



'Unity in Diversity is not for us'

LT+ negotiating gender, sexuality and Islamic faith in contemporary Indonesia

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Imagine...



Frentzy

“There was no answer. Whom to ask? (...) In school, if they discovered we liked us that would have been awkward. (...) Back then there was only silence, bury yourself, look for answers on your own. In addition, you could not look for answers outside nor at home. Parents who were – notabene – truly into religion (...), Islam right, yes, and really much of what is called a mother also, inculcating that, lesbian is a sin” (Interview Frentzy, 23.08.2014).

- seclusion, unasked questions, silence and hateful rhetoric



Outline

- Intro
- Questions and overarching approach
- Methodology
- Findings

Gender, sexuality, self and society

Same-sex sexuality and Islam

From 'Unity in Diversity' to 'Unity in Morality'



Questions and overarching approach (1)

Gender and sexuality as subjective experience

1. How do LT+ subjectivities develop within the temporal horizon between childhood and young adulthood in relation to the specific socio-cultural environment?
2. How is silence practically implemented collectively and what does that mean for the political representation of a group?

Gender and sexuality as cultural categories negotiated in practice

3. What expectations concerning gender and sexuality do LT+ face in different spaces, and how are these topics negotiated and (not) put into practice by LT+ in the spaces?
4. How does the intrapersonal performance of gender vary according to space? In which spaces and under what conditions do LT+ articulate their identifications?

A decorative vertical border on the left side of the slide, featuring a repeating pattern of stylized starburst or floral motifs in white and black on a red background.

Questions and overarching approach (2)

LT+ negotiations with religion and personal faith

1. In what ways, and based on what concepts, do different Islamic discourses and actors construct an (in-)compatibility of Islam and same-sex desire and sexuality?
2. How do religious lesbi/ans and trans males relate to the incompatibility thesis and what modes of negotiation do they create at this very intersection of personal faith and desire?

- **Findings fill a research gap**

First systematic research on female bodied LT+ in relation to their faith

- **Cross-over disciplines approach**

Anthropology of Religion and Queer Studies as necessary combination to focus on queer believers

Methodology (1)

- Eleven months of field research
- Research on marginalized groups presents an empirical challenge: sensitivity, ethical responsibility, and self-reflection are required
 - Participant observation with a multi-sited approach (Marcus 1995)
 - “Situated knowledge” (Haraway 1988) to disclose perspective and reflect on status as insider/outsider
 - Recognizing intersectional positions
 - “Do no harm” approach (Unger 2014) to safe-guard participants and navigate ethical dilemmas



Interview with Viant, 01.12.2014

Methodology (2)

Category of respondent	Religious affiliation in 2014	Sample size
LT+ individuals	Muslim	15
	Christian	6
	Hindu	5
	No affiliation	2
		n= 28
Related people, 'experts' and other professionals	Category/ position	
	Religious personnel (ustazd, pastors, experts on hindu religion); university lecturers; women's rights activists; representatives of several lgbt+ ngo's; head of pesantren waria; a psychologist; a father	17
		Total interviews n= 45

- Transcription of interviews
- Grounded Theory Analysis (Charmaz 2000)
- Triangulation of interviews, participant observation and field notes



Findings

1. Gender, sexuality, self and society
2. Same-sex sexuality and Islam
3. From ,Unity in Diversity‘ to ,Unity in Morality‘



Gender, sexuality, self and society

- Practice Theory (Ortner1996)
- Performativity Theory (Butler 1990)
- Ideal *kodrat wanita*: heteronormative notions of gender and sexuality
- Ideal ignores history of diverse genders, sexualities and labor done by women
- LT+ gender roles and labels: *Butchi*, trans men, *Femme*, *Ngondek*



Lesbi/an subject formation

- Labeling approach and stigma (Goffman 1975)
- *Cara Java* combines local ideas of hierarchy and deference, collective harmony (*rukun*), and self-restrained, *halus* behavior

Coming of age as a lesbi/an

1. Discovering the desire: Curiosity, early crushes and ingenuous puppy love
2. Realizing desire as ongoing: Between excitement, uncertainty and difference
3. Facing desire: Change in perceptions and the phase of denial
4. Searching perspectives and finding space: Encountering the other Other
5. Coming in
6. Dealing with the unspeakable – practices of secrecy and *desired identifications*



4. Searching perspectives and finding space: Encountering the other Other

Frentzy

“I searched for lesbian community. (...) Wah, there actually were some! (...) It was like encountering a world, a world so much larger, I was there, that was my world, this is what elevated my spirit. (...) I talked, I chatted. (...) Finally, I found friends I also met through there. Finally, I met a group in Solo”

(Interview Frentzy, 23.08.1014).



5. Coming in

- State of inner acknowledgement of desire
- ‘unlearning’ of internalized negative evaluations
- Ongoing process
- Coming Out as Western concept stands in opposition to local concepts of *rukun* and *halus* behavior
- Disclosing “deviance” may result in change of one’s moral status, ruin personal and affiliates reputation



6. Dealing with the unspeakable – practices of secrecy

Desired identifications

- collective stigma management through concealment of same-sex desire
- enable unhindered social participation
- Combination of practices
 - to performatively fulfill heterosexual expectations, e.g., dating men for ‘having the status’, using language strategically
 - to keep desire inconspicuous, e.g., measures to erase or safe-guard material evidence, introducing partners as best friends
- Presented strategically and in space-specific manner to maintain social harmony and to avoid discrimination
- *Desired identifications* are culturally embedded strategies that demonstrate the understanding of the *Cara Java*

Same-sex sexuality and Islam

Qur'anic norm	Conflict to LGBT+ subjectivities
The naturalness of binary bodily sex	Only cis- men and women are natural
The commandment of marriage, only between cis- man and woman	LGBT+ relations lack legal framework
Sexual relations only permissible within marriage	Other sexual acts are zina (fornication/ adultery)
Biological reproduction as goal of marriage	Same-sex relations are not procreative

- story of Prophet Lot from the Qur'an as textual proof
- Analysis of attributes: sinful, religiously prohibited and not belonging to the religious community, unnatural, immoral and changeable
- Liberal scholars create alternate inclusive religious interpretations

Modes of negotiation

- approach of lived religion (Orsi 2003)
 1. Compartmentalization
 2. Turning away from organized religion
 3. God's providence: Turning to and trusting Allah
 4. Tolerance for ambiguity: Compensation, balance and personal responsibility
 5. Integration via interpretation



Spaces of alternate knowledge





3. Gods providence: Turning to and trusting Allah

Frentzy

“In the end, every day I decided to just pray. With all the methods I had. Praying doesn’t only have to follow [ritual] prayers, right. Every time I prayed like this: ‘Please God, if this is my path, give me strength. But if possibly this is not my path, give me a way out’”

(Interview Frentzy, 23.08.2014).

Modes of negotiation

1. Compartmentalization
2. Turning away from organized religion
3. God's providence: Turning to and trusting Allah
4. Tolerance for ambiguity: Compensation, balance and personal responsibility
5. Integration via interpretation

- reconstructed attributes provided starting points to evaluate the Self
- agentive process of negotiation included confirmation, negation, or reinterpretation
- respondents reworked the subject-making effects and transcended incompatibility thesis





Desired identifications and modes of negotiation as agency

- Mahmoods (2005) understanding opposes trope of 'resistance'
- agency is culturally specific
- subordination as a requirement to master something
- practices conjoint in concepts are embedded in and informed by cultural logics
- interviewees as intersectional beings who aspire to, inhabit and master multiple sets of norms
- *modes of negotiation* and *desired identifications* as culturally specific agency

From 'Unity in Diversity' to 'Unity in Morality'

- Construction of LGBT+ as opponents of the 'morally-conscious' majority
- Islam and Westernization deployed as "ideoscapes" (Appadurai 1996)
- Democratization gave new pathways to political Islam
- Political homophobia is growing; attacks on religious minorities and LGBT+ increase
- Construction as 'dangerous minority' – Islam is staged as solution
- numerous legal attempts to criminalize LGBT+ and impose Islamic-style morality.



'Unity in Diversity' in rainbow colors

From 'Unity in Diversity' to 'Unity in Morality'

- Significant, conservative turn is obvious
- polarization between Westernization and Islam has become 'localized'
- Still, plurality affirming actors are fighting for democracy that grants rights and protection

Let's keep fighting until 'Unity in Diversity' is for everyone!

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Thank you!

*IDAHOBIT flash mob at
Tugu monument, 17.5.2014*



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