# **Book Proposal “Independent Refugee Youth in Waiting: Social Navigations while in Transit in Indonesia”**

I am working on a book, based on earlier dissertation research, that focuses on the social navigations of independent refugee youth as they maneuver uncertainties while waiting in transit in Indonesia. This book aims to answer the question of how independent refugee youth exercise active waiting while transiting in Indonesia.

My interlocutors were young refugees and asylum seekers (8-24 years old) who are travelling alone to Indonesia to apply for refugee status to UNHCR. Mainly, they are from the Hazara ethnic group born in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran; and also youth from Somalia, Ethiopia, Yemen, Sri Lanka, and Rohingya youth from Myanmar. Given that the migration of “unaccompanied minors” has often been shadowed by the stigma of “anchor children”, this study illustrates that the decision to travel alone is not always taken by young people’s parents or relatives. In some cases, the decision may be taken by the young people themselves, with help from friends, or it can be the result of a discussion between the youth and their parents in planning their future. Many chose Indonesia as transit country because the easier routes; and cheaper and safer journeys to Indonesia for refugee youth. Moreover, Indonesia’s malleable border security and the state’s deliberate practices of non -recording has created an enabling transit spot for the youth.

To capture young people’s multidirectional moves, I followed their mobility and conducted multi-sited ethnography in four cities in Indonesia: Cisarua, Jakarta, Medan, and Pekanbaru for 14 months (Januari 2016- February 2017). To gather comprehensive data, I did participant observation for six months in Cisarua and observation in several shelters accommodating youths in Jakarta, Medan, and Pekanbaru. In the four cities, I conducted 129 semi-structured, in-depth, individual interviews with independent refugee youth. I also conducted six semi-structured group interviews in Medan and Pekanbaru with a total of 57 youth. As visual method, I held three photography workshops with the youth in Jakarta and Cisarua employing photo life histories, which enabled the exchange of additional perspectives beyond what could be captured through interviews and observations. Additionally, I did online news analysis by collecting online news sources (national and local) from across Indonesia about refugees transiting in Indonesia for the period 2006 to 2016.

This book employs the concept of social navigation -“the way we move in a moving environment,” the “motion within motion” (Vigh 2006; 2009). Regarding the case of independent refugee youth in Indonesia, the social navigation concept is highly suitable, as the young people must deal with an unstable legal situation that leads to constant changes in their conditions. Different from the European or US context, where non-European migrants are perceived as a needy and powerless population trying to get social and political protection from rich white nations, refugees transiting in Indonesia is a different phenomenon. The social environment in Indonesia is more fluid and maneuverable for transiting refugees, where both groups – independent refugee youth and locals – see diverse potential for how they can gain something from and cooperate with one another.

I argue that the independent refugee youth perform active waiting in Indonesia: as their movements demonstrate that they do not merely perform tactics to counteract a suffocating system or social environment; but also create premeditated strategies that would invite the system, or powerful actors in the system – in this case, the migration management regime in Indonesia – to respond. Moreover, I demonstrate that young people manage to keep exercising agency, not only by performing single linear maneuvers but also by engaging in multidirectional movements in multi-layered arenas and social environments: the arena of refugee status determination and humanitarian assistance; the arena of livelihood provision and economic opportunities; the arena of social network connections; and the arena of self-actualization in the context of global youth culture.

In attempt to advance the academic debate on the agency-vulnerability spectrum of many forms of social navigations, I coined the term “production of vulnerability,” to show how youth centralize their minority/vulnerable status as victims (in terms of age, gender, health, sexuality), mostly to meet the expectations and preferences of aid providers and decision-makers. I discuss four aspects of youth’s production of vulnerability: (1) centralizing their risk/minority status/vulnerable condition; (2) engaging in “victimcy” by creating a social and bodily condition of being vulnerable; (3) performing a representational strategy by mimicking the condition of vulnerable people; and (4) utilizing their stigmatized identity to raise a sense of solidarity from the broader society.