition, the hazard-independent, root causes of unequal power relations between gender minorities and other social actors must be addressed. As Tacoli et al. (2014, p. 1) underline, 'gender equality is not just about women, but about inequalities that cut across social, economic and cultural systems and norms'. The root causes of inequalities in fact reflect multi-scalar and structural issues that range from deeply ingrained local cultural norms to global political ideologies, which have little to do with disasters in the first instance (Wisner, 1993; Wisner et al., 2004)—for instance, traditional Austronesian practices and Western religious values in the context of the three case studies presented in this paper. In this sense, the root causes of gender minorities' vulnerability when confronting hazards intersect with those of many other vulnerable groups, whether ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, or the homeless, to name but a few. Tackling these issues mirrors, therefore, one of the greatest challenges to DRR: transforming everyday power relations for the benefit of those whose diverse voices are usually unheard and/or whose vulnerability and capacities are overlooked. In fact, achieving the genuine participation of marginalised groups, including gender minorities, often entails weakening the position of those with more power, making it a highly political and conflictual process (White, 1996). Consequently, it is likely to be a long and winding course of action, which goes beyond the rhetoric of gender mainstreaming and tokenistic participation that dominates the discourse, policies, and practices geared towards 'engendering' DRR (Bradshaw and Linneker, 2014). The starting point is to reconsider the dominant framing of gender and disaster, moving away from sole Western concepts, standards, and values in order to reinforce local realities.

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