



The Influence of Religion on the Development of Heterosexism in Indonesia

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Resumen

En este artículo se argumenta que cada religión que ha dominado Indonesia durante un cierto período de tiempo ha generado una visión del mundo distintiva que finalmente influyó en la comprensión de las personas acerca de las cuestiones de género, la sexualidad y la orientación sexual. A través de un examen histórico-religioso, el análisis traza la forma en que el budismo, el hinduismo, el islam y el cristianismo se han entrelazado en el desarrollo de los conceptos de género, sexualidad y orientación sexual en la actual sociedad indonesia. El resultado ha sido un discurso y una praxis de discriminación contra las personas queer. Por lo tanto, el artículo aborda el tema del heterosexismo como una manera de contribuir a su desmantelamiento en medio de la sociedad indonesia.

Palabras claves: heterosexismo, homofobia, Indonesia, Budismo, el Hinduismo, el Islam, el cristianismo.

Abstract

This article argues that every religion that has dominated Indonesia for a certain period of time has generated a distinct worldview that eventually influenced people's understanding of issues of gender, sexuality, and sexual orientation. Through a religious-historical examination, the analysis traces the way that Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity have intertwined with the development of the concepts of gender, sexuality, and sexual orientation in present day Indonesian society. The result has been discursive and praxis discrimination against queer individuals. Therefore, the article addresses the issue of heterosexism as a way to contribute towards dismantling it amidst Indonesian society.

Keywords: heterosexism, homophobia, Indonesia, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity.



Resumo

Este artigo argumenta que toda religião que dominou a Indonésia durante certo período de tempo gerou uma visão de mundo diferente que acaba influenciando a compreensão das questões de gênero, sexualidade e orientação sexual das pessoas. Através de um exame histórico-religioso, a análise traça o modo em que o budismo, o hinduísmo, o islamismo e o cristianismo foram entrelaçados no desenvolvimento dos conceitos de gênero, sexualidade e orientação sexual na atual sociedade indonésia. O resultado tem sido o discurso e a prática de discriminação contra pessoas queer. Portanto, o artigo aborda a questão do heterossexismo, como forma de contribuir para desconstruí-lo na sociedade indonésia.

Palavras-chave: heterossexismo, homofobia, Indonésia, Budismo, Hinduísmo, Islamismo, Cristianismo.

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Introduction

There are many gay, lesbians, bisexual, transgender and intersex individuals in Indonesia. However, State and religious institutions often perceive them as a group of people that has been «infected» by decadent Western gay culture. They consider gay culture as immoral, against nature and «the traditional values of Indonesia.» This heterosexist view is supported by religious teaching that understands gender as a fixed, unchangeable, and «God-given» attribute of human beings. Heterosexism did not immediately give rise to homophobia; however, heterosexist society is a fertile breeding ground that can trigger homophobia and violence against queer individuals.

Tom Boellstorff (2004), a North American anthropologist who conducted research on Indonesian queer culture from 1992 to 2002, determined that before 1999 violence against gay men in Indonesia was «rare to a degree unimaginable in many Euro-American societies» (465). However, a year after President Suharto's New Order regime was overthrown and fundamentalist Islamic groups started to grow, a series of violent acts against gays occurred. Boellstorff (2004) indicated that these incidents marked the emergence of political homophobia (468). He mentioned that Islamic teaching contributed to this development, but the main contributor was politics. For Boellstorff (2004), «it is not clear to what degree Islam is a cofounding variable» (474) because he assumed that any religion that dominates a nation will always have the fundamentalist variants that harbor the potential to carry out acts of violence. Therefore, there is not much difference whether the dominant religion is Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, or Hinduism.

While it is true that fundamentalism exists in every religion, I do not believe that the fundamentalist teaching of every religion contributes to the emergence of homophobia or heterosexism to the same degree. I argue that every religion that has dominated Indonesia for a certain period of time has generated a distinct worldview that eventually influenced people's understanding of issues of gender, sexuality, and sexual orientation. I will analyze the influence of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity throughout Indonesian history on increasing or decreasing the



level of heterosexism within Indonesian society. Through a religious-historical examination, I will trace the way that religion has intertwined with the development of the concept of gender, sexuality, and sexual orientation in present day Indonesian society. Finally, I will cite some negative impacts of heterosexism while hoping that further work will be done to overcome heterosexism, particularly in the Indonesian context.

Heterosexism and Homophobia

Historically, attitudes towards queer individuals and communities were addressed within the context of the construct «homophobia.» The term was first used in a study that focused on developing a profile of individuals who hold negative or fearful attitudes towards lesbians and gay men (Smith, 1971: 1092-1094). This term gained popularity after George Weinberg published the book *Society and the Healthy Homosexual* in 1972. In that work, Weinberg (1972) defined homophobia as «the dread of being in close quarters with homosexuals, and in the case of homosexual themselves, self-loathing» (4).

Broadly defined, homophobia is characterized by «dislike or hatred toward homosexuals, including both cultural and personal biases against homosexuals» (Sullivan, 2003: 2). As the construct homophobia has become widely used, scholars have begun to address limitations encountered with this construct. First, the term focuses on individual negative attitudes toward gays and lesbians. Thus, the complexity of social or cultural backdrops that shape negative attitudes towards gays and lesbians is often ignored. Second, the term contains a homo/hetero binary. Therefore, it fails to recognize the experiences of bisexual, transgender, and intersex individuals, which may not readily fit into either heterosexual or homosexual categories.

In 1979, the North American linguist and English professor Julia Penelope introduced the term «heterosexism,» which «designates, in particular, those central social structures that proscribe heterosexuality as the only 'natural' sexual interest» (Kilmer, 1986: 35). The construct of heterosexism includes attitudes toward non-heterosexual individuals beyond gays and lesbians (queer). Most



importantly, utilization of the suffix «-ism» denotes the incorporation of an ideology or a belief system that was constructed by society.

For this article, I will use the definition of heterosexism formulated by Patricia Beattie Jung and Ralph F. Smith (1993):

Heterosexism is a reasoned system of bias regarding sexual orientation. It denotes prejudice in favor of heterosexual people and connotes prejudice against bisexual and, especially, homosexual people (13).

Jung and Smith's definition made a clear distinction between homophobia and heterosexism. Unlike homophobia, heterosexism is not grounded primarily in personal fears, hatred, or other visceral responses to queer individuals. According to the quotation above Jung and Smith (1993) clearly stated that heterosexism is «a reasoned system» because «it is rooted in a largely cognitive constellation of beliefs about human sexuality» (13).

Therefore, a person who is heterosexist is not always homophobic. For example, someone can be very friendly and tolerant towards queer people but at the same time not look on them as «normal» because of the belief that heterosexuality is the only normative form of human sexuality by which all other sexual orientations are judged.

De-linking homophobia and heterosexism can give us a clearer understanding of sexual inequality in Indonesia as well as in other parts of Southeast Asia. Boellstorff (2004) mentioned that many Western people have an inaccurate perception of Indonesians. They commonly believe that Indonesians are tolerant toward queer people. In rural areas, it is still common to see two men walking down the street holding hands — a scene that does not make onlookers feel uncomfortable — as holding hands is considered a normal gesture of friendship between men.

Furthermore, the Indonesian Civil Code, which is based on the Dutch Civil Code, does not criminalize homosexual activity, unlike the legal systems of Singapore or Malaysia, which were inherited from the British colonial power (Blackwood, 2007: 294).



Although Indonesian Civil Law (*Kitab Undang-undang Hukum Pidana*, hereinafter cited as «KUHP») has been revised many times, it still has little to say about homosexuality and transgenderism.¹

There is little homophobia in contemporary Indonesia. However, Boellstorff (2007) argues, heterosexism is pervasive because everyone is expected to marry heterosexually, and the tolerance of non-normative sexuality exists only as long as people who practice it keep it secret and do not proclaim their sexual identities publicly (168). He also describes the situation in Indonesia as «heterosexism over homophobia.»

The Contribution of Religion to the Development of Heterosexism in Indonesia

Scholars have explored many possible explanations of factors that contribute to the development of heterosexism. It is helpful to differentiate between psychological heterosexism and cultural/institutional heterosexism. At the psychological level, some scholars explain that heterosexism exists because of the needs of straight men to maintain patriarchal structures that keep women tied to men and keep men linked with masculinity and women linked with femininity.

The diversity of genders and sexualities made known through queer people has challenged the traditional boundaries of sex, gender, and sexuality because it proves that sexual identities are fluid and not as rigid as previously assumed. Therefore, heterosexism emerged as a reaction to prevent the collapse of the dominant order (Kilmer, 1986: 35). Others link heterosexism to the negative attitude toward any forms of sexual expression oriented to pleasure rather than reproduction.

¹ Revisions to the Penal Code have been carried out twice, with the last revision currently still in proposal form. The proposed revision to the Penal Code does not mention a prohibition of transgender behavior or same-sex acts between consenting adults. The proposed revised Article 492 reads: «A person who engages in indecent acts with another person of the same sex under 18 years of age will receive a sentence of from one to seven years» («RUU KUHP», 2013).



On the cultural/institutional level, scholars look at societal institutions that have potency to generate heterosexism. Jee-seon Park (2001) — in an attempt to establish a reliable heterosexism scale — indicates five major societal institutions where institutional heterosexism can flourish: (a) family, (b) education, (c) law, (d) mass media, and (e) religious institutions (18–22).

It is clear that religion is only one of many factors that contribute to the development of heterosexism. However, the influence of religion cannot be underestimated, particularly in Indonesia, where every citizen is required to subscribe to one of six «officially recognized religions»: Islam, Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Hinduism, or Confucianism (Hosen, 2005: 419).² The history of Indonesia shows that the concept of gender has always been differently produced, understood, and interiorized in relation to the religion that dominated the country in particular historical eras. Some scholars link heterosexism with colonization. Colonizers from Europe brought Christianity to the colonies they established, and by the time they left, internalization of Christian capitalist values had replaced traditional tribal values. Such a phenomenon resulted in an increase in homophobia and heterosexism, as shown in the case of the rise of homophobia among Native North Americans.³

I think an attempt to relate heterosexism directly to colonization somewhat oversimplifies the problem because in Indonesia, heterosexist culture emerged before the colonial era. For example, it developed along with the gradual adoption of Islam, which was

² It is noteworthy that although Roman Catholicism and Protestantism are branches of the same religion, namely Christianity, the Indonesian government list them as «religions» rather than «confessions» or «branches» within the Christian religion.

³ In *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (1986), Paula Gunn Allen related that the woman-centered North American tribal societies — the gynocratic social systems — flourished before the European conquest. Colonization not only changed the traditional tribal lifestyle into one based on patriarchy, but also changed the North American Indian's attitude toward homosexuality. In pre-conquest times, homosexuality between both women and men was practiced freely and without political implication. Homosexuals were assigned respectable roles in ceremonial life. However, the introduction of «the Christian God» and Christian capitalist values increased homophobia (194–208).



not spread through colonization. It is more accurate to say that heterosexism flourishes when the dominant religious doctrine in the country forces people to draw a strict gender boundary between men and women. The opposite is also true: heterosexism will not flourish when the dominant religious teaching is open to the fluidity of gender. Regarding the five major societal institutions mentioned by Park (2001: 18–22), I argue that in a religious-based country like Indonesia, religious teaching regarding gender and sexuality that fosters heterosexism has an impact beyond religious institutions. It influences all other societal institutions — family, education, law and mass media — because religion shapes people’s worldview.

Religion and Heterosexism During the Hindu-Buddhist Period

Michael G. Peletz observed that transgender practices and gender pluralism have been in place in Indonesia since early modern times (Peletz, 2009: 37), long before the coming of colonizers who brought Christianity and even before Islam was introduced into the country by traders from Gujarat, India. In his comparative Peletz (2009) study of gender pluralism in Southeast Asia since the early modern era, he found that Southeast Asian cultural history has «the deeply entrenched and broadly institutionalized traditions of pluralism with respect to gender and sexuality» (20). Long before the Dutch colonization and even before the Pre-Islamic era, non-normative genders were not only known in Indonesia, but were also legitimized by the society.

Peletz (2009) claims that the legitimization of numerous variations of gender behavior came from the influence of what he called «the syncretic blend of Hindu and/or Buddhist belief and practices and the Austronesian ritual cults that predated Indic influences in [Southeast Asia] region» (37). Monuments and inscriptions from the Kingdom of Sriwijaya in Sumatra (8-14 CE) and the Kingdom of Majapahit in Java (13–15 CE) show the existence of royal cults focusing on the veneration of Siva, the Hindu god of creation, destruction, and fertility who was characterized as androgynous, hermaphroditic, bisexual, or ambiguous or ambivalent with respect to sex, gender, or both



(Peletz, 2009: 24). Scholars found multiple interpretations of Siva's gender and sexuality in iconographies that differed from one region to another. Peletz (2009) argues that the existence of these multiple interpretations created circumstances that were «highly conducive to the florescence of diverse expressions of gender and sexuality as well as a climate of pluralism concerning sex, gender, and various other aspects of human experience, desire, and expression» (25).

Since the fourteenth century, Tantric cults have flourished in various parts of Indonesia. Tantric cults work from the principle that the universe we experience is nothing other than the concrete manifestation of the divine energy of the godhead that creates and maintains the universe. Through rituals that include sexual/erotic rituals — either heterosexual or homosexual —, the divine energy can be channeled within the human microcosm in creative and emancipatory ways. Tantric rituals were practiced in the royal court, but Peletz (2009) argues that they were also practiced by commoners as they emulated various practices of their rulers (36). Furthermore, the tantric texts legitimized and sanctified multiple forms and combinations of gender and sexuality, including gender without sexuality.

Dramatic tales involving androgynous beings also permeate the mythological past of Indonesia. Drawing on such mythological narratives — where androgyny was a central feature — people respected transvestite persons and acknowledged their unique role in society. Evelyn Blackwood (2005) found that «ritual transvestitism» has been known and practiced widely in many tribes throughout Indonesia from pre-Islamic times (849). Individuals who in the course of priestly or shamanic functions «switched» genders or took on gender-ambiguous roles as they interceded with spiritual beings on behalf of human subjects performed this ritual. The best known figure in the historical literature on transgenderism in Indonesia is the *bissu*, a shaman in the Bugis tradition⁴ who was usually a male transvestite. The *bissu* was a highly respected figure because it was believed that s/he

⁴ The Bugis are an Indonesia tribe that lives in Sulawesi Selatan, a province located in the eastern part of the country. Many tribes in eastern Indonesia have cultures similar to that of the Bugis.



possessed an androgynous nature. *Bissus* are neither completely female nor completely male, but rather a powerful combination of aspects of both (Davies, 2010: 72). The term *bissu* is cognate with the Buddhist term *bhiksu*, for priest. *Bissus* were called upon to facilitate marriage, and they guarded the sacred regalia in the royal court. These traditional roles provide a strong foundation from which *bissus* assert their contemporary social legitimacy. A *bissu* usually engaged in sexual relations and marriage with a same-sex partner.

On the island of Kalimantan, the Ngaju Dayak and Iban tribes had a long tradition of ritual transgending that had to be performed when a man wants to become a *manang* (shaman). The ritual had its origins in the Austronesian and Tantric Buddhist practices. Vinson Sutlive (1992) explains that the prescribed rite was performed by other *manang* and that after the ritual was performed, the man was transformed into a shaman. The transformation was signified by the change of his name and status to that of a woman. He was dressed as a woman and was presented in his new status to the community by the wife of the longhouse headman (Stulive, 1992: 279-280). The male *manang* was known to take a husband or to be involved in a same-sex relationship.

In Java, especially in the Ponorogo region, people have long been familiar with the *warok*, a male actor in a genre of Javanese drama known as *reog*. The *warok* is a spirit medium that possesses an ability in the martial arts that comes from a supernatural power. This power can be obtained through mystical practices (*ngelmu*) and it can only be maintained as long as the *warok* avoids having sexual intercourse with women. As *waroks* have sexual desire, they commonly take one or several young boys between the ages of about eight and sixteen years as understudies and sexual partners; these boys are known as *gemblak* (Khasanah, 2012). The *warok* usually goes to the home of the *gemblak*'s parents to «propose,» using a ritualized form of speech. The families of the *gemblak* generally welcome the proposal, as the parents will receive gifts and gain social prestige as a result of the relationship. Moreover, their son can learn and participate in *reog* drama. This practice — which is influenced by the Hindu-Buddhist tradition — has been known probably since the fifteenth century (Laurent, 2005: 200). It appears that during this period Ponorogo



society has allowed these same-gender relations without any reaction.

Cases like those of the *bissu*, *manang*, and *warok* cannot be generalized to represent Indonesian indigenous or traditional homosexuality because homosexual expression that appeared before the modern era can be classified as «profession-defined homosexuality,» «age-structured homosexuality» — a temporary homosexuality that only appears during adolescence — (Laurent, 2005: 255), or what Boellstorff (2005) called «ethnolocalized homosexual and transvestite professional subject positions» (43). Boellstorff (2007) argues that there is no meaningful connection between this tradition and contemporary Indonesian gay and lesbian subject positions because these traditions are found only among some ethnic groups and are usually linked to ritual or performance (84).

It is true that *bissu* and *warok* are professions; neither one is a sexuality or gender. In the case of the *warok*, after he retires from the stage, or of the *gemblak* when he comes of age, each usually marries heterosexually. Neither *bissu* nor *warok* would call himself «homosexual» because *bissu* and *warok* are not categories of selfhood organized around sexual desire. Nevertheless, the existence of recognized male transvestites or same-sex relationships in the society in the past has had a profound impact upon gay subject positions.

Sharyn Graham Davies (2010), in her extensive ethnographic research on the nature of gender diversity among the Bugis tribe, showed that contemporary Bugis people still do not inherently conceptualize male and female as opposites. Biological sex (*jenis kelamin*) is often seen «as particular configurations of maleness and femaleness» (73). Therefore, besides the category of male and female, the Bugis tribe also has the category of *calalai* — transgender females — and *calabai* — transgender males —, along with *bissu* — male transvestite shaman who engages in sex with men — (Davies, 2010: 73).

Furthermore, Blackwood (2005) argues that the existence of «transgressive ritual practitioners» shows that during the Hindu-Buddhist period people used sacred gendered cosmologies as the source of their understanding of gender. As a result, although



religious practices did not provide a niche for queer individuals, they provided the ideological belief, the symbolic system, through which people learned to see gender as difference — as masculine and feminine — and therefore «[...] in need of recombination» (Blackwood, 2005: 857). Gendered cosmologies that contained powerful masculine and feminine energies required ritual specialists who reflected an androgynous character, such as *bissu* and *manang*, to access spiritual powers, regain sacred oneness, and preserve community harmony (Blackwood, 2005: 859). They produced transgender people who were highly regarded in the society, as they were able to transcend or transgress human difference to achieve a sacred oneness or unity of opposites. Heterosexism could not develop in this kind of environment.

Religion and Heterosexism During the Islamic and Colonial Periods

From the thirteenth century, Islam began to displace the Hindu-Buddhism of the Javanese courts. Two centuries later, rulers in all the major Indonesian ports had adopted Islam. This monotheistic religion — along with Christianity — has doctrines that Barbara Andaya (1994) described as «male oriented, legalistic, and hierarchical» (99). During this period, the mythologies of sacred gender were subsumed or replaced by what Blackwood (2005) refers to as «mythology of innate gender,» which emphasized belief in one almighty being, a masculinized God who created man and then woman as his spouse (862). In contrast to the androgynous and dual-gendered deities of the old cosmologies, Islamic — and Christian — discourses deny the magical powers arising from gender and the ability of humans to contain gender ambiguity.

The sacred gender binary of the older religions, in which even the universe and the gods embodied dual genders, was replaced by the teaching that gender is a fixed, unchangeable, and God-given attribute of human beings. There were subtle changes in male-female relations and in society's view of gender and sexuality. Islamic beliefs emphasize gender differences and gender boundaries that restrict women's lives. As a consequence, female rulers rapidly disappeared as people began to believe that female rule was against the law of Allah (Meade and Wiesner-Hanks,



2008: 335). The role of transgendered individuals in public ritual practices also declined and was delegitimized as the new religion discouraged shamanic practices and syncretic rituals.

Despite its impact on females, Islamisation did not mean the cessation of transgressive ritual practices by males in the colonial period. Islam has an ability to adapt to existing custom. The historical record shows the persistence of indigenous transvestite priests in some areas, despite Islam's abhorrence of such practices. In the Banten (West Java) region, which was famed for its devout Muslim environment, the transgender ceremonial dance was still performed in the court during the seventeenth century (Meade and Wiesner-Hanks, 2008: 336).

Until as late as the 1960s, gender play was still popular in several forms of Indonesian theatre; male and female performers playing the role of the other gender appealed to and entertained local villagers. In Bali, the dance-drama embraces gender fluidity through the performances of both masculine and feminine styles by women. In the Bugis kingdom, females were no longer acceptable as candidates for *bissu*, but male *bissus* remained important functionaries to the royal courts, maintaining a significant presence up until the mid-twentieth century. Male *bissus* incorporated Islamic beliefs into their ritual practices, invoking the prophet Muhammad in their spells and blessings (Davies, 2010: 197).

Blackwood (2005) mentioned that until the nineteenth century, Islamic practices in Indonesia were predominately of the Sufi tradition that still provided ample room for ritual specialists and the spirit world. However, the situation changed with the arrival of reformist Wahabism in the nineteenth century, which aimed at «purifying the faith» and purged it of all non-Islamic folk beliefs and rituals (Blackwood, 2005: 860). In the case of the *bissu*, during the 1960s the Kahar Muzakkar movement that was linked to Islamic separatists authorized the persecution of the *bissus*. They were «forced to be real men (*lelaki sejati*) in accordance with [Islamic] teaching» (Lewi, 2012). *Bissus* still exist today, despite increasing efforts to stigmatize them as un-Islamic.

Islamic teaching has clearly contributed to the development of heterosexism and homophobia in the society as homosexuality is seen as «a grave disorder,» a source of evil and anarchy, because it



violates the fundamental order of the world where heterosexuality is the only normal and acceptable sexual expression (Boellstorff, 2007: 143).

Christianity, brought by Dutch colonizers in the 1500s, did not reduce the level of heterosexism established by Islam. On the contrary, it intensified heterosexism because the official church teaching – the Dutch Reformed Calvinistic doctrine – during that period was very strict regarding gender and sexuality. The gender binary of the Dutch, and much of the West at that time, attached gender to bodies in a system that defined gender as the necessary consequence of sex. A man had to marry a woman, and women had to serve men as housewives and child-bearers. Blackwood (2005) states that among all European countries, the Netherlands was particularly harsh in its treatment of same-sex sexuality and cross-dressing, and the Dutch courts were determined to eradicate it (864). Men who engaged in same-sex behavior were prosecuted and sentenced to death.

Peter Murell (2013), in his historical study, reports that «the crime of sodomy» was punished severely, both in the Netherlands and in Dutch East India – Indonesia – because it was deemed a crime against nature (11). Before the seventeenth century, execution was commonly carried out by burning or beheading. From the seventeenth century on, it was usually effected by strangulation or hanging. Paradoxically, the state legalized the practice of Dutch men in Indonesia employing prostitutes or concubines. This fact clearly reflects the existence of a heterosexist mindset.

Murell (2013) reports the trial and execution of Joost Schouten, which took place in Batavia (Jakarta) in 1644 (11). Schouten was an excellent trader, administrator, diplomat, and writer, and he served in the law courts as a judge for several years and officiated at church councils. He had a strong chance of becoming the next governor-general. However, after he was found to have engaged in homosexual acts, the court in Batavia sentenced him to death. Murell (2013) explained the reason why Schouten was treated with such harshness:



The sentence claimed that as a judge of several years' standing Schouten must have known how abominable this filthy and vile sodomitic sin is in the eyes of God and man, so that for this reason the Lord God has destroyed Lands and Cities with fire from Heaven, as an example and warning to the whole world. Therefore such sins could not be left unpunished for any reason and the accused should be brought to the usual place where criminal justice is done, and there delivered over to the executioner, to be strangled at the stake, and his dead body thrown into the fire and burnt to ashes, with all his property confiscated...The revulsion that the judge felt for Schuten's crimes... nullified all mitigating considerations, such as his long and valuable service to the Company... The judge's fear of God's vengeance if any weakness was shown was paramount and mirrored similar concerns in attitudes to sodomy prevalent in Europe at that time (14).

This court sentence shows clearly how profoundly Christian teaching about «the sin of sodomy» influenced people to think with a heterosexist disposition, where heterosexuality was seen as the only normative form of human sexuality and the measure by which all other sexual acts were judged. Schouten himself had internalized heterosexism; in his confession he admitted that he «had allowed himself to be used as a woman» and had «committed vile and gruesome acts with several other men» (Murrel, 2013: 14). After the verdict was confirmed, he asked to appear before the judge again in order to confess further homosexual crimes to «ease his conscience» (Murrel, 2013: 14). Heterosexism had shaped his values, attitudes, feelings, beliefs, and behaviors and convinced him that he deserved to receive the death penalty because he had failed to live in the natural and God-given form of sexuality.

The governor-general and city council, reflecting God-fearing sentiments, expressed the hope that they would be spared sodomitic colleagues in future, but it was a false hope. In fact there were further sodomy trials in Batavia in the seventeenth century, with drowning having become the standard punishment. In the Netherlands, nearly a thousand «sodomy crime» trials occurred between 1730 and 1811. In 1811, the state loosened the law regarding same-sex relations. It abolished the criminalization of homosexual acts between consenting adults in private (Rodgers and Connor, 2014). However, the Christian-based political parties



enacted various laws against «public indecency» which were used against gay men.

The Dutch homosexual movement arose in response to these new laws. However, the threat against queer individuals continued to exist in the Dutch colonies. In 1936, following news reports of incidents of homosexuality in several cities in Java — where highly placed civil servants were said to be involved — a Christian political party requested the Dutch East Indies Governor-General to order a police investigation and take measures against the «spreading sin of homosexuality» (Aldrich, 2003: 199).

A year later, 223 Europeans — along with local street-boys — were arrested in several cities in Indonesia. Three men committed suicide after the newspaper published the names and professions of the suspects. Anti-homosexual prejudice in the colonial era shows how Christianity has contributed to the development of heterosexism. Max Weber, in his comparative-social-historical study of religion, concluded that the traditional teaching of Christianity went beyond all other religions in the limitation imposed upon permissible and legitimate sexuality, because of its demand of «absolute and indissoluble monogamy» (Weber, 1991: 239).

Religion and Heterosexism In The Post-Colonial Period

A few months before the proclamation of Indonesian independence in 1945, the future President Soekarno was facing the need to pull together the diverse archipelago. He promulgated the philosophical foundation of the Indonesian State in a document entitled *Pancasila* [The Five Principles]. The first principle, «the belief in the divinity of God,» was intended to help solve the conflicting priorities among Muslims, Christians, and nationalists. The Muslims wanted a formulation where the religion of Indonesia was Islam, but other parties insisted that the new country should promote religious freedom. Therefore, the term «Allah» which appeared in the draft of the first principle («the belief in Allah») was changed to «Tuhan» [God], a more general term which was supported by the Hindus. As a result, Indonesia does not constitute



an Islamic country based on Islamic law, despite the majority of the people being Muslim.

However, Indonesian law also does not guarantee real religious freedom, as it has a culture of repression against atheists and forces people to subscribe to only one of the religions recognized by the state — Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism and Hinduism, and Confucianism —.⁵ This limitation to six recognized religions has left other belief systems — such as indigenous native Indonesian beliefs — unrecognized and unprotected by the State. As a result, the adherents of native beliefs are often forced to convert to or identify themselves with one of the six—officially recognized religions. This policy clearly favors established religions, particularly Christianity and Islam, the two main missionary religions in the world. These two major religions actively organized the practice of proselytizing and converting the rural indigenous population from their native ancestral beliefs. Unfortunately, the traditional teaching of Islam and Christianity is highly heterosexist.

In the earlier years of the Suharto era — before the 1990s —, known as «The New Order» regime, the state sought to control sexuality through a deployment of gender. It increasingly imposed a repressive gender ideology that stigmatized alternative gender identities (Blackwood, 2007: 295). Concepts of proper manhood and womanhood were promoted not only through state programs, but also through the sermons and pronouncements of Islamic clerics that upheld the idea of «natural» gender difference. They believed that a man and a woman had to fulfill their duty to God to get married and have children. The failure to fulfill one's duty as a woman or man through marriage and children was seen as acting contrary to one's God-given nature (*kodrat*). This contemporary Islamic doctrine, which strictly drew gender boundaries between men and women and emphasized the properness of marriage as the only possible place and future for sexuality, made Indonesian

⁵ In 1979, as a part of his anti-Chinese-culture policy, President Suharto's New Order government de-recognised Confucianism because it was considered to be a part of Chinese culture. Indonesian Confucians then became part of the «others» category or registered as Buddhists or Christians. It was not until 2000 that Confucianism was recognized again as an official religion, under the government of President Abdurrahman Wahid. (Yang, 2005)



Muslims acknowledge that any sexual relationships outside of heterosexual marriage were unacceptable to the moral code of Islam. Interestingly, Indonesian Christians held a similar belief.

Furthermore, this religious teaching was in line with the state program, promulgated during the Suharto era, to publicize family planning discourse (*Keluarga Berencana*). Supported by religious teaching and the mass media, the State indoctrinated people to believe that the nation was made up not of citizens but of families. Boellstorff (2005) affirmed that it emphasized the importance of having a family and asserted that an ideal marriage involves a single husband and wife with two children, where the husband is head of household (104). Boellstorff (2005) also observed that the state media campaign was quite successful in promoting a heterosexist ideology that linked ideally gendered men and women into the citizen-family (107). Marriage became imperative and a powerful norm throughout Indonesia, a norm that is still firmly in place.

Most Indonesian parents expect every child to get married. Besides the typical reason that people need to get married to have children in order to continue the family name and support their elders in their old age, Indonesians found that it is through marriage and parenthood that people gain the status of full adults in society. Thus heterosexual marriage is a kind of coming-of-age ritual of passage. It is a highly public act and often viewed as an important means of advancing individual or family social status — or losing it through marrying the wrong person —. For parents, having children who are not married is seen as a failure and brings shame on them. Consequently parents push their children to get married. Although modern Indonesian families have moved from the concept of arranged marriage to marriage by choice, this choice must be a heterosexual choice. Queer members in the family are under great family pressure to marry. Seeing marriage more as a duty or responsibility than as a choice, most queer individuals want to marry, but they also scheme how to secretly maintain their non-normative sexual relationships with their partners once married.



Boellstorff (2004) and Blackwood (2005) notice changes beginning in the early 1980s in the regulation of sexuality in Indonesia as seen through state and religious discourses on sexuality. Indonesian print media had popularized the terms «gay» and «lesbian» and began to bring the topic of non-normative sexualities to public attention. It did not normalize these sexualities, however, as the media persistently portrayed any sexual behavior outside heterosexual marriage as sick and deviant. Queer people were seen as criminals or as suffering from mental illness or disease. Interestingly, the Indonesian word «sick» (*sakit*) became commonly used to refer to a queer individual and is also used by queer people to refer to themselves. This fact proves that media representations have successfully caused the heterosexist logic of thinking to flourish in Indonesian society.

During the 1990s, the State and Islamic/Christian discourses on sexuality shifted in response to international pressure to support same-sex marriage and sexual rights. The Indonesian Minister of Population declared that Indonesia would not support a declaration acknowledging same-sex marriage (Oetomo, 2000: 52). Even President Suharto himself called it «such a weird thing» (Oetomo, 2001: 121). The Indonesian print media took this opposition to same-sex marriage as a declaration of the state's official position against homosexuality. These comments by state and Islamic officials during the 1990s reveal a changing attitude toward sexual practices deemed outside normative gender. Where the deployment of gender had worked in the past to consolidate normative heterosexuality, the international visibility of lesbian and gay rights movements seemed to call for new tactics in dealing with «perverse» sexualities.

Blackwood (2007) argues that public pronouncements by state officials and religious leaders constituted an effort to bring new tools to bear in the discursive production of knowledge about sexuality. The international pressure from gay and lesbian activists' demands for human rights was perceived as a threat to the stability of normative gender and heterosexuality in Indonesia. Therefore, it was not enough just to encourage heterosexuality and marriage as a means to deter non-reproductive behaviors. A more explicit discourse was needed to convey messages about the abnormality of homosexuality for Indonesian citizens. Therefore, state officials



and religious — particularly Islamic — leaders stated that homosexuality was not Indonesian; instead it was an immoral product of Western culture that went «against the traditional values of Indonesia.» (Blackwood, 2007: 299).

The latest change in the regulation of sexuality in Indonesia occurred after the fall of the Suharto regime in 1998. Following greater freedom of the press after the collapse of the totalitarian regime, the mainstream media raised queer issues in Indonesian public discourse, issues such as same-sex marriage, rights activism, and empowering the voices of sexual minority communities. These media representations have sparked stronger reactions in the public sphere, especially those coming from the state and Islamic religious authorities. Boellstorff (2004) observes that after 1998, queer issues that had widely been ignored now became objects of public attention (468). As a result, Islamic religious-based hostility emerged, targeting queer populations. A conservative Islamic minority pushed for more restrictive laws in the State Penal Code, initiating intense public debate on the role of the state in questions of sexuality and morality. Heterosexism has now spilled over onto homophobia. Boellstorff (2004) shows that the new phenomenon of violent acts against queer Indonesians emerged after 1998. The Fourth National Gay and Lesbian Congress in 1999, which had been held three times before — in 1993, 1995, and 1997 — without any negative consequences was now facing threats from several Muslim organizations.

In 2000, 150 men from the Ka'bah Islamic Youth Movement attacked gay and transgender individuals who were attending artistic performances, sponsored by the France-Indonesia Institute, in observance of National Health Day. At least twenty-five were injured. Incidents like this continued to happen after Boellstorff (2004) published his journal article. He argues that this incident was a result of «political homophobia,» the term he used to highlight how politicians shape postcolonial heterosexuality «in ways specific to particular colonial legacies and national visions, and which therefore vary over time as well as space.» (Boellstorff, 2004: 470).



In the Indonesian context, political homophobia consists of a cultural logic that links emotion, sexuality, and political violence informed by Islamic sexual norms. The attendance of non-normative individuals at national events or gatherings is perceived as a shameful threat and a challenge to the nationalized concept of masculinity (Boellstorff, 2004: 469).

In recent years the country has seen the emergence of provincial/local legislation that prohibits and criminalizes consensual same-sex sexual activity. In 2013, LGBTIQ organizations – The «Forum LGBTIQ Indonesia» – produced an independent report based on documentation of cases of violence and discrimination against queer people, which resulted in specific questioning about the existence of legislative and administrative measures related to protection against discrimination on the grounds of sex and sexual orientation. The organizations released a letter of complaint to the government and to the assembly of the 108th session of the Human Rights Committee in July 2013, stating that «the government does not have a clear stand point in recognition of the existence of LGBT people in Indonesia» (Rustinawata and da Costa, 2014). However, the government has done nothing to eradicate these bylaws.

In January 2014, the provincial administration and legislative council in strictly conservative Aceh province approved the *Qanun Jinayat* (behavior-governing bylaw) that obliges every Muslim and non-Muslim in Aceh to follow sharia, the Islamic legal code (Simanjuntak & Parlina, 2014). Under the bylaw, people found in homosexual relationship in that province would be publicly lashed 100 times, as homosexuality is seen as «a social disease that should be eradicated» (Pasandaran & Hasan, 2013). Besides Aceh, there are other regions that enforce bylaws that discriminate against and have criminalized homosexuality; these include Padang Panjang, Padang Pariaman, Sawahlunto, and Banjar. Not surprisingly, these are all fundamentalist Islamic regions. These bylaws have made violence against gay individuals more common in recent years.



The Negative Impact of Heterosexism

Heterosexism, like racism and sexism, will not be dismantled easily or quickly, primarily because people cannot recognize that heterosexism is a problem. Many heterosexual people may even argue that heterosexism should be maintained to stabilize society, and queer people may think that the social cost of abolishing heterosexism might be far greater than the benefits. The role of religious discourses in this worldview is highly notorious. However, Jung and Smith (1993) argue that by doing nothing to abolish heterosexism, society has to bear its negative impact (90). Allow me to briefly expand on three heterosexist points of view.

First, according to the heterosexist point of view, social acceptance of queer relationships will undermine or even destroy the family (Jung and Smith, 1993: 90). Ironically, the concept of heterosexism itself already undermines the family. Many bisexual and homosexual children fail to develop close ties with their parents or siblings because of fear or rejection. There is also the cost of the pain of rejection that has to be paid not only by children but also by the parents when they reject their own children when they find out that the children are gay or lesbian. There is also the great cost that has to be paid by the family when men and women enter into marriage for the sake of fulfilling «family duty» and use marriage as a façade to veil their true sexuality, because heterosexism does not give them a choice to be the way they are.

Second, according to the heterosexist point of view, social acceptance of queer relationships will destabilize society (Jung and Smith, 1993: 94). However, it is heterosexism that drains the energy from queer individuals as they have to keep their sexuality invisible to the rest of society. This social constriction creates dishonesty and manipulation. Heterosexism hinders the ability of people, including heterosexuals, to have a healthy environment in society where they can be involved in a dialog that creates respect and understanding toward each person's sexual identity and that eventually enables queer individuals to contribute fully to the well-being of the society. Heterosexism forces people to discharge talented and creative queer individuals from their jobs and hinder them from exercising their gifts to build up the community. In the case of Schouten, heterosexism diminished his accomplishments



and potency as an excellent trader, administrator, diplomat, and courtier that could have contributed so much to the society in his time. It was not until 1935 that the well-known Dutch East India Company (VOC for its acronym in Dutch) historian C. R. Boxer stated that «the Dutch East India Company lost one of its ablest servants on the public execution ground at Batavia in 1644» (quoted by Murrell, 2013: 17).

Third, according to the heterosexist point of view, social acceptance of queer relationships will result in moral relativism and it is against the teaching of the sacred texts (Jung and Smith, 1993: 103). However, many religious scholars have realized that religious teaching was not developed purely from the sacred text, but also from people's interpretation of the text. When the text is read with heterocentric lenses, it will justify our prejudice toward non-normative sexuality. In Christianity, it is obvious that the fear of homosexual behavior was based on a biased reading of the few scriptural texts that seem to speak directly to the issue of same-sex activity. Recent work on interpretation of these scriptural texts has shown that dismantling heterosexism does not threaten biblical authority (See, for example, Brownson, 2013). On the contrary, it frees us from a false justification and enables us to find a richer and deeper interpretation of the sacred text. Therefore, it is heterosexism that misinterprets or muzzles the message from the text. Jung and Smith argue that «by reducing sexuality to male-female dichotomies, heterosexism creates an idolatrous focus on one part of the whole» (Jung & Smith, 1993: 107).

Conclusion

Each religion that has dominated Indonesia for a certain period of time has influenced or changed people's understanding of issues of gender, sexuality, and sexual orientation. The syncretic blend of Hindu and/or Buddhist belief with its androgynous and dual-gendered deities of the old cosmologies has provided the ideological belief, the symbolic system through which people view gender as fluid. In contrast, Abrahamic religions like Islam and Christianity, with their emphasized belief in one almighty being, a «masculinized» God who created man, and woman as his spouse, have provided the ideological belief through which people view



gender as a fixed, unchangeable, and God-given attribute of human beings.

The history of Indonesia shows that fundamentalist the teachings of Islam and Christianity have increased the level of heterosexism in society and even contributed to the emergence of homophobia, which can be expressed through violence. Therefore, heterosexism must be diminished, not only for the sake of queer individuals but also for the benefit of society. Further research has to be carried out in order to find an effective way to overcome heterosexism, particularly in the Indonesian context. It seems that the ideal starting place to do that is in religious institutions, as Indonesians still respect the teachings of their religious leaders. It is certainly not an easy task, but it is something worth fighting for in life.

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