



# “Unity in Diversity is not for us”

Lesbi and Trans Men Navigating Gender,  
Desire, and Islam in Java, Indonesia

Kristina Schneider



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# 1. Introduction

Indonesia, a multi-ethnic and multi-religious state, seeks to unite its diverse population under its state motto *bhinneka tunggal ika*, or ‘unity in diversity’. However, there have been increasing challenges regarding the inclusion of certain fractions of its population within the concepts of ‘unity’ and ‘diversity’, especially in recent years. After Indonesia’s democratic opening in 1998, discourses on human rights and individual rights of citizens entered politics and civil society, alongside established and growing conservative discourses (Wieringa 2007). Marginalized citizens who entered public debate as objects of discussion only acquired a limited voice and attention. They were, and often still are, subject to violent attacks or further human rights violations when claiming space or rights.<sup>1</sup> This book is concerned with a subset of these citizens, namely, persons assigned as ‘female’ at birth who are clustered under the umbrella LGBT+ acronym. The research focuses on the self-understandings, practices and experiences in relation to sexuality and gender of *lesbi/ans* and trans

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<sup>1</sup> These non-hegemonic subjects include the ‘unmodern’ indigenous groups *suku terasing* or *komunitas adat terpencil*, who are trying to maintain their way of life and their traditions (Bakhori 2005); religious minorities like *Ahmadiyah* (Ahmad 2007; Armindya 2015; Liow and Leifer 2015:13); and people whose sex, gender or desires (Boellstorff 2014; Liang 2010) do not correspond to the normative framework of society.

males<sup>2</sup> (LT+ in the following; see Chapter 1.3 for detailed explanations on terminology and definitions), as well as their negotiations with the fields of religion and personal faith in Yogyakarta, Java.

Dogmatic religion, personal faith, and spirituality are deeply entrenched in Indonesia's everyday life. The realm of religion and faith is of high importance to the society and its people, evident in collective and individual daily rituals, in the shaping of cityscapes with religious symbolism and places of worship, and by the influence that religious concepts of 'public' and 'private' exert on the gendered use of space. Additionally, citizens are officially required to belong to one recognized religion. Despite the plurality of beliefs within religions and the prominence of state references to Indonesia's diversity in terms of e.g. ethnic and cultural differences, religions, and languages, LGBT+ subjects are increasingly excluded from this socially acknowledged and celebrated diversity. The intertwining of religious and state discourses means that efforts are being made to implement an unambiguous normative framework concerning gender, sexuality, and morality. This framework upholds a binary understanding of sexed bodies and essentialized, innate gender differences, assigning distinct roles to men and women.<sup>3</sup> In this frame, sexuality is understood to only be legitimate inside heterosexual marriage – same-sex desire is deemed to contradict religious faith and morality, labeled as a sin or sickness. Upon such desires, a person should never act. LGBT+ desire and identifications are rendered *unintelligible* in contrast with those genders, desires, and identifications that are 'normal' and intelligible. In the sense of Butler (1990), the unintelligible gender is 'definitional', in that it provides the foundation for the definition of the intelligible, 'normal' gender. In the Indonesian context, if one's desire or gender is unintelligible then it is incompatible with religion, and one is thus excluded from 'being faithful'. These moral normativities do not only shape a discursive realm, but also unfold in practice to claim and restrict social space: LGBT+ people are widely depreciated in everyday speech, and LGBT+ events are frequently made the target of violence by religious groups or police raids.<sup>4</sup>

Seen in this light, the process of 'doing identity' – developing, fostering, and articulating an identification – in a way which differs in gender expression or sexuality from 'the normal' is a tightrope walk. To do so while simultaneously claiming religious belief (or, for those less invested in faith, ethical and moral personhood in general) is a particular challenge, as it includes the combining of elements which are

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<sup>2</sup> Keen readers may wonder about bisexual women, who also fall under the female-bodied fraction. Initially, my research was supposed to include LBT+. However, during the course of my research I was only able to meet and interview one bisexual woman. For lack of reliable data, my research therefore focuses on LT+ subjectivities alone.

<sup>3</sup> For details, see Blackwood (2010:33). The ideal woman embodies femininity, is naturally and exclusively heterosexual, and is a wife and mother – certainly not a masculine *lesbi/an*.

<sup>4</sup> While attacks had occurred before 2016, a broad climate of rejection of LGBT+ people has emerged since that year. This has manifested itself, for example, in the public display of banners warning against the "LGBT illness", or declaring a neighborhood to be "free of LGBT".

constructed as opposites in the dominant public discourse. In this social climate, it is not surprising that *lesbi/ans* are a rather invisible part of the population compared with the unavoidably visible *warias*<sup>5</sup>, who are familiar to most Indonesians.<sup>6</sup> As I will lay out in detail below, *lesbi/ans* are deeply invested in keeping quiet about their desires and romantic relationships, adhering to cultural etiquette, and avoiding stigmatization. My research records the precursors of the escalating tendency of a social climate that stigmatizes LGBT+ people, which culminated in a real explosion of hostile discourse in early 2016.<sup>7</sup>

Yet, this is not a book about LT+ victimhood in the light of religion. While the hegemonic discourse labels LGBT+ as immoral and perceives an irresolvable contradiction between religious and same-sex identifications, my research demonstrates how LT+ people maneuver the ideals of gender in fluid ways, and use both religion and their personal faith as landscapes for negotiation. In doing so, they combine supposedly paradoxical fractions of identification within their self-conceptions and social practice. This allows them to ‘inhabit’ the unintelligible space in different ways. While a social minority is in focus, this book will also illustrate and analyze the shifting social dynamics that pervade Indonesian society, which is increasingly struggling to bridge the cleavages within its widely diverse population.

## 1.1 Research topics and questions

In this book, I combine two research foci. The first, on gender and sexuality, seeks to broaden and update existing perspectives. The second focus, on religion and faith, sheds light on aspects that have received insufficient attention in the academic literature. Both these foci are discussed in detail below.

### 1.1.1 First focus: Subject formation, space related performance and articulation of gender and sexual subjectivity

My primary research focus builds on two common statements in the literature: First, that silence and non-thematization of the *lesbi/an* identification and desire are characteristic for the way *lesbi/ans* handle their subjectivities (see e.g. Blackwood 2010;

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<sup>5</sup> Roughly translated either as male transvestites or male-to-female transgenders.

<sup>6</sup> Since Dédé Oetomo (1991:125), Indonesia’s most well-known gay activist, named *lesbi/ans* the least visible population in 1991, their public visibility has grown through activist efforts and media reporting. The ambivalent social stance towards them had not changed tremendously by the conclusion of my fieldwork at the end of 2014. See also Boellstorff (2006b:159, 2007:87–89, 102, 112). In comparison, in scientific discourse LT+ subjectivities became more visible from the mid-1990s onwards, as a result of the feminist research foci of women anthropologists such as, e.g., Blackwood (1996, 1999, 2005a, 2005b); Blackwood and Wieringa (1999); Murray (1999); Webster (2004, 2006); Wieringa (1999). From the mid-2000s the scientific field widened in terms of topics and authors.

<sup>7</sup> For manifold examples of the anti-LGBT+ statements of politicians during this time, see HRW (2016a). This explosion of discourse dragged LGBT+ people into the populist political spotlight for months, creating a moral panic based on stereotyped misrepresentation: For details, see Chapter 8.

Sulandari 2009; Wieringa 2007). Second, that *lesbi/ans* gender understandings and performances reflect a gender binary (masculine *butchi* and feminine *femme*, to use two concepts from local gender terminology; see Table 1) but are not monolithic, wherein especially *butchis* performance is seen as quite variable or fluid (see e.g. Blackwood 2009, 2010; Graham Davies 2010).<sup>8</sup>

Table 1: Simplified schema of LT+ gender terminology, and of my decisions on used categories and diction

gender label	gendered expression	self-understanding in terms of gender and sex	abbreviation	pronoun used
femme, lines	femininity	feminine woman	L+	she/her
butchi, tom-boi	masculinity	masculine woman, female-bodied, 'like men', man	L+	she/her; seldom he/his; s/he, hir
trans man, priawan		trans male, female-bodied, man, 'like men'	T+	he/his; s/he/hir

These findings raised practical questions regarding the formation of a LT+ subjectivity and the use of silence. They led me to wonder how people assessed, evaluated, and developed their own *lesbi/an* or trans identification in a social environment where LT+ desire and identifications were either absent or negatively judged. I was also curious about the personal and collective taxonomies of silence, and whether something else was expressed instead; what consequences unfolded when silence failed, or desire was willfully disclosed. This led me to ask: *How do LT+ subjectivities develop within the temporal horizon between childhood and young adulthood in relation to the specific socio-cultural environment?* Blackwood (2010:229) is interested in similar issues, but takes a more focused look at the aspect of gender, and concludes that desire is clearly conditioned by the gendered position of the subject. I concentrate on the aspect of subject formation in terms of desire, of persons' emergent self-understandings as *lesbi/ans* and their handling of it, which I describe as 'coming of age as a *lesbi/an*' in Chapter 4.2. There, I explore how silence is enacted collectively. To grasp this 'collective effect' I develop the concept of *desired identification*, an auxiliary identification used to manage potential stigma, which I conceive as a socio-culturally informed form of agency. Applying the concept of desired identification to the meta-level brings societal dynamics into focus by asking: *How can the social and political representation of a group be shaped when its members cloak themselves in silence?* If we consider silence not as a condition but as a practice, the question then looms: *What effects*

<sup>8</sup> Blackwood (2009, 2010) framed this most explicitly as 'contingency' of gender performances of *lesbi/ans* preferring masculinity. She showed that contingency unfolded *interpersonally*, i.e. different people perform masculinity in different ways, and *intrapersonally*, meaning that one and the same person performed gender in a contingent, or, as I will call it later, 'fluid' way. By doing so, they can cross spatial gender boundaries, or confront gender norms, in ways that vary by degrees depending on the performance of gender in different spaces.

*unfold after accidental or willful disclosure?* This is discussed in Chapter 5, which focuses on the practical negotiations of LT+ individuals' gender and desire in interaction with their social environment.

The fluidity of gender expression led me to consider space in combination with the conditions that shape the performativity of identifications. Space itself might be a factor influencing not only the articulation of a *lesbi/an* identification but also the *intrapersonal* fluidity of gender expression. In the various social spaces and contexts where *lesbi/an* persons participated, hegemonic ideals of gender and desire were differently present. This in turn affected the performance and expression of *lesbi/an* gender and sexual identifications contradicting these ideals. These considerations lead to the following questions: *What expectations concerning gender and sexuality do LT+ face in different spaces, and how do LT+ negotiate these topics and (not) put them into practice in these spaces? How does the intrapersonal performance of gender vary according to space? In which spaces and under what conditions are LT+ identifications articulated?* Chapter 5 focuses on these interactive, spatial negotiations of LT+ gender and sexuality. In a second step, I consider my findings on *intrapersonal* gender fluidity in relation to performativity theory. Here, I discuss the question *how fluidity of gender is included and conceptualized within performativity theory, and what the practices of LT+ subjects in Indonesia may contribute to that theory?*

### 1.1.2 Second focus: LT+ negotiations at the intersection of faith and desire

The second focus of this research is based on the significance of religion in Indonesia, not only for individuals but also as a factor in politics and a prominent force in civil society. Since Indonesia's democratic opening in 1998 a 'conservative turn' (van Bruinessen 2013) has taken place in the orientation of the country's dominant religion, Islam. The increasing influence of this conservative orientation has led to a standardization of the Islamic faith, in which images of 'authentic' Islam have emerged to define what constitutes an 'authentic' Muslim in terms of faith and ritual practice (Smith-Hefner 2020). LGBT+ identifications and desires are cast as incompatible with these normative designations. Without inhabiting the intersection of these aspects, it becomes easy to claim the existence of a simple paradox, but we have to ask: *What do those subjects for whom both aspects are important and real think, experience, and do?*

These considerations highlight a research gap regarding the religiosity and religious self-understandings of *lesbi/ans*, as well as their negotiations with this constructed incompatibility between their faith and desire (or, for transgender persons, their gender identity). The majority of publications on *lesbi/ans* consider religion as a system of reference that imposes norms, such as binary notions of gender, claims about anatomy, or the role of women as mothers and wives, that affect and inform *lesbi/ans'* self-understanding and practices of gender, or their freedom of movement. Another common reference to religion is to designate conservative, especially Islamic fundamentalism, as a source of homophobia (see e.g. Boellstorff 2004c; Liang

2010; Wieringa 2019). However, the other side of the story is either not captured or else is dealt with very briefly: A perspective that identifies personal faith and religious identifications as important alongside, in friction, in dialogue, or intersecting with sexual identifications. There has been no attempt to systematically address such positioned perspectives and experiences of female-bodied LT+ in relation to their faith, enabled by their faith. Usually, the simultaneity is mentioned – but not elaborated on – as an existing and complex field of negotiation for LGBT+.<sup>9</sup> Graham Davies (2010:21, 35-37) highlights gender understandings and practices as rooted in Islamic conceptions (such as perceptions of non-normative gender as God’s will), but does not elaborate on the connection to sexual subjectivities and desire. Blackwood (2010:15) for example, briefly touches on the topic by stating that “both tombois and femmes told me that according to Islam homosexuality is a sin, but they find their own accommodations between their religious beliefs and their desires.” However, due to a different focus and the moderate to non-identification with piety among her Muslim participants, the topic is not extensively explored. Webster (2004:34–35) is a little more detailed:

*For each of the women Islam meant different things. Although the Islamic teachings do not prohibit lesbianism and intimacy among women, passages on sodomy are interpreted to relate to any same sex attraction. [...] There was a general consensus among the women regarding the expression of their sexuality in relation to religion. Overall they felt that who they are, in its fullness, is a creation of God, and as such God must be approving of them.*

These short and broad statements point to the complexity, challenges, emotions, and forms of self-reflection involved. The negotiations of mostly Muslim LGBT+ Indonesian people’s relationships with the religious and the sexual have become a field of study for a younger generation of anthropologists, who have broadened the established focus on gender.<sup>10</sup> As one of this generation, who has focused on *lesbi/ans* and trans males specifically, I seek to fill the research gap outlined. In doing so, I respond to the call made by Smith-Hefner (2020:9), who argues that more research is needed on the intersections of youth, sexuality, Muslim discourse and practice, and Indonesian and Javanese culture to better understand the “evolving religious identifications, family relations, and gender roles among young Indonesians.”

Accordingly, I address the following questions: *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? How do religious lesbi/ans and trans males relate to and negotiate the incompatibility thesis? What modes of negotiation do they create at the intersection of personal faith and desire to inhabit, reconcile, transcend potentially conflicting identifications?* As a general

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<sup>9</sup> Boellstorff (2005a), who writes about male gay Muslims, and Thajib (2014), who focuses on the online expression of emotions by queer Muslims of all genders, are the exceptions here.

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., Coppens (2015); Hegarty (2022); Rodriguez (2019, 2020, 2022); Schneider (2015, 2016); Thajib (2014, 2019); Toomistu (2022) and Wijaya (2022).



overarching question, I also ask: *What does it mean to be a young, religious LT+ person in contemporary Java?* I address these questions in Chapter 6, which focuses on the Islamic discourses and stakeholders that construct either contradiction or compatibility, and Chapter 7, which focuses on the personal negotiations of my research participants. The answers to these questions contextualize LT+'s strategies of religious engagement from the perspective of their everyday world, shedding light on the struggles of a society between pluralization and politicization of Islam.

Both research foci combine social and cultural anthropology and gender studies. Motivated by friends, I started learning Indonesian, which manifested itself as a regional specialization after an eleven-month language course in Indonesia. Since I had, meanwhile, adopted a queer identification, my regional-thematic interest expanded to include LGBT+ subjectivities in Indonesia. Having completed my master's thesis on concepts of gender and relationships of *lesbi* in Indonesia (Schneider 2011), I chose to retain this focus in my doctoral research, but expanded it to provide a fresh and updated understanding of the positionings and associated joys and challenges of living as a religious LT+ person in Indonesia. I extended my research focus to the topic of religion due to the pivotal nature of religion in contemporary Indonesia. Even though I had abandoned my own religiosity long ago, the sense of connectedness and value that faith can provide are still accessible to me. This is why I am interested in non-hegemonic subjects' use of, and interaction with, power-imbued religion.

### 1.1.3 The relevance of this research

My research reveals, first, how subject formation takes place when marginalized desire is at play, and how participants manage the significant risk of individual and collective stigmatization. Second, it shows how participants negotiate ideals of gender and sexuality in their performative practice in a space-dependent way, and how this produces a fluidity in their performance of gender. Third, the research gives insight into how LT+ personally negotiate and inhabit a *mélange* of identifications, combining religiosity and same-sex desire in their self-understandings in complex ways, creating a place for it in some social spaces.

The focus on a social minority holds the promise of generating productive insights for the anthropology of Indonesia. From a bottom-up perspective, my research shows how socially marginalized individuals appropriate and confront social transformations, discourses around human rights, and the increasing politicization of Islam. It also examines how these normative frameworks are perceived by and affect people who 'inhabit' marginalized subjectivities. On the meta-level, my research illuminates how an increasingly conservative Muslim-majority society handles the demands for inclusive affiliation and self-determination by non-hegemonic subjects, and the challenge of pluralizing religious and sexual identifications this entails. I show how political, religious, and social actors increasingly construct LGBT+ subjectivities not only as a dangerous minority, but also as opponents of

the ‘morally conscious’ majority. In response, they lay claim to a comprehensive conservative, ‘traditional’ political alignment. In other words, this is not only about social participation of LGBT+ people in the creation of society, but it also concerns power struggles over the future political orientation of Indonesia. Thus, my research provides new insights into how religion and sexuality can be contemplated in tandem in our globalized world, where marginalized persons striving to attain livable subject positions use heterodox concepts to create counter-discourses to hegemonic discursive norms.

## 1.2 Theoretical perspectives

Below, I outline the specific scientific fields, theoretical perspectives and categories I base my work on and explain how I use them throughout this book.

### 1.2.1 Anthropological studies of gender and sexuality

For over fifty years, a systematic discussion on how to theorize the lived diversity of gender and sexuality has been ongoing in the discipline of social and cultural anthropology. In the beginning of the debate on gender, the body was seen as pre-discursive, its nature determining gender. This gave way, over time, to an understanding of gender as a socio-cultural construction (Moore 1988:15). Gender was then seen as socially determined gender identity, inscribed on the body (Hauser-Schäublin and Röttger-Rössler 1998:14–16; Morris 1995:573–575).<sup>11</sup> Theories of performativity examined how gender is interactively produced via the repetition of norms in accordance with cultural rules, rendering it not a fixed natural condition but a power-related process *creating* gender as role and identity. Further research showed that sexed bodies, sexual practices, and gender identities do not naturally correspond (Morris 1995:571–573); in fact, manifold differences exist cross-culturally, both between men and women, and within these groups themselves (Hauser-Schäublin and Röttger-Rössler 1998:8). Gender thereby ‘came of age’ as a relational and historically situated category that is constructed, articulated, and implemented socially in specific contexts, further differentiated by age, ethnicity, class, *et cetera* (Blackwood 2010:29; Hauser-Schäublin and Röttger-Rössler 1998:9, 6, 18; Strasser and Schein 1997:9).

Many forms of gender, bodies, and sexualities perceived as different within the sex/gender systems dominant in a given society (Schröter 1997:121) – or which, as Towle and Morgan (2002:469) emphasize, differed from the culturally informed

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<sup>11</sup> In line with this approach, Rubin (1975) described the importance of the analytical separation of sex as biological and gender as socially constructed, thereby contributing to a further denaturalization of gender. Others following this approach are, for example, Mouffe (1983); Ortner (1981, 1984); Rosaldo (1974).

perception of researchers – were described as ‘third sex/gender’ in anthropology.<sup>12</sup> Although the category ‘third gender’ excited great academic interest as it offered the opportunity to theorize sex/gender outside a binary and rethink its diversity, it also met with criticism.<sup>13</sup> In any case, the concept of the third sex/gender seems inappropriate in my case, because the majority of *lesbi/ans* situated themselves within a gender binary consisting of men and women. Although they were socially recognized as somewhat different, they were not assigned to a separate gender category.<sup>14</sup>

Another attempt to theorize especially non-Western gender diversity has conceptualized gender as a continuum (Jackson 2000, 2003).<sup>15</sup> In this view, the gender location on a scale is crucial for erotic subjectivity, as a specific desire is thought to follow as a consequence of the individual’s gender position. This implies the existence of an inhabitable middle ground, which could include lived practices beyond the rigid binary.<sup>16</sup> While the continuum model reflects my personal understanding of performatively produced gender, it seems similarly inappropriate for my research context. There, LT+ subjects obviously understood and performed gender and sexual identifications beyond the subject positions of heterosexual men and women, but did so in a context that did not recognize these multiple gender positions – especially not in relation to desire.

Gender as a category of analysis and as a subjective experience is interwoven and interdependent with other categories, such as sexuality/desire. In Indonesia, research has shown that there are several concepts framing the connection between body, gender, and desire.<sup>17</sup> In the hegemonic view that reiterates heteronormativity,

<sup>12</sup> Gilbert Herdt (1997) chose the term *third gender* to heuristically describe certain forms of gender and sexuality among the Sambia in Papua New Guinea, in order to open up a space for analyzing non-dichotomous categories and to escape dualism. Also, *Xanith* in Oman (Wikan 1977), *Hijras* in India (Nanda 1994), *Two-spirit-people* in America (Blackwood 1988) or *Travestis* in Brazil (Cornwall 1994) were and are sometimes still referred to as third or alternative genders.

<sup>13</sup> For example, critiques have been made questioning the use of the category as a tool for ‘othering’ in the West/non-West power dynamic (Reddy 2005:32), and its utility in describing complex experiences or deeply challenging existing binaries (Graham Davies 2010:47; Halberstam 1998a:28; Schröter 1997:143–145; Towle and Morgan 2002:484; Wieringa and Blackwood 1999:23–24).

<sup>14</sup> While I will not use this category due to the almost opposing practices of LT+ subjects, the category third gender got quite popular in 2014 in Indonesian LGBT+ activism and NGO’s (e.g. Arus Pelangi), who, in relation to the Transgender Day of Remembrance (hereafter TDoR), started a petition demanding recognition of *waria/priawan*/trans subjectivities as a third gender (*jender ketiga*).

<sup>15</sup> The idea of a continuum allows Jackson (2000:415) to arrange the vast variety of recognized gender positions (*phet*) as it works on the premise that in the Thai context gender (not sex/desire) is crucial for understanding a person’s position.

<sup>16</sup> Graham Davies (2010:55), in her discussion of whether the idea of a continuum fits the gender system of the Indonesian Bugis who recognize five gender positions, concludes that it does not because of the linkage of gender and desire.

<sup>17</sup> Blackwood (2010) conclusively suggests that with *lesbi* in Padang, Sumatra, the body is relegated to the background and desire/sexuality emerges as an intricate entwinement of masculinity and femininity, appropriating the hegemonic logic of ‘opposites attract,’ but deriving it from gender, not sex.

gender and desire are assumed to be corollaries of sex, either biologically or divinely determined. While I do not want to downplay the manifold connections and intricacies between bodies, gender, and sexuality that many researchers have found, I am not focusing on the question of how this connection took form within my sample. Rather, I ask how the ideal of womanhood, which intertwines ideas of gender and sexuality, was negotiated in practice and affected LT+ identifications. Even if I concentrate on gender, the aspect of sexuality as a category of social difference is more in focus overall in order to consider how sexual subject formation initiates LT+ subjectivities. This helps understand the negotiations with religion that revolved around the aspect of sexual difference.

Although their performative practice of masculinity went beyond the confines of conventional women, most *butchi* saw themselves as bound to the category of ‘woman’ through their bodies. To acknowledge this self-understanding of *butchi*, I frame their gender plurality under the concept of ‘female masculinity’. ‘Female masculinity’ describes the appropriation and embodiment of masculinity by people ‘born female’ (Halberstam 1998a). It seems appropriate for my participants, because while the term acknowledges a binary understanding of the body as a powerful social category, this is not a determinant of gender or of gendered self-understanding. Female masculinity is not simply a copy of male masculinity, but is instead a subversive appropriation and reinterpretation of the latter (Butler 1991).<sup>18</sup> Female masculinity is not only performance but also non-performance, as anatomically-assumed femininity is rejected (Halberstam 1998a:123–126). Most *butchi*, though recognizing their sex as female, dissociate themselves from femininity and make sense of their gender expression by comparing themselves to men.

With these perspectives, I build upon contributions of post-1990s ethnological research that focused on the disciplinary mechanisms that shape individuals and their sexuality through social institutions and practices which naturalize heterosexuality. Rather than framing the discussion solely around sexuality, I prefer to speak of desire as initiating the *lesbi/an* subject positions. This term allows for a nuanced exploration of erotic interest and affection between people, and challenges the notion that sexual subjectivities solely derive from performed sexual acts. Neverthe-

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Graham Davies (2010:25–32), in comparison emphasized that desire can also be the stimulus, as desire had the power to align one’s gendered practice (e.g. desire towards women produced investment in masculinity) or that gender positions may be substantiated by sexual desire, when e.g. a *calabai* (roughly *varia* or trans woman) may only claim a *calabai* subject position if s/he both performed femininity and desired men.

<sup>18</sup> Female or lesbian masculinity is generally referred to by the word ‘butch’, an umbrella category for different lesbian masculinities (Halberstam 1998a:120). Female masculinity differs from male masculinity: Butches primarily seek to satisfy their partners and not, as men often do (as Halberstam puts it), themselves. This is also highlighted by Indonesian *femmes* as a quality of female masculinity compared to male masculinity (Wieringa 2007). Second, a butch unites within herself the contradiction of ‘being’ a woman while perceiving herself as masculine (Halberstam 1998a:123–126).

less, I localize my work in the field of ‘queer anthropology’, which by contextualization and a focus on the intersections of different categories of identification offers interdisciplinary insights about the ways in which sexuality, sex, gender, culture and power are produced, established and intertwined with each other (Boellstorff 2006c:627; Manalansan 2006:224–226).<sup>19</sup>

During my research, it became clear that Foucault’s and Butler’s theoretical frameworks concerning discursive power, performativity, and the formation of gendered and sexual subjects, when combined with a practice theory approach, complement the results obtained through the empirically-based Grounded Theory approach in fruitful ways.<sup>20</sup> This triangulation not only allows me to capture and interpret the constraints and practices that create complex, historically and socio-culturally embedded gendered and sexual subjectivities ‘in place’ (Blackwood and Wieringa 2007:8) in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, but also to meet Graham Davies’ (2010:57) call to “to initiate context based, cross-cultural dialogue, which grounds theoretical developments in rich data.”

### 1.2.2 Discourse, subject formation and identifications

In this book, I conceptualize gender and sexuality as social constructions, highlighting their contextual quality and the existence of various competing formations of gender and sexuality, including the numerous ways these formations are endowed with meaning. Our world is structured by discourses, frameworks of (claims to) knowledge and truth that structure our perceptions and interpretations, such as our understanding of ‘normal’ forms of gender and sexuality. Discourses are practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak (Foucault 1981:74). Discourses are not neutral; they are imbued with power, history, and ideology. They are productive because they allow us to create comprehensible blueprints, apply meaning, and thereby give structure to thoughts and things.

A variety of discourses exist, unequal in power and influence; some are hegemonic, yet none are all-encompassing (Foucault 1983:100). To capture this simultaneous existence of hegemony and variability, I refer to (dominant) conceptions of gender and sexuality as ‘systems’ and ‘ideals’, and, following Smith-Hefner (2020:71), of ‘currents’. Throughout this book, I explore how LT+ individuals perceive, negotiate, and re-arrange these discourses, demonstrating their aspiration and

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<sup>19</sup> Critical, ethnological research on normative heterosexuality can be employed to destabilize dominant notions, whether in regards to romantic love, see Ahearn (2004) and Kelsky (2001); in regards to manhood and masculinity, see Clark (2010); Connell, Stahl and Müller (2006); Ford and Lyons (2012); Nilan, Demartoto and Broom (2013); Peletz (1995); in regard to heterosexual relationships, see Carrillo (2002) and Frank (2002), and in connection to nationalism, see Dwyer (2000).

<sup>20</sup> That is why I am applying these theories here, even if they are heavily influenced by western perspectives, history, and reasoning. For critiques of the application of western theories of gender to non-western contexts, see Blackwood and Wieringa (2007:3–7); Graham Davies (2010:56–57); Halberstam (2012); Towle and Morgan (2002).

agency within competing gender and sexuality currents on a micro-level. These discourses contain ‘knowledge’ and ‘truths’ about gender and sexuality, but they do not simply overwrite or homogenize ‘local’ or national discourses.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, hegemonic constellations of knowledge and truth exert power, not in the unilinear sense of subordination, but by entering and binding the minds and bodies of individuals.

In analyzing subject formation, it is crucial to consider power relations, as subjects are socially positioned and ranked within, and by, power structures (Foucault 2005:270).<sup>22</sup> In their daily lives, individuals experience objectifying power, which divides them into culturally specific categories, such as woman or man, healthy or sick, heterosexual or homosexual, normal or abnormal. These categories ascribe identities accompanied by specific ‘truths’ – cultural constructions of meaning – that force individuals to subjectify themselves because recognition by others relies on a ‘readable’ identity (Foucault 2005:275). As such, the formation of an intelligible and comprehensible subject involves external disciplining through state regulation practices, combined with internal disciplining through self-government practices (Große Kracht 2006; Lemke, Krasmann and Bröckling 2000:29–30).<sup>23</sup>

Subjects do not exist outside of social structures, but are constituted by them.

*Identity becomes a ‘moveable feast’: formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are presented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us. [...] Within us are contradictory identities, pulling in different directions, so that our identifications are continuously being shifted about.* (Hall 1992:277)

To avoid the common-sense associations of fixity and natural innateness that are connected to the term ‘identity’, particularly within ‘collective identity-groups’ like *lesbi/ans*, I hence primarily use the word ‘identification’, in alignment with Hall (1996b:2). This choice highlights contingency and marks “the process of subjectification to discursive practices” (Hall 1996b:2). Identity, then, is a processual phenomenon constructed *within* discourse, capable of change and accommodating differences between the people sharing an identification. As Hall suggests, people’s identifications are always multiple and relational, as they are “the product of the marking of difference and exclusion” (Hall 1996b:4). For example, a *lesbi/an* identification differs from and excludes heterosexual desire. The notion of ‘articulation’,

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<sup>21</sup> International and national notions of gender and sexuality are (to varying degrees) appropriated and embedded in the local contexts in which LT+ move, shaped by and reshaping ‘local’ perceptions. What is rather helpful here is the approach of “glocalization” (Robertson 1998), which sees the relationship between local and global processes as intertwined.

<sup>22</sup> Various disciplines such as medicine, education, and the state have the effect of individualization, leading to the reduction of individuals to objects of knowledge.

<sup>23</sup> A governmentalized subject obeys rules and commands, not solely as an effect of prohibition, coercion or consent, but because of a learned system of conduct derived from cultural and institutional integration in society.

as delineated by Hall (1996b:14), denotes the relationship between subjects and discourse, rendering identities, positions, or interests accessible and perceptible to others. It creates a conjunction between the subject and the identity or position (Hall 1996a:141–142; Murray Li 2000:152). However, as (cultural) identifications rely on shifting history, power and its continuing effects, they are provisional positionings (Hall 1990:226). In line with this understanding I use, as Blackwood (2010:21) suggests, ‘subject positions’ for the ideological categories of ‘women’ and ‘men’ that are constructed within cultural contexts. I conceptualize subjectivity in the context of identification, emphasizing its varying personal dimensions, including the sense of self, emotions, thoughts, and the dynamic process of self-positioning in relation to recognized subject positions (Blackwood 2010:22; see also Ortner 2006:107).

Judith Butler (1990) offers fruitful insights into subject formation and identity concerning sex and gender. People adopt and perform a gender on a daily basis according to socially accepted meanings and culturally specific norms. This practice, termed ‘performativity’ by Butler (1993), invokes a gender and its associated identity. Repetitions of socially established meanings in these performances are not arbitrary, but conform with recognizable standards through which subjects and their being are constituted (Butler 1993). In this unending process, gender categories become normalized and establish an idea of ‘coherence’ and ‘continuity’ between sex, gender, and (heterosexual) sexuality, demarcating the realm of ‘intelligible genders’ (Butler 1990:22, 208). To define what sexualities or genders are considered legitimate, humane, livable, or unnatural is, therefore, a question of power in hegemonic discourse.

Gender is indeed a social construction, but it is also very real, perceptible, and sensible.<sup>24</sup> Gender is incorporated in identity through daily performative practices and becomes, in the process, so ingrained that a person really feels that s/he “*is* a gender” (Butler 1990:21, emphasis in original). As we incorporate the attributes of our ascribed genders, we perceive socially established limits and structures in which we have learned ‘our place’; this enables us to easily conform to the gendered standards of our culture (Bourdieu 1990b:90). For Bourdieu, gender becomes an unconscious tactile reality – a social construct that can, in some cases, be ‘felt’. I understand gender as an embodied and learned interplay of behaviors, tasks, physical and emotional attributes, specific dress styles, and scopes of action assigned by society. However, the existence of LGBT+ genders and sexualities implies that the discursive norm of heterosexuality does not thoroughly determine people (Butler 1993), revealing its status as a social construct. This understanding includes not only the societal images of gender, but also points to the fluidity of ‘personal’ gender, which emerges through ‘doing’ in specific historical and cultural constellations.

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<sup>24</sup> Gender is a construct that deeply influences individuals, shaping not only their bodies but also their perceptions and emotions. Statements uttered by LT+ in Indonesia, like “I am a woman”, or “I feel like a man”, carry genuine significance and are far from meaningless or imagined.

A performativity theory approach can analyze how gender is created, enacted, and transformed in relation to societal norms, yet it grapples with the aspect of the body, the materiality gender often becomes.<sup>25</sup> By combining performativity theory with practice theory, I am able to make sense of disparate empiric observations in terms of gender.<sup>26</sup> The assumption is that gender identity is created through performativity, but that gender is anchored to different degrees in subjects and their bodies. Some individuals perform gender within established expressions due to habitual embodiment and conformity to intelligible genders, while others navigate multiple identifications, resulting in (hyper-)fluid gender performances. In my understanding, performativity theory and practice theory work well together. Both deal with the reproduction or transformation of hegemonic social notions via continuing social structures that inform human action. Drawing on Ortner's (1996:4)<sup>27</sup> practice theory, which implies a dialectic between structure and action, I understand actors and practices as produced through structure, yet at the same time reproducing or changing structure through their practices. To frame the agency of subjects, I use Mahmood's (2005) insights.<sup>28</sup> Mahmood (2005:188) defines agency as culturally specific, involving various modalities of "enacting, transgressing, or inhabiting ethical norms and moral principles". She argues that a certain form of subordination – and not resistance – is a prerequisite for agentive personhood. Mahmood illustrates this paradoxical 'docility' using the image of a pianist who engages in hour-long disciplinary practice of mind and body "in order to acquire the ability – the requisite agency – to play the instrument with mastery" (Mahmood 2005:29). In my research, interview partners are the pianists who play their instrument, the respective socio-cultural context, with mastery, as they negotiate that instrument across powerful social norms and ideals, while partially inhabiting them.

With these considerations in mind, I explore religious and societal ideals of female gender and sexuality as articulated in various contemporary discourses. I focus particularly on the sexual subject formation of *lesbi/ans* and observe the everyday practices and narratives of gender. Throughout my examination, I remain attentive

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<sup>25</sup> It can therefore hardly account for above-mentioned statements, or for the gendered reality of persons who struggle to pass as the gender they were not assigned to at birth and who can't 'do' gender differently, but encounter the need to materialize their gender through surgery.

<sup>26</sup> Some interviewees were not invested in a fluid and contingent performance of gender. Others had established a clear gender identity as self-identification, but their everyday performance of gender was fluid and changeable according to spatial location – it sometimes even crossed gendered borders. See Chapter 5 below.

<sup>27</sup> Ortner builds on work of earlier practice theory scholars, especially Bourdieu (1977, 1990a), but also Sahlins (1981), Giddens (1979) and Certeau (1984).

<sup>28</sup> Mahmood conceptualizes agency in distinction to Ortner (1996:17–18) even more apart from "resistance" or "acting against" (Webster 2008:3). I nevertheless find Ortner's model of 'serious games' helpful as it allows a better understanding of the dialectic between multiple constraints and affiliations, without negating slippages and modifications. In Chapter 7, I elaborate why concepts that frame agency only as resistance are problematic.



to the influence of structure, sensitive to negotiation and variation, and curious about ruptures, alternate understandings, and enactments.

### 1.2.3 Space-dependent ‘doing of identifications’

The attention to space and to spatial theory in this book is based on the assumption that LT+ individuals often maintain secrecy over their identifications or same-sex desire, even as academic research reveals that LT+ people are friends (or participated in a specific research), and consequently must have articulated their identification at some point. The expression of these non-normative identifications appears to be space-dependent, prompting inquiry into the factors that enable or inhibit articulation within different spatial contexts. Furthermore, research participants often used spatial metaphors like ‘entering a new world’ in relation to their LT+ identification. The application of spatial theory contributes to the understanding of how the ‘doing of identifications’ is related to space, the penetration (or lack thereof) of normative discursive currents into space, and the co-creation of space by LT+ individuals for their subjectivities. In line with the above-mentioned theories, I also apply a social-constructivist understanding of space that conceptualizes space as produced in interaction.

Based on Certeau (1984:117), I understand space not as a pre-arranged container with fixed social and physical structures, but as produced through the interaction of participants and their practices. Participants, through their ideological positions manifested in speech and practice, shape the power relations that manifest in a plural fashion within space. Certeau (1984:117) explains that

*[...] space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities. Space is [...] transformed into a term dependent upon many different conventions, [...], and modified by the transformations caused by successive contexts. In contradistinction to the place, it has thus none of the univocity or stability or stability of a “proper.” In short, space is a practiced place.*

If space and its power relations are dependent on the participants and their ideological positions and practices, then space is both “a means of control, and hence of domination, of power” (Lefebvre 1991:26), and a means for subjects to find ways to use hegemonic social spaces subversively for their interests (Certeau 1984).

This conception contrasts with earlier anthropological views of culture as bounded to physical space or a specific research ‘field’, typically synonymous with a physical location like a village. Space was seen as a given and a natural constant. Within the debates on constructivism during the spatial turn in the 1990s, anthropology reflected on the trope of ‘the field’ as well as the relationship between culture and space within the discipline. Scholars broadened understandings of ‘the field’ by taking space into differentiated consideration (Bhabha 1994; Clifford 1997; Döring

and Thielmann 2009; Gupta and Ferguson 1997a, 1997b). In the aftermath, culture is no longer seen as bound to a singular locale, while new physically unbound ‘fields’ for research on topics such as transnationalism emerged. Research topics related to space were framed within wider metaphors, such as ‘global ethnoscares’ (Appadurai 1996b).

Global flows of culture, ideas, material and people, interconnectedness, and ‘de-territorialization’ are key to globalization (Appadurai 1996b; Kearney 1995; Massey 2007 [1994]). However, everyday interactions between people remain pivotal to the transformation and reproduction of ‘culture’ and its social orders. This is because, on a local level, hybridizing influences come together and sediment into practice and convictions (Hannerz 1996:27). Therefore, local spaces as field-sites remain central to anthropology, even amidst considerations of the unboundedness and multiplicity of influences and relations. In a social constructivist perspective, space is not a ‘container’ with fixed boundaries but rather the product of social practices that construct space as their mediator (Hauser-Schäublin and Dickhardt 2003).

Power relations were inevitably at play within the various and overlapping spaces inhabited or created by LT+ people, promoting specific idea(l)s and frames of reference for gender, sexuality, or sexuality in religion. Due to the changing participants in these spaces and webs of affiliation, different dimensions of the cultural construction of gender/sexuality were invoked, taken up, challenged, and negotiated in practice by LT+ respondents. The ‘doing of identification’ (whether gendered, sexual, religious, etc.) and its articulation are necessary due to the constraint to produce ‘understandable’ identifications. However, this process may vary in relation to space-specific and interactively produced power relations. In the ensuing chapters, I analyze how practiced space became gendered and thereby enabled or restricted participation respective to gender. I also explore how LT+ persons performed and negotiated gendered and sexual identifications in spatial interaction with non-LGBT+ actors, who imbued the space with heteronormativity (see chapters 4 and 5). In these contexts, non-LGBT+ and LT+ individuals participated in the co-creation of space. However, LT+ people regularly also created space with alternative power relations among themselves, thereby facilitating the expression of their subjectivities.

#### **1.2.4 Stigma and marginality**

As a sexual minority, LGBT+ people in Indonesia face marginalization and stigma, not only when their affiliation with the LGBT+ group becomes known, but also when the threat of stigma constrains their behavior and articulation of identifications in social life. Stigma theory contributes to the understanding of situated moralities prevalent in Yogyakarta, and the ways in which anti-LGBT+ rhetoric and heteronormative discourse contributed to the formation of LT+ subjectivity and their negotiation of identifications in different social spaces. Social marginalization is dynamic, disadvantaging, and exclusionary, and linked to power structures that

are asymmetrical between center and periphery (Gurung and Kollmair 2005:11–13). These power structures are continuously reproduced and situated, as Stodulka and Röttger-Rössler (2014:16) summarize with reference to Haug (2010), Li (1999) and Tsing (1993). However, stigma does not follow from every social or spatial marginalization (Stodulka and Röttger-Rössler 2014).

Goffman (1975:11) defines stigma as an “attribute that is deeply discrediting”, emphasizing its relational aspect. Theorization of stigma as a social construction was particularly prominent in the work of social psychologists and scholars of social medicine, who emphasized stigma’s character as “relational to the socio-cultural, political, and historical context and its local hierarchies” (Stodulka and Röttger-Rössler 2014:17). Forms of stigma emerge, with varying intensity, when individuals or groups do not (or cannot) adhere to social norms. Accordingly, stigma, while universal, takes on specific forms dependent on the local context and power relations. As Link and Phelan (2001:377) assert, “Stigma exists when elements of labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination occur together in a power situation that allows them.” I address this process of labeling in Chapter 4, where I analyze LT+ subject formation and the practices of silence that enable stigma management.

The stigmatization of LGBT+ is based on social norms that assume that gender and heterosexuality are innate. These norms dictate idea(l)s of marriage, family, and biological reproduction, which LGBT+ subjects allegedly deviate from. In Goffman’s terms (1975:12), my interview partners are to be understood as “discreditable” rather than “discredited” individuals, because the incompatibility of their identifications with the norm is not immediately perceptible until their status is revealed. The above definition of stigma already points to the real effects of stigma through negative labeling by powerful institutions and individuals, and its long-term physical and psychological impact on those labeled.

If LT+ identification or desire was not obscured by desired identifications,<sup>29</sup> the experience of stigma could be even more pronounced, as shown by research on directly perceptible, visible, and known stigma. Stigmatized individuals are not only perceived as different, creating a separation between ‘us’ and ‘them’, but are also seen as embodying the stereotypes associated with the label (Link and Phelan 2001:370). This leads to discrimination and disqualification of further personality traits (Goffman 1975:13), and a change in the ascribed moral status of a person or community. This, in turn, often triggers a feeling of shame in individuals (Yang and Kleinman 2008).<sup>30</sup> Stigma spurs social avoidance and distance, not only towards the stigmatized persons, but also towards those associated with them, including their friends and family (Das 2001; Goffman 1975:43, 164; Stodulka and Röttger-Rössler

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<sup>29</sup> In Chapter 4, I develop the concept of *desired identification* along the phases of LT+ subject formation in light of stigma.

<sup>30</sup> For detailed examples of this point in the Indonesian context, see Boellstorff (2014); Heuser (2014); Rickum (2014); Sakti (2014); Stodulka (2014b); Thajib (2014); Wardaya (2014).

2014:18). This contributes to social, though not necessarily physical, segregation (Matsueda 2014:21). The processes surrounding labeling and stigma also give rise to structural discrimination (Link and Phelan 2001:371–373). As a result, stigma can have a significant impact not only on educational and employment opportunities and individuals' corresponding access to income, but also on housing and a person's mental and physical health, as stigma creates obstacles to accessing healthcare or the job market.

In light of these potential impacts on both LT+ individuals' everyday lives and their social and moral status, as well as those of their social affiliates, the secretive handling of identifications is not only a security measure. It is also a witness to the participants' multiple relations to cultural norms and how those relations are informed by various strands of identity affiliations.

### 1.2.5 Lived religion – Islam and homosexuality

To answer my questions, and to analyze how interview partners navigated the intersections of religion and desire and negotiated the 'incompatibility thesis', I use the approach of 'everyday' or 'lived religion':

*Rethinking religion as a form of cultural work, the study of lived religion directs attention to institutions and persons, texts and rituals, practice and theology, things and ideas—all as media of making and unmaking worlds. The key questions concern what people do with religious idioms, how they use them, what they make of themselves and their worlds with them, and how, in turn, men, women, and children are fundamentally shaped by the worlds they are making as they make these worlds. [...] Religion approached this way is situated amid the ordinary concerns of life, at the junctures of self and culture, family and social world, [...]. It includes the work of social agents/actors themselves as narrators and interpreters (and reinterpreters) of their own experiences and histories. (Orsi 2003:172, emphasis in original)*

Focusing on topics at the intersection of religiosity and same-sex desire from a perspective of lived religion is not uncommon in scholarly inquiry (see e.g. Peumans 2014; Rostosky et al. 2008; Shah 2018; Talvacchia, Pettinger and Larrimore 2015). This approach is particularly appropriate for my research question for two reasons.

Firstly, the approach allows for prioritizing the perspectives and practices of non-experts (Ammerman 2007:5). The LT+ respondents who are the focus of this work are not scholars, clergy, or experts claiming authority over interpretation or ritual; rather, they are regular practitioners with diverse understandings of their faith, who practice religion differently and *do* something with it. In this way, the perspective of 'lived religion' differs from more dominant approaches in the history of the

anthropology of religion.<sup>31</sup> Secondly, the lived religion approach resonates with social constructivist perspectives on performativity and practice, as the structuring importance of institutions and experts is assumed (Ammerman 2007:5). The approach presumes that the ideas, practices, and self-understandings of believers are neither independent of structure (doctrine, institutions, experts), nor determined by it. Instead, they convey structuring effects in theological content, practical ritual routines, and patterns of thought. These structuring effects are mediated through institutions and in religious socialization. In the lived religion approach, it is emphasized that in individual practice they are used, transformed, and applied *differently*. Frederik Barth, though writing on Bali, puts the interrelation between socially embedded Islamic structure, ideas, and practices in sensible terms that also describe the environment of the participants of this research. Islam defines

*[...] a whole world in which to participate; a set of concepts and representations to live by; and a universe of discourse in which to frame one's awareness, design one's social relationships and acts, and interpret oneself and one another. [...]. The Islamic stream [is] thus [...] a structure of ideas and practices that penetrates but does not encompass the lives of its practitioners.* (Barth 1993:177)

In this understanding, individuals are neither puppets dominated by structure, nor is religion the sole source of knowledge. With Barth (1993:177), I conceptualize religion as one 'motor' of cultural transformation and reproduction, operating dynamically in conjunction with other locally relevant cultural 'streams'.

The approach of lived religion recognizes the body as crucial to understanding diverse forms of religious practice, where the body is doubly relevant (McGuire 2007). On the one hand, religious content and precepts directly relate to the body. Concepts and rituals surrounding birth and death, as well as prayers for health and bodily wellbeing, relate to corporeality. Practitioners relate their embodied practice to the future well-being of their soul after the time of embodiment on earth. Moreover, religious injunctions, especially regarding gender and sexuality, address the body and contain instructions for disciplining it in terms of purity, concealment, or sociality between sexes. On the other hand, since embodiment is a fundamental condition of humanity, religion and religiosity are experienced, practiced, and expressed through the body (McGuire 2007:190). Research participants expressed and perceived the bodily component of religion through various means, including verbal greetings, physical postures, individual or communal prayers, emotion experiences during worship, fasting, and contemplation. While contemplation may be an activity of the mind, it is also enacted through the body. Both aspects of the relationship

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<sup>31</sup> Work in the anthropology of religion classically considered the boundaries and content, the rationality of what was understood as religion, and the (hierarchical) relationship between organizations, orthodoxy, and practice. In the course of the nineteenth century the focus shifted to the experts, intellectuals and clergy, and the doctrines via which the contents were codified in text and scripture (Tambiah 1990:1–5).

between religion and the body are present in the rest of this book. The ideals of gender and sexuality that interviewees were measured against reflect religious norms, while corporeality serves as a vital component of their religious experience and expression.

The chapter structure of the second empirical section reflects this twofold perspective on structure/practice or discourse/performance with regards to religion. In Chapter 6, I analyze how religion functioned as a structure/discourse producing hegemonic and alternative knowledges across different actors. I examine how religion provides interview partners with different interpretive frameworks to evaluate their desire. Moving forward, Chapter 7 delves into the personal negotiations of participants, the question of subjectivation and what they *did* with religion. I show how they interpreted their desires alongside, but also in distinction to, established religious understandings, and how they used their knowledge of religion as a resource to *work on* and overcome struggles or to ‘furnish’ the unintelligible space their subjectivities were assigned to, making it inhabitable. I classify these different approaches as *modes of negotiation*. As forms of lived religion at this specific intersection, the *modes* stand in relation to religious norms and the practical, ritual canon, but also in opposition to normative religious content that accompanied participants’ upbringing and religious socialization in families, educational institutions, places of worship, and the public sphere.

A central issue of debate in the anthropology of religion has always been the challenge of comparing strikingly different religious beliefs and cultural concepts and translating them into intelligible scientific language and concepts (Tambiah 1990:3).<sup>32</sup> Today, anthropological research on religion, particularly concerning Islam, has the further responsibility to translate its results within and beyond scientific boundaries while navigating and confronting global ideological divides intensified by one-sided discourses.<sup>33</sup> Despite aiming for impartiality, my research has the potential to be co-opted by various ideological factions, reflecting power struggles over

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<sup>32</sup> An endeavor undertaken from a western perspective, and situated in “western ‘scientism’ as a paradigm” (Tambiah 1990:3).

<sup>33</sup> The war on terror of ‘the’ western world intensified polarization. Discourses of ‘the West’ often affirm Islam’s fundamental difference (Boellstorff 2005a:575) and ignore inner-Islamic debates complicating violence, diversity, tolerance, and ethics. Islam is imagined in singularity, as the antagonist of a liberal and secular democracy, which represents freedom, self-determination, and adherence to human rights. Meanwhile, Islam is allegedly violent, patriarchal, and homophobic, denouncing LGBTIQ lifestyles. Such ideologically biased views impact queer Muslims in various ways, see Al-Sayyad (2010); Khan (2010a). However, the liberal western ideology regarding gender and sexualities is not simply liberating but also normative. See, for example, Mohanty (1994); Spivak (1988) on the construction of ‘third world women’ as passive victims; Halley (2018) on feminism as un-emancipatory governance project; or Haritaworn (2009); King (2009); Puar (2006, 2007) on homonormativity and homonationalism.

authority of interpretation, legitimacy, and belonging that occur at local, national, and global levels.<sup>34</sup>

Research on the compatibility of homosexuality, transgender, and Islam faces numerous challenges, extending beyond political oversimplification. Queer Studies, inherently secular and often antireligious, tends to view religions as engines of homophobic discrimination, regularly ignoring the more affirmative perspectives of queer religious believers and the potential for religions to serve as spaces of empowerment (van Klinken 2019:13–15; Wilcox 2006:73–74). Affirmative research that supports the exploration of LGBT+ perspectives also experiences resistance within the framework of theology, through the inherent diversity and contradictions of Islamic texts,<sup>35</sup> some of which suggest compatibility and others opposition (Kugle 2010:3). Additionally, patriarchal culture permeating most Muslim communities perpetuates sexist and homophobic views. However, patriarchy is neither ‘Islamic’ nor congruent with ‘Islam’s’ considerable plurality, even if some religious teachings support patriarchal cultural elements (Kugle 2010:3). Research on homosexuality and Islam typically navigates these complexities by focusing primarily on texts,<sup>36</sup> or lived experiences situated at the intersection of culture, politics, and religious reasoning in different national locales.

The analyses of the lived experiences of LGBTIQ<sup>37</sup> Muslims are diverse and show that the struggle of queer Muslims with the ‘incompatibility thesis’ is a global phenomenon. Many focus, as I do, on what people *do* with religion and the social construction of identities or religious realities.<sup>38</sup> Others focus on political or discursive

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<sup>34</sup> Progressive liberals may overhear the tones of joy and agency the book presents, and focus on the stigma as confirmation of the ‘actual incompatibility’ of Islam and LGBT+ lifestyles. Conservatives and radicals, in comparison, may not like to have their understanding of the limits of tolerance and inclusion questioned and see themselves confirmed in the ‘actual depravity’ of the participants.

<sup>35</sup> Islamic religious traditions are built on a variety of texts – “from Qur’an as scripture and *hadith* as oral teachings to *fiqh* as legal rulings and the *shari’a* as a rhetoric of orthodoxy” (Kugle 2010:2).

<sup>36</sup> In terms of theology, Kugle (2010) takes the most elaborate reformist approach and focuses on the varieties of religious text included in theology to argue that essential sources of doctrine allow lesbian, gay, and transgender practices and identifications as long as they fulfill the ethical values defined by the *Qur’an* that are also essential for heterosexual relationships. Zollner (2010) and Jahangir (2010) discuss the unlawfulness of same-sex relations in orthodoxy and dismantle biases in classical readings of the respective qur’anic passages and *hadith*. Musić (2010) addresses the topic of situatedness in exegesis of textual sources, while Kelly (2010a) analyzes the power relations between historical mainstream positions and alternative interpretations. Sharlet (2010) and Ghandour (2019) focus on homo-erotic Islamic culture in historic literature and Shah (2010) addresses writings on the great pilgrimage *hajj* from margins of Muslim identity.

<sup>37</sup> As this is about queer Muslims in general, I include more western abbreviations. LGBT+ I use for the Indonesian context.

<sup>38</sup> See e.g. Kelly (2010b); Maulod and Jamil (2010); Yip (2005); Yip and Khalid (2010); on queer Muslims in Muslim-majority countries, see Luongo (2010); on queer Muslims in non-Muslim majority countries, see Al-Sayyad (2010); Jaspal (2012); Khan (2010a); Khan (2010b); Yip (2008); for comparative approaches between both, see Williams (2010) on Malaysia and China, or Shah (2018) on Malaysia and Great Britain.

sive aspects that shape these worlds, such as competing discourses and the differences between concepts in Muslim-West relations (see Kramer 2010; Zanghellini 2010), emphasizing the influence of orientalism and colonialism by historicizing views on sexuality and social order in Arab societies (Abdulahadi 2010), or critiquing the homonormativity of queer organizations (e.g. Hamzić 2012; Yorukoglu 2010). Although these scholars usually prioritize either textual analysis or the lived experiences of queer Muslims, they recognize and integrate the ‘other side’, seeing them as interdependent. Similarly, my focus is on the lived experiences, but I do also acknowledge and integrate theological aspects, as they frame the negotiations and are necessary for understanding the experiences and references of LT+.

### 1.3 *Lesbi/ans* and trans males in Indonesia: Some terms and remarks

After situating my research in theoretical perspectives, I introduce and clarify sub-cultural terminology, as LT+ people use a variety of terms to describe their gender and desire. These definitions form the foundation that will help the reader understand the individuals and their positioning and involvement in gender dynamics. At the same time, they clarify the similarities and differences to internationally used terms and concepts.

#### 1.3.1 *Lesbi/an* and trans male gender positions

Many *lesbi/ans* use specific labels to denote their gender positions in relation to masculinity or femininity. Masculine gender categories are: *butchi*, *sentul*, *cowok*, *laki laki*, *tomboi*, *calalai* and *bunter*. Feminine gender categories are: *femme*, *kantil*, *cewek* and *lines* (Blackwood 2010; Graham Davies 2010; Murray 1999; Webster 2008; Wieringa 2007). The use of each category varies according to region and context. In Yogyakarta where I conducted research, the terms *butchi* and *femme* dominate, and I primarily use them in the ensuing chapters, acknowledging the challenges they pose. Some *lesbi/ans* living in Yogyakarta also use the terms *andro butchi*, *andro* and *andro femme*, which denote different nuances in the continuum between masculine and feminine.

However, some women whose desire is same-sex oriented reject these categories due to the gender expressions and expectations associated with them, opting instead for the label ‘no label’. As mentioned above, when *lesbi/ans* identify as *butchi* and thus locate themselves as a female person favoring a masculine gender expression, the individual performance of masculinity varies within the *butchi* category and *intrapersonally*. The labels encompass different meanings and subjective expressions, as both *butchis* and *femmes* craft their expression at the intersection of their



personal perspectives and a certain dominant form.<sup>39</sup> The same surely holds true for trans male individuals who identify with masculinity but do not understand or feel themselves to be women, but at most female-bodied. Aligning with the international concepts of transgender, trans male subjects used the terms FTM (female-to-male) and trans man, *transpria* or the newer Indonesian term *priawan* for their gendered subjectivity, a composite of the Indonesian terms *pria* (man/male) and *wanita* (woman/lady).

The research also uncovered regionally different understandings and references to anatomical sex, especially by people identifying with masculinity (see Table 2). In my sample, the majority of masculine L+ research participants stressed that they were women, but frequently used the analogy ‘like men’ to articulate their gender expression in contrast to the femininity associated with women. Other female-bodied respondents, usually activists, altered their former identification to that of trans man or *priawan*, clearly disidentifying with the category of woman, some still using the word *lesbi/an* to describe their desire. I try to reflect this differentiation by referring to L+ and T+, with the plus signifying internal plurality.

Table 2: Regional references to anatomical sex by masculine lesbi/ans

location	masculine gender label	reference to sex	source
Padang, West Sumatra	tomboi	claim category men	Blackwood 2010
South Sulawesi	calabai (distinct gender category out of five acknowledged among Bugis ethnic group), tomboi, hunter	female bodied but neither woman nor man	Graham Davies 2007, 2010
Jakarta, Java	laki-laki or butchi	female bodied with male soul	Wieringa 2007:N1
Yogyakarta, Java	butchi, suntil (Jav. for man)	not generalizable (women, ‘like men’, men)	my research and Webster 2004, 2008

### 1.3.2 *Lesbi/an* desire and sexuality

Similarly to gender, people use various categories to describe their same-sex desire or sexuality, such as *lesbi*, *lesbian*, *les* and *lesbong* (Blackwood 2010:186–189; Webster 2006:6, 50). From my observations, ‘lover of the same sex’ (*penyuka sesama jenis*) and ‘L-person’ and ‘L-girl’ (*seorang L* or *cewek L*) are also used. Neither the use, nor the

<sup>39</sup> The scholarly literature on transgressive masculinities in Southeast Asia demonstrates a complex but nuanced plurality of masculine lesbian subjectivities and female masculinities interacting with local and, to varying degrees, global cultural and historical discourses, see Blackwood (2010:2), but also Sinnott (2004, 2010, 2012) and the papers gathered in Wieringa, Blackwood and Bhayīā (2007).

content of these categories can be generalized. A *lesbi/an* identification or desire may not be understood as either an unalterable, permanent identification or an identity-creating category. For long, *lesbi* was neither a term known to all same-sex loving Indonesian ‘women’, nor a concept necessarily framed in a positive light. However, the term was (and is) negatively depicted in media, linking it to pathology, stereotypes, and deviance. Therefore, some individuals refrain from using this term to describe their desire or identification (Boellstorff 2003, 2005b:23, 2006b:159; Graham Davies 2007:141; Murray 1999:142).

In my sample, more lower-class, non-activist women identified with the term *lesbi* or *penyuka sesama jenis* and used gender labels. Activists, often positioned in the middle classes, usually identified with and used the full term *lesbian*. To encompass both but still illustrate this separation, I choose the compound word *lesbi/an*. The italics separate the regionalized version from the international one, while the slash combines but visualizes the divides that ran through the *lesbi/an* scene based on factors such as class and formal education.<sup>40</sup>

### 1.3.3 Non-activist/activist divides and global discourse

Besides the term *lesbian* in activist contexts, activists use gender labels infrequently, and criticize them for being old-fashioned, patriarchal, and too oriented toward ‘the heteronormative model’. To activists, international queer discourses and knowledge are often accessible through international networks and friendships, conferences, publications, funding requirements and the Internet – especially if they speak English. In their circles feminist thought prevailed, emphasizing the social construction of gender, the value of consent, and an understanding of *lesbians* as ‘women who love women’ (see also Blackwood 2010; Wieringa 2007), distinct from trans men.<sup>41</sup>

As Blackwood (2008, 2010) points out, non-activist *lesbi* likewise participate in international queer discourses, albeit in different forms and with different outcomes than activists. Their participation occurs via international friendships (see also Heuser 2014), social media, and media consumption and is evident in the widespread appropriation of relevant English terms. The Indonesian labels *lesbi*, *tomboi*, *butchi* and *femme* are examples of transnational appropriations or references to terms such

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<sup>40</sup> Another divide concerned bisexual women. They were invisible even in the LGBT+ scene. Opinions about them revealed that they faced a double-edged discrimination: for most heterosexuals they were as immoral as the other groups in the acronym, for many *lesbi/ans* they were ‘neither fish nor fowl’, evident in the derogatory term ‘amphibia’ sometimes used. Furthermore, as women they faced gender subordination. Since bisexuals may enter heterosexual relationships, their specific experiences of discrimination were hardly perceived, and they were usually perceived as more privileged.

<sup>41</sup> Part of activists’ task was to give workshops for the LGBT+ community, where among other topics social constructivist approaches to gender, sex and sexual orientation were taught. Lower class *lesbi* from my sample mostly avoided contact with activists and their NGOs. They perceived activists as arrogant towards them; as non-activists they allegedly lacked education and queer knowledge, and were too invested in binary concepts of gender. For an analysis of the activists’ accusation of false consciousness to *lesbi* not invested in global LGBTIQ concepts, see Hamzić (2012).

as lesbian, tomboy, butch and femme, which are primarily used in Europe, Australia, and North America (Blackwood 2010:190; Webster 2008:60).<sup>42</sup> Similarly, the acronym LGBT is locally appropriated and used as an umbrella term by people occupying non-normative gender positions, sexualities, and erotic desires – therefore, I use the term here.<sup>43</sup> I augment the acronym with the + symbol to indicate its incompleteness and shortcomings, so as to properly represent the diversity within, and to include further non-hegemonic subjectivities in terms of sex, gender, and desire.<sup>44</sup>

Through the use of words whose origins lie outside of Indonesia, *lesbi/ans* draw on their connection to a global ‘community’ of lesbian-loving women (Wright Webster 2008:24).<sup>45</sup> Despite these appropriations and global connections, Indonesian LGBT+ individuals are neither imports nor copies of a western ‘original’: There are no ‘natural originals’ in terms of gender or sexualities, but only specific constructions, established in different parts of the world. Further, even though the word *lesbi/an* and some practices may be globally similar, the terms and concepts become localized. Because of this, their meaning can diverge from seemingly equivalent English meanings and concepts.

### 1.3.4 Categories and constraints

The preceding discussion demonstrates two constraints connected to acts of categorization. Firstly, although LT+ subjectivities share commonalities in terms of masculinity, they ultimately follow neither a universal, nor a single national or local pattern, which is why such categories always simplify more complex realities. Consequently, while I show how individuals in *my sample* understood and performed gender or negotiated their position regarding religion, I do not claim that their experiences represent the norm for all LT+ subjects in Java or Indonesia. Such a claim would disregard individuals’ intersectional positionings along hierarchical lines of ethnicity, class, and religious affiliation. Secondly, the plurality in LT+ people’s self-understanding indicates that Indonesian categories, despite their apparent similarity,

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<sup>42</sup> Kennedy and Davis (1993) describe the lesbian scene in New York from the 1940s to the 1960s as almost exclusively structured by butch/femme relationships that were closely linked to a working-class milieu. Butch and femme identifications still exist but have lost importance at least in many western LGBTIQ scenes as Blackwood (1996, 2010:8) for the US and Wieringa (1999, 2007) for the Netherlands report.

<sup>43</sup> During my research, the acronym was used almost exclusively by people who felt they belonged to the group it designated. Since 2016, the explosion of LGBT discourse (see Chapter 8) has made the acronym a familiar term in general society, which led to its devaluation, giving its usage a bitter note.

<sup>44</sup> Analytically, the subjects in focus here can also be grasped under the term ‘queer’, which is less grounded in identity politics (Jagose 1997). While the use of the term queer is useful for specific questions and approaches, see e.g. Blackwood (2010); Thajib (2014), I do not use it. It was unknown to most participants in 2014, and was only used sometimes in activist contexts.

<sup>45</sup> Lesbians elsewhere are imagined as similar in their same-sex desire and different in terms of their social acceptance or access to rights. They are still included in the ‘imagined community’ and connected to translocal *lesbi/an* subjectivities in Indonesia (Boellstorff 2003:221–223).

are not equivalent to those of western LGBTIQ and academic Queer Theory discourse.<sup>46</sup> In these discourses, lesbians are often defined as ‘women who love women’. However, the definition of a woman – be it through a gendered behavior, a body, an attribution or self-image – is subject to interpretation. While the ‘women who love women’ narrative exists in LGBT+ circles in Indonesia (Blackwood 2010; Wieringa 2007), it is not the sole narrative, and may not even be the predominant one, as demonstrated by Blackwood’s protagonists’ self-image as men alongside their identification as *lesbi*. Anthropologists and other scholars invested in empirical research are thus faced with the challenge of naming. They must critically reflect on their naming decisions, which may lead them to use different categories and associated concepts.<sup>47</sup>

Since some of the masculine identified persons in my sample explicitly defined themselves as transgender, and others explicitly self-defined as masculine women, I maintain this distinction between trans men/T+ as transgender and *butchi* as masculine women. While this may seem consistent with the western distinction made between these categories, the reality is more complicated. In self-naming, the distinction exists, but in practice it blurs: Both involve performances of masculinity as one crosses the realm of female gender, challenging the social construction of the gender binary in the process. Individuals who perform masculinity in this way often understand themselves as being (like) men, while also acknowledging that they are female-bodied.<sup>48</sup> While some *butchi* subjectivities may appear as *actually being* transgender subjectivities in western LGBTIQ and academic Queer Theory terms, to me such similarities indicate the permeability, lack of precision, and tendency towards exclusion inherent in all categories. Through the examples of *butchi* individuals, I show the multiplicity within the discursively limited category of woman. Furthermore, I discuss the aspect of fluidity in the performance of gender beyond transgender persons, who are typically used as an example (see Davis 2009). I show how an empirical example from Indonesia can inform an understanding of gender

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<sup>46</sup> Such limits to the transferability of categories are well known, and are reflections on scientific authority. For anthropology, as for other disciplines, powerful imaginations of ‘the other’ are created through the integration of academic knowledge production into global power relations. These asymmetries and limits to representation have been addressed in the *Writing Culture* debate (see Clifford 1986, 1997; Clifford and Marcus 1986), and by postcolonial scholars who exposed how colonialism, missionaries, and scientists created ‘the Orient’ as inferior (Said 2003 [1978]).

<sup>47</sup> For example, based on the self-definition of the *tombois* and their practical transgression of the category woman, Blackwood (2010:4) decided to consider their subjectivities as transgender, and to discuss them under the academic definition of transgender.

<sup>48</sup> In Indonesia, the physical body (sex) is usually conceived as a biological or God-given truth that cannot actually be overcome by performance of a different gender role. Instead, it stipulates social responsibilities connected to an individual’s physical attributes, such as the expectation to bear or father children, or pray in the ‘right’ sex-designated section of the mosque (Graham Davies 2010:20). Even when masculine L+ clearly demonstrate that femininity does not necessarily derive from physicality, the socio-religious truth of sex is still embraced as a determinant of gender identity.

that was born in western academic discourse but has become a global theoretical position.

In relation to linguistic translatability, another aspect to ponder concerns the use of pronouns. Languages that, unlike Indonesian, only have gender-related pronouns, make it difficult to display the fluidity of gender performance in practice and acknowledge the gendered self-positioning of individuals (which are also linguistically expressed but not through pronouns, see Blackwood 2014). Pronouns, in this language constellation (Indonesian to English), are ascriptions. However, I base my use of pronouns as much as possible on the gendered self-identifications of my research participants: For *femmes*, I use the pronoun ‘she’, while for persons who primarily perform masculinity, I use both ‘she’ and ‘he’, reflecting the different self-identifications involved in relation to *butchi*. I use these latter pronouns only sometimes in relation to trans men, for whom I rather use ‘he’ or the alternatives, ‘s/he’ and ‘hir’. Even though the change of pronouns may give the impression of inconsistency, I am able to emphasize different aspects by using the pronouns independent of anatomy. If, in a chapter of this book, a masculine self-image is emphasized by the use of ‘he’, the use of ‘she’ for the same *butchi* can refer to a physicality recognized by the participant or ascribed by others. Thus, gender is also presented as socially contested and negotiated. By using pronouns in an intentionally inconsistent way, I offer the reader the opportunity to explore ambiguities. A simplified summary of the way LT+ gender positions and categories are used in this book is provided in Table 1.

## 1.4 Structure of the book

This introduction, which has already outlined the relevant theoretical perspectives, is followed by a chapter on methods which explains my methodological approach, and how my research is positioned within Haraway’s (1988) concept of ‘situated knowledge’. There, I reflect on ethics in the qualitative research process. Chapter 3 focuses on the national, religious, and local cultural discourses on gender, sexuality, and family that create frameworks for appropriate conduct, against which social behavior and identity is measured.

Chapter 4 and 5 focus on the research participants’ self-understandings and performances of gender and sexuality/desire in relation to the Indonesian gender ideal. In Chapter 4, the notion of ‘coming of age as a *lesbi/an*’ is crucial to the theme of sexual subject formation and gender labels. Here, I also outline the concept of ‘desired identifications’, which helps to contextualize secrecy as a culturally embedded practice of stigma management. Chapter 5 shifts perspective, dissecting interviewees’ performative negotiation of gender and sexual identifications in their interactions with others in different spaces. I show that gender is performed fluidly depending on spatial context and demonstrate that space and time are necessary factors to consider for capturing fluidity in the performativity of gender. I also present

interactive negotiations over desire, as they occur in different spaces after accidental or intentional disclosures of desire.

In Chapters 6 and 7, I take up the issue of the (ir)reconcilability of religion with same-sex desire and LT+ identifications. Chapter 6 takes a meta-perspective on competing discourses and their actors. Here, I show how the incompatibility of religious belief and doctrine with same-sex desire is substantiated with reference to the *Qur'an*, ascribing negative normative attributes to the excluded LT+. In contrast, actors who question this perceived incompatibility undertake alternative readings of religious doctrine, and commit to specific dissemination strategies. In Chapter 7, I again take a micro-perspective, and analyze how LT+ interview partners evaluate, form, and negotiate the relationship between their faith and their desire, actions I describe as 'modes of negotiation'. The attributes the hegemonic discourse ascribes to LGBT+ mark a starting point for these negotiations. My analysis demonstrates the processual character of negotiation, in which participants signified the relation between both aspects and negotiate, transform, confirm, or reject the normative position.

The final chapters comprise of an outlook and a conclusion. In Chapter 8, I address the discursive shifts and moral panics that occurred in the aftermath of my research stay. As of 2016, the anti-LGBT+ discourse became even more reductionist and populist. This raises questions not only for the future of the LGBT+ community, but also for minorities labeled as 'immoral' in general. I show how LGBT+ have been constructed as a social minority and how this process is linked to the position of religion in the Indonesian state and the competing ideoscapes of Westernization and Islam. The book concludes with Chapter 9, where I provide a summary of the main societal challenges LT+ people face in Indonesia today, as well as the results of my research and their contributions to the theoretical fields described above.

## 2. Methodology and ethical challenges: Situatedness within a research field

This study is based on ethnographic fieldwork, a cornerstone of anthropological research. While anthropological research is directed towards specific subjects, it inherently involves the researcher in the process as it relies on social interaction. The researcher's ideas, interests, (academic) background, and situatedness in terms of social categories inform all stages of the research process. Individual situatedness is produced and informed by regional, national, and global social hierarchies, including factors such as gender, sexual orientation, class and distribution of knowledge. This situatedness impacts the researcher's behavior, paths pursued or abandoned, and their interpretation of social contexts. This underscores the importance of ethical reflexivity, given the experiences of discrimination and privilege that both the researcher and the interview partners navigate within globally, nationally, and regionally structured power dynamics.

This chapter centers on the research process itself, reflecting on methodology and ethics. I invite the reader to follow me into the nuanced aspects of qualitative research *with people*; the ongoing learning process, the occasionally surprising or awkward situations I encountered, and the various and shifting roles I took or that were ascribed to me by others. As a queer feminist anthropologist, I believe transparency about the research process and its struggles is helpful. Transparency opens the black

box of what happens ‘behind the curtain’ of the simplified, nicely written, and concise images of practical research we find in publications. As a novice researcher, I was surprised about the complex discrepancy between publications and the practical realities of conducting research. While I value methodological and ethical reflexivity, my aim is to disclose and discuss approaches, situations, and decisions that create academically useful insights, with the overall aim to illuminate the research process and critically situate myself in it. Reflexivity has been especially demanded in critical feminist, post-colonial, and anthropological approaches (see e.g., Abu-Lughod 1991; Davies 1999:5; Harding 1991; Strathern 1991:8–11), such as within Donna Haraway’s (1988) ‘situated knowledge’.<sup>49</sup>

In the following, I establish a poststructuralist theoretical frame for my research. Drawing on Haraway’s concept of situated knowledge, I reflect on my own situatedness and that of my research in local and global constellations of power. Based on her account, I argue for the need and value of reflecting on ethical challenges encountered in practical social science research. Consequently, the second part of this chapter connects my methods and research design with the complexities of methodological practice and implementation. It interweaves the explication of concrete phases of research and the methods used with a discussion of the ethical challenges encountered in practice. Through this exploration, I reveal the context and conditions of knowledge production in which my research is, and was, engaged. I aim to illustrate that ethnographic research is, in practice, a complex undertaking comprising of uncountable days, encounters, emotions, and decisions that scholars transform into text.

## **2.1 Situated knowledge and reflexivity in social science research**

### **2.1.1 (Feminist) Objectivity and vision**

Donna Haraway wants to “unmask the doctrines of objectivity” (1988:578) in science because what is regularly understood and heralded as objectivity tends to fall short of that ideal. For Haraway, objectivity is not an unmarked, unembodied narrative derived from the vision of a master who, in an ‘objective’ account of knowledge, disappears as a socially situated medium of perception and translation. She criticizes this understanding of objectivity because “this is the gaze that mythically inscribes all the marked bodies, that makes the unmarked category claim the power to see and not be seen, to represent while escaping representation”

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<sup>49</sup> Reflexivity has likewise been criticized and challenged by academics of the same fields as “mystification and creative self-empowerment” (Sangren 1988:414), or as being merely egocentric “navel-gazing” (Jarvie 1988:428). Despite such criticism, I affirm its importance due to its benefits to methodological sensitivity and transparency.



(1988:581). Instead, Haraway advocates for ‘situated knowledge’ as a preferable concept of objectivity, where the locations, influencing streams, and (political) interests of the narratives that make knowledge claims are acknowledged and understood as embodied. It is more objective because it can be traced back to an identifiable position, enabling accountability.

Vision, one of the main sources through which objectivity in science is claimed, is not neutral but rather socially and culturally trained and informed through one’s intersectional position (Haraway 1988:582). In ethnography, it is common to present observations from one’s research via vignettes or arrival stories that introduce the reader to a certain mood or climate. This lends authority to what is presented in the written account, because one was really there, one *saw* what *is* there (Clifford 1986; Geertz 2007 [1988]; Pratt 1986). While I chose to illustrate my writing with only a few pictures,<sup>50</sup> I have also included some ethnographic vignettes to outline illuminating situations. While I have tried to write myself into the text to mark myself as a medium of perception and knowledge production, the risk of producing a perception of pretended objectivity is always there. I appeal to my readers to understand my writing as doubly mediated, situated, and partial, influenced both by the perspectives of my research participants, and my own embodied existence with a situated vision.

### 2.1.2 Positionality and subjugated knowledge

As Haraway (1988:583) further suggests, it is important to “learn how to see faithfully from another’s point of view”. This offers challenges, especially when a ‘white’<sup>51</sup> researcher from the Global North<sup>52</sup>, such as myself, is interested in marginalized positions deriving from non-normative gender and desire of ‘brown’ LT+ in the Global South. I agree with Haraway (1988:583) and others that “there is good reason to believe vision is better from below the brilliant space platforms of the powerful” when attempting to uncover and defeat hegemonic narratives. By ‘faithfully’ but also (self-) critically listening, learning, seeing, and writing situated knowledge, my research builds on a “hope for transformative knowledge” (Haraway 1988:585). With this statement, I openly reveal my political stance, while also acknowledging, with Haraway, that there can be “a serious danger of romanticizing and/or appropriating the vision of the less powerful while claiming to see from their positions” (Haraway 1988:583–584). While viewpoints from below promise

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<sup>50</sup> I do so because of the problems of visual, potentially neo-colonial representation, and also because of ethical considerations regarding the bodily safety of research participants.

<sup>51</sup> I use single quotation marks to highlight that I understand ‘white’ and ‘brown’ and, hence, race itself as social constructs, which none the less have very real and powerful but differentiated effects.

<sup>52</sup> A person living in ‘the Global North’ is not automatically ‘white’, formally educated, and/or economically well off and is not ‘obviously’ in a position of greater power than a person from ‘the Global South’. While global relations and their powerful histories do matter, there are also very (de-) privileged positions in regionally located systems of power.

less ‘denial’ and extenuation, “[t]he positionings of the subjugated are not exempt from critical reexamination, decoding, deconstruction, and interpretation” (Haraway 1988:584). Research participants are (as I am) intersectional beings, embedded in diverse power relations. The challenge is to counter the “danger of a single story” (Adichie 2009)<sup>53</sup> by representing complexity and allowing for contradiction. By ignoring relational shifts in terms of power and disregarding intersectional complexity we risk producing a one-dimensional image of ‘third world women’ (Mohanty 1994). Here, it helps to understand subjects and selves as split, contradictory, partial, multidimensional, and never finished (Haraway 1988:586). This approach integrates intersectionality in feminist research with the effort to avoid identity politics, which makes people appear one-dimensional and conceals other positionings, attributions, or intersections.

One facet of research participants’ identifications was their LT+ affiliation, which put them, socially, in a minority position. Another was their ethnic or religious identification: Most belonged to a privileged majority as Muslim and Javanese in Yogyakarta. All had a gender (expression), a body, an educational or economic background. So, while the respondents are joined together in my research because of their LT+ identification, they were individually situated and fragmented, and they held hierarchical positions in relation to each other and within society. They were a kaleidoscope of subjectivities with shared but also starkly differing views on the world, and various experiences of privilege and discrimination. All of them participated, with agency, in a network of social relations on a daily basis, positioning themselves socially while also being ascribed social attributes and roles by others.

### 2.1.3 Positioning myself in fields of power

The same holds true for me; I positioned myself and was positioned by people I met, according to the circumstances and the images they had about ‘people like me’. These images were rooted in historically ingrained hierarchic relations that extend beyond individuals encountering each other in specific spaces. On a global scale I am not only profiting from the unequal, historically formed positions of Germany and Indonesia, but also from being abled-bodied, holding a strong passport through German citizenship, enjoying access to graduate education, and having the economic means to do research thanks to an academic scholarship. I was socialized in a particular national space and academic discipline that understands itself as the producer of knowledge rather than the source of the data that knowledge is based on. While this situatedness accompanied me in Indonesia, others’ perception of me was augmented and rearranged in locally situated discourses and hierarchies. As

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<sup>53</sup> A term coined by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a Nigerian author. She highlights how a single story creates stereotypes and subjects only represented by that stereotype, which leads to powerful limits on the imagination of those subjected to an othering gaze.

such, I was usually perceived as enjoying high status in terms of nationality, education, and socio-economic security, but less so in terms of gender, sexual orientation, or religion. My personal intersectionality led to discussions among locals about how to navigate interaction with me, illustrating how categories merged and related not according to fixed patterns but on shifting grounds.<sup>54</sup> In the same way, my privileges did not shield me from experiencing discrimination in terms of gender and queerness, both in Indonesia and in Germany.

While differently positioned from my research participants in some ways, I was experiencing similar although temporally limited moments of restriction, stereotyping, and negative ascription by identifying as woman and queer. To my participants, I was often simultaneously in a position of insider and outsider. As an insider, I shared (imagined) lines of identifications and experiences. As an outsider, I was not producing or profiting from local hegemonic discourse in terms of gender and sexuality, but was interested in the effects of that discourse. Both positions helped me to gain the trust of research participants. As an outsider, I was interested in *their* ‘subjugated’ accounts and not the hegemonic story of the normality they had allegedly breached. In this role, I received astonishing openness, for participants trusted that their account would not be judged based on local hegemonic principles that dictated what was deemed acceptable or unacceptable. As an insider, I was considered capable of retracing, sharing, and comprehending their affects, emotions, and feelings of social pressure – as I had, arguably, experienced them in Indonesia or Germany. Nevertheless, in this role I was sometimes considered ‘slow on the uptake’, because I wanted to have even the most logical or minor things explained to me. The role of the informed insider was partially supported, as I will discuss in the section on ‘access’, by my romantic relationship with Dian, my research assistant.

Emotional, intimate, and sexual relations may arise for anthropologists because of their emotional engagement in the field. This has long been a real, but widely unacknowledged or taboo topic within the discipline (Ashkenazi and Markowitz 1999:2; Haller and Martin 2019:xvi; Kulick 1996:2; Lewin and Leap 1996:3; Newton 1993). Here, Caplan (1993:23) identifies a gender bias<sup>55</sup>, and argues that the absence of discussions about romantic intimacy in the field indicates that “for women sexual

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<sup>54</sup> Once during *Ramadhan*, I accompanied Dian, my then girlfriend and research assistant, to visit her extended family in a rural mountain village some 70 km from Yogyakarta. Before eating, the adult members of the family discussed where I should sit during dinner: with the men at the table, or with the women on the floor of the kitchen? In this moment, my status as a guest, my educational background, and my skin-color ‘over-ruled’ my gender. I was seated with the elderly men, while the women served us food and ate in the kitchen. On the next day my gender, in conjunction with stereotypes concerning my skin color, over-ruled my status of the previous night. It was Friday, midday, and Dian and I were about to take a walk. An uncle called Dian and she delivered the decision to me: We were forbidden to wander around shortly before *sholat jumat* (Friday prayers). If we were outside at that time, men on their way to the mosque would become distracted by me, the white girl, possibly provoking *haram* thoughts. To protect the men, our mobility was restricted, and we were allowed to go walking only after Friday prayers had started.

<sup>55</sup> This bias still exists, as Haller and Martin (2019:xvi) assert.

activity, or, even more so, ‘confessing’ it, still has very different consequences than [for] men.” Anthropologists are meant to dive deeply into cultural formations, but those who trespass *that* ambiguous line and dare to talk about it are often shamed. This perpetuates the myth of the researcher as an emotionless, unembodied, and objective tool of research, while ignoring the implications of emotional engagement that can occur during research, just as in other settings. In doing so, we also lose the opportunity to translate these experiences into useful academic insights (Kulick 1996:6).

But why are romantic attraction, attachments and sexual intimacy frowned upon in a research setting? Romantic intimacy seems to raise difficulties with regards to the core values that science is supposed to stand for – credibility, objectivity, and detachment. To be a credible scholar is (supposedly) to be an objective and emotionally detached scholar. A scholar’s intimacy and romantic or sexual relationships all arouse the suspicion that unreliable emotions may overpower their otherwise objective mind, potentially distorting their findings and undermining their validity (Gearing 1996:207).<sup>56</sup> To strengthen the position of anthropology as a trustworthy science, the notion of the “asexual” (Ashkenazi and Markowitz 1999:2) or “celibate anthropologist” (Wengle 2011 [1988]:25) entered the discipline as both a source of disciplinary identity and as a prohibitive norm (Kulick 1996:9–10).<sup>57</sup> Despite the academic culture of silence surrounding this topic, various queer anthropologists have engaged in disclosure and reflective work on the implications of sexual encounters in ‘the field’. Their discussions of such intersubjective relations and their same-sex sexual identifications provide insights for analysis and theory building on fieldwork.<sup>58</sup> Not only are problems of power relations and the risk of exploitation discussed in this work, so too are the potentially positive side-effects of crossing *that* line, such as a deepened sense of cultural understanding. As I, too, have crossed that line, I believe discussion and reflection are necessary.

In terms of power relations and exploitation, the question of whether consent was given freely or obtained from a “powerless being” (Grauerholz et al. 2013:169) appears valid, as the informant is rather the ‘object’ and the researcher ‘the superior’ (Markowitz 1999:171). While hierarchies surely exist, anthropologists today are not a force of coercion, dominance, or subordination (Ashkenazi and Markowitz 1999:14). Informants may take no interest in the boundaries and categories that

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<sup>56</sup> Also, to admit to having emotions might threaten to blur the line with its hidden ethnocentric and westernized notion between the objective, emotionless researcher and the involved, emotional ‘other’ (Kulick 1996:5).

<sup>57</sup> For example, Esther Newton recalled: “In graduate school in the early 1960s, I learned – because it was never mentioned – that erotic interest between fieldworker and informant either didn’t exist, would be inappropriate, or couldn’t be mentioned; I had no idea which” (Newton 1993:4). Further, she suspects that this omission had the effect of reifying the stereotype of the anthropologist as a heterosexual and male person whose subjectivity is beyond scrutiny (Newton 1993:7–8).

<sup>58</sup> See, for example, Blackwood (1996); van de Port (2011); Wieringa (2011) or the chapters gathered in Martin and Haller (2019).

seem ‘natural’ to the anthropologist, and may view the researcher as a sexual being (Markowitz 1999:171). At the beginning of my research, Dian, who I had met during my preliminary visit to Yogya in 2013, became my research assistant and a key informant. Although flirtatious from the beginning, we began a romantic relationship after about a month of working together – she asked, I consented. I knew that romantic involvement with a member of the researched group raises issues of power and ethics (Kulick and Willson 1996). These challenges were mitigated by Dian’s disinterest in being a research participant. She saw her role as that of an expert helping me to understand, and not as an ‘object’ under scrutiny herself.<sup>59</sup> While she often shared personal stories, these exchanges were in the context of our emotional relationship and were not formally recorded. Two weeks before my return to Germany she changed her opinion and expressed her willingness to be interviewed, if I were interested in recording her story. This partially reintroduced ethical issues that I thought had been superseded, but as my trusted research assistant and girlfriend she had known from the beginning about my role as a researcher and the function and boundedness of my stay. I remain tremendously thankful for all the shared time, her reliable work, her mindful insights and information, and all the support we gave each other. In her role as research assistant and girlfriend, Dian will pop up here and there in the following chapters, but in her role as interview partner she will be anonymized as other participants are, and for the same reason – privacy.

Within this ethical debate, I critically approach the assumption that romantic and sexual entanglements must entail loss of objectivity due to an uncontrolled rise of emotion. Instead, I assert that the researcher is not a passive machine but an embodied, situated ‘tool of research’. I argue, also, for the recognition of the sensory reactions to situations or people we face during field research – whether we act on them or not (Altork 1996). Despite our best intentions, the possibility and likelihood of treating people differently depending on sympathy or dislike is a fact most anthropologists must be aware of. Emotions, in all their range, are born almost automatically out of ethnography’s core methodological approach. Can (or should) ethnographic research, which from the beginning and by definition aims for trust and close relationships, abstain from emotional engagement? If emotions and affects appear in a research setting, why do we still feel the urge to relegate them to field diaries, as Malinowski did over a hundred years ago? In recent times, critical scholarship that goes beyond romantic affects and emotions (e.g. the frustration, worries, and self-doubt anthropologist experience during their work) has examined this relegation of emotions and the tendency to abstain from acknowledging them. This body of work is breaking the silence around them and demonstrates that emotions,

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<sup>59</sup> Here, between the lines, there appear two forms of power prevalent within the local cultural context of equality and difference. First, having the economic means to pay Dian for her work put me in a powerful position. Second, her expert knowledge and understanding of the local culture put her, also, in a powerful position.

if reflected on, can serve as teachers to the anthropologist.<sup>60</sup> As argued by Gearing (1996:207), Kulick (1996:9–10) and others, scrutinizing emotions can, in certain circumstances, reveal something about *all* the socially and culturally situated participants under scrutiny – including the researcher.

## 2.2 Translations from theory to practice: Anthropological research and ethical reflections

### 2.2.1 Preparation work, research design and methods

After having received funding in 2013, I began preparations for my empirical research. I took a month of language lessons in Yogyakarta to update my *bahasa Indonesia*, and began an exploratory phase of research that helped ensure future research access. I got in touch with several individuals that I had met before, searched for LGBT+ content and groups via Facebook, and visited spaces in which I hoped to find queer culture. These initial contacts enabled me to successfully access local LGBT+ networks and to hire a research assistant<sup>61</sup> who identified as *lesbi/an* herself.

The research topic demanded an interdisciplinary design, combining queer, feminist, and postcolonial approaches. This was essential because regional, religious, legal, and political discourses on gender and sexuality, along with global discourses on human rights and LGBTIQ activism, all played a role. To focus on the spatial practices and negotiations occurring at the intersection of personal faith and non-normative desire, while respecting the sensitivity of the subject, I adopted an empirical-ethnographic approach. Qualitative research methods allow for access and proximity to participants' subjective experience and their connected social lifeworlds, but also enable the researcher to contact subjects which could have been "difficult to locate because of their social invisibility and deviant social status" (Lee 1993:119). Interviews and participant observation served as primary research methods, enabling contextualization and a focus on every-day practices, processes, and meaning (Breuer 2000; Mruck and Mey 2005).

I conducted the empirical phase of this research in Indonesia over a period of eleven months in 2014. To gain broader perspectives on cultural influence and experiences, particularly focusing on the perceptions and experiences of/within various religious denominations, I chose a multi-sited research design. Using a multi-

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<sup>60</sup> See, among this growing scholarship, the works of Davies and Spencer (2010); Irwin (2009); Monchamp (2009); Stodulka (2014a, 2015); van de Port (2011); Woodthorpe (2009).

<sup>61</sup> Given the sensitivity of my research topic and my ability to speak Indonesian, I decided against employing an extra interpreter alongside a research assistant. I did not want to put respondents at risk by bringing in someone whose political agenda would be difficult to assess. Gottlieb (2006:54) gives a good example of this in her research on Côte d'Ivoire. Interpreters can create further challenges in anthropological research, especially in terms of translation, see Gentzler and Tymoczko (2002); Schäffner and Kelly-Holmes (2010); Wagner, Bech and Martínez (2016).

sited approach enabled me to follow people and ideas into various, and increasingly labile, social spaces (Falzon 2009; Lauser 2005; Marcus 1995) gaining various perspectives, and aiming to contextualize their spatial practices and dynamic identifications. I see the risk of multi-sited ethnography as implying “a problematic reconfiguration of holism” (Candea 2007:167) as if by that the researcher could perceive all existing circumstances in their completeness, disregarding the above-mentioned situatedness. In response, I understand the locations where I did research not as spectacles of holism, but as partial prisms through which geographical locations and involved actors could be viewed. Conducting research in different regions of the archipelago allowed me to perceive local differences of cultural diversity as located in various geographical, historical, religious, and social settings. Subjects’ participation in research was thus based on geographical location and self-definition (identification as *lesbi/an* or trans). However, it was also inclusive of the perspectives of people working at the topic’s intersections, such as religious leaders or activists. In this sense, my research participants belonged to a social group; they shared certain characteristics and social networks, while intersectional logic positioned them according to markers such as religious (non-) affiliation, socio-economic background, and ethnicity.

My fieldwork was divided between seven months in Yogyakarta, Java, and four months in Denpasar, Bali. In Yogyakarta the interviewees’ religious affiliation was mostly Muslim and Christian, while in Bali it was mostly Hindu. During my stay, I also undertook shorter research trips to Medan (North Sumatra), Solo (Java), and to the capital Jakarta (Java). The different locations and religious affiliations provided contrast, but in the course of my analysis, this approach turned out to be too broad. Therefore, the book is now solely based on the data from Yogyakarta (Muslim and Christian respondents) and from additional Muslim interview partners from other cities.

Starting in February 2014 after a ‘visa run’ in Jakarta, I based myself in Yogyakarta. Yogya was my starting site because, as a college town, it was a social and cultural hub where young, predominantly middle-class people went to study. Here, plural cultural, political, and generational stances mixed. The town offered newly-independent young women novel opportunities to explore new identifications and/or desire. I followed the participants in their every-day life through different spaces.<sup>62</sup>

Extended residence in one location is widely considered a cornerstone of anthropological research, and is particularly useful for its method of participatory observation. The logic is simple: “[t]he more time you take to get to know the people whose lives you are trying to understand, the more likely it is that they will take the

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<sup>62</sup> Due to confidentiality concerns, it was impossible to follow them the whole day through all spaces, especially when with family or at work. On several occasions I was, however, able to enter the work- and family spaces of some interview partners.

time to share their honest reflections with you” (Gottlieb 2006:50). Extended residence enabled me to establish reliable and trustworthy relationships with research participants, which proved crucial to understanding their social embeddedness (Hauser-Schäublin 2003; LeCompte and Schensul 2010) and their agency. Participant observation was, from the beginning, supplemented with in-depth informal interviews and discussions with key informants. After the exploratory phase, I conducted semi-structured interviews with LT+ individuals to add subjective accounts (Schensul and LeCompte 2013:171–175; Schlehe 2003) that allowed me to delve deeper in their self-understandings of religion and desire. During a later fieldwork phase, I conducted qualitative interviews with other professionals and LT+-related people, who are sometimes framed as ‘experts’ (Gläser 2004). They mostly work within the topical context as women’s/LGBT+ activists, religious leaders, or as psychiatrists in Yogya and in other parts of Java and Sumatra. I also participated in various meetings and workshops from different LGBT+ NGOs and religious institutions. This triangulation of methods allowed me to develop an understanding of the fluid, space-dependent negotiations of identifications, to capture values and morals dominating spaces, and to analyze the ‘modes of negotiation’ that arose at the intersection of faith and desire.

### **2.2.2 Applied ethics in methodological practice**

As empirical research unfolds *in practice*, questions of ethical conduct appear at every stage of research, particularly when dealing with sensitive topics or vulnerable groups (Lee 1993). In the German context, research ethics in the social sciences are mostly discussed in terms of the relationships between researchers and interviewees (Hopf 2004:589–590; Unger, Narimani and M’Bayo 2014). An applied research-ethical perspective on such relationships invites reflection on the scope and application of ethical principles, as well as their practical realization (Unger, Narimani and M’Bayo 2014). While in British social anthropology the topic of research ethics is highly prevalent and formalized through institutional committee boards and codices, in Germany there is less discussion on applied ethics<sup>63</sup> and little formalization. Fortunately, debate is growing (Hornbacher 2013; Schönhuth 2009; Unger, Narimani and M’Bayo 2014:4–6). In the absence of formalized processes, ethical considerations are left to individual researchers and, where applicable, their supervisors.

In my preparatory research phase, ethical considerations were questions of implementation and legitimation of research. While conducting the actual research, ethical questions appeared in decisions small and large about my interactions with respondents. Even the writing process was *in practice* pervaded with ethical decisions and challenges that were previously unimagined. In the course of my research four

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<sup>63</sup> With the exception of privacy protection.



areas of ethical negotiation solidified.<sup>64</sup> I discuss them in conjunction with Unger (2014:20–31), who emphasizes the ethical importance of the protection of research participants, and who divides this protection into four categories:

- (1) Voluntary participation: How did I get access to the interlocutors? When and how did I communicate my research interest and my role towards potential participants?
- (2) Informed consent:<sup>65</sup> How was informed consent obtained? What information was communicated in the process to obtain informed consent?
- (3) Avoiding harm: What were possible risks LT+ interview partners might face due to participation in my research? What were measurements to reduce such risks?
- (4) Confidentiality and anonymity: How was confidentiality dealt with? How was the acquired data anonymized?

In what follows, I will clarify different stages of my research *in practice* by interweaving reflections on how I navigated these ethical questions. Additionally, I trace how my research decisions were informed by my own positionality, allowing for a reflective examination on my role in the study.

### *Access*

Gaining access to ‘the field’ was a pivotal challenge in my research. As Lee (1993:122) points out, it was a dynamic and recurring process in which multiple factors played a role. Possible routes of access were shaped by the sensitivity of the topic and its position in social fields of power. In anthropological research, access to a particular field is usually achieved via gatekeepers, local informants who provide credentials for the researcher, as well as contacts, individuals supporting the research, and knowledge about the content and unwritten rules of behavior.<sup>66</sup> Gatekeepers were individuals I had encountered in 2013, whom I contacted for preliminary advice and further contacts. Different persons helped me to gain access to different groups of people or institutions. My research assistant Dian, as a senior *lesbi/an*, contacted some friends whom she thought might be interested in sharing

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<sup>64</sup> Here, I outline ethical principles of the German Sociological Association (BDS & DGS 1993) as guiding principles for the following discussion. I use these principles to evoke questions asked by Unger (2014:21) for my individual situation. This places the abstract ethical principles on a concrete level and structures the practical challenges I encountered.

<sup>65</sup> Unger (2014:26) marks this principle as conflicting with the method of participant observation because the repeated interruption to obtain informed consent disturbs the social processes the method is meant to grasp.

<sup>66</sup> Pocahontas and La Malinche are well-known historical examples of local people helping settlers or colonialist in terms of literal and cultural translation. Their outstanding roles in understanding and research were appreciated late, and the potential effects on local communities have been discussed critically (Scully 2005). Colonial anthropologists relied on informants from local communities and their cultural brokerage without properly acknowledging their work (Clifford 1983; Sanjek 1993).

their story. She helped me meet non-activist Javanese *lesbi/ans*, most of whom had working-class backgrounds and had grown up in Yogyakarta. They came to trust me because I was not solely perceived as a researcher, but also as Dian's partner. Dian was a skillful icebreaker able to further normalize the presence of the *bulé* (white foreigner).<sup>67</sup> Dian also taught me social etiquette, and helped me to formally contact lecturers at local universities, women's rights activists, and representatives of the *Pesantren Waria*.<sup>68</sup> In establishing contact with LGBT+ activists of groups like *PLU Satu Hati* (PLUsh), Dian was not the gatekeeper.<sup>69</sup> Here my previously established contacts with people working at PLUsh helped me, as did assistance provided by an activist friend from Jakarta.

I met most of my later research participants through a snowball system, whereby people informed about my research recommended me to friends whom they thought were interested in the topic. Having previously worked on connected themes of *lesbi/an* life in Indonesia (see Schneider 2011), I had relevant knowledge and was familiar with the terminology. This knowledge had to be performed and combined with respectful behavior. I was once taken aside by an activist at PKBI<sup>70</sup> Yogyakarta. She told me, angrily, about another anthropologist who had interviewed one of their members for seven hours nonstop, in a 'pushy' and aggressive manner. Her words were a warning: Through such unprofessional behavior, researchers destroyed their own 'field' for all future research. Implicitly, her message was: "Don't be one of them." As my snowball system worked very well, I concluded that interviewees thought it was safe to recommend me to friends. Having personally met individuals from different places and groups, the practice of name-dropping also bolstered my credentials. Finally, I learnt the importance of staying in touch, of not caring about the time of the day, and I texted, chatted, drove, met, listened, and talked at all hours to keep my contacts and access alive.

### *Agency and participant observation*

The elaboration of my role as insider/outsider implicitly shows that the people I worked with were agentive subjects engaged in a dialectical process of structuring and being structured. Understanding and depicting them as agentive is important to

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<sup>67</sup> As Dian was friends with some people in this particular social circle, we regularly went together to their meetings. I generally preferred to do the ensuing interviews alone, as I found this less distracting, but with members of this group her Javanese to Indonesian translations were invaluable.

<sup>68</sup> As outlined in Chapter 3, *Pesantren* are Indonesian Islamic boarding schools. The *Pesantren Waria al' Fattah* is a unique place in Yogyakarta where *waria* can safely learn and practice their Islamic faith.

<sup>69</sup> Many other researchers fully relied on NGO contacts. While I was in contact with activists from different NGOs, participated in their activities, and did some interviews with activists, it was important to me that my research be independent. If I had been perceived as being 'with them', access to respondents critical of NGO work would have been hindered.

<sup>70</sup> *Program Keluarga Berencana Indonesia*, the state-driven family planning program, had a section focusing on reproductive health in which they mostly worked with *waria* but also other groups of the LGBT+ spectrum.

the project of feminist objectivity (Haraway 1988:592), because it demonstrates that “we are not in charge of the world” (1988:594). This is nothing new to experienced researchers, but I struggled with it, especially at the beginning of my research. In 2013, as the practical phase of my research was approaching, I experienced insecurities provoked by the task of effectively translating my theoretical understandings of agency and power into my practical research. I was temporarily afraid of my structural position of privilege, which seemed powerful. However, I was thinking in a ‘one-dimensional’ manner, ignoring the powerful positions of privilege and agency enjoyed by my participants. Some of these insecurities disappeared as I gained experience. With practice, I learned to negotiate the topic of informed consent. Finding my role as an observing participant or a participating observer took time. I was initially unsure when, and how, to tell people around me that I was doing research and that our informal encounters would probably be part of this research, even if these research methods would not be obvious to them. I had to learn that openly taking notes by hand confused those around me and made them feel uncomfortable<sup>71</sup> – so I took to making digital notes on my smartphone.

I had to learn that the moment a new person joined a scene was not always the perfect time to push myself to the center. However, if I did not disclose my role right away, I felt like a spy stealing information. With some practice I found ways that worked for participants and me. New people usually introduced themselves to me, or asked others what the *bulé* was there for. That was generally the moment when I would announce my research topic and motivation, and explain that one part of my research, besides interviews, was to join in the ‘scene’, be there, see, hear, and observe. This was easier while participating in NGO activities, because their staff and members were used to foreign researchers in their midst and specified my role immediately. My commitment was towards LT+ identifying people, which meant that the degree and detail of disclosure of my role intertwined with the principle of avoiding harm. This was, in turn, also space-related. Some of the groups in which I did participant observation were spontaneous and mobile; and when respondents allowed me to follow them in spaces in which their desire had to be kept secret, I handled their need for secrecy as an ethical priority, to ensure their safety. I also conducted participant observation at various workshops, camps, and activities organized by religious-educational institutions or by different LGBT+ NGOs in Yogyakarta, Solo, Jakarta, Bali and Medan. Within activist settings, I coordinated the disclosure or non-disclosure of my role with the organizers.

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<sup>71</sup> The anthropologist Denise Allen (2002) reports similar reactions during her fieldwork, which led her to abandon the notebook for the first year of research. Bresler (1996) elucidates that participation was a form of closeness, of being a member, while taking notes was a distancing activity.

*Agency and the ascription of roles*

During participant observation, I learnt about, saw, and felt the agency of research participants.<sup>72</sup> One way to prevent participants from being read as allegedly passive ‘objects’ of knowledge is by disclosing a selection of roles ascribed to me by respondents and random strangers. I include the roles I was given by strangers to illustrate such positioning work as a general dynamic and mutual activity, in which the signified person is actively participating and ‘giving’ to the situation, while remaining a screen for the projection of discursive societal meaning. Below, I elaborate on why this understanding is pivotal to my research as a whole.

1. Being (perceived as) a *fellow queer person* facilitated access to otherwise secretive interview partners, because I was understood to be an insider. I also became, for them, an informant: I was asked about legislation and homo- and trans-discrimination in Germany, about gay marriage, youth religiosity, visual and activist queer culture, whether I had ‘come out’ to my parents and friends – and what their reactions had been. The questions not only indicated interest, but also conveyed the perception that it was great to be queer in Europe. I was careful to acknowledge the positive sides of European queer life, yet also pointed to the existence of discrimination, areas still requiring improvement, and Europe’s right-wing backlash. In this role, I also became a trusted person, and some participants asked me for my analyses and advice.

2. I was sometimes given the role of *rich and smart foreigner* when the reason for my presence in Indonesia was queried. This was usually in formal settings like the Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education (RISTEK), at the Immigration Services, or when initiating future interviews with professionals. My academic training in Germany, and the fact that I was doing my doctoral research in the beginnings of my thirties, led to an assumption of intellect. Sometimes, this facilitated expert discussions. At other times, it positioned me as the lecturer, where my perspective was accepted without question. This role enabled me to participate academically in Indonesia, and to contact scholars or other experts of interest. Through this role, I was asked to hold a lecture at *Atma Jaya University* in Yogyakarta, to participate in a conference on *Church and Homophobia* held at STT Jakarta (Jakarta Theological Seminary: see Image 1). This positioning also enabled me to acquire contacts from several NGO’s and conduct interviews with various figures.

3. The role of *strange, unmarried bulé* was one I encountered mostly in situations of everyday life not explicitly linked to my research. When I encountered random strangers in *warungs* (small food stalls), shops, or in public, I would attract attention as a Westerner who moved outside of fancy restaurants, malls, and touristic sites, and entered the everyday spaces of Indonesian life. As a Westerner, I was never

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<sup>72</sup> For example, when people declined to participate in my research. Luckily only two individuals refused to take part. In Chapter 7, I elaborate on my theoretical understanding of agency and complicate the oft-implied notion that confines agency to resistance and uttered speech.

invisible. People often approached me, once they overcame their shyness, expressing curiosity and interest through their many personal questions. In the interaction, verbal and non-verbal cues revealed local stereotypes of ‘white’ female Westerners. Depending on my mood and availability, I participated in the exchange, sharing where I came from and what I thought of Indonesia. I did so because I sought to evade the stereotype of being a snobby tourist.<sup>73</sup> Using *bahasa Indonesia* was a key to mitigate stereotyping, although my relative linguistic fluency also increased my strangeness (positively, in this case).

The discussion of these three roles serves two purposes. First and foremost, the role of *fellow queer person* illustrates the vivid character of integration and engagement that participant observation can enable. Examining this role demystifies the researcher as an allegedly ‘neutral tool of method’, who does not affect the methods or the field (Gottlieb 2006:59; LeCompte and Schensul 2010:60–61). I acknowledge that my mere presence affected the field, because it produced reactions and interactions. Accessing a field also meant accessing a field of reciprocity, of exchange relationships, and gift-giving (Mauss 2002 [1950]). While I was invested in minimizing my impact, participating created obligations and a duty to refrain from aloof or dismissive behavior, seeking a balance between involvement and non-interference.

Second, the discussion of these three roles mirrors a central topic of my dissertation: the flexible and multiple positionings and identifications that arise from a dialectic process between self-positioning and ascription through others. By illustrating such shifting, at times overlapping roles, I provide an example for such processes in practice. By shifting perspective, I show that I too was a canvas for the discursive meaning claims of my counterparts and actively involved in positioning work. In doing so, I deconstruct and normalize the practices described in later chapters. To omit or articulate specific identity facets in relation to perceived, or anticipated, ideological stances, and to guide your perception in un/conscious consideration of learnt socio-cultural patterns: This is the work that positions agents. To account for this is to understand subjects and their identifications as relational, as outlined in the introduction above.

#### *Avoiding harm: On interviewing*

Conducting interviews with “discreditable” (Goffman 1975:12) individuals came with certain practical challenges. I sought to mitigate any potential risks arising from participation in my research, such as an unintended disclosure of an informant’s desire to their family. As the organizer of the practical setting, I had to think through and coordinate various factors related to social atmosphere, physical well-being, and location requirements. The challenge was to harmonize the methodological needs of the research with the requirements of the individual participant.

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<sup>73</sup> Often, I showed integrational behavior or, out of general respect, took measures to avoid corresponding to stereotypes about *bulés*, e.g., by dressing appropriately, using polite forms of address, or not drinking alcohol in public.

### Locations

In Yogyakarta, public locations are often unsuitable to talk freely about sensitive issues or make clear recordings, because most were densely frequented during the day, and noisy with crowds and traffic. Additionally, there was a risk of being overheard or observed by acquaintances, which might lead to uncomfortable questions. Suitable locations instead needed to have qualities such as (relative) quiet and reclusion, accessibility, being appropriate to the respondent, and with amenities that catered to their needs and well-being, all to prevent social discomfort. Semi-public spaces often combined such requirements adequately.<sup>74</sup> Usually, I let my interview partner propose a meeting place. Only if they were indifferent or seemed overwhelmed by the question, perhaps assuming that a *bulé* would prefer some fancy place, I suggested locations and observed their reactions. In terms of social comfort, Dian taught me the need to consider the socio-economic background of the participant-to-be.<sup>75</sup> I had to learn to be sensitive towards social and class hierarchies in, and structuring, space. Price range, interior design, and ‘youthful fanciness’ had to be considered, and my choices had to be adapted to the individual respondent. As I was usually familiar with the interview partner beforehand, I could gauge whether we had chosen a comfortable setting soon after the interview commenced.

### Practice of interviewing

In total, I conducted 45 interviews, with durations ranging from one to four hours each (see Table 3). The 28 semi-structured in-depth interviews with LT+ individuals centered around their practices, experiences, and self-understandings of desire and gender. They covered religious socialization in the contexts of family and society, and religious practices and personal faith. In general, the interviews dealt with respondents’ qualitative experiences and areas of struggle within communities of faith, the LGBT+ community, and society in general. The respondents were internally diverse (including five Hindu partners in Bali) and ranged in age from 18 to 42 years. Most respondents were unmarried, and two had children. Ethnically, the majority identified themselves as Javanese or of mixed-Javanese origin, while three individuals were of Batak, Minangkabau, or Sumbawanese origin. Social class origins were a mix between working and middle class backgrounds.<sup>76</sup> The inclusion of diverse perspectives was important to me, because of my conviction “that the richest eth-

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<sup>74</sup> Over time, I conducted interviews in certain cafés, restaurants, a park at night, or in private spaces such as personal rooms on family compounds, their or my *rumah kost* (short to long-term rentable, often furnished rooms), sometimes meeting in a hotel room or in an office room for interviews with professionals.

<sup>75</sup> Initially, Dian would often despair on hearing my suggested interview location, and might comment, for example, “that is a rich people location, not suitable for X, she will feel uncomfortable and not open up.”

<sup>76</sup> Those from working class backgrounds were more likely to be critical of activism. Middle class people were more likely to either be activists, or have activist friends, see Chapter 1.3.

nographic portrait comes from collecting and presenting several stories across divergent lines of class, ethnicity, religion, and gender rather than seeking just one as the single, authoritative version” (Gottlieb 2006:61, referring to Altheide and Johnson 1998).

Table 3: Summary of Interviews

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	sample size
	religious personnel (ustadz, 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

The 17 semi-structured in-depth interviews with LGBT+-related persons varied according to the background of the person, but all were centered on hegemonic or counter-hegemonic perceptions and interpretations of religious texts or gender in society. These interviews covered areas of struggle and psychological liabilities for LGBT+ individuals and communities, as well as cultural concepts, discourses, and bodily norms. Themes of gender and desire, gendered morality and gendered use of space were common throughout. Interviewing and accommodating professionals came with its own challenges because of their expertise and expectations. Giving interviews was part of their work.<sup>77</sup> They were motivated and involved with these topics in a professional, at times distanced sense.

In comparison, in interviews with LT+ individuals it was harder to find a balance between formality and informality. I would verbally inform the interviewee about the topics of the interview, explain the purpose of the research, and dissemination of the data. I formally asked respondents about their personal wishes for anonymization, their consent in general, and their specific consent to being audio-

<sup>77</sup> Some had developed an ‘interview professionalism’ that impressed and confused me. During one interview, the participant clearly reeled off a routine, centering on personal experiences that s/he seemed to have recited many times before, instead of providing an assessment of the issues at the macro-level.

recorded. This methodologically necessary process created a formal atmosphere that sometimes conflicted with our previous interactions. Some respondents seemed intimidated by this sudden formality. If this manifested itself in monosyllabic answers and insecure questions whether their answers were ‘correct’, I would openly discuss any nervousness and reassure participants I was looking for informal and subjective data.<sup>78</sup> Subsequently, my opening statement included the information that it was not possible to give ‘wrong’ answers, as the interview concerned their personal views and experiences. What helped in creating a relaxed atmosphere was to communicate clearly that the formal introduction was over, and that from now on we could talk as we usually did. As my experience accumulated, I adjusted my interview questions several times, because initially, they had been too analytical and theoretical.

The challenge of anonymization in anthropological research, as discussed by Baumgartinger (2014) and Unger (2014:25),<sup>79</sup> motivated me to leave the question of anonymization to my participants. Baumgartinger (2014) reevaluates anonymization as a socially and politically situated practice, one required by the need to be sensitive to power dynamics within empirical research. My decision was further validated by the experiences of an anthropologist friend who had worked on a project focusing on sexually marginalized NGO activists in India. Activists took pride in being mentioned by their (chosen) name, embracing the recognition of their expertise. Considering that choices about anonymization can vary based on personal motives,<sup>80</sup> I asked every respondent if s/he wished to be represented by a personally chosen name or a pseudonym, and informed them about the possible risk of retraceability. Activists and professionals usually chose to forego anonymization, while LT+ individuals usually opted for it. In the text I will not differentiate between them. I also anonymize names and addresses of locations, especially if the location was regularly used by LT+ for work or leisure. General public leisure spaces, as well as spaces used only once, are disclosed by name. In these spaces, LT+ individuals are regular participants unnoticed by the heteronormative gaze. Because of the high frequency of human ‘traffic’ in such locations, they are not at risk of being identified.

Anonymization also intersects with the broader topic of confidentiality. As part of the process of obtaining informed consent, I assured potential respondents of

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<sup>78</sup> Knowing that such behavior conflicts with the rules of interviewing, in rare moments I broke with neutrality and the interviewer’s usual self-restraint to support the formation of narratives and to foster trust. For a more detailed discussion of the breach of rules like this, see Çetin (2014).

<sup>79</sup> Unger (2014:25) complicates anonymization for confidentiality. It is questionable how this principle can be realized. If the case is unique and portrayed in detail, it may be identifiable despite anonymization measures: See van der Geest (2003); Unger, Narimani and M’Bayo (2014); Tilley and Woodthorpe (2011).

<sup>80</sup> During my research I learnt that personal motivations behind research participation varied widely. Some participants stated that they were flattered by the prospect that their account of events mattered, while some were interested in expert discussions on the topic. Others hoped that the study would benefit their situations, and the public discussion around LGBT+ people in Indonesia.



general confidentiality. This meant that I would not tell others about their individual experiences and (political) opinions conveyed during the interview. This produced at least one ethical dilemma, where the need to assure confidentiality had to be balanced with the necessity of avoiding harm to other participants. Early in my research, I interviewed an *ustadz* from a local mosque, who expressed antipathy and pity towards LGBT+ individuals who, in his view, had breached ‘the right path’. Four months later, the same *ustadz* began to mingle and even preach (*berkehotbah*) at the *Pesantren Waria* on days that their main *ustadz* was unavailable. I was unsure what to do: I had assured him of confidentiality, but at the same time I saw myself as duty-bound to reduce the risks for LGBT+ participants who attended the *Pesantren Waria*. It was possible that he was faking acceptance to enter the *Pesantren* and undermine the *warias*’ safe religious space. At the same time, it was possible that he wanted to acquire, or had already acquired, a new outlook. For days I considered this dilemma. In the end, I decided to trust the agency of the *waria* – if he was trying to undermine their esteem and institution, I reasoned, surely they would recognize this and act. This decision was soon substantiated, when I learnt that the *waria* had already chased off more than one Imam who tried to disseminate reactionary religious teachings. Again, I learnt not to assume victimhood of LGBT+ individuals, but to take their agency serious, and to recognize that they are the experts in assessing socio-cultural circumstances.

At the end of an interview, I usually gave the interviewed person the chance to ask me questions as well. Interview partners had often shared very personal experiences with me, and the offer to switch roles was meant to gently disrupt the hierarchies inherent in the interview process. This measure also offered them the opportunity to lead the conversation to an end in a way that accorded with their interests. After a completed interview, I would give respondents a small material gift to compensate them for their information and their time.

### 2.2.3 After leaving Indonesia

Leaving Indonesia marked the transition to the next stage: analyzing the data and writing the thesis. Back in Germany, I had to reformulate my role, shifting from field research to working in confined offices, with written data. In this environment, interactive exchange with my supervisor and colleagues facilitated an analytical approach to the data.

#### *Connecting the strings: Method of analysis and writing*

*Most grounded theorists write as if their data have an objective status. [...]. Whether our respondents ply us with data in interview accounts they recast for our consumption or we record ethnographic stories to reflect experience as best we can recall and narrate, data remain reconstructions. (Charmaz 2000:514)*

In the beginning of 2015, I started the analysis and writing of the research project. I chose Grounded Theory Analysis (GTA) to analyze and integrate my data, as it enabled me to construct inductive codes and categories derived from my material.<sup>81</sup> In GTA, the aim is to grasp the progression of events and actions from the perspective of interviewees (Charmaz 2014; Strauss and Corbin 2010). I started with initial coding as described by Strauss and Corbin (2010). After this, I used the strategies described by Kathy Charmaz (2014) and only used gerunds as codes – this is done because active verbs code data as actions.

*Think of the difference in imagery between the following gerunds and their noun forms: describing versus description, stating versus statement, and leading versus leader. We gain a strong sense of action and sequence with gerunds. The nouns turn these actions into topics. Staying close to the data and, when possible, starting from the words and actions of your respondents, preserves the fluidity of their experience and gives you new ways of looking at it. Their steps encourage you to begin analysis from their perspective. (Charmaz 2014:120–121)*

This coding strategy allowed me to capture the meanings, actions, and processes involved in LT+ negotiations, accounting for the fluidity of their spatial and temporal situations. This helped me to better grasp sexual subject formation, fluidity of identifications and negotiating the self in light of religion. I followed Charmaz' (2014) constructivist understanding of GTA, rejecting the idea of a value-free, neutral researcher, and of 'reality' as unidimensional. As Charmaz states, "[r]esearcher and subjects frame that interaction and confer meaning upon it. The viewer then is part of what is viewed rather than separate from it" (Charmaz 2000:523–524). By using GTA I was able to reduce the influence of preconceived (theoretical) knowledge, making it possible to analyze processes, and to grasp and systematize them.

Translation<sup>82</sup> and anonymization raised ethical challenges. In this study, I juggle translation between three languages – Indonesian (the main language of my data), German (the main language in which I think), and English (the language in which I write). Language, and especially the translation of language, struggles with instability and diversity of meaning. Therefore, when directly quoting from interviews, I have chosen to use English translations in the text while reproducing the original *bahasa Indonesia* wording in the footnotes. This improves transparency, as it offers readers who are proficient in the language the opportunity to consider the original formulations themselves. In the introduction, I have already elaborated on the challenge of translating language in relation to gender pronouns. In the following, Indonesian,

<sup>81</sup> As I focused on data generation while in Indonesia, starting the systematical analysis only after my return, my project did not follow key tenets of Grounded Theory Method. In this method, data generation and data analysis are alternating and iterative steps performed until theoretical saturation is reached, see Glaser (1992), Strauss and Corbin (2010) or Charmaz (2014).

<sup>82</sup> The topic of translation in anthropology is not new, see Gentzler and Tymoczko (2002) or Rubel and Rosman (2003).

Javanese, and Islamic terms are written in italics.<sup>83</sup> By using this typeface I draw attention to the ‘conceptual difference’ between situated concepts such as e.g. *lesbi/ans* and ‘lesbians’ (see Chapter 1).

*Afterwards is still within: Compression, continuity and time in flux*

In my research, I was neither neutral, nor interested in relativism. I stand with Scheper-Hughes (1995), who argues that anthropology must be committed and ethically grounded. Anthropological research needs to draw on hegemonic narrations to contextualize the life worlds and logics of participants. However I was, and I remain, politically positioned with LGBT+ subjects, and politically committed to social justice and social equality. The year 2015 saw conservative political discourse commenting on the LGBT+ community increasing; by 2016, “state homophobia” (Poore 2016) had become a real problem. Even after returning to Germany, ‘neutral’ behavior was not an option for me. Silence would have meant supporting those screaming for the eviction and bashing of LGBT+ people. Therefore, I speak out on these issues and act in support of LGBT+ persons when necessary.<sup>84</sup>

This illustrates two interwoven aspects of 21<sup>st</sup> century globalization: (1) the ability to bridge time and geographical locations, and (2) the changeability of localized conditions. Nowadays, in contrast to 25 years ago, information about faraway places and developments are readily accessible without major delay. Wide geographical distances are bridged through modern technology, email, messenger services, or social media. Interconnected mediascapes span the globe (Appadurai 1996b). However, the second aspect is not new; the world is in flux and social, political, and economic conditions change. Yet, when taking these two aspects together, new intricacies have unfolded for anthropological research in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Nowadays, detailed information on changes in distant locales is accessible right away. While transformations of discourse in Indonesia were therefore accessible to me after my return to Germany, I have to emphasize that the empirical data, as well as my text itself, are not ‘timeless’, but are clearly bound to the specific social, political, and economic conditions of 2014.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Ethnographic vignettes are also italicized and indented to mark another level of narration.

<sup>84</sup> In February 2016, sensitive information about a planned eviction of LGBT+ people I knew was leaked to me. I passed this information on to relevant parties. For some academics, this meant ‘overstepping’ the boundaries of my role as researcher. I may have been, arguably, actively changing the field, but socially, politically, and morally I felt obligated to act as I did, so as to reciprocate the solidarity I had experienced while in Indonesia.

<sup>85</sup> I address the recent political changes in Indonesia in Chapter 8.



### 3. State, religion and society: Shifting discourses and formations of gender and sexuality

The understanding of how gender and sexuality are ‘natural’ or ‘normal’ is mediated through various discourses in different sociopolitical realms, such as religious doctrine, state policies, law, and the media. These discourses are not clearly separated. Rather, they are intertwined, and therefore producing synergistic effects, especially for my research participants.<sup>86</sup> Dominant ideas within these discourses mark the background on which gender is understood and lived as a cultural category in society (Blackwood 2005a:852; Butler 1990; Foucault 1983). With this in mind, I use this chapter to introduce those state and religious discourses and ideals which play this role in relation to gender in Indonesia’s modern history. They signify sexed bodies, gender, and connected roles as well as sexuality and desire in multiple and contested ways, providing the context by which the negotiations of LT+ people are informed. With their images of a ‘natural’ binary of men’s and women’s sexed bodies and roles, they form the backdrop of gender concepts and self-understandings of LT+. They inform interaction between masculine *butchis* and feminine *femmes* in platonic and romantic relationships and are, as Blackwood (2010:33) highlights, the scenery for “the production of gender transgression”.

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<sup>86</sup> State ideologies of gender are increasingly informed by religion, and religious discourses in turn shape the social perception of gender.

The LT+ persons in my sample were raised and socialized during the New Order regime of President Suharto and the subsequent period of democratization, the *Reformasi* era. I will therefore focus on this timeframe in the first section of this chapter, to examine the formation of, and shifts in, state discourses. The second section will then show how in practice gender in Indonesian society is more complex than these discourses reveal. The third subchapter addresses the topic of gender and sexuality in light of religion. Here, I discuss which notions, configurations, and concepts prevalent in Islam have given rise to the dominant understanding that same-sex desire and LGBT+ identifications are irreconcilable with religion and piety. At the same time, I show how religiously-based notions of relational behavior between the sexes structure space and its use. The last section explores the context of Yogyakarta, and focuses on Javanese cultural values and conventions.

It is important to recognize that this division into four sections is artificial and done for analytical purposes. In lived reality, the discursive stances merge and are enacted, articulated, intertwined, and dismissed. Nevertheless, the purpose of this approach is to disentangle what is usually fused in discourse and practice to reveal the historic links and shifting relations between ideological constructions of gender and sexuality and the subjective experiences of those positioned within the social setting of Java in a specific moment of time.

### 3.1 State-driven discourses on gender and sexuality through modern history

Under Dutch colonial rule, Indonesia experienced significant changes in attitudes concerning sex, sexual orientation, and gender expression. Homosexuality surfaced as a field of state intervention in which a police response was justified, even though same-sex sexual acts were not illegal in general (Bloembergen 2011). Initially, homosexuality had been tolerated by the colonialists, while local attitudes remained ambiguous.<sup>87</sup> In the wake of a ‘vice scandal’ in 1938/1939, which exclusively targeted Dutch homosexuals (some of high rank), a discourse emerged of “moral cleaning”. This was part of an effort by the colonial regime to present itself as the bearer of civilization and hygiene, two idealized goods of European modernity (Bloembergen 2011; Wieringa 1995:71, 81-82). In doing so, they established an association between homosexuality, weakness, indecency, and crime.

At the same time, a burgeoning Indonesian nationalism increasingly challenged Dutch colonial power. During this period, political parties developed, regional-cultural considerations were integrated into national structures, and Indonesians working towards independence formed new institutions with “secular, religious (Islamic),

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<sup>87</sup> Some elite representatives considered it a disease and danger, while other local sources indicated that male friendships of an intimate nature were tolerated until the time of the scandal (Bloembergen 2011:121–122).

socialist/communist and traditionalist” orientations (Locher-Scholten 2000:20). Women, especially those from the educated middle- and upper-class, were involved in these political activities. They built women’s organizations, which emerged in urban areas from the 1920s, and engaged in nationalist parties alongside men, or in the women’s wings of religious organizations such as *Nabdlatul Ulama* (NU) and *Mubammadiyah*<sup>88</sup>. While questions of religion and politics were rather side-lined, their activist repertoire expanded beyond nationalism to include questions of women’s economics, labor, marriage and education (Locher-Scholten 2000:21–22; Wieringa 1995:70–84). The issue of child marriage, for example, stirred up controversy in the nationalist and women’s movement, as traditionalist orientations competed with ‘modern values’ (Blackburn and Bessell 1997).<sup>89</sup> Through such controversies between modern/traditional and local/imported values, sexual relations and family life were increasingly framed in terms of public morality, and therefore became targets of state control. This would continue after the end of Dutch colonial rule, although in a changed political landscape.

Independence, proclaimed by Sukarno and Hatta in 1945, brought the new state philosophy of *Pancasila*. From an ideological point of view, *Pancasila* fulfills an integrative function, unifying different ethnic and religious elements, and marking them as part of the diversity of the nation. For example, the ideology’s first principle<sup>90</sup> is the belief in a great, true God, established religion and godliness as a principle of the state without privileging Islam or establishing a theocracy. *Pancasila* was understood as an ideological compromise between secular Muslims, non-Muslim nationalists, and Islamic nationalists who were building the new nation while grappling over the place of Islam in it (Franke 2012:110–121; Olle 2009:96–97). In this context, women’s political activism took on new meanings.

During the struggle for independence, it had been possible to be a good wife and mother *by* being politically active. After independence, without the unifying factor of the common struggle, men claimed the space of the political, leaving women with the social. This separation was underpinned by the idea of women’s nature, their *kodrat*.<sup>91</sup> Thus, an equality/difference paradigm was invoked, which supported the idea of gendered spheres: “Political rights had been earned through

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<sup>88</sup> *Mubammadiyah* and *Nabdlatul Ulama* are two Islamic mass organizations that were founded in the 1920s and are still active today. In 2020 they had a total of about 70 (30+40) million members.

<sup>89</sup> Especially upper-class, Dutch-educated Indonesian women, like R.A. Kartini (the icon of Indonesian women’s rights struggle), argued on behalf of such (Dutch) ‘modern’ values, for the protection of young girls from sexual abuse, and for the right of females to self-determine their future (Blackburn and Bessell 1997:109).

<sup>90</sup> The *Pancasila* encompasses five principles: 1. Belief in one Almighty God, 2. Just and civilized humanity, 3. National unity, 4. Democracy through deliberations and consensus among representatives, 5. Social justice.

<sup>91</sup> “Kodrat describes both biological traits and a religiously-inspired paradigm of harmony” (Wieringa 1995:137), which Sukarno also referred to in his book *Sarinah*.

participation in the colonial war, but should not extend to areas of ‘natural’ difference, i.e. family relations” (Wieringa 1995:138).<sup>92</sup>

In the period between 1950 and 1965, the women’s movement operated between President Sukarno’s populist nationalism, which promoted cooperation and unity,<sup>93</sup> and the local version of Marxism of the Indonesian Communist Party (*Partai Komunis Indonesia*, PKI) (Wieringa 1995:103–104). Gerwani, the radical communist women’s organization, concentrated on “equal labour rights for women and for equal responsibilities in the struggle for full national independence and socialism” (Wieringa 1995:172). Gerwani distinguished itself from other organized women’s groups with its anti-imperialist fighting militancy and its expressions of political struggle and womanhood, which embraced the image of the mystic warrior princess *Srikandi*. After 1965 this political orientation, which opposed society’s conservative and religious convictions, would become its members undoing.

In Indonesia the year 1965 saw the overthrow of Sukarno<sup>94</sup> and the rise of a “New Order” under Suharto, the country’s new military leader, who instigated mass-killings of communists and other leftists. This regime was “characterized by a powerful military, centralized decision-making, violent repression, and ideological control” (van Klinken and Barker 2009a:2). It strove to drive out all radical conceptions of women’s place in society, and to assert the subordination of Indonesia’s women. It restored the ‘natural’ social order along religious and conservative lines (the *kodrat wanita*) within a ‘developmental family’. This family would support nation-building as ‘smallest unit of society’ with clearly separated gender roles. In effect, this meant that women were relegated to the place ‘appropriate for them’ – an image that was fostered and supervised by state sexual policies and agencies.<sup>95</sup> Through the universalization of reproduction and provision of care to husband and children as a woman’s task, heterosexuality was implicitly, and marriage explicitly set as the norm. Female same-sex sexuality logically contradicted heteronormative marriage and motherhood. In the 1980s, *lesbi/ans* were officially non-existent

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<sup>92</sup> Sukarno had gained the support of the women’s movement because of his appreciation of feminist ideas, also expressed in his book *Sarinah*. In the later phase of his presidency he increasingly disavowed those ideas, and took a critical stance towards Western feminism, which with its ‘decadence’ contradicted Indonesian ideas about women’s gender (Wieringa 2000:443).

<sup>93</sup> “In Sukarno’s ideology the population is seen as characterized by unity (and not as stratified into social classes) and villages are seen as ruled by traditional values based on the Javanese ideal of harmony with norms of *gotong royong* (mutual assistance) and *musyawarah-mufakat* (deliberation until consensus is reached)” (Wieringa 1995:115).

<sup>94</sup> For detailed accounts of the complicated events surrounding the coup d’état, including a gender perspective, see Wetangterah and Kolimon (2015); Wieringa (1995:287–325, 2003); Wieringa and Katjasungkana (2019).

<sup>95</sup> Women’s organizations, like the PKK (*Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga*, Family Welfare Guidance) or the newly founded *Dharma Wanita* (the Duty of Women), which delivered state programs and its gender ideology to the population, became structured as “wives’ organizations”. In 1974, the law on marriage established the husband as the head and breadwinner of the family, see Katjasungkana and Wieringa (2003); Klenke (2011:67–68); Suryakusuma (1996); Wieringa (1992:104–105, 1993:26, 2003:70).



(Wieringa 1999:215), while the Indonesian women's movement considered it a "western phenomenon" (1999:206). In the 1990s, Mien Sugandhi, State Minister of Women's Affairs (1993–1998), openly considered lesbians as incompatible with the heteronormative nation, noting that she could not "accept them as Indonesian women [...], because lesbians have forgotten their fundamental duties to be mothers, giving birth and raising children" (*Suara Karya*, June 6<sup>th</sup> 1994, cited in Gayatri 1996:86). Though marginalized and harassed, "there was no sustained systematic state or religious persecution" of LGBT+ between 1945–1998 (Graham Davies 2018:327).

The fall of Suharto's regime in 1998 initiated a process of political democratization and social transformation, in which the state loosened its restrictions on the press, media, and public gatherings (van Klinken and Barker 2009a:2). This created space for more diverse representations and political participation. For example, the post-1998 democratization process saw a resurgence of Islamic activism, as religion emerged as a player on the political stage. At the same time, women's increased civil, legal, and political commitment enabled some women to acquire leading positions and public standing, exemplified by Megawati Sukarnoputri's presidency in 2001 (Oey-Gardiner 2002).<sup>96</sup> In the separatist province of Aceh the resurgence of Islam included the introduction and application of *shari'a* law alongside national legislation (Ziegenhain 2006:45). Additionally, several other provinces introduced district regulations based on Islamic teachings known as *Perda Shari'a* (*Peraturan Daerah*). These regulations aimed to police 'social ills' and affected mostly women, but were, in some instances, also trans- and homophobic (Allen 2007; Arivia 2008:194; Candraningrum 2006:1; Graham Davies 2018:327). Female activists increasingly challenged such conservative religious-political advances targeting legislation and impacting women (Allen 2009:4, citing Andren 2007:4). They participated in discourse over newly founded women's organizations and debates over proposed laws and regulations, thus conquering space in public life. Ideological conflicts and discussions over the alleged increase of "the new freedoms of sexual expression in media and society, explicitly targeting women" proliferated (Hatley 2008:2).

Sexuality was and remains a politically sensitive topic in post-Reformasi Indonesia. The *Reformasi* era enabled *lesbi/an* activism to emerge, whether among the *lesbi/an* community itself, or within the wider LGBT+ spectrum. New associations, such as the *Swara Srikandi*, were established locally and beyond the state's borders. They fought for visibility and sought connection to, and sometimes funding from, western agencies and wider Asian LGBT+ networks (Blackwood 2015:223–224). Upon its 'discovery' of the *lesbi/an* topic, media outlets painted a very stereotypical

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<sup>96</sup> For further discussion of the socio-political developments accompanying this transition of state, politics, and society, see Aspinall and Fealy (2003); Carnegie (2010); van Klinken and Barker (2009b). For elaborations on changes and continuities, including an analysis of gender in relation to politics and religion, see Bennett (2005); Bennett and Graham Davies (2015); O'Shaughnessy (2009); Rinaldo (2007); Robinson (2009); Satriyo (2003).

picture of *lesbi/ans* as mentally disordered, associating them with deviance (e.g. suicide, sickness, illegal marriage) and prostitution (Blackwood 2010:49–53; Gayatri 1996:90; Murray 1999:143).

In 2006, a controversy over the Anti-Pornography law draft (RUU APP) broke out.<sup>97</sup> The bill's supporters emphasized women's protection based on gender constructions found in Islamic scripture, and instigated a moral panic over the alleged erosion of national identity and morality by global cultural influences (Hatley 2008:3). They propagated a version of the narrative of 'imported indecency', a narrative already familiar from colonial and New Order times, now increasingly associated with the catchword *seks bebas* or 'free sex'. Such unregulated sex outside of marriage is seen as un-Indonesian, immoral, incompatible with Islamic faith, and a danger to as all that is 'Indonesian'. This view is deeply heteronormative, positing the nation as comprised of families, which are privileged by law and thus considered legitimate.<sup>98</sup> In this way, the heterosexual norm is legally embedded and socially hegemonic, enforced through legal regulations shaping social coexistence (Boellstorff 2006a).

This view is so pervasive that in 2013 the Pew Research Center found that only 3% of Indonesians thought homosexuality should be accepted by society. By 2019, this perspective was shared by 9% of respondents (Pew Research Center 2014:1, 2020:7). Nearly 90% of LGBT+ respondents surveyed elsewhere in Indonesia report having faced violence, which included physical, psychological, economic, sexual, or cultural violence (Laazulva and Oey 2013:62). In post-Suharto state and media discourses, deviant sexualities including *lesbi/an*, *gay*, teenage sexuality, or sexuality outside marriage, are subsumed under the term *seks bebas*. These sexualities are associated with imported western values and sexual liberalism, and regularly become a source of moral panics.

### 3.2 Plurality and dis-/continuities in practice

Despite the influence of national discourses propagating powerful normative ideas, their influence is not absolute. There exists a plurality of discursive ideals and norms, as well as a diversity of lived realities regarding gender and sexuality. I will now delve into these aspects. Hierarchical lines and powerful social inequalities based on different identity markers, such as ethnicity, gender, age, sexuality, religion,

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<sup>97</sup> For detailed elaborations of the contents of the bill and the reactions to it, see Allen (2007); Bel-lows (2011).

<sup>98</sup> All other relationship formations, such as homosexualities or unmarried couples, thus forfeit legitimacy.

class, health and region, frame the social and cultural position of individuals, including *lesbi/ans*.<sup>99</sup> I will explore the topics of gender and sexual diversity, as well as marriage and work, since these are more complex than the aforementioned ideals would suggest, and are especially relevant to LT+ lives. Through these discussions, I aim to provide further context to the negotiations of LT+ presented in later chapters.

### 3.2.1 Gender and sexual diversity

As described above, both national and religious discourses predominantly portrayed gender as largely biological and binary, while promoting a heteronormative image of sexuality. While this image reflects a widespread understanding, it ignores the archipelago's long history of diversity of gender and sexuality. The plurality and local specificity of gender in ethnically and culturally diverse localities in Indonesia is anything but surprising.<sup>100</sup>

A popular example of this diversity is that of the five genders recognized among Muslim Bugis in South Sulawesi. In addition to women and men, the Bugis recognize three genders (*bissu*, *calalai* and *calabai*), which exist in the context of same-sex or non-heterosexual desire and ritual power (Graham Davies 2010). From at least 1500 AD, *bissu*, unsatisfactorily translated as “transgender shaman” (Graham Davies 2018:323), assumed influential ritual roles in royal courts, conducting ceremonies and mediating between the earthly and divine world. Their ritual power derives precisely from the combination of male and female traits that transcends singularity (Graham Davies 2018:323–324).<sup>101</sup> *Bissu* are considered distinct from men and women, embodying a “combination of all genders” and forming what Sharyn Graham Davies describes as a “fifth meta-gender group” (Graham 2001).<sup>102</sup> The other two genders, *calalai* and *calabai*, translate to “false man” and “false woman” (Graham 2001). *Calalai*, assigned female at birth, perform masculinity through their clothing, activities, and mobility. They neither understand themselves as men, nor are they seen as men by others: They are seen as *calalai*. In terms of desire, they desire feminine women (Graham Davies 2010:119–137). *Calabai*, in contrast, are assigned male at birth and identify with and perform different modes of femininity. They often work in beauty-related sectors, such as Salons. Their desire is most often directed towards men (Graham Davies 2010:138–173).

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<sup>99</sup> See Murray (1999) to grasp how class was a dividing factor in the *lesbi/an* community in the 90s. While my research did not put class in the center of analysis, I have tried to place this factor in an intersectionally sensitive manner, which is why I will refer to it briefly but repeatedly in the following.

<sup>100</sup> The papers that Atkinson and Errington (1990) bring together reveal, at a glance, that even gender as practiced among heterosexual women is often starkly different from the national ideal.

<sup>101</sup> Javanese and Balinese traditions also emphasize that it is precisely the interplay of masculine and feminine, embodied by transgender persons, that may reveal power and potential, see Graham Davies (2018:323).

<sup>102</sup> On *bissu*, see also Andaya (2000); Graham Davies (2010:174–206).

'Ritualized homosexuality' is practiced by some Indonesian ethnic groups (see Serpenti 1984), and same-sex desire and sexuality vary widely, with some local and others national in nature. Early accounts of 'ritual transvestism' and same-sex sexual practice became known through accounts of travelers, colonialists, and missionaries.<sup>103</sup> In light of several known examples of female gender transgression, Blackwood (2005a:871–872) argues that "a striking transformation occurred as a new innate gender binary began to replace the old sacred gender binaries." This indicates a shift in the status and perception of the respective subject positions in relation to the hegemonic gender constructions prevalent at a specific time. *Warias*, anatomically male persons whose group name is unsatisfactorily translated as 'trans women' or 'transvestites', claim to have a female soul and embody femininity. Since *Reformasi*, they have become one of the best-known groups representing non-normative embodiments of gender and sexuality, especially in urban environments (Boellstorff 2004b, 2007:87–89).<sup>104</sup> In comparison, *gays* and *lesbi/ans* are a far less visible part of the population (Boellstorff 2006b:159, 2007:102, 112). *Lesbi/an* subjectivities, although prevalent across Indonesia, differ regionally in their understandings of gender and sexuality, as summarized by Blackwood (2015) when comparing female masculinities in Padang, Jakarta, Yogya and South Sulawesi.<sup>105</sup>

Mythical narratives popular in Indonesia, to which LT+ subjects frequently referred, also include characters expressing diverse gender and sexuality constructions. I often came across *Srikandi*, a figure originating from the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*. Stories from that epic, as well as those of the *Ramayana*, are widely known throughout Indonesia, not least because the popular *Wayang* puppet theatre is based on its tales (Pausacker 1991:271).<sup>106</sup> *Srikandi* was known among Indonesia's general public and her name has been used, historically, to describe powerful and strong-minded women. Because of the popularity and general appreciation of the mythical past in society, she also served as a positive point of collective reference for LGBT+ people.<sup>107</sup>

<sup>103</sup> See Wieringa (2000) for a detailed summary of the contents of such early travel accounts.

<sup>104</sup> They are considered an element of national culture despite their social marginalization.

<sup>105</sup> *Gays*, men who have sex with men, and other queer subjectivities, have been researched by writers such as Boellstorff (2003, 2004a, 2005b, 2007); McNally, Grierson and Hidayana (2015); Oetomo (1996a, 1996b, 2000); and Thajib (2014, 2019).

<sup>106</sup> The Archipelago possesses a rich history of literature and performing arts in which gender and sexual diversity is represented. In manifold works 'inappropriate' and marginal women figures (sex workers, dancers, concubines, minor wives, *lesbi/ans*, *waria*) are imagined and represented beyond the middle-class ideal of submissiveness, see Allen (2015); Anderson (1996); Curnow (2007); Florida (1996); Hatley (2002); Taylor (1996). In the performing arts, representations of gender and sexual diversity are also no exception. Neither are actors that cross-dress for their roles nor those who are associated with same-sex sexual acts, see Kellar (2004); Kumar (2000); Lysloff (2001, 2009); Peacock (1978b); Sunardi (2015); Wilson (1999).

<sup>107</sup> Besides the movie 'The children of Srikandi' documenting female queer lives (see Coppens (2015) on the movie and queer film activism), there were various LGBT+ groups and NGOs using *Srikandi* in their names, e.g. the group *Swara Srikandi* or *Srikandi Dewata* who I worked with in Bali.

Hardjowirogo describes *Srikandi* as having

[...] a personality like a man's: she likes fighting, and because of that she is called a female warrior. Right up to the present day, women who are brave enough to right wrongs, especially those which concern the Indonesian people are called *Srikandhi*. (Hardjowirogo 1965:151, cited in Pausacker 1991:272; her translation).<sup>108</sup>

Benedict Anderson (1965:26) as well as Pausacker (1991:289) argue that in the context of the *Wayang* puppet theatre *Srikandi* and her sister *Sumbadra* served as opposing role-models accessible to Javanese girls, with *Srikandi* representing strength and independence and *Sumbadra* portraying the obedient wife.

However, the story of *Srikandi* is not fixed, varying across different versions of the *Mahabharata*.<sup>109</sup> Additionally, the *Wayang* theater is an oral tradition, which “makes it difficult to provide a definitive picture of the character of Srikandhi” (Pausacker 1991:274). Despite variations, there are commonalities between versions, and LBT+ regularly deployed *Srikandi* to connect their subjectivities.<sup>110</sup> Furthermore, *Srikandi* already has served, and continues to serve, as a positive symbol for women and trans men, as *Srikandi* is depicted as a strong and brave (female) warrior who rebels against the expectations linked to her gender role. One could even identify same-sex interest, because of an apparent same-sex marriage presented in both the Indian and Javanese version. Through referencing *Srikandi*, LT+ implied an analogy between their struggles without claiming an “unbroken historical timeline” (Boellstorff 2005b:36). The hoped-for effect of creating a connection to a socially well-known and positively received figure might be self-empowerment and self-identification, particularly in an environment that does not offer a variety of suitable images for positive self-identification, as well as to legitimize one’s existence in a context in which social acceptance is contested.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>108</sup> *Srikandi* was taken up as a role model by the women’s units of the Indonesian national Army during Sukarno’s time. The public and the president referenced the women groups that successfully landed in West Irian in 1962 as “our *Srikandi*” (Anderson 1965:26). Equally, Gerwani used *Srikandi* as symbol to differentiate their gender understanding from that of the *kodrat wanita* that was symbolized by *Sumbadra* (Wieringa 2000).

<sup>109</sup> The most important difference between the Indian and the Javanese *Mahabharata* is that *Srikandi* in the Javanese version is married to Arjuna (Pausacker 1991:287 N27). Anderson (1965:22) locates the most important difference in *Srikandi* being a man who was changed to a woman in the Indian original, while in the *Wayang* stories she is a woman with a “masculine side”.

<sup>110</sup> *Srikandi* can be read as either transgender or gender variant because of the sex change or her ‘masculine side’. Additionally, *Srikandi* can be understood as embodying female masculinity, as she disguises herself repeatedly as a man and conveys ‘male’ character traits: See Anderson (1965); Pausacker (1991).

<sup>111</sup> Scholars argue over the evaluation of the legitimizing character in theory and practice. Some draw on historic or even epic pasts in scholarship to claim an “unbroken historical timeline” (Boellstorff 2005b:36) of e.g. homosexuality, in the interest not only of presenting authenticity but of legitimizing a specific way of life and gaining a social space in society. This is a disputed strategy, because a “developmentalist perspective” (2005b:36) claims ‘authenticity’ through former existence, which might

### 3.2.2 Young people and sexual activity

The forms of sexuality considered taboo or ‘morally difficult’, besides the same-sex acts labeled as *seks bebas*, also include sex work<sup>112</sup> and youth sexuality. In official national discourse, young people are not imagined as being sexually active, as sexuality is only legitimate within marriage. Additionally, they are assumed to grow up ‘naturally’ heterosexual, due to social heteronormativity (Parker 2008:3; Utomo 2003:108). In local media, sexuality of adolescents is branded as abnormal, unhealthy, western, and sinful (Harding 2008:13). Yet through cable TV and other media, sexual images become increasingly accessible and displayed, albeit without integrative education efforts (Utomo and McDonald 2008). The situation was even more ambiguous because legitimate sexuality, fertility, and the need to remain attractive to one’s partner were topics of discussion and were visible in the cityscape, just as ‘reprehensible’ aspects of sexuality were (see also Graham Davies and Bennett 2015).<sup>113</sup> As such, sexuality and respective moral evaluations are present, while knowledge transfer and personal sexuality are declared taboo, especially for teenagers and young adults. Female reproductive health and especially the sexually vital functions of bodies have effectively been erased from formal education that caters to adolescents and young adults.<sup>114</sup> Discussing sexuality or distributing condoms (e.g. on world HIV/AIDS day) stirred protest, because to do so would ‘encourage premarital sexual activity, casual sex, and promiscuity’.<sup>115</sup>

This accursed discursive atmosphere was ongoing during my research (see for example Image 2, a poster advertising a seminar on “healthy sociability without free sex”). Society’s ongoing understanding of (youth) sexuality as taboo resulted in a lack of accessible information for male and female youth. The effects of this struck

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delegitimize new(er) subjectivities (Boellstorff 2005b:38). Graham Davies (2018:323), likewise, sees a danger but nevertheless advocates taking strategic advantage of this approach, especially in an atmosphere that increasingly marks LGBT+ subjectivities as ‘foreign’ and ‘non-Indonesian’, deliberately ignoring existing traditions.

<sup>112</sup> For research addressing sex work, see Beazley (2015); Hull (2017); Idrus and Hardon (2015); Surtees (2004).

<sup>113</sup> Research participants repeatedly drew my attention to beauty salons, where *ratius* (smoking out of the vulva) was practiced to increase the attractiveness of this body part for the husband, as well as to ++ massage salons, where the ++ indicated that employees also provided sexual services to (male) customers.

<sup>114</sup> According to interview partners, sexual education was reduced to an absolute minimum in their schools emphasizing chastity only. Holzner and Oetomo (2004:41) characterized the atmosphere surrounding sexual education as involving “discourses of prohibition and intimidation.”

<sup>115</sup> When in 2012 and 2013 a more informed sexual education policy and greater access to contraceptives (especially condoms) was discussed in media, conservative officials or representatives of religions rejected a loosening of existing regulations. They highlighted the alleged harmful consequences of corrupting societal and religious morality, see Fardah (2013); Schonhardt (2013). Due to horrific cases of sexualized violence towards children, which became public in 2016, the number of critical statements demanding more comprehensive sexual education in state-educational settings rose, see Yosephine (2016b).

young women especially hard, because the moral code against premarital sexual activity was not enforced by making men discipline their bodies, but was imposed, instead, on girls.<sup>116</sup> To comply with this duty, girls' physical movements were limited and monitored by a guardian from puberty onwards. Even if the ideal was missed, the "performance of purity", meaning the concealment of 'impure' acts, had to be fostered even more so (Bennett 2005:24). Lack of, or false information about sexual acts,<sup>117</sup> procreative capacities, or sexually transmitted infections were widespread, hindered the possibility of informed consent and increased the risk of pregnancy, infections, and sexual abuse. Moreover, unmarried women's social status and security were endangered, as they were the ones stigmatized if transgressions were proven.

However, the reality of adolescent life is diverse, and contrasts strongly with the ideal upheld by the state and parents. The participants of Utomo (2003:111–114) clearly indicate that premarital sex, pregnancy, and illegal abortions are not uncommon among young people.<sup>118</sup> Nevertheless, there are also young people who are not sexually active because of their beliefs and adherence to social, cultural or ethnic norms (Parker 2008:26, 55). As such, it becomes clear that one should speak of "multiple adolescent sexualities in Indonesia" (Parker 2008:4).

The LT+ lives and experiences that form the backbone of the later, empirical chapters were subject to discursive regulation and part of these multiple adolescent sexualities – and genders. They faced regulation because of their age, their unmarried status, and the implicit assumption of heterosexuality rooted in the gender binary. How respondents negotiated discourses, cultural norms, and familial expectations bound to gender, sexuality, and associated topics of moral female behavior and purity in the context of same-sex desire, will be analyzed in detail in Chapter 5.

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<sup>116</sup> While 'maidens' were held responsible to abstain from sexual activity before marriage to guard their 'value', and protect both their own and the family's reputation, sexual activity of boys was considered 'normal' and sometimes even encouraged (Bennett 2005:23–26). Consequently, experiences of sexualized and gender-based violence may be understood as individual rather than structural problems, potentially leading to victim blaming. Victim blaming refers to socially accepted argumentations that attribute blame to the victims of violence instead of the perpetrators, for example, by considering the victim's clothes. Victim blaming discourses as well as sexism are a pressing issue, see Komnas Perempuan (2016b) or Poerwandari, Utami and Primasari (2021).

<sup>117</sup> Information on sexual acts was often acquired through watching mainstream or amateur heterosexual pornography transferred by friends or downloaded illegally from the Internet. In general, this 'source of information' did not focus on gendered equality, conveyance of procreative knowledge, or safer-sex practices.

<sup>118</sup> This is especially problematic for unmarried women who have two 'solutions' besides becoming an unmarried single mom: either they opt for an illegal and often unsafe abortion, endangering their health, or they/their families pressure the father of the unborn child to marry the woman he impregnated. Such a marriage was designated, in colloquial expression, as an 'MBA', a case of being *Married By Accident*.

### 3.2.3 Marriage

Sulandari (2009:39) an Indonesian author who focuses on *lesbi/ans* negotiations in local culture, describes the cultural value of marriage in normative terms: “As human being, either man or woman is naturally faced to a phase of marriage in their life.” Marriage, in other words, is understood as ‘natural’, as a regular life stage to which everyone (supposedly) aspires. This local perspective is reflected in academic consensus.<sup>119</sup> Marriage is often viewed as a *rite of passage* in Indonesia. “[T]hrough marriage, and subsequent childbirth, a female becomes a woman” (Webster 2006:4). A system of arranged marriages (*dijodohkan*) prevailed until at least the 1960s (Jones 2010), but today the decision to marry is increasingly an autonomous one for both parties.<sup>120</sup> There is a social consensus that women should be married by the age of 30 at the latest (Bennett 2005:2).<sup>121</sup> Those remaining single beyond the age of twenty-five face social stigma, and are often believed to be socially incompetent (Himawan, Bambling and Edirippulige 2018; Smith-Hefner 2020:146).<sup>122</sup>

This “marriage imperative” (Boellstorff 2005b:111) does not recognize personal gender expression or different sexual desires as legitimate reasons for failing to marry. *Lesbi/ans* (and sometimes trans men) are seen as women, regardless of personal gender expression. Because of the value and status marriage ensures for the individual and their family, individuals usually experience familial pressure to marry. Boellstorff (2005b:111) states some *lesbi/ans* wished to marry heterosexually, have children, and meet social and parental expectations. Based on my experience, and that of other researchers (e.g. Webster 2008:29), this assessment applies more often to *femmes* than to *butchi*.<sup>123</sup> Both try to delay parental marriage aspirations by citing educational reasons, a justification increasingly valid in contemporary Indonesia due to women’s growing access to secondary and tertiary education (Smith-Hefner 2020).

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<sup>119</sup> Authors who have been researching on gender for years, especially in relation to youth or same-sex desire, emphasize the importance of marriage, see Bennett (2005); Blackwood (2010); Boellstorff (2005b, 2007); Nilan (2003); Parker (2008); Suryakusuma (1996); Utomo (2003); Webster (2006).

<sup>120</sup> In systems in which arranged marriages prevail, marriage becomes universal, as usually only physically or mentally disabled people remain unmarried. In Indonesia, marriages are still sometimes arranged with the child’s consent (Brenner 1998:48; Smith-Hefner 2020:73, 143). With arranged marriage rates declining, many young people have to decide which candidate might be suitable in light of complex factors (e.g. socio-economic standing, education, political interest, grade of religiosity). A growing marriage service market tries to minister to (and cash in on) this modern ‘gap’ by offering mass match-making events or dating apps along religious or ethnic lines (Smith-Hefner 2018:342; Utomo 2019).

<sup>121</sup> “The singulate mean age at marriage for women in the early 1990s was around 22.0. It climbed to 23.2 in 2006, but fell to 22.4 in 2011–13” (Qibthiyah and Utomo 2016:147, citing Hull 2015).

<sup>122</sup> In 1970, the percentage of unmarried women above 35 was at 1,4% and in 2005 at 4,3% (Jones 2010:Tab. 2).

<sup>123</sup> *Femmes* in my sample considered marriage more as a normative aspect of their *kodrat* than as a choice. Young *butchi* imagined marriage in some distant future in connection to their *kodrat*, while older *butchi* did not want to marry.



Regardless of individual stances towards future marriage, many *lesbi/ans* expressed ambiguity towards marriage. They acknowledged socially prevalent stereotypes of gendered behavior that asserted what marriage ‘naturally entailed’, and feared the loss of social, bodily, and sexual autonomy. Bennet explicates the latter aspect:

*Within marriage, idealized sexual scripts dictate that it is a wife’s kewajiban (duty or obligation) to satisfy the sexual ‘needs’ of her husband, and conversely that exclusive sexual access to her body is a husband’s hak or right. These ideals are iterated by religious leaders of different faiths and are synonymous with common interpretations of the Qur’an concerning the sexual rights of men and obligations of women. (2005:29–30)*

In orthodox conceptions, women are seen as vulnerable and positioned in relation to men, who are responsible and entitled to limit or broaden her scope of mobility, social interactions, and professional life (Bennett 2005:28–29).<sup>124</sup> Smith-Hefner (2020:72–79) points out the existence of another ‘gender current’ also existing in Java, which stresses complementarity of gender and is historically attributed to ordinary people (*wong cilik*). However, among the middle-class and higher social strata, adherence to hierarchical gender notions is often more stringent, driven by concern for reputation (Dzuhayatin 2004:257).

Another important aspect is the hierarchical division of spaces related to married couples, where each has their primary area of responsibility. The separation of spheres intertwines with the notion of dependence and provision for women, reflected not only in the Islamic concept of *nafkah* (the husbands obligation to provide to his wife in material terms) but also with the idea of *kodrat*, the soft and submissive ‘nature’ of women.<sup>125</sup> Such a prospect conflicted especially with the gender articulation and mobility of *butchis*. In reality, the situation is more complex and ambiguous: While in Javanese families men may exercise the last word, women exercise power and agency, managing the family and overseeing the household budget, as is frequently emphasized in anthropological sources.<sup>126</sup> Furthermore, the idealized notion of gender relations ignores the reality that rural and lower-class women have ‘always’ worked outside the house, even if their earnings were considered a secondary income.<sup>127</sup>

<sup>124</sup> First and foremost, her father who may entrust a male guardian (*wali*) to accompany the ‘dependent daughter’, and later her husband.

<sup>125</sup> The strong separation of spheres is of *priyayi* origin (*priyayi* refers to the aristocratic, court-based elite of precolonial kingdoms and later administrative civil servants during colonialism) and belongs to the ‘hierarchical gender current’. It was reinforced by the colonial division of labor and ultimately enshrined in the middle-class New Order ideal with its emphasis on *kodrat* (Smith-Hefner 2020:79).

<sup>126</sup> See Brenner (1995:23); Dzuhayatin (2004:257); Geertz (1961:46, 78–79); Koentjaraningrat (1985); Smith-Hefner (2020:78).

<sup>127</sup> Jennaway (2002:33–58) demonstrates this for Bali, Bennett (2005:35) for Lombok, and Brenner (1998) for women in the Batik industry in Java, where the marketplace is also known to be dominated by women (Alexander 1998; Dzuhayatin 2004:258). Even the *Dharma Wanita* women with their representative functions were surely not confined to the household (Wieringa 1993:26–27).

### 3.2.4 Employment and education

Having some kind of career or job becomes more and more important for married women, driven by the idealized middle-class imagination, aspirations for status, and the need to secure one's position within the growing, post-*Reformasi* middle-class (Boellstorff 2005b:103–104; Smith-Hefner 2020; van Klinken 2014).<sup>128</sup> As a prerequisite of entering the labor market in higher positions, education is becoming more important. Smith-Hefner's (2020) research shows how much effort is made by families from different economic backgrounds to secure tertiary education for their children.

The increase in young middle-class women's participation in the workforce also influences gender roles, encouraging men's responsibility and active inclusion in the domestic sphere (Robinson 2018:316). Many female university graduates wanting to use their education aspire to a 'modern' marriage based on companionship, in which partners are open towards flexible family and career arrangements beyond traditional models (Smith-Hefner 2020:145). Nevertheless, the discursive image of women as secondary earners alongside men has had an impact on women's education opportunities and labor market participation. On the basis of two studies carried out in Java, Azzizah (2017:125) found that, if resources were insufficient to school all children, the education of boys was given preference, as financial responsibility was seen as the responsibility of men. Further, more women than men worked in an informal sector characterized by poorer working conditions, insecurity, and lower wages (Cameron and Suarez 2017:10; van Klaveren et al. 2010).<sup>129</sup> Especially after marriage and childbirth, many women dropped out of the workforce to care for their children and to become housewives. Some did so temporarily, and many permanently (Cameron and Suarez 2019).

These issues explain how the dominant gender imagery and connected practices, especially in terms of 'scheduled' economic dependency of women and actual disadvantages facing them in the world of work, leads to a structural disadvantage that influences the biographies and economic prospects of LT+ people. As an effect of the social imagination of women's relationality to men, I argue that many women are not, in practice, equally socialized or prepared as men to live a financially independent and self-sufficient life.<sup>130</sup> This leads to specific challenges for women who do not want to get married or who want to be independent of men. LT+ invest less in getting married heterosexually than heterosexual women. As will become clear in

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<sup>128</sup> Women's participation in the formal workforce has been increasing (Utomo 2008), although their total number remains relatively low compared to other countries of the region (Cameron and Suarez 2019).

<sup>129</sup> In the formal labor sector women faced a gender wage gap of about 70-80% of the average wage of men; in the informal sector the gender wage gap was even bigger (Cameron and Suarez 2017:13; Utomo 2008:14).

<sup>130</sup> This situation seems to be in flux. Smith-Hefner (2020:143–144) reports that many mothers of interviewees pushed their daughter's education, as it would reduce their financial dependence on their husband.

later empirical chapters, families of LT+ individuals support their education and participation in the economy, but usually also expect their child to get married one day. Refraining from marriage may jeopardize the security system of the family, which is socially, emotionally, and economically disastrous, given that Indonesia lacks a strong welfare system. Impaired finances can be challenging – so too can be the problem of having little experience of independent living due to one's former familial dependency.<sup>131</sup>

The position of women has fluctuated over the course of Indonesian history, due to state regulations. During the Old Order under President Sukarno, women's liberation and engagement in politics reached a peak. During the New Order regime, these gains were reversed, and political control targeted women, their bodies, and their organized activities. Since *Reformasi*, gender and sexuality have become a battlefield between Islamic Conservatism, and secular, democratic ideals. A biologicistic understanding of gender with binary roles, along with the perception of heterosexuality as natural and marriage as its primary expression for women, continues to be dominant in Indonesian society. Discussions and discourses about sexuality narrowly cling to moral norms, creating 'moral panics' upholding middle-class ideals informed by cultural and religious conventions. Even if these ideals do not translate identically into practice, they inform lived practice. Despite these power-infused discourses, gender and sexuality still remain plural in practice, reflecting the wide range of cultural, religious, class and ethnic influences in the globally connected Archipelago.

### 3.3 Islamic discourses on gender and (same-sex) sexuality

In the previous section, it became clear that Islamic discourses have played a role in shaping politics and society since Indonesia's democratization. State discourses, along with conservative, religiously based positions on gender and sexuality, mutually legitimized each other, leading to practical legal regulations. This section focuses on four specific topics that are relevant for this study. First, I address the developments that have increased Islam's political influence as well as Islamic plurality since democratization. I do so to introduce the reader to local Islamic diversity and its historical transformation, which is also conditioned by varying degrees of state regulation. This sets the stage to analyze, in Chapter 8, how the moral panic towards LGBT+ that has erupted since 2016 is informed by both local and global political transformations. Secondly, I will focus on normative, religious concepts of gender and (same-sex) sexuality in order to contextualize subsequent discussions. This in-

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<sup>131</sup> More *butchi* found it difficult to obtain well-paying jobs because of their gender expression. Yet, they took pride in sharing their means with their *femme* partner, conquering the role of the husband (see also Wieringa 2007). *Femmes* rather faced the challenge of having little experience with independence because their upbringing was often aligned to gendered norms for females.

cludes exploring the religious landscape of rejection, the alternative, inclusive approaches sketched out in Chapter 6, and the negotiations that research participants made in relation to religion, discussed in Chapter 7. Without claiming that these religious concepts are singular or ‘true’ stances of a global and complex religion, I do say that the perception of sinfulness and incompatibility of LGBT+ subjectivities and desire with Islam are locally grounded in these concepts.<sup>132</sup> The third topic demonstrates the consequences of political homophobia for LGBT+ on a collective level, using the example of anti-LGBT attacks by radical Islamic groups, as well as activist strategies to evade them. As a final topic, this section focuses on the Islamic concept of *mubrim*, which governs possible marriage partners and defines relational rules of un/permissible bodily exposure. I discuss the gendering and segregating effect of the *mubrim* concept on social spaces in order to understand my respondents’ gendered negotiations in social space and the challenges they face reconciling their desire to their faith.

### 3.3.1 Islamic plurality and the position of religion in the state since New Order

The plurality of religion in Indonesia has a centuries-long history. Before Islam spread from west to east from the 14<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the reigning kingdoms of the region were primarily characterized by Hindu, Buddhist, and Animist forms of belief. As Islam expanded into the archipelago, it took on a syncretized form by integrating local *adat* (customary) law and institutions, and linking them with other religious beliefs and rituals. Islam in Indonesia has developed syncretistic variations, each of which has been shaped by local history and culture (Bennett 2005:9–10; Franke 2012:74). Up to the 1930s, only a minority in Java were pious Muslims, with the majority adhering to Islam in a rather nominal sense, embodying a specific Javanese form known as *Islam Jawa* (see Chapter 3.4.2 for details). This relationship was reversed in the period up to the *Reformasi* era, in which the population’s orthodox-oriented religiosity, while still plural, grew steadily (Ricklefs 2012). Over time, this local variant of Islam has emerged, receded, and diversified. With 130 million believers, *Islam Jawa* remains the biggest variant of Islam in Indonesia, and combines orthodox Islam with pre-Islamic spiritual components (Franke 2012:165–166).

Five religions are recognized under the constitution, with *Pancasila* enshrining the importance of belief in a God.<sup>133</sup> Under the New Order regime, to suppress any potential political claims that might challenge public order, religion was mostly a

<sup>132</sup> These views were widespread assumptions, socially shared even across religious boundaries, regarded as a consensus view of ‘religion’ on the issue. Even though I am focusing on Islamic configurations here, the view that homosexuality was forbidden was frequently shared in Christian churches.

<sup>133</sup> Indonesia recognized Islam, Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, Hinduism and Buddhism. Under the New Order, the status of Confucianism was unclear. Since 1998, Confucianism has been the sixth officially recognized religion. Indigenous spiritual beliefs that were not recognizable by the criterion of belief in a God were marginalized.

private matter. The public and political dimensions of religious freedom were strictly controlled, with the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA) administering religious affairs (Hefner 2018:212). Since the late 1970s Indonesia has witnessed an Islamic revitalization, with heightened ritual observance, religious education, and the building of new places of worship. This was enabled by rising levels of literacy and education, coupled with restrictions on civic and political fields of engagement (Hefner 2000:17–18). Demands of Muslim intellectuals and organizations such as NU repeatedly challenged the place of religion in the state.<sup>134</sup> In the early 1990s, there was a turnaround in the government’s treatment of religion, when they started giving more space to orthodox and modernist Islam. In this period, Suharto presented himself as increasingly religious. Subsequently, the government encouraged the establishment of Muslim organizations, such as an Islamic banking system and newspapers, and Muslim television programs. It allowed the wearing of headscarves at school, while also increasing funding for Islamic education (Franke 2012:167; Hefner 2000:18). Those who defamed Islam received strict sentences (Ricklefs 2001:393). However, as Hefner (2000:19) points out, this was a “regimist Islam” that continued to oppress those Muslims who advocated for democracy, pluralism, and participation, while favoring orthodox Islam and relegating *Islam Java* to the background.<sup>135</sup>

Conservative and orthodox convictions organized and over time, grew more dominant in society, challenging the state’s view and regulation of religious diversity. As a result, a wide continuum unfolded, with feminist and other liberal stances on one side (see Robinson 2018), the big mass organizations *Muhammadiyah* and NU<sup>136</sup> in the middle, and, at the other extreme, the fundamentalist, radical Islamist stances represented by the FPI (*Front Pembela Islam*, Islamic Defenders Front), MMI (*Majelis Mujahiddin Indonesia*, Assembly of Islamic Warriors) and JI (*Jemaah Islamiyah*, Islamic Congregation). These small but vociferous militant fundamentalist groups seek to impose their version of Islam, often under the pretense of morality, and may resort to force to restrict liberality, plurality, and equal rights, and ultimately democracy itself (Hefner 2018).<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> For example, they criticized the bill, introduced in 1983, that required any organization to adopt the *Pancasila* as its sole founding ideology. They saw in this an over-elevation of *Pancasila*. Nevertheless, in 1984 NU adopted *Pancasila* as its foundation (Ricklefs 2001:377–378).

<sup>135</sup> Many Muslims preferred tolerant, independent, plural forms of faith and spirituality rather than state-regulated Islam or an Islamic state. This became obvious in the contemporary resurgence of Sufi mysticism and Muslims being the most stable force of the pro-democracy tide that arose in the 1990s, and that ultimately led to Suharto’s demise in 1998 (Hefner 2000:18–19).

<sup>136</sup> Both representing modernist, reformist or traditionalist, more orthodox Islam. They justify religious plurality on the basis of the *Qur’an* and advocate a re-orientation on Islamic traditions.

<sup>137</sup> Such radical groups have repeatedly been involved in attacks against Muslim minorities, and LGBT+ people and events (see Coppens 2015; Hefner 2018:213; Liang 2010; see also below). The jihadist JI are blamed for the Bali bombings in 2002 and the attack on the Marriott Hotel in Jakarta in 2003 (ICG 2003). Such groups try to legitimize their violence partly through *fatawa*, Islamic legal

With the democratization process of the *Reformasi*, religion's place in the state, its government, politics and policies, as well as in the wider society, was restructured with a conservative twist.<sup>138</sup> New constitutional amendments guaranteed the right to hold private beliefs, but without protecting the right for public practice (Hefner 2018:213). In 2001, the parliament rejected a proposal introduced by parties with Islamist leaders that would have obliged the state to impose Islamic law on Muslims. The leaders of the two Islamic mass organizations had voiced their opposition to this proposal, defending democracy and plurality-affirming *Pancasila* (Hefner 2018:213; Salim 2008).

Recent research on Indonesia describes how increasingly authoritarian, standardizing, and conservative Islamic tendencies have gained considerable ground, and how this has put pressure on *Pancasila's* and society's pluralism, as well as on local Islam's previous religious, political, and social tolerance (see e.g. Hasan 2018; Hefner 2018; Lindsey 2018; Olle 2009; Salim 2008; van Dijk and Kaptein 2016; Wieringa 2009). This assessment is substantiated by the public debates surrounding women's morality. However, plurality-oriented counter-discourses continue to fight for space and recognition of diversity (see also Robinson 2018; Wieringa 2009), as will be discussed in Chapter 6 and 8 below.

### 3.3.2 Scriptural reasoning substantiating the incompatibility of Islam and same-sex desire

In the following, I explore and spell out the qur'anic norms and concepts on which the hegemonic view is based.<sup>139</sup> I look at how gender, sexuality and its legitimate expression are normatively conceived, based on entries of different Encyclopedias on Islam and *al Qur'an*, enhanced by the statements of religious and cultural experts I interviewed. Many principles overlap with culturally shared ideals across religions.

#### *Binary sex*

As taught in *al Qur'an*, God created a pair of two sexes, men and women (Sura 49:13; 53:45; 75:39). "Naturally occurring pairs are an important part of the order of the

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opinions, proclaimed by the MUI (Franke 2012:77; Olle 2009). The MUI (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia*, Council of Indonesian Ulama) was founded in 1975 by Suharto and was then considered "a mouth-piece for the Suharto government within the Muslim community" (Olle 2009:95). After *Reformasi*, the MUI encompassed diverse strands of Islamic thought. Its proclaimed *fatawa* are therefore not necessarily representative of all strands gathered within it (Franke 2012:77). My interview partners associated the MUI with conservative views and interpretations of scripture.

<sup>138</sup> For example, through religious parties or by the introduction of *shari'a* regulations that restrict liberty in several districts.

<sup>139</sup> Although there is no uniform stance on this, as my research clearly shows, the dominant opinion of many Muslims in Indonesia was exactly this, that LGBT+ did not comply with or fulfil the norms defined in scripture, and, hence, had to be perceived as contradictory and sinful. Yet, I dissociate myself from the stereotype that 'Islam' is in itself homophobic. By emphasizing inner-Islamic plurality in this research, 'Islam' appears as not singular in form.

universe which the Qurʾān cites again and again as evidence for God's existence and unity" (Stewart 2004:581). The *ustadz* of the *Pesantren Waria* also emphasizes the clear binary:

*In the Qur'an it is clear for the problem of bodily sex [...] from verse one to the end there are only two, namely men and women [...] who are predestined by nature, natural means 'given', something that cannot be changed anymore*<sup>140</sup> (Interview Pak Arif, 24.08.2014).

The sexes have biologically different abilities<sup>141</sup> and functional roles in family and society, and, even though they are different, they are regarded as equally valued as human beings (Badran 2002:289). This fundamental premise of a clear binary of sexes conflicts foremost with the T in LGBT+, as transgender persons transgress the social and God-given role assigned to their sex and their gender identities are rarely recognized as real and legitimate.<sup>142</sup> In contradistinction, Röttger-Rössler (2009:280) notes that a *waria* status does not contradict Indonesian Islam, but is regarded as God-given or the will of *Allah*. These divergent assessments can be attributed to the plurality of Islamic, syncretistic shaped doctrine, or diverging cultural evaluations concerning *waria*, varying across regions like Yogyakarta and Makassar, a region of Sulawesi where Röttger-Rössler's research is placed. There, the Makassar and Bugis recognize gender positions beyond male and female (*bissu*, *calabai* and *calalai*, see above).<sup>143</sup> Her latter assessment that 'it was God's will' is familiar to me in the self-definition of *waria*. In my sample however, this view was rarely shared by religious leaders. Some religious leaders held the opinion that God would not receive *waria*'s prayer as long as they did not self-identify and present themselves as ordinary men.<sup>144</sup> While the subject position *waria* may be socially recognized, their 'inner core' is often perceived as male. Concurrently, I agree with Boellstorff's (2004b:167) assessment that being *waria* was not generally equated with 'being sinful', because 'sinful' usually referred to reprehensible behavior, for example when *waria* engaged in sex work. Nevertheless, their transgressive gender position was in friction with the binary gender norm, as they assumed a distinct gender expression alongside their biological status.

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<sup>140</sup> Original: "Didalam al-Qur'an memang jelas untuk masalah seks [...] dari ayat satu sampai terakhir itu cuma dua, yaitu laki-laki dan perempuan [...] yang sudah kodrati, kodrati adalah given yang enggak bisa di rubah lagi."

<sup>141</sup> In Muslim cultures in the region, it is e.g. assumed that men and women not only have different intensities of desire (*nafsu*), but also different abilities to control it, see Bennett (2005); Nurish (2011); Peletz (1995).

<sup>142</sup> This was evident in conflicts over whether *waria* should be buried as women or men, or in divergent attitudes about whether God had made them *waria* or whether they would ultimately always be male before God.

<sup>143</sup> A third less likely possibility is that the difference is due to the time gap between our research, in which the 'conservative turn' has deepened.

<sup>144</sup> Thus, as Pak Arif notes, some mosques did not allow *waria* to pray in the *ruknen*, the female prayer dress.

### Marriage

A further commandment is marriage, a sacred contract before God, reserved for a man and a woman in religious contexts. Marriage is not necessarily linked to desire. “Chastity (q.v.) is one of the cardinal virtues demanded of Muslims [...]. To marry is therefore desirable for every member of the community of believers” (Motzki 2003:277). Bouhdiba (2004:89) frames marriage as ‘pleasure’ and ‘duty’. The resulting difficulties for LGBT+ are obvious in this regard. While same-sex desiring people can voluntarily opt for heterosexual marriage to fulfill religious commandments, some are forced to do so. Moreover, in Indonesia same-sex loving men and women cannot enjoy religiously recognized marriage within the scope of their desire. Consequently, if they do not want to enter into a heterosexual marriage to meet social or religious expectations important to them, they cannot fulfill the commandment of marriage.<sup>145</sup> It is in this context that an accusation against LGBT+ of *seks bebas* or free sex must be understood. Partly, the stereotype of promiscuous *gay* sex was included here, but more importantly, such sex would lack the legitimacy that could be achieved through marriage.

### Sexual relations

Religious doctrine allows sexual acts only within a legitimate marriage. “Licit sex in the Qurʾān is designated by the term *nikāḥ*” (Stewart 2004:580), which is also the verb (*menikah*) meaning ‘to marry’ in *bahasa Indonesia*. Sexual acts not involving a proper legal relationship between those involved, such as premarital or extramarital sex, are *zina* (fornication/adultery), which as a term and concept is also often used in Indonesia. “Q 17:32 characterizes this behavior as a *fāḥisha*, i.e. an obscene act of transgression against God from which a Muslim should refrain (cf. Q 25:68)” (Abu-Zahra 2001:28). Behaviors producing *zina* are sinful and forbidden according to Islamic norms.<sup>146</sup> Since same-sex marriage is not recognized within Islam, same-sex sexual relations are forbidden or condemnable. In addition, such sexual acts are generally seen as unnatural, based on the concepts of *līmāʾ*, i.e., when the glans is

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<sup>145</sup> For *waria* or trans male people, one might think this commandment should be easier to fulfill, because trans is a category that refers to gender. But still, incongruities emerge, because the actual gender/sex realized through transition is usually not officially recognized by either religion or state. If the sex assigned at birth is understood as ‘true’, a *waria* would have to marry a woman and a trans male person a man. This might, optically, actually appear as homosexual. Of course, there are also *lesbi/an waria* and *gay* trans men, but the desire of *waria* is more often directed towards men and the desire of trans men more often towards women. A marriage within their respective desires would therefore only be possible if their actual gender/sex was recognized.

<sup>146</sup> Of course, norms represent ideals and practice is more diverse. All these behaviors exist despite the principles. However, as they can lead to penalties, such behavior is often hidden.



inserted in another man's anus, or *musabaqat al-nisa'* or *sibaq*,<sup>147</sup> terms translated today as 'tribadism'. The *ustadz* of the *Pesantren Waria* likewise declared sexual practices "from behind, anal" (*mendatangi dari belakang, lewat anal*) as well as the use of coercion and violence next to *zina* as clearly forbidden. Usually *zina* and *liwat*, sometimes even *musabaqat al-nisa'* are included in compilations of 'enormities', or major sins. In Islamic theology, these have been listed by Muslim scholars on the basis of *al Qur'an*, *hadith*, and *fiqh* over the centuries (Ali 2006:75–77). Even if the Prophet Mohammed discouraged men from sexual abstinence, in practice abstinence can be a means by which same-sex desiring men can lessen the sinfulness of their actions. Some religious authorities differentiate in this way between desire/identity and sinful behavior, adopting the perspective of "hate the sin, not the sinner".

In response to the undifferentiated assertion that Islam prohibits homosexuality, it should be emphasized that there exists in the *Qur'an* no historically anchored differentiation between heterosexuality and homosexuality, nor are such differentiations historically identifiable in Indonesian societies (Röttger-Rössler 2009:280). Pak Arif likewise emphasizes: "In *al Qur'an* there is no sexual orientation, there is no mentioning if someone is homosexual, heterosexual or bisexual, nothing like that we will find"<sup>148</sup> (Interview Pak Arif, 24.08.2014). While marriage is understood in a binary way, sexuality has not been, at least not until recent history. A more nuanced view is therefore that specific sexual acts are regarded as forbidden – not in the *Qur'an*, but like *liwat* within the historical legal texts of *fiqh*.

### *Procreation*

The rejection of LGBT+ based on religious teachings also touches on procreation. Though only implicitly mentioned in *al Qur'an*, reproduction is an integral goal of marriage (Giladi 2004:20). Fertility, procreation, and children are highly valued in both religion (Giladi 2001:302; Motzki 2003) and Indonesian society. One reason for the rejection of same-sex desire on religious grounds was its inability to produce offspring without the use of reproductive medical assistance. From this perspective, unproductive sexual acts are unnatural and, therefore, religiously reprehensible.<sup>149</sup>

I have presented only those aspects of Islamic sexual morality that are important to my topic. Overall, sexual morality and ethics in Islam are far more complex than

<sup>147</sup> *Sibaq* means rubbing, crushing, or squashing. This term also refers to an action, not an identity (Ghandour 2019:90). It refers to rubbing or pounding sexual acts without penetration, mostly but not exclusively between women. In Islamic history, physicians and legal scholars have dealt with it more in terms of ritual questions, and less in terms of criminal law, because it was not seen as illegal penetration (Ghandour 2019:90–92). In Indonesia, I never came across the term *sibaq*.

<sup>148</sup> Original: "Dalam al-Qur'an maka orientasi seks tidak ada, orientasi tidak ada disebutkan emm apakah dia itu homoseks, heteroseks atau biseks ini enggak ada sama sekali tidak akan kita temukan di dalam."

<sup>149</sup> Generalized statements such as "If LGBT were allowed, there would soon be no more mankind", alluded precisely to the absence of the reproductive capacity and regarded it as an omen of the downfall of mankind.

this presentation implies.<sup>150</sup> For my interview partners, however, it was clear that same-sex desire and LGBT+ identifications were problematic in the field of religion generally, not just within Islam.

### 3.3.3 Practical consequences and activist ways of dealing with it

At the reading to launch Irshad Manji's book *Islam, Liberty and Love*<sup>151</sup>, attackers said to be from the hardline fundamentalist MMI stormed the venue<sup>152</sup> in Yogyakarta, as Gunawan, an NGO activist, recalled:

*They brought a lot of clubs [...] it was difficult to identify them because they wore helmets, everything covered [...] there were also people hurt in the audience; two of our friends [mentions names] were wounded seriously. One was wounded in the head, so right away we reported the incident to the police. And we preceded the case so that, what is it called, the suspects could be caught. But yes again [...] the police said, they had difficulty to identify the perpetrators because all of them wore veils [visor of helmet] ... and I also think the police did not dare to examine the MMI.*<sup>153</sup> (Interview Gunawan, 20.03.2014)

Such attacks confirmed, for many, the idea that religion is at least partially hostile towards LGBT+ people, prompting a need for security measures. Different activist and non-activist interview partners told me about previous incidents and the preventive and actual safety precautions subsequently implemented to ensure participants' safety.

The police often proved unreliable in protecting LGBT+ events, lacking investigative 'stamina' in the aftermath of attacks;<sup>154</sup> it was suspected, as media also reported (see e.g. Saragih 2011), that some hardline groups were working hand in hand with the police. Against this backdrop, security matters were taken seriously, and precautionary measures were carefully practiced. This meant, most of all, information control: Posters advertising LGBT+ events never mentioned the actual venue, just a phone number for further information; detailed information was

<sup>150</sup> For more complex elaborations on sexual ethics in Islam, see Ali (2006); Bouhdiba (2004).

<sup>151</sup> See newspaper reporting from Hopper (2012); Indrasafitri (2012); Kriesdinar (2012).

<sup>152</sup> Initially, the reading was located at the Gajah Mada University. After receiving threats by the MMI which questioned the University's morality, university management withdrew its approval, forcing the event's relocation to the LKIS (*Lembaga Kajian Islam dan Sosial*, Institute for Islamic and Social Studies), a Muslim NGO promoting peaceful diversity, gender equality, and human rights.

<sup>153</sup> Original: "Mereka banyak bawa pentungan [...] dan sulit juga untuk mengidentifikasi siapa mereka karena mereka pake helm semuanya ditutup [...] waktu itu... juga ada korban juga dari peserta teman kita ada beberapa yang luka luka ya beberapa ada dua orang yang parah itu ada... siapa namanya... [mentions names]. Itu dia luka di kepala gitu kan, itu kemudian kita eee apa namanya melaporkan kejadian itu ke polisi gitukan. Dan kita sempat mengawal kasus ini supaya apa namanya... tersangkanya itu bisa tertangkap. Tapi ya lagi [...] polisi mengatakan dia kesulitan untuk mengidentifikasi siapa pelakunya karena semuanya pakai cadar dan saya kira juga polisi tidak berani untuk eeee apa memeriksa MMI."

<sup>154</sup> See also Coppens (2015:128) analysis on this point.

spread informally; event banners were hung inside venues instead of outside,<sup>155</sup> where they would normally inform by-passers of the event;<sup>156</sup> participants were forbidden to make the location public in their social media updates; obvious wording and reference to the LGBT+ cause was avoided and replaced by symbols that referenced the content in a way that only the trained gaze could recognize. Cyberattacks on homepages could not be prevented.<sup>157</sup>

Although these measures prevented attacks, they also made access more difficult for less well-connected LGBT+ people. However, sometimes there were pleasant surprises, as when the PLUsh NGO moved their office:

*This neighborhood is quite friendly with waria. Because 200 meters further down is a habitation with lots of waria. [...] That was a consideration for choosing this location because the neighborhood is LGBT friendly. When we had the launching of the new office, an open house celebration, some invited neighbors came and we presented and explained [our work]. [...] They even asked for our program to contribute to the social life of the neighborhood. Ya (laughs) woaah! We, I, are very comfortable here.*<sup>158</sup> (Interview PLUsh, 11.07.2014)

Even with the experience of relative safety in the neighborhood they were careful not to display material signs related to LGBT+, to guard both the site and the people from attacks by fundamentalists.

Tolerance, in PLUsh's neighborhood, was also based on the fact that the NGO refrained from public advertising. It was a comfortable and quiet residential neighborhood, but not a rich one. Class intersected with modes of piety and influenced whether people tolerated or rejected LGBT+ persons. According to women's rights activist Budi Wahyuni, a later commissioner of Komnas Perempuan (National Commission on Violence against Women):

*If a person has reached the level of an official, a functionary wife position, who also wears a veil throws her name in the ring for religion, yes, surely, she will reject it. And it will be noisy because it is not allowed in religion. And people will say so, but middle and lower*

<sup>155</sup> This varied regionally: In Java and Sumatra especially, banners hung outside were unimaginable.

<sup>156</sup> I attended one event (by the Christian Jakarta Theological Seminary) where a banner was hung over the venue entrance, see Image 1. Event organizers had received threats from Islamist groups, but being a well-respected institution, the Seminary, in discussion with the police, had decided to take the risk of hanging the banner publicly. Luckily, the threats were not carried out.

<sup>157</sup> Most LGBT+ NGOs maintained homepages to make their services and information widely accessible. Activists reported that their NGOs homepages were regularly attacked by hackers, who blocked access data, denigrated contents and installed banners that would, for example, condemn LGBT+ with reference to Islam.

<sup>158</sup> Original: "Tempat ini cukup ramah waria. Karena 200m ke sana itu kampung yang sebagian besar berisi waria. [...] dan karena ini juga pertimbangan kita kenapa kita memilih tempat ini karena kampung cukup ramah LGBT. Iya dan waktu kita open house launching e kantor baru, beberapa warga yg diundang datang lalu kita e presentasi menjelaskan. [...] Dan bahkan mereka e meminta program dari kita untuk bisa e berkontribusi di kampung ini. Ya, a, ya, waow banget. Kita, aku, sangat, kita sangat nyaman sekali di sini."

*social classes will not say it's malignant. No, [they will say], 'whatever, it's okay', it's fine in the village. If the person joins the arisan [regular social gatherings of neighborhood], there is no problem. [...] The more elite a person is, the higher the tendency to maintain his/her image and the look of the ideal family or the impeccable woman or wife.*<sup>159</sup> (Interview Budi Wahyuni, 09.09.2014)

Enhanced socio-economic status increased the need for 'moral' public representation. This did not guarantee that people from lower income groups would approve of LGBT+. Wahyuni's statement emphasizes, rather, that the LGBT+ aspect was only one of many components by which a person was judged in a social setting. If this specific aspect was not explicit, the acceptance of a person or a couple could be measured by other social parameters because they respected cultural rules. This ambiguous relationship between cultural norms, openness, secrecy, acceptance, and LT+ negotiations thereof will be discussed in Chapter 4.

### 3.3.4 The *mubrim* concept and its effect on space

A key to understanding how social space is occupied and gendered in Muslim-majority parts of Indonesia is the complex Islamic concept of *mubrim* or *bukan mubrim*.<sup>160</sup> This concept structures social relations in space according to gender. The classification of people into *mubrim* and not (*bukan*) *mubrim* in (Indonesian) Islam bears some resemblance to the distinction between private and public in Western or (formerly) Christian countries.<sup>161</sup> In Western societies, private and public realms are often defined in terms of physical locations or economic spheres, with the public sphere considered accessible to all citizens (Thompson and Whitten 2005:3–4). In contrast, social space in Muslim majority parts of Indonesia is often structured by the *mubrim* understanding, which not only genders space relationally, but also renders public space as primarily male.

Within the *mubrim* category, a gender-based distinction is observed. People who are *mubrim* to each other are usually related by blood and are not eligible as future marriage partners (for details, see Table 4). From the perspective of an unmarried woman, the father and other male *mubrim* relatives may be shown the hair and forearms. Towards female *mubrim*, such as the mother, the requirement of covering the

<sup>159</sup> Original: "Misalnya, sudah masuk ke tataran yang ibu-ibu pejabat, yang apalagi berkerudung dan dia harus mempertaruhkan namanya untuk agama ya pasti dia akan, akan menolak. Dan akan ribut. Karena itu tidak dibolehkan di agama. Dan orang akan bilang, sosial yang menengah ke bawah gak akan pernah bilang itu nular. Nggak, biarin aja, gak papa kok, baik-baik aja kok di kampung. Datang arisan gak ada masalah. [...] Semakin orang itu elit, itu kecenderungannya untuk jaga image dan, dan, kelihatan sebagai keluarga yang ideal atau perempuan baik-baik atau istri yang baik akan dia jaga."

<sup>160</sup> The more correct term would theoretically be *mabram*/*bukan mabram*. However, since people in daily practice usually used the expressions *mubrim* and *bukan mubrim*, I use them as well.

<sup>161</sup> One difference, for example, is that the domestic sphere and the home in Indonesia are central sites of material and cultural production (Brenner 1998:18).

body is less stringent, although in practice this differs. Through marriage, the husband becomes *mubrim* to the wife. All other people fall within the *bukan mubrim* category; toward them the hair, neck and body should be covered (*menutup aurat*) up to the wrists and ankles as a sign of morality, while the gaze should be lowered. The *mubrim* classification becomes relevant from menarche on, signifying the age of marriageability in textual interpretation. The covering regulations are also intended to prevent *zina*.

Table 4: Simplified schema of the Islamic concepts of mubrim/not-mubrim

unmarried woman	mubrim (= / ≠ private)	not-mubrim (= / ≠ public)
who	Consanguinity (parents, grandparents, female relatives of the mother's family, the mothers' brother and direct siblings)	No consanguinity; everyone else
bodily regulations	To mubrim men: naked fore-arms and hair may be visible. To mubrim women: body doesn't need to be covered extensively.	Body should be covered extensively (hair and arms and legs until the wrists and ankles). Hands, feet, eyes (or face) can be visible.
behavior	Not suitable for marriage. Mubrim men are suitable company for a woman in public.	Might be suitable for marriage. Especially men should not be touched or looked in the eyes.

In Indonesia, the private house of a Muslim family can also be governed by the *mubrim* concept. A male *bukan mubrim* guest transforms the 'private' character of a house into a more 'public' one. This changes gendered individuals' behavior towards each other, because communication and bodily conduct are regulated by the *mubrim* classification. Nonetheless, the actual implementation of the *mubrim* classification, like other norms, depended on the situation, practice, and the intensity or grade of standardization of faith. Often, the rules of *menutup aurat* were less strictly applied vis-à-vis other women, even if these other women were not *mubrim* according to textual interpretations.<sup>162</sup>

<sup>162</sup> For example, Fifi, a Muslim LGBT+ activist who regularly wore a headscarf and Muslim clothing, took off her headscarf at the *Pesantren Waria* as soon as the last man had left the building. In front of female identified people, i.e. the *waria*, Dian and me, she felt comfortable enough to do so. For the most part, with the exception of Aceh and districts where specific *perda shari'a* have been introduced, Indonesian Muslim women are free to choose whether or not to wear a headscarf. For publications focusing on headscarves, see Arimbi (2009:72–74); Brenner (1996); Candraningrum (2013); Hasan (2009); Ida (2008); Parker (2006); Smith-Hefner (2007, 2020).

Ideas of female morality influenced how social space was used and occupied by gendered subjects by marking the boundaries of public and private according to religious criteria (Brenner 2011),<sup>163</sup> the *muhrim* concept being one of them. While during the day public space was occupied by women as much as by men, its use changed at night. During the day, as well as in the early evening, many groups of women spent time together in places such as shopping malls or cafes. At night, however, I saw women only when they were accompanied by men. The intertwining of cultural and religious ideas of gender, and their influence on the gendered structure of social space, was also evident in the multitude of gender-segregated places in Muslim-majority regions. Specific areas were segregated by gender, not only in toilets and in mosques, but also in some state-operated public transportation systems, such as the local trains in Jakarta in which female security personnel patrolled the women-only car with batons. Further, most of the stores catering to the body, such as fitness studios, beauty centers, or massage parlors, offered their customers a gender-segregated space. In Yogyakarta, housing solutions such as *rumah kost* (boarding houses, often family-run) also often catered to only one gender, and enforced gender-specific visiting rules.

The *muhrim* classification is relevant in light of the LT+ negotiations with dressing regulations and scopes of mobility discussed in Chapter 5, and LT+ negotiations with personal faith outlined in Chapter 7.

### 3.4 Javanese values and the city of Yogyakarta

This section maps out the local context characterized by diverse and often strong ideological discourses. Its purpose is to contextualize and explain the experiences, views, and references of LT+ interview partners presented in the empirical parts. Their joyful or stigmatizing experiences, their political standpoints, as well as their practices and performances of gender, sexuality and faith were not only informed by the ‘great’, expansive, national, and religiously propagated images and values, but also by the regional, local, and sometimes ‘quieter’ images and values structuring their lives. All three fields provide the backdrop against which LT+ negotiate their lives, and as such, I continuously emphasize their overlapping and partially convergent nature. The discursive fields previously described mutually reinforce and nurture each other. Javanese spirituality, values, and ideals (see below), mixed with Islamic professions of faith, converge in *Islam Java*, a local form of Islam. Through the historical and ongoing dominance of Java in politics, Javanese people and values

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<sup>163</sup> For research that explores how differently positioned heterosexual women negotiated social and religious gender norms in different settings, see Silvey (2000); Srimulyani (2008, 2012); Webster (2011); Williams (2005); Wiyatiningsih (2010).

also informed national discourses.<sup>164</sup> For those respondents who ‘were Javanese’, Javanese culture and values were present as (un)conscious frames of orientation, informing language, behavior, interaction, and patterns of perception and evaluation. The three respondents who had moved to Yogya from Sumatra and Kalimantan had been socialized in other ethnic-cultural contexts, but had learned to maneuver social relationships in a Javanese style, due to Javanese political dominance, residence in Yogyakarta, and because of their associations with Javanese friends.

### 3.4.1 *Yogya Istimewa* – Special Yogyakarta

Yogyakarta is a special region in the heart of Java. Despite the different influences that the city’s student population have brought to the local scenery, Yogya is still considered a hotspot of cultural heritage,<sup>165</sup> with strong Javanese traditions and religion. This image is most strongly represented by the officiating Sultan and the *Kraton* palace in the geographical center of the city at the southern end of the *Malioboro* street. The *Kraton* palace stands as a symbol of the aristocratic Yogyakarta history, characterized by noble courts and refined cultural expressions, and known for its Javanized mode of Islam which incorporates “mystic synthesis” (Ricklefs 2007:5–6).<sup>166</sup> The aristocratic gentry (*priyayi*) had its counterpart in the ‘peasants’ or folk masses (*abangan*), as Geertz (1960:227–229) argues. Today, this population is metaphorically symbolized by the *Jalan Malioboro* opposite the *Kraton*, which stands for the entrepreneurial, hectic, and eclectic Yogyakarta of today.<sup>167</sup>

Attracted by the mixture of culture, tradition, religion and modernity, members of the educated elite highlight the high-culture resources of Yogya, the writers and artists promote the fine arts. Since *Reformasi*, this includes an alternative art world with ‘glocal’ libertine and gallery spaces. At the same time, *santri* (students) from rural Islamic *pesantren* as well as middle-class students from other cities gather in Yogya to study at its many and renowned (Islamic) universities.<sup>168</sup> This resonates with the meaning of the name of Yogyakarta, “a city that is fit to prosper” (Stodulka 2017:49).

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<sup>164</sup> Javanese ideas of ethics and harmony were instrumentalized by Suharto to propagate national unity and consciousness in an authoritarian way. Suharto also engraved hierarchical order as an intrinsic aspect of Javanese conventions of communication and behavior intersecting with gender in the middle-class *kodrat* family image and in his political style, see Wieringa (1993, 1995, 2007:81).

<sup>165</sup> With the tourist-savvy spots of the Ramayana Ballet at Hindu Temple of Prambanan, the Buddhist Borobudur temple complex, or the nearby Imogiri royal graves.

<sup>166</sup> The Sultan is symbolically married to *Ratu Kidul*, the Queen of the Southern Sea, “ruler of all the spirits of Java”. The royal courts perform rituals to ensure *Ratu Kidul*’s safeguarding of the region, especially from eruptions of the Merapi volcano (Schlehe 2010:113, see also Schlehe 1998).

<sup>167</sup> Lined with street vendors and food *warungs*, *Malioboro* is the city’s most famous shopping street, with hotels for every budget. Here, national and international chains, huge batik and souvenir stores compete with market women day and night for the attention of tourists.

<sup>168</sup> “In 2010, Yogyakarta was home to four state universities, 17 private universities and over forty colleges, and housed around 25.000 Indonesian and international students” (Stodulka 2017:50).

In 1945, Yogyakarta was granted a special administrative status (*daerah istimewa*) due to its commitment to national independence. Yogyakarta is the only region in Indonesia which possesses this special status, and is for this reason ruled by a monarch. Since 1989 this has been the Sultan Hamengkubuwono X. In 2015, the city had a population of about 400.000–500.000 inhabitants, while the wider region has a population of about 3.5 million people. In the 1970s, Java was hit by combined economic and environmental crises, prompting many farmers from the surrounding region to move to the city or nearby villages (Dahles 2001:63; Hüsken and White 1989; White 1991). Under the New Order, the city's image as a center of culture, arts, and education was revitalized. As a result, Yogya enjoys a reputation as a tourist attraction.

The LT+ protagonists of this book were a product of this mixture; some had come to Yogya from other (Javanese) cities to study, while others had grown up in Yogya, predominantly in working-class and some in middle-class families – none, to my knowledge, were of aristocratic descent. Some were pursuing studies or practical training, while others were working in offices, NGOs, or low-paying, informal jobs.<sup>169</sup> All enjoyed the multi-influential and mostly rather tolerant atmosphere of Yogya, because there were always festivals or places where one could hang out or work with LGBT+ NGOs. However, LT+ people also questioned the permanence of the city's special (*istimewa*) character, citing incidents such as the attacks on Christians and LGBT+ events in 2014 (see Muryanto 2014a and Chapter 8) or the increased control of public space through new regulations that restricted begging and loitering by the poor (see Stodulka 2017:51–52).

### 3.4.2 Plural local Islam: *Islam Java*, further varieties and increasing normativity

More than half a century ago, Geertz (1960) classified *abangan* and *santri* as the two socio-cultural groups most salient within the Islamic religious landscape in Java. The above-mentioned 'nominal' Muslims of Java were the *abangan*.<sup>170</sup> *Abangan* engaged in life-circle celebrations called *slametan*,<sup>171</sup> believed in the power of spirits of the earth or sea, prepared offerings to appease spirits, or turned to a *dukun*<sup>172</sup> for spiritual advice. These were all Javanese elements persisting within this syncretistic form of Islam. According to Geertz, the vast majority of Javanese were *abangan* in the

<sup>169</sup> Yogya, as one of the still more affordable cities in Indonesia, is home to a considerable informal sector in which students and unskilled workers sell their products and labor.

<sup>170</sup> *Abangan* are regular peasant folk who self-identify and are identified as Muslim but whose belief and practice combine "Sufi, pantheistic, and Javanese folk beliefs (including some Indonesian Hindu elements)" (Smith-Hefner 2020:21), mixing it with beliefs and worship practice of textual Islam.

<sup>171</sup> Community feasts with rituals and food for birth, death etc., see Geertz (1960); Woodward (2011:113–135).

<sup>172</sup> An indigenous healer or spiritual expert, sometimes rather occult, see Woodward (2011:69–111).



1950s, while *santri*<sup>173</sup> made up about one-third of the population. *Santri* are understood to be devout Muslims who actively practiced their faith and sought education in classical Islamic sciences, studying the *Qur'an*, *hadith*, and *fiqh* jurisprudence. Internally, the *santri* category includes two main lines of reasoning – the traditionalist, roughly represented by NU, and the reformist, roughly represented by *Mubammadiyah*. Geertz (1960) classified *priyayi* as a third group. *Priyayi* are the highly cultured counterparts to *abangan*, the noble and aristocratic elite of the royal courts that stressed Hinduist elements (Geertz 1960:6), held political power, and influenced the *abangan* with their cultured preferences (Smith-Hefner 1989).<sup>174</sup>

In the last sixty years, Geertz's classification has been widely used in the academic community, but some authors have questioned its historical and contemporary accuracy. Critics question its image of a historic, long-standing emic system<sup>175</sup> and characterize it as too simplified a binary.<sup>176</sup> They also argue that it is unhelpful for understanding the social dynamics and changes observed in Indonesia from the twentieth century onwards. As such, Indonesian and Western researchers have nuanced this classification in light of such social changes<sup>177</sup> and emphasize the expansion of orthodox Islam and its influence on religious belief and practice, politics and local culture as the most important change (see Azra 2003; Hefner 2011; Jamhari 2002; Jonge 1993; Ricklefs 2007; Woodward 1989:7). Some, like Azra (2003:40), speak of 'santrinitisation'. The increase in *santri* numbers was paralleled by a decrease in numbers and relevance of *abangan* as a category for self-identification.<sup>178</sup> Nevertheless, the *santri/abangan/priyayi* differentiation is relevant to my topic, because it highlights Islam's inner-religious plurality on Java. Syncretistic Islamic practices,

<sup>173</sup> The *santri* are, in this categorization, Javanese that are oriented towards orthodox worship practice, who were or are trained in the Islamic school system, *pesantren* or *madrasah* (Islamic day schools).

<sup>174</sup> They represent the 'great traditions' of philosophy, art, religion, education, and are known for their status deference generating refined, mystical and self-controlled behavior while, simultaneously, enacting hierarchy (Geertz 1960). Under colonialism the 'cultured' *priyayi* were incorporated into the colonial administration: This led to a universalization of the term, which later covered all colonially employed government and civil servants, bureaucrats and clerks across Java, regardless of their origins (Smith-Hefner 2020:23).

<sup>175</sup> Ricklefs (2007:84–104) argues that no deep-rooted history of the divide existed, but that the differentiation became manifest and entrenched in societal usage only from the middle of nineteenth century onwards.

<sup>176</sup> Woodward (2011:48–52) argues that early assessments of the strength of Islam in Java by missionaries, theologians, and colonialists, underestimated the Islamic character due to Orientalism and Christian images that constructed Islam as an enemy. This supported the image of the Javanese as not really Muslim, as if the cultural, 'Javanese factor' was incompatible with an orthodox Muslim identity. Smith-Hefner (2020:23) further adds that *priyayi* are not a religious, but a social or status group, "in Weberian terms."

<sup>177</sup> Woodward (2001) extended Geertz' model by capturing five currents that characterized religious pluralism around the turn of the millennium. He distinguished Indigenized Islam, the traditional Islam of NU, Islamic Modernism, Islamism, and Neo-Modernism.

<sup>178</sup> Many interviewees of Smith-Hefner (2020:43) dissociated themselves from the ritual practice of their parents, who they labeled as *abangan* or *Islam Java*, categories they never used to describe their own religious orientation.

such as that of *abangan/priyayi* elements, were present in Yogyakarta, not least due to the ongoing impact of the Sultan and the representation of the city as a repository of Javanese cultural heritage. At the same time, normative Islamic currents were also present. Furthermore, the categories are relevant because hierarchical *priyayi* notions were maintained in the national gender ideal, and continued to provide norms for social communication and conduct.

Santrization has developed in interaction with political events since the 1930s. These included the loss of power of the sultanates and the regulation of religious matters in colonial times, factional competition during Sukarno's presidency, and the killing and persecution of Communists and leftists, primarily of the *abangan* group in Java, after the failed coup that brought Suharto and the military to power (Smith-Hefner 2020:21–25).<sup>179</sup> Together with development policies of the New Order that strengthened the educational system, the resurgence of religiosity supported the blossoming of scriptural and *shari'a*-based, normative Islam.

The 1970s and 1980s brought infrastructural development, which led to economic expansion, new job opportunities, urbanization, and educational reforms. Many new schools were built, and compulsory education was introduced. This educational offensive, combined with a growing economy, increased the number of graduates in lower, secondary, and tertiary education. The absolute number of female students enrolled in state and religious schools rose significantly and soon settled as relatively equal to the number of male students (Smith-Hefner 2020:32–33). In response to the demands of parents and the labor market “for marketable skills as well as religious piety” (Smith-Hefner 2020:33), many *pesantren* adapted and expanded their curriculum to also include general, non-religious subjects (Hefner 2009; van Bruinessen 2008). These developments resulted not only in a raised consciousness of those syncretistic aspects of *Islam Java* deemed incommensurate with ‘proper’ Islam, but also in the official equivalence of degrees enabling university enrolment, irrespective of whether they were obtained from a regular or a religious school. This, in turn, promised upward social mobility, bringing new people into the middle-classes (Smith-Hefner 2020:33–34, 43). They also account for the increasing number of Muslims who, through their education, follow and stand for a more standardized profession of Islam in Java.

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<sup>179</sup> In the nineteenth century the local syncretistic sultanates and aristocratic courts lost their power and thus their influence, while Muslim schools, *pesantren*, were established in rural areas especially, enabling more Muslims to study Islam (Ricklefs 2007; Smith-Hefner 2020:21–23). These students, and returning *haji* pilgrims, in turn established more Islamic educational institutions. This advanced the Islamization of Java. *Priyayi* thus lost societal influence. The divergence was least after independence, as reflected in respective political leanings toward political parties, where one side aimed for Islam to play a pivotal role in the state (roughly the perspective of *santri* Muslims), while on the other side, secular nationalists designed the democratic *Pancasila* state (roughly the perspective of *abangan* Muslims). The rivalry between the camps increased during the fifties and culminated in 1965 in the coup defeated by the conservative military, which brought Suharto to power (Smith-Hefner 2020:24–25).

The religious currents represented by the *santri/pesantren* tradition are, nevertheless, diverse. The majority of Indonesia's more than 16,000 *pesantren* are located in rural areas. *Pesantren* are usually privately run by a *kyai*, even if they often exist under the auspices of mass religious organizations such as NU and *Muhammadiyah*, and are therefore associated with their respective orientations. *Kyai* are charismatic Islamic scholars who lead the *pesantren* according to their specifically situated religious orientation, often with the help of their own family. As van Bruinessen (2008:218) notes, "[t]he *pesantrens* of Java [...] are the centres of rural religious life; they tend to be tradition-oriented and socially conservative." While researchers often stress the patriarchal orientation of *pesantren* (see Nurish 2011; Rahayu 2014), Smith and Woodward (2014:5) emphasize that some *pesantren* "cultivate new Muslim subjectivities and are used by Muslims concerned about gender justice and equality to transform culture and society. These lead to the construction of implicitly or explicitly feminist *pesantren* selves."

Life in *pesantren* is complex for students, as it is not only an educational setting, but also a living space; subjectivities are shaped by educational content and in shared practical religious engagement, both within and outside of the *pesantren* context (Smith and Woodward 2014:4–5). The qur'anic teachings forbidding premarital sexual relations are enforced in *pesantren* through various means. These include the teachings stressing Islamic morality as the universal principle for the conduct of life, and the sexual segregation of space. Often *pesantren* are all-female or all-male, yet even then strict rules of dress are implemented and mobility and different-sex mingling is restricted. This is to prevent sexual activity, and to also meet the expectations of parents. Parents feared their daughters' engagement in *seks bebas* when studying outside of parental supervision (Nurish 2011; Rahayu 2014:175). Yet, romantic encounters and sexual relations between *santri* do occur. Due to the sexual segregation of space, they also happen in same-sex forms. Nurish (2011) describes same-sex relationships among women in *pesantren* and interprets them as 'acts of resistance', opposing patriarchal power and the strict regulation of women's bodies. Same-sex sexual acts also take place between men in *pesantren*, often between teachers and students, a practice known as *mairil*. Even though both forms were hardly ever discussed in public, with the exception of rare news reporting (e.g. Khumaini 2014) or in Syarifuddin's (2005) novel *Mairil*, LGBT+ activists and interview partners highlighted their existence – usually with a clear emphasis on the irony of these practices occurring in the nursery of Islamic morality, which rejected any 'odor' (*bau*) coming from that direction.

In the post-*Reformasi* era, there exists a range of Islamic identities among middle-class Muslim Youth in Yogyakarta, reflecting wider developments in Java. This diversity includes neo-reformist 'new *santri*', neo-traditionalist *santri*, and a small portion of adherents to syncretistic *Islam Java*, still often mistaken as 'secular' Muslims (Smith-Hefner 2020:40–70). The neo-reformists had to prove themselves and leaned towards strictness, as they were 'new' in their normative profession, unlike neo-traditionalists who claimed historic familiarity and knowledge. This created a

symbolic competition over who adhered to the correct teachings and could therefore claim normative superiority. This struggle was accompanied by “pietization” (2020:50) and escalated to a ‘goodness competition’ and the rigorous disciplining of sociability and morality (Smith-Hefner 2020:41, 70).

The standardization of content and practice, as well as the increase in followers of these normative Islamic currents, carries implications for the religious landscape of Indonesia. This spills over into the personal and collective (inter-) religious life of the population in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For LT+ respondents, it had strong implications for their self-understanding and experiences. On the one hand, many had at least been partially educated in Islamic educational institutions – they had learned a standardized religious curriculum and believed in its interpretations, leading to the specific negotiations analyzed in Chapter 7. On the other hand, the standardization affected them on an ascriptive and interactive level, as they had to face and negotiate the incompatibility thesis often expressed by others. Some faced and negotiated that thesis through activism, by disseminating alternative interpretations, as will be discussed in Chapter 6. Others did so through personal interaction, especially when their desire had become disclosed, as I explain in Chapter 5.

### 3.4.3 Values of conduct: Hierarchy and self-constraint foster social harmony

Informed by *priyayi* ideals, Javanese ideas of hierarchy form the core of social norms and inform appropriate behavior in response to hierarchy. They apply to gender (e.g. in the ideology of *kodrat wanita*), and also construct hierarchies based on age, such as those existing between parents and children. This is related to the *cara Jawa*, the Javanese way of relational conduct, which informs participants’ behavior, bodily gestures, and speech in response to counterparts’ social position and space. By displaying the ‘appropriate’ behavior, implementing the complex and relational rules of conduct, one demonstrates that one ‘knows one’s place’ in the net of hierarchy. Additionally, one shows that one is able to control at least one’s outer self (*labir* realm), for example by showing patience (*sabar*) and uncomplaining acceptance (*nrimo*) of adversities. It also signals that one has learned to enact respect/deference (*bormat*). This refined behavior publicly supported social harmony (*rukun*), and protected an individual’s reputation (*nama baik*, good name). Behavior demonstrating the *cara Jawa* was widely expected, and contrasted with hot-tempered, naughty, or harsh behavior, which would reduce reputation and stir shame and embarrassment (*malu*) in self and others.

These qualitative opposites, derived from the *priyayi* model, are based in the basic Javanese classification of behaviors into *halus*, known to be refined, civilized, or delicate, and *kasar*, meaning rude, uncivilized or harsh; a dichotomy already described by Geertz (1960:232). *Halus* and *kasar* are moral values to evaluate the performance of Javanese. By adapting one’s actions and displaying oneself as refined and self-controlled, *halus* behavior means demonstrating ‘being Javanese’,

which is equated with being moral and guided by a clear conscience. Behavior classified as *kasar* demonstrates the opposite, namely, that one is guided by inappropriate emotions, is immoral, and careless of social harmony. *Halus* and *kasar* were present in my research as the moral compass of LT+ individuals who had grown up in Java, orienting their behavior and allowing them to evaluate that of others. *Kasar* behavior was not only considered impolite (*kurang sopan*), but was received with a degree of sincere bewilderment and offense.

Self-control and a balance between the inner *batin* realm and outer behavior (*lahir* realm) are necessary to accomplish *halus* behavior. *Batin* does not simply mean soul, but extends to “the emotional lives of the individual taken generally – what we call ‘the inner life,’ or ‘the subjective’; it consists of the fuzzy, shifting shapes of private feeling perceived directly in all their phenomenological immediacy” (Geertz 1960:232). Both areas must be ordered and controlled to master *halus* and achieve a harmonious *rukun* relation between the inner and the outer realm of personal being.

The concept of harmonious and ethical sociability, *rukun*, includes both the relations between people and an individual’s harmonious relationship with God (Stodulka 2017:60). “*Rukun* is an ideal standard for social relationships, meaning harmony, co-operation, unity of effort, minimization of conflicts. It is the state striven for at all times in a family, neighborhood, village, in any enduring group” (Geertz 1961:47–48). To maintain social harmony, personal feelings and social conduct need to be controlled and channeled to produce predictable behavior. Emotional outbursts or direct, confrontational behavior are to be avoided, as they not only damage social harmony, but also incite negative emotions in others. A breach does not only affect the breaching person’s inner well-being, but also that of their counterpart; as such, ordered and controlled interaction is expected, even in response to offence. This speaks to the mastery of Javanese conduct, which values the downplaying of individuality and negative emotions (Stodulka 2017:60–61).

Javanese language use is strongly imbued with hierarchy. It is through appropriate usage that a person’s ‘Javaneseness’ and adherence to *cara Java* is further substantiated. ‘Usage’ in this sense does not simply mean that a person uses Javanese language, but that that person is aware of the respective social positions of the interacting parties and able to reflect their relationality by using the appropriate level of language. Javanese contains three hierarchical speech levels, *krama*, *krama madya*, and *ngoko* (Berman 1998). Through the level of speech, a person indicates the qualitative nature of the relationship the interacting parties have. The closer and more familiar the relationship is, the lower the speech levels used. The speech levels further convey the social status of the interacting individuals. Language has to be adjusted according to context, and the status of those participating determines its appropriate use (Berman 1998:14–15).

It is also essential, when interacting with high status counterparts, to not be accused of ‘ignorance’ and ‘not knowing oneself’ (*tidak tahu diri*). Those guilty of vulgar, impatient, envious (*iri*), or straightforward behavior do not escape attention, and are carefully evaluated within their relational social network. They risk loss of

*hormat* by tainting their reputation, and, potentially, provoke the feeling of *malu* in themselves and others. This relational dynamic marks the moment of collective practice and regulation, instigating processes of social ‘correction’.

Clearly, *cara Java* is a complex dialectical interplay between individual behavior and the collective. The first involves relationships with others, and includes the need to adapt to hierarchy. The second involves the avoidance of social conflict, disorder, and negative feeling to promote collective and personal harmony. The ensuing chapters describe how my participants were intimately entangled with *rukun* and *hormat*, and the extent to which norms of adequate social conduct shaped their lives. The ‘need for adaptation’ to support *rukun* and demonstrate *hormat* regularly led to situations where respondents did not express personal dissenting opinions. Through this mechanism, the ideal of culturally adequate behavior produced the characteristic silence of LT+ towards their desire. The uptake and performance of desired identifications, as I describe them in Chapter 4, and the space-specific performance of gender and sexual subjectivities described in Chapter 5, have to be understood against the background of the imperatives of self-control, avoidance of disturbance, and securing personal and family reputation. Their mindful concealment and adaptation reveals that agency was not solely entrenched in ‘taking action’. Rather, the local socio-cultural *modus operandi* emphasized reactions and the relational involvement of the self in larger processes.

The following empirical chapters present the stories of individuals who are not only affected by the discourses outlined in this chapter, but who emerge as subjects through them, live them, reproduce them through referential practice, and maneuver with and through them in different ways. The focus is always on the adept negotiations of my research participants between discursive state, religious, and local-cultural ideals, which blur at the level of the individual and provide different zones of reference and attachment.

## **I      Intersections and negotiations: LT+ gender, body and desire in society**

Chapters 4 and 5 delve into the complex life-worlds of LT+ individuals, exploring inner-community standards, normativities, and the dynamics of fluid practices of performing and articulating gender and sexual identifications in the context of spatial power structures and societal discourses. These chapters aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the life-worlds, discourses, topics, and struggles that *lesbi/ans* and trans males in Yogyakarta and other parts in Indonesia live and participate in, and which challenge and structure them. As outlined in Chapter 1, my approach draws from practice theory, as mapped out by Ortner (1996), and performativity theory, as proposed by Butler (1990). The former sees subjects and their practices as produced through structure, while they, at the same time, reproduce or change structure through their practices. It recognizes the existence of hegemonic structures, but does not propose a unilateral, all-encompassing domination through structure. When looked at through the lens of performativity (Butler 1990), subjects then ‘make’ or ‘do’ gender in practice, while referencing cultural specific ideas of gender. By doing so, they reproduce or change the construction of gender within their specific setting.

Gender and sexuality in Indonesia are deeply intertwined, because gender norms also transmit ideas about sexuality and appropriate sexual behavior, as Blackwood

(2000:229) emphasizes. Blackwood (1999:182) also points to the danger of conflating separate yet interacting processes, namely gender as a subjective experience, and gender as a cultural category. This analytical separation is incorporated into my chapter structure. Each of the two chapters of this empirical section contains a subchapter focusing on either gender or sexuality. Blackwood's remark on conflating processes is considered through the thematic focus of the respective chapters: Chapter 4 focuses on the subjective experience of gender and sexuality, without ignoring local social ideals and discourses that inform them. Chapter 5 then turns this perspective around, focusing on gender and sexuality as cultural categories that are negotiated *in practice*.

Chapter 4 focuses on self-understandings and LT+ as they interact with each other. The main question of this chapter is: *How did respondents perform and understand gender, and what biographical processes were typical during the course of 'coming of age' as a lesbi/an?* Here, I illustrate the inner logics and organization of LT+ lives and community encountered in Yogyakarta in moments when LT+ people were creating temporal spaces with 'each other'. I introduce the reader to important concepts, understandings, and practices of gender of Indonesian LT+ 'communities', and analyze how the realization of desire unfolds over time in the sexual subject formation as a *lesbi/an*.<sup>180</sup>

Chapter 5 focuses on the question of *how LT+ performed and negotiated (their) gender in interaction with (presumably) non-LGBT actors?* The chapter shows how cultural constructions were conveyed to interview partners, and how LT+ individuals approach and negotiate these constructions. In the section focusing on sexuality, I turn to moments of disclosure and their consequences, as they represent a clear breach of the cultural construction of female gender as being 'naturally' heterosexual. Here I ask: *What happens if desire is revealed after all?*

The ethnographic vignettes in both chapters depict the same Muslim informants and their activities within a mainly lower-class, suburban circle of friends in Yogyakarta. They describe especially 'telling' or symbolic incidents that mirror the specific topic of each chapter. While the vignettes are not analyzed in detail, they set the stage for the analytical sections that follow. In these analytical sections, I take up themes openly expressed, implied, or occurring within the vignette, or those connected to it. I also complement and broaden the discussion by adding other perspectives and drawing on further participant observations and interviews with other, differently positioned, informants, to highlight similarities and differences that arose from intersectional positionings in terms of class, gender, or religious affiliation.

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<sup>180</sup> Before living an identification as trans male, trans male interview partners had identified as *lesbi/an*.



## 4. *Lesbi/ans* in Yogyakarta: General understandings, practices and challenges

This chapter focuses on LT+ individuals' gendered self-understandings, their practices, and their *lesbi/an* 'coming of age' through sexual subject formation, within the context of hegemonic gender norms. It answers the following question: *How did respondents preferably perform and understand gender, and how did the process of realizing their desire and 'coming to terms' with it unfold?* The chapter starts with a vignette that describes the organization of a small, private, *lesbi/an* event, where attendance was organized by ticket. This is followed by a discussion on masculine and feminine gender roles within the local LT+ community. The second section dissects the biographical negotiations surrounding the emergence of same-sex desire, with its characteristic silence and non-thematization of LT+ identifications. Silence and spatial segregation emerge as key strategies of culturally embedded stigma-management (Goffman 1975), offering insights into the possible effects that disclosure of desire might produce in different spaces.

### **Ethnographic vignette: Realizing the *kontinum lesbi***

*Our venue, to have greater privacy, was tucked away to the rear of a bigger hall. Shortly after 5pm, the first group arrived, consisting of three butchi-femme couples and two individual butchis. Andre escorted them to the welcoming table. All were dressed casually*

*and neatly. All the butchis wore button-down shirts in combination with loose, full-length jeans in muted colors, and sneakers. The femmes, in contrast, wore tight jeans, blouses, or slim-fitted short-sleeved shirts, along with sandals, ballerina shoes, or high heels. While all the butchis wore short hairstyles, the long hair of the femmes was tied up in ponytails or held back by colorful hair clips or plastic headbands.*

*The decor of the venue encouraged the group to pose for group pictures. The longer I watched, I noticed more and more differences in the gendered behavior between butchis and femmes. Butchis, when photographed with femmes, stood mostly behind with a wide stance, laying their hand slightly on their partner's waist from behind. Femmes mostly posed with crossed legs and put on their most endearing smiles, whereas the butchis only smiled slightly or put on a rather neutral face expression. Only when butchi posed with each other did they smile more broadly.*

*Everyone settled into their seats, neatly separated in the same friend-groups they had arrived with. The atmosphere was still a little stiff, with everyone communicating thoughtfully and politely. It seemed as though everyone was still considering whether they could trust the space and the company they found themselves in. Anju and Dian took the stage and welcomed the guests. Anju started: "So nice to meet everyone here tonight, I am happy you all came. I welcome all lesbi/ans, or should I rather say anak belok koleb,<sup>181</sup> – oh well, anyhow, we are all lovers of the same sex. Most of you may have seen each other before or have mutual friends, but have never really met, talked, or spent time together. We will change this tonight; this is why we created this event." After watching a movie, we began to play games – games with a strong element of gender performance.*

*It started with a round of introductions: everyone was asked to share their names, gender labels, and their motivation for participating in the evening, followed by a warm-up game. In the second game, a masculine and a feminine person were paired up in every round, and asked to mount the stage while music was playing. The task was to walk down the improvised catwalk into a circle of chairs and pose on both sides – but in reversed gender roles. This elicited roaring laughter from those watching, and noticeable timidity from those having to perform. While performing, the femmes became stiffer in their movements, tried to appear bigger or taller, and smiled less. They walked prudently and rather slowly, while broadening their stride. Those who had to "be like a woman" and perform femininity found it difficult to adhere to the task. There were no big smiles or swinging hips, or other (western-style) stereotypes of femininity. When most butchi walked, they became smaller and less obtrusive in their posture, by pulling their shoulders to the front: they walked fast while lowering their eyes and looking down. They appeared shy. Butchis who were about to perform appeared embarrassed, gazing over to their butchi friends, who were giggling and*

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<sup>181</sup> *Anak belok* is a colloquial expression used by and for lesbi/ans. Here, Anju creatively plays with the obvious and the less obvious versions of the phrase. In *bahasa Indonesia* *anak* means 'child', and *belok* means 'to turn (around)'. In everyday language *anak...* is often used to describe a person's affiliation with something. The expression means a person who has turned (around), who is not 'straight'. *Koleb* is *belok* spelled backwards.

mocking “their beauty”<sup>182</sup> and sweetness. Their poses were also photographed several times, heightening their personal exposure while highlighting the character of gender performance as a game.

After this, the last round of games began, to raffle off the door prizes. To determine who would win a prize the people ‘competing’ in the different categories, such as ‘Best Couple’, ‘Coolest Single’, and ‘Person in LDR’ (long distance relationship), had to do short performances. Those competing in the category ‘Best Couple’ went first. Dian explained the task: “In real life, a butchi normally approaches the femme and asks at some point, if they want to become a couple. We now want to turn this pattern around. Today the femme shall approach the butchi and you [pointing to femmes] shall demonstrate how you would ask your butchi, whether s/he wants to be your girlfriend.”<sup>183</sup>

After the introduction, there were some voices of protest, asking if the prizes were good enough for such an embarrassing task. Some femmes turned to their partners, obviously feeling ‘stunted’ in their capacity to perform like this. It seemed they already felt embarrassed just by imagining making a love confession under the spotlight. Some couples started whispering as if they were developing a plan. One couple refused to participate.

In the following performances, some femmes spoke faster than others, and their voices grew lower, as they rushed through to the end of their ‘confession’. For one, the experience was so unpleasant that she could only whisper her sentences, which her partner then repeated loudly to the audience. Watching these performances, I understood femmes’ feeling of exposure.<sup>184</sup> Nuri, one of the three femmes of the circle of friends who had organized this event, mastered her performance. She, too, seemed nervous – this manifested itself in small gestures like re-adjusting her clothing, or repeatedly combing her chin-length dark hair with her fingers. It took her two attempts before she could control her awkward laughter, and her voice began to sound confident. She sat in front of Bayu, with her back half-turned towards the audience, and took Bayu’s hands, laying them down on top of her crossed legs. She started with a smile in her voice:

Nuri: Do you know what ‘I’ means in English?

Bayu: Yes, it means saya.

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<sup>182</sup> They mockingly used the word *cantik* (pretty), which is used for feminine beauty, and not the word *ganteng* (handsome) generally used for *butchi* and men.

<sup>183</sup> When I heard of this task, I was surprised by its distinct, and renewed, gender component (in intersection with desire) and the implicit gender stereotypes invoked as the game’s starting point. The instructions implied that *butchi* saw themselves as, and were understood to be, the active initiators in matters of love. Further, it seemed to be ‘not up for discussion’ that a *lesbi/an* couple consisted of a *femme* and *butchi*. I address these topics in the section on masculinity, performativity, and *butchi* gender positions below.

<sup>184</sup> To me, it seemed that they were neither used to, nor comfortable with, performing loudly and self-assuredly in front of a crowd. As for confessing same-sex desire publicly for others to hear, this was even harder. I address these topics in the section on femininity, performativity, and *femme* gender positions below.

- Nuri: Yes, that is right, do you also know what 'l-o-v-e' [spelling out the individual letters], 'love' means in English?
- Bayu: Yes, I know! Cinta, right?
- Nuri: Yes [laughs]. And do you also know the meaning of 'you'?
- Bayu: Yes, I know.
- Nuri: Yes, and if you put all together, it becomes ...? I love you, I love YOU, saya mencintai kamu! Do you want to become my girlfriend, honey?

Bayu, smiling widely, replied: "Yes, I want to, honey."<sup>185</sup> Having said this, Nuri smiled, seemed to feel liberated, and fell into Bayu's arms. Bayu hugged her dearly.

The organizers then moved on to the tasks planned for the other categories. The people in long-distance relationships had to imitate a romantic phone call with their girlfriends. The audience applauded those best able to overcome spatial distance with strong romantic language that dripped with popular symbols of love. The final exercise of the evening was for singles to explain what sort of partner they were looking for, in the style of a lonely-hearts advertisement. Each participant introduced themselves with their name, age, and gender label. In describing their longed-for partner, all mentioned a label they were interested in, before describing character traits like fidelity, loyalty, determination, or an affectionate nature.<sup>186</sup> During the last performances many presenters (butchi and femme alike) were, at first, equally embarrassed to express their desire or romantic vision aloud in front of an audience. While the performances seemed temporarily stressful, the whole evening was mutually cheering.<sup>187</sup>

In this vignette, gender labels have been mentioned several times, as well as the differences in gender performance by *butchi* and *femmes*. At the same time, spatial seclusion was considered necessary for such a meeting to even occur. Despite their segregation into a separate space, it appeared difficult for the participants to express their same-sex desire outside their immediate circle of friends. I now turn to these aspects of *lesbi/an* gender and desire, in their social, discursive, context.

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<sup>185</sup> Original from fieldnotes: Nuri: "Kamu tahu apa I di dalam bahasa inggris? Bayu: Ya, saya. Nuri: Ya benar, kamu juga tahu apa l-o-v-e di dalam bahasa inggris? Bayu: Ya ak tahu, cinta kan? Nuri: Haha ya, dan kamu juga tahu artinya you? Bayu: Ya tahuu. Nuri [senyum]: Ya dan semua bersama-sama menjadi...? I love you, I love you, saya mencintai kamu... kamu mau menjadi pacarku sayang? Bayu [big smile]: Ya ak mau sayang."

<sup>186</sup> Interestingly, no one described other aspects of outer appearance. Apparently, the label said it all.

<sup>187</sup> It seemed that the temporary exposure was obviously unusual but it created a (situational) collective bond: the group overcame situations that mirrored shared experiences of vulnerability over the socially unacceptable expression of same-sex identifications, and overcame them by enabling an atmosphere of 'cheerfulness' with each other. I address these dynamics in the section on coming of age as a *lesbi/an* below.

## 4.1 Performativity and the meaning of gender for *lesbi/ans*

In Chapter 1.3, I introduced the gender labels used by *lesbi/ans* in Yogyakarta. Here I explicate the content and practices that these labels entailed, and how the people who identified with masculinity or femininity filled them with gendered meaning.

### 4.1.1 Masculinity, performativity and *butchi* gender positions

*Butchi* embody and define themselves and their gender via concepts of masculinity, and through individually ‘customizing’ their masculine expression.<sup>188</sup> *Androbutchi*, by inserting an abbreviation of androgyny, implied a ‘softer’ masculinity, or a position more to the center in the continuum of gendered expression.

Many *butchi* were, from a young age, interested in activities considered typical for boys. Anju remembered:

*[When I was younger, I already was] more masculine, because I played, well if playing with girls it's just playing Barbie, playing dolls or what is called dakon<sup>189</sup>, [...] and I don't like that. I was more happy playing with boys, running through the rice-fields, getting sugarcane, afterwards climbing trees, getting young coconuts and then playing soccer or kasti<sup>190</sup>. (Interview Anju, 31.07.2014)<sup>191</sup>*

Many *butchi* portrayed their character according to cultural stereotypes of masculinity as brave, strong, energetic, assertive, and willing to take risks (see also Blackwood 2010:74). Others recognized character traits or feelings associated with femininity. Anju, for example, mentioned that she, as a *butchi*, sometimes liked to cry, as other women did, and Nike described herself as “very soft, a sensitive person”<sup>192</sup> (Interview Nike, 11.08.2014).

Masculine women portrayed their masculine gender through clothing and visual appearance, further marking their distance from cultural femininity. Bayu stated:

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<sup>188</sup> From the perspective of a gender researcher practices of some *butchi* exhibit parallels with trans masculinities’ subjectivities, which demonstrates the ambiguity of these categories not being fixed in terms of content or connected practices, see Chapter 1.3. Nevertheless, queer negotiations have led to conflict over differences and borders, especially between identifications forming over masculinity (Halberstam 1998b).

<sup>189</sup> *Dakon* is the Javanese term for the in Indonesia popular game of *congklak*, a strategy counting game mostly played by women.

<sup>190</sup> A popular ball game, similar to rounders or kickball (though not identical to either), often played in school.

<sup>191</sup> Original: “Lebih maskulin, karena saya main, itu kalau sama cewek cuman main barbie, main boneka, [...], kalau di sini namanya dakon, [...] dan saya gak seneng, saya lebih senang main sama anak lelaki, iya, e, main ke sawah, e, ngambil tebu, nanti manjat pohon, ambil kelapa muda, terus nanti kita main bola, main kasti.”

<sup>192</sup> Original: “Sangat lembut, perasa.”

*I use the label butchi, that means I am like a guy, I can protect a femme. [...] My everyday life, well, is like a guy's, my appearance is like a guy, [...] I wear a guy's haircut [...] and my clothes are all men's clothes.*<sup>193</sup> (Interview Nuri and Bayu, 22.08.2014)

These were the 'typical' aspects *butchi* referred to when asked to describe their masculinity, or what they understood as 'butchiness'. When asked about further behaviors, they referred to contents of gender roles that were enacted in romantic relationships, instead of more individual 'masculine' privileges such as smoking in public, or having a wide scope of physical mobility.

*Butchi* predominantly wore short hair and clothing coded as male. Popular garments and shoes included buttoned men's shirts, muscle shirts, baggy trousers or jeans, and sandals or sneakers. They avoided feminine, figure-hugging clothes that might cause physical discomfort. Anju told me of her memories regarding her school uniform, which had made her feel restricted:

*Actually [it felt] queasy and not comfortable. PE was the subject I liked most. Because we wore pants, and not the skirt. When wearing a skirt, your movements are not, it's not possible to move freely. But when wearing pants, we can freely do whatever we want.*<sup>194</sup> (Interview Anju, 31.07.2014)

She wore the skirt out of fear of being punished, because it was required under the rules of the school. If, during the month of *Ramadhan*, there were events of fast-breaking together or an *al Qur'an* recitation, she chose not to attend, because it meant either wearing a headscarf or, in the case of the qur'anic recitation, the female prayer dress *mukena*.<sup>195</sup> "I rather sat on the side, I did not participate"<sup>196</sup> (Interview Anju 31.07.2014).

Here we see a hint of the internalizing character of gender in Bourdieu's (1990b:90) sense. Attributes and scopes of movements of gender (here, masculinity) became internalized, and could cause physical and emotional discomfort when transgressed. Reno, another masculine woman, provided an additional reason for her preference for men's clothing, aside from its practicality, comfort, and her rather masculine sense of self. She was studying architecture, and often visited construction sites:

*If I am at a project that is still pure soil wearing a skirt, oh, no wind should blow ... and it makes my movements slow. Also, it makes the shape of my body too clearly visible.*

<sup>193</sup> Original: "Saya pakai label butchi, maksudnya saya seperti cowok, bisa melindungi fem. [...] Keseharianku ya kayak cowok, penampilanku kayak cowok, [...] Potongan cowok, [...] Pakaianku cowok semua."

<sup>194</sup> Original: "Sebenarnya gak nyaman. E, saya paling senang kan e, pelajaran itu pas lagi olahraga. Karena kita pakai celana, enggak pakai rok. Kalau rok, kan, geraknya enggak, enggak bisa begitu bebas. Tapi giliran kita pakai celana kan kita mau ngapain aja bebas, gitu, kan."

<sup>195</sup> Only one *butchi* I interviewed wore a headscarf in her private daily life. Some wore, at most, a *jilbab*, on special occasions when social space required such attire. See chapters 5.1, and 7.2.

<sup>196</sup> Original: "Saya mending duduk, gak ikut."

*When I am going like this [points to her long trousers and t-shirt], I am already watched by people [other workers]. [Imitates person speaking in a deeper voice] 'Hmm, that's her, you think she has breasts or not?' Dangerous!*<sup>197</sup> (Interview Reno, 27.08.2014)

For Reno, wearing men's clothes also served as a strategy to reduce her exposure to sexism and avoid being reduced to a female body, in a working environment mostly dominated by men.

Other *butchi* highlighted this same benefit of men's clothing – not being treated 'like a girl' by men in a heteronormative economy of meaning. As a side-effect, embodying masculinity enabled a temporal change of position in the societal hierarchy of gender. By embracing masculinity, they experienced less patriarchal impositions, at least in some situations.

Nevertheless, this did not mean *butchi* could step outside of the hegemonic binary logic completely. On the one hand, *butchi*'s bodies were, if known or recognized, still a powerful medium counterparts could use to classify them as belonging to the category 'female'. Such bodies, which from a hegemonic perspective 'lacked' femininity, were vulnerable in another sense, as they might become the aim of efforts of 'correction' (see Chapter 5). On the other hand, they were not immune to 'cashing in' on privileges derived from masculinity, or from reproducing gendered hierarchies towards feminine subjects, for example within romantic relationships.

Besides masculine-coded attributes and behaviors technically reserved for men, *butchi* appropriated male or gender-neutral nicknames and gendered words, and were described as handsome (*ganteng*) and not, as women were, as pretty (*cantik*).<sup>198</sup> While almost all identified as masculine females and, in doing so, acknowledged societal and religious definitions of sex as some kind of natural truth, some stressed "being like a man" more than others. Viant, in Bali, explained what being a *butchi* meant to him:

*My butchi-ness is different, there are different types of butchi, there is the soft one and the top*<sup>199</sup> *one. So, I am a dominant butchi, a top like that. This model is really a man.*<sup>200</sup> (Interview Viant, 01.12.2014)

<sup>197</sup> Original: "Kalau harus turun ke proyek yang masih tanah gak jelas gitu, kalau aku pakai rok oh tidak jangan-jangan ada angin bertiup aku ..., dan itu membuat lambat gerakan. Terus terlalu memperlihatkan bentuk tubuh. Yang kayak gini aja aku di pandangin orang-orang, 'emm itu dia, kira-kira punya payudara gak ya?' Bahaya!"

<sup>198</sup> Generally, pronouns, nouns, and adjectives are gender-neutral in Indonesian language. Only few adjectives are used for a specific gender. Therefore, this appropriation of gender-marking adjectives also shows a positioning in terms of gender.

<sup>199</sup> Viant refers to categories often used in gay male communities describing roles in sexual activity, see Johns et al. (2012:506); Wegesin and Meyer-Bahlburg (2000). A *top* is the one penetrating; a *bottom* the one receiving. The former is stereotypically understood to be dominant, the latter to be passive. A *switch* is versatile.

<sup>200</sup> Original: "Butchienya saya memang beda yaa, ada beberapa Butchie tipe dua Butchie, ada soft ada top, jadi saya dominan itu Butchie itu seperti top gitu lo. Modelnya benar laki-lakinya dia."

By stressing that he is the dominant ‘top’<sup>201</sup>, Viant’s self-representation resonates with the masculine sense of self and the cultural understanding that men are, sexually, active performers (Webster 2008:32), distancing himself from passive understandings of feminine sexuality.

Viant was also one of the few *butchis* in my sample who dominantly and almost exclusively identified with masculinity or even being male.<sup>202</sup> He preferred being called by male forms of address, like the Javanese form *mas*, or the Balinese form *bli*, and he used the men’s bathroom. If he was “called *mbak* [Javanese female form of address] that is uncomfortable, like uneasy, just strange. [...] I feel being a man, not half-male – so no middle”<sup>203</sup> (Interview Viant, 01.12.2014). This negated any kind of femininity that was understood to derive naturally from a specifically sexed body and marked his identification as male.

In contrast, the majority of *butchis* in my sample identified themselves as surely masculine yet still female.<sup>204</sup> They wanted to be female, and to be perceived as such. Anju, one young *butchi* member of the friendship circle in the vignette, elaborated: “Most call me *mas*. But well, here I am wondering, *mas*? I am invariably a woman. [...] So, every time I am called *mas*, I always say that I am a woman”<sup>205</sup> (Interview Anju 31.07.2014). When I asked Reno how she thought of herself, she replied: “More masculine. But I don’t like it, when people say ‘very much a boy’ or something like that. Masculine, OK, but I am still a girl”<sup>206</sup> (Interview Reno, 27.08.2014).

These statements show that most *butchis* acknowledge their bodies as female and consider anatomy as the basis of sex. Additionally, they identify positively with the category of ‘women’. In contrast to Viant’s (and Andre’s) preference for the men’s bathroom, Reno, Anju, and others chose and felt safer within the women’s bathroom, if toilets were gendered.<sup>207</sup> Nevertheless, using the ‘ladies’ room’ as a masculine woman was not without its pitfalls. All masculine-identifying respondents recalled incidents in which (other) women (mis)read their masculinity and identified them as male. They then had to justify their choice of bathroom. These incidents illustrate the rigid and binary understanding of gender at this point in time. By repeatedly explaining and claiming their belonging, they did not change hegemonic

<sup>201</sup> Wieringa (2007:79–81) has dismantled this stereotype by emphasizing *femmes’* erotic self-understanding and activity.

<sup>202</sup> Another example was Andre, whose gendered understandings of self seemed quite similar to those of Viant, but whose gender performativity was very different, as elaborated on in Chapter 5.1.

<sup>203</sup> Original: “Sukanya ya mas, cowok tapi kalau dipanggil mbak itu risih kayaknya, risih, aneh aja. [...] Saya merasa diri saya laki-laki, enggak nengah cowok, jadi nengah enggak.”

<sup>204</sup> Table 2 gives an overview of how masculine *lesbi/ans* reference anatomical sex in other regions.

<sup>205</sup> Original: “Kebanyakan, sih, manggil mas. Tapi, kan, di situ saya juga, e, kok, mas? Saya, kan, tetep wanita. [...] Jadi saya setiap dipanggil mas, saya selalu bilang saya wanita.”

<sup>206</sup> Original: “Lebih maskulin. Tapi kalau sampai orang bilang cowok banget yang kayak gitu aku gak suka. Maskulin oke tapi aku tetap cewek.”

<sup>207</sup> Gendered bathrooms were not widespread during my research. Only in official buildings, malls, expensive restaurants, and ‘modern’ spaces were bathrooms regularly separated by gender.



perceptions of gender. Nevertheless, they did complicate some individuals' understandings of gender, and actively engaged in the de/construction of space in terms of dominant ideology. By identifying themselves simultaneously as women and masculine they deconstructed the societal notion that gender naturally derives from one's sexed body.

Carrying a gender label, from which a role and associated behaviors were derived, was very prevalent in the *lesbi/an* scene. Almost every day I overheard the question of 'what label a person belonged to', indicating the imperative nature of this practice. Labels fulfilled functions, carried meanings, and were important in certain spaces dominated or created by the LT+ scene. However, for personal self-understandings, they were in many cases less significant, as explained below in Chapter 4.1.3.

#### 4.1.2 Femininity, performativity and *femme* gender positions

*Femmes* and *androfemme* embodied and defined themselves and their gender based on concepts and practices of cultural femininity, in which the feminine expression varied individually. *Androfemme*, by alluding to androgyny, mixed attributes and implied a rather feminine position closer to the center of the continuum of gendered expression.<sup>208</sup>

Most *femmes* understood their gender expression as conventional femininity (see Chapter 3). From a young age they remembered being socialized into behaviors, expressions, and activities defined as appropriate for women in Indonesian society. Nuri remembered:

*I played more in the house than outside. My parents usually didn't allow me to be outside. But now I go out more often. In childhood, I was more often at home, reading comics, reading novels, doing things like that [...], I played alone, I rarely played with friends.*<sup>209</sup>  
(Interview Nuri and Bayu, 22.08.14)

*Femmes* retrospectively recognized their familial socialization into becoming appropriate women, but did not perceive of it as challenging to their gendered sense of self. Chien, who grew up in a traditional Javanese family in Solo, stated:

*In my family I was counted as a woman, as a lady. So, I was taught like a woman, I got lessons in painting, I was tutored in singing, dancing, things like that. Dance, [traditional] local dance, for sure, [that happens] automatically if you are in Solo, the whole time, local*

<sup>208</sup> This is how other *lesbi/ans* explained the label *androfemme*. While I saw the usage in names on Facebook, and people told me about friends identifying as *androfemme*, no research participant identified with this label.

<sup>209</sup> Original: "Lebih sering dirumah daripada keluar main. Soalnya orang tua enggak ngebolehin keluar, biasanya gitu. Tapi sekarang lebih sering. Dulu lebih sering di rumah, baca komik, baca novel, gitu gitu. [...] main sendirian, jarang main sama teman-teman."

*dance. And my father taught me, to sit like this [closes her legs and folds them to one side].*<sup>210</sup> (Interview Chien, 11.09.14)

Chiens' upbringing included training in various forms of local cultural performances and arts, a practice shared by several of my participants. Solo and Yogyakarta are both cities in which artistic traditions have thrived throughout history (Peacock 1991; Williams 1991b), and where they are still taught, performed, and consumed.

From a young age, girls, in particular, are taught local dances. They then perform these dances with local dance companies on occasions like (religious) celebrations or rituals. In these dances, they performed roles rooted in characters from mythical or time-honored stories. The female characters represent idealized notions of beauty and grace. In many sequences, all dancers perform the same movements, choreographed with high precision. Only in some sequences some dancers perform roles different from the rest, while still maintaining perfect symmetry (Hughes-Freeland 2008; Lysloff 2001, 2009).<sup>211</sup>

Dances, as "embodied practices", are seldom acknowledged for their role in constructing national identities (Schlehe 2010:118). "Dancing literally embodies ideas about acceptable forms of behaviour and being" (Hughes-Freeland 2001:153), thereby also providing gendered images. By practicing these women's characters with exactly defined and refined movements, their bodies were trained to adopt the specific gendered bodily postures of femininity. While this practice may not dictate a gendered expression, it does convey culturally understood gender images and inscribes distinct movements and postures into the body's repertoire, which the body can retrieve at key moments.<sup>212</sup>

Ayu, a *femme* I interviewed in Medan in North-Sumatra, also described being socialized in way that focused on traits regarded as feminine:

*When I was young, traditionally daughters were always feminine in my family's view, that means I was not taught... there were simply no boys clothes, because daughters have to be feminine. So, I was taught how to cook, so I became comfortable towards feminine [sic!] since I was young, indeed [before I was] already feminine.*<sup>213</sup> (Interview Ayu and Adek, 09.11.2014)

<sup>210</sup> Original: "Di keluargaku dari kecil tetap hitungannya cewek, ya, sebagai wanita. Terus diajarinnya juga sama, kayak les, tetap ngegambar, terus les nyanyi, nari, kayak gitu juga. Tari, tari-tari daerah, otomatis, ya, kalau di Solo, tari daerah terus. Iya, terus diajarinnya pak, kalau duduk tu seperti ini."

<sup>211</sup> Yet, some traditional dances, like *Ludruk* (Peacock 1987), *Beskalan Putri*, *Ngremo* (Sunardi 2015) or *Lengger Lanang* (Yudono 2012) include cross-gender roles and gender transgression by the dancers.

<sup>212</sup> Some *butchis* I interviewed were, as children, likewise trained in local dances. While they refrained from expressing femininity on a daily basis, dance's feminine movements became bodily knowledge that could be activated and used strategically in certain situations, see Chapter 5.1.

<sup>213</sup> Original: "Waktu kecil yang tradisi anak perempuan itu selalu feminim kalau dari keluarga, jadi kecil itu gak diajarin gak ada pakaian laki-laki karena anak perempuan harus feminim terus diajarin masak, jadi udah nyamanya ke feminim dari kecil itu memang udah feminin."

Further, she and other *femmes* expressed that they were (and often still are) in charge of women's household tasks, such as cleaning the rooms, washing dishes, and cooking and boiling water for the family.<sup>214</sup>

Most *femmes* also expressed their femininity and *femme* identification via their clothing. Popular were skinny jeans, skirts, and dresses. Those who felt comfortable in them might even wear hotpants. Bows or colorful barrettes were worn in long hair. The tight(er), brightly colored shirts frequently had writing or 'cute' cartoon characters on them. Sometimes they were flouncy and fitted. Clothes almost never exposed the bare shoulders or legs above the knees, nor was too much cleavage shown. In private, everyday life, the *busana muslim*, or headscarf, was never worn.<sup>215</sup>

For most, being a *femme* meant identifying with and practicing femininity, like "normal" (heterosexual) women. When I asked Nuri what being a *femme* meant, she explained: "Femme in lesbian surroundings means I am the girl, and the butchi is the boy."<sup>216</sup> This implied certain behaviors or characteristics: "More gentle, more feminine [...] than my partner, gentler, and more spoiled"<sup>217</sup> (both Interview Nuri and Bayu 22.08.14). Rani, in Bali, correlated the *femme's* position to *butchi's* masculinity and used the woman-man binary as a symbolic reference point:

*A femme has to be like the partner of a butchi, she is the girl. [...] A butchi is a woman whose appearance is like a boy. So, a femme [is like a] normal woman, whatever happens. Her hair is long and so on. A femme is responsible and takes care of the tasks in the household or... yes like cooking, like washing, like that.*<sup>218</sup> (Interview Rani, 08.12.2014)

In these accounts, a *femme* gender position is established by embodying femininity through appearance, behavior, and reference to essentializing female stereotypes.

In comparison to *butchi*, who constantly highlighted their difference to 'regular woman', *femmes* foregrounded their alikeness. *Butchi* needed to mark their difference because 'being a woman' was culturally equated with embodying femininity, which

<sup>214</sup> Having to do women's task in the family's household applied also to *butchi*, as they were (seen as) female offspring (see Chapter 5.1). A few had never had to do household chores, as their families employed maids.

<sup>215</sup> The significance of this should not be overestimated. Faith cannot be measured by clothing practices, and wearing a headscarf does not correlate with sexuality. Many interview partners told me about *lesbi/ans* who wore Muslim clothing daily; these women had often distanced themselves from the LT+ scene, as they struggled with their desire and were scared of exposure. As such, being interviewed by a foreign researcher was not in their interests.

<sup>216</sup> Original: "Fem buat di lingkungan lesbi aku jadi ceweknya terus butchi kan jadi cowoknya."

<sup>217</sup> Original: "Lebih lemah lembut, lebih feminim [...] dari pasanganku, lebih lemah lembut terus lebih manja."

<sup>218</sup> Original: "A fem itu ya harus seperti pasangannya Butchi harus jadi ceweknya. [...] Butchi itukan dia cewek tapi dandanannya cowok. Terus kalau fem itu ya cewek normal apa adanya gitu. Rambutnya panjang dan sebagainya. Fem ya tanggungjawabnya a mengerjakan pekerjaan-pekerjaan rumah atau ... ya kayak masakini kayak nyuci kayak gitu."

in turn implied appearance, traits, and specific behaviors that were bound to the domestic sphere (see Chapter 3).

Both *femme* and *butchi* used and reproduced the social gender binary by deploying stereotypical references and distinct practices. However, theory and practice complicated the meaning and understanding of female gender: By usually engaging in *butchi-femme* relationships, they reproduced the cultural logic of binary-gendered desire, while denying bodily sex as point of origin of desire, instead emphasizing gender. I now turn to those who offered criticism towards the prevalent use of labels and their concealed normativity.

#### 4.1.3 Criticism towards gender labels – *butchi ngondek*

Labels, and labeling, were recurrent themes in my interviews with respondents, in ways that surprised me. It turned out that many same-sex loving women did not necessarily adopt labels as part of their self-understandings, using them only provisionally in situations when others requested them. Nike:

*Sometimes fellows insist on labels. [...] Alright, if it is necessary, I will say I am ... butchi, but I am too feminine for being a butchi. So, what, I just give in.*<sup>219</sup>

Later on in the interview s/he explained the uneasiness further:

*I have never [used a label], because I am in a position that is really, really dynamic I think, actually I tend to identify myself as feminine male [...] trapped in the body of a woman, something like that.*<sup>220</sup> *Yet, if I look at my behavior, my dress style, my speaking and so on, I think I'm very feminine, so quite femininlah*<sup>221</sup>. *Therefore, it would be so difficult for people to identify me, so I figure ok I am flexible. [...] [If I have to explain, I] will explain 'yes I am a lesbian', if they think my appearance leans to butchi, please be my guest, if they think I'm too ngondek, flickerish, I release them for that they do not insist any further.*<sup>222</sup> (Interview Nike, 11.08.2014)

<sup>219</sup> Original: “Kadang-kadang teman itu menuntut label. [...] Ya udah, kalau diperlukan aku akan bilang aku... butchi, tp aku terlalu feminin untuk jadi butchi. Sudahlah, aku nyerah.”

<sup>220</sup> A verbal construction like “being trapped in the wrong body” as a representation for transgender identity relies on and fortifies medical constructions of body and transsexualism. It has been criticized from queer, feminist and trans perspectives, see e.g. Engdahl (2014); Hines (2007:60–67); Lovelock (2017); Putzi (2017); Roen (2001). Interestingly, Nike did not identify as trans nor mentioned the term. S/he knew the term and underlying concept, as s/he was active in a LGBT+ NGO and one of his best friends identified as trans male.

<sup>221</sup> *Lab* is a suffix expressing certainty.

<sup>222</sup> Original: “Enggak pernah dari awal karena aku, aku berada di posisi yang betul-betul dinamis menurutku, sebenarnya aku cenderung mengidentifikasikan diriku adl laki-laki feminin [...] yang terjebak di tubuh perempuan semacam itu gitu. Namun kalau aku lihat dari sikapku, dari gayaku berpakaian, berbicara dan segala macam, aku pikir aku sangat feminin gitu, cukup femininlah. Jadi akan susah bagi orang gitu untuk mengidentifikasiku, jadi aku pikir ya fleksibel aja gitu. [...] Ak akan menjelaskan 'ya ak adalah lesbian', kalau menurut mereka penampilanku cenderung butchi, silakan,

For Nike, labels did not fit hir gender expression, and did not allow for gender flexibility or inconsistency. They offered, instead, a pretense of fixed gender locations with accompanying rules. In Nike's opinion, this "thinking in boxes" was strong in Indonesia:

*Men have to behave a certain way, right? [...] Women have to fulfill A-B-C-D... Nah, so I think, if I employ the societal construction, I don't meet the men's criteria because [in this logic] I am very womanly, very gentle and emotional.*<sup>223</sup> (Interview Nike, 11.08.2014)

Constricted societal and *lesbi/an* gender definitions rendered hir gendered understanding of self illogical, semi-incomprehensible, and even indefinable within the existing categories. Still, as others invoked labels and gendered identifications, Nike used labels provisionally and tried to explain hir perception of self with the categories at hand. They did so without submitting to gendered stereotypes of 'men' and 'women', or to any of the normativity-laden labels common throughout the LT+ scene.

Carrying a label was not only a self-identification. Instead, it functioned as a frame through which others interpreted and judged a person's demeanor. They were collectively built up and reproduced by their performative usage. Others often policed 'wrong' behaviors that did not align with label expectations. Revo, a *butchi* in her 40s, explained:

*The young generation is so fixed on gender roles. A young butchi recently asked me why I cook, 'butchis do not cook'. Or another example, when I go to church, I usually wear a skirt. That was also questioned, 'butchis do not wear skirts'. I am annoyed by this adherence. Hello, I have a child, of course, I cook for my family, who else would do it, if not me? I am a butchi, but also a woman.* (Fieldnotes, 18.07.2014)

Other research participants questioned the rigidity of gendered expectations, and used non-adherence to dominant gender practices to show their power and potential harm. Reno stated:

*Often there is [the idea] a butchi has to be with a femme, and a femme, she has to be with a butchi. For me there is no problem, my girlfriend can be butchi or femme, as long as she is a woman. So, for me labels are not important. [...] Because often people say for example butchi have to become the figure of a man. [...] If a couple lives together, the one responsible for income has to be the butchi. Even though that is not necessarily the case. Sometimes it's the femme who works and contributes more funds for their living together. [...] Sometimes there are butchi who don't want to wash the dishes, don't want to wash clothes or other*

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kalau menurut mereka aku terlalu ngondek, e melambai gitu, silakan aku membebaskan mereka asal mereka tidak menuntutku untuk apa-apa, gitu."

<sup>223</sup> Original: "Gitu laki-laki harus bgini-bgitu gitu, kan? [...] Perempuan itu harus a-b-c-d gitu, nah ak pikir kalau ak mengikuti konstruksi masyarakat a aku tidak memenuhi kriteria laki-laki itu, gitu karena ak sangt perempuan, sangat lembut, perasa."

*cleaning, they think are trifle. [...] So, judging from most of my friends for example, the femme cooks, the butchi just receives the dish that is ready-made for eating, the dirty dish she just leaves. [I think] 'Is that your girlfriend or your maid?' It seems true what is often said, that the labeling produces violence in relationships. I think it is one form of violence. Not physical, but psychological by treating her like a maid.*<sup>224</sup> (Interview Reno, 27.08.14)

Reno, like Revo, questioned the normativity of the stereotypical roles they witnessed in the usage of gender labels, exposing the inequality underlying them, and their role in re/producing gendered hierarchies. Wieringa (2007:81–82) recounts possessive love, jealousy and control in *butchi-femme* relationships as effects of trying to live up to dominant gender perceptions. As individuals, LT+ people were general participants in society. As such, societal hierarchies and their discriminating effects, like sexism and various forms of violence, were also part of their lives and relationships.

However, alternative practices existed. Some subjects adopted other labels like *andro* or *no label*, which were less binary in their positioning, and only rarely used. Kesi, for example, explained she was never fond of using labels. At first, she thought her expression resembled a *butchi*, but over the course of time she adopted *andro* when in need of a label:

*I prefer the term andro because the term andro in my ears sounds cool, like a robot. And I think I could be sexy, because I like my female body [...]. But I can somewhat look masculine, too. [...] In Facebook, I often use andro in my name, because I think andro is more [reflecting the status of] lesbian, lesbians are discriminated against by people, andro label is also discriminated against, because s/he is like in the middle and is considered feminine gay. This same climate of being discriminated against – there has to be a connection.*<sup>225</sup> (Interview Kesi, 23.07.14)

<sup>224</sup> Original: “Jadi sering ada, kalau butchi itu harus sama fem, fem itu harus sama butchi, aku sendiri aku enggak masalah pacarku mau butchi mau fem asal dia cewek, jadi menurutku enggak penting sih label [...] Karena terkadang orang bilang butchi itu misalnya harus yang jadi sosok seorang laki-laki. [...] ketika mereka hidup bersama yang membiayai itu harus buchinya, padahal belum tentu seperti itu. terkadang femnya yang bekerja dia yang sedikit banyak membantu untuk kehidupan bersama. [...] Kadang butchi dia gak mau nyuci piring, gak mau nyuci baju yang hal-hal sepele gak mau bersih-bersih [...] Jadi, kalau dilihat dari kebanyakan teman-temanku misalnya femnya masakin, butchinya cuma menerima itu sudah mateng di tinggal makan, piring kotor dia tinggal taruh. Itu pacarmu atau itu pembantumu? Bener yang sering dibilang kalau kadang perlebelan itu membuat ada kekerasan dalam hubungan. Menurutku salah satu bentuk kekerasan. Itu sih secara fisik enggak tapi secara psikis dengan sedikit banyak memperlakukan dia seperti pembantu.”

<sup>225</sup> Original: “Aku lebih suka dengan istilah andro karena istilah andro di telinga terdengar lebih keren seperti robot seperti itu kan, dan aku pikir kalau jadi andro terlihat lebih seksi karena aku terlalu menyukai tubuh perempuanku [...] tapi juga aku berpenampilan agak maskulin seperti itu. [...] di nama fb aku sering pake andro andro andro, karena aku pikir sendiri juga andro itu lebih seperti lesbian, lesbian di diskriminasi an orang-orang, dengan label andro juga di diskriminasi karena dia seperti ada di tengah-tengah dan dianggap banci. Suasana yang sama terdiskriminasi seperti itu harus seperti punya ikatan, seperti itu.”

The label *andro* allowed Kesi a comfortable flexibility of gender expression, a positioning she explained citing a political analogy between *lesbi/ans*' position in society's hierarchy and *andros*' position in *lesbi/an* hierarchy. She used the label to express her experience of discrimination in both contexts. Her reasoning reveals her awareness of the power hierarchies pervading both worlds.

Other interview partners provisionally used the label *butchi* for its convenience but criticized its normative rigidity. Reno, Nike, and Yuni used an alternative practice, describing themselves as *butchi ngondek*. *Ngondek* was popular LGBT+ slang, often derogatory, describing the expressive femininity often associated with gay guys, translated as 'sissy' or 'effeminate' (Aji and Handoyo 2016; Krisanty 2007). Being and acting *ngondek* was, to them, a way of challenging how they were perceived by non-*lesbi/ans*, who sometimes saw them either as men, or as inappropriate (because non-feminine) women. When Yuni found the lavatory attendant looking her over and suggesting that 'he' should go to the men's room, or if someone called her 'mister' in the streets, she would act *ngondek*:

*Sometimes it needs something like that, and [...] acting ngondek for me is great. Being ngondek is fun, yes, we don't have to tell that we are women. Also, because even despite our butchiness, people still see there is a female side, right? So, I am happy being and acting ngondek.*<sup>226</sup> (Interview Yuni, 14.09.2014)

Yuni used this parodic gender reference not only as a lighthearted means of indirect criticism and correction, but also as a way of positioning herself. The aspects of critique and positioning also came into play when people deliberately practiced *ngondek* in LT+ spaces. Expressing temporary femininity as a masculine *butchi*, even in the 'gay' *ngondek* way, was not always welcome nor unchallenged. I observed Yuni being *ngondek* several times, and I overheard other *butchi* commenting on it. One asked her, "what kind of syndrome this *ngondek* is?" The usage of the word 'syndrome', evoking illness, indicated antipathy. I asked Yuni about this experience in our interview, and she stated:

*The thing is, for some butchi, for them being butchi means to be (like) a man, you are not allowed to be feminine or womanly, not the slightest amount whatsoever, whereas in my understanding whatever butchiness, I am a woman and sure I have a feminine side.*<sup>227</sup> (Interview Yuni, 14.09.2014)

<sup>226</sup> Original: "Ya, kadang-kadang itu dibutuhkan dan [...] bagiku ngondek itu asik. Ngondek itu lucu, ya enggak harus menunjukkan bahwa kita ini perempuan, sebenarnya enggak usah nunjukin kita perempuan tetap sebutchi -butchinya tetap orang masih melihat masih ada sisi perempuannya kan? Jadi aku memang senang ngondek."

<sup>227</sup> Original: "Kan soalnya kan kalau bagi mereka butchi, pengertian orang-orang itu ya, ya namanya butchi itu harus seperti laki-laki, enggak boleh ada perempuan-perempuannya sedikitpun, sedangkan kalau di pemahamanku ya se butchi-butchinya aku ya tetap perempuan dan pasti punya sisi perempuan gitu."

By acting *ngondek*, these *butchi* created a space for the temporary and situational performance of femininity. Even temporary enactment of gay male femininity could be offensive to other *butchi*, who understood and performed their role as exclusively masculine. Therefore, ‘acting *ngondek*’ provided, likewise, an opportunity to intentionally break or ridicule the rigid roles other *lesbi/ans* expected. The usage of *ngondek* also became a device for self-/critique, marking a departure from the unidirectional replication of masculinity and the people who normatively *were*, or tried to be, ‘like men’. Ambiguity in *butchi* re/presentation made *ngondek* a practice that connected (and enhanced) masculinity with a form of femininity that was not associated with women or girls. This presented gender expressions as fluid, contingent, and performative in character.

The use of labels in the Indonesian LT+ scene reflects diverse perspectives and practices. For many LT+, a label helps to delineate a specific role and its attendant behaviors, with which they identify. For others, labels are less significant in their self-identification but a viable means to an end. They apply them provisionally for practical reasons, but also voice criticism of some of their aspects. As such, alternative practices like identifying with less-binary labels or acting *ngondek* emerge. While the labels stand in relation to the subject positions of ‘men’ and ‘women’, many see their desire as a factor differentiating them from ‘normal’, heterosexual women. As Kesi put it: “I better like to be called a lesbian woman”<sup>228</sup>, while Chien stated she identified “as lesbian. A woman that likes women, who has this particular attraction.”<sup>229</sup> In this regard, *lesbi/an*, or abbreviations of it, like ‘L-woman’ (*perempuan L*) are often used. For me, this raised the question whether these differences were rooted in personal biographies, the answer(s) to which I will discuss below.

## 4.2 Coming of age as a *lesbi/an*: On perception, secrecy and self-acceptance in the light of stigma

In Indonesia, LGBT+ identifications, desire, and relationships are socially marginalized and subject to stigma (Murray 1999:144; Stodulka and Röttger-Rössler 2014:14). For my research participants, ‘being a *lesbi/an*’ was usually not something that could be displayed or discussed publicly. It was, rather, a condition that needed to be protected and concealed, because it could cause harm or even be used as threat. Reluctance to openly discuss one’s desires mirrors the local socio-cultural climate as in Indonesia, “women are not socialized to seek out a sexual partner (of any gender), or to be sexual at all” (Murray 1999:143). The general public, often incited by the religious hostility of loud and aggressive fundamentalists and political

<sup>228</sup> Original: “Aku lebih suka di sebut perempuan lesbian.”

<sup>229</sup> Original: “Sebagai lesbian. Perempuan yang suka sama perempuan. Yang memiliki ketertarikan ini, lo.”



homophobia (Boellstorff 2004c; Thajib 2014), labeled same-sex desire beyond platonic homo-sociality as deviant, sinful, or immoral.<sup>230</sup> Official national discourses imagined young people as not sexual (Parker 2008:3; Utomo 2003:108). Taking all this as a background, this section addresses LT+ sexual subject formation by analyzing how people assessed, developed, and evaluated their *lesbi/an*<sup>231</sup> identification in a social environment in which LGBT+ desire and identifications were either absent or judged.

The following elaborates on the biographical experiences and practices, which are intrinsically interwoven with growing up in a social surrounding that was, at the very least, critical of non-heterosexual desire. This involves inquiries into how respondents realized their desire towards women, how they felt about it, and what role the common social disdain towards such desire played in their own assessment of it. *How did they acquire further information about this tabooed, silenced topic? How did they treat knowledge of their desire in the process of coming to terms with it?*

I am interested in *how* interaction was organized, and what intersubjective phases structured the processes of coming of age as a *lesbi/an*. Therefore, I discuss LT+ practices of secrecy, which reveal the adversity inherent in standing out in a social context valuing self-restraint and collective harmony. In many cases, research participants built up what I conceptualize as ‘desired identifications’, complex images combining various practices in which they appeared heterosexual, or in which same-sex desire was inconspicuous. These were presented to others (including family and friends) to satisfy the social expectations of embodying adequacy, maintaining social harmony, and avoiding vulnerability. I understand desired identifications to be a form of stigma-management that enables unhindered social participation.

I coined the term ‘desired identification’ because the impressions interview partners aimed to uphold and project were shaped by what LT+ respondents perceived as *desired* by a counterpart, *desired* by society.<sup>232</sup> Counterparts, here, I understand as ‘reference groups’ that “provide an individual with a perspective, a point of reference, and a comparison group” (Matsueda 2014:15, referring to Matsueda 1992). The performed identification was directed towards the counterpart, mirroring the desires the counterpart was assumed to hold. This highlights the connection between individuals’ self-representation and their anticipations based on knowledge and past experiences, as well as its intrinsic relationship to the social. Within a desired identification, interview partners combined – to their benefit – different practices of secrecy embedded in the socio-cultural backdrop of their surroundings. It allowed them to adapt their self-representations, evade socially negative ascriptions and stigmas (Goffman 1975), while displaying the specific expressions of successful

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<sup>230</sup> For details, see Chapter 3.3 and Boellstorff (2004c); Liang (2010); Murray (1999:143–144); Nilsson (2018); Sulandari (2009); Thajib (2014).

<sup>231</sup> I focus on *lesbi/an* subject formation, because trans interviewees had earlier in life identified as *lesbi/ans*.

<sup>232</sup> And, sometimes, also, an image desired by the producer.

socialization that leads to individuals' adoption of roles (Mead 1967). I elaborate on this below, using the labeling approach (Becker 1963; Spector and Kitsuse 1977; Tannenbaum 1938) and interaction theory (Matsueda 2014).<sup>233</sup>

### *Labeling and subject formation*

In Indonesia, non-normative gender expressions, same-sex desire, and sexual intimacy became stereotypically and negatively 'labeled' in state and media discourses from the mid-1990s onwards. Persons so labeled became, increasingly, the target of militant religious groups. In 1999 and 2000 violent members of radical organizations in Kaliurang and Solo<sup>234</sup> attacked public meetings and conferences associated with primarily *gay* and *waria*, but also *lesbi* (Boellstorff 2004c:465–467).<sup>235</sup> In addition, adolescent sexuality received discursive regulation and judgement. Although the state and parents imagined adolescents as being heterosexual in their future lives (Parker 2008:3; Utomo 2003:108), other adolescent sexualities were discursively labeled in derogatory terms (Harding 2008:13). These examples illustrate how social dissociation from these subjectivities increased and how discursive labels became established.

According to the labeling approach, labels develop a 'shared meaning' through social interaction (Mead 1967) and are reproduced in daily life by 'particular others', conveying social expectations to children and young people. They learn their identities by getting to know and internalizing general norms in the context of their social environment (such as family, friends, school, religious community). Indonesian processes of subject formation emphasize community and kinship as well as age, social status, and rank (Blackwood 2010:159, 161; Geertz 1984; Smith Kipp 1996). Smith-Hefner (2020:28) emphasizes that these aspects are part of 'traditional'

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<sup>233</sup> The labeling approach in interaction theory mainly focuses on the production of deviance in the sense of crime and delinquency (Matsueda 2014). Even though same-sex desire and LGBT+ identifications were generally not prohibited by law during my research in 2014, the application of these theoretical perspectives is useful, as LGBT+ were already marginalized and seen as socially deviant. In the province of Aceh, the *Qanun Jinayat*, Criminal Code bylaws to *sharia* legislation that criminalizes same-sex acts, came into force in 2014. They have been implemented since 2015 with the arrest and punishment of people suspected of same-sex intimacy (Harsono 2018; HRW 2015, 2016a, 2016b, 2017b, 2017c; Kloos 2018).

<sup>234</sup> Both are smaller cities in Java with close proximity to Yogyakarta.

<sup>235</sup> Boellstorff (2004c:470) analyzes these incidents as expressions of incipient "political homophobia", a side-effect of "postcolonial heterosexuality" which is shaped by gender relations and ideologies of the historically established, heterosexist visions of gender and family carried by the state, and inherited from the colonial past.

Javanese socialization encouraging “passivity, dependency, and sociocentric identification with a hierarchical social world.” Within this, *rukun* and *hormat* (see Chapter 3.4) are important values (Geertz 1961:47-47, 110-114; Peacock 1978a:59).<sup>236</sup>

Socialization and connected collectivities play a dual role in shaping individuals in society. They exert a disciplinary effect and mediate shared understandings and norms, and at the same time, hold productive power. Both are important for enabling local subject formation. They possess the “power to provide identity, purpose, satisfaction, and reward, in short, to embed people in a nexus of social relations within which they find solidarity, support, and the means to accomplish some of their own goals” (Blackwood 2010:161–162). That a sense of loyalty and appreciation of belonging to a group intersects with the development of an understanding of the self is evident in the experiences of coming of age as a *lesbi/an*, and similarly, in the establishment of desired identifications.

However, if a category of identification is associated with labels that transmit judgement, the outcomes may not be positive. Personal recognition of alignment with a labeled category, especially when combined with “officially legitimized designations”, increases the likelihood that individuals will believe in the quality of these labels and apply them to themselves. This, in turn, can lead to isolation from the reference group, and the affirmation of a personal “deviant identity” (Matsueda 2014:16). For instance, many LGBT+ may learn negative discursive images about their desire in daily interaction, such as at school.<sup>237</sup> As individuals perceive themselves through the mediated perspective of the group, their self-understanding as a *lesbi/an* initially forms on the basis of this understanding (Matsueda 2014:15), and includes a socially constructed deviant image. In the process of coming of age, such socially negative images are partly internalized and partly overcome by ‘coming in’<sup>238</sup> after a process of self-scrutiny.

By establishing a desired identification, loyalty to one’s own family or kin through following their rules and norms was realized, and unpleasant feelings in self and others were not aroused. Further, a desired identification enabled an active, self-determined way of dealing with both their identification and the stigma associated with their desire in a culturally embedded way. This reflective behavior can be understood as ‘role-taking’, since individuals consider the consequences of different behaviors or the articulation of their identification beforehand, taking into account

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<sup>236</sup> While these values encourage personal restraint, politeness and solidarity towards (kin) groups which in turn supports social harmony, Blackwood (2010:161) argues not to misinterpret this relational orientation of self towards kin or the joy of group sociability as producing “mechanical solidarity” (Durkheim 1983 [1933]) towards the collective, in which the individual would subsume all its interests and actions under the collectives’ goals. Strauss (2000:71–77) summarizes the anthropological debate on alleged psychological differences of ‘collectivist’ and ‘individualist’ societies and why most anthropologists are “suspicious” (2000:73) of this construct.

<sup>237</sup> Teachers would usually not label individual pupils but mediate negative discursive images in descriptive terms. Thus, not ‘you are sinful’, but ‘people who desire this way are sinful’.

<sup>238</sup> Coming in denotes a local concept of self-acceptance, on which I elaborate in Chapter 4.2.5.

the group's standpoints (Matsueda 2014:15; Mead 1967). Even if interview partners concealed their LT+ identification from others by taking on a socially desired role, the role presented appeared to others as one of several identities, which justifies the usage of the term 'identification' for this concept.

With desired identifications individuals evaded stigmatization by controlling available information about their identification (Goffman 1975:160). Gayatri (1996) and Murray (1999) locate such behavior among (especially) *lesbi/ans* of more privileged classes, who may fear loss of prestige and status. Wieringa (2007) describes the dilemma between silence and disclosure in working class *lesbi/an* circles in Jakarta. Heuser (2014:134), meanwhile, refers to one informant who "displayed the ideal of a heteronormative daughter", similar to the practices I observed among my respondents. Rather than following Heuser's (2014:141) tracing of the practices of secrecy and concealment that allowed his informants to be "commuters between various social worlds", I focus here on the collective, culturally embedded moments of silence, which I relate to political struggles for recognition. These struggles, and the desired identifications central to them, occur within the societal conditions that frame, shape, and underlie processes of societal marginalization and stigmatization. These conditions, with their underlying processes, build up a well-defined realm of normality established by a broader group than those who conform to its norms (Goffman 1975:160).

#### 4.2.1 Discovering desire: Curiosity and early crushes

There was no average age or situation in which respondents recognized, for the first time, their emotional and sexual desire, nor did their reactions to this issue resemble each other. Some interview partners recognized a form of affection towards females as early as kindergarten. Others recalled memories of affectionate feelings when they were about 6-8 years old and in primary school. They generally named it as special interest or some kind of (childish) affection towards female classmates or teachers, and refrained from defining this interest as sexual, even though two respondents highlighted a sexual aspect to it. Tama recalled the following as an early indicator of desire for women:

*I liked my kindergarten teacher, ha-ha, so the first time being interested, I remember that I always wanted to be close to her, I wanted to be the number one in front of her, I wanted – ya what – be like her guardian.*<sup>239</sup> (Interview Tama, 12.08.2014)

Also, Nike recognized early, even if s/he did not know how to classify that 'something':

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<sup>239</sup> Original: "Aku ini... suka sama guru TK ku he he he tu pertama kali tertarik yag tadinya aku ingat yang aku ingin selalu dekat sama dia terus pengen jadi nomor satu didepan dia gitu terus pingin sok apa ya, jadi kayak guardian gitu."

*From when I was in kindergarten [...] it was like I had a crush on my teacher, just not really sexual. [...] Like I affectionately liked her, so I was jealous when she paid more attention to the other kids. [...] I just couldn't yet identify what that something was.*<sup>240</sup>  
(Interview Nike, 11.08.2014)

Kesi also wished for special attention and during primary school tried to connect to girls she liked by initiating *adik-kakak* bonds (younger sibling – older sibling). She wrote letters asking older girls to become a *kakak* to her. Most girls declined the request.

The word pair *adik-kakak* originally describes kinship ties, as the literal meaning suggests. In such ties, certain characteristics are conceptually implied, such as social obligation, social hierarchy based on age, experience and status, as well as appreciation and mutual benevolence. In everyday life, these terms are employed beyond blood ties. While the usage in this sense can be quite broad, for example when used as a polite form of address that reflects seniority, the designation often signifies a close relationship between the two people involved. Usually, the characteristics designated by the term are part of the mutual expectations. The *kakak* is not only understood to be older, but also higher in status and more experienced.<sup>241</sup> The *kakak*, therefore, is in a position of responsibility and upholds the social (and familial) obligation of guiding, guarding and, if necessary, restraining the *adik*. Nurish (2011:273) describes similar close and even erotic *adik-kakak* relations between female *pesantren* students in which the *kakak* takes on the responsibility of helping and guiding the younger student.

Against this cultural background, Kesi's requests can be interpreted as an ingenious strategy to gain attention from girls she liked, and to be part of a meaningful, durable social relationship. This is evocative of the practices of forming *lesbi/an* families (*keluarga lesbi*) as strategic communities mirroring (and valuing) the family principle (Webster 2006). Chien, one *femme* interviewee, recalled her first childlike relationship with the neighbors' daughter:

*Dating, yes she said: 'come let's date, come on'. [...] Ok then, we went everywhere together. Like that, I don't know, they [the parents] saw us just like kakak-adik, right, but when*

<sup>240</sup> Original: "Sejak aku kecil, sejak aku TK [...], kayak aku sudah naksir sama guruku, cuman mungkin ga seksual. [...] kayak aku sayang gitu terus aku cemburu kalau misalnya dia lebih perhatikan anak-anak lain. [...] Cuman aku masih belum bisa mengidentifikasinya apa itu."

<sup>241</sup> This differentiation was in practice neither precise nor static, especially in the case of people whose age was allegedly similar. So, some called each other *kakak*, which implicitly meant no one or both were also *adik* to each other. In other cases, social status and experience were used to arrange the people in the *adik-kakak* pattern also with the function of especially honoring said status and experience. So sometimes I was politely called *kakak* by office-colleagues or research participants who were older than me.

*we were in the chamber, we were not. When we slept, we bugged, I bugged her [imitates a bug]. Very pleasing.*<sup>242</sup> (Interview Chien, 11.09.2014)

During the interview, research participants interpreted such early affection as precursors of their desire for women, their first experiences of intimate attraction.<sup>243</sup> As they delved into their memories and rediscovered their behavior and feelings, many respondents were giggling, amused about how it all started. Most clearly remembered the name of their first crush and details of the events surrounding their attraction to that person. Some reevaluated these experiences as something funny, innocently pleasing, and worthwhile, recalling it as a beautiful experience – an early somewhat intimate connection with another person, rather than as something shocking or dangerous. Others did recall moments in which they felt their interest was strange (*aneh*), but it was unclear if this evaluation was because of the general newness of such emotions, or because they already assessed these feelings with a heteronormative ‘normality’ in mind.

#### 4.2.2 Realizing desire as ongoing: Between excitement, uncertainty and difference

Later, usually around puberty, those early affectionate feelings evolved into romantic desire. The time between experiencing these first early crushes and then falling in love and developing a desire to form a romantic/sexual relationship was for many respondents a period of self-doubt, curious examination, and scrutiny. Here, they examined their felt attractions and behaviors and contrasted those with socially acceptable behaviors and attractions. As they recognized that their attraction towards women persisted, they saw the need to grapple with it. Most interview partners undertook this journey of self-scrutiny somewhere between the age of 6 and 16. For many, it was a lengthy and often painful process that began long before they actually entered their first ‘real’ romantic relationship.

The beginning of this process was marked by the realization that the attraction towards women was ‘a thing’, because it kept reoccurring. Mas Luky, a trans man in his early thirties, stated:

*In fourth grade I just teased because I felt fidgety, but in sixth grade I tried [...] to approach directly like when people like something, chasing, giving clues that ‘I like you’, connote identity crisis, but well I didn’t yet disclose it directly, but tried to get closer. She could not, she just distanced herself, I was confused about my feelings at the time, ‘Why?’*

<sup>242</sup> Original: “Pacaran. Ya itu bilang juga. E, ,kita pacaran yuk, yuk’, gitu. [...] Ya udah gitu ke mana-mana bareng. Ya itu, ora, mereka ngelihatnya cuma kayak kakak-adik, gitu, kan, tapi kita kalau di kamar enggak. Kita kalau bobo dipeluk gitu, akunya. Ya kan seneng gitu, lho.”

<sup>243</sup> In my sample, some *femmes*, like Chien, also recalled noticing their desire towards women in childhood. This contrasts Blackwood (2010:136), who notes the feminine girlfriends she interviewed did not have a long history of same-sex desire as they desired masculinity like *normal* women, but did so independently of bodies.

*Is my feeling wrong?’ Apparently, it was not wrong, because there was no shiver towards men, nothing at all.<sup>244</sup> (Interview Mas Luky, 09.06.2014)*

Interestingly, he did not question whether the object of his affection had been the right or wrong person – rather, he questioned his desire altogether. Apparently, he already had an implicit idea that society differentiated between a ‘wrong’ and a ‘right’ desire. The end of the quote describes his struggle between questioning the legitimacy of his feelings and validating them by mentioning his lack of affection towards men. However, first experiences with this kind of desire often need classification and validation for the individual involved.

The memory of the personal assessment of childhood crushes was mostly positively framed. However, when remembering emotions and the evaluation of later crushes as teenagers, the framing became more cautious. Interviewees mostly described the need to face and negate their feelings as painful and dreadful. Anju recognized this difference:

*Since elementary school when I met the opposite sex [I felt] indifferent. But when I was side by side with women [...] I felt there was something different. And I understood when I was in third grade of [...] Junior High. [...] There I met with one girl, her name Gadis [...]. There I began to understand that my world is in fact different from normal people who are my age, it is different. Because I realized I am a lover of the same sex.<sup>245</sup> (Interview Anju, 31.07.2014, my emphasis)*

Anju did not just realize her feelings for women were different from her feelings towards men. When discovering romantic interest towards Gadis, she recognized that her desire was, in a general sense, different from others the same age. In her perception, her desire made her ‘world’ different in a rather negative sense. This difference was not unbiased or impartial, as suggested by the term she attributes to others: ‘normal’. Many research participants referred to heterosexual people as “normal people”, a status they felt they lacked. Once respondents acknowledged to themselves that their desire towards women was real and probably lasting, it sparked a phase of inner struggle. Anju explained her feelings:

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<sup>244</sup> Original: “Kelas empat kan cuma saya sendir karena saya ada resah tapi ketika kelas enam saya mencoba [...] deketlah langsung seperti halnya orang suka, mengejar memberi petunjuk ‘aku senang sama kamu’, berarti krisis identitaslah, tapi ya belum ngomong tapi coba lebih dekat. Dia enggak bisa, dia malah menjauh aku bingung dengan perasaanmu waktu itu, ngopo? Apa perasaanmu salah?, gitu. Sepertinya tidak salah karena memang tidak ada getaran dengan laki-laki, tidak ada sama sekali.”

<sup>245</sup> Original: “Tapi semenjak SD saya tu kalau apa, ya, kalau bertemu lawan jenis biasa aja. Tapi saat saya berdampingan dengan sesama wanita [...] saya merasa ada yang berbeda, gitu. Dan saya baru mengerti setelah saya kelas tiga [...] SMP. [...] Di sana saya bertemu dengan, e, satu cewek, namanya, e, [Gadis] [...]. Di situ saya mulai mengerti kalau sebenarnya dunia saya sama orang lain tu berbeda, sama orang-orang normal yang se, mungkin sebaya saya tu beda. Karena saya menyadari kalau saya, saya penyuka sesama jenis.”

*Scared, I thought it was weird, she is a girl, I am a girl... it should be a girl and a boy, right? So, there was fear. I was scared what my parents will say if I am caught. That was my fear, I was not scared of her.*<sup>246</sup> (Interview Anju, 31.07.2014)

As Anju *feared* the social reactions of her loved ones, she assumed she would not fulfil their expectations, but instead provoke negative reactions from them. In view of the labeling approach, it is clear that interview partners had already learnt as teenagers and young adults what was considered normal (“it should be a girl and a boy”), and that same-sex desire was valued differently than ‘normal’ heterosexual attraction, or appreciated homo-sociality. This may be because such desire was negatively labeled in the social environment, or because no other form of desire existed until one experienced it firsthand. In any case, in this social surrounding there were no strong discourses advocating for the validity of same-sex desire. Consequently, the inner struggle was a mixture of personal negotiation with the unfamiliar desire and the expected social hostility that marked them as different, as Anju’s quote suggests. They grappled with their actual desire in part because within the mindset they were raised in, this nascent desire was perceived as ‘sick’<sup>247</sup> or deviant.

Yuni, who was in her thirties when I spoke to her in 2014, attributed her struggle and confusion when she was about 15 years old to socially practiced and religiously backed heteronormativity:

*I already knew I liked women, but that made me feel like I was a weird person, because from my friends there was no one like that, just me. [...] I already knew this is called lesbian but, in my head, they were damned persons, a person whose behavior is like an animal, so a bad person. Why am I like this, I didn’t actively do anything, what have I done wrong, so I am this?’ [...] Oh God [...] I was terrified at that time. [...] Terrified because I also studied religion and I was indoctrinated from the place where I studied recitation that women are not like me, women have to pair with men, so why can’t I?*<sup>248</sup> (Interview Yuni, 14.09.2014)

This quote illustrates how Yuni was pulled in different directions by her desire and by religious views, how religion and desire ‘argued’. The intersection of faith with

<sup>246</sup> Original: “Takut, anehnya itu, dia kan cewek, aku, kan cewek, seharusnya cewek sama cowok gitu, kan. Jadi kan, ada rasa takut gitu. Ada rasa takut, nanti kalau ketahuan orang tua gimana. Takutnya sebenarnya di situ, sih. Enggak, bukan takut sama dia, enggak.”

<sup>247</sup> While I knew about this classification, I was bewildered when one research participant asked me when I first realized I was ‘sick’. I answered that I felt totally healthy. She laughed and explained that she meant when I had first fallen in love with a woman.

<sup>248</sup> Original: “Aku sudah tau aku suka sama perempuan tapi aku merasa aku orang yang aneh, karena teman-temanku tidak ada yang begitu hanya aku. [...] Aku sudah tau itu namanya lesbian tapi yang dikepalaku itu adalah orang yang terkutuk, orang yang kelakuannya itu seperti binatang, jadi orang yang buruk. Kenapa aku begini, aku itu gak ngelakuin apapun aku, punya salah apa kok aku bisa begini? [...] Ya Tuhan [...] waktu itu aku ketakutan sekali. [...] Ketakutan karena aku kan belajar agama juga, aku juga doktrin ditempatku pengajian bahwa perempuan itu tidak seperti aku, perempuan itu ya harus berpasangan dengan laki-laki, kenapa aku gak bisa gitu.”



desire produced deep contradictions within LT+ individuals, as all were brought up in social surroundings where religious reasoning was highly valued, and where many were practicing religion daily (see Chapter 7). Then suddenly the learned, believed, and internalized truths of cultural and religious teachings became personally challenged by the nascent, incongruous desire.

In the case of Yuni, she had already learned how significant others thought about the *lesbi/an* label, and felt shame because of her inability to be what she was supposed to be. Her self-inquiry searched for inward causes, acts of wrongdoing, which she could not determine.

In theoretical terms, interviewees experienced in this phase a transformation from a “normal” person to a discreditable person potentially affected by stigma (Goffman 1975:163). Yet, the distress they experienced should not be interpreted as confusion over their new identification. It was, rather, a matter of grieving over what they knew they had become (Goffman 1975:163–164).

### 4.2.3 Facing desire: Change in perceptions and the phase of denial

Recognition of desire was often characterized by not only attraction towards women, but also by the absence of desire towards men. Participants had learnt the negative labels towards same-sex desire, leading them into a phase of self-struggle. Knowledge of likely social hostility, which most imagined as social exclusion ‘if their families and friends knew’, sparked fear.

The phase of realization was so emotionally overwhelming that it was regularly followed by a phase of denial.<sup>249</sup> Nike’s phase of denial was fueled by the hostility expressed by her mother, who repeatedly used the example of her own *lesbi/an* sister to teach her child that same-sex desire was bad:

*SMP [Junior High] was my most tough time because I really denied it, I rejected it, it’s not possible I am ..., not possible. Because I began to discover, oh there is something that is called lesbian. [...]. If for example it was on TV, one or two stimuluses in the TV, afterwards my mother would say ‘Something like that, it’s not normal. Girl with girl. Your aunt is like that.’*<sup>250</sup> (Interview Nike, 11.08.2014)

This approach of “holding up the actions of others as models (both positive and negative) for public comment and evaluation” is a common strategy of parents, teachers, and peers to enforce socially acceptable behavior in Java (Smith-Hefner 2020:188, N14). It is also common in other areas, as Nike lived with her mother in Balikpapan, Kalimantan, during the scene s/he describes above.

<sup>249</sup> Respondents repeatedly used the English word ‘denial’ to describe their state of being after realization.

<sup>250</sup> Original: “SMP itu masa terberatku karena aku betul-betul deny itu, kayak yang menolak ah ga mungkin aku ... gak mungkin. Karena aku sudah mulai mengenal. Oh, ada yang begitu namanya lesbian gitu kan. [...] Kalau misalnya ada di TV gitu kan, ada ajakan satu dua di TV gitu nanti ibuku nyebut, ‘itu lho ga normal itu. masa cewek sama cewek. Tantemu tu kayak gitu.’”

Yuni also used the trope of denial for describing her struggle and self-scrutiny:

*I was still scared to admit it to myself, I had not yet accepted myself that I am a lesbian. [...] Why does a woman have to be with a man, why can't a woman be with a woman and why can't I like men like them [her friends], why do I like them?' That made me angry and in the end, I [was in] denial.<sup>251</sup> (Interview Yuni, 14.09.2014)*

Denial meant not giving in to the desire, suppressing and rejecting it, and refusing to admit it to oneself. One did not want to be what was condemned. One tried, instead, to ignore the obvious signs. This highlights the ambivalence inherent in constructing a bond to a stigmatized category (Goffman 1975:52). Suppression of one's true feelings sometimes affected mental health, leading to depression. Ignoring one's desire allowed the familiar standards of the social environment, which outlined the acceptable norms and one's expected path to the future, to remain unchanged.

The phase of denial involved both suppression of desire and a subtle investigation of its existence over time. Even if avoiding a closer examination seemed functional at times, ambiguity was also evident in the form of burgeoning questions. In the 'phase of denial', individuals struggled with their relation to the stigmatized attribute. As a result, they had to reorientate and realign their selves with established social norms (Goffman 1975:163). On the one hand, this transformation, and coupled with an increasing certainty about one's inability to change, led to isolation and feelings of powerlessness, which affected the psychological integrity of the individual. On the other hand, the issue also prompted introspection, which could lead to a new understanding of self (Goffman 1975:54-55, 158). It could also trigger a quest for information and allies, which I now explore.

#### 4.2.4 Searching perspectives and finding space: Encountering the other Other

How does one deal with the knowledge of desire, after privately acknowledging its existence? All respondents were younger than 18 years old when they recognized their attraction for women. Having examined their feelings, they became curious and sought answers on how to navigate their emerging sexuality.

##### *Finding information*

The images and initial conceptions of same-sex sexuality that respondents recalled were based on stereotypical and/or stigmatizing notions of heteronormative and

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<sup>251</sup> Original: "Aku juga masih takut mengakui ke diriku sendiri, aku belum menerima diriku ini bahwa aku ini lesbian. [...] 'Kenapa sih perempuan harus sama laki, kenapa perempuan gak bisa sama perempuan terus kenapa sih aku gak bisa suka sama laki-laki seperti mereka kenapa aku harus suka sama mereka,' gitu. Dan itu membuatku marah dan akhirnya aku denial."

religious interpretations. Under such paradigms, feeling and acting on same-sex desire was understood as a sin or sickness. Sexuality was already an ambiguous topic: It was widely tabooed in public discourse (see Chapter 3.2) and, if too explicit (e.g. in films), censored (Harding 2008:8; Paramaditha 2012). Private exploration often differed, for example in personal conversations (Wieringa 2007:84) or via the home consumption of pornography, which had become easily available in the post-Suharto era (Barker 2006; Bellows 2011:216; Dewanto, Lebang and Budiyarso 2001). For teenagers and young adults this made reliable, unbiased information extremely scarce. Unsurprisingly, given this context, many interviewees thought they were unique cases, contributing to feelings of loneliness. Anju: “I thought, in Yogya it was only me, [...] I felt I was the only one, who is not normal”<sup>252</sup> (Interview Anju, 31.07.2014).

To avoid adverse reactions from family and friends, respondents avoided the literally unspeakable<sup>253</sup> topic of their desire, and searched for relevant information alone, if at all. Depending on the decade they had grown up in, they would access different channels for acquiring information. Frentzy was born in 1972 and was 42 years old when I interviewed her. In the late 80s, during high school, she secretly dated a classmate and searched for information, to no avail:

*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 what is called a mother also, inculcating that, lesbian is a sin.*<sup>254</sup> (Interview Frentzy, 23.08.2014)

For interview partners, this was a common reaction: they abdicated the involvement of families and friends. Pre-Internet generations found themselves isolated, relying on luck and intuition for initial contacts and networking with other *lesbi/ans*. In the early 2000s, Nike consulted print media, but found only biased information:

*I searched everywhere for information, but what I got was not good. For example, in [...] porn magazines, in adult magazines, so the pieces of information were not good. Like an*

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<sup>252</sup> Original: “Kupikir, di Jogja, kan, cuman aku, [...] merasa sendiri, yang seperti itu yang gak normal.”

<sup>253</sup> Coming out can be understood as a performative speech act, see Chirrey (2003); Harvey (1997:72); Liang (1997:293).

<sup>254</sup> Original: “Gak ada jawaban. Mau tanya siapa? (Suara bisung.) [...] di sekolah itu kalau ketahuan kita suka, itu aneh. [...] Makanya waktu itu adanya cuma diem aja, dipendem sendiri, cari jawaban sendiri. Apalagi di luar itu gak bisa cari jawaban, apalagi di rumah. Orang tua yang notabene itu dia bener-bener dia agama itu, [...], Islam tu, ya, bener-bener yang namanya ibu juga itu, menanamkan bahwa, e, lesbian itu sesuatu yang dosa.”

*aberration, and what that means. Or the info that I got from a sociology book, a school textbook, [...] also a deviation.*<sup>255</sup> (Interview Nike, 11.08.2014)

When the Internet became accessible from the early to mid-2000s onwards, it became the medium of choice. It provided wider, less biased information and the means to search *incognito*.<sup>256</sup> Furthermore, the Internet provided contact with other *lesbi/ans*, and the first step for many in overcoming their seclusion.

#### *Finding other Others*

On network sites popular in the mid-2000s such as Friendster, blogs and (later) Facebook, my participants contacted others who were 'like them'. As Frentzy explained:

*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.*<sup>257</sup> (Interview Frentzy, 23.08.1014)

Interviewees vividly remembered the moments when they definitively learned that theirs was not a unique case. Usually, some Internet contacts were continued over handphone, or even offline if proximity allowed it. Unlike the anonymous Internet, meeting in physical locations was risky and thrilling. Anju recalled finding the first other *lesbi/an* she met, who dared to open up about their shared desire:

*At first we talked 'oh this is nice, that is good' like that. In my heart I just asked myself, 'is she the same, same like me? Is she a lover of the same sex too, like me?' So, after long time meeting, getting to know each other, knowing each other better, [she] opened up, [she] told me [she] likes girls and so on.*<sup>258</sup> (Interview Anju, 31.07.2014)

When I asked for her reaction, she replied: "I was happy, so happy, *alhamdulillah* [thank God], grateful, there is a friend. If we have to face the responsibility over the

<sup>255</sup> Original: "Jadi aku cari-cari di manapunlah info itu. Tapi yang ku dapat itu ga bagus. misalnya [...] majalah-majalah porno, majalah-majalah dewasa gitu-gitu jadi info infonya ga bagus. Kayak itu penyimpangan, itu apa. Apalagi info yang aku dapet di buku sosiologi, di buku pelajaran sekolah [...] itu kan penyimpangan."

<sup>256</sup> Research participants reported, however, that at the beginning of the Internet era there were usually no computers with Internet access in their family homes. Internet access was sometimes available at school or for a fee in internet cafes, but privacy was necessarily limited.

<sup>257</sup> Original: "Aku cari komunitas lesbian gitu. [...] 'Wah, di sini ada ih wah.' [...] Seperti menemukan dunia, dunia yang lebih luas lagi, aku di situ, ini, aduh, ini duniaku, nih ini yang ini yang bikin aku semangat. [...] Aku ya ngobrol-ngobrol. Chatting-chatting, [...]. Akhirnya ada temen-temen yang kenal-kenalan ya. Ya lewat situlah. Akhirnya ketemu sama grup Solo."

<sup>258</sup> Original: "Awalnya berbicara, e, ini cantik, ini bagus, kan gitu. Dalam hati, kan, cuman bilang, apa dia sama? Sama seperti saya? Apa dia penyuka sesama jenis juga, sama seperti saya? Lama-lama kenal, makin kenal, makin kenal, baru terbuka, kan, cerita lagi suka sama cewek, ini gini-gini."

sin, we do it together, like that, I am not indicted alone”<sup>259</sup> (Interview Anju, 31.07.2014). By sharing about their experiences as same-sex lovers, they discovered many of these experiences were collective and not individual because of widespread hegemonic heteronormative discourses and practices. Anju’s reference to shared sin reflects this: In her account, a formerly imagined individual sin arising from personal failure to live up to the heterosexual ideal was transformed into a collective, shared responsibility. To be held accountable for this sin together in front of *Allah* seemed a relief from guilt, solitude, and silence.<sup>260</sup>

Contact with others who were similar reduced distress by offering access to experiences and instructions for handling stigma (Goffman 1975:50). Within such relationships, what was unspeakable in society became communicable. Contact showed my participants that ‘other Others’ were also normal, diverse people (Goffman 1975:53). Being able to finally discuss ‘it’ provided new perspectives, information, and an entrance to hidden networks.

#### *Finding and building space*

These new relationships created new spaces, which is why I consider them from a spatial angle, understanding space, with Certeau (1984:117), as involving practices that make its properties dependent on succession. Many perceived the establishment of relationships between two or more LT+ (accepting) people as akin to entering a ‘new world’. By engaging with each other, respondents participated in and ‘practiced’ the creation of (temporal) spaces with somewhat modified power structures, as they not only adhered to conventions but also brought their situated perspectives into play. Tama discovered a same-sex appreciating temporal space by chance, because as a teenager s/he participated in a conference held by a feminist organization in Jakarta:

*It was the first time I heard [people] openly talking about lesbians [...]. And there was no rejection! People talked about it in an open and earnest way. And from my perspective, that was mind-blowing*<sup>261</sup> (Interview Tama, 12.08.2014)

At that moment, Tama’s reality was widened through spatialized participation that enabled acceptance and an escape from marginalization.

From a theoretical perspective, get-togethers of LGBT+ (accepting) people, whether institutionally organized by LGBT+ NGOs or within groups of friends,

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<sup>259</sup> Original: “Seneng, sih, maksudnya senengnya, alhamdulillah, syukur, ada temennya, gitu, lho. Kalau nanggung dosa, bareng-barenglah, kayak gitu, jadi aku gak sendiri.”

<sup>260</sup> The concept of sin, and the fact that there would be punishment at least for Muslim LGBT+, was usually not questioned collectively, but rather individually. See Chapter 7 for more details on the experience of sin.

<sup>261</sup> Original: “Itu pertama kali aku dengar tentang lesbian dibicarakan di depan umum [...]. Dan gak ada penolakan. Orang bener-bener membicarakan itu dengan terbuka dan menurutku itu keren sekali.”

created affirmative spaces empowering individuals, enabling ‘speakability’ and challenging stigma. In these spaces, desire was the core qualification for participation and the basis on which individuals related to each other; it did not make them different, but the same.<sup>262</sup> As part of a wider collective, such spaces offered temporal, space-bound normalization of their desire.

On the individual level, the personal value of such spaces was reflected in an often-used spatial metaphor, that of ‘getting to know a new or different world’:

*I have never known a world like that, my world was in the village. [...] In my village, a very Muslim village, so there wasn't one single day without recitations. But I got to know a new world, which is like, much greater. Satan's temptation was there. Yes, well, I got tempted, seduced like that. I lost sight of recitations, forgot my home.*<sup>263</sup> (Interview Anju, 31.07.2014)

Anju locating “Satan’s temptation” in that world might be misunderstood as evidence for public discourse’s frequent claim that same-sex desiring people chose (*pilih*)<sup>264</sup> to deliberately enter ‘that world’ by following their desire, which implies that they could (and should) have chosen differently. There might also be an implication that by falling for ‘temptation’ a person automatically turned against religion and ‘the right path’ (*jalan yang benar*).<sup>265</sup> LT+ motivation, in such cases, was by no means driven by a will to transgress social or religious ideals. Those participating in such spaces sought, rather, a social outlet for distress, by building up permissive spaces.

In summary, by realizing the reality of same-sex desire in the world, research participants were able to ‘face desire’, challenging their previous, exhausting, self-scrutiny. They then formed relationships with the stigmatized category, opening up the possibility of normalization (Goffman 1975:51–52). They encountered other ‘Others’ who were quite ordinary, and new collective identities and a sense of belonging to a ‘We’ emerged (Goffman 1975:52–54). Assessment of their desire became disassociated from dominant, heteronormative social evaluations; respondents called this ‘coming in’.

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<sup>262</sup> Other categories of social differentiation e.g. religion or class still constituted aspects of difference.

<sup>263</sup> Original: “Saya, belum pernah kenal dengan dunia seperti itu, setahuku, ya, duniaku, ya, di kampung. [...] Di kampungku itu, kampung Islam banget, jadi, e, tidak ada hari tanpa ngaji. Tapi aku kenal dunia baru, yang seperti itu, e, lebih asyik. Godaan syetan itu ada aja. Ya, udah tergoda, tergoda, segala macem. Ya, lupa ma ngaji, lupa ma, sama rumah.”

<sup>264</sup> See e.g. Zuhra’s (2013) findings of her framing analysis of homosexuality in *Republika Online* and *Tempo.co*, two major Indonesian online news outlets.

<sup>265</sup> In Chapter 7, I elaborate on the trope of the ‘right path’. Here I illustrate the dichotomy of either/or, which asserts mutual exclusivity of being faithful and simultaneously desiring the same sex.

### 4.2.5 Coming in

In the Indonesian LT+ scene, ‘coming in’ signifies reaching a state of inner acknowledgement and at best positive appreciation of one’s desire, despite its challenging nature within the broader social context. It entails an ‘unlearning’ of internalized negative societal evaluations and reassessing one’s self-judgements. Coming in is an ongoing condition with a relational character connected to wider social developments. It involves a desirable state of mind, and is relevant to the LGBT+ community’s internal politics around mental health. It has to be nurtured and renewed by individuals’ inner ‘debates’ on frictions arising from one’s intersectional positionality.

Participants always used the phrase in English, alluding to the globally known concept of ‘coming out’,<sup>266</sup> as in ‘coming out of the closet’, moving from concealment to openness (Brown 2000; Sedgwick 1990; Urbach 1996). Coming out describes the disclosure of same-sex or bisexual desire, or of one’s identification as transgender to the social surroundings (Butler 1997; Fuss 1991; Gross 1991; Zimman 2009).<sup>267</sup> Coming out renders queer identities visible, a politically valuable outcome that normalizes what was previously invisible (Jagose 1997:38).

However, coming out can be psychologically demanding, or even a source of personal danger. Representatives of LGBT+ NGOs I met on Java, Bali, and Sumatra accounted of the personal dangers posed by this practice within the specific local contexts of Indonesia, where the socio-political climate marginalizes minorities both sexual and religious.<sup>268</sup> Usually they advised against it, and certainly did not push their clients to ‘come out’, though they did acknowledge its possible political value. The caution towards the western imperative of visibility<sup>269</sup> was influenced not only by the potential risk for the individual, but also by local cultural concepts val-

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<sup>266</sup> The historical rise of ‘coming out’ as global LGBTIQ+ good is rooted in early activism and politics employed in the USA. Gay, lesbian and trans activists and organizations pushed the consistent public disclosure of these identifications as a political tool to gain visibility, representation, and stimulate societal transformation (Jagose 1997:38; Lorraine 1997; McCarthy 1994). Out of this impetus, coming out evolved not only as globally known practice and “central narrative” (Plummer 1995:84) but also as prospect for individual practice.

<sup>267</sup> While closeting processes and coming out have long mainly been associated with non-normative sexual orientations or gendered identities (Snorton 2014), on a global scale, the wording is nowadays also used to mean the disclosure of other identifications, as in terms of mental health, citizenship, disability, or religious belief, see e.g. Chávez (2013); Defenbaugh (2013); Faulkner and Hecht (2011); Harris and Fortney (2017); McDonald (2018); Romo, Dinsmore and Watterson (2016).

<sup>268</sup> See Fealy (2018); Hamid (2018:12–15); Harsono and Knight (2018:8); Knight, Harsono and Bauchner (2016); Liang (2010); Lindsey and Pausacker (2016).

<sup>269</sup> Liberational politics relying on visibility have been criticized as being ethno- or western-centric and insensitive towards multiple discrimination (King 2009; Ritchie 2010) and with upcoming Queer Theory since the 1990s, as relying on identity politics reproducing the myth of unified identities creating internal regulatory regimes (Butler 1991:13–15; Cohen 1991; Fuss 1989:100; Halperin 1995:32, 45; Jagose 1997:91).

uing social harmony through relational self-restraint and protection of one's affiliates. These stood in opposition to the confessional practice of coming out. The desire for coming out and expecting social acceptance would be a rather un-Indonesian desire for individualization (in the sense of prioritizing self-interest), or for making one's perceived difference visible, recognized, and a source of pride.

Within the setting of *rukun* or social harmony, with its emphasis on inner and outer states of peaceful orderliness, social hierarchy, and associated norms of conduct and language use (Berman 1998:15–16; Wolff and Poedjosoedarmo 1982:14), and of cultural heterosexism, voicing personal 'deviance' could alter one's perceived moral status, resulting in social and physical restrictions (Yang and Kleinman 2008). On a collective level, it might even be interpreted as an inability to behave maturely or to know 'one's place'. This would threaten social harmony in the family or neighborhood, by advancing a radical stance in a *kasar* (harsh, confrontational) manner. This would contradict the ideal of *halus*, highly cultured behavior in which people control self-interest and earn respect and prestige through polite social conduct (Berman 1998:12; Smith-Hefner 1988b). Silence was not only embedded in cultural etiquette, but also supported by norms mandating protection of close affiliates. Stigma and its connected emotions are, after all, "contagious" on an interpersonal level (Stodulka and Röttger-Rössler 2014:18).

Coming out, within Indonesian LGBT+ discourses and practice, is therefore not a prevalent activity.<sup>270</sup> Instead, 'coming in' was considered (by both NGOs and friendship groups) as an 'obligation' emphasizing self-acceptance and mental health as priorities, considering context-specific needs and priorities. Even if pursued individually and in private, coming in remains political, as the move from self-doubt towards self-acceptance, facilitated by alternative interpretations and social resources, equips the individual with resilience that empowers the whole group from within. As a locally embedded moral practice, it accounts for the personal effects of stigma and potential breaches of social harmony, but it does not render the individual person as a lone 'vindicator', singularly responsible for the advancement of the cause.

#### **4.2.6 Dealing with the unspeakable – practices of secrecy and *desired identifications***

LT+ people highly valued the spaces and relationships they built. These enabled expression, discussion, dissent, mutual support, and changes in perspective and behavior. Still, research participants were equally bound to other spaces because of friendship circles, work, school, hobbies, or other affiliations. As such, LT+ relationships and spaces remained *within* or *part of* what several respondents called 'the normal world'. All interview partners moved in and between LGBT+ spaces and

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<sup>270</sup> I discuss motivations and experiences of interview partners who decided to come out, or who were outed accidentally, in Chapter 5.2.



contexts of the heteronormative majority society. In such spaces, they established diverse practices of secrecy to conceal this part of themselves, to avoid attracting attention and breaching social protocol, and to avoid discrimination. LT+ people used these practices differently, depending on the context and the presence of others in a given space. Families, especially, were seen as a delicate context, but respondents also guarded knowledge of their desire in other spaces in which participation was personally important, especially in daily contact with individuals. Material evidence of one's desire (letters, romantic photos, etc.) had to be kept secure and secret, and other traces had to be minimized, by, for example, deleting internet search histories. These measures were complemented with additional behavioral strategies.

Some participants had dated men in high school to test the absence of desire for men, or for 'the status', where the relationship was meant to evoke an image of heterosexuality before one's parents. *Butchi* Bayu stated: "I dated men before, but just for having the status [...] during high school. [...] So that my parents don't become suspicious."<sup>271</sup> It was one strategy used to build up a desired identification of oneself, to seem safely heterosexual in the perception of others. Other interview respondents focused on advancing their career aspirations in order to delay their parents' desire for an early marriage. This tactic often found parental approval, in a climate of increased opportunities for education and self-fulfillment for women, especially those from the middle class (Smith-Hefner 2020:16).

Some respondents, like Nuri, were more secretive, especially if they had been 'caught' in the past (see Chapter 5.2). Nuri's strategy was to stop bringing home *butchis*, so that her family would not know that she was still socializing with them. She would generally meet her girlfriend Bayu at Bayu's house. Sensitivity to the family also meant renouncing bodily affection – as any 'decent' couple would do – and adjusting how they addressed each other. Bayu explained: "Well normal, like friends. [...] No handholding. In front of my little brother, we are like people in a relationship, it does not matter. My little brother already knows"<sup>272</sup> (Interview Nuri and Bayu, 22.08.14).

It was common that partners had met each other's parents, if proximity allowed it. Romantic partners were introduced as good, close friends, as in the example of Nuri and Bayu. Some respondents' parents had quite close contact with the girlfriends of their daughters without (officially) knowing the relationship status. Parents regularly checked in with them on the phone or kept in contact via messenger services. If there was regular contact, it was described as loving and appreciative.

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<sup>271</sup> Original: "Kalau pacaran sama laki-laki pernah, tapi itu cuma buat status. [...] Dulu SMA. [...] Orang tua biar enggak curiga."

<sup>272</sup> Original: "Ya biasa saja, kayak teman. [...] Enggak bisa pegang tangan, kalau di depan adikku ya kayak orang pacaran gitu enggak apa-apa. Adikku kan sudah tahu."

I asked research participants if parents ever became suspicious about the closeness and quality of the ‘friendship’. I received various answers, ranging from certainty that their parents had no clue, up to doubt arising from what appeared to be allusions to awareness of the truth. Bayu noted that:

*Often [he] is talking, just joking, but sometimes it is like sarcastically mocking. For instance, ‘Yo, kiss her so she is quiet,’ like that. ‘Cuddled, taken care of... [is she] your girlfriend?’ he says like that.*<sup>273</sup> (Interview Nuri and Bayu, 22.08.14)

They were unsure if this really meant Bayu’s father ‘knew’, but if he did, they were convinced the topic would be too uncomfortable (*tidak enak*) for him, as a man and father, to address. Likewise, they expressed relief that Bayu’s mother did not show any signs of doubt. Nuri explained: “If her mother knew, it wouldn’t be possible [for her] to be silent, I would be separated from Bayu”<sup>274</sup> (Interview Nuri and Bayu, 22.08.14). Two aspects of this quote implicitly illustrate the cultural dynamics in which LT+ negotiations were embedded. First, even if parents recognize the romantic relationship, they might keep quiet, because of their own embeddedness in the cultural etiquette. Concealment is accommodated by practices of respect that are traditionally valued, as Geertz noted over sixty years ago:

*A significant aspect of all Javenese social relationships is that the important thing is not the sincerity of the action but the successful concealment of all dissonant aspects of the relationship. And, although in many social interactions both sides are well aware that the true situation between them is not as it appears on the surface, all are happy as long as the superficial accord is not disturbed.* (Geertz 1961:111)

I repeatedly observed this as an existing pattern in (polite) social interaction. Second, something becomes a problem only when ‘dissonant aspects’ are known in the sense of *tabu* (rationally knowing something) or *mengerti* (deeply understanding), because then they materialize and cause need for reaction, punishment, demarcation, and regulation. This logic resonates with society’s handling of sexual ‘secrets’: “Sexual behavior, however bad, is tolerated if kept under wraps, but condemned if it becomes public” (Suryakusuma 1996:117). Wieringa’s account describes the same logic of avoidance: “As long as the couple does not force the neighbors to openly acknowledge their relationships as a sexual union, and as long as the nature of their love is not brought to the public surface of *tabu*, let alone of *mengerti*, their relationship need not be condemned” (Wieringa 2007:83). For parents, also, keeping quiet and leaving the topic undisputed on purpose might be a strategy of practicing respect, perhaps even acceptance, while deploying the same cultural logic of silence to avoid the materialization of an actual problem.

<sup>273</sup> Original: “Sering, sering ngomong, cuma bercanda tapi kadang kan kayak nyindir. Umpamanya, ‘Yo di cium biar diem’, gitu. ‘Dipeluk, diurusin... pacarmu tho?’ Bilang gitu-gitu.”

<sup>274</sup> Original: “Kalau sampai ibunya tahu, enggak mungkin cuma diem, pasti aku dipisahin ama Bayu.”

The notion of “parents are never wrong” (*orang tua tidak pernah salah*) underscores the importance of obedience and deference to parents, cited by research participants when they explained why they evaded certain topics and did not challenge parental authority, for example by initiating discussions.<sup>275</sup> “Displaying feelings of deference, shame or unworthiness are signs of virtue [...] because it indicates that one understands what is shameful, and knows how to behave properly” (O’Shaughnessy 2009:61). By insisting on the eternal correctness of their parents, respondents not only expressed that they knew ‘their place’ in social hierarchy and how to comport themselves within social logic, but also, that they knew how to maneuver within these structures.

Therefore, the unspeakability of the topic was at least sometimes enacted in a ‘two-sided’ fashion, following a logic of “don’t ask, don’t tell”. If the desire and relationships were not visible and labeled as *lesbi/an*, a same-sex relationship was acceptable because it adhered to cultural rules. Sexuality was left in the private sphere and the couple’s acceptance could be measured by other social parameters, such as participation in social or religious life.

Other practices enabling the production of an external desired identification were facilitated by gender-neutral language combined with heteronormative assumptions. Pronouns, and many nouns, in *bahasa Indonesia* do not indicate gender, providing an enabling structure that is used by *lesbi/ans* in different ways (Blackwood 2014:85). The usage of the pronoun *dia* (she/he) and the words *pacar* (girl- or boyfriend) or *pasangan* (partner) make it possible to talk about one’s (same-sex) partner without lying or revealing one’s desire. Heteronormative perceptions supported this strategy: If one of my participants talked about her *pacar* outside of LGBT+ circles, it was assumed she was heterosexual, and talking about her relationship to a man. *Butchi* Andre used this strategy in conversations with friends at school: “So if my female friends at my campus [...] talk about their boyfriends, I join in to talk about my girlfriend, as if I would consider her to be a boy”<sup>276</sup> (Interview Andre, 19.08.2014). Nuri, who worked as a salesgirl promoting special brands, sometimes feigned interest towards men at work. To maintain her desired identification, she sometimes talked about Bayu as a man. By doing so, she avoided stigma and gossip in a confined workspace that also employed some of her family member. To do otherwise would put her own good name at risk, and that of her company. This example hints at the potential dangers caused by travelling stigma and connected

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<sup>275</sup> Receptiveness to hierarchy, obedience, and deference, for example in interaction with parents, is expected of children and continuously taught during socialization, see, for example, Geertz (1961:114–116); Koentjaraningrat (1985); Peacock (1978a); Smith-Hefner (1988a, 1988b, 2020:28–30); Williams (1991).

<sup>276</sup> Original: “Terus kalau temen cewek kan di kampusku [...] bicara tentang pacar-pacarnya, saya juga ikut bicara tentang pacarku seakan-akan pacarku aku anggap sebagai cowok.”

gossip, which can be triggered by the disclosure of same-sex desire and by behavior perceived as improper for the female gender in general.<sup>277</sup>

Failure to represent heterosexual femininity threatens the family's reputation, and has the potential to create, in both oneself and social surroundings, feelings of *isin* (Jav.) and *malu* (Ind.), roughly translated as embarrassment or shame. Both these concepts are part of 'respect' in Javanese society (Geertz 1961:110–118; O'Shaughnessy 2009:61; Stodulka 2017:62). Status and shame are interlocked, because disrespectful behavior demonstrates one's ignorance of the rules of behavior and brings shame to the self (Keeler 1983:156–160). Nuri, by enacting an appropriate desired identification at work, demonstrated her understanding of the workings of *isin/malu*, and her commitment to maintaining the status of those associated with her. *Lesbi/ans* were – as different examples within this chapter show – actively involved in protecting their multiple circles of affiliation. As cultural experts, they knew about the spaces and constellations in which risks were most likely to occur. They were also acutely aware of the transgressing behaviors or nuances of gendered expression connected to each situation. By adjusting their behavior, they demonstrated sensitivity towards others' needs, and acknowledged the relational dynamics of social status, in which the self was actor and recipient for associated collectivities.

Social media<sup>278</sup> provided another practice in which to perform same-sex desire and identification in a self-controlled and spatially separated manner. On Facebook, respondents would often maintain several separate accounts, enabling them to display different parts of their identifications to different audiences.<sup>279</sup> In general, the different accounts served defined functions. Some were specially created, for example, to flirt with others, while some were restricted to a single group, such as one's family, displaying only certain types of content. The most common distinction between profiles was between non-LT+ people and LT+ people – where the latter would often use pseudonyms. Andre explained:

*The first Facebook is for formal [use], yes... for school, the second Facebook for private, the below world. [...] The one for the friends from campus [...] for sending assignments [...] or friends from campus notify me using Facebook, chatting, like that. The private*

<sup>277</sup> The potential risks following a breach of gender roles led especially *butchi* to deploy strategies to minimize trouble for their family, see Chapter 5.1.

<sup>278</sup> Internet social media was accessed via internet cafes or personal smartphones. This is not surprising since "smartphone use in Indonesia has risen sharply since 2012; 91% of Indonesian have a mobile phone, with all age groups using smartphones from pre-schoolers to parents" (Dhamayanti, Dwiwina and Adawiyah 2019:47, quoting Manumpil, Ismanto and Onibala 2015:1–6).

<sup>279</sup> While the risks inherent in this strategy are debatable and shared photos could reach unintended audiences via detours, no respondent emphasized this problem. The use of visual content for being outed without consent was mentioned as a potential threat after a failed romantic relationship, see Chapter 5.2.

*one is for my girlfriend, for romantic appreciation in cyberspace.*<sup>280</sup> (Interview Andre, 19.08.2014)

When asked, most research participants could see a difference in the writings or pictures they shared.<sup>281</sup> Nike, an LT+ activist from Balikpapan, Kalimantan, separated her two Facebook accounts on the basis of their respective audiences' physical locations, thereby controlling the disclosure of their *lesbi/an* identification:

Nike: *Family, [...] long-term friends, friends from middle and high school, [...] generally for people from Balikpapan, my city, because people, it seems in Yogyakarta everyone knows that I am a lesbian, but in Balikpapan not. [...]*

Kristina: *And what are you posting in the account for the family?*

Nike: *Good things (laughs)*

Kristina: *For example? (laughs)*

Nike: *Yes, for example, 'I just came down from the mountain, I am happy I spent time in nature' and things like that. But there are also some [names NGO] friends, actually many that are friends with me on the original Facebook, but I filter. [...] If they tag my name, I have to approve it. So, the most we share is that we are eating together, we are breaking fasting together. Things that do not hurt my family.*<sup>282</sup> (Interview Nike, 11.08.2014)

Multiple social media accounts allowed their owners to control information and to define its recipients, as online spaces were not separated from the normative dis-

<sup>280</sup> Original: "Yang pertama FB untuk formal ya untuk kuliah, dan yang kedua FB pribadi, dunia belok. [...] Yang satu untuk teman kampusku [...] buat ngirim tugaslah [...], atau teman kampusku ngabarin aku lewat FB, chatting. Kayak gitu, tapi kalau yang satunya pribadi buat pacarku jadi buat sayang-sayangan di dunia maya."

<sup>281</sup> I often noticed that *lesbi/ans* clearly portrayed their partner on their respective Facebook profiles, often with pictures that showed trips, dinners, or gifts, such as stuffed animals, combining romance and consumption. Eva Illouz (2003) shows how, in the case of the USA, romance and consumer culture have become linked under postmodernity, transferring the initiation and realization of love relationships to the public, through display and consumption. For *lesbi/ans* in Indonesia, only romantic love exists within their desire. Due to the heteronormative context, it is not possible for *lesbi/ans* to celebrate and consume their love in public in the same way as heterosexuals can. The Internet provides *lesbi/ans* and their relationships with the necessary audience for valorizing their romance.

<sup>282</sup> Original: Nike: "Keluargaku, [...] teman-teman lama, teman SMP, teman SMA, [...] terutama sih untuk orang-orang di Balikpapan di kotaku. Karena orang, kayaknya di Jogja semua orang tahu kalau aku lesbian, tapi di Balikpapan enggak. [...]. Kristina: Ehe dan apa yang kamu posting di a a account keluargamu? Nike: Hal yang baik-baik hehehe. Kristina: Hahaha contoh? Nike: Ya contohnya e, aku baru saja turun gunung, aku bahagia habis main-main di alam bebas' dan lalala, gitu-gitu aja. Atau yang kayak ada juga yang temen beberapa temen [name NGO] banyak sih cukup banyak berteman dengan aku di FB asli. Tapi aku filter kan, [...] kalau tag namaku harus pakai persetujuanku gitu-gitu. Paling yang kita masukin kayak kita makan bersama, kita buka puasa bareng gitu-gitu. Yang kira-kira tidak menyakiti hati keluargaku."

courses they encountered in the offline world. This mirrors Izquierdo's (2019) findings, who highlights the influence of local, offline discourses for the online self-presentation of her participants in Aceh. Similarly for my research participants, who strategically conveyed (or not) their *lesbi/an* or trans subjectivity in a space-sensitive manner only to specific audiences in the everyday, they considered some information as unsuitable for some audiences in digital space.

While I did not observe this practice among heterosexuals in Indonesia, Schäfer's (2016:261) observation of the same among atheists in Indonesia suggests it was generally typical for members of stigmatized minorities. They engage in this strategy to embrace socially, religiously, or politically ostracized identifications in a protected way, and to network. However, Schäfer's informants were activists who not only networked through these alternate accounts but also strived "to educate an Internet-savvy public about their lives and non-religious views" (Schäfer 2016:255). In contrast, my interview partners' practices usually lacked this public purpose, as only some understood themselves as activists. However, this educational purpose is commonly pursued on- and offline by LGBT+ NGOs.

Although I discuss the practice of maintaining multiple profiles in this section because of its protective character, a change of perspective reveals an ambivalence of categorization: The anonymized presentation of a *lesbi/an* identification indicates not only secrecy, but also openness, and connection, as participants simultaneously took part in community building by networking across circles of friends and NGOs.

#### *The concept of 'desired identifications' revisited*

Strict management of the outside persona in the form of a desired identification was a way to handle the 'discreditable' attribute to support personal safety and protect kin, friends, and acquaintances from stigma. It also represents practices of stigma management that prompt a reexamination of the concepts inherited from Goffman's (1975) understanding of stigma, urging a deeper connection to processes of identification. A desired identification, in daily routine, fosters a reputable role by the appearance of sameness/alikeness to the heteronormative world, reducing the risks for the status of one's social circles. It upholds the value of social harmony by minimizing social disturbances. The adoption of a desired identification was nevertheless grounded in the societal rejection of LGBT+, that made their desire appear as a "dissonant aspect" (Geertz 1961:111), as well as in the unpredictability of the effects that disclosure might produce. Contradictorily, by the performance of desired identifications full participation in society was ensured even though that society was, officially, denying inclusion to LGBT+ persons. Therefore, the practice of desired identification can be understood as a reconciliatory effort, employing images and techniques of caution and self-discipline that support inclusion while avoiding the looming threat of exclusion.

For me, desired identifications resemble other identifications on a theoretical level; they are "formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are

presented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us” (Hall 1992:277). In other words, desired identifications rely on performativity, are fluid and unfixed, and change their form depending on the space in which they are performed.<sup>283</sup> Contrary to those forms of identification where somebody is convinced s/he *is*, my conceptualization of desired identifications emphasizes the articulation, production, and portrayal of those characteristics that individuals believe their counterparts expect of them. As Calhoun (1994:20–21) succinctly notes, “Discourse[s] about who it is possible or appropriate or valuable to be inevitably shape the way we look at and constitute ourselves with varying degrees of agonism and tension.” Even if they are personally experienced as uncomfortable, they seem, from the outside, to be as ‘authentic’ as other identifications.

In contrast to Goffman, who analyzes the abstract structures of stigma and its various attachments and triggers<sup>284</sup> in the context of post-war American society, my analysis provides insights into how a specific group experienced and dealt with stigma in a very different cultural and historical context. While Goffman (1975:118), for example, speaks only briefly of “disidentifiers” as a cover-up strategy for homosexual men, the concept of desired identifications integrates concrete strategies of stigma-management at play at the micro-level. These strategies are set in a specific time and place, in which the image of an individual with a ‘normal’ sexual desire is performatively produced. In this respect, my concept is more concrete in its orientation towards local context, as it analyzes the culturally embedded strategies of interview partners, who concealed their desire, but did not, usually, operate according to a binary of familiar/public. Further, by analyzing and integrating numerous practices of intersectionally positioned women and trans men the concept is sensitive towards local expectations of behavior connected not only to desire, but also to gender. I use the term ‘identification’, because although a role has been presented to the external observer it appears as a complete, ‘authentic’ identification due to its coherent continuity and the density of its representation.

Desired identifications enable ‘passing’, as they cloud those parts of the self that are considered unsuitable within a specific socio-cultural space: “‘Passing’ designates a successful self-presentation in line with a socially favored identity at the expense of an ‘authentic’ one – e.g., passing for white when black, heterosexual when LGB/Q, cisgender when transgender, etc.” (Harrison 2013:1). Thus, the ‘dissonant’ parts were evaluated by my participants as a hidden, but genuine essence – more ‘authentic’ than the publicly displayed desired identification. ‘Authenticity’ (or the lack thereof) is often a criterion employed in the assessment of people, even if authenticity in the sense of a true essence is theoretically problematic at best.<sup>285</sup> For a trans person, for example, social authentication may take place when a counterpart does not misconstrue them, but recognizes ‘who they really are’ (Davis 2009:103,

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<sup>283</sup> For more details on my theoretical understanding of identifications and space, see Chapter 1.2.

<sup>284</sup> For example, disabilities, professional criminals, sex work, etc.

<sup>285</sup> Within a poststructuralist approach, identifications never express ‘essence’ (Butler 1990).

106, 117, 123) – an external recognition of the intelligibility, and authenticity, of their self-presentation. My interview partners who produce desired identifications also appeared ‘authentic’ and intelligible, even if this was a form of passing, done to avoid attracting attention to ‘who they really are’. Presenting the self in relation to others and occasionally hiding something is, according to Goffman (1969, 1975:161), ‘normal’ and a social capacity, just as the capacity for stigma-management is not restricted to the stigmatized perspective.

This is also where the difference between practices of concealing stigmatized characteristics and general, occasional concealment appears. Compared to people who situationally hide a non-stigmatized characteristic or behavior, the behavior of research participants was systematic. Concealment was not only practiced by a few persons on an occasional basis, but by many. Some people were unwillingly ‘outed’ and others had voluntarily decided to come out to particular people, but overall, concealment led to the invisibility of an entire population group. LGB+ people did participate in daily life, but were intangible in their LGB+ identifications due to their desired identifications. This situation raises structural issues of collective political representation, social exclusion, and participation in society on the basis of an identitarian affiliation – a further distinction to the type of situational concealment all people engage in.

Deliberate, stigma-reducing practices of performing desired identifications were, from a personal perspective, sometimes seen as dishonesty. Yet, I understand this practice as guided by Javanese principles of hierarchy and harmony. As such, the performance of desired identifications is consistent with cultural etiquette of maintaining harmony, keeping private things private, and managing social expectations. Because they imbue the work of identification with values of comportment, desired identifications represent participants’ ‘successful socialization’. Because of this, some *lesbi/ans* perceived coming out as selfish or rude, since it was incongruent with and disregarded cultural scripts. From my perspective, this silence should nevertheless be seen as queer labor sustaining the prevailing status quo: Hegemonic normativity is not openly challenged, and feelings of inadequacy remain within the individual. Social recognition can therefore become psychologically burdensome, as it invokes only other parts of the self or images of the desired identification.

### 4.3 Summary

The first subchapter addressed the dominant, though contested, performativities and gender expressions of research participants. Internalized hegemonic idea(l)s of appropriate *lesbi/an* gender expressions were based on a binary. This binary reflected societal ideas about gender characteristics and behavior, which were derived not from physical sex, but from gender. Others questioned and contested such normative images by offering understandings and practices which searched for more contingent or in-between expressions, augmenting the binary.



I then explicated the process of sexual subject formation as a *lesbi/an*. The analysis revealed how respondents formed their self-understanding in relation to, and in negotiation with, society's image of *lesbi/ans*. Interview partners first assessed the nascent desire neutrally, but with interest. Later, society's heteronormative stance towards non-normative desire became a foil of evaluation and led to a heightened sense of self-perceived difference. They learnt they *are lesbi/ans* but struggled with the accompanying societal stigma. Their difference was experienced as one separating them from their surroundings, but it at least allowed them to connect with other LT+ people. While coming to terms with desire they gained a more analytical view, distinguishing between the social evaluation and a descriptive level of the category. In the process, they formed a more positive relationship with the category and their desire, reflected in their 'coming in'. Politically and personally, the focus on coming in supported mental health while accounting for the socio-cultural values of conduct, securing ongoing societal participation. Coming in did not prevent further struggles in society, but enabled a positive self-identification in the process of sexual subject formation as a *lesbi/an*. This reduced feelings of shame and guilt.

Their double socialization – first as women within their cultural surroundings and later, as concealed LT+ – equipped interview partners with an acute awareness of the dominant discourses and expectations of behavior in the spaces that they moved in. To avoid stigma and its repercussions on their social circles, respondents combined practices of secrecy and fleshed out desired identifications to manage their outside persona. Within LT+ practice and consciousness, secrecy was not only a personal practice but also a shared, collective experience, which produced spaces – such as the one described in the vignette at the beginning of this chapter – with different power arrangements. This enabled, at least temporarily, a space of encounter, a sense of collectivity that bridged isolation, and access to information – all of which were much needed and highly appreciated by the people I interviewed.

The highly developed ability to flexibly articulate identifications, a functional desired identification, and mastery of the ability to move 'within', can be framed as agency, as LT+ people use these capacities to negotiate and navigate their cultural context and its social relationships.<sup>286</sup> In this constellation secrecy, a term in everyday language often underpinned as negative, was in LT+ practice highly enabling and productive. Secrecy might, therefore, be better understood as involving the strategic control of information for purposes of stigma-management. For LT+ positionings, it produced ways of more safely engaging with society and moving within its social, emotional, and spatial structure.

This chapter, with its focus on sexual subject formation, has concentrated on the biographical becoming and being of interview partners. The following chapter shifts the focus to the negotiation of gender and desire with the social environment in different spaces.

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<sup>286</sup> In Chapter 7, I discuss how desired identifications are considered as agency.



## 5. Negotiating LT+ gender and desire in family and society

In this chapter, I focus on how gender, as a cultural category, was ‘made’ and negotiated in practice, performed by respondents within their social contexts outside the “Lesbi world” (Blackwood 2010), where many preferred to spend their leisure time. Drawing from Ortner’s practice theory (1996, 2006) in combination with performativity theory, I describe respondents’ performative ‘making’ of gender. This process unfolded against the backdrop of the cultural construction of gender represented in the *kodrat wanita*, a code of conduct inspired by the cultural and religious views and assumptions about intrinsic female ‘nature’ described in Chapter 3.

In the *kodrat wanita*, women are wives and mothers and responsible for maintaining social harmony in the family and neighborhood. The woman performs the emotional work within this idealized middle-class notion of womanhood and domesticity (Jones 2004:510). The man, as husband, supports social hierarchy and provides economic security, public representation, and political and religious guidance (Stodulka 2017:48). The post-*Reformasi* rise of political Islam and its gender ideology expanded these expectations to include piety (Wieringa 2015b:28).

In reality, practices are far more diverse than cultural ideals (see Chapter 3.2), which I attempt to capture by combining a practice theory approach with the notion of performativity.

To analyze the socio-cultural negotiation and performativity of gender in this context, I adopt a chapter structure that addresses two major themes. The first theme is that of the ‘making’, or performativity, of gender in relation to space. The second is that of sexuality and desire, especially in relationship to moments of disclosure, ‘coming out’, and *ketahuan* (getting caught or discovered). These are key milestones in the negotiation of female gender as a cultural category. Each of these themes has its own subchapter. In the first theme, I pursue the question of *how LT+ performed and negotiated (their) gender in interaction with (presumably) non-LGBT actors, or within spaces predominantly structured by heteronormative ideas and practices?* Turning to the second theme, I provide answers to a question that remained unanswered in the last chapter: *What happens when the desire is revealed after all – for LT+ subjects and their counterparts?* By asking what the image of ‘the good (Javanese) girl’ means, I reveal *kodrat wanita’s* use as a benchmark for the judging of womanhood, and the definition of borders of appropriate, moral gender in the name of collective, patriarchal social order and harmony.

The first subchapter addresses the fluidity of gender and its place in performance theory. Fluidity of gender performance is influenced by personal affiliations, and the obligations imposed by ‘structure’ conveyed in space. In the second subchapter, I take a spatial view of the moments of disclosure that threaten open rupture with the ideal of marriage and motherhood. I begin this chapter with a vignette that throws light on these themes and concepts. What began as a birthday party at the house of a *lesbi/an* where her family was present, later transformed into a semi-public hearing of an unspoken dispute about *lesbi/an* jealousy with a village leader.

### **Ethnographic vignette: Olay’s birthday party at her parents’ house**

Olay’s father was a *kyai*, a *pesantren* leader, and her mother was a housewife. Olay had been Selly’s girlfriend for over a year, but neither her parents nor her younger siblings knew this. Although she was not a regular participant in the circle of friends of Andre, Anju, Kesi, Bayu and Nuri, she was known to the rest of the group through Selly. They had all been invited to celebrate her twentieth birthday. I was curious how a birthday celebration at the house of a *kyai*, where faith was important to the household, would unfold with almost exclusively *lesbi/ans* as invited guests.

#### *The beginning: a birthday celebration*

*At around 8 pm, our group arrived at Olay’s house somewhere in suburban Bantul. She came to the yard and welcomed us, dressed in long jeans and a buttoned-down shirt, with her dark hair worn short. She displayed markers of butchiness, with a demeanor that was soft or flexible in her expression of masculinity.*

*Olay’s father with his peci (Muslim headgear for males) on his head stood two steps back from her mother, who was dressed in long colorful clothing and an orange hijab. He welcomed the female guests by nodding at everyone, avoiding physical contact. Her mother*

*politely shook guests' hands, while they respectfully lowered their gaze and bowed slightly. Olay's younger sisters, who both also wore hijabs, greeted the guests friendly but modestly. Soon, we were seated in the half-open Musholla (room for Muslim prayers) at the left of the garden, where we found a table that offered snacks, and soft drinks were served. Olay's femme girlfriend Selly asked what we wanted to drink, and a few minutes later Olay entered the Musholla carrying a crate with various soft-drinks, which Selly handed out. Everyone (it seemed to me) was on their best behavior, politely avoiding any inappropriate joking within earshot of Olay's parents. Remarkably, more than half an hour after our arrival, no one had started smoking.*

*Olay and Selly then brought out trays filled with food. About an hour later everyone in the Musholla had finished eating, Olay's father had entered the house, while her mother temporarily joined the gathering in the garden. More guest had arrived. The atmosphere had noticeably loosened up: The guests in the garden had organized a guitar and sung Indonesian love songs. All other people in the Musholla were by now smoking and joking, as usual. Only Nuri seemed tense and distracted. After the birthday cake was brought out and the obligatory birthday song was over, a spontaneous cake fight broke out. I settled with Nuri and Kesi in the Musholla when Nuri began to share that she had been in contact with Okky and her shy young girlfriend Devi. These were two members of the friend group who would arrive later, as Okky was working. Soon, the rest of the group was called over to discuss the absent butchi-femme couple.*

#### *The incident*

*Nuri lowered her voice and told us that there had been an incident: Okky had been in a fist-fight with the ex-girlfriend of Devi, butchi Ino. Ino now threatened Okky via SMS that she should come to Ino's house by ten p.m. to provide compensation. If not, she would report Okky to the police for assault. Those hearing this were worried and upset. Dian and Kesi, both law students, began discussing the legal implications and possible strategies of action.*

*Ten minutes later, Okky and Devi arrived, and were asked to relate what had happened to those gathered in the Musholla. Okky seemed nervous and reluctant, but she spoke nonetheless. The couple had 'met' Ino while they had been on their motorbikes waiting next to each other for the traffic lights. Okky had shoved Ino, and had wanted to hit her, but in the end Devi persuaded her not to. In their account, Ino had 'just' tipped over with her motorcycle and both had traded verbal insults. Now, Okky told us, Ino's family were accusing her of having destroyed the motorbike and beaten up Ino so badly that she had to go to the Emergency Room. Ino's family were demanding compensation for the alleged damage, and threatening Okky with the police.*

*After Okky had recounted the incident she looked at us, concerned and disheartened, and asked for advice. She said she was scared of being reported to the police, because of the risk of bringing discredit to her parents and her family. The other friends around her tried to encourage Okky in various ways. Nuri did so by questioning Ino's honor as a butchi.*

*“Such a mama’s child, if she is a butchi she should be brave. Real butchi face their opponents directly, and don’t tell their parents.”*<sup>287</sup>

*Dian and Kesi, however, pursued a practical strategy by giving legal advice to Okky and Devi (she had been sitting to the side, anxious and in total silence). They hypothesized that Ino’s family was trying to benefit economically from the incident but also scrutinized if Okky was “really” telling the truth. Okky, close to tears, asserted her innocence, reaffirming her testimony even after repeated, intense questioning. Dian and Kesi decided to trust Okky and to advocate for her. In their view, Okky could not be reported for assault. They proposed that, if the worst came to the worst, they in turn could threaten Ino’s family to out their daughter as a lesbi/an, perhaps even in public media.*<sup>288</sup>

*As our deadline of 10 pm approached, the group discussed how to proceed. Selly decided to stay with Olay, because Olay was not allowed to go out at night. Everyone else would go. Okky, Dian as a kind of law attorney and Nuri as a less threatening femme, would approach the house in advance, to persuade Ino to tell the truth and negotiate with the family. If necessary, they could call the others waiting outside. Kesi and Dian asked Olay to lend them an al Qur’an, to help find the truth. As Kesi put it, “no one will dare to lie on al Qur’an thus directly before God.” Therefore, they would have both swear on al Qur’an to discover if one was lying or exaggerating. Olay, though surprised, handed over a well-used version of the holy scriptures, which I carried, as I was the only one with a bag. All thanked Olay for the invitation, and apologized for the abrupt departure of the group.*

#### *Intermezzo at Ino’s house*

*At Ino’s house, Okky, Dian, Kesi and P<sup>289</sup> met Ino’s older sister. What followed was a short and stiff conversation about the whereabouts of Ino and her parents, and what the damage was. Ino’s sister further threatened Okky with the police but nevertheless let us take pictures of Ino’s motorbike and the helmet, neither of which showed any obvious signs of damage. Ino’s parents had driven with her to Okky’s kampung<sup>290</sup> to put their case*

<sup>287</sup> Original: “Dia anak mami, kalau dia butchi berani, butchis benar langsung hadapi dengan butchis itu, biasanya nga bilang sama orang tua.”

<sup>288</sup> I was quite surprised by this idea to exploit the stigmatization of LGBT+ (stigmatization that the attendees had themselves sometimes feared and suffered from), exposing another *lesbi/an* to social rejection and potential violence. In this case they did not feel solidarity with an alleged ‘We’ including other *lesbi/ans*, but only injustice.

<sup>289</sup> I felt rather uncomfortable but I was asked to come along for two reasons. First, I had my camera with me, so I could document the damage to the motorbike. The second reason was my assumed status. As a group of unmarried, younger women, having a lower status in most settings, they reasoned that other Indonesians would behave more respectfully to them if an Indonesian-speaking foreigner accompanied them.

<sup>290</sup> A *kampung* is a residential unit, where mostly lower-class residents live connected to an urban social structure but with rural patterns of organization (Geertz 1960; Guinness 1986, 2009; Sullivan 1995).

*before Okky's parents. Hearing that, Okky noticeably slumped and looked over to Dian and Kesi. Quickly, we said goodbye and hurried to our motorbikes.*

*On the way to Okky's kampung we met Okky's older brother at a parking space. He informed us that the situation was already quite unpleasant: The Pak RT<sup>291</sup>, the head of the neighborhood unit, had stepped in. Okky's brother was both supportive and frustrated, because Okky's trouble now involved the whole family. He also warned Okky that their own family, and especially their uncle, were angry. He quoted his uncle having said: "Problems like this can only happen when daughters are wandering outside every night."<sup>292</sup>*

#### *Public negotiation of an unspoken lesbi/an jealousy fight*

*We arrived in Okky's kampung at about 10.45 pm. Okky drove with Dewi directly to the house of the village head. The rest of us parked our motorbikes about 50 meters away.<sup>293</sup> While walking over to the open terrace of the Pak RT's assembly house, Andre hissed at me to put out my cigarette because it would be considered very inappropriate for a woman to smoke in front of him. The Pak RT, some older men dressed in sarungs, members of Okky's family (father and uncle) and the family of Ino (father, mother, brother) were sitting in the assembly space. Ino and Okky both sat with their families. Only Dewi sat with two other, older women next to the terrace. Our group, consisting of six butchi, one femme and I, thus encountered about ten people discussing the case. The Pak RT seemed surprised that even more people were joining but invited us – politely rather than graciously – to join. The butchi joined the male dominated circle; Nuri sat with the women on the side. That left me puzzled about where I belonged in this seating order, but the Pak RT invited me to the circle. The Pak RT spoke up and explained he would like to solve this 'incident' (kasus) peacefully. Dian and Kesi seized their chance and introduced themselves. Their introduction was one of the most polite and official ones I ever witnessed in Indonesia. Obviously, they knew how to perform both their selfhood and the case in this gendered setting of hierarchical conduct. Their introduction included not only their full names, addresses, and to which Pak RT they 'belonged', but they also showed their student ID. This specified their study program, Law. They proceeded to rephrase the case in judicial terms, using only highly official and polite language. They strategically invited the accusing*

<sup>291</sup> The *Bapak* or *Ketua RT* (head of *Rukun Tetangga*) is the lowest official representative of the Indonesian governmental structure. He (only occasionally she) manages about 20 households and is responsible for organizing official neighborhood activities, representing the state and maintaining harmonious relations between the families living in his administrative unit. He is chosen by the households and generally a well-respected member of the village (Guinness 1986; Newberry 2010:407; Sulivan 1992).

<sup>292</sup> Original: "Persoalan seperti ini cuma bisa terjadi kalau anak putri terus main-main di luar setiap malam."

<sup>293</sup> Again, I did not feel comfortable joining them, given the delicacy of this issue. I was very aware of my difference, and it felt inappropriate to mingle in this situation which had acquired an official aspect through the intervention of the *Pak RT*. My concerns were dismissed as unnecessary. They told me my presence would be helpful, that they would benefit from my attributed status, would be taken more seriously, and treated more fairly.

*family to present the case to the police, but reminded them that such an official approach prevented informal compensation. It seemed no one was seriously interested in actually involving the police – that would mean prolonging this rather small case, as the Pak RT argued. He proposed a discussion to find a low-level solution, which was (grudgingly) accepted by the parties. Dian and Kesi proposed to let Okky and Ino swear on al Qur'an to discover who was lying. I fumbled the holy script out of my bag. I noticed confused glances. Ino's family declined this method. They were Christians so al Qur'an was inappropriate, and there was no Bible available. Ino's mother again brought up their hospital visit as an argument for the wrongdoing of Okky. By doing so, she overstepped a line. The Pak RT, increasingly annoyed, reminded them that they wanted to come to a peaceful solution. He suggested an official contract letter in which both Okky and Ino would agree to observe respectful and peaceful behavior in the future, creating a settlement for the matter. Ino's mother protested silently against this settlement by ostentatiously turning her back to the others. Ino's father, in turn, was not amused by his wife's disrespectful behavior: He snapped at her, then turned to the old men mediating this conflict. While, he said very politely in formal language, they had hoped for a more favorable solution, they would accept this option. Pleased, the Pak RT commanded Kesi and Dian to formulate such a letter, which they did immediately. He also sent one woman to get a specific stamp, to create and seal the official document.*

*Okky and Ino, both speechless since our arrival, sat remorsefully, their eyes on the ground in the midst of their family. Their malu<sup>294</sup> feeling was obvious. Kesi and Dian read the letter out loud. Okky and Ino then signed the letter, without looking at each other; the old men declared that the 'case' was settled. The Pak RT then requested that Okky and Ino be photographed shaking hands, a task that was given to me. Slowly and unhappily, almost paralyzed, Okky and Ino got up and shook hands without looking at each other. After signing, Ino's family again tried to enforce financial compensation. Although from his bodily posture and hesitancy to answer the Pak RT seemed annoyed, he nevertheless reacted politely. He said they could bring the motorcycle to the local repair shop of his village. If there was something to repair, the cost would be defrayed, but nothing else. Ino's mother angrily objected. She ranted about the Pak RT's decision and went over to her family's motorbikes indicating her discontent and her wish to leave. The rest of her family followed, and they drove off. Now that everything was settled, the Pak RT brought tea and biscuits, which he offered to me first. All people still present went on chatting about what just had happened. Only Okky was still silent with a lowered gaze, sitting with her family without communicating with her friends. All of a sudden, Okky's uncle requested that we change the topic and return to something "normal". When this did not happen, he got up and, grumbling, demanded that everyone went home now, as "this subject" had received sufficient attention. The Pak RT agreed, dissolved the meeting, and asked us to leave. He dismissed us with a strict facial expression, and the comment that "you shouldn't be out at this time at night anyway."*

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<sup>294</sup> *Malu* is a shameful, embarrassing feeling. See Chapter 3.4 for its function in Javanese culture.



The vignette demonstrates structural emergence and making in practice and the consequent dialectic of structure and action, of reproduction and modification. This story illustrates at least five pivotal characteristics of the local socio-cultural structure that impacted the gendered negotiations of interview partners. These are (1) hierarchies and intersections along lines of gender and age, (2) negotiation and adaptation of one's (gendered) behavior and bodily comportment in space, and (3) gendered segregation and gendered use of space in relation to time. I take these as a point of departure for the subsequent discussion. Two topics remain: (4) silence over what had caused the fight, and (5) webs of support and patronage. I elaborate on these in the second subchapter.

## 5.1 Idealized femininity and gendered negotiations in space

In the vignette above, three aspects of Javanese social hierarchies intersected: those of gender and age,<sup>295</sup> attunement of one's (gendered) behavior and bodily comportment in space<sup>296</sup> and the gendered use of space in relation to time<sup>297</sup>. Since this was an official setting led by older men, one of whom was a low-level state representative, they established implicit and explicit rules of procedure and behavior in this interactive space. These rules were oriented towards socially prevailing norms of status and gender (such as who addresses whom and how, and who sits where). These power relations were established through interaction and confirmed, negotiated, and challenged by the behavior of all those present. They were confirmed by each individual behaving, as much as possible, according to the known rules. They were negotiated and challenged by the attempts at interference by Ino's mother, or by the *butchi* whose choice of seating was based on their masculinity, (a gender

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<sup>295</sup> The *Pak RT*, a man in his 60s, led the meeting, supported by other older men. Families were represented by older men, demonstrating those men's superior position. They set the terms and conditions of the assembly: they decided when it was over; they silenced the only directly participating feminine woman when she overstepped her expected script of gender- and age-appropriate, scene-structuring, politeness. Males' position was also fortified by the extreme politeness the *lesbi/ans* expressed when communicating with them. By this, they showed that they 'knew their place' in the hierarchy while still supporting their friend.

<sup>296</sup> During the birthday party, while the parents were in sight, everyone was on their best behavior. The *butchis* refrained from jokes, smoking, and space-occupying gestures, which had both a gendered appeal and a relationship to hierarchy. Their spatiality was cushioned by masculinity and their extremely polite expressions of bodily behavior and language, a fluid adaptation. They even instructed me to follow the rule that states that it is inappropriate for women to smoke in front of men in a formal situation.

<sup>297</sup> Nuri, as *femme*, immediately assessed the dividing lines present in the space and placed herself to the side. The *butchis* however demonstrated, by their choice of seating, that they rather belonged to the men. Still, the general mobility of women at this time of the day was called into question.

breach they balanced by adapting their physical behavior and language). In the birthday party's setting, the presence of the parents, religious and 'good people' who were situated higher in the social hierarchy, structured that space. It made the *butchis*, especially, adapt their performance of gender. Acting differently than usual,<sup>298</sup> they negotiated between their favored expressions and adaptation to cultural expectations of appropriate womanhood. I recognized such strategic changes especially when I was familiar with the group/person in moments when they moved from one space to another, or when the constellation of people in a space changed. Space, made up by social interactions and time, structured the performativity of gender of respondents in manifold ways and to different degrees. Almost all interview partners could recall examples of situations in which they changed their behavior or appearance slightly or even drastically because they 'knew' the surrounding context with its unspoken expectations (or even open demands) for gender-appropriate behavior. To understand the performativity and negotiation of gender in practice we need to consider how the *kodrat wanita* provides the contextual frame for such performance through familial socialization, and its implications for use of public space. Accordingly, I address the following questions: *How were ideals and expectations of the kodrat wanita conveyed to interviewees? How did they perform and negotiate gender between their personal expression of gender and the strategic adaption and sometimes dismissal of the cultural expectations in different spaces?*

Some LT+ participants performed gender creatively or very fluidly in reference to masculinity and femininity. It is this fluidity that is of most importance here. Three conceptual understandings of fluidity have appeared within theoretical debates on gender (Davis 2009:101).<sup>299</sup> These approaches primarily either examine the theoretical grounds of gender in philosophically-oriented analyses, or else draw on trans subjectivities as examples. Philosophically-based theoretical approaches have explanatory strength, but often have limited applicability to empirical circumstances – at least until they are grounded in relation to empirical phenomena. Davis (2009:102) criticizes the stylization of trans people as *the* examples of gender transgression in academic discourse: "Fluid, disruptive, transgressive beings are juxtaposed with intelligible, coherent, stable, hegemonic beings." The former attributes

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<sup>298</sup> None of the *butchis* drastically turned their gendered expression around (by, for example, driving home to change their trousers for a dress). Adjustment of gendered behavior occurred through the accumulation of small details, that added up to an image counterparts could judge.

<sup>299</sup> The first approach emphasizes a fluidity of gender and sexuality in contrast to a conceptualization of identities, bodies, and behavior as stable or fixed. In the second approach, fluidity refers to a space outside and without reference to traditional gender, conceiving fluidity as freedom and independence, as Bornstein (1995:52) does. This assumes a pre-discursive willful subject, an assumption incompatible with performativity theory. The third conception understands the organization of society through identities and casts identity itself as oppressive. Here, fluidity deconstructs identity, as deployed in identity politics questioning its political utility (Davis 2009:101).

stand for trans subjectivities, the later apparently designate cis-gendered subjects.<sup>300</sup> In response, she formulates a new avenue of inquiry: “An empirical examination of the ways in which individuals negotiate potentially incoherent identities can expand postmodern insights into the tensions of identification and the regulatory regimes of gender” (Davis 2009:102). Namaste (1996:193), meanwhile, urges for a perspective that “situates fluidity with regard to broader social processes.”

Taking up Davis’ call, the following section focuses on empirical examples considered in light of their social context. While I elaborate shifts in gender performativity in general, for the discussion on fluidity I consider especially the performativities of three respondents, Ryo, Frentzy and Andre, who did not identify as trans. Their performances exceeded the practices of what I call ‘mono-gender fluidity’, a form of fluidity that characterized the performances of the majority of respondents.<sup>301</sup> As their examples represent an even more pronounced negotiation with norms, it is obvious that the practices from which their fluidity result are not voluntarily free or unbound, although I do consider them as forms of agency in Mahmood’s (2005) sense. In this way, I pursue the quest of expanding the continuum of fluidity in practice, in relation to space and time.

I understand plural self-presentations not as a result, characterized by disconnectedness or ‘freedom from constraint’, but as efforts to appear coherent within a specific social context or space. It is there, where the agentive self intersects with social norms, that identifications are negotiated. As Butler (1990:17) notes, “‘Intelligible’ genders are those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice and desire.”

Given variations inherent in time, space, and the positionality of subjects, this intelligible coherence is likely to manifest in different ways, resulting in diverse and flexible performances and articulations of identities, *inter-* and *intrapersonally*. I understand these as fluidity. By considering it in time and space, I achieve an extended understanding of fluidity, one capable of capturing forms of both mono-gender and dual-gender fluidity that do not exclusively manifest in the practices of trans persons. While the fluidity of gender in the practices and negotiations of trans people will remain central to research, this perspective allows understanding of other fluid ‘border-crossing’ practices that are not situated in Western logics of LGBTIQ identities. As such, my examples offer an empirically grounded, non-Western-centered extension of theory.

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<sup>300</sup> The theoretically guided idealization of trans as transgression often ignores the adverse living conditions of trans persons, in which “unintelligibility may disrupt individual lives” (Davis 2009:102).

<sup>301</sup> The majority performed gender situationally, but mostly within one established form of gender, either masculinity *or* femininity. Their practices varied in degree (fluidity in the range of one gender) but not in principle (switching from one gender to another) as they moved through spaces imbued with power structures.

### 5.1.1 Cultivating womanhood: Families as spaces for socializing ‘good women’

All interview partners who had grown up in Java were familiar with the *kodrat wanita*, as were those who came from elsewhere but who had lived in Yogyakarta, Java for some years.<sup>302</sup> Depending on the person’s expression of gender, different difficulties or opportunities arose when their actions were compared to or deviated from this code.

Interview partners in Yogyakarta, regardless of their gender expression, recalled memories of their families mentioning the principles of the *kodrat wanita*. Nuri for example stated:

*Yes, the duties of women, yes to marry a man and have children, to form a happy family. About marriage, I am more and more requested to do so, the more I grow up.*<sup>303</sup> (Interview Bayu and Nuri, 22.08.2014)

Nuri’s recollection was typical. The idealized goal for women is (heterosexual) marriage and motherhood, within families that (putatively) provide social and economic security, and are hierarchically structured by age and gender.<sup>304</sup> Such hierarchies were a structural feature in participants’ socialization and their intra-familial negotiations over femininity. In ideology and practice, fathers and mothers assume different roles in the families. Whenever both parents are actively involved in family life, the father is understood as the head of the family and the bread-winner, while the mother is the ‘household manager’ (Bennett 2005:33; Jones 2004; Smith-Hefner 2020:111; Utomo 2012). The main responsibility for childrearing is imposed on mothers (Blackburn 2004:11). Yet, mothers’ power to decide the future of their children varies depending on their socio-economic background and religious affiliation, and their access to wage labor. Still, hegemonic discourses on gender put pressure on mothers as those responsible for ‘creating’ adequate family members and citizens in accordance with the state’s gender ideology (Bennett 2005:34).

Parents play a pivotal role in socializing children into social patterns. If children fail to adhere to social norms, this can tarnish the family name and create feelings of *malu* (shame and embarrassment). Such instances carry implications for evaluating the performance of parents, especially mothers, who are held accountable for their children’s behavior. Accordingly, women and other female relatives commu-

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<sup>302</sup> Interview partners in Bali equally understood what was meant. Interview partners in Medan, North-Sumatra were mostly puzzled when I asked them about the *kodrat wanita*. Even though the wording was apparently not used across all areas, my observations show a supralocal usage of the concept beyond Java or Javanese people.

<sup>303</sup> Original: “Ya kodrat perempuan ya menikah sama laki-laki, punya anak, punya keluarga yang bahagia begitu. Kalau nikah, aku juga sampai sekarang malah juga di tuntutan tetap. Semakin dewasa.”

<sup>304</sup> This pattern, with its expectations of compliance, can be less strong in case of economic independence.

nicated ideals connected to gendered conduct, including the division of labor, clothing and beauty standards, and proper bodily comportment.<sup>305</sup> I was once present when a mother compared her *butchi* daughter to the ideal image of a Javanese daughter and emphasized her transgressions, which in her opinion had physical and moral consequences.

*Yuni is in the hospital. During my visit her mother also came. I am sitting on the side, the mother on Yuni's bed. Yuni shows her mother a few photos, including humorous photos of her wearing a headscarf or a headband with a pink bow. Both photos are far more feminine than her daily appearance. She explains the context, but with laughter. The mother is enthusiastic and photographs both photos immediately. She comments: "Yes, if you'd gotten married or looked like this all the time, then you wouldn't be ill and wouldn't have to undergo surgery. In the photos you look as if you are still free from sin." I look up, irritated, but say nothing. The mother, reacting to my irritated view, holds her hand in front of her mouth and corrects herself: "Ah what I meant, you look as if you are not yet sick [sick in the sense of desiring the same sex]. You look very pretty. You should always look like this. This is my girl, my pretty Javanese girl. [...] Javanese girls must be smooth, polite, and gentle." (Field notes, 7.8.2014)*

In her interview, Yuni described how, in Jakarta in the early 1990s, her mother would meet with other women of the neighborhood in front of their houses to share afternoon child-care collectively. Here, Yuni's mother shaped Yuni's body according to the already institutionalized, collectively accepted practices of gendered difference.

*It was like a pageant, if you bring your kids they have to be dressed up beautifully, so she tried to dress me up in dresses [...] like a woman and I often cried. I felt more comfortable in shorts and a tucked in t-shirt [...] and men's shoes. [...] But my Mum couldn't, she wanted [...] me to look like Cinderella, [...] very tiring. Sometimes when dressed up like this I didn't bother, I played marbles with my friends, then my Mum came over, screaming: 'Hey, that's dirty, hey, she is a girl, don't sit with your legs wide open, that's not good, don't you have another game? Because you are playing with a girl, not a boy.'<sup>306</sup> (Interview Yuni, 14.09.2014)*

<sup>305</sup> Mothers also take on this parenting role in relation to boys. In boy's socialization other responsibilities, independence in decision-making, mobilities, and tasks outside the domestic sphere that are in accordance with (Javanese) males' role are emphasized (Bennett 2005:28; Blackwood 2010:73; Smith-Hefner 2020:101).

<sup>306</sup> Original: "Jadi disitu kayak ajang, bawa anak-anaknya harus tampil cantik, jadi dia berusaha memakaikan aku dress [...] seperti perempuan, dan aku sering nangis. Aku lebih nyaman dengan celana pendek, baju dimasukkan, [...] pakai sepatu laki-laki. [...] Tapi ibuku enggak boleh, dia mau aku [...] mengembang seperti cinderella, [...] kan males banget begitu. Jadi kadang kalau misalnya aku harus begitu ya, aku cuek aja, aku akan main dengan teman-temanku yang lain, main gundu, nanti ibuku yang teriak-teriak sendiri gitu, 'hey itu kotor, hey itu anak perempuan jangan nganggang duduknya, enggak bagus, heh, itu mainnya enggak ada mainan lain, kamu itu mainnya sama anak perempuan, enggak sama anak laki-laki?'"

The efforts of Yuni's mother went beyond material markers of femininity, like clothing. They included the usage of discursive norms and images, which made the body the epitome of gender. Through judgmental comments and training, the body gained a gendered meaning, and was marked and positioned on the ground of the binary construction of sex and gender. Against the socially implicated idea that the body 'naturally' produces (or *is*) gender, the following quote illustrates that the production of gender is 'hard work' on the body.

*She kept ordering me to be like a woman and to keep care of my body. [...] I should not play running with my friends because [she was] afraid of blisters and damage of my skin. [...] If I fell and wounded myself, she would be very angry, because it meant there would be scars. [...] Same with bathing, she observed the way I took my shower. If I was not exhaustive, she would take over and bathe me [...] 'there should be nothing black, no black buttocks, no black crotch' [begins to imitate her mother's voice with a rigid rhythm] 'everything has to be white, all has to be clean, not black, because you are a girl, you will be a girl and a girl's skin has to be clean.'*<sup>307</sup> (Interview Yuni, 14.09.2014)

The work of establishing, forming, and expressing gender in an appropriate feminine form was important to the mothers of many interview partners. Yuni likened the situation described above with a "pageant", a public format with an audience, and scrutiny and evaluation. In pageants, not only is the 'work' examined carefully, but its 'creator' is also judged. The person in charge is questioned, receives feedback and, if necessary, is held accountable for the success or failure of their work. To fulfill their responsibilities, mothers adhered to accepted practices, such as those mentioned above, which also conveyed broader social expectations for women.<sup>308</sup>

Everyday socialization mediated and reinforced societal gender roles and ideals, with the *kodrat* serving as a cultural framework. During interviews, these ideals were present as normal and everyday social beliefs about 'how women and men are' or at least 'should be'. Everyday references to the *kodrat wanita* normalized the expectation that one should wholeheartedly fulfill one's gendered responsibility to the family and society as a whole.

Both religious norms and family hierarchies have an amplifying effect, encouraging compliant behavior. Such behavior also satisfied the gender roles and ideals portrayed in Islam, as the *kodrat wanita* espouses religious notions of gender (Smith-Hefner 2020:58, 77). Gender-role compliant behavior prevents the transgression of

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<sup>307</sup> Original: "Dia terus menyuruhku untuk seperti perempuan, dan aku harus menjaga badanku. [...] Aku tidak boleh main lari-larian dengan teman-temanku lainnya karena takut nanti kulitnya lecet dan kulitku rusak, gitu. [...] Justru kalau aku jatuh, aku luka, dia akan sangat marah besar, karena itu berarti akan ada bekas. [...] Sama kalau mandi, dia harus memperhatikan aku mandi, cara aku mandi, kalau enggak sabar, dia akan mandiin aku, [...] jadi tidak boleh ada yang hitam, pantat tidak boleh hitam, selangkangan tidak boleh hitam, 'semua harus putih, semua harus bersih tidak boleh hitam, karena kamu anak gadis, akan jadi anak gadis, dan anak gadis itu kulitnya harus bersih'."

<sup>308</sup> See Saraswati (2013) for an analysis of whiteness in relation to race and female beauty standards in Indonesia.

God's rules (see Chapter 3.3). Being a 'good woman' in the sense of the *kodrat wanita* would, therefore, also protect against sin, as Yuni's mother implied during the hospital scene.

While I underline the centrality of the mother in socialization, Tama, who was brought up in a strict Catholic family, recalled their father's role in evoking the *kodrat wanita*. Tama noted that the mother may be responsible for the house, but that both mother and children should not dispute with the father: "I was always getting into trouble with my father at home or especially when with the wider family: 'You really, really cannot sit like this, you have to sit properly'"<sup>309</sup> (Interview Tama, 12.08.2014).

By telling women their place, Tama's father reconfirmed his own position at the top of the family hierarchy. His heightened attention to the bodily comportment of his daughters in situations when the wider family was around highlighted the importance of appropriately performing one's role and fulfilling one's responsibility.<sup>310</sup> It also indicated how he understood himself to be ultimately responsible for supervising his family, and his awareness of the fact that inappropriate behavior would reflect on both him and his wife.

When the wider family comes together, the pressure to adhere to the social expectations of one's culturally defined role is keenly felt.<sup>311</sup> For example, many Muslim respondents who lived in Yogya but planned to go home over the holidays at the end of *Ramadhan* expressed mixed feelings. They were happy to meet their family, but also afraid of uncomfortable and judgmental questions or comments. Questions about when one planned to get married (*kapan nikah?*) and comments criticizing one's appearance were repeatedly joked about. The circle of friends consisting of Andre, Anju, Kesi, Selly, Bayu and Nuri, who lived with their families, also reported receiving these awkward questions during the familial *Idul Fitri* gatherings. In these instances, humor functioned as form of critique and tension relief. By listening, it became clear to me that most did not (yet) fulfill the expectations of their parents, families, or society, and that they struggled emotionally with this situation.

As a principle of Javanese ethics and values, (familial) hierarchy supports social harmony by denying space to conflicts or criticism, because there is no equality in parties or claims. Respectful, receiving/accepting (*nrimo*) behavior in light of adversities is stressed as a Javanese value, especially for girls (Smith-Hefner 2020:103; Stodulka 2017:62). For respondents their embeddedness in familial hierarchy and dependence on their families often meant that there was little space for critique,

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<sup>309</sup> Original: "Kan aku selalu dimarahi bapakku kalau dirumah apalagi kalau di keluarga besar 'itu benar-benar enggak boleh duduk begini. Jadi harus di tutup duduknya.'"

<sup>310</sup> Smith-Hefner (2020:82) reports a comparable case in which the father of one of her participants repeatedly emphasized the *kodrat* and the "biological destiny" of his daughter, which she interpreted as strengthening his male, hierarchically superior role in the aristocratic 'gender current'.

<sup>311</sup> This dynamic was even apparent during the assembly with the *Pak RT*. During the meeting, Okky and Ino, who had transgressed the female role, silently fulfilled the role of the child and complied without rejoinder.

independent decisions, or equal discussions. In practice, this meant following parental rules and wishes to the best of one's ability. This did not mean that personal desires were not pursued, but it was typically done discreetly to avoid appearing disrespectful and disrupting harmony.<sup>312</sup> Maxims like "parents are never wrong" (*kan, orang tua bukan pernah salah*) or the more religious version "heaven is under the soles of mother's feet" (*surga itu dibawah telapak kaki ibu*) proliferated. Both situate the power of legitimate decision-making within the hierarchical system of the family. It was, for example, not unusual for parents or fathers to decide on the termination or continuation of their daughters education and, in some cases, on the program of study (Smith-Hefner 2020:101). In concrete terms this meant that children, teenagers, but also unmarried adults in their twenties and thirties like my research participants, relied on parental favor and support for major life decisions. If caught disobeying parental decisions, one transgressed not only cultural rules of conduct but also risked losing access to the entire familial support structure.

Even if the family is a powerful collective system, individuals – regardless of their sexual orientation – do not passively conform to these ideals. While families and the wider public place both *butchi* and *femme* in relation to ideals of womanhood, they are differently affected because of the differences in their favored gender expression. Consequently, some aspects typically concern either *femmes* or *butchis*. Other topics, like that of marriage, are fundamentally challenging fields of negotiation for both. In the following sections, I illustrate various negotiations that highlight the complexities of performing gender at the intersection of structure and agency within a system that imposes strong moral constraints and limitations.

#### *Femmes gendered negotiations with femininity*

As they were not married, many *femmes* lived with their parents or other relatives, where they had been, or still were, subject to strict gender-based rules. Respondents recalled rules concerning 'womanly' bodily comportment, polite speech, appropriate clothing, and gendered use of space in the house and outside, such as early curfew hours. In contrast to *butchi*, *femmes* seldomly expressed feelings of incongruity or the need to negotiate because of their favored gender expression.<sup>313</sup> Being feminine was taught and expected by parents, and lived and seen as normal by *femmes*. The concept of femininity provided them a rich repertoire for shifting their expressions according to the spaces and social contexts they moved in.

Space-specific power structures and associated expectations of appropriate behavior can be influential factors driving conscious or unconscious shifts in gender

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<sup>312</sup> It took me, who grew up in Germany, very long to understand this principle of social harmony. I was often sneered at when asking research participants why they did not discuss something openly with their parents, for example when their personal career aspiration differed from their parents. It was implied (correctly, at the time) that I did not fully understand the situation.

<sup>313</sup> Their disruption of hegemonic femininity unfolded, instead, in regard to desire.



performance. Moving from a café that was experienced as a safe space, where everyone was playful and less concerned with appropriate appearance, ‘into’ a more public or familial space would require shifts of this kind. For example, during the planning of the *lesbi/an* evening portrayed in the first vignette, Selly phoned the people in charge of the venue to clarify the rental. While she was never particularly polite, quiet, or restrained during gatherings with her friends, her voice became extra soft and she spoke in a highly polite manner, using respectful, formal speech. It was a change so noticeable that even her *butchi* liaison became jealous, suspecting her (jokingly) of romantic interest in the other party. Selly countered the jocular accusation with the words: “I am a femme, aren’t I?”, emphasizing that femininity contained various registers, which she had mastered.

While Selly displayed changes in her speech, Chien exhibited recognizable changes in her clothing practice. When Chien was about 18, she moved to Yogyakarta to study. When we met, she was a semester away from graduation and friendly, funny, and self-determined in her communication with me. I perceived her to be strong-minded, independent, and largely unaffected by group pressure. She countered cheeky *butchi* friends with ease, humor, and intellect. Originally, she came from Solo (Surakarta), where she had grown up in an ethnic Chinese Catholic family that was deeply embedded in Javanese culture. When she was about 16 the family converted to Islam, practicing strict adherence to the rules of God and the prophet Mohammad. Chien embraced her new religion not only at her parents demand, but also through her own (and not uncritical) study of *al Qur’an* and the *hadith* collections. She respected standards of appropriate behavior, but assessed the behavioral expectations of spaces well, estimating possible social consequences and balancing between compliance and transgression according to her own interest. This was revealed by her clothing practices: She liked to wear regular short clothes because of Yogyakarta’s hot weather. I often met her in a colorful tank top combined with short pants or, at times, even hot pants. It turned out this attire was space-bound; it was part of her visible expression of femininity in most spaces she participated in in Yogyakarta, excluding the campus environment.

- Chien: *In Yogyakarta, my clothes are like this, short, short. But if I am at home in Solo, I wear the veil. That is not fun, or anything, but well, it’s appropriately obedient. Better to be obedient than to be railed at by Mum. Yes, I just wear it, because it is also no hassle.*
- Kristina: *This means, when you are home you wear a veil. What else, long sleeves?*
- Chien: *Yes, everything long, different from [what I wear] here. Essentially the contrast is 180 degrees. I am scared the neighbours will talk ABC-ABC.<sup>314</sup> (Interview Chien, 11.09.2014, my emphasis)*

<sup>314</sup> Original: *Chien*: “Di Jogja pakaiannya begini, gitu, kan, pendek, pendek. Ntar kalau udah di rumah di Solo, pakainya kerudung. Itu kan gak, gak keren, gitu, kan. Ya, udah, tapi nurut aja, sih. Ya, nurut

Gossip by neighbors had prompted Chien to adapt her clothing practices. She adjusted her expression of femininity to suit the contrasting spatial contexts between religious and liberal femininity. By appropriately adjusting her clothing before her family, she accounted for the powerful and potentially harmful effects of gossip to her families reputation (see e.g. Gluckman 1963), and avoided open transgression of the spatially expected forms of behavior.

*Femmes* are more affected than *butchis* by the strict gender norms pertaining to unmarried women.<sup>315</sup> Paradoxically, the prevailing heteronormativity in society allows them to find various ways to pursue their interests by handling or breaching relevant norms, such as those restricting their spatial mobility. For example, it was possible for *femmes* to welcome their romantic partner at home or have them sleep over, because the partner, however masculine, was female in social perception. Many families simply did not perceive or assume a romantic, premarital relationship (see also Blackwood 1996:65; Murray 1999:145), because “in Indonesia as elsewhere in Southeast Asia, it is typical for girls and unmarried women to sleep together” (Blackwood 2010:166). Parents also allow *femmes* to sleep at their friend’s house, if the ‘friend’ is a woman. Bayu’s parents, for example, often invited Nuri to stay over to keep Bayu company overnight.

*That is not a problem; we are [behaving] like friends, right? [...] At my house, I don't have a friend. My siblings are all brothers, I am the only girl. Therefore, I call Nuri to my place to accompany me. [...] My parents are like 'oh it's Bayu's friend to accompany Bayu at home.'*<sup>316</sup> (Interview Bayu and Nuri, 22.08.14)

Nuri was practically living with Bayu; she spent almost every night at Bayu’s parents’ house. Nuri’s parents had agreed to let her move to a short-term rental house (*rumah kost*) due to the distant location of her job as Sales Girl at a big supermarket. Here, she shared a room with a female friend she worked with. Interview partners who had moved to Yogya for their studies sooner or later used the opportunity to move in with their romantic partner while staying at a *rumah kost*. By maintaining secrecy and avoiding romantic physical intimacy, landlords, parents, or neighbors did not expect more than a platonic relationship, one consistent with culturally accepted practices of female proximity. In comparison, unmarried heterosexual couples or

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daripada dijitak sama mama, digini-gini. Ya, pakai aja, karena aku gak ngerasa rugi juga, sih. *Kristina*: Maksudnya kalau di rumah, kamu pakai jilbab, apa lagi, pakai yang lengan-lengan panjang? *Chien*: Iya, semua panjang, gitu, beda kayak di sini. Pokoknya kontraslah udah ya 180 derajat. takutnya nanti tetangga ngomong yang ABC-ABC.”

<sup>315</sup> Unmarried women were regularly reckoned as “dependent daughter” whose virginity and moral reputation needed to be protected resulting in restrictions of movement, company, and autonomy (Bennett 2005:28).

<sup>316</sup> Original: “Enggak apa-apa, kan cuma kayak temen tho? [...] Aku dirumah enggak punya temen. Kan apa, saudaraku semua kan cowok semua, aku tinggal yang cewek, kan Nuri kan ak suruh ketempatku biar nemenin aku di rumah. [...] Kan kalau orang tuaku, ‘temennya Bayu, buat nemenin Bayu di rumah’, gitu.”

friends of the opposite sex rarely had the possibility of staying over or living together, because of dominant cultural and religious norms dictating the importance of sexual abstinence before marriage.<sup>317</sup>

As should be clear from these examples, *femme's* gender expressions were fluid and shifting because of perceived spatial power structures, while remaining within the realm of what was socially understood as femininity. What, then, of *butchi's* negotiations in the family realm?

*Being judged against images of femininity: Butchis gendered negotiations with female masculinity*  
For *butchi* the family was an equally important frame of reference where femininity was both valued and cultivated. As they grew up, they negotiated family norms, often attaining levels of autonomy more usually granted to sons than to daughters. Nevertheless, norms of femininity remained familial reference points.

Some *butchi* influenced the dynamics in their family sphere through their long-term masculine performance, embodying an intelligible masculinity in the family. This ensured that their families grew accustomed to their 'atypical' daughter and accepted them.<sup>318</sup> Reno, for example, could not recall having been curtailed by her parents in terms of gendered appearance, and her scope of mobility was never strictly limited to the house. When I asked if she liked to play outside, she recalled:

*Yes, every day. After coming home from school, I practiced reciting al Qur'an, afterwards I was free, I was allowed to play until the beginning of maghrib [evening prayer at sunset], then I had to come home and study. So, for playing my parents never forbid me, I was free to play what I wanted.*<sup>319</sup> (Interview Reno, 27.08.2014)

However, a primarily masculine gender expression led to friction within the family for many *butchi* growing up, due to *kodrat wanita's* equation of sex with gender. Despite performing masculinity, *butchi* were socialized, judged, and counted as women by their families, who desired that they conform to traditional femininity. Tama, who identified as a trans male when I met him, recalled being socialized into a feminine gender role, evident in the gendered division of tasks and the limited scope of mobility permitted to him:

*I wasn't allowed to participate in many activities. Because my father still believed that Javanese women should be confined to the house and do the domestic work. So, I wasn't*

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<sup>317</sup> While living together (and having sex) was not illegal between two unmarried persons of different sexes in 2014, it was socially heavily frowned upon as a corruption of morality. Despite its legality, cohabitation was becoming more difficult, with landlords often requesting marriage certificates to prevent *zina* or *seks bebas*.

<sup>318</sup> *Femmes* also shaped the space of the family, but through a performance and self-understanding based on femininity, meaning they had a different effect than *butchis*.

<sup>319</sup> Original: "Iya, setiap hari. Pulang sekolah itu, aku belajar ngaji, alquran setelah itu bebas aku bisa main sampai sebelum maghrib setelah itu pulang dan belajar. Jadi kalau untuk main orang tua enggak pernah melarang, main apapun terserah."

*allowed to come home late. So mainly, apart from school, afterwards I had to go home directly and always clean the house. From washing clothes, washing dishes, sweeping, mopping, all that.*<sup>320</sup> (Interview Tama, 12.08.2014)

Most *butchi* I interviewed recalled incidents in which their parents, noting an absence of femininity in their presentation, began to actively encourage feminine traits as a practical gendered reference point. *Butchi* were asked to adopt feminine clothing, to let their hair grow long, to observe the manners or hygienic practices appropriate to women, or to move and behave with more feminine refinement, grace, and diligence. Such regulative comments and practices often started in childhood, and continued over the years. Yuni recalled:

*Yes, she [the mother] tried it slowly, if she bought clothes, she always bought skirts, feminine shirts, but I never wanted to wear them, I felt more pleasant in shorts and a tank top. [...] My father stopped to buy me feminine clothes, but not my mother.*<sup>321</sup> (Interview Yuni, 14.09.2014)

Yuni and Tama's quotes show how parents were invested in regulating expressions of gender and directing them towards feminine forms. For *femmes* compliance with the rules of femininity was demanded, for *butchis*, at least, an approximation of it. These efforts were only partly in vain, because even though *butchis* still preferred a masculine expression, the practices trained their ability to also perform femininity.

The judgement of *butchis* against social ideas of femininity equipped them with the ability to perform at least some aspects of femininity when necessary. This knowledge of the body formed over years of social and spatial participation, was retrievable and un/consciously usable when compliance became necessary, such as in the family context. Gender expressions could be varied strategically when outside of spaces shared with LGBT+ friends; for example, no *butchi* smoker would smoke tobacco cigarettes in the presence of elder family members. Cigarette smoking, a masculine act, was frowned upon for women, especially when done publicly. When living at home, *butchi* completed the household tasks for women, like cooking food or water or cleaning. They also accepted being addressed by their feminine birth names and by female forms of address. Some described adopting a quieter and more diligent persona as compared to how they would be when with their friends, to avoid bringing discomfort to their family. Most Muslim *butchi* did not wear a headscarf on a daily basis, because it was associated with strong piety and perceived as an explicitly gendered symbol of (religious) femininity. Some *butchi* who had left

<sup>320</sup> Original: "Aku gak boleh ikut banyak kegiatan. karena bapakku masih percaya bahwa perempuan jawa itu harus tinggal di rumah jadi melakukan pekerjaan domestik itu, terus aku gak boleh pulang malam. Itu jadi dulu pokoknya selain pulang sekolah aku harus langsung pulang dan harus selalu ini, bersih bersih rumah. Dari cuci baju, cuci piring, nyapu, ngepel itu semuanya."

<sup>321</sup> Original: "Ya pelan-pelan dia coba kalau dia beli baju, dia selalu belikan rok, baju-baju feminin gitu, tapi aku enggak pernah mau pakai, aku lebih nyaman dengan celana dalam dan kaos kutang saja. [...] papaku berhenti membelikan aku baju feminin, tapi tidak dengan mamaku."

home nevertheless wore a *jilbab* for family visits, because in their families, understandings of appropriate gender expression were oriented around the religious *mubrim* rules.<sup>322</sup> Other *butchi* declared they wore a headscarf either on special occasions or in specific spaces. *Butchi* Ryo was an exception – she wore a *jilbab* more regularly and only took it off when participating in specific spaces. Ryo directly connected this change to the expectations connected to each space: “I am able to adjust, where I can behave like this, where I can... I can know the situation and conditions. What should I do, what do I have to do.”<sup>323</sup> Concerning her office, she explained: “They know that I returned from the *Umroh*<sup>324</sup> so I am honoring that, so to look pious I just wear the *jilbab*”<sup>325</sup> (both quotes Interview Ryo, 22.08.2014). Taking off the *jilbab* also met expectations that she perceived in activist LGBT+ spaces. In such spaces, she abstained from the *jilbab* because she feared ridicule as a *jilbab*-wearing *butchi*. In LGBT+ spaces as elsewhere, normative assumptions have been created through practice, with space influencing the fluid and shifting performance of gender. This is why adaptations of gender performance occurred there, also.

#### *Negotiating gender and marriage*

Ryo was in her late twenties, living in Yogyakarta. Frenzy hailed from Surakarta (Solo), a small city some 65 kilometers from Yogyakarta, and was in her early forties. When I met and worked with them, both self-identified as *butchis*. In this section, I analyze how Ryo’s preferred gender performance shaped her imagination on marriage, and how marriage influenced Frenzy’s gender performance. Marriage, as these examples show, is one of the most important cornerstones in the Indonesian construction of gender, and has many ramifications for gender performance.<sup>326</sup>

In my first meetings with Ryo, I perceived her as masculine, but in her interview with me, she enriched this image. Her childhood had involved socialization into masculine behavior. Later on, her parents tended to invoke femininity more often. She concluded: “The older I got, they let me have two sides. I can be like a boy or a girl”<sup>327</sup> (Interview Ryo, 22.08.2014). Later on, she applied this ability strategically and in response to what she sensed was expected or possible in different spaces. I

<sup>322</sup> See Chapter 3.3 for details of *mubrim*.

<sup>323</sup> Original: “Karena aku bisa menyesuaikan e di mana bisa berperilaku kayak gini, di mana aku bisa ... tahu situasi dan kondisinya gitukan. Aku harus bagaimana, aku harus gimana.”

<sup>324</sup> The pilgrimage to Mecca, the *Hajj*, is one of the five pillars of Islam. Every believing Muslim should undertake it. However, the *Hajj* is very expensive, and there are very long waiting times due to a quota system by Saudi Arabia. Therefore, many Muslims undertake first the more easily accessible and less expensive *Umroh*, the ‘little’ pilgrimage, as a prelude to the *Hajj*. See Lücking (2014).

<sup>325</sup> Original: “Mereka tahunya aku habis umroh, jadi ya aku menghormati gitukan jadi biar kelihatan alim kayak gitulah, jadi ya udah aku pakai jilbab gitu.”

<sup>326</sup> For elaborations of how the topic of marriage is negotiated in general, see Blackwood (2010) and Boellstorff (2003, 2005b).

<sup>327</sup> Original: “Semakin lama mereka kayak apa ya e membiarkan aku memang ada mempunyai dua sisi. Jadi bisa seperti cowok bisa seperti cewek.”

had only met her in masculine or androgynous attire, but she regularly wore feminine clothing, a sign of her ability to conform her gender expression to social expectations.

Masculine expression gave her independence and freedom, without opposing femininity. She worked, met friends as she pleased, and lived by herself. As a woman in her late twenties, receptive to expectations, marriage still concerned her – and her family kept bringing it up. As a *lesbi/an* she was not fond of the topic, as Indonesia does not permit homosexual marriage. In her mother's eyes, only a man would be an acceptable choice. Ryo considered her options. Like other family members, she imagined a marriage “for status”. Previously she had had a relationship with a *lesbi/an* trans woman, whom she had introduced to her parents. During the meeting, her girlfriend pretended to be a guy. “S/he was rather feminine, so my parents thought, ‘Oh, our child likes them like that and not real guys.’ [...] Immediately they said, ‘Well, if you like guys like that, that is fine, as long as it is a guy’”<sup>328</sup> (Interview Ryo, 22.08.2014).

Ryo used her imagination of marriage to negotiate the expectations placed on her by family and society. Lacking the possibility of gay marriage, she thought of forms not only possible, but to her advantage considering her same-sex desire and autonomy. Likewise, she took her parents' expectations, with their essentialist logic of sex and gender, into account. The logical conclusion was that she could be with either a gay man, or a trans woman. In her calculation, marriage with a gay man would uphold a public image that showed a man married to a woman, with the advantage that he would probably not expect sexual relations. Marriage to a trans woman might mean actually falling in love, as both would be women. Even if this did not transpire, still, sexual relations would not be expected, and Ryo would be in a formalized relationship with a woman. Therefore, she might still have the chance to express masculinity on a regular basis, as her partner would provide the feminine aspect others would expect in a relationship. Crucially, a partner who was a ‘strange man’ in her parents' eyes would at least *be* a man in the perception of society, and therefore an acceptable marriage partner. In both these constellations, she might continue having *lesbi/an* relationships, even though she would be formally married.

Both routes to attaining the status of ‘married’ represented creative, agentive negotiations of societal norms. Ryo appropriated the cultural norm of marriage for women to create a niche for herself in which she could embrace her desire, and flexibly perform gender beyond femininity. In this imaginary, the couple would take advantage of the social notion that trans women were not actual women; Ryo's parents, even if not enthusiastic, would recognize such a marriage as appropriate and close enough to ‘normal’.

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<sup>328</sup> Original: “Dia rada ngondek gitu terus orangtuaku menangkap e oh ‘anak sukanya yang kayak gini po daripada yang cowok tulen’ [...]. E langsung orangtuaku bilang ‘kalau kamu memang suka cowok yang seperti itu ya gak papa yang penting cowok’ ehe.”

Such redefinitions of legitimate marriage had unexpected and – from the perspective of national politics – unintended consequences with regard to the lived form of family (see, e.g. Blackwood 2010:138–140; Graham Davies 2010:125; Webster 2006, 2008:28). By negotiating the norms shaping their specific positionality, LT+ modified them by combining regular and irregular aspects of family life. Some long-standing *lesbi/an* relationships, for example, corresponded with the outside world's normative, desired, and national image of the family: a masculine partner, with male responsibilities, and a feminine partner with a domestic role, sometimes living together as a family with children from previous marriages. The partners, in such cases, leaned on the concept of marriage and, as described by Blackwood (2010:115) and Wieringa (2007), called themselves *mami/papi* or *isteri/suami* (wife/husband). The aspects of their relationship that were not corresponding to the national concept of marriage were not necessarily obvious to outsiders.

Frentzy was a *butchi* in her early to mid-forties when I met her in 2014. Ryo's fluid form of gender expression was structured and enabled by long-term practice involving the interplay of perception and space. In contrast, Frentzy's gender fluidity took the form of long-term alternations of her gendered expression and was strongly defined by a temporal factor. She had, since her youth, preferred and performed masculinity, much to the disapproval of her parents, but masculinity had not always been a constant in her gender performance. Until her late twenties, she had been in several serious same-sex relationships. She had become frustrated by their secrecy, their lack of access to respectability (social and religious), and by the disappointment of her family as she remained unmarried. When her *lesbi/an* partner at that time ended the relationship to enter a heterosexual marriage, Frentzy rethought the possibility of marriage on her own. Her family welcomed this change of perspective, as they had insisted on marriage since her father's death in the late nineties. At that time, she had successfully scared off any candidates presented to her. Over the years, the pressure from her mother had increased, as she was concerned for the family's social reputation<sup>329</sup> and economic future.<sup>330</sup> After being presented with more suitable candidates Frentzy got married, in the early 2000s, to a man she had briefly dated during school to test if she was 'really' a *lesbi/an*. "In the end, when they pressured me to get married, I accepted. Even though it was not from the heart. Only half-convinced"<sup>331</sup> (Interview Frentzy, 23.08.2014).

In this marriage, Frentzy's husband was 'the man' and she was 'the woman'. As a result, social notions of gender roles in marriages and families entered the rela-

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<sup>329</sup> Married mothers are considered superior to unmarried and childless women, see Bennett (2005:27).

<sup>330</sup> People from different social classes may experience differing forms of pressure or effects from marriage. Depending on the family's position, marriage can impact on economic status or social standing, see e.g. Dzuhayatin (2004:257); Smith-Hefner (2020:72–82).

<sup>331</sup> Original: "Akhirnya waktu mereka mendesak untuk menikah, akhirnya aku meng-iya-kan. Padahal itu gak, bukan dari hati. Setengah jalan aja."

tionship and her gender performance changed. Previously, Frentzy had led an independent and self-sufficient life as she had moved out to live with her *lesbi/an* partner in Jakarta. Now, back in Surakarta, she was a wife, responsible for the household and, later, for the children.

Her husband took over realms she herself had occupied in her previous relationships. Working fulltime, he was responsible for the household's economic welfare. As she had been honest with him about her *lesbi/an* identification when they were newlyweds, he became "paranoid" she might cheat on him and secretly return to her ex-girlfriend while he was at work. In local cultural understandings of gender, husbands have the right to regulate the autonomy and mobility of a woman depending on her perceived faithfulness (Bennett 2005:29). Driven by his fear, he restricted Frentzy's scope of mobility and locked her in. As a wife, she became relegated to the boundaries of the house. When after six months, he stopped locking her in the house, the boundaries of the feminine and associate physical restrictions were maintained. "I was taken along. The point is, I had to be accompanied by him. When I stepped out alone, I was already searched for after five minutes"<sup>332</sup> (Interview Frentzy, 23.08.2014). It was common for Muslim women in particular to be accompanied by a male guardian in public (Bennett 2005:28), but for Frentzy, though Muslim herself, such surveillance was anything but common. Frentzy described how she, after enduring domestic violence, began to limit her social behavior when she went out with him. She became more introverted and ignored friends out of fear of his distrust, especially friends she knew from the *lesbi/an* community. By adopting introverted behavior in public, she could avoid suspicious questions and the 'wrong' sort of attention.

After their first child was born, their gender roles solidified. She stayed home with their child while he went to work. At night he might go out to meet friends, have fun, or get drunk. She struggled with the whole situation not only because of the violence, but also because of the gender role she was expected to fulfill. These conflicted with her *butchi* self-image, which in turn impeded his self-image as husband:

*It's called being a housewife. That was already very much an inner conflict. My way was, well, I am a butchi. [...] This means my behavior and my perspective is similar to a man. So, he was tough, and I was tough. He always said, 'regular people, regular girls are obedient.' I was not. When I didn't want to, I said so. 'No!' Well, that is where he apprehended, I fought back. That is where we clashed... and clashed again. Always when I lost, I tried to start the conversation with him to find our problem to improve the situation. Because it is also called living together and repeatedly clashing is uncomfortable. So sometimes I tried to start the clarification, but when in discussion, it usually ended in another*

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<sup>332</sup> Original: "Jadi aku diajak, pokoknya keluar itu harus sama dia. Kalau aku keluar sendiri, ya, paling lima menit udah dicari."



*argument. Then I started to withdraw myself. No more mediating talks. I was tired. Important was [that] I care for my kids. Teach my kids, nurse and foster my kids. Healthy, nothing more. If you [referring to the husband] come home, just eat. If you want to eat out, fine by me. [...] I cook like this, if you like it ok, if you don't, find something yourself.*<sup>333</sup>  
(Interview Frentzy, 23.08.2014)

This quote illustrates several key points. Despite adapting to different facets of the expectation placed upon her as a wife, Frentzy did not completely abandon her *butchi* behavior. Her role as a wife included cooking, caring for the kids, mediating, and presenting herself as reserved in public. Still, both spouses recognized that she was no 'regular' wife, as parts of her masculine Self persisted. Her husband considered this a lack of obedience, inconsistent with her role. As a wife and mother, it was self-evidently her duty to subordinate herself and provide him and the children with food and care. As the last sentences of the quote demonstrate, her willingness to compromise and to indulge in this feminine role collapsed. She was no longer willing to strain herself for her husband, prioritizing her children instead. This expression of indifference is an almost radical affront for an Indonesian housewife, especially for one without an income.

In the absence of other viable roles, she fulfilled the expectations placed upon her up to a certain point, although not out of personal preference but in an effort to appear coherent. When asked if she worked during her marriage, she answered: "No, not at all. I wasn't allowed to do that by my husband. [...] Wives stay home and take care of the children"<sup>334</sup> (Interview Frentzy, 23.08.2014). Thus, while she had previously worked as a guard and in a factory, during her marriage she had to submit to a role that was culturally assigned to her biological sex.

Her public presentation also started to conform to images of appropriate female appearance within the context of a marriage. I asked her if she was still tomboyish during her marriage:

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<sup>333</sup> Original: "Namanya udah ibu rumah tangga, kan. Pokoknya penuh, penuh inilah, pe apa perang batin banget. Po meneh kan kondisine aku kan butchis. [...] Ini maksudnya e perilaku atau tingkahku seperti ini terus pandanganku wis itu kan cowok kayak gitu kan. Jadi ini sama cowok. Dia keras aku keras. Nah, (ga jelas) dia ngomong apa mungkin kalau orang-orang biasa kan cewek-cewek gitu yang umumnya itu kan nurut. Kalau aku enggak. Kalau memang gak gak aku mau ya aku bilang. Gak ah. Nah itu di situ dia pikir aku nglawan. Gitu. Ya akhirnya ya udah bentrok terus. Bentrok terus akhirnya apa. Setiap aku ngalah gitu ngajak ngobrol masalah apa gitu, biar agak enakan dikitlah masa namanya hidup satu rumah kita mau bentrok terus kan gak enak. Kadang-kadang aku memutuskan untuk ya udah ngobrol deh. Tapi kalau sedang membahas sesuatu itu ujung-ujungnya ribut. Akhirnya aku mau menarik diri. Wis, dah gak ada bahas-bahasan lagi. Gak ada obrol-obrolan lagi. Sak bosene. Yang penting aku ngrawat bocah. Didik bocah. Ngurusin bocah. Sehat. Gak ada apa-apa. 'Kamu kalau pulang makan, makan aja. Kalau kamu makan di luar, silakan. [...] Aku masak seperti ini ni kamu cocok makan, kamu mau, kamu gak cocok, silakan nyari di luar.'"

<sup>334</sup> Original: "Gak, gak kerja sama sekali. Sama suami itu tidak dibolehkan. [...] Istri di rumah saja ngurus anak."

*I wasn't allowed to. [...] my husband did not allow it. For example, I chose a shirt like this one when he wanted to buy me clothes. He seldom agreed. [...] He did not like it; he did not allow it. So, he, well I really had to change my style of clothing. And also, my behavior. [...] [Be] like women are generally. Wearing a housedress at home.*<sup>335</sup> (Interview Frentzy, 23.08.2014)

Due to her status as a wife, Frentzy was confronted with novel expectations of femininity, ones absent from her previous, *butchi*, articulation of gender. Over the six years of her marriage, her performance of gender gradually changed: She negotiated that performance by balancing between what was familiar to her and what was expected by society, her husband, and (partly) by herself.

The aspects of mobility, clothing, public behavior, division of labor, decision-making power, and dependency, collectively constitute the articulation and understanding of gender in society. Frentzy described changes in all these aspects when marriage changed her gender performance as situated practice. Gender appeared as a clearly relational construct whose form and content were not exclusively based on personal preferences. Frentzy's case highlights the rigidity of social structure when personal understandings and performances differed from social ideas. Frentzy shaped the marital gendered space through her practical non-obedience, but her husband powerfully cultivated prevalent social norms, trying to make her behavior 'normal'. After the sudden death of her husband, Frentzy slowly changed her gender performance back to masculinity. When I met her in 2014, she was again in a same-sex relationship and had recaptured her *butchi* role. As a widowed mother, she had fulfilled social and familial expectations to marry and give birth to children, thereby reducing the regulation of her expression of female masculinity. Both Frentzy and Ryo's examples exemplify gender fluidity, but in different ways. Where Ryo's gender fluidity was situational, that of Frentzy was a processual, long-term fluidity in gender performance, one conditioned by the persuasive power of marital gender images translated into practice.

Understanding gender as a multivocal, relational, multi-spatial, and temporal practice allows us to grasp the fluidity of gender as it appears in both of these examples. Ryo and Frentzy's gender performances – one situational, one long-term – crossed boundaries and alternated between femininity and masculinity. This fluidity, extending beyond mono-gender fluidity, becomes apparent when we consider space and temporality in addition to changing external circumstances. For most people, such gender fluidity is unimaginable. Critics of Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) assert that she denies the body as either material base of gender, or as the canvas on which gender is inscribed (e.g. Duden 1993). They argue that gender cannot be put on and taken off like a piece of clothing. For most of us, this may well be the

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<sup>335</sup> Original: "Gak diperbolehkan. [...] Suami, suami itu tidak memperbolehkan, a, umpamanya aku memilih baju seperti ini, misalnya dia membelikan baju aku, dia jarang-jarang menyetujui. [...] Dia gak suka, dia gak boleh. Jadi dia, aku harus bener-bener yang berubah dari, dari cara berpakaian. Dari cara istilahnya, berperilaku. [...] Seperti umumnya perempuan-perempuan. Di rumah pakai daster."

case, but in the following sections I will counter this criticism through examples from the field. These examples reveal that while fluidity may be inherent to gender because of its performative character, it is also conditioned by structural pressures and the negotiation of societal norms.

### 5.1.2 Negotiating gender in public space

In the vignette above, several men expressed disapproval of the nighttime public presence of young female family members, using the universalizing term ‘daughters’. If ‘daughters’ were outside at night, this would cause some form of trouble. The words connected the gendered usage of space in intersection with time: The mobility of the *lesbi/an* group at night was a transgression of an obvious part of the cultural canon. In the following, I concentrate on the intersections of gender, religion, space and time, their practical implications for LT+ mobility in public space, and how they were negotiated in practice.

Due to the influence of the *kodrat* and Muslim *mubrim* understandings of social spaces, the utilization of these spaces by men and women are differently shaped on both a structural and a symbolic level. Public spaces are defined as male, reflecting the intertwining of patriarchal cultural and religious ideas; the domestic sphere, the house, and the family are the responsibility of women.

While the physical mobility and autonomy of unmarried daughters was less restricted during childhood, limitations became more pronounced around the ages of ten to twelve years, especially after menarche. Unmarried women, especially if Muslim, are usually accompanied by a male family member in public, and should be home in the evening (Blackwood 2010:73; Smith-Hefner 2020:101, 105). Yuni explained the ideal for women: “From the evening prayer on women should normally be in the house”<sup>336</sup> (Conversation record, 10.08.2014). Unmarried young women are supervised at or close to home because of the “social regulation of female sexuality” which protects their reputation and morality and gives them little opportunity to transgress (Bennett 2005:28). Sons, under the assumption that they are able to protect themselves, are granted a high degree of autonomy in decision making and public mobility, regardless of the time of day (Bennett 2005:28; Blackwood 2010:73; Smith-Hefner 2020:101, 105). Men’s ‘natural’ spatial mobility and ability to handle independence is often exemplified by the Javanese maxim that men have a ‘long stride’ (*laki-laki panjang langkah*) (Smith-Hefner 2020:101), an aphorism Yuni also mentioned. To her, it symbolized the different positions of men and women, not only in terms of mobility:

*My mother and grandma always said: ‘Don’t equate yourself with men, because they have a long stride, they can do everything with women, whether in marriage or in the family.’*

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<sup>336</sup> Original: “Dari sholat maghrib perempuan biasanya harus berada di rumah.”

*You're just a woman, what can you do? [...] Women who dare [to equate themselves] with men will be punished by nature or God.*<sup>337</sup> (Conversation record, 10.08.2014)

These positions structured the mobility of women (especially feminine women) in public space. During the day and early evening, women or women's groups occupied public spaces in Yogyakarta, spending their time together in *warungs*, shopping malls, or cafés. This changed tremendously at night. From about 10 pm onwards women appeared in public spaces exclusively in male company – with husbands, brothers, male friends, partners, or in mixed groups. The friendship group of Andre, Anju, Selly, Kesi, Bayu and Nuri were an exception: Cis-male friends never accompanied the group, not even in the evenings, but at that time *femme's* participation was also less frequent.

Mostly *butchi* had cis-male heterosexual friends. However, inviting them to hang out with the *lesbi/an* group could be seen as inappropriate, because it could disturb the space for others who might doubt their ability and willingness to refrain from stereotyping or enacting misogynistic scripts. *Femmes* might also avoid bringing cis-men because *butchis* could perceive them as competitors. Then *femmes* might have to put up with accusations that they were flirting, bisexual,<sup>338</sup> or not real *lesbi/ans*.<sup>339</sup>

It was unusual for *femmes* to travel on their own or to spend the night outside their home, free of parental supervision. Access to public places where *lesbi/ans* met was, for unaccompanied *femmes*, complicated.<sup>340</sup> They rarely had the permission or much experience of moving alone in public spaces, and tended to be insecure (see also Webster 2008:21).

A reason for the restriction of mobility for women was often this 'liability' of heterosexuality, which imposes ideas of purity on female bodies for fear of loss of virginity and pregnancy. While *femmes* were spared the 'liability' of becoming pregnant because of their same-sex attraction, they were still affected by the same discursive image, because their desire was invisible due to their desired identification and the societal assumption of heterosexuality. Therefore, they received the same familial treatment as unmarried heterosexual women. For *femme* Nuri, this restrictive treatment relaxed when she took up employment.

<sup>337</sup> Original: "Ibuku dan nenekku dulu selalu bilang 'jangan suka berani sama laki-laki karena mereka panjang langkah, mereka bisa berbuat apa saja dengan perempuan. Kamu cuman perempuan, bisa apa? [...] Kalau berani sama laki-laki nanti kualat'."

<sup>338</sup> Bisexuality was heavily frowned upon in many Indonesian *lesbi/an* circles. Bisexuals were imagined to be traitors to the *lesbi/an* cause, being unable (it was argued) to decide where they actually belong and prone to leave their partners for heterosexual marriage.

<sup>339</sup> See also Blackwood (2010:136) and Webster (2006:6) concerning this accusation. The view that masculine lesbians are 'real' lesbians and feminine lesbians are not is not limited to Indonesia, see e.g. Ciasullo (2001).

<sup>340</sup> This even applied to Chien, who lived in a *rumah kost* and was hence under less family supervision. Her mobility was restricted at nighttime, as her all-female *kost* had a curfew afterwards locking the gate. See also Webster (2006:6) and Boellstorff (2003:222) about restricted access and *femme* participation.

*Previously, before I began to work, I was always scolded. But now I work and I have money on my own, not once I was scolded, what is important is that I know how to behave myself, and well it is not possible that I get pregnant by accident because I am with a girl.*<sup>341</sup>  
(Interview Bayu and Nuri, 22.08.14)

Nuri's job reflected her sense of responsibility, so her family recognized that she knew 'how to behave herself'. This encompassed self-conscious behavior appropriate to the position of an unmarried daughter, while also expressing a desired identification that prevented damage to her moral image. Work gave Nuri not only a certain degree of financial independence from her family, but also a legitimate reason to extent her scope of mobility in public.

*Butchi's* performativity of masculinity, in fact, increased parents' confidence that they knew how to behave themselves and decreased any fears. Still, the obvious transgression of gender-based norms in public could lead to problems for *butchis*. This led them to show sensitivity in assessing potential risks involved in open transgressions that might cause gossip. This allowed them to deploy strategies to minimize trouble for their family, while leaving their mobility and masculinity (at best) unaffected. Andre explained:

*Actually, it is problematic, because I am a girl and, in my village, if a girl comes home late at night it is not good. It doesn't befit women – then the neighborhood talks. But what should I do if I like to be outside? [...] As far as they [the parents] know I'm going and sleeping at a school friend's place, their kost, near the campus, so they think I am studying. But actually, in such cases I sleep at a lesbian friend's place.*<sup>342</sup> (Interview Andre, 19.08.2014)

When, on several evenings during *Ramadhan*, I joined the *lesbi/an* group of Andre, Anju, Selly, Kesi, Bayu and Nuri while they sat together, smoking and drinking a bit of alcohol, the *butchi* confirmed their masculine gender among themselves by calling each other "Bro". Even waiters addressed them as men. While this was obviously not appropriate behavior for women, the expression of masculinity enabled *lesbi/ans* to circumvent the rules that usually restricted women's mobility. They 'didn't need' men – the *butchi* performance of masculinity legitimized the appropriation of public space by *lesbi/ans* at night. *Butch's* masculinity and self-assurance could also enable *femme's* participation because *butchi* picked them up, accompanied them, and made sure they had a suitable and safe space to sleep later on.

<sup>341</sup> Original: "Dulu, pas sebelum kerja selalu dimarahi tapi sekarang aku udah kerja, punya uang sendiri, gak pernah dimarahin. Yang penting bisa jaga diri, lagian gak mungkin hamil toh kan aku sama cewek."

<sup>342</sup> Original: "Ya sebenarnya ada masalah, karena kan aku cewek kalau di desaku kan kalau cewek itu pulang malem kan enggak baik ya. Pasti bakalan jadi pembicaraan kampung, seperti itu, tapi mau gimana lagi kalau aku sukanya main di luar. [...] Setahu mereka kan aku pergi dan menginap di tempat temenku kuliah, ke kos, dekat kampus seperti itu jadi tahunya mereka aku belajar seperti itu. Tapi sebenarnya ak menginap di tempat teman L, teman main."

As shown here, while *butchis* and *femmes* were both culturally defined females, the difference in their gendered performance produced different challenges for their mobility in public space. The following section analyzes how gender was implied, made and negotiated in semi-public contexts when the bodily sex was known.

### 5.1.3 Gender at work and at educational institutions

Workplaces are structured by state regulation, the economic system, and the organization of labor. Educational institutions are regulated by state policies, school formats, and ideological orientation. Both are somewhat semi-public spaces, meaning that they are not private and participation goes beyond personal affiliation. In both workplaces and educational spaces, however, LT+ encountered structural requirements and ideas about gender that they could not ignore. As children and adolescents, their sex was known to their schools and required specific clothing and behavior. Workplaces were sometimes more flexible, and even if dependence on paid work was an issue, it was easier to bend regulations or change jobs if necessary. Practices at work and within educational institutions varied tremendously. This had strong implications for the negotiation and expression of gender.

Many of the Muslim-identifying *butchi* and *femme* I interviewed had attended schools affiliated with their religion. In these schools, girls usually had to wear school uniforms consistent with religious dress codes, which mainly prescribed that clothing should conceal the parts of the female body that cannot be seen according to Islamic law (*menutup aurat*).<sup>343</sup> At the very least, the headscarf had to be worn in religious classes.<sup>344</sup> While *femmes* may not have favored Muslim dress themselves, this regulation usually did not contradict their gender performance and self-understanding. Many *butchi*, in comparison, had experienced feelings of discomfort when wearing a headscarf, skirts, and long clothing while at school. Still, it was a common experience of feminine expression for *butchi*, and a training in the performance of religious femininity.

Occupations considered typical for women or which demanded the wearing of feminine clothing were unproblematic for *femmes* but were mostly avoided by *butchi*. In Indonesia, especially in urban regions, wearing a uniform is needed for many occupations that include promotional or customer service activities. In state offices, grocery stores and bakeries, in the security sector, at clubs, in barber shops or salons, formal restaurants, in banks or hotels (especially if it was a chain), employees wear uniforms identifying them as a worker. Such uniforms are usually divided by gender; men wear pants or slacks and a t-shirt or buttoned-down shirt, while women's uniforms are often fitted or feminine. The specifics of the uniforms depend on the context of the workspace. Uniforms worn in a state office are more formal and

<sup>343</sup> A woman's *aurat* ends at the ankles and wrists. While the face is showable, hair pertains to the *aurat* and should be concealed. See Chapter 3.3.

<sup>344</sup> See Smith-Hefner (2020:118–120) for a detailed description of differences in religious education, and treatment and expectations of students by gender in *pesantren* schools and state schools in Java.

modest compared to the uniforms worn in nightclubs. In some contexts, uniforms worn by woman workers evoke images of trustworthiness, modesty, or reliability. In other contexts, such as night clubs, uniforms are at least mildly sexy and highlight feminine parts of the body. This is also the case for occupations such as Sales Promotion Girl (SPG), where women work to promote specific brands.

Some of these jobs are low-paying but accessible, as they do not require higher education or long-term practical training. LT+ persons who cannot access university education or long-term vocational training would become part of the masses of young, unskilled workers. When seeking employment or hoping to be considered suitable for a job, they have to take into account their gender expression, religious piety, as well as the challenges of competitive job-hunting and the constant threat of being easily exchanged or exploited. Some *femme* research participants had worked as SPG, or still did during my research. For them, wearing a revealing uniform, or embody femininity, was not the contradiction of gendered self-understanding that it was for *butchis*.

“Even if the salary in a wear-skirts-job would be higher as in a pants-job, I pick the one with the pants. [...] It is just important it is *halal*”<sup>345</sup> (Interview Anju, 31.07.2014). Here, Anju’s gendered self-understanding intersects with her religious orientation, which – if adhered to – precluded various workspaces. By declining visual references to femininity, she rejected workspaces with gendered uniforms. Her refusal to transgress the realm of *halal* (religiously permissible) further precluded workspaces where *haram* (religiously forbidden) practices were common, such as exposing your body or interacting with *haram* products like alcohol. A non-normative gender expression together with religious considerations impeded the access of *butchi* to workspaces otherwise accessible to unskilled feminine (pious) women. As a result, *butchi* often faced difficulties not only in obtaining a job, but finding a job that paid enough to support their *femme* partner financially, as heterosexual husbands were supposed to. *Butchi* therefore often searched for work either in ‘male’ domains such as security, skilled crafts and trade, or in non-gendered professions such as gastronomy, factory work, or self-employment. Yet, some *butchi* saw their masculinity as a part of their private life – to them it was acceptable or necessary to perform (a higher degree of) femininity at work.

This was the case with Andre, whose hyperfluid performance of gender exceeded the boundaries between the sexes on a daily basis. His example demonstrates the gendered coding of a semi-public space, and its consequences for the negotiations of masculine females. The institutionalized framework Andre moved in demanded femininity *qua* sex, which produced his hyperfluid performance of gender.

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<sup>345</sup> Original: “Biarpun yang pakai rok gajinya lebih tinggi daripada yang pakai celana tapi saya me, me, memilih yang pakai celana. [...] Yang penting halal.”

Andre was 21 years old in 2014 and belonged to the friendship circle of Anju, Selly, Kesi, Bayu and Nuri. He identified himself via the cultural concept of masculinity. To me, his performance and ‘passing’ in the range of maleness was striking.<sup>346</sup> He remembered that from a young age, he happily followed his brothers in their typically boyish activities. Andre wore clothes and adorned himself with other optical markers of gendered, masculine, appearance. He stressed that the feminine clothes he had to wear at school made him feel uncomfortable and restricted his movements. His male performance was usually so impermeable and felt so adequate, that he was shocked and uncomfortable whenever he was ascribed to the female gender. “I am usually called *mas*, almost never *mbak*. If I am referred to as *mbak*, I am shocked and *malu* – how can that person know I am a woman?”<sup>347</sup> (Interview Andre, 19.08.2014). This reflects an internalization and embodiment of gender and emotions in Bourdieu’s (1990b:90) sense. His subjectively, (more) authentically experienced gender identity was masculine/male.<sup>348</sup> Therefore, external attribution to the female gender felt inaccurate, shameful, and almost unbearable. Most *butchi* simply tolerated being mistaken for a man in public, but still preferred to be acknowledged as masculine females. Andre, in comparison, enjoyed the perception of him as a person who unambiguously belonged to the category ‘male’, and actively fostered it.

In his childhood he felt his gender performance was comparatively unregulated by his parents. Nonetheless, the requirements of school included femininity, performed through certain dress and behavior, and he fulfilled these spatially-bound expectations outwardly. By the time he entered high school (SMA/*Sekolah Menengah Atas*) at 15, he noticed a change in his parents’ attention to the gender performance of their only daughter. Andre’s parents began to demand that he adopt femininity, especially his mother. Various efforts to do this included buying feminine clothes, or giving him lessons about his ‘nature and duty’ as a woman by applying the *kodrat wanita* to him. He expressed a sense of loss or even regret towards his ‘incapacity’ to identify with femininity properly, and sorrow for ‘not being able’ to fulfill these parental demands for feminine subjectivation. Concerning this ‘inability’, he stated: “They requested me to wear women’s clothes, to talk like a woman, to walk like a

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<sup>346</sup> When asked, he opted for male pronouns for my written account. I use these in combination with his self-identification as *butchi*. When referring to performed femininity, I temporarily switch to female pronouns, in congruence with the temporal image he wanted to produce.

<sup>347</sup> Original: “Ya, saya sering dipanggil mas daripada dipanggil mbak. Kalau dipanggil mbak pasti saya akan malu. Kenapa dia bisa tahu kalau aku cewek?”

<sup>348</sup> He explained: “My behavior is (like) that of a man and everyone who sees me perceives a man. [...] They also call me as a man, [...] because from my outward appearance there is really nothing womanly to see” (Interview Andre, 19.08.2014).



woman, but I can't, for now I cannot, because that needs a long time"<sup>349</sup> (Interview Andre 19.08.2014).<sup>350</sup>

Andre did perform femininity in several spaces. As a female pupil, he had been obliged to wear a girl's uniform at school. Teachers and students addressed and treated him like a girl. Even though he performed masculinity in those spaces that permitted it, performing a somewhat coherent femininity in educational spaces was a common part of his everyday practice. He neither liked nor identified with it, and therefore did not stress this aspect of his gendered socialization, but he was used to the practices of 'doing' femininity.

This continued even after graduating high school because of his embeddedness in a Javanese family. It is not uncommon for parents to have the last word in deciding the future career path of their (female) offspring (Smith-Hefner 2020:100, 111). Andre's career path, to become a mid-wife and get professionally trained at an Islamic health-school, was also a family decision.

*"At first, I felt forced to become a midwife, but I wanted to make my parents happy because I [had] already disappointed them as a woman. They wanted me to be like a woman, so they wanted me to become a midwife, [...] I would have preferred to work at the police."*<sup>351</sup>  
(Interview Andre, 19.08.2014)

On campus and during the seminars of the religiously-run educational institution, conventional rules of gender presentation for a Muslim formal context applied. The rules of bodily and social comportment were based on the Muslim *muhrim* understanding (see Chapter 3.3). Students wore a school uniform consisting of a long skirt, long-sleeved blouse, and a headscarf. But performing a coherent femininity went beyond following a dress-code:

*Outside of school I am like a man, but on campus, I am like a woman. I look feminine [...] from the uniform, over the behavior, my language changes to cute, even how I walk... I manipulate my whole being.*<sup>352</sup> (Interview Andre, 19.08.2014)

If classmates discussed their relationships with men, Andre joined in and similarly spoke about romantic relationships, without the others suspecting she was talking about relationships with women. Such embodied and linguistic conformity with

<sup>349</sup> Original: "Mereka minta seperti berpakaian seperti perempuan, berbicara seperti perempuan, cara berjalan seperti perempuan, tapi kan tidak bisa, untuk saat ini tidak bisa karena itu membutuhkan waktu yang lama juga."

<sup>350</sup> This statement reveals his implicit knowledge of the practices that 'make gender', as well as of the processual character that accounts for fluidity in the sense of convertibility in relation to time.

<sup>351</sup> Original: "Saya itu terpaksa menjadi bidan karena saya ingin membahagiakan orang tua saya, karena saya belum bisa membahagiakan sebagai perempuan, kan mereka menginginkan aku sebagai perempuan terus orang tua saya menginginkan saya menjadi bidan. [...] sebenarnya saya tu ingin menjadi polisi."

<sup>352</sup> Original: "Kalau di luar kuliah, saya sebagai cowok tapi kalau di dalam kampus, di dalam perkuliahan, aku sebagai cewek. Aku terlihat feminim [...] lewat seragam, lewat perilaku, cara saya bicara njut, cara berjalan saya. Memanipulasi semua keadaan itu."

heteronormative logic was, in his perception, extremely important; it was part of his repertoire of practical secrecy connected to his desired identification. He was afraid of being expelled from school if his out-of-school masculine gender or same-sex desire would become known in the educational space. To minimize this risk, and to hold up his established image, Andre also used a second Facebook profile to communicate with classmates: “In my Campus Facebook I appear as if I were normal and interested in boys. [...] In the photo I wear the *jilbab* and the school uniform”<sup>353</sup> (Interview Andre, 19.08.2014). As if to prove his narrative, Andre opened both profiles on his cell phone and showed the pictures to me during the interview. The differences in their visual articulation of gender was tremendous.<sup>354</sup> After our interview, he commented on his situation:

*In the end, I live two lives. By day I am a nurse in the hospital, I give babies injections and grandmothers their medication. There I look like a good girl. When I get home from work, I step into my other life. I take off the headscarf and the uniform and turn into myself again, a proper butchi, a child of the night.*<sup>355</sup> (Conversation record, 19.08.2014)

In the workspace, Andre unambiguously performed femininity. Through clothes, appropriate bodily behavior, and a congruent Facebook profile she engaged in the creation of a desired identification – a coherent perception of her person as a woman persuasive to classmates and supervisors. Femininity was bound to his job and functional in nature. To him, femininity was a garment that he was able to put on and take off – exactly like a work uniform.

I have shown that Andre had a very precise (if implicit) awareness of the multiple aspects by which others perceived a gendered performance as genuine, coherent, and appropriate. Through his participation in spaces filled with expectations contradictory to his self-identification and consequentially, his long years of training, he was on a practical level extremely skilled. Without changing his self-identification, he had become an expert not only in the general implementation of gender, but also in moving fluidly across gender’s (b)orders and executing abrupt daily shifts in its expression.

The wording ‘to manipulate’ reveals Andre’s evaluation of his masculinity as (more) authentic, although he had mastered the repertoire of femininity. However,

<sup>353</sup> Original: “Kalau di FB yang buat kuliah saya terlihat normal, saya seakan-akan mencintai laki-laki. [...] Di foto saya pakai jilbab, pakai seragam kampus.”

<sup>354</sup> On the campus profile, I saw a smiling, slightly tilted face; the hair covered by a white *jilbab*, the shoulders pulled forward. Here, the performance of femininity was unambiguous and I was impressed. The other profile showed the *butchi* Andre I knew: Tall, lean, and lanky, sitting relaxed with space-occupying spread legs on a heavy motorcycle. He wore jeans and a red T-shirt, was short-haired and smiled amiably.

<sup>355</sup> Original: “Jadi, aku itu mempunyai perilaku dua, ganda perilaku ya. Selama sehari, ak bidan, menyuntik bayi, memberi obat pada nenek. Ak terlihat seperti cewek baik. Tapi kalau setelah pulang kuliah udah lepas jilbab udah lepas seragam, jadilah diriku sendiri, butchi. Butchi sejati, anak malam.”

neither his gender performance or gender fluidity were independent of the spatialized power hierarchies that structured spaces by defining their gender content. In the space of school, Andre was classified by her bodily sex and its associated gender performance. Meeting the demands of femininity seemed more important in school than in the family, where the construction of space occurred to a greater extent through negotiations between family members. In school, however, interactively produced power structures are supported by institutional regulations. Andre perceived these as directive, and concluded that only a feminine presentation would be safe. If he were to be expelled, his parents would most likely be informed. This would probably result a new disappointment for his parents, already burdened by Andre's incapacity to meet the standards of femininity. Additionally, this could jeopardize the family's good name and his future prospects. His loyalty to his family encouraged "strategic compromise" (Blackwood 2010:162) in the form of his space-specific performances of femininity, which ensured his education. However, loyalty and compromise produced friction between two important aspects of his identification. For him, gender fluidity was not only a strategic compromise between identifications of importance to him, but also an effect of the friction between his masculinity and the expectations of his family.

Andre was able to 'do' femininity, but unable to self-identify or exclusively embody femininity, as parents and society required for those they considered women. Far from being a 'natural quality' of his sexed body, Andre's femininity was practiced for some time of the day in specific spaces in the interest of coherence. Femininity was a requirement of his job (a moment when in contact with 'the state') and aided his goal of graduation. It also functioned as an aspect of a desired identification, as it guarded Andre's socially marginalized self-identifications in these spaces.

In my understanding, Andre could enact this functional fluidity for two main reasons. Firstly, Andre had participated in spaces structured by the nation-state, which required the intelligible articulation of femininity, since starting school. He was experienced and knew how to vary his posture, his walk, and modulate the content of his language or voice, so that others would identify him as a (heterosexual) woman. Secondly, the obligatory uniform he had to wear at work and in school provided contextually familiar symbols of femininity. The headscarf was especially pivotal, as it concealed his boyish haircut. However, only the combination of all these aspects created the desired, feminine effect. Without a change in posture and voice, he might have seemed as if he was a man in disguise; without the clothes associated with women, counterparts might have read him as a feminine (gay) male, which might have led to homophobic ostracism. Therefore, the successful performance of femininity was directly connected to the uniform – a costume he was able to put on and (importantly) take off again when leaving spaces requiring this practice.

Female masculinity could hamper access to employment, as Andre's example shows. Even if it didn't, it could become a workplace topic, creating a need for negotiation. For example in the case of Frentzy, who worked in the security sector,

her female masculinity drew attention in the workplace. She took an approach of ‘educational mediation’ with co-workers who deprecated her gender expression but who were generally aware of her desire and *butchi* identification (see Chapter 5.2). On one occasion she, her colleagues, and their male boss were invited to a wedding. Even before the celebration, she was asked what she was going to wear. Her masculine dress style consisting of a batik shirt and long trousers became a point of discussion. “Sometimes they want to see me wearing a dress. ‘Ah, better than being forced to do so, I don’t come at all, boss’”<sup>356</sup> (Interview Frentzy, 23.08.2014). Such requests are not coercion-based, but instead rely on subtle practices of criticism, correction, and reward. As such, they can be theoretically understood as mechanisms enforcing or at least supporting the standard view of gender, even if they lack that explicit intention. The ‘correction’ of Frentzy’s doing gender may have been conveyed in playful tone, but it entailed the normative message that it was not ‘suiting’ and would be better once it was ‘improved’.

These examples show how ideals of hegemonic gender expression permeated the workplace, presenting especially *butchi* with challenges arising from their ‘inability’ to meet the criteria of gender intelligibility. *Femmes* and *butchi* negotiated their gender performance in educational institutions and at work, but in the case of *butchi*, these negotiations were more complex and essential, as female masculinity impeded access to work and educational institutions that classified students by sex. Andre and Frentzy’s cases illustrate two different ways of negotiating the gendered structure without merely reproducing it: Andre’s gender performance was profoundly fluid, and oscillated in relation to spatial and social expectations. Frentzy’s gender performance at work was resistant to adaptation, but nevertheless socially negotiated through the drawing of boundaries and doing mediation work.

#### 5.1.4 Summary

The negotiations of gender described in this chapter are often intertwined with the *kodrat*, as most interviewees saw it as influential in their familial socialization. *Femmes*’ performance of gender was rarely problematized by others, since it did not transgress the boundaries of socially understood femininity. As such, the cultural, moral norms concerning femininity were firmly applied to them. After adolescence, they were able to shift their gender expressions as long as they paid due consideration to space with its power structures, and thus established a certain fluidity within their feminine expression. They found ways to practice liberal femininity outside of their neighborhood, or to create ways to increase their mobility.

For *butchis*’, whose families sometimes lamented their lack of femininity, there was often parental instruction in the basics of gender, such as in regard to appearance. In these experiences the mediation of structure came into focus, as well as the

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<sup>356</sup> Original: “Kadang mereka pengen lihat ya pakai gaun gitu. ‘Ah, daripada dipaksain mendingan aku gak datang, pak’.”

character of gender as an active site of collective construction with the body as its core medium. *Butchi* demonstrated comprehension of the different roles they enacted in their families and a willingness to compromise. At the same time, their persuasive masculinity enabled liberties in mobility or residential arrangements. Because of the longtime disciplining of their bodies, they nevertheless gained sensitivity towards the expectations dominating different spaces, and learnt to embody (aspects of) femininity as a situation-based retrievable capability. This did not result in self-identification with femininity. However, successful mastery of femininity combined with the compromises made between their masculinity and other axes of identification led to space-dependent fluidity in gender performance, sometimes transgressing gendered (b)orders.

This capacity for fluidity can be framed as LT+ agency, not in the sense of resistance but in the sense of negotiations that navigated and subverted the cultural context, enabling them to realize personal concepts and wishes despite a restrictive surrounding.

## The aspect of fluidity within theory

These forms of fluidity have significant implications for how we think about gender. In the case of those performing female masculinity, ascribed femininity was to a great extent rejected while the physical sex was accepted as a stable truth by both society and *butchi* participants. Even Andre, who identified his practices as those of a man, regarded his sex as female. Bodies like his *were* essentially female, no matter what reiterative practices they did or what gender expression or identity the individual held. This leads to the question of the place and significance of the body in the local system: *On what basis, through which processes, is the body culturally formed and cultivated?*

Butler does not understand the body as a ‘truth’ of society or person based on a pre-discursive passive nature on which social ideas of gender are inscribed:

*The category of ‘sex’ [...] is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs [...]. In other words, ‘sex’ is an ideal construct, which is forcibly materialized through time. It is not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize ‘sex’ and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms.* (Butler 1993:xi–xii)

Medical discourses that transform a new-born infant from an ‘it’ to a ‘boy’ or ‘girl’ are for Butler a key example of how symbolic systems precede subjects, and bear with them norms of sexual difference and heterosexuality (Butler 1993:xvii). The emergence as a subject is thus not a willful or agentive activity of the self, but a product of constraining social structures, and of their regulatory, sex-differentiating practices.

In contemporary Indonesia, medical discourses' uphold the belief in natural difference between the sexes (Wieringa 2015a). This is further substantiated by the idea of difference and hierarchy between genders, especially in conservative and radical religious discourses (Robinson 2015), as well as the nation state's policy-shaping ideology of heteronormativity (Graham Davies and Bennett 2015:12). Respondents who did not claim male subject positions found their bodies subjected to the symbolic system's logic for the female category, ensuring that they emerged as embodied female subjects. Different perceptions of the bodily self were hardly possible, as non-conformity denied them the status of an intelligible subject.<sup>357</sup> They risked becoming the inside's defining, external, abject Other, since the intelligible inside conceptually needs an outside in order to define its properties (Butler 1993:xiii).

Butler's elaborations on the construction of gender and sex and its forceful production through performativity includes the possibility of gender fluidity in practice. She explains that sex materializes through performative practices and notes that sex was always gender (Butler 1993:xv). In doing so, she distances herself from constructionist perspectives which understand gender as a cultural inscription on a pre-given, naturally sexed body. As soon as nature as the source of the sexed body is relinquished, space for manifold formations of sex and gender opens up, and gender fluidity appears as the outcome of shifting performative practices. Yet, as the intelligibly sexed and gendered individual only arises through its citational engagement with already established norms, the person cannot be understood as a pre-discursive "willful subject" (Butler 1993:xviii) enacting a free choice.<sup>358</sup> As such, I consider conceptualizations of fluidity as either 'free choice' or as being 'beyond known genders' of little use. Butler developed her insights on the basis of philosophical inquiry and not empirical research.<sup>359</sup> The empirical examples of gender performances I have presented here are cases of performances that were, although fluid and oscillating, still aligned with hegemonic formations of sex and gender.

Andre's performance, changing between masculinity and femininity, is not based on free will: Andre exists *by* gender as a subject, namely as female, even though he prefers to perform and identify himself as male. He generated dual gender fluidity transcending (b)orders of gender not because he wanted to or could freely choose any form, but because his status as subject was constrained by the gendered system. This (hyper)fluidity can be well explained by and incorporated into Butler's theory: Andre had, over the years, established a tremendous practical

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<sup>357</sup> This principle often becomes obvious in the social and medical treatment of intersexual people. See Wieringa's (2015a) insights on the treatment of some intersexual people in Indonesia.

<sup>358</sup> She particularly distanced herself from the reception of her theory that alleged its inclusion of a freely choosing subject, on which the criticism that gender cannot be changed 'at will' was also based (Butler 1993:ix).

<sup>359</sup> Therefore, it is at times challenging to find appropriate language to explain empirical findings in relation to her abstract view of the matter. In light of actual empirical practices, parts of her theory appear 'unuttered'.

knowledge of various gender performances, which enabled him to manage the perception of his gender. This ability was neither innate nor the consequence of free will. The dual gender fluidity arose, rather, out of the incongruity of his self-understanding with the external attribution of femininity to his body. The codes and citations of his respective performances clearly referenced the separate local frames of either female or male, and he did not intermix references, nor performed 'beyond gender'. Yet agency, in the sense of Butler's, appears precisely in this hyperfluid form, because although he is produced through his performance, his fluidity allowed him a position as a "lived contestation." As Butler (1993:xxi) puts it: Agency

*"is to be found, paradoxically, in the possibilities opened up in and by that constrained appropriation of the regulatory law, by the materialization of that law, the compulsory appropriation and identification with those normative demands."*

Depending on the space and the space-specific power relations they perceived, interview partners adapted their performance through clothing, body language, language, gendered tasks and behaviors, or a combination thereof. Such variance (often more pronounced and explicit with *butchi* than with *femmes*), reveals gender as fluid in *intrapersonal* practice, as it does not only appear in respondents because of their specifically marginalized position.

Gender fluidity that ranges only within one gender, what I call mono-gender fluidity, was manifest in the practice of many research participants. In this context, *butchi* practices of female masculinity scratched at the borders and shifted them outward to the realm of manhood. To account for this mono-gender fluidity within the performance of gender, it was important to consider time and space. The hyperfluid examples of Ryo, Frenzy, and especially Andre, reveal that in practice multiplicity and movements not bound to trans subjectivities *across* gender (b)orders were possible. In their cases, the consideration of time and space was even more crucial to both the perception and analysis of fluidity, allowing me to uncover their diverse articulations and shifting displays of gender in practice.

The (hyper) fluidity exhibited in the performances of interviewees can best be understood in the context of a performativity-based, post-structuralist way of thinking about sex and gender. My research illuminates and empirically grounds this important, but underdeveloped theoretical realm. Temporality and spatiality are key concepts with which to grasp fluidity in gender performance. My examples provide an understanding of fluidity that bridges the divide between mono-gender fluidity as a quality of cis-gendered persons' performance, and alternative forms of fluidity that transgress gendered (b)orders as a quality of trans subjectivities. Hence, fluidity is a property of performativity itself, as its form is not bound to a specific gender identity and its performance. Rather, attention should be paid to culture-specific conditions placing demands on subjects who, regardless of whether they are cis or trans, may produce fluidity in response to those conditions, through their loyalty to multiple strands of their intersectional positioning. I argue that theory should be further elaborated in relation to practices that elude its analytical stringency, in order

to grasp, through fluidity, gendered practices transcending (b)orders. It is necessary to recognize and draw on practices, experiences and understandings which do not neatly fit and fall into the academic theoretical distinctions of western Gender- and Queer Studies. This will not only acknowledge the validity of practices and societal dynamics happening in non-western places, but will also enable us to rethink and reflect on our own theoretical (b)orders in relation to the Eurocentric system of knowledge production.

## 5.2 Ways of disclosure: *Ketahuan* and coming out

The overarching theme of this chapter is the interaction between structure and practice. I explore this through the example of gender norms for females defined in the *kodrat wanita*, and how these were negotiated by interview partners. Having focused, so far, on gender, I now turn to sexuality, as sexuality is closely interwoven with gender in ideology and practice (Blackwood 2000:229). The *kodrat* defined women as heterosexuals, as wives and mothers, positioning them in relation to men.

The settlement of the dispute at the *Pak RT* in the vignette exemplifies the paradigmatic silence over same-sex desire/sexuality and LGBT+ subjectivities. The night's negotiation was ostensibly about the effects of the fight, the alleged damage, and the appropriate measures for resolution. Even though the families and the village head knew the sexual orientation of the individuals involved in the altercation, this aspect was excluded from the collective conversation.<sup>360</sup> By strategically leaving the root cause of the fight unmentioned, all those present avoided transgression of the social protocol; this would have produced greater shame and irreparable consequences. The meeting's internal dynamics illustrate the importance of belonging to a kin group that simultaneously offered and required solidarity, support, discipline, responsible behavior, and a sense of identity (see Blackwood 2010:161–162).

This section brings these strands together by discussing instances where prevailing practices of secrecy among *lesbi/ans* and trans males failed, either because respondents 'became known' (*ketahuan*) or deliberately disclosed their desire (coming out). These disclosure events are moments of obvious gender transgression, as they expose to others breaches of, and possible distance from, the gendered ideal. For *femmes*, especially, it was their desire instead of their gender performance that was

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<sup>360</sup> Initially, because of the silence around the topic, I was unsure if the parents, the *Pak RT* and his entourage actually knew about their sexual orientation and the role of jealousy in the case. Anju later told me that the parents and the village head did know; she overheard the *Pak RT* whispering with the other men that it is an 'oranges with oranges' (*jeruk sama jeruk*) case (a vulva is considered to be visually similar to a cut-up orange). Dian added that some people in Okky's neighborhood knew because her family and neighbors had "read the signs" (her regularly meeting other *butchi*, her changes in body language when bringing home feminine women). Anju told me Okky's family, after this incident, condemned her as ignominy (*ailb*) for failing to fulfill her duty to represent the family name. As a penalty, Okky suffered house arrest for several weeks.



their first experience of gender transgression (Wieringa 2007:80). With same-sex desire ‘on the table’, parents could no longer imagine their offspring as players in the ‘serious heteronormative game’ of state, culture, and religion. The future they expected for their ‘daughter’, a heterosexual future, was now challenged. Disclosure of same-sex desire meant the possibility of breaking with the hierarchical relationality of women to men inscribed within the framework of the heterosexual, moral family.

This section aims to shed light on the unpredictability surrounding disclosure and its consequences, by turning to the actual and sometimes dangerous effects of disclosure and subsequent stigma. Respondents tried to avoid stigma by adopting practices of secrecy and desired identifications. To counter a reading of these practices as exaggerated, paranoid, or passive, I describe the precautions taken by my respondents and the practical social consequences following disclosure.

Budi Wahyuni, a women’s rights activist and the later Vice Chairwoman of Komnas Perempuan, emphasized class background as the decisive criterion for how a social context deals with persons with same-sex desire and the extent of their rejection. As open misconduct might lead to downward mobility in terms of status (Kreager and Schröder-Butterfill 2007:5), some have more to lose than others. LGBT+ people in lower social strata find the likelihood of rejection by their social environment reduced, though not eliminated, if they continue to embrace their roles in the local community. For example, showing up at neighborhood gatherings and engaging in local festivities (*arisan*) provides them with some protection from exclusion. According to Budi Wahyuni, middle and higher social classes, in comparison, are “*jaim*” (abbreviation for *jaga image*), careful to protect their reputation and status. They also more often and more loudly reject LGBT+ people on the basis of religion. PLUsh activists further added that mutual esteem, love, and friendship made ambivalent reactions to disclosure possible. Even if friends and family considered a person’s desire to be sinful, they still loved that person and did not want to hurt or harm them. However, they also knew of extreme reactions even within close and loving relationships.<sup>361</sup>

Family ties offer both support and expectations for family members, presenting a specific challenge to *lesbi/ans* when thinking of disclosing their non-normative desire to their family, their most essential collective of belonging.<sup>362</sup> In my participants, the value of kinship was clear from their intertwined motivations for silence: self-protection, because of their fear of unforeseeable consequences; preservation of the harmony of the family, by avoiding worries and unpleasant feelings; protection from the world outside the family by avoiding reputational damage and shame.

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<sup>361</sup> In addition to the exorcisms that also some respondents had experienced, they reported cases of ‘corrective’ rape in other parts of the country.

<sup>362</sup> They verbalized questions and insecurities: How would this information impact their family relations? Would they destroy their established image of self within the family dynamic? Would this transgression fade away, or would their family impose conditions on them, or exclude them from the group altogether?

Same-sexual desire was non-normative and therefore ‘in itself’ shameful, this shame was compounded by societal paradigms problematizing this desire (see Chapter 6.1).<sup>363</sup>

In the following, I subdivide the topic of disclosure in two sections. The first section examines cases and consequences of unwanted, accidental, and forced disclosure (*ketahuan*). In these cases (the majority of disclosures), an individual’s outing was unplanned and happened either because of a lack of caution, bad luck, or the negligence of others. Those it concerned had no chance to prepare themselves. They were confronted with reactions they might have anticipated, but had not chosen to expose themselves to. The second section examines cases of planned and voluntary disclosure in the general meaning of the term ‘coming out’. Here, interviewees had prepared themselves for their conversations of disclosure, and had made arrangements to deal with any possible consequences. Because of the importance of the family in the Indonesian context, the negotiations within the family context are the main focus of both sections.

### 5.2.1 *Ketahuan* (being caught, being discovered)

When interview partners came out involuntarily, they were confronted with the sudden reactions of others, and were catapulted into a changed reality. They did not have time to prepare a strategy of reaction or gather support for their case. Especially material evidence, such as letters, diaries, emails, or SMS created a risk for experiencing *ketahuan*. These tangible representations of same-sex desire could be found by family members or friends, or be instrumentalized by ex-partners who wanted to ‘out’ their former lover.

#### *Ketahuan in the family*

The following five examples cover the variety of families’ reactions and efforts to deal with the news of their child’s same-sex desire. The examples also depict the ways in which families sought to influence and change the sexual orientation and behavior of their child.

#### Frentzy: Facing the Family Council

Frentzy was caught in the late 1980s, because she wrote love-letters to a classmate that she hid under her mattress.

*When my mother came to the room, I have no idea why she lifted the mattress and found this writing. I was interrogated, repeatedly asked, ‘so you like girls, yes? Tell the truth!’*

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<sup>363</sup> For example, one approach based on Islam concludes that this sinful desire is inherited as punishment for former sins of kin (generally the parents). Parents would then be responsible for the ‘depravity’ the daughter faces. Other approaches assumed that same-sex desire is genetic and inherited. Public disclosure might therefore make the whole family appear as sinful, because it would be unclear who was responsible for the original sin or ‘gay gene’.

*Something like this doesn't run in my family, that something what you are', my Mom said like that. [...] I was just quiet, 'was this [desire] my fault? You think, I want this?' – I wanted to answer, but it is called parents, at that time, it [silence] was all that you dared to reply.<sup>364</sup> (Interview Frentzy, 23.08.2014)*

Here, Frentzy verbalized her internalized respect towards those older than her, which led her to submit to her mother's reaction. It also conveys the moment of drama this incident spontaneously caused. The mother rejected "this desire, signaling that she considered it alien. In the aftermath Frentzy tried to downplay and change her mother's impression. After finding other evidence, the family became more suspicious:

*They instructed my younger brother to watch me. Watch me and if I would try to slip away, [he was] instructed to follow me. Nah, there we were meeting – jbrete [sound for a clash], that was it. Ultimately, her and my parents met. In the chairs of the living room, on a long sofa, like this one.<sup>365</sup> (Interview Frentzy, 23.08.2014)*

This emergency meeting remained very awkward in Frentzy's memory. It reminded her of the moment when Javanese families met to arrange a marriage between their offspring; a serious moment, with one family on one side of the room and the other family on the opposite side, facing each other while trying to come to terms.

*My girlfriend was crying. The parents [wondering] 'How is this our kid, dear, behaving like this.' What I remember, her parents talked about how to solve this, when there is no way out. My people were asked, they remained silent. I stayed silent. [...] The one next to me was crying. Bewilderment. Various people from her family were also crying. They could not find a way out, so finally we were left to go and everyone returned to their homes.<sup>366</sup> (Interview Frentzy, 23.08.2014)*

After this incident, the couple split up. Both faced familial surveillance and became restricted in their mobility. Frentzy was additionally grounded for about three

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<sup>364</sup> Original: "Terus waktu ibuku masuk kamar, e, gak tahu kenapa ibuku buka-buka kasur dan menemukan tulisan itu. Aku diinterogasi, ditanya-tanya, 'eh, kamu suka sama cewek, ya! Yang bener aja. Gak ada di keturunan aku itu, e, seperti kamu.' Ibuku bilang seperti itu. [...] aku cuma diem aja. 'Emang ini salahku? Emang ini mauku gitukan?' Aku mau jawab lagi, ya, namanya orang tua, ya, waktu itu, ya, a, kamu berani sama orang tua paling gitu, kan."

<sup>365</sup> Original: "Nyuruh adikku yang cowok untuk ngawasi. Ngawasi kalau aku udah hilang itu suruh ngikutin. Nah, pas ketemu jbrete, ya, itu, gara-garanya itu. akhirnya orangtua sana sama orangtua sini ketemu. Di kursi di ruang, ruang keluarga itu ada kursi panjang seperti ini, nih."

<sup>366</sup> Original: "Pacarku itu nangis. Orang tua 'Gimana ini anak-anak kita, kok, seperti ini'. Yang aku inget itu, dia ngomong gimana tu solusinya apa, gak ada jalan keluar. Orang aku ditanya, cuma diem aja. Aku cuma diem. [...] Nih, yang sampingku nangis. Bingung. Keluarga dia juga banyak yang nangis itu. Gak ketemu jalan keluarnya bagaimana, akhirnya udah, bubar ke rumah masing-masing."

months. In the rare instances that she was allowed to leave the house, she was forbidden to bring a jacket, because with a jacket “[then I] look like a man”<sup>367</sup> (Interview Frentzy, 23.08.2014). All measures taken by the family to support a ‘normal’ life for their daughter clearly signaled that the desire was understood as a transgression of her gendered realm that required restriction, perhaps even forcible correction.

Chien: Economic pressure, deprivation of privileges, proposing marriage

The parents of outspoken *femme* Chien discovered their daughter’s desire when they received a photo via SMS in the middle of 2012 – two years before our interview. Chien’s ex-partner had used the visual evidence of their romance against her; she made the sensitive knowledge a powerful weapon and forcefully outed Chien to her parents, who immediately demanded that she come home. When she arrived home, they sat her down to discuss “something difficult”. Her father showed her the picture. Chien realized she had been outed as she erased all visual evidence of her desire immediately. This incident was not extensively discussed in the family: “After getting caught, I was just beaten, after that just stillness. Silence. Until now”<sup>368</sup> (Interview Chien, 11.09.2014). Besides the ‘silent treatment’, a hierarchically enacted punishment using social exclusion, her parents employed further disciplinary measures. They cut off her allowance and access to other amenities, like the family Wi-Fi. After two months, her mother approached her to explain:

*‘It is sinning, isn’t it’ that is what she said. ‘So later, how will it be when you die? How will your relationship with God be?’ and other things like that, she explained. Also, these verses... in the holy book were read.*<sup>369</sup> (Interview Chien, 11.09.2014)

Her parents obviously worried about Chien’s future economic and spiritual wellbeing, as both depended on a husband. Hoping to convince their daughter to return to ‘the right way’ (*jalan yang benar*), her parents even consulted holy scripture. The absence of heterosexuality corrupted her relationship to God in this life, and would affect her being in the afterlife.

As the Indonesian state does not offer far-reaching welfare programs,<sup>370</sup> socioeconomic security of the young and elderly alike depends mostly on personal networks, primarily the (extended) family. The husband was considered to be mainly responsible for providing for the wife and children, even if the wife might contribute to the family funds by working herself. In old age, the kin network and especially

<sup>367</sup> Original: “Kelihatan seperti laki-laki.”

<sup>368</sup> Original: “Kalau yang pas ketahuan cuma digampar, tapi abis diem, gitu, lho. Diem. Selama ini.”

<sup>369</sup> Original: “Itu, kan, dosa, katanya gitu. Terus, a, kamu nanti gimana, mat, meninggalnya? Nanti kalau hubungan sama Tuhan gimana, terus gini-gini, dijelasin. Kayak, kayak ayat-ayat ini, kitab suci gitu, kan, dibacain gitu, kan.”

<sup>370</sup> See Sumarto and Bazzi (2011); Tambunan and Purwoko (2002).

their children would provide support and care for their parents (Kreager and Schröder-Butterfill 2007). Marriage was therefore not only important because of religious reasons, but also vitally intertwined with socio-economic security. Same-sex desire, it was imagined, would preclude access to this common system of care and responsibility and it meant that there would be no children, a source of pride. Without marriage, Chien's parents feared all these aspirations for their daughter would no longer have a future.

The parental appeal to Chien's conscience did not have the intended effect:

*The obligation of marriage was brought up again at that time. The duty to marry. [...]. In the end I was commanded to get married. But I did not want to, I was only in the fourth semester. So, yes, they withdrew because I was still going to university. [...] So, in the end, that was it... because I knew I was not allowed to use any facilities at home, it was like I was not at home. That was it, I did not feel at home in the house and finally in Yogya it was better.<sup>371</sup> (Interview Chien, 11.09.2014)*

'Ghosted' in daily communication, having her socio-economic support revoked, and facing pressure to marry, Chien went back to Yogya. She was not prepared to submit herself to her parents' wishes, but was able to endure the break. The rising importance of women's education, which makes it increasingly justifiable to schedule marriage after successful graduation (see also Smith-Hefner 2020), assisted her here. While Chien never experienced a total break of relations, at the time of our interview she was still working on improving her relationship with her parents. It seemed her mother had gradually processed her initial shock, but her relationship to her father remained unsettled:

*Just lately, from June [2014] until now the conditions improve for the better. I started going home again, going home often. I was allowed to again, but [...] I don't have a right to a room. So, I sleep in the living room, on the sofa. But that doesn't matter; it's important that I can go home again. [...]. With my father, not yet [better] really. For example, when we are chatting, and it is not really important, he is not talking. [...] Only if I am really begging, there is a 'he-eh', only that. But smooth communication like before, not yet. Have not got that back.<sup>372</sup> (Interview Chien, 11.09.2014)*

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<sup>371</sup> Original: "Kayak kewajiban menikah tu diungkit lagi, kan, waktu itu. Kewajiban menikah. [...]. Akhirnya disuruh nikah, tapi, kan, aku gak mau, masih semester 4 kan waktu itu. Terus, ya, udah, akhirnya alasan kuliah, tu. [...]. Terus akhirnya udah karena aku dah tahu gak boleh, gak boleh, pakai fasilitas apapun, ya, di rumah, kayak gak di rumah, kan. Terus akhirnya udah, gak betah di rumah, terus akhirnya di Jogja aja mending."

<sup>372</sup> Original: "Baru akhir-akhir ini, dari Juni sampai, sampai sekarang ini baru mulai agak-agak baik lagi kondisinya. Mulai pulang, gitu, kan, mulai sering pulang lagi. Mulai boleh, tapi [...] aku gak dapat hak kamar, gitu, lho. Jadi, aku tidurnya di ruang tamu, di sofa. Ya, udah, gak papa, yang penting boleh ke rumah, kan, gitu. [...]. Kalau papa masih agak belum. Jadi kalau misalnya ngobrol, kalau misalnya gak penting banget, itu gak ngobrol. [...] kalau udah ngemis banget gitu nanti baru 'he-ch' gitu aja. Tapi untuk komunikasi yang lancar kayak dulu, belum. Belum bisa dapat lagi."

Some interview partners experienced comparable reactions from their families in cases of *ketabuan*. Shock, ghosting, ignoring, violence, removal of privileges, or demands for immediate marriage were common when same-sex desire was forcefully or accidentally disclosed. Most interviewees could still be physically present in family spaces, but were at least somewhat socially excluded from them.

#### Ryo and Tama: healing attempts

When same-sex desire was discovered, parents wanted to help their child with the ‘disease’ or sin. Uncertain as to its cause, some sought the help of spiritual and religious experts. These ranged from different kinds of local healers (*dukun*) to official representatives of religion, such as priests for Christians or *kyais* or *ustadz* for Muslims. These representatives were usually practicing the religion the family was affiliated with, but in a few rare cases the borders of religion were bridged, and parents sought help with an expert of another religion.<sup>373</sup>

Family members contacted one or sometimes even various experts and sought advice but also practical help such as medication, healing, or exorcisms. Some LT+ persons were forced to participate in the proposed procedures. Others, like Ryo or Yuni, consented. Ryo, for example, would rather not experience this desire, and was open to try and eliminate it. Nevertheless, she was not desperate to rid herself of her same-sex desire, and didn’t expect it to work out. When her parents found out that she had a girlfriend, they were worried about their daughter’s health. The family contacted a *ustadz* who tried an exorcism to heal Ryo. She remembered:

*He said I was sick. So, I needed healing. Healing through an exorcism it seemed [laughs]. Indeed, I entered trance, I came to say that I was possessed. [...] I came to say, talking very annoyed that I was possessed by as lesbian jinn [laughs]. Even though I was exorcised it did not take effect at that time. It depends on me together with the one responsible for me, the Almighty.*<sup>374</sup> (Interview Ryo, 22.08.2014)

After the *ustadz* was unable to exorcise the spirit supposedly causing Ryo’s desire, he met with Ryo and her parents for a lengthy discussion. He explained that Ryo’s parents had been too late in attending to their responsibility to care for the matter. For the parents, it seemed difficult to understand that the powerful *ustadz* could not find an easy cure for their daughter. While he confirmed that Ryo was somehow ‘sick’, he refrained from assigning guilt and did not classify the matter as a mere ritual or medical problem. Ryo remembered him saying:

<sup>373</sup> For example, this happened in an interreligious family, in which parts of the wider family were Christians and the family with the *lesbi/an* daughter was Muslim. I discuss this case in Chapter 7.

<sup>374</sup> Original: “Terus bilangnya aku sakit. Terus aku perlu penyembuhan. Penyembuhannya diruqyah kayak gitu hehe. Emangnya aku kesurupan gitu, aku sampai bilang memangnya aku kesurupan ya? [...] Aku sampai bilang, sampai saling kesalnya aku ngomong aku kesurupan jinn lesbian hehe. Sampai mesti diruqyah gak ngaruh juga kali itu, kan tergantung dari diri aku sama yang apa tanggungjawabku sama Yang Maha Kuasa gitukan.”

*'Not sick, Mam, if she was sick, there would be a medicine to cure her. The cure here comes from your child herself and from the father and mother themselves. [...] It is up to her in the future to take responsibility before God SWT [glory to Him, the Exalted]', he said. 'If indeed your child wants to be like this, then later it also depends on her company, the strength of her faith and how she later deals with it, if you, father and mother, still don't want to accept her, and you must learn more deeply why your child is like this.'*<sup>375</sup>  
(Interview Ryo, 22.08.2014)

As Ryo recalled it, the demeanor of this *ustadz* seemed to comfort her, because he was only mildly moralizing and did not condemn or judge her too harshly by using the common trope of sin, in which a person's sinful behavior is the result of their willful or careless actions. While holding Ryo responsible, he also reminded her parents of external factors and their responsibility, and this relieved her from some of the pressure she felt. This illustrates how parents, and especially the mother, are ideologically thought to be responsible for their children's upbringing and its results.

Some research participants recalled encounters with experts in which the expert actually used their position of power to initiate a rethinking of the parents' negative attitude. Tama's parents brought their child to a psychiatrist after two Catholic priests considered 'healing' her to be beyond their competence, while another had preached that Tama must 'return' to liking men. The psychiatrist was well reputed in their parents' Catholic community.

*My parents agreed because they perceived him as very Catholic [...] So Doctor [name] did not judge me at all. He asked: 'Are you comfortable?' – 'Yes, I am comfortable.' – 'So, who is the person not comfortable? What made you come here?' – 'Well, because my parents are angry with me', I said, I was there with my mother, my father did not want to come. So, he said to my mother: 'Well, Mam, so the one feeling uncomfortable is you, your child is perfectly fine' [laughs]. [...] So he gave an explanation to my mother, but my mother could not embrace it. When we went home, she surely thought it was just bullshit this Doctor. [...] So I was brought to another psychiatrist. [...] My mother chose him because he ministers the priest candidates and caters to their psyche [...]. But he was also a good psychiatrist. He employed the standards of counselling. So, my mother was not allowed to observe, and we talked a lot. [...] He only advised me to be patient when communicating with my parents, because it was surely not easy for them. But apart from that, he said 'it*

<sup>375</sup> Original: "“Bukan sakit bu, kalau sakit pasti ada obatnya gitukan. Obatnya itu adalah dari diri anaknya sendiri dan dari orang e apa bapak sama ibu sendiri gitukan. [...] anaknya sendiri e nanti tanggungjawab sama Allah SWT” bilang ustadnya begitu. ‘Kalau memang (suara berisik dan menjerit) anaknya pengen apa e dia seperti ini gitu kan dan nantinya tergantung juga pergaulan dia gitu kan, apa ininya dia, kekuatan iman dia, gitukan, gimana dia nantinya menyikapi kalau bapak sama ibu memang tetap gak mau terima seperti itu dan bapak ama ibu harus mempelajari lebih dalam kenapa anak, anak bapak sama ibu seperti ini?’”

*doesn't matter if that's the way you feel, be like that. It's fine.*<sup>376</sup> (Interview Tama, 12.08.2014)

Tama was surprised, but appreciated the approach the psychiatrists took towards hir desire and towards hir parents, who had probably expected to have their opinion confirmed. While the psychiatrists both offered an affirmative interpretation, it surely did not immediately change the views of parents who had come to have the sexual orientation of their child 'restored'. Nevertheless, their approaches still created a counterweight to hir parents' views.

Parents' choice of experts was not solely based on his (or her) status as an independent expert in their fields. A 'truly' impartial, independent assessment of the situation was not desired. Instead, identitarian affiliations played a major role in the decision regarding which expert to consult. It was assumed that shared identity would mean shared values, leading to actions or treatment that would restore the 'natural' heterosexual desire.

In other words, experts had room to maneuver. Within the examples cited here, experts used their position to support the individual and negotiate between the parties involved, instead of uncritically following public opinion or the stereotypical stances associated with their disciplines.

Psychiatrists, however, still had a bad reputation within the LT+ scene; they were considered a professional group that LT+ should be careful with, as they would classify trans identifications and same-sex desire as mental disorders.<sup>377</sup> Some respondents recalled very unpleasant experiences with experts who did not take mediating approaches of the kind described above. Instead, they reinforced stigma by lecturing them on religious principles, labeling them as sinners, or recommending traditional medicine to heal them. Needless to say, these efforts were unsuccessful with people who participated in my research, because they still identified as LT+ in 2014.

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<sup>376</sup> Original: "Orang tuaku setuju karena menurut orang tuaku dia sangat Katolik. [...] terus a dokter [name] gak menghakimi sama sekali. Dia tanya 'kamu nyaman gak?' 'Iya nyaman' gitu. 'Terus yang gak nyaman siapa. Yang bikin, yang membuat kamu datang ke sini apa', 'ya karena orang tua saya marah', itu, aku datang dengan ibuku, bapak gak mau ikut itu. Terus dia bilang ke ibuku, 'tuh kan ibu, yang gak nyaman itu ibu, anaknya ibu baik-baik saja', hihhi. [...] Terus ngasih penjelasan ke ibu. Tapi ibuku masih gak terima hahaha, masih marah. Terus ya ketika kami pulang dari situ, dia ngerasa, pasti just bullshit gitu lho dokter [name]. [...] Terus akhirnya ke psikiater lain. [...] Dia, ibuku ngajak kesitu karena psikiater ini dasarnya ini lho, e, mendampingi calon-calon romo untuk masalah psikisnya mereka [...] Iya tapi psikiaternya juga bagus. Jadi e ya pakai standar apa konseling. Jadi ibuku gak boleh ada di situ terus kami ngobrol banyak gitu. [...] Cuma dia ngasih nasihat bahwa aku harus sabar dalam berkomunikasi dengan orang tua gitu. Karena ini pasti gak mudah untuk orang tua gitu, gitu, tapi selebihnya dia bilang 'gak papa, kalau kamu merasa itu kamu, ya, silahkan itu. Itu baik?'"

<sup>377</sup> Unsurprisingly, the Indonesian Psychiatric Association (PDSKJI) declared LGBT+ a mental disorder in 2016, contrary to international standards (Yosephine 2016a).



## Yuni: Violence and exclusion from family

Only a few interview partners were kicked out of their homes (at least temporarily) or underwent such unbearable treatment that they decided to leave. Yuni, for example, became *ketabuan* in the mid-1990s, when she was about 15 years old. After trying to religiously heal her without result, her parents cut off her social relations and sent her to live with her grandmother in a village in Central Java. After three months she was sent back to West Java to finish high school. There, she fell in love with a married woman in her twenties, who then ran away from her husband. The police searched for the 16-year-old Yuni because the woman's family had accused her of having seduced their daughter. Yuni spent about a week in jail and, when released, her direct family in Jakarta refused to take her back. This was not primarily because of her becoming *ketabuan*, but because of the shame spawned by the police search and detention. She returned to her grandmother's place, living with and helping her for about two years. That went well, until her grandmother and the extended family in the village discovered that she had been in jail and what she had been suspected of:

*I got sat down and there I really didn't like the way they judged me. [...] They said I disgraced them because this is a good family, a family of prestigious standing. [...] I felt very sad. [...] At that time my grandfather had already passed. I'm sure if he had been there he would have helped me, but by that time my grandmother spoke very harsh, 'you want to kill me?' [...] Yes, and they said something about me being a human being lower than an animal, to the bottom of a haram child and my grandmother said it was like I was throwing shit into their face. I got self-conscious, I finally left home.*<sup>378</sup> (Interview Yuni, 14.09.2014)

As her conduct was neither intentional nor her desire something Yuni was able to change, the grandmothers abusive and derogatory language crossed the line of excusable behavior for Yuni, so she left the family.

As a teenager with no safety net beyond her family, she lived on the streets for more than half a year. It was an emotionally stressful and ambiguous time:

*Sometimes on the streets I was sick, [...] so I was sad, crying for myself and wanted to be home. Sometimes I wanted to surrender, enough already, it doesn't bother me to bow to their will and just sit quietly at home. But on the other hand, I did not want it, I would not feel at home and might let them down again, so I endured. If I was tired and could not sing for money, I had no money, sad. If I didn't have money while living at home, I still*

<sup>378</sup> Original: "Aku didudukkan dan disitu sebenarnya aku gak suka mereka ngejudge aku. [...] Mereka bilang aku membuat aib karena ini keluarga baik-baik, keluarga yang dipandang orang. [...] Aku merasa sedih sekali. [...] Waktu itu kakekku sudah gak ada. Aku yakin kalau kakekku ada disitu dia akan menolong aku tapi waktu itu nenekku bicara pedas sekali 'kamu mau bunuh aku?' [...] Iya, dan mereka entah bilang apa aja tentang aku dibilang manusia lebih rendah dari binatang sampai dibilang dasar anak haram dan nenekku bilang seperti melempar tai ke wajah mereka dan aku sadar diri, akhirnya aku pergi dari rumah."

*could eat. If I polished shoes and the customer got angry, sure I felt very desolate. But being a lesbian, was not a problem.*<sup>379</sup> (Interview Yuni, 14.09.2014)

She wrestled with her decision. If she went back, she would have certain comforts, but would have to submit. What her submission would practically entail was uncertain. The risks of trouble and shame outweighed the possible comforts.

While leaving her family spared her from further abuse and moralizing lectures about her shortcomings as a woman, it also meant poverty. As she had become *ketahuan* and left the family network after she had finished high school, no one provided her with university education or practical job training. As such, even after escaping the street, she had to keep switching between different low-skilled jobs to meet her daily needs, unable to create long-term socio-economic security.<sup>380</sup> Stigma and shame over her desire led to the loss of her socio-economic support system, which is difficult to generate outside the family.

Reactions to *ketahuan* restructured family space (temporarily, in most cases) by withdrawing trust and access. It also often led to the stricter implementation of socially and physically restricting measures, the usage of physical force, or an increase in moral reasoning. The measures spoke the language of correction following gendered norms. They were challenging to bear but most interview partners endured them, hoping that their family would become accustomed to the desire in the long run. Most respondents were rewarded for their persistence. They still carried the mark of stigma, but remained in contact with their families, and retained at least basic family support. For the most part, relations were permanently clouded, but improvements were noticed over time.

#### *Ketahuan with friends or at school*

Not all experiences after *ketahuan* were equally profound or durable. Some research participants became *ketahuan* towards friends or classmates, mostly during high school. In this context the disclosure led to different reactions, which I depict in the following using the examples of Kesi and Nuri.

After junior high, Kesi was sent to an Islamic senior high school where she expected the students to be pious, but “it turned out they were out of control of the teacher, they got drunk in the bathroom, they had sex there”<sup>381</sup> (Interview Kesi, 23.07.2014). A former classmate of her junior high, where Kesi’s desire had been

<sup>379</sup> Original: “Kadang aku juga sakit dijalan [...] aku sedihnya gitu, suka menangis sendiri aku pengen dirumah. Kadang aku pengen nyerah, udahlah aku gak apa-apa ikutin mau mereka, aku diam dirumah. Tapi disisi lain aku gak mau, aku gak akan betah daripada aku mengecewakan mereka lagi, makanya aku bertahan. Kalau badanku capek aku gak bisa ngamen aku gak punya uang, sedih. Kalau dirumah gak punya uang kan aku bisa makan. Kalau lagi nyemir sepatu gitu terus aku dimarahin orang itu rasanya sedih banget. Tapi untuk masalah aku lesbian itu gak jadi masalah.”

<sup>380</sup> In the meantime, she acquired support and entered university education.

<sup>381</sup> Original: “Ternyata di dalam situ mereka pergaulannya terlalu di luar kendali guru, jadi mereka mabuk di dalam kamar mandi, mereka berhubungan seks di situ.”

found out before, outed her to the whole class in the new school. “Every other day I got written notes saying ‘Leave, you lesbian’”<sup>382</sup> (Interview Kesi, 23.07.2014).

Nuri recalled a similar reaction but from the reverse perspective, when she learnt about the same-sex desire of one of her friends: “They were caught because of an SMS. I was shocked, at first, I really didn’t like seeing them together, icky... Yes, imagine, I was... disgusted. [...] I stayed away from them”<sup>383</sup> (Interview Bayu and Nuri, 22.08.14).

This quote sheds light on the possible perspective of another person in a moment of *ketahuan* when confrontation with a desire beyond the socially ‘normal’ leads to rejection. Later on, when Nuri became *ketahuan* by friends herself, she faced similar reactions. Her friends avoided and excluded her as she had done before. In some cases, same-sex desire would become tolerated or even accepted, though often remained at least somewhat strange. In other cases, friendships ended over the matter.

Kesi’s and Chien’s examples of forceful outings demonstrate that information about a person’s deviation from the norm could be used as a powerful weapon against that person. Becoming *ketahuan* in one social context or space had the potential to spill over into other social contexts, bringing stigma with it. This meant that individuals were dependent on the protective behavior of others, leaving them in a permanent condition of vulnerability. Research participants therefore limited the group of people ‘who knew’ by practicing secrecy measures. Former experiences of insults and devaluation often led to even stricter secrecy, to prevent a reprisal.

Even if, over time, slow improvements of integration and communication in the social environment happened after *ketahuan*, interview partners remained vulnerable. Maintaining a comparatively positive self-image by ‘coming in’ in a disapproving environment consumed energy. Coming in required cultivation and renewal, and depended on changing discourses. The risk of getting caught in other spaces and having to endure hostilities continued to exist, as did the risk of being deliberately exposed to others. Nevertheless, after *ketahuan*, subsequent negotiations could at least partially modify existing power relations within a specific space. In terms of content, this often included alignment along hegemonic norms and responding to demands of more strict compliance. Yet, it could also lead to the abandonment of norms in some spaces, or even their modification.

Based on the cases examined here, most families responded to *ketahuan* by regulating gender along the lines of the *kodrat wanita*, reacting to the transgression with behavioral correction and pushing for the practical fulfillment of gender-specific norms. Nevertheless, they accepted the challenges of collective cohesion, set limits to stigma, and (mostly) allowed their child to remain within the family. Tolerance was more often accompanied by measures of education, and restriction than by

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<sup>382</sup> Original: “Terus hampir beberapa hari aku dapat tulisan-tulisan yang bilang ‘pergi kamu lesbian?’”

<sup>383</sup> Original: “Terus ketahuan karena sms, terus aku kaget, awalnya aku enggak suka gitu lho liat mereka, jijik. Terus ya bayangan, terus aku... jijik gitu. [...] Menjauhi mereka.”

acceptance. The strangeness and difference interviewees felt before and even more after *ketabuan* remained, as they were reproduced as a mark of stigma within the families. Among friends or at school, where reactions varied from social exclusion to outright bullying, stigma had the potential to expand without limit.

### 5.2.2 Coming out

Reaching ‘coming in’, a state of self-awareness and self-appreciation, was a desirable and almost a compulsory goal within the LT+ scene. Coming out, in comparison, did not have the same status as it does within most western queer discourses. Instead, coming out was seen as optional, because of the consequences disclosure might produce. In the activist scene, coming out was given a higher priority. Nevertheless, activists also evaluated each situation carefully and questioned the motivation and situation of clients, most of them young people, who frivolously aimed for a coming out within the family. Even though coming out was seldom done, stories about coming out or *ketabuan* were very popular.<sup>384</sup>

The following examples of coming out shed light on its preparatory steps, concrete interactions, and subsequent processes of engagement – and also its consequences. The focus lies, again, on negotiations within the family. Grouping these stories by space and context, I consider the space-specific power structures that affect the act of positioning oneself as a *lesbi/an*. As spaces are structured by the individuals who participate within – who each bear their own structural attachments – spaces place different demands and obligations on those participating. This social situatedness of space in turn allowed or required interviewees to adapt their approaches to disclosure. I begin with the Internet, where coming out involved few demands and interpersonal interaction, before moving to the workplace and friends, and ending with the space of the family, with its high level of commitment and interaction. Coming out is revealed as a space-bound practice, which will not occur in all spaces, and whose strategic considerations may vary from one space to another.

#### *Internet: Filtering friends*

The Internet as a fluid, moldable, and open space in which all kind of ideologies could bloom<sup>385</sup> offered opportunities for the ‘semi-public’ display of LT+ identifications to curated audiences. Feminine Chien belonged to the small minority of people I interviewed who never maintained more than one social media profile.

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<sup>384</sup> Everyone joined in, because everyone had a *ketabuan* or coming out story, even if it was toward other LGBT+ people. People sought these stories for their entertainment value, and to better evaluate their personal situation. The sharing of such stories was a form of meaningful community building in which knowledge, and challenges, were passed on.

<sup>385</sup> Shared on social media, the ideologies elicited religious ‘responses’ and controversies online and offline, due to their perceived moral transgression (Postill and Epafra 2018).

Fear made her always very careful regarding disclosure within her physical surroundings, especially when she was younger and still in school. As a young adult, through her coming in, she became more resilient towards criticism on her identification and now cared little about other people's opinions about her. Even on Facebook she did not filter out any content revealing her desire.

*If they know, they know. [...] For example, if friends say 'Oh Chien, turns out you are L', it does not matter. So, what if they know I am L, so what? Do you want to block all my paths to get a job? Probably not. Who are they anyways? [...] I am sorry, but if you still want to be friends, then be friends. If not, well then not.*<sup>386</sup> (Interview Chien, 11.09.2014)

Chien was aware that disclosure of her desire to others might have material consequences for her future, as she remarked on its potential effect on her job opportunities. However, she relativized such dangers. In doing so, she dedramatized the situation for herself, and decentered herself as a target by considering her situation as comparatively unimportant. At the same time, she made the situation valuable to her, by filtering the reactions of others to identify who actually wanted to be friends with her as she was.

Chien had come to terms with her desire. She refused to act in anticipatory obedience, and had emancipated herself from the logic mandating shame, which required that she change her desire or become invisible. Refraining from direct confrontations offline, online she could stir reactions without having to confront a physically present other. Such online practices allowed to place her long-term comfort and psychological health at the center. This coming out exhibits a forward approach in a space that does not necessarily impose forms of behavior or interaction, but where disclosure could extend to offline spaces.

#### *Work space: Pedagogical mediation*

For many respondents coming out at work was unthinkable, as the possible consequence of losing one's job were too severe.<sup>387</sup> Depending on one's relationship with their family, a loss of personal income could be disastrous, as it could lead to poverty.

Frentzy, when she decided to come out at work in her early 40s, was in a considerably different position than LT+ teenagers or young adults. By marrying and bearing children, she had achieved the respectable adult status that women can only obtain through marriage (see e.g. Bennett 2005:28; Sulandari 2009:68; Webster

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<sup>386</sup> Original: "Kalau menurutku kalian tahu mah tahu aja. [...] Misalnya temen-temen, 'Oh Chien ternyata L' gitu kan, Gak penting gitu. Toh kalau misalnya kalian tahu aku L, emang kenapa? Kalian mau ngeblokir semua jalanku buat dapet pekerjaan? Kan enggak juga. Lagian kalian itu, siapa? [...] Sorry ya. Kalau kamu masih mau temenan, ya temenan aja. Kalau enggak ya udah gitu."

<sup>387</sup> Andre's case, with all his efforts to maintain his desired identification at work, is a clear example of this.

2006:4). As a widowed woman, she assumed the status of head of the household, restoring her mobility and decision-making authority. However, her widowed status made it less likely that people would assume her same-sex desire, despite the fact that she had recaptured her *butchi* expression. When she needed to find employment to feed her children, her masculine appearance helped her get a job in the security sector. While not a typical job for women, it was much to her liking.

As a masculine woman she attracted attention and received comments about her appearance from her female boss. She didn't feel intimidated, but could take it with humor. They joked together about how she was a strange woman because she didn't dress up, didn't use makeup, and always wore these masculine clothes. After working there for over a year, Frentzy felt able to trust her boss. As she became increasingly annoyed by the jokes at her expense, she decided to come out to her.

*So, before becoming really afflicted I decided to talk. 'Ma'am I want to talk, let's chat. Did you know...' – 'What is it?' – 'What if, actually, I am, my partner was not a man?' – 'Oh yes, I already know.' – 'What, why do you know it already?' – 'Well, I just know.' Geez, it turned out she was a great person.*<sup>388</sup> (Interview Frentzy, 23.08.2014)

Frentzy was amazed that in her interactions with her boss nothing changed except that she could now also speak honestly about her relationship. Similarly, relaxed reactions enabled more communication on aspects of one's private life for other research participants. Knowing that their counterpart was open-minded, it became a pleasure for LT+ to share these otherwise guarded parts of their private lives; it meant feeling as 'normal' about one's same-sex relationships as heterosexuals did. By coming out like this, Frentzy took the risk and was rewarded. Although uncertain about the outcome, her existing relationship with her boss provided a base on which she could dare to confide in her.

Frentzy was alienated by the behavior of other colleagues, which she assessed as insensitive, driven by stereotypes, and unreasonable. Previously, she had come out to three of her colleagues whom she knew well because they worked together every day and often shared information about their private lives. The colleagues not only knew about Frentzy's girlfriend, but also – albeit not with all the painful details – about her difficult former marriage. While her colleagues did accept her to some extent, she felt repeatedly attacked in her identification by their statements and suggestions. A female colleague, for example, had recently married and spoke not only of how great her own marriage was, but enthusiastically tried to convince Frentzy that marriage in general was wonderful:

*'How do you do it? It is so nice to be with a guy' she said, 'and you are with a girl instead.' I was offended there. 'Eh [name of colleague], what do you mean? If you are convinced a*

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<sup>388</sup> Original: "Akhirnya aku daripada aku a tersiksa bangetlah, aku ngomong, aku sekalian. 'Bu, mau ngomong.' 'Ngobrol, nih.' 'Bu, ibu tahu gak sih.' 'Apa?' 'Kalau sebenarnya e aku tu, pacar aku tu bukan cowok.' 'Iya aku udah tahu.' 'Lho ibu tahu darimana?' 'Ya tahu aja deh.' 'Ya ampun asyik banget sih ternyata orangnya.'"

*guy feels great, then feel it yourself.' What is she doing, talking to me like that?*<sup>389</sup> (Interview Frentzy, 23.08.2014)

While recollecting such alienating moments, Frentzy became noticeably upset. It was unclear whether her colleagues were acting intentionally, or if they merely lacked sensitivity or knowledge regarding *lesbi/an* subjectivities and experiences. Their statements undoubtedly carried normative content reaffirming their own heterosexuality and wider heteronormativity, denying same-sex desire the status of a valid, independent desire. When Frentzy's colleague made her exuberant appraisal of marriage, she ignored Frentzy's experience of domestic violence and the fact that she, as a *lesbi/an*, had only agreed to enter a heterosexual marriage because of the absence of viable alternatives.

After this incident, Frentzy took some space from her colleague. In the end, the colleague clarified that she was 'just joking' and apologized. Frentzy accepted her apology and explained again that she simply liked women. This statement led to new challenges:

*Then with every look, with every girl they thought I like her. [...] 'Wah, Frentzy likes her, look at her. All happy, lustful appetite...' – 'Um', I replied, 'even though I have this L condition, it doesn't mean I like every woman in that way. [...] You are so random, everything so generalized. I do look for quality in people, too. I see if they are interested in me or not. If I have a look and it's smutty, the person can stand naked in front of me and I am still not interested.'*<sup>390</sup> (Interview Frentzy, 23.08.2014)

Her colleagues understood that Frentzy liked girls, but they often veered into stereotyping and over-sexualization. In such interactions, Frentzy took up the work of pedagogical intermediary in her workspace. As a representative of the '*lesbi/an* clan' she became a spokesperson for these subjectivities and took on a mediating role. While such pedagogical work can be tiring because it involves engaging with stereotypes, it can be helpful to the cause as it gradually sensitizes its participants. Frentzy's openness in pedagogical mediation shifted the discursive framework. Because of this, normalization of the topic could emerge in this space, at least to some degree. Through her commitment at work, she participated in reshaping the spatial power relations. Coming out to selected individuals created a very valuable change: "With every person who knows and who can accept it, a load falls off me, one by one. It's pleasant. I feel like I am becoming myself in front of the person. There is

<sup>389</sup> Original: "Gimana sih mbak kamu itu, e cowok tu enaknya,' kayak gitu. 'Kok kamu malah sama cewek.' Aku tersinggung di situ. 'Eh, [nama teman kerja] maksud kamu apa? E kamu tahu tu rasanya cowok tu enak, ya, udah rasain sendiri.' Ngapain pakai ngomong kayak gitu ke aku?"

<sup>390</sup> Original: "Terus nek terus setiap nganggepnya tu, setiap cewek tu aku suka. [...] 'Itu wah, Frentzy suka nih, lihatnya. Seneng nih, napsu nih.' 'Eh' gue bilangin. 'Walaupun aku kondisinya L seperti ini, gak setiap cewek tu aku suka. [...]. Sembarangan aja kamu. Terus semuanya disamaratakan. Aku lihat kualitasnya orang juga. Terus dia mau gak. Kalau aku lihat, asal comot, tu, orang kan mau telanjang di depan aku aja aku juga gak bakal napsu ama dia.'"

nothing that I cover”<sup>391</sup> (Interview Frentzy, 23.08.2014). For Frentzy, the amount of work and energy she spent on hiding became especially perceivable in the aftermath of disclosure, when the work of creating a desired identification could be suspended, at least temporarily.

*With friends: Giving time*

Nike, who grew up in East Kalimantan (Borneo), never considered coming out at home because hir *lesbi/an* aunts were regularly cited by hir mother as examples of what not to become. The fear of negative consequences led hir to pass through high school without opening up to anyone. In distress and isolation after leaving high school, Nike decided to come out towards a long-term female friend, whom s/he felt very close to.

*She went to university in Malang, so in a different city. [...] I only told her over chat. [...] And it happened exactly what I thought would happen: She berated me and got very, very angry with me, saying it contradicted religion and things like that.*<sup>392</sup> (Interview Nike, 11.08.2014)

By coming out to her friend, Nike did not gain a trustworthy counterpart for dialogue, as hoped, but temporarily lost a friend. Nike continued: “But now, we are still good friends. It seems like she got exhausted with being angry at me, so we can be good friends again. She doesn’t care anymore”<sup>393</sup> (Interview Nike, 11.08.2014). Here, the temporal factor appears again. The immediate reaction of the friend reproduced the socially normative reaction to a disclosure of same-sex desire. In acts of norm-setting, Nike’s friend tried to convince hir of the validity of the predominant canon. Long-term negotiation, however, overcame the normative disapproval and eventually, hir friend stopped her efforts to align Nikes behavior with the norm.

Many respondents reported similar sequential, temporal patterns in the process of disclosure with friends, regardless of whether they became *ketabuan* or came out voluntarily. They were motivated to come out to heterosexual friends in order to overcome isolation and because they were tired of producing desired identifications towards persons who were, otherwise, confidants. Still, sometimes friendships simply broke up over this matter. Coming out with friends was planned beforehand, but no specific security measures were taken. Initial reactions might be dismissive, reflecting heteronormativity, but after a “cooling off” period, a state of friendship could often be restored.

<sup>391</sup> Original: “Ya, setiap ada orang tahu, dan dia bisa terima aku tu, aku tu seperti lepas beban satu-persatu. Enak. Jadi aku merasa jadi diri aku sendiri di depan dia. Jadi gak ada yang kututup-tutup.”

<sup>392</sup> Original: “Dia kuliah di Malang, di kota lain. [...] aku cuman cerita via chat gitu. [...] dan betul apa yang kuperkirakan. Dia habis-habisan memarahiku, bilang itu ga sesuai agama segala macem.”

<sup>393</sup> Original: “Tapi kita masih berteman baik sekarang. Dia kayaknya udah capek marahin aku terus, jadi kayak kita berteman baik lagi. Dia ga peduli juga gitu.”



*In the Family: Considering hierarchy and personal dependence*

The family is the most sensitive context for coming out. Structural economic dependency of women on men makes economic survival difficult for women who do not wish to marry, or who wish to leave a marriage. Within this gendered structure, in which marriage is especially important for females, women are not brought up to live a self-sustaining independent life in the same way as men. Education and training are accessible to women and provided by families, but their quality varies according to economic and social context (see Chapter 3.2, and Rammohan and Robertson 2012:301–302; Smith-Hefner 2020).

For my participants, these factors combined with a profound gender wage gap and misogynistic regulations<sup>394</sup> that make it difficult for women in general to earn incomes adequate for independence. If women work, they are expected to earn only supplementary incomes. This makes unmarried women economically dependent on the good will of their families, requiring them to obey due to the age hierarchy and their pre-adult status. Disclosure of same-sex desire can strain the good will of the family or adversely influence general family dynamics. Aware of these potential consequences, only a few participants decided to take this risk.

## Nike: Balancing longing for familial alliance with respect for seniority

As mentioned above, Nike did not fancy coming out to her parents, as her mother ghosted her same-sex loving sisters, Nike's aunts. Nike did not feel the need to verify that stance, telling me instead of multiple timid attempts to come out to or become *ketahuan* by these aunts:

*Not directly but with codes, but they are true lesbians, they are in some way also in denial. So, I repeatedly used codes like for example 'Aunty, I am now actively involved writing on lesbian webpages.' So, my aunt often just replied 'Oh yes, it's good', [...] but their answers were not responsive to it. [...] It seemed they were afraid that I mentioned that. Even though I mentioned the matter because I wanted to tell them: 'Me too. [...] We can be unified side by side!'<sup>395</sup> (Interview Nike, 11.08.2014)*

To allude to *lesbi/an* symbols as a code was a practice often used if LT+ respondents suspected their counterparts to share the same sexual orientation. These moments of hinting and responding were sensitive, characterized by insecurity and requiring

<sup>394</sup> Even in the formal labor sector women faced a gender wage gap of about 70–80% of the average wage of men. The tax law prevented the independent and equal participation of women apart from men: Married women need their husband's assistance in signing contracts, thus "removing women's control over their own financial transactions" (Cameron and Suarez 2017:13, 22–23).

<sup>395</sup> Original: "Gak secara langsung tapi kode-kode gitu. Tapi mereka tu sebenarnya nyata-nyata lesbian gitu. Tapi mereka kayak denial juga gitu. Jadi sebenarnya aku berkali-kali bikin kode misalnya gini, 'tante saya sekarang aktif lho, nulis di web lesbian.' Terus tante cuma 'Ya ya baguslah' sering-sering [...]. Ga nyambung jawabannya. [...] Kayaknya mereka tu takut kalau aku sungguh-sungguh soal itu. Gitu. Padahal aku tu nyinggung soal itu karena aku pengen cerita gitu: 'Aku juga. [...] Kita bisa bareng-bareng'."

courage and self-confidence. Why didn't Nike simply tell his aunts directly, as s/he was already informed that they were *lesbi/ans*? The chosen approach was a culturally appropriate invitation that respected the seniority of the aunts and their right to 'open up' without pressure. For his aunts the stakes were higher; responding to Nike's obvious allusions seemed too daring, because it could expose them to blame from Nike's mother and might evoke theories of biological or social transmission. As the aunts were not responsive to his allusions, Nike could not (yet) connect with the *lesbi/ans* of his family or establish a secret alliance of mutual support, an exchange that could have reduced their distress within the wider kin group.

#### Anju: Slow familiarization

Anju discovered her romantic feelings towards women when she was in high school, and while she enjoyed the affection she felt, she feared the reactions of others (see Chapter 4.2). Some months after she started her first relationship, she wanted to let her mother know. Her father was no longer around, as he had left the family. I asked if she had told her mother directly:

*No, not directly, but pointing in that direction, yes. I said something like, 'Mother, if I wanted to be honest with you, would you accept that or not? But this is me. This is your child who wants to speak the truth, if I had a partner, and, my partner was different from normal people, I could be considered abnormal? Because my partner is a girl too, just like me.'*<sup>396</sup> (Interview Anju, 31.07.2014)

Anju told her mother in a reserved and submissive way. She tried to mediate, choosing polite linguistic forms that were appropriate for communicating a sensitive matter to a higher status parent. By using a 'what if' formulation, she avoided direct confrontation and (hopefully) acclimatized her mother, via a hypothetical thought game, to what were somewhat obvious facts. She called herself 'abnormal,' preempting criticism by not waiting for her mother's judgment. This formulation also gave her mother the impression that her daughter was not satisfied with this circumstance herself and had not chosen it voluntarily, while understanding the social implications. Yet it remained a severely difficult topic: "The reaction of my mother was ... at first actual shock, upset and [being] taken aback. But as time passed, yes, she began to accept that my state is like this"<sup>397</sup> (Interview Anju, 31.07.2014). Anju did not elaborate explicitly on the immediate consequences of her coming out, or if her relationship with her mother changed. It appears that initial strain on the relationship was followed by growing normalization and acceptance.

<sup>396</sup> Original: "Langsung, sih, enggak, tapi agak sedikit menjurus, ya. E, katakanlah gini. Saya bilang sama ibu, Bu, kalau seandainya saya mau jujur, ibu bakal terima enggak? Tapi ini saya. Ini anakmu yang pengen ngomong sebenarnya, kalau saya mempunyai pacar, dan, pacar saya beda dengan orang normal. Saya bisa dibilang abnormallah, karena pacar saya tu perempuan juga, sama seperti saya."

<sup>397</sup> Original: "Reaksi, reaksi ibu saya, sih, pertama, memang shock, kaget. Tapi lama kelamaan, e, ya, mulai bisa menerima keadaan saya yang seperti ini."

While her mother accepted Anju's identification and supported her daughter in many ways, Anju's 'girl-friendships' became a topic with the neighbors, who tried to exercise social control. They began questioning why the girls Anju brought home were always changing. Were they "friends, or who are they?" As a self-confident young woman, and as a *butchi* who had rarely experienced invocations of female morality, she chose to defend herself. She reminded the neighbors of their limits: "I returned and answered, 'Yes, I am a lesbian, here I am. But the important thing is that I never interfered into your life. So, that is why you do not need to interfere with my life'"<sup>398</sup> (both Interview Anju, 31.07.2014). By her statement, Anju clearly marked the neighbors as having overstepped their responsibility, intruding into a field that belonged to her kinship network. If there was any obligation to obey and to examine the adequacy of her own behavior, then it was to come from her family. From them criticism was acceptable, and only to them did she feel reciprocal obligation.

Henny and Kesi: Hoping for the best, preparing for the worst

Henny and Kesi had unusual coming out stories that showed striking similarities, despite the fact that they happened 1,600 kilometers apart and within different socio-cultural surroundings. Both were between 18 and 20 years old at the time of their coming out: Kesi lived with her family in Yogya in which Sumbawanese (father) and Javanese (mother) ethnic influences with patrilineal descent prevailed. Henny was of matrilineal Minangkabau descent and had grown up in the house of her uncle and her extended family in West Sumatra.<sup>399</sup> While belonging to different ethnic groups with contrasting heritages and different kinship system, their ethnic affiliations were associated with Islam. Henny's father was an *ustadz* and Kesi's father was a Muslim activist who held a number of functions in an Islamic party.

Henny had started to think about coming out early; she was sure that she would tell someone, someday. For this day she prepared herself:

*So, when I was a kid, I already saved [money], I already built up savings with the expectation that when I came out, I would be expelled from my house. And I would be able to run away, [because] I have money.*<sup>400</sup> (Interview Henny, 10.09.2014)

She had carefully considered the location of her savings book and which bus to take to the train station. She had chosen the city of Bandung as her likeliest escape destination; it appeared suitable because of the prospect of other *lesbi/ans* living there,

<sup>398</sup> Original: "Ya, balik lagi saya jawab, ya, saya ini lesbian, ini saya. Yang penting saya tidak pernah mengusik kehidupan kalian. Jadi kalian ga usah, mengusi, mengusik kehidupanku gitu, lho."

<sup>399</sup> In matrilineal Minang culture the "brother of the mother is the most important person for the upbringing of the children of his sister" (Stark 2013:1). Even though Henny's parents had died early or left the region, it was not unusual, within such cultural surroundings, for her to have been raised by her mother's brother.

<sup>400</sup> Original: "Jadi waktu kecil saya udah nabung, udah punya tabungan dengan ekspektasi kalau nanti saya coming out, saya diusir dari rumah saya bisa kabur, saya punya uang gitu."

whom she knew from online chatting, and who had offered to help her in case of need. In the end, she found herself in Yogyakarta – not because she had to run away, but because she chose it.

Her coming out was very different from the scenario she had planned for. It happened accidentally, not as deliberately as she had planned. While she was lost in thought her older cousin had asked her if she was L. In reflex, she answered the question truthfully. Then ‘it’ was out, and she was surprised and scared of what would happen. Her family’s reaction was almost the opposite of the expulsion she had expected. Her cousin told her that her family had known for a long time, but had not been brave enough to ask. Now they were happy they had come to know about it firsthand and not through gossip. Instead of expelling her, Henny’s family gathered, and asked her to explain why she had become a *lesbi/an*:

*My uncle who is the world’s fiercest attended. ‘Come here, Henny.’ My heart started pounding [imitates heartbeat]. I already began counting the amount of money in my head I had saved. [...] ‘Henny, your uncle heard from your cousin you are L?’ – ‘Yes, uncle.’ – ‘Whose fault is that?’ I began counting again and estimating how far my savings would bring me. ‘Is it your mother’s fault who divorced her husband?’ – ‘No.’ – ‘Is it because you don’t have a father figure?’ – ‘No.’ – ‘Is it because you want to become a man?’ – ‘No, I don’t.’ – ‘So why is it then?’ – ‘Well uncle, because I just like women.’ – ‘Oh, yes, ok. How does it feel, do you feel comfortable?’ – ‘Yes, I feel comfortable.’<sup>401</sup> (Interview Henny, 10.09.2014)*

Her uncle’s questions reveal some of society’s presumptions about why an individual might desire the same sex. Besides the suspicion that his niece desired women because she might rather identify as man – a thought informed by a heteronormative understanding of desire *sui generis* – the reasons listed all refer to external, social, and family factors that are seen as triggering the ‘deviation’: rupture in the family, the absence of an appropriately gendered parental role model, et cetera. While divorce and family upheavals have social and psychological consequences for those affected, they are not reasons cited by *lesbi/ans* as triggers of their desire. Implicitly, this line of thinking reveals both the idealized value and consequential angst applied to ‘the family’, as well as the prevailing combination of misinformation and heteronormativity shaping societal judgement of non-heterosexual desire.

Fortunately, Henny’s careful preparations for an expulsion were not necessary. Even though her coming out went comparatively well, the beginnings of social stigma were noticeably present, and became more apparent over time. According to Henny, her uncle then said:

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<sup>401</sup> Original: “Om yang paling galak sedunia itu datang. ‘Henny, sini.’ Mulailah deg-degannya. Udah mulai ngitung duit tabungan ada berapa. [...] ‘Henny, om dengar dari kakak, kamu L?’ Iya, om. ‘Itu salah siapa?’ Hah udah mulai mikir tabungan ada berapa bisa lari kemana gitu. ‘Terus salah mamamu yang bercerai dengan suaminya?’ Gak. ‘Karena kamu gak punya figur ayah?’ Enggak. ‘Karena kamu pengen jadi laki-laki?’ Enggak juga. ‘Terus kenapa?’ Ya karena suka perempuan aja om. O iya. ‘Gimana rasanya? Kamu nyaman?’ ‘Nyaman.’”

*'Oh ok, but your uncle asks you for one thing, the family can accept it, [...] but if the family later on gets asked, the family cannot give any answers. Maybe it is better if you live outside the country or of this region.'*<sup>402</sup> (Interview Henny, 10.09.2014)

Even though her uncle suggested that Henny move out, his reason was not rejection, but protection – both for Henny and family's reputation. Henny's relocation would minimize inquiries and potential difficulties for the family.

Henny's disclosure was productive within the space of the family because it led to discussion, curiosity, dissemination of information, and reflection. Henny's family rediscovered her as an expert in a field that was mysterious to them:

*After this, there was every day someone asking 'And how does it feel?' Until even my grandma asked how having sex worked. [laughs] Finally, I got confused how to answer my family. So, we watched a movie. [...] Even my nephews who were eight and ten years old understood that I, that my partner is female, at that time [name of girlfriend]. That auntie [name] is the girlfriend of auntie Henny.'*<sup>403</sup> (Interview Henny, 10.09.2014)

Obviously, this particular family provided an open atmosphere at home that allowed for discussion and enabled all family members to acquire knowledge. At the time of our interview, Henny had lived in Yogya for some years and was in good and regular contact with her family. When Henny broke up with her girlfriend, they worried about her well-being and future as a *lesbi/an*, instead of proposing a man as her next partner. This indicated that her family no longer problematized her desire:

*My auntie, my older sibling, my uncle all panicked at home. They called me every day 'What about your girlfriend, isn't there any woman in Yogya you are interested in?' – 'It's okay, I'm not ready yet,' I said. So, my older sibling suddenly started to message me, sending a picture of a girl. 'What's that?' – 'Do you like her? She is in Yogya. I send you her number.' That's my family.'*<sup>404</sup> (Interview Henny, 10.09.2014)

Once established, Henny's family maintained their interest and support for her romantic well-being. Despite the physical distance, she remained a family member as others did, sharing the same obligations and receiving support, without her desire being perceived as a threat to the family's reputation.

<sup>402</sup> Original: "O ya udah, tapi om minta satu hal, keluarga bisa terima, [...] tapi kalau keluarga nanti ditanya, keluarga gak punya jawaban apa-apa. Mungkin lebih baik kamu tinggal di luar negeri atau di luar daerah."

<sup>403</sup> Original: "Abis itu setiap hari ada aja yang ditanyain 'Eh gimana rasanya?' Sampai nenekku nanya having sexnya gimana? Hehehe... Sampai akhirnya aku kelabakan jawab keluarga. Akhirnya kita nonton film. [...] Akhirnya ponakan, ponakan umur, baru umur 8 tahun, umur 10 tahun, ya udah, mereka udah ngerti kalau aku, pasanganku perempuan, waktu itu [name]. Itu tante [name] itu pacarnya tante Henny gitu."

<sup>404</sup> Original: "Tante saya, kakak, om, itu panik di rumah. Telepon tiap hari. 'Kamu pacarmu kok gak ada sih perempuan di Jogja yang kamu mau?' Terus ya belum, belum mau. Gitu. Terus kakak saya tiba-tiba BBM kirim foto cewek. Hah ini apa? 'Kamu suka gak? Dia ada di Jogja. Aku kirim PIN nya ya.' Itu keluarga saya gitu."

All in all, I heard and recorded many *ketabuan* and coming out stories during my research, but Henny's story stood out as special. It was simply very different from most, which were associated with sanctions, isolation, and long periods of negotiation. She was aware of this and joked: "[I had] everything prepared, but apparently – nothing. The drama didn't happen. If this was a story on TV, the rating would be poor, the story would not sell"<sup>405</sup> (Interview Henny, 10.09.2014). She offered two explanations for this unexpected outcome, "a good one, and a bad one":

*The bad one is, because I don't have parents anymore. My family is poor. If I was heterosexual, then they would have an obligation to marry me off. And for that costs are high.*<sup>406</sup> (Interview Henny, 10.09.2014)

Here Henny refers to the costs of a wedding but also to marriage payments like a "groom price" and "fetching money", both of which the bride's family is supposed to pay to the groom and his family in matriarchal Minangkabau society (Krier 2000:884). Henny's older sister had already been married. When Henny refrained from marriage, her family was given time to save for her younger sister's wedding. This might have been a welcome relief, as her family was rich in female offspring but less well-off in economic terms.

The good interpretation, from Henny's point of view, amounted to a moral lesson. The family had a neighbor, who was trans male and fought his way through life with two children. "My family always berated him, was always bullying him. Because they didn't understand"<sup>407</sup> (Interview Henny, 10.09.2014). When Henny outed herself, she became the real proof that 'something like this' can happen in every family. This made her family reflect on their own past behavior. After her coming out, Henny noticed that her family was friendlier and more accepting towards their neighbor – for example, they started using male forms of address. In this interpretation, Henny's family accepted her after she came out because they had previously stigmatized others, and now feared facing stigma themselves.

Henny's framing as 'good' and 'bad' revealed her perspective on the societal norms that such interpretations were embedded in. In the 'bad' version, she, as a woman, was a financial liability that could be eliminated 'thanks' to her desire; acceptance was bound to financial advantage benefitting solely the family. In contrast, the 'good' version was enabling; through reflection, her family adopted a more respectful attitude towards other LGBT+ people, and the family learnt about the complexity of desire and stigma from the perspective of those affected. Here, they learnt humility, benefitting the (LGBT+) community.

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<sup>405</sup> Original: "Udah siap. Ternyata, gak ada. Yah dramanya gak seru. Gak bagus ratingnya kalau di tv. Gak menjual ceritanya."

<sup>406</sup> Original: "Yang jeleknya, karena saya gak punya orang tua lagi. Keluarga saya miskin. Kalau saya heteroseksual maka mereka punya kewajiban untuk menikahkan saya. Dan biayanya sangat besar."

<sup>407</sup> Original: "Keluarga saya selalu mencaci maki dia, selalu membully dia. Karena mereka tidak paham."

Whatever interpretation might be correct, Henny's case seemed to involve a combination of factors that enabled acceptance. Her family was able to look beyond the normatively assessed attribute and developed curiosity towards her desire. This led to open communication, which was focused on Henny's psychological and romantic well-being. The suggestion for her to move away from the region could be seen as a way to support her to develop and realize her identification. The negotiation between Henny and her family shows sensitivity towards hierarchy and mutual obligation, commitment, and interactive shaping of space, without Henny being judged according to the idealized image of femininity.

In 2010, when Kesi graduated high school, she decided to come out to her father – again.<sup>408</sup> Like Henny, she had been afraid of the potential consequences:

*I still thought that later I would be kicked out from home. My father took the initiative, he said 'What would you like to talk about? Do you want to talk about that you like women?' Then I said 'No, I don't like women,' then I kept quiet, and started again using the polite form of Javanese language saying 'Sir, sorry if I can't be what you, father and mother, want me to be, because actually I do like women not men, if I become thrown out of this family, it's okay.'*<sup>409</sup> (Interview Kesi, 23.07.2014)

By switching to high Javanese, she signaled her awareness of her subordinate position and dependence on his benevolence. Her wording displayed adherence to the Javanese value of *nrimo* (receiving/accepting behavior, see Smith-Hefner 2020:103; Stodulka 2017:62), and it signaled her willingness to accept even expulsion. In choosing these words, she confirmed and re-produced the existing hierarchy within the social space of the family. Due to the incalculability of consequence and regrets over her failure to meet her parents' expectations, she performed anticipatory obedience by apologetically excusing her 'incapacity'. She depicted a hint of self-condemnation – a strategy already deployed by Anju above – that the father could confirm but hopefully would relativize.

*My father replied: 'It is up to you, this is your path but you have to be aware of possible consequences. If you meet a religious leader, yes surely it is said to be a sin. When you meet*

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<sup>408</sup> Kesi became *ketahuan* in primary school. Kesi suspected that her parents were waiting for her youth, and did not take her previous statements about her sexuality too serious.

<sup>409</sup> Original: "Aku masih berfikir nanti di usir gak ya dari rumah, terus ayahku ambil kendali dia bilang kamu mau bicara apa? Apa kau mau bicara kalau kamu itu suka sama perempuan? Terus aku bilang, enggak kok aku gak suka perempuan, terus diam lagikan, terus baru aku bilang pake bahasa jawa haluskan yang intinya: 'Pak maaf kalau saya tidak bisa jadi apa yang diinginkan bapak sama ibu karena sebenarnya saya suka sama perempuan bukan dengan lelaki, kalau saya mau dibuang dari keluarga ini, ya gak apa-apa.'"

*your old days, you will be alone. If you face people who hate you, you have to be ready to be pelted.*<sup>410</sup> (Interview Kesi, 23.07.2014)

Her father's reaction did not reflect his personal beliefs but did remind her of the challenges connected with her desire in the current social climate. He did not mark religion *per se*, but religious leaders – those with the power to interpret religion and influence people – as opponents of this desire, which they judged as sinful.<sup>411</sup> He also addressed the social losses she would face: no family of her own, no one to care for her in old age, and constant confrontations. Those who shared her desire would be deprived of all routes to personal and social hope and fulfillment, and of all sources of collective appreciation (family, religion, social community).

Kesi's father took on the role of a responsible advisor, not a morally superior patriarch, despite the fact that Kesi's desire did not correspond to his vision of her future. His understanding of their relationship kept him from making prescriptions, empowering his daughter to take responsibility for her choices. Islam became a facilitating factor in the negotiation. Kesi explained: "I used to think, maybe my father's Islam is liberal Islam, but he said 'No, your father's Islam is democratic, from which follows that you are responsible because it is your own life'"<sup>412</sup> (Interview Kesi, 23.07.2014). His specific conception of human nature was grounded in religion. He used the examples of drug addicts to explain the concept of self-responsibility to me, and the ability of humans to overcome deviations from the 'right path'. By overcoming such challenges, humans prove to God that they are able and willing to handle their God-given capacities, thus proving their worthiness in divine sight.

*The Almighty gives us soul and mind for us to use. [...] My child has been given liberty and freedom to think, to choose on her own. Coming back to her, the last decision is on her, we the parents only point to a direction.*<sup>413</sup> (Interview Kesi's father, 13.08.2014)

During his interview, in which Kesi was also present, he was explicit about the direction he was pointing to: "If it was possible that she could become healed tomorrow, she should go back to the path in accordance with her nature, because women are supposed to marry, she should have children, she must breastfeed and so on"<sup>414</sup>

<sup>410</sup> Original: "Terus ayah bilang: 'Ya terserah kamu, itu jalanmu tapi kamu harus tahu konsekuensinya apa. Kalau ketemu guru agama, ya pasti dibilang itu dosa. Kalau ketemu hari tuamu, ya kamu sendirian. Kalau kamu ketemu masyarakat yang membenci kamu, ya kamu harus siap dilemparin?'"

<sup>411</sup> In our interview, he complicated this view by stating that rejection was included in the story of *Luth* in *al Qur'an*, and therefore explicitly specified by God (Interview Kesi's father, 13.08.2014).

<sup>412</sup> Original: "Dulu, aku pernah bilang, mungkin ayahku itu islamnya itu islam liberal. Terus dia bilang, 'Bukan, ayahmu itu islam demokratis, asalkan kamu bisa bertanggung jawab, ya itu adalah hidup kamu?'"

<sup>413</sup> Original: "Kita diberi akal pikiran oleh yang maha kuasa itu yang kita gunakan. [...] anak saya diberi kebebasan kemerdekaan untuk berfikir untuk memilih, kembali kepada dianya nanti keputusan akhir ada kepada dianya, kita orang tua cuma mengarahkan."

<sup>414</sup> Original: "Tetapi kalau besok dia masih bisa disembuhkan, baik kembalilah kepada jalan yang sesuai dengan fitrahnya, karena perempuan itu kan mestinya dia harus kawin, dia harus punya anak, dia harus menyusui dan seterusnya."



(Interview Kesi's father, 13.08.2014). However, he confined himself to the role of guiding rather than enforcing. Obviously, he would appreciate it if her future womanhood became aligned with the *kodrat wanita*, as he was not convinced that she was irrevocably a *lesbi/an*. On this point, Kesi and her father disagreed.

In their negotiation, Kesi's father oscillated between expressing his hope for a more 'normal' future and providing preparatory support of his daughter to be able to navigate what he saw as a challenging future. Therefore, he appealed to her to take up her self-responsibility, and to be aware of possible consequences. Through discussions about religious teachings, her role as a woman, and her desire, as well as by facilitating university education and a scope of mobility unusually wide for a woman, he prepared her for an independent life. In providing these, he supported her to be accountable for her own financial livelihood and decision-making.

Kesi's father was also aware of the risk of potential stigma and reputational damage if Kesi's identification became known outside the family. During our interview, he emphasized his role as a *haji*, regularly giving consultation to his neighbors, (party) friends, and members of the mosque community, who visited him to seek his advice. I asked if he had ever sought others' advice on the topic of his own daughter's sexuality. He vehemently rejected this idea:

Father: *Never, I have never told this topic to others. [...] This belongs to me personally, why should I take it to the outside?*

Kristina: *I was just curious. [...] If you imagine discussing this topic with others, what kind of reactions do you anticipate?*

Father: *Therefore, I told you this belongs to my family, why would I let others interfere?*<sup>415</sup> (Interview Kesi's father, 13.08.2014)

His upset tone told me that I was suggesting something implausible. His answer made it clear that the topic was of no concern to (Indonesian) others, as it bore a sensitivity that could easily become detrimental for the family. He foresaw negative reactions and interference. To avoid confrontation, maintain social harmony, and protect the family, Kesi's sexual orientation was kept secret for more than a decade.

This leads to several conclusions. First, family members seeking advice on this tabooed topic find only few (if any) accessible sources of information or counseling. Second, people with a medium or higher status seeking to protect their reputation encounter difficulties in obtaining trustworthy advice within their own social networks. Their assumed position within social hierarchy leads to self-enclosure: They maintain their function as an untarnished role model in an environment of interpretations that can implicate the biological or social history of the family, which might be seen as guilty of provoking the forbidden desire. Disclosure to the outside

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<sup>415</sup> Original: *Bapak Kesi*: "Gak pernah, saya tidak pernah mengatakan hal ini pada orang lain. [...] Ini adalah kepunyaan saya pribadi, kenapa harus saya keluarkan keluar? *Kristina*: Saya hanya heran. [...] Kalau anda membayangkan samapaikan hal ini kepada orang lain, bagaimana anda memikirkan reaksi orang lain? *Bapak Kesi*: Makanya, saya bilang ini kepunyaan keluarga saya, ngapain diurus orang lain?"

can trigger disfavor in people with equal or lower status, or criticism and interference by persons with higher status, including (possibly binding) instructions on how to handle the matter. Respectable persons risk losing face or getting into a conflict of solidarity between different affiliations and connected interests.

Coming out in the family indicates a wish for family affiliation and cohesion. Since the risk of serious loss is great, preparations are made. The message is presented submissively in a non-confrontational way, with due respect for hierarchy. Ensuing negotiations in the family are characterized by compassion and mutual responsibility. Subsequent demands of families do not necessarily require conformity to the *kodrat wanita*, but often prioritize family secrecy to avoid stigma.

### 5.2.3 Collectivity, seniority, patriarchy: *ketahuan* and coming out in summary

In Chapter 4.2, I established the complex interplay of feared stigma, unclear consequences, cultural embeddedness, and no perceived necessity for disclosure, as reasons to conceal LT+ identifications. However, respondents sometimes had to deal with situations in the family, school or work, where their desire had involuntarily become known. Others voluntarily decided to come out in individual contexts.

Although facing manifold reactions to their disclosure, which ranged on a continuum from rejection to acceptance, none of my research participants who voluntarily disclosed themselves were kicked out of home, forcibly married, or legally prosecuted.<sup>416</sup> The obvious breach in gender norms prescribed by the *kodrat wanita* was not met by strict discipline regarding gender performance. In sharp contrast, instances of *ketahuan* revealed varying scenarios, ranging from school bullying to healing attempts or expulsion from the family home. Demands that respondents become ‘normal’ proved fruitless. Some interviewees responded by trying to restore their desired identification, while others withdrew from the context altogether.

In some cases, despite initial harsh rejection, small islands of acceptance emerged over time. Where this was not possible, same-sex loving identifications remained marginalized, and no transformation occurred. However, the examples of coming out in the family clearly demonstrate that some spaces can experience transformation through long-term negotiations, showing potential for affirmative normalization of the topic.

Gender and age hierarchies, entrenched in the local conception of family, shaped both *ketahuan* and coming out in the family. The dynamics surrounding coming out with friends and at work were more direct and confrontational. In the family, participants were very aware of the hierarchies entrenched in this context, and therefore adhered to rules of appropriate conduct. In the case of familial *ketahuan*, hierarchy was enforced from the higher position. Respondents found that others expected them to submit to what was proper for younger people or ‘women’.

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<sup>416</sup> This is not to say that this did not happen to other *lesbi/an* or trans male persons in Indonesia.

Due to the prevailing ideological structure, economic dependence of women on men emerges in intersection to class background as one of the most crucial barriers to an independent, self-sustaining life for *lesbi/ans* and trans males. Nevertheless, the character of the family is thoroughly ambivalent, because it also offers a sense of belonging and identification, social and economic security, and protection.

Silence, this section confirms, has a protective function not only for LT+ individuals. For families, it equally offers the safeguarding of status and reputation. Even if silence offers personal protection on the surface, it also perpetuates the invisibility of such subjectivities in terms of social and political representation. Without an orchestrated struggle for self-representation that ties together efforts of NGO's and allies the isolation of LT+ subjects, family secrets, and tabooed identifications will persist, as educational effects on the public do not occur and representative role models are missing. Mainstream public and religious discourses have, since 2016, further marginalized the LGBT+ community by launching initiatives against them, thereby limiting their opportunities for self-representation.

### 5.3 Summary: The *kodrat wanita* as blueprint for adequate womanhood

Throughout this chapter, I have utilized the practice theory approach paired with performativity theory to analyze the negotiations of LT+ respondents concerning gender and sexuality in different spaces. Due to the importance of the family, negotiations in family spaces became a particular focus of attention. Other spaces, such as employment and education settings, friendship circles, social media, and public spaces, also appeared as spaces of critical negotiation for LT+ subjectivities.

The family is the main arena of socialization in regard to the learning and production process and surrounding negotiations of gender. For LT+ people, the family also represents the central domain of social and economic participation. It is also in the kinship space that gendered socialization conveys and evokes the structure of heteronormativity and demands that family members adhere to it in practice, along the binary of sex. My respondents' performance of gender was repeatedly evaluated against this blueprint of an ideal-typical, Javanese femininity. When their desire became *ketabuan*, the most perceivable moment of transgression of the *kodrat wanita*, disciplinary approaches to gendered practice started to emerge.

Structure, even when ideologically hegemonic, does not actually determine practice. The heteronormative structure is powerful, and the basis on which many interview partners understood and evaluated themselves, their gender, and their desire (at least initially). Others, however, distanced themselves from an understanding and practices that produced their subjectivity as inferior.

Structure also influences performativity but manifested among my research participants in diverse methods of 'making gender'. Performance of gender was fluid

and strategically performed according to spaces and their power relations. This (hyper-) fluidity in gendered performance was the result of participants engaging differently with intersectional affiliation and interactively practiced spatial norms, which influenced but did not entirely determine their practice. Fluidity reflected a specific form of struggle with the ideological construction of gender and can be understood as agency in Mahmood's (2005) sense (see Chapter 7.2). The participants considered here had perfected this fluidity to such an extent that they maneuvered their way through norms that either ignored or outright rejected their gendered and sexual subjectivity, but could not prevent their being. LT+ co-created spaces, and they creatively shifted, re-signified, and sometimes subversively challenged hegemonic gender norms through these maneuvers.

Temporary transformations of structure became particularly noticeable when the disciplining of female masculinity decreased, or in the aftermath of *ketabuan* and coming out. In Henny's example, the shift was obvious: Her open interaction with her family, enabled by her coming out, increased their sensitivity and awareness towards her position and their trans neighbor. Yet, due to Javanese hierarchies and values, LGBT+ subjectivities unfolded more easily in seclusion due to subjects' simultaneous affiliation with these strains of cultural belonging.

LT+ participants negotiated their gender expression or desire in relation to expectations and roles structuring ties with immediate family and wider kinship groups. These negotiations underscored the family's role as a moral compass, reconciling the various individuals within it and their respective wants and needs. Personal interests were oftentimes pursued only partially, or shifted to other spaces. Practices of respondents and their parents were evaluated against social roles defining boundaries of behavior for 'mothers', 'fathers', and 'children/daughters'. Such deliberate practices demonstrate cultural belonging and willingness to compromise, not only by those lower in hierarchy. By contributing to the reduction of stigma, family members maintain social harmony within their families (micro level), their kinship groups (meso level), and in the wider social surroundings (macro level).

The resulting silences and the absence of voices challenging anti-LGBT+ stances made the promotion of representation, visibility, legal recognition, and normalization of LGBT+ in politics and society the work of one agent: NGOs. The next chapter discusses their negotiations around power, education, and alternative perspectives in the sphere of religion.

## II Negotiating same-sex desire, Islamic religion and personal faith

In the next two chapters, I focus on how religion profoundly structures and impacts LT+ self-understandings at the intersection of desire and faith in their everyday lives. Given that Islam holds significant sway as the most prevalent religion in Indonesia, the negotiations central to the following two chapters involve Islam.<sup>417</sup> The complex negotiations around the incompatibility thesis take place on discursive and on personal levels. As before, I apply the practice theory approach of Ortner (1996), and I combine it with a lived religion approach. My focus continues to be on the dialectic of structure and action. The lived religion approach<sup>418</sup> focuses on what lay people *do* with religion and thus neatly complements the performativity approach. Here, I am interested in how LT+ subjects understand themselves on the basis of discursive knowledge and personal expertise, i.e. what they *do* with religion (rather than how they perform gender) in order to interpret and signify their positioned being at the intersection of religion and desire. The lived religion approach also assumes that practice is shaped but not determined by structure (Ammerman

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<sup>417</sup> Even though I interviewed practitioners of Christianity and Hinduism, the majority of respondents identified as Muslims. When I present examples or interpretations that concern the other two religions, I indicate this.

<sup>418</sup> For a more detailed theoretical overview of the lived religion approach, see Chapter 1.

2007:5): institutions, doctrines, and experts produce understandings or interpretations that individuals then use, transform, or variably engage with. This assumption is reflected in the structure of the two ensuing chapters. I begin with an ethnographic vignette that highlights the key issues at stake here.

During the ‘Youth Interfaith Camp on Sexuality’<sup>419</sup> in 2014, about 30 young Indonesian adults from different backgrounds gathered for a week-long program.<sup>420</sup> During the camp, they discussed topics from different perspectives, with the aim of carrying knowledge and practical capacities back to their communities and becoming agents of peace and civil transformation.<sup>421</sup> At the end of the week, a theatrical performance was featured in a Festival of Cultures. In small groups, the participants had developed short performances on the topics of being different, self-acceptance, and associated challenges. The resulting sketches were rich in thematic diversity and intense, illustrating the complex interpersonal experiences, struggles, and various perspectives and understandings of young people on ‘their Indonesia’.<sup>422</sup> The fourth presentation, which I describe below, dealt with the topic of multi-layered identifications and social stereotypes.

### **Ethnographic vignette: Performance on ‘being different’**

*Scene 1: A person dressed as ustadz, with a man’s sarung, peci and tasbih (tube of fabric wrapped around the waist, religious headgear for men, prayer chain) sits on the stage. Two women, wearing headscarves, walk past him. He rejoices and comments: “Oh that’s beautiful, everyone is pious and true to their faith.” He walks off the stage.*

*Scene 2: One of the previous girls comes on stage. Now, she wears a baseball cap on her short hair and starts with martial arts, kicks and turns. Then she opens her backpack, puts in her jacket, takes out a scarf and leaves. On the way, she meets a person who congratulates her on her beauty and addresses her with ‘mbak’.*

*Scene 3: The same girl meets her mother who wears a headscarf and immediately begins to criticize her appearance and to impose household tasks on her, like washing clothes and dishes. The mother goes to a beauty Salon to get a pedicure. A feminine man, whom she*

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<sup>419</sup> Many thanks to YIFoS (Youth Interfaith Forum on Sexuality), who welcomed me to participate in this camp.

<sup>420</sup> I recognized, and was told about, differences in terms of religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, economic position, regional origin, professional or educational background.

<sup>421</sup> Thematic units approached, for example, the topics of body and power, the body in law, mental health, body and sexuality in different religions, and gender/sexual diversity in Indonesian history.

<sup>422</sup> One group dealt with the issue of discrimination, creating an alliance of affected persons from various marginalized groups, e.g. ethnic Chinese, *waria*, sex workers, and members of religious minorities. The second group focused on bullying, group pressure, and impacts on affected individuals at school. The third group portrayed a gay couple having a secret relationship, who get caught by the sham girlfriend, become outed to the parents and are forced to marry. The punch line, however, defied the heteronormative ideal, revealing that the parents of one member of the couple had given in and allowed their son to marry his boyfriend.

*immediately harshly confronts with his femininity, serves her. He answers that one must be feminine in a Salon.*

*Scene 4: Two befriended gangsters (preman), come on stage, a poor man walks by and they insult him.*

*Scene 5: (Dance music is playing.) The girl, again wearing the headscarf, comes on stage and meets her gay friend, the feminine man from the Salon, in a club. He doesn't wear a shirt, but also dons a headscarf. They dance together cheerfully.*

*Scene 6: The poor man comes back on stage and meets the ustadz. The ustadz invites him to a round of gambling with cards. He orders the poor man to get coffee and change seats. He also warns him to register if he should stay in the neighborhood overnight. In the background, the gangsters walk through the picture. With prayer rugs, they enter the mosque in front of which the scene is set. The ustadz is really upset and speaks loudly because he lost at gambling.*

*Scene 7: They all come on stage in their roles and stand with their backs to the audience. The poor man says he is surprised that the ustadz is gambling. The girl says that not every tomboy has lost her faith. The feminine gay says that not all men are masculine... Everyone turns around with papers in their hands with the English words: 'Not every single stereotype you think is always true'.*

*The audience reacts enthusiastically and the jury begins to comment on the performance. (Field notes, 4.9.2014)*

The performance portrayed Indonesian stereotypes through the staging of inconsistencies: religious authority figures are expected to refrain from (religiously condemned) gambling, (pious) women are expected to be feminine, men to be masculine, and gangsters to be morally corrupt – not pious. Socially, specific aspects or conditions are imagined, visible, or well-known mostly in only one particular way. Dominant images are often implicitly condensed alongside other “appropriate” aspects that form and complete a normative image, which in turn functions as a pattern attributed to the social context. The performance shows that this reduced and simplified perception, coupled with normative content, is an issue that people in general face on the basis of their (assumed) identification. Nevertheless, there are striking differences in the effects of these ‘inconsistencies,’ because they relate to power hierarchies structuring social affiliations. As such, each is judged and treated differently by society, and by subjects themselves.<sup>423</sup>

To the outsider, inconsistencies that do not correspond to social/personal logic and belief will be seen as contradictory. Yet from an insider’s position, these aspects may be negotiated, especially when they are judged to be morally reprehensible. In Chapter 6, I outline the hegemonic discourse that proposes an incompatibility of

<sup>423</sup> See Chapter 1 for a theoretical elaboration on power relations and stigma.

Islamic religion and faith with same-sex desire. I also delineate a progressive discourse that challenges this claim to truth and offers alternative interpretations that bring together Islamic faith and same-sex desire. Chapter 7 examines the experience of such alleged contradictions. There, I show that in personal practice there is convergence, parallel existence, simultaneity of aspects otherwise constructed as incompatible, and negotiation between these multi-layered identifications.



## 6. Contested grounds: On the evaluation of same-sex desire in religion

In what ways, and based on what concepts, have different discourses constructed an (in-) compatibility of Islam and same-sex desire and sexuality? In this chapter I address this question by laying out the perspectives that impart rejection of same-sex desire and LGBT+ people. This perceived incompatibility arises from an inability to meet certain religious principles, and from the qur'anic story of Luth. Perspectives affirming LGBT+, which I encountered in spaces dominated by LGBT+ people or friendly to the LGBT+ cause, use alternative readings of key texts to challenge these interpretations. These are then disseminated in various ways, which I describe later in this chapter. Using the concept of 'lived' or 'everyday' religion, I investigate the contents and attributes of experts' discourses and interpretations as structural and structuring forces. By doing so, I "take the power of the social context seriously" (Ammerman 2007:6). I ask, *what did the religious landscape offer LT+ individuals, how did it signify their positioned being?* Hence, in the following I consider rather standardized but also alternate 'unofficial' ideas of various experts I interviewed (religious leaders, scholars, and activists) who worked on religion and

LGBT+ subjectivities, creating the fields in which LGBT+ made sense of their religiosities, shaping their modes of negotiations (see Chapter 7).<sup>424</sup>

Opinions and justifications on the subject on behalf of Islam were by no means uniform. Approaches rejecting LGBT+ desire and identities argued on a variety of bases, just as approaches supportive of LGBT+ used various reasons to claim their position.<sup>425</sup> Comments of two employees of an LGBT+ NGO in Yogyakarta reveal the plurality in Islamic religious views on LGBT+. One noted that there are those “tending towards fundamentalism” – for them “homosexuality becomes a topic that is very taboo, very forbidden”<sup>426</sup> (Interview PLUsh, 11.07.2014). This proscription of same-sex desire appeals to a reading of the Holy book. The second employee stated that there are others who read the same text in more liberal fashion, adhering to a “subtler” model of “‘hate the sin, not the sinner’ [...] They don’t agree with homosexuality, but they go there to carry out religious activities with waria, hoping to help them find their way back to the right path”<sup>427</sup> (Interview PLUsh, 11.07.2014). Faith and theology are just one aspect among others that influence the perspectives of individuals. These aspects form a multifaceted bricolage, and reflect the contrast between ideals and their feasibility in practice. While some positions were socially prevalent and were often professed to be ‘the position’ of Islam on the issue of LGBT+ identity and desire, alternative approaches often sought to question and deconstruct them.

## 6.1 Discourses rejecting same-sex desire and LGBT+ persons

The topic of LGBT+ identity and desire had the potential to stir up religious sentiments and evoke strong emotions, since all believers experienced the religiously regulated aspects of gender, sex, love and sexuality within their own life and personhood. Despite the internal plurality mentioned above, the disapproving and rejecting voices were many, loud and sharp. They predominantly referenced the story of the Prophet Lot (Luṭ, in Indonesian usually *Luth*) in *al Qur’an*, which Mr. Arif, the liberal *ustadz* of the *Pesantren Waria*, summarized as follows:

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<sup>424</sup> When approached from the wider angle of lived religion, religion is not bound to orthodoxy with its in-line authorities. Then a multiplicity of actors intertwining ‘old’ and ‘new’ appear of which some also enable LGBT+ people in their religiosity.

<sup>425</sup> While representatives of both camps referred to religious sources and thus justified their rejection or affinity, especially non-experts argued with reference to an alleged canon of religion in the sense of religiously shared ‘common sense’, but without explicit textual references.

<sup>426</sup> Original: “Yang lebih ke agak fundamental. [...] homoseksual menjadi sesuatu hal yang cukup tabu, cukup forbidden.”

<sup>427</sup> Original: “‘Hate the sin not the sinner’ [...] Dia tidak setuju dengan homoseksualitas tetapi mereka datang ke sana melakukan kegiatan keagamaan bersama teman-teman waria ke dalam harapan supaya mereka kembali ke jalan yang benar.”

*The story of the prophet Luth, they say the people were homo. Well, then they were punished or tortured with the means of turning upside down their land, their territory, and that's usually why people react like 'Oh yes, the Prophet Luth, right, the people were homo. Waria are like homos', from which it is concluded that they are haram.*<sup>428</sup> (Interview Pak Arif, 24.08.2014)

### 6.1.1 The story of Lot

The story of Lot is that of a prophet who, like others in *al Qur'an*, spreads the message of God and of how to please God.<sup>429</sup> His story is passed down in several passages (*ayat*) in different *suras*<sup>430</sup> (7:80–84, 11:77–83, 15:58–77, 26:160–175, 27:54–58, 29:28–35, 54:33–39), and it warns of the consequences of ignoring God's law. Even though Prophet Lot tried to teach the inhabitants of his town ('his people') to fear God and obey His rules, they rejected Lot as a prophet and ignored his teachings. It is stated that they approached men in desire – an improper behavior, from a male perspective – instead of the women God created for them. They thus violated divine boundaries, such as those implied in the commandments to marry and avoid adultery, and were inappropriately violent and contemptuous of others. They even, it is said, committed 'an unprecedented abomination'. The residents defended themselves against this accusation, and mocked Lot and his followers. The Prophet condemned their nefarious behavior, warning that it would provoke God's punishment. Remaining ignorant, the people threatened to expel him from the city. Suspecting that his efforts to teach these people would be unsuccessful, Lot turned to God, and asked for salvation for himself and his followers. God informed Abraham that Lot's people were to be punished, but that he would save Lot and those

<sup>428</sup> Original: "Kisah nabi Luth, itu kan kono katanya, homo. Nah, kemudian diazab atau disiksa, itu dengan cara dijungkir balikkan, yang bawah jadi atas, tanah mereka, daerah mereka, dan ini biasanya yang jadi alasan orang untuk: 'Oh ya, nabi Luth itu kan, kaum Homo, berarti waria, itu kan, homo' misalnya kemudian haram."

<sup>429</sup> A scholar of Islam, Dr. Ayşe Başol from Frankfurt University, suggested this categorization. She also helped me with the following summary and translated the named *suras* for me. Please be aware that every translation already contains interpretation. However, she further provided the following insights: The *suras* that contain the different parts of the story of Lot were all passed down in the middle and late Meccan era, when Prophet Mohammed was still in Mecca. At this time, Mohammed struggled to establish himself in society. He deemed himself a monotheist and joined the ranks of biblical prophets. (The prophets who appear in *al Qur'an* are the prominent ones of the Old Testament. The biblical equivalent to the story of Lot is the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, Genesis, 1st Book of Moses). Mohammed wanted to put God's teachings into practice, encountered resistance and then referred to those who experienced something similar. The focus of the story is not on the described actions, but on the notion that the prophets were not obeyed, from which divine punishment followed. Accordingly, it is mostly about defiance as an attitude that is condemned (Başol 2019); for further information on qur'anic tales of divine punishment, see e.g. Busse (2003).

<sup>430</sup> Different editions of *al Qur'an* sometimes use different counting methods for the numbers of the *ayat*. This means that the passages of *al Qur'an* concerning these themes might, in some cases, be adjacent to the passages of the *suras* cited here.

who accepted Lot's teachings. Angels came to Lot to announce God's plan of punishment and salvation. Lot accommodated the angels as guests, but had to confront an angry mob of town residents who vehemently demanded access to them. Lot offered his daughters to the residents, who were more chaste and purer than the angels there as his guests, and admonished them again to fear God. He appealed to their reason, asking them to not shame him in front of his guests by their behavior. The people replied that they had no right to his daughters – they did not want to compromise, and so rejected the offer. When Lot explained to the angels that he was powerless to control his people, the angels revealed themselves as God's messengers. They announced a remedy: they would soon prove God's power which the people doubted, and rain down divine punishment. Lot had time to leave the city with his righteous followers, provided they did not turn back on the way. His wife, according to the prediction of the angels, would be left behind. Lot and his followers managed to flee the city unnoticed during the night. At dawn, the city was punished for its abandonment of the right path. The angels turned the city upside down and mighty stone rain descended, destroying the city for all time. A clear sign was left behind for those who understand the story today.

*Al Qur'an*, in which the story of Lot is included, does not speak of *homosexuality* or *homosexual* acts, but of sexuality. It is without reference to modern concepts of sexual orientation, but refers to 'reprehensible acts' (see Chapter 3.3).<sup>431</sup> Recognizing the historical context of these categories reveals their non-universality. In *al Qur'an* and the prophetic traditions it is a behavior, an act, rather than an inherent identity (Ghandour 2019:70–71). Applying contemporary categories to historical contexts should be done cautiously, if at all, for it should not be assumed that they are identical in meaning.

No matter whether an identity (*lesbi/an, gay, maria...*) or a single behavior (same-sex sexual acts) is assumed, the story of Lot was, during my research, regarded as the clearest source for the prohibition of same-sex desire and sexual behavior in Islam. Many supporters of this view saw, in Lot's story, an absolute unambiguity that could not be dismissed. Likewise, in the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, the entry about *Lūṭ* mentions "homosexual practices" as crimes of the people next to other acts (Lévi-Provencal 1986:832). The *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an* writes, under the entry *Lot*, that "[his] people were addicted to homosexuality" (Busse 2003:232). At the same time, under the entry *Homosexuality*, the same lexicon differentiates and emphasizes:

*Among the later exegetes and authors in the "stories of the prophets" genre, who augmented the story with many vivid details, there was general agreement that the sin alluded to was*

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<sup>431</sup> The term 'homosexuality', as an antonym for 'heterosexuality', arose and spread in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century through, e.g., Krafft-Ebing's work *Psychopathia Sexualis*, published in 1886 (Skinner 1999). At the beginning of the twentieth century, Hirschfeld (1914) noted its new prevalence as a term for same-sex desire and related acts. For Foucault, this illustrated sexuality's status as a historically situated construct. Homosexuality reached the status of an identity only with the emergence of 'the homosexual' as a species with a personal history and way of life (Foucault 2008:1061).

*anal intercourse between males; but neither the Qur'an nor a series of more explicit but poorly attested prophetic hadith allowed jurists to reach any consensus on either its severity or the appropriate penalty for those who committed it, determinations of the latter ranging from purely discretionary punishment (ta'zir) to death.* (Rowson 2002:444–445)

As a result of the sparse sources and few references regarding the topic of same-sex sexual acts or desire in *al Qur'an*, the topic has historically “been subject to considerable controversy in the exegetical and legal traditions” (Rowson 2002:444). Ghandour (2019:70–95) outlines the diverse legal assessments of same-sex relations in Islam, and also highlights the controversy of the subject. He traces the rich Islamic literary and poetic traditions, which allow conclusions to be drawn about a certain spread of same-sex practices in different Islamic societies over the centuries. In the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, the entry on *liwāt* (Birken 1986:776–779), which is translated as sodomy or pederasty (Stewart 2004:584) and etymologically derived from the word *Lūt*, also mentions a certain spread of male and female same-sex acts over the centuries that, while largely tolerated, were also condemned by strict moralists and Christians in the Middle Ages.

However, female same-sex sexual practices were never problematized:

*[T]hose who turn to scripture or hadith collections looking for material on lesbian sexual activity and relationships will find little to help them grapple with these issues. While the Qur'an explicitly addresses male-male sexual activity (albeit interpreted in various ways), there is no consensus as to whether the Qur'an even mentions female same-sex activity. There are numerous hadith addressing men's sexual behavior with other men, but, again, little mention of lesbian behavior in hadith collections.* (Ali 2002)

Discussions in jurisprudence and exegesis debated whether or not anal intercourse (*liwāt*)<sup>432</sup> should be punished under criminal law, and if so, how. Meanwhile, in social practice in Indonesia the view dominated that same-sex sexual acts were clearly forbidden, and this view explicitly referenced Lot's story.<sup>433</sup> This discourse, on the basis of *al Qur'an* and religion, constructed same-sex desire and its associated present-day identities as prohibited and sinful. This meant that same-sex sexual contacts were rejected as non-Muslim or incompatible with religion. While this assertion was made

<sup>432</sup> Ghandour (2019:71) criticizes the frequent translation of the term *liwāt* as homosexuality, sodomy or pederasty. While in Indonesia, I did not recognize the word *liwat* in public discourses attached to the subject. The more general synonyms *Kaum Luth*, *Kaum Sodom* or *Kaum Homo* were commonly used for LGBT+ people. I encountered talk about *liwat* in activist circles, as a practice (not an identity) of same-sex intercourse between men. They assumed *liwat* occurred rather frequently in religion-based and sexually segregated spaces such as *Pesantren*, where it was ignored or tacitly tolerated.

<sup>433</sup> This view became formalized towards the end of my research period: The *Qanun Jinayat* introduced at the end of 2014 in Aceh province included punishments for ‘male’ *liwat* and ‘female’ *mu-sabaqab*. Subsequently, the 2015 introduced *fatwa* of the MUI on same-sex sexual acts and LGBT+ people also defined *liwat* as sinful, and punishable under Islamic law; see HRW (2016b); MUI (2014); Nilsson (2018).

on the basis of textual evidence, the ambiguity of this ‘evidence’ was seldom addressed.

### 6.1.2 Further conflicting concepts: Sexual morality and societal silence

In addition to Lot’s story, same-sex sexual acts and identifications conflicted with other religious principles and norms relating to the sexes and the appropriate connection between them. In the following I summarize the core aspects of these principles, although they were often mixed and implied rather than individually differentiated.<sup>434</sup> The principles important for the discussion around the topic of same-sex love and LGBT+ were the notion of a binary sex, marriage, sexual relations, and procreation. Based on a heteronormative logic, these were intertwined into an ideal, religiously-based family model. As taught in *al Qur’an*, the *ustadz* of the *Pesantren Waria* told me, God created a pair of two sexes: “In the Qur’an it is clear for the problem of bodily sex [...] from verse one to the end there are only two, namely men and women [...], who are predestined by nature. Natural means given, something that cannot be changed anymore”<sup>435</sup> (Interview Pak Arif, 24.08.2014). The sexes are joined in marriage, a sacred contract before God, and from there on they form a family. A marriage, if religiously executed, may only take place between a man and a woman. Sexual acts are religiously allowed only within a legitimate marriage. Sexual acts that miss such a proper legalized relationship between those involved, such as premarital or extramarital sex are *zina* (fornication/adultery), a term and concept regularly used in Indonesia. Fertility, procreation, and children are highly valued in Islam (Giladi 2001:302; Motzki 2003) and Indonesian society at large. One of the main aims of matrimony is to provide a space for legitimate offspring within a marriage recognized by God, thereby ensuring the procreation of mankind.

Given the absence of same-sex marriage within Islam (or Indonesian law), same-sex sexual relations are consequently forbidden or condemnable, as they do not take place within a legitimate, religiously legal marital framework. Additionally, same-sex desire is rejected by religious parameters because of its inability to produce offspring ‘naturally’, without the use of reproductive medical assistance. From this perspective, both same-sex desire and same-sex sexual acts are discursively marked as unnatural, lacking morality, and are therefore considered to be religiously reprehensible.

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<sup>434</sup> See Chapter 3.3 for an elaboration of these principles and their grounding in religion and societal ideals.

<sup>435</sup> Original: “Di dalam al Qur’an memang jelas untuk masalah seks [...] dari ayat 1 sampai terakhir itu cuma 2, yaitu laki-laki dan perempuan [...] yang sudah kodrati, kodrati adalah given yang enggak bisa di rubah lagi.”

Islamic sexual morality is far more complex than what is presented here or in Chapter 3.<sup>436</sup> There are also discrepancies between the discursive ideal and the actual practices of individuals, which are structured by their negotiations and shaped by many references. Nevertheless, in public discourses (e.g., state discourses on regulations, which were informed by Islam and disseminated by the media) an ideal-typical sexual morality is regularly upheld. In such discourses, sexuality is dangerous and has to be regulated to protect public and personal morality. These regulations involve curbing sexual education for youth (Nurish 2011:269), controlling the sale of contraceptives to married couples (Marcoes 2018), or demanding highly restrictive, religiously-based clothing regulations<sup>437</sup>. With these cultural, religious, and moral norms framing the discussion, open conversations about sexuality have become taboo (Hidayana 2004:60, quoted in Nurish 2011:269; see also Chapter 3.2). In rare instances, I did encounter timid, awkward talk about sexual acts within small and sexually segregated circles of females. Sexuality, lust or sexual acts were a constrained topic of conversation, especially in public and between the generations.<sup>438</sup> When I asked one father about his negotiations with his *lesbi/an* daughter, he replied: “We don’t talk about the lesbi problem in specifics. Let me state once again, Indonesian society is a society where it is taboo to talk about that problem”<sup>439</sup> (Interview Kesi’s father, 13.08.2014).

Precisely because the religious ideal of (sex in) marriage was so prominent in public discourse, along with the offenses against it, conversations between members of different generations about personal sexual relations were avoided in practice. This was even more true when those relations were ‘deviant’. Further aggravating the problem was the friction between religious and Javanese values and the implications of desire, lust, and sexual satisfaction.

*Discussing sexuality is a problem because it relates to sexual satisfaction. Satisfaction through sex means lust. It means that lust must be controlled. Which means that it is taboo. [...] Especially for women. [...] So, satisfaction is the fulfilment of lust. And in*

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<sup>436</sup> For more details on sexual morality and ethics in Islam, see e.g. Ali (2006); Bouhdiba (2008).

<sup>437</sup> In 2014, the keyword *jilboobs* sparked public discussion. It refers to a style of dress that combines a headscarf (*jilbab*) with tight clothing. According to the critics, such tight clothing inappropriately emphasized the body shape, contradicting the actual intention of Muslim dress codes, to which the wearing of the headscarf is strongly linked. Media reports on this topic include: Friastuti (2014); Ledysia (2014); Pratomo (2014); Triono and Yulianingsih (2014).

<sup>438</sup> A fellow anthropologist, who had interacted with married Hindu women in Bali, identified a regional bias within these patterns. It also made a difference if the topic was discussed in general or in regard to oneself. I also think that married women were able to ‘talk heterosexual sex’ in ways that were less constrained than those experienced by my unmarried respondents, who, when talking about their same-sexual experiences, did not enjoy the legitimizing framework of marriage.

<sup>439</sup> Original: “Kita tidak bicara secara spesifik masalah lesbi, masalah itu. Sekali lagi saya katakan bahwa masyarakat Indonesia ini masyarakat yang tabu bicara masalah itu.”

*religion, in Javanese culture, people should not be lustful. People should not allow themselves to be driven by lust.*<sup>440</sup> (Interview Budi Wahyuni, 09.09.2014)

Being “driven by lust” implies a lack of self-control inconsistent with the refined conduct of the *cara Jawa* that people are meant to strive for (see Chapter 3.4). This mixture of religious principles was informed and valorized by the local social setting, and it relegated sexuality to the private and personal sphere.

The silence over sexuality, as well as sexuality’s containment in marriage, was yet another aspect impairing the discussion and evaluation of LGBT+, because any discussion of LGBT+ people would implicitly include themes of sexual activity.

*If you are LGBT+, the connotation is that you have been sexually active. [...] So yes, what it’s really about is that you’re stigmatized because you have sex with the same sex. Not because you love the same sex.*<sup>441</sup> (Interview PLUsh, 11.07.2014)

Here, religious and societal values interlock and overlap. Despite the moderate and mediating discussions pursued by LGBT+ NGOs, the issue is prone to be perceived as a breach of social conventions, not only in content but also in form. Not only is the desire itself problematized within the mainstream discourse, but also sexual activity outside of marriage. As such, any discussion about ‘it’ (i.e. sexuality) brought up a topic that, in the eyes of many, did not belong in the public domain.

### 6.1.3 Interpretations about the causes of the desire: Infection, sin and *Allah’s* Creation

In addition to the reasoning which marked same-sex desires as unintelligible in relation to religion, different interpretations of the origins of these ‘peculiar’ desires circulated in society. Some of these ideas were connected to religious beliefs. Blackwood (2010:82–84) analyzed newspaper articles and *tomboi* statements to suggest that in Indonesia, people employ specific knowledge practices to explain such desires. Popular explanations primarily attribute gender nonconformity and same-sex desire to environmental and socio-cultural factors. A common explanatory motif, which Blackwood argues (2010:83) resonates with Indonesian concepts of personhood and state doctrine, emphasizes the importance of training and nurture to adequately achieve and occupy one’s gendered position. These same aspects were key factors in mastering the refined *halus* behavior, which demonstrates that a person has *learned* her/his place (see Chapter 3.4). As such, training and education, whether

<sup>440</sup> Original: “Sembincang seksualitas jadi ada masalah karena di sana memuat kepuasan seks. Yang kepuasan seks itu artinya napsu. Yang artinya itu harus dikendalikan. Yang artinya itu ditabukan. [...] Khususnya perempuan. [...] jadi kepuasan itu adalah pemenuhan napsu. Dan di dalam agama, di dalam kultur Jawa, orang tidak boleh napsu. Orang tidak boleh melepas napsu.”

<sup>441</sup> Original: “Ketika kamu LGBT+, konotasi you did a sexually active. [...] Jadi ya, yang sebenarnya yang dipermasalahkan adalah kamu distigma karena kamu berhubungan seks dengan sesama jenis. Bukan kamu mencintai sesama jenis.”



by the self or the environment, permeated explanations for same-sex desire, such as those described below.

The ‘born this way’ trope, which is popular within the U.S. and Europe, purports a biological naturalness and immutability of same-sex desire. This trope was rarely brought forward by LGB+ people in Indonesia themselves. More widespread were explanations that suggested that individuals had deviated from an alleged previous heterosexuality. This implied not only that there had been something lacking in a person’s ‘nurture’, but also that their desire might, with the right training, change again.

The employees of the NGO PLUsh cited an explanation often used by parents to account for their children’s LGBT+ status, namely the neglect of religion:

*People become LGBT+ because they are far from religion. ‘You became like this because you never pray, never obey the commandments of God and never go to the mosque or church, that is why you became like this, so you should pray with me now.’ This is often said by parents, ‘pray with me, follow God’s commandments with me and you won’t be like this anymore.’<sup>442</sup> (Interview PLUsh, 11.07.2014)*

In the interview with Kesi’s father, he made various comments that reflected the importance of nurture over nature. At one point, he spoke about the influence of God and the parents on the child:

*[H]uman nature depends on [Allah]... internally God determines ABC, but the more dominant factor is the outside, so possibly acquaintances [...] because there isn’t a gene from us, it cannot be a gene from her mother, a gene from me because we don’t have a thing like this [in our family], homo or lesbi.<sup>443</sup> (Interview Kesi’s father, 13.08.2014)*

Even if God provided the foundation stone for a person’s individual condition, that condition depended equally on ‘external’ socio-cultural realities, and their behavior. God, in this explanation, did not create the desire. Accordingly, Kesi’s father, like many others, saw the desire as something acquired through the environment, rather like a disease that his daughter might have picked up through her social contacts. Though he mentioned the possibility of a biologically inherited ‘gay gene’, he rejected this as being unlikely in his family’s case. At a later point, he mentioned another explanation, namely that of the spiritual purpose of the family:

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<sup>442</sup> Original: “Orang-orang itu menjadi LGBT+ karena jauh dari agama. Begitukan jadi apa namanya ‘kamu jadi seperti ini karena kamu gak pernah shalat, tidak mentaati perintah tuhan dan tidak pernah ke mesjid atau tidak pernah ke gereja kan, makanya kamu jadi begini, makanya ayo kamu shalat sama aku.’ Itu biasanya yang dikatakan orang tua, ‘kamu shalat sama aku, kamu menjalani perintah tuhan bersamaku dan kamu tidak akan menjadi seperti ini lagi.’”

<sup>443</sup> Original: “[F]itrahnya manusia itukan tergantung ... dari dalam sana sudah ditentukan Tuhan abc, tetapi yang lebih dominan itu ada di luar, pergaulan mungkin [...] karena tidak ada gen dari kami gen dari ibunya gen dari saya tidak ada yang hal-hal seperti itu, apakah homo apakah lesbi tidak ada.”

*In the conception of Islam, we will not be able to enter heaven without the temptation of God. This is probably one of the biggest forms of temptation that God gave to me and my child.*<sup>444</sup> (Interview Kesi's father, 13.08.2014)

In this approach, same-sex desire appears as a trial by God. The challenge of God's trial for the daughter lies in overcoming this desire and returning to her female nature (*kodratnya*). The motive of divine trial can encompass two aspects that both resonate with willful training. On the one hand, it can be about not giving in, i.e., controlling the perceived desire or lust. On the other hand, it can be about finding, and following the right path. Both aspects are also reflected in the idea that being LGBT+ is a choice. To have the desire is not understood as a choice (*pilihan*), but to follow it actively is a choice. If the lust (*nafsu*) is followed, then it is understood from the outside as '*pilihan*'.

*[There is the belief] that people are created with different kinds of unfavorable conditions. But those who will later go to heaven are those who have succeeded in finding the right way. Perhaps you are born poor, [...] disabled, [...] born as LGBT+. But those who are later recognized are the ones who find the way back. So, it is a test when you are born unlike other people.*<sup>445</sup> (Interview PLUsh, 11.07.2014)

Kesi's father's challenge was to accept her and support her in returning to the right path. He later compared her task to that of an addict seeking to overcome drug dependency. It would be difficult, but as long as she could find the strength to choose the right path, and perhaps with the help of a yet to be discovered medicine, it might be possible.

Elsewhere in the interview, he expressed fears that his daughter had developed her desire as a punishment for a sin committed in his family in previous generations, as would have been considered true in the case of a child born disabled.<sup>446</sup> In Islam, punishments for sins must usually be borne by the sinful person themselves, and are not inherited (Adnan 2004:12). From this understanding, however, the family would be guilty of Kesi's transgression as a collective, which explains why this assumption is considered especially explosive.

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<sup>444</sup> Original: "Kalau konsepsi Islam kita tidak akan bisa masuk surga tanpa ada yang namanya cobaan daripada Allah. Nah ini mungkin salah satu bentuk cobaan yang terbesar yang diturunkan diberikan Tuhan kepada saya, anak saya seperti ini."

<sup>445</sup> Original: "Bahwa manusia itu akan diciptakan dengan berbagai macam keadaan yang tidak menguntungkan. Tapi mereka yang kemudian akan masuk surga adalah mereka yang berhasil menemukan jalan yang benar. Mungkin kamu akan dilahirkan miskin, [...] difabel, [...], dilahirkan LGBT+ gitu. Tapi mereka yang kemudian diakui adalah mereka yang berhasil kembali. Jadi itu adalah sebuah ujian jika kamu dilahirkan tidak seperti orang lain."

<sup>446</sup> Dian later on contextualized this argumentation. She explained: "There is a *hadith* that says that all diseases come from one's own hand. This means people get sick because of their own mistakes. But if people are disabled or blind, it is caused by the inheritance of a sin and is a result of mistakes made by the parents."

Another explanation took affliction by a *jinn* as the reason for same-sex desire. A *jinn* is, in the qur'anic sense, "a category of created beings believed to possess powers for evil and good" (Chabbi 2003:43). In Arabic, the concept of the *jinn* carries the "the negative meaning 'possessed'" (Chabbi 2003:49), signaling an evil power with the ability to possess a person. This concept is also found in Indonesia, and is invoked in relation to same-sex desire. In these cases, family members or religious leaders suggest or perform religious rituals and exorcisms (*ruqyah*) for the 'sick' person.<sup>447</sup> In this approach, individuals are seen as more or less affected by external forces, and are not blamed for the desire but 'healed' from it. The approach still emphasizes that desire is malleable through nurturing and training by those close to the affected person.

Besides these explanations, psychological explanations that account for socio-cultural factors circulated in the *lesbi/an* circles that I studied. Some explained same-sex desire as a reaction to abuse, or as a result of bad experiences with men. One respondent suggested she had entered her first *lesbi/an* relationship due to a trend. Sometimes the 'born this way' trope changed into an '*Allah* created me like this' trope. In this approach, God had created the desire, and therefore wanted it. If *Allah* created nature and all beings in the world, and if this creation was flawless, then it was purposeful. In this approach neither the possibility nor the necessity of changing desire arose, in strong contrast with more dominant social narratives.

Whether it was considered a case of a disease to be cured, a divine trial to be managed, a *jinn* to be exorcized, or a matter of a person being returned to the 'right path' by his or her own 'choice' – all widely-used explanations of desire's origin that had religious connotations emphasized its changeability through intentional training and nurture. This 'common sense' regulated the climate towards same-sex desire during my research. In the course of this period LGBT+ subjectivities were discursively constructed as sinful and unintelligible in terms of religion. In this conservative mainstream strand of Islam, oriented towards orthodoxy, LGBT+ subjectivities were not seen as properly religious. They could become pious again only if they subordinated their Self to training and nurture, and took a path of healing with the aim of complying with cis- and heteronormative religious values. Below, I focus on alternate religious perspectives which questioned these narratives by pointing out the ambiguity of sacred source material, and which understood same-sex desire and LGBT+ subjectivities as compatible or partially harmonizable with Islamic principles.

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<sup>447</sup> Several interview partners experienced this, see Chapter 5.2.1 on healing attempts or Yuni's story in Chapter 7.2.4.

## 6.2 Alternate perspectives challenging hegemonic narratives

The following subsection addresses alternative knowledges, their production, and the perceptions of them in LGBT+ circles. Questions that this section addresses are: *Which strategies inform the approaches to alternative knowledges? Which actors were involved in the process of creating these alternatives? How was dissemination done? What did the emerging forms of knowledge have to offer with regard to the transformation of power relations in local spaces?*

The issue of how to reconcile *lesbi/an* desire and non-normative gender identities and expressions with dogmatic religion and personal belief was a recurring topic among LGBT+ people and their allies. Alternate bodies of knowledge enjoyed popularity among those who felt questioned and excluded. The frequency of discussion on this topic reflected not only its importance, but also the felt need for alternative understandings. Scholars creating alternative interpretations allowed themselves to approach the dogmatic, theoretical system fragmentarily, without pursuing the claim of creating a new ‘truth’ or a complete and finalized new theoretical system.<sup>448</sup> I use empirical examples to illustrate the topic and to highlight the challenge of countering the incompatibility thesis by providing alternatives that do not fit into powerful motifs.<sup>449</sup>

### 6.2.1 Approaches to alternative knowledge

From an analytical point of view, those involved in alternative knowledge creation drew on different disciplines, such as feminist and queer theology, history, and post-colonial studies, as well as on a diverse set of disciplinary methods such as (feminist or humanist) hermeneutics, exegesis or deconstruction. As such, their work was rather fluid and cross-cutting. The hermeneutic approach investigates the preconditions, implicit assumptions, and goals of interpretations. The field of exegesis (*tafsir*) concentrates on the concrete interpretation of particular religious texts. Both defy the simplified truth-claims of conservative perspectives, which, they argue, ignore the plurality of interpretations, take texts out of context, or selectively quote those texts. Among the orthodox-oriented perspectives that they query are those that argue for the condemnation of homosexuality as practice and identity. As an

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<sup>448</sup> On the contrary, during an online lecture in the framework of IDAHOBIT 2020, organized by GAYa NUSANTARA (GN), with the Coalition for Sexual and Bodily Rights in Muslim Societies (CSBRS) and the Global Interfaith Network (GIN), the speakers emphasized the importance for progressive interpretations to not mark them as truth. The notion of ‘truth’ is problematic, as ‘one truth’ has so far suppressed LGBT+ people. Instead, it is a matter of creating an awareness around the plurality of interpretations, in which progressive interpretations are marked as different. This would also promote a democratization of interpretation practice.

<sup>449</sup> Not only did LGBT+ NGOs resist Islamic conservatism, but so too did many other liberal or feminist organizations working on issues likewise under attack or restricted by conservatism; see, for example, Andren (2007); Robinson (2009, 2018); Wieringa (2009).

alternative, they argue for plurality and the acceptance of minorities, who are among all humans created by God – created equally, and for a purpose.

As Pak Arif, the *ustadz* of the *Pesantren Waria*, put it:

*Religion belongs to everyone, not only to me, not only to those who are considered good, it also does not belong to people who are considered kyai haji [...]. So, if there are people who want to be religious, we must appreciate them. Additionally, for me religion is for people, if religion were for God, it would be strange. [...] When the Prophet Muhammad Sallallahu ‘Alaihi wassalam [peace be upon him] was sent as the Prophet of Muslims, it was because of social phenomena that were terrifying at that time. Oppression of the poor, murder of women, girls buried alive, so then it was up to Prophet Muhammad to put everything into order. And that is our role now, the function of religion is to humanize humans. That is the principle, to make religion useful for the people themselves.<sup>450</sup> (Interview Pak Arif, 24.08.2014)*

Emphasizing core principles of love and respect for others and for God’s creation, those seeking alternative approaches argue that it is God, not other believers, who will ultimately evaluate individuals’ religious piety and the gravity of their sins. The actors who propagated these ideas during my fieldwork period were sensitive to power and context, and sought to diversify established perspective, and to dismantle possible political instrumentalization by individuals. In the efforts of (feminist and/or humanist) hermeneutic and exegetic approaches there were three fundamental assumptions, which I will briefly summarize.

#### *Critical hermeneutical approaches*

A key element in critical hermeneutic approaches to sacred texts is the emphasis on the particular social contexts in which those texts were produced. In relation to *al Qur’an* specifically, historical factors that informed its values and rules often mentioned are the tribal societies, gender relations, and polytheism of the time. Seen in this light, scripture cannot refer directly to today’s sexual and gender identities because the realities of life at the time of its transmission/creation do not correspond with the differentiated and fragmented contexts of today’s globalized world (Ghandour 2019). Moreover, if what we understand as homosexuality today was indeed a direct topic of regulation in religious source material, then the passages

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<sup>450</sup> Original: “Agama itu milik siapapun, jadi bukan hanya milik saya, bukan hanya milik orang-orang yang dianggap baik, iya bukan milik orang-orang yang dianggap kyai haji. [...]. Jadi ketika ada orang lain pun ingin beragama maka kita harus menghargainya itu ya. Kemudian bagi saya, agama itu kan untuk manusia kalau agama untuk Tuhan, aneh. [...] Dulu ketika nabi Muhammad Sallallahu ‘Alaihi wassalam juga diutus sebagai nabi dari umat Islam adalah berawal dari fenomena sosial yang waktu itu kejahiliyahannya itu luar biasa. E penindasan terhadap orang miskin, pembunuhan terhadap wanita, anak perempuan dikubur hidup-hidup jadi kemudian ada turun kepada nabi Muhammad, perbaiki itu semua. Dan itulah peran kita seperti itu jadi fungsi agama itu adalah memanusiakan manusia, jadi prinsipnya adalah agama adalah bagaimana menjadikannya bermanfaat untuk manusia itu sendiri.”

noting this prohibition would be more frequent and more explicit. There would also be fewer contradictions with other statements in the text, such as that ‘in paradise boys are provided’, without explicitly specifying for whom they are provided. According to some perspectives in critical hermeneutics, this means that specific *suras* or sections were not (primarily) meant literally but had a superordinate function in relation to the complete scripture.<sup>451</sup> Traditional interpretations also had to have their situatedness recognized – for example, how they were situated in the gender relations of their time. Most interpreters in history were men, meaning that common interpretations were not unbiased but unconsciously permeated by themes relating to men’s interests and points of view, status, and position in society. Recognition of this factor meant returning to the original Arabic sources, to read and question them through a gender lens, and with reference to female Muslim scholars of theology, law, or Muslim women’s studies (see, e.g., Wadud 2006)<sup>452</sup>.

### *Exegetical approaches*

Following the search for male-centered interpretations, actors in the field of exegesis proposed and worked out novel, alternate interpretations. The story of Lot, for example, was reinterpreted and by that lost its alleged denunciation of same-sex desire, and reappeared as a condemnation of violence and the refusal of hospitality.<sup>453</sup> At a conference in Jakarta in November 2014, I saw a presentation by Prof. Dr. Siti Musdah Mulia,<sup>454</sup> who lectured on ‘Muslim View on Sexual Minorities’. She spelled out her analysis<sup>455</sup> and reinterpretation of Prophet Lot’s story in detail, some of which I quote here:

*Third, the people of Luth committed violence, injustice, and gender inequality and those [sic!] evil causing the great anger of Allah and causing Him to pass on them terrible disaster, misery, and calamity. Fourth, one of the specific abuses committed by the people of Luth was to express forbidden sexual behavior; saturated with elements of violence, force,*

<sup>451</sup> Still, that religion was frequently questioned on contemporary circumstances demonstrated its value as a grandeur in individuals’ lives, and leaders and lay people’s assessment as a capacity providing answers.

<sup>452</sup> Dr. Amina Wadud, for example, was one speaker at the online lecture ‘Bringing Progressive Faith Voices towards Diverse Genders and Sexualities’ organized by GN, CSBR and GIN on IDAHOBIT 2020.

<sup>453</sup> The Christian pastor and university lecturer Stephen Sulceman emphasized this interpretation of the story of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Bible when interviewed in SITT Jakarta.

<sup>454</sup> Committed to humanizing Islam, Prof. Mulia was part of a group of moderate Muslim scholars who already in 2008 argued that Islam and homosexuality were compatible (Khalik 2008). Several research participants referred to her, and her student Mohamad Guntur Romli and author of the book ‘Muslim Feminis’ (2010) who presented about ‘Islam and Sexual Minorities’ at a seminar I attended in April 2014.

<sup>455</sup> Elsewhere in the presentation, she mentioned methodological principles reinterpretations should be based on: “The principle of *Tawbid*, The principle of *Maqashid al-Shari’ah*, The principle of *fiqh* relativity, The principle of thematic interpretation” (Mulia 2014).

*and physical maltreatment, among others, in the form of rape. [...] Seventh, the bitter torment in the story of Luth also befell the people of other prophets, like the people of prophets Nuh, Hud, Syuaib, Saleh, and Mozes.<sup>456</sup> Even, the torment [which] befell the people of Nuh was much more severe so that the happening was referred to as first doomsday. It means that Allah is always angry with every people who commit acts of cruelty and atrocity and excessiveness regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. The ordeals are not necessarily associated with the issue of sexuality. The torments may befall whoever, regardless they are homo or not. (Mulia 2014, emphasis in original)*

This interpretation emphasized the element of violence and force in the (sexual) behavior of Lot's people as the reason for God's punishment, not same-sex sexual acts in general. By arguing for this interpretation, she directed the theological focus to non-violent behavior and opened up space for same-sex loving individuals to be loved by God, provided they behave in a godly manner without exercising force or violence upon others.<sup>457</sup>

Ustadz Arif took a different approach in his work on this topic in the *Pesantren Waria*. He chose to focus on the analysis of today's social phenomena and the questions they raise regarding values. He then interrogated the original texts for corresponding situations and the values they evoked. From these, he tried to assess what would be the correct way to deal with social phenomena in the present, like *waria* and the LGBT+ community. His starting point was the reality of the present: even if *waria* or same-sex desiring people did not exist (anymore)<sup>458</sup> in scripture, in the present they did exist, and were longing for spiritual guidance and instruction.

*I say the nature of uluhiyah, the instinct of God, the instinct towards God cannot be removed from within any human being... no matter what. [Humans] will never be able, including our waria friends, to determine their own diversity, to preserve it or deny it, so for me it is still the case that whatever the reason for the diversity of spiritual experience is, we have to give them as much opportunity as possible, there is no right for me to forbid them. [...] All human beings are equally creatures of God. When they relate to religion, for me, let them be, they have the same right, in the eyes of God they are equal. No matter if gay, lesbi, bi or anything, when they want to face their God and express the religion that they believe in, then it is their right.<sup>459</sup> (Interview Pak Arif, 24.08.2014)*

<sup>456</sup> The Christian or rather Jewish 'equivalents' of these Islamic prophets are Noah (Nuh), Eber (Hud), Jethro or Reuel (Syuaib), Salah or Shela (Saleh) and Moses (Mozes).

<sup>457</sup> In the next chapter, I trace how interview partners perceived this alternate interpretation.

<sup>458</sup> Pak Arif noted, they don't exist in scripture anymore because of the socio-politically influenced and continually fluctuating historical processes of unification that shaped the canon.

<sup>459</sup> Original: "Saya bilang fitrah uluhiyah, naluri ke Tuhanan bahwa insting ke Tuhanan itu enggak bisa dihilangkan dari dalam diri setiap manusia. Bagaimanapun caranya. Tidak akan pernah bisa, termasuk teman waria enggak bisa di nafikkan atau ditiadakan keberagaman mereka, jadi bagi saya masih seperti ini apapun alasannya dalam hal keberagaman pengalaman spritual kita harus memberikan kesempatan seluas mungkin kepada mereka, enggak ada hak saya untuk melarang

For Pak Arif, religion and spirituality were desirable and necessary for everyone, and needed to be made accessible by religious leaders like himself, and by others. He mentioned more than once that in *al Qur'an* there are two sexes, men and women. However, in other religious sources of *fiqh* and *hadith* there are other sex/gender categories. Uninformed people, he said, often used the category *kbuntsa* (appearing similar to intersexuality in Western medical terms) for *waria*, as it was apparently better known and denoted a position somehow apart from men and women. However, he considered this to be imprecise, because the category *kbuntsa* referred to persons with ambiguous or no sexual characteristics. *Waria*, Pak Arif stated, clearly had male sexual characteristics but a female soul, which is why *waria* were much more likely to belong to the fourth known sexual category, called *al-mukhonnas/mukhonniss* (a person with opposite-sex traits/soul).<sup>460</sup>

Even though society did not recognize *waria* or LGBT+ people as equals, Pak Arif did not consider this inequality to be inherent in religious content itself. God would not consider *waria* or members of other sex/gender categories inferior simply by belonging to a certain category.

*In the eyes of God all [categories] are equal, where it is distinguished is piety, piety means the spiritual worth. A normal man, who works with corruption, insults people and then kills them, is certainly not honorable in the sight of God. A mukhonnas who expresses an extraordinary spiritual, faithful experience, who appreciates people, helps people... [such a person] is much more honorable than a man, a woman who [by category] is considered normal.*<sup>461</sup> (Interview Pak Arif, 24.08.2014)

In Pak Arif's perception, *Allah* determined the value of people according to their behavior, piety, and adherence to other religious principles. His approach pointed to change and ambivalence as inherent in religious interpretations and evaluations. For him, neither common religious teachings nor widespread views among believers could be cast as irrefutable truths. In the *Pesantren*, he enabled *waria* and same-sex loving individuals to realize their religiosity, to get closer to God, and learn and perform religious practices like prayers or recitation of *al Qur'an*. He also enabled a

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mereka. [...] semua manusia itu adalah sama-sama mahluk Tuhan. Ketika kaitannya dengan agama, bagi saya, ya sudahlah, mereka ya sama haknya, ya sama di mata Tuhan. Mau dia gay, mau dia lesbi mau dia bi mau dia apapun, ketika dia ingin menghadap Tuhannya, mengekspresikan agama yang dia yakini, maka itu adalah hak mereka.”

<sup>460</sup> He referred to a *hadith* source in which a *waria* or *mukhonnas* was allowed to enter the bedroom of Prophet Mohammad's third wife but who lost the Prophets grace after having been recognized to have a gaze full of lust for women. Pak Arif concluded, due to this incident, the assessment of *mukhonnas* only simulating (*pura-pura*) their characteristics gained currency in the subsequent historical progression.

<sup>461</sup> Original: “Di mata Tuhan sama semua, yang membedakan adalah ketakwaan, ketakwaan adalah nilai spiritual. Laki-laki normal tapi kerjanya korupsi misalnya, kerjanya menghina orang kemudian membunuh orang, ya tetap saja itu enggak mulia dihadapan Tuhan. Seorang Mukhonnas misalnya, tetapi luarbiasa pengalaman spritualnya luar biasa tinggi, menghargai orang, membantu orang. Maka itu jauh lebih mulia daripada seorang laki-laki, perempuan yang dianggap normal misalnya.”



differentiated understanding of Islam as a multivocal, historically situated process. His work, like that of others, would be used in a variety of spaces and formats that catered to different crowds, but always critically addressed the intersection of various religions, faith, gender, and same-sex desire.

These formats included public seminars and the *syawalan* feasts that celebrate the first month *syawal* after *Idul Fitri* at the end of *Ramadhan* (see Image 3). Such festivals allowed for the dissemination of pro-LGBT+ interpretations out of the immediate LGBT+ community to neighbors and strategically invited guests. For LGBT+ individuals, it was a way to publicly affirm one's membership in the *umma*, the wider community of believers.

### 6.2.2 Difficulties in spreading alternate knowledges

The public dissemination at festivities like the *syawalan* resonates with the example of the Youth Interfaith Camp on Sexuality, where the vignette that introduces these chapters on religion was located. Here, the forces of innovation met the forces of inertia, which sought to silence the pluralizing message of those who had reinterpreted religion to make a place for LGBT+. According to those rejecting their message, the theology of Islam is a hierarchized epistemological discipline that is formed by legitimately educated experts and passed on to believers to inform and create legitimate religious practice.<sup>462</sup>

However, while educational institutions continually undergo change, they likewise encourage continuity and persistence. Because of this, transformations are often first negotiated outside of the institution before they are incorporated inside. The camp was an avenue for such negotiation. The pluralistic interfaith orientation of its content was reflected in the diversity of backgrounds of participants, who were offered capacity building exercises in interactive workshops.

During one session, alongside two representatives of Islam and Christianity (the two recognized Abrahamic religions in Indonesia), two instructors presented on the conceptualization of body and sexuality in Indonesian Hinduism and Buddhism. All speakers also presented on the compliance of same-sex desire and LGBT+ subjectivities with the principles of their religion, or else explained why such questions did not arise within the context of their faith. Following the presentations, the speakers answered questions from the audience. Here, the focus was on the representative of Islam.<sup>463</sup> During his presentation, he had presented very liberal views. Drawing from his previous involvement in the *Pesantren Waria*, he had realized Islam was not hostile towards sexual and gender diversity, and that his previous views had been based on rigid interpretations (*tafsir yang kaku*). His contact with the *waria* had taught him this lesson, opening up new perspectives. He noted that the *Qur'an* stated, in

<sup>462</sup> It was also a reason why only some LT+ people in their personal negotiations developed their own or adopted alternative interpretations from experts, as I show in Chapter 7.

<sup>463</sup> He was a leader of two *Pesantren* in Cirebon (West Java) and formerly had worked for the MUI Sumenap (East Java) and was subsequently involved in the *Pesantren Waria* in Yogyakarta.

various instances, that God had created humans differently and praised all human-kind. It followed that LGBT+ people were included within this diversity and valued by God. He mentioned, texts of the *fiqh* or *hadith* even entailed men who had no desire for women (*al mukhonnas*), and there was evidence of ambiguous sex/gender categories besides those of men and women (*kehuntsaa*). In his view, people who claimed there was no reference whatsoever to sexual or gender diversity in Islam should study the sacred sources again.

In his talk, the Islamic representative denormalized the notion of binary sexes connected by a natural heterosexuality, and decentralized vaginal penetrative sex as the only legitimate sex by referring to other sexual practices mentioned in *al Qur'an*. Sexual practices did not become *halal* through marriage, but through marriage in combination with the absence of coercion. Even anal sex, normally considered *haram*, was legitimate under the condition of mutual enjoyment (*kasih sayang, saling menikmati*). In his opinion the real sins, which could also be committed by LGBT+ people, were the use of violence, pretense (*kepura-puraan*) of one's sexual or gender identity, and the absence of serious intentions when in a relationship (*dibiarkan mengambang*).

The audience was presented with an interpretation that emphasized the principles of non-violence, consent, and the value of serious intent. This wealth of liberal interpretations, which challenged various widespread assumptions and called into question personal convictions likely shaped by hegemonic perspectives, faced criticism from various quarters. In their questions, the audience formulated subtle and direct criticisms. Some contended that his way of interpreting the sources was inaccurate, because he took certain lines out of context by not including the preceding and succeeding *ayat*. Another listener asked him to explain his *tafsir* method in relation to written Arabic language. Someone else inquired why, if what he was saying was actually in *al Qur'an*, other religious experts did not know about it. He was not very persuasive: I saw irritation and doubt pervade the audience, especially among the Muslim attendees.

Although the participants were in principle interested in alternative interpretations, this speaker had, apparently, too vehemently undermined the pillars on which their previous knowledge and personal truth had been based. Although he was well-situated to be recognized as a legitimate expert due to the high-status positions he had held during his career, he was not granted legitimacy during his talk or while in interaction with the audience.<sup>464</sup> This shows that while the authority of Islamic interpretations is legitimized by their author's education and prior experience within an expert culture, it cannot be reduced to it, as parts of the audience met his interpretations with resistance. Even though this took me by surprise considering the liberal orientation of the audience, it shows the situatedness of these interpretations

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<sup>464</sup> This clearly shows the relativity and relationality of interpretations and their reception. Despite his status, his interpretations either dealt with too many topics in a too abbreviated way or were overall too contrary to established positions.

within power relations, and the numerous obstacles that alternate interpretations may face in their dissemination. Plural and negotiated stances can exist on a topic, but alternative knowledge may still face ‘hurdles’ in its efforts to gain recognition.

### 6.3 Summary

In contemporary Indonesia, the discourse surrounding Islam, gender, and sexuality is negotiated by a multitude of organizations and individuals who engage, network, and support each other. This is true for those engaged in the production and dissemination of alternative interpretations as well. Among them are LGBT+ people and organizations, scholars, jurists, women’s rights activists, and liberal, reformist religious leaders. Alternative knowledges signify a pluralization of interpretations, empowerment of marginalized subjects, and the provision of alternate ways to think about and evaluate the self and ‘other’.

For these actors, religion is seen as inclusive towards same-sex desire and transgender identities because of the intrinsic aspect of religious respect towards *Allah’s* creation, minorities and marginalized people. They deconstruct the essentializing narrative of a ‘true’ Islam, including the incompatibility thesis, by emphasizing the historicity and multiplicity of interpretations. It is not the constellation of genders in romantic relationships that guarantees religious esteem. Rather, adherence to other religious commandments, commitment to non-violence and consent, and honesty in gender and sexual identifications – coupled with having true and honest intentions regarding religious values and in relationships – are deemed crucial.

Simultaneously, I have addressed opposing perspectives that deny any compatibility of same-sex desire and LGBT+ identifications with Islam.<sup>465</sup> These positions present the incompatibility thesis as common knowledge, part of the essence of Islam, and use specific religious content (such as the story of Lot) to substantiate the incompatibility thesis. Here, proper religiosity is not solely based on God-fearing behavior that implements religious values; rather, adherence to the male-female binary and heterosexuality mark the natural essence of human beings and are therefore a prerequisite to a good religious life. Hegemonic explanations for LGBT+ desire therefore include the assumption of a post-natal deviation from proper nature, implying that ‘the condition’ could be changed, bringing the individual back to their natural state through deliberate training and third-party nurture. Conversely, the discourses opposing the reconciliation of LGBT+ and Islam marked LGBT+

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<sup>465</sup> I have not addressed Islamic fundamentalists, such as the FPI (*Front Pembela Islam*) individually who repeatedly attacked liberal and LGBT+ events (see Chapter 3.3). Nevertheless, as I analyze in chapter 8, since 2016, an intensification of tone and alignment of attributes around the tropes of ‘western import’ and ‘danger to morality’ are noticeable which bespeaks a closing of ranks between conservative and fundamentalist orientations defending their re-narrated socio-political vision of Indonesia.

and same-sex desire as sinful, prohibited on the basis of *al Qur'an*, unnatural, immoral, far from the right path, and not belonging to the religious community. Together, these attributes form the cornerstones of the incompatibility thesis within the Indonesian context.

I regard these discursive attributes as constructs that create and assign a subject position through the ascription of a collective identity. On the one hand, they define how LGBT+ people supposedly *are* (and should be evaluated) in light of religion, and on the other hand, they define what the collective of ‘properly’ religious people *is not*. On behalf of collective identities, individuals experience discursive inclusion or exclusion based on an assumed adherence to norms, while their intersectional plurality is disregarded. This enables a classification of people as either valuable, or less valuable (Meßmer, Villa and Emcke 2014:79–80). The ensuing chapter delves into the persuasiveness of this classification. As I will show, these ascriptions ignore not only the fluid complexity and shifting situatedness of practice but also fail to account for personal identification, which is characterized by intersectional belonging. Therefore, I will now move on to an examination of the practical, daily life of lived religion and my interview partners’ personal negotiations with this topic at the micro level.

## 7. Negotiating the incompatibility thesis: Dynamic identifications, religious practices, and LT+ experiences

In the previous chapter, I have analyzed how religious experts structured their subject matter, to show in which ‘man-made’ religious landscapes LT+ people moved, in relation to which they interpreted and negotiated their sensations, identifications, and self-understandings. With this chapter, I now move on to questioning how LT+ handled contradiction. Specifically, I focus on how individuals negotiate with the incompatibility thesis and, accordingly, with the position of unintelligibility assigned to LT+ gendered and desiring people. Based on the lived religion approach, I consider what LT+ interviewees as non-experts *did*, how they used, worked with, and what they made out of the pre-shaped contents, idioms, and attributes produced by discourses on the topic. I see the negotiations of LGBT+ persons as the “work of social agents/actors themselves as narrators and interpreters (and reinterpreters) of their own experiences and histories” (Orsi 2003:172). They used their own religious knowledge and understanding as resources in their negotiations to ‘furnish’ the formerly unintelligible space they were assigned to. Building on the discursive attributes extracted and discussed in the previous chapter, I analyze biographical narratives that reveal these ‘signified subjects’ use of hegemonic tropes, and how this shapes their self-understanding, including their positioning as addressees of religious discourses. Through biographical analysis, I explore if discourses produced

subjectivation and hence, shaped subjects ‘in its own terms’ (see Pfahl and Traue 2022), or if subjected individuals evaded or defied discursive prescriptions. Accordingly, I pose the following questions: *How did interview partners evaluate the relationship between their faith and desire? How did the incompatibility thesis and its attributions affect their negotiations? What self-understandings arose at this intersection of faith and desire?*

In this chapter, I discuss religious socialization, the forms of its mediation, and the factors influencing subjects’ negotiations with such socialization, including the intertwining of the norm of marriage in the religious and cultural fabric. I first describe LT+ experiences of organized religion and personal faith. I then shift the perspective even further to the micro level and examine the ways in which respondents dealt with the complex challenges of alleged incompatibility with religion. I investigate how interviewees practiced religion, how they interpreted and gave meaning to their position, and how they evaluated scripture. I describe the different processes of negotiation and the concepts of self they engender as *modes of negotiation*.<sup>466</sup>

## 7.1 Overview

Dogmatic Religion, personal faith and spirituality are deeply entrenched in everyday life in Indonesia: “For most Indonesians religion is a role model. Religion serves as a model for life. That’s because it’s been nurtured from birth and during childhood”<sup>467</sup> (Interview PLUsh, 11.07.2014). Religious socialization played a pivotal role. The inclusion of children in daily religious activities, and through education in religiously oriented institutions such as kindergartens, mosques, or church communities in the neighborhood, starts early in life.

*Most children are brought up with reference to religion and receive religious knowledge, they are taught in schools which, it is said, have a fairly good religious level. And this is actually true for all religions.*<sup>468</sup> (Interview PLUsh, 11.07.2014)

Interview partners reported that on average, religion played a noticeable role during their childhood, which they considered normal. Some did not recall a specific point in time when religion entered their lives, because they felt it had always been there. Most reported that their parents or other older family members had taught them to

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<sup>466</sup> I have worked out these generalized modes via the Grounded Theory Analysis of my interview material (for details, see Chapter 2). Nevertheless, practice is more complex than an abstracted compendium of segmented modes: In practice, the modes overlap and complement each other. Some interviewees outlined how their point of view developed and changed, indicating that a person could traverse different modes over time.

<sup>467</sup> Original: “Buat sebagian besar orang-orang Indonesia, agama itu sebagai panutan. Agama itu kan panutan hidup. Dan karena itu sudah terkonstruksi sejak lahir dan dibangun di masa kanak-kanak.”

<sup>468</sup> Original: “Sebagian besar anak-anak itu dididik dengan agama e di mereka diberi pengetahuan agama, mereka di sekolahkan di sekolah yang e mempunyai apa namanya, tingkat keagamaan yang cukup baik. Am iya. Itu dan itu di semua agama.”

pray at a young age, and in a playful way. They had attended prayers in mosques, church services, or temple ceremonies together with parents in their respective community, and they had received religious education in the community at least one afternoon a week. In addition, most of them attended kindergarten or schools affiliated with religious denominations.

*The principles on which their lives rest are from religion, built from religion. Then when at school, religion becomes very important. Lessons are becoming so important. That and, what we do, it is taught, we are taught to always be grounded in religion.*<sup>469</sup> (Interview PLUsh, 11.07.2014)

Religion, as a ritual bodily practice but also as a standard by which to evaluate behavior, thus becomes a significant aspect of the life of the individual.

Raised in a framework of religious normality, many interview partners recognized their desire, in their teenage years, as contradicting their religious views. A PLUsh employee explained:

*We are first taught religion, and then we recognize our sexuality when everything is already compared or weighed against religion. Then you feel that 'what I am doing does not fit there', then the inner conflict begins. That is why religion is important, because first LGBT+ friends face the problem with themselves. You have to compare what you feel with what you believe. How my behavior should be in comparison with the religion I believe in.*<sup>470</sup> (Interview PLUsh, 11.07.2014)

Once the desire was acknowledged as real, previous truths began to falter, and a phase of re-evaluation or reorientation began:

*It's a process, [...] so there will be a sense of guilt. Denial, for sure. The feeling could be: 'Oh dear, am I really like this.' Because the norm has been so instilled since childhood. 'No, it can't be.' [...] And also to actually accept afterwards that 'yes, I am lesbian.' This fight is quite intense in my opinion.*<sup>471</sup> (Interview Budi Wahyuni, 09.09.2014)

An inner confrontation with the self was taking place, one that led people to keep their religious questions to themselves. Another reason for not confiding in the

<sup>469</sup> Original: "Asas-asas kehidupan mereka itu dari agama, dibangun dari agama. Terus ketika di sekolah, agama menjadi begitu penting. Pelajaran doang menjadi begitu penting. Itu dan, dan apa yang kita lakukan itu diajari ha, kita diajarkan untuk selalu berpijak pada agama."

<sup>470</sup> Original: "Kita diajari agama dulu, baru ketika mengenal seksualitas kita, ketika semua harus dibandingkan atau a dihitung dengan agama, kemudian dia merasa 'kok yang kulakukan tidak sesuai', kemudian mulai ada konflik dalam diri. Itu kenapa agama menjadi penting karena pertama e teman-teman LGBT+ menghadapi permasalahan itu dengan dirinya sendiri, ketika dia harus mempertentangkan antara apa yang dia rasakan dengan apa yang dia pikirkan itu mengenai bagaimana seharusnya tindakanku dibandingkan dengan agama yang diyakini."

<sup>471</sup> Original: "Berproses. [...] Iya, karena itu akan ada rasa bersalah juga. Menolak, itu pasti. Rasanya kayak, aku, kok, jadi begini. [...] karena sejak kecil norma yang ditanamkan seperti itu. Tidak, jangankan, kok, itu. [...] Apalagi kemudian menerima bahwa, ya, saya seorang lesbian. Itu pertarungan itu cukup berat menurut saya."

family was to spare them from worries about the salvation of the soul of their child. In Islam sinning in this life may have far-reaching consequences in the afterlife:

*According to Muslim understanding, life is oriented towards eternal life. This means that we are only passing by in this world temporarily, it is only transitory. Eternal or longer life will be in the hereafter that is how it is. So now is the most appropriate corridor to use the Qur'an, that's the religious view. If religion, in the Qur'an, forbids it, Muslims also forbid it.*<sup>472</sup> (Interview Zacharias, 02.04.2014)

A person's efforts to live in the manner of *al Qur'an*, for example by avoiding sin, will be evaluated at the Day of Judgement. The way of life in the present therefore determines the position of the self in the long afterlife. In this conception, *Allah*, who may be punitive or merciful, scrutinizes the nature of faith and the observance of religious commandments during persons' lifetimes, and grants or denies them access to paradise after their worldly death. Only then do believers gain certainty as to whether the qur'anic interpretation of the masses, proclaimed as truth during their lifetime, actually correspond to *Allah's* assessment of right or wrong. This idea is at the core of the power of hegemonic religious interpretations. If the understanding that something is forbidden and constitutes a sin in *al Qur'an* has become hegemonic, the persuasiveness of the masses creates challenges for alternative understandings and interpretations of scripture as well as for the believing individual to disbelieve those widely recognized understandings. To trust and follow majoritarian interpretations appears logical, as they promise a greater likelihood of the salvation of souls after death. For this reason, faithful individuals, including many of my interview partners, were keen to avoid sinful behavior. Instead, they sought to engage in behavior for which there were religious rewards (*pahala*), so as to avoid being condemned by other believers or by *Allah*.

Two structural organizational factors impact LGBT+ people's religious negotiations: religious authorities and religious mediation. Religious leaders lead prayers, instruct believers, and teach religion in schools. However, in most cases they lack factual, secular knowledge and information on same-sex desire and LGBT+ identifications. As for religious mediation, it involves self-conception and didactics, meaning the ways in which religious knowledge is transmitted to students.

*There is no two-way communication. Whatever your religious leader says, you must obey, and that is considered true. [...] Education about religion is a one-way education. So we*

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<sup>472</sup> Original: "Kalau pandangan orang Islam itu, hidup adalah menuju kehidupan yang kekal. Maksudnya di dunia itu hanya mampir, hanya sementara, yang lebih abadi atau lebih lama itu di akhirat, itu seperti itu. Maka koridor yang paling tepat memakai Al-Quran, seperti itu pandangan agama. Kalau agama, dalam Al-Quran melarang pasti orang Islam juga melarang."



*have to do A, B, C, D, E, F, G, because that is in accordance with religion without being able to debate.*<sup>473</sup> (Interview PLUsh, 11.07.2014)

In this form, the potential for religion to be a place of active negotiation in a world of complex relationships fades away, as ‘truths’ that believers need to learn and follow are simply conveyed. Without discussion and debate, a hierarchical relationship between teachers and students is maintained, reducing the space for informed or reflective assessments. If there are more widely established cultures of discussion in teaching, personal challenges as well as religious principles could be discussed more openly, fostering slow transformation of established opinions on LGBT+.<sup>474</sup> For this reason, LT+ interviewees did not see their parents or religious leaders as confidants in their struggles.

Yet, this did not necessarily result in withdrawal from religious contexts. Many interviewees self-identified as religious, and oriented their life towards religious principles, even if they aligned their ritual practice according to their personal need. Some *lesbi/an* or *gay* people continued to participate in collective religious practice, either regularly or whenever their families attended mosques (or churches or temples). Some felt they were no longer welcome in places of collective worship. Others retained a felt connection to individual principles or religious figures, but no longer identified as religious.

Power structures influenced *lesbi/an* engagement with religious practice, and two examples stood out for me in this area. *Lesbi/ans* are usually categorized as women, independent of their gender expression. Marriage is one of the outstanding social ideals for women, and is underpinned by religious values (see Chapter 3).<sup>475</sup> In terms of collective religious practice this means that even if same-sex desire is not visible, members of a religious community may judge women who remain unmarried beyond a certain age as strange or abnormal. This demonstrates how *lesbi/ans* are doubly affected by patriarchal structures through both their gender and their desire, resulting sometimes in infrequent participation in collective worship and individualization of religious practice.

The second key example refers to the pervasiveness of the incompatibility thesis and how it permeated a *lesbi/an* circle of friends. During an interview I asked Nuri, in her early 20s, if she prayed or wore a headscarf and if so, on what occasions.

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<sup>473</sup> Original: “Tidak terjadi komunikasi dua arah. Jadi apapun yang dikatakan pemimpin agamamu, kamu harus patuh dan itu yang dianggap benar. [...] Pendidikan soal agama itu pendidikan satu arah. Jadi harus A, B, C, D, E, F, G, karena itu sesuai dengan agama tanpa kita harus bisa mendebat.”

<sup>474</sup> As the previous chapter demonstrated, there is a plurality of thinking on this topic, at least in Islamic debates, which may not have been emphasized in individual educational instruction.

<sup>475</sup> PLUsh reported that it was especially important for young *lesbi/ans* to be able to imagine marriage with a self-chosen partner, or to not marry at all. “[We tell them:] ‘You don’t have to marry someone you don’t like.’ But they are very pessimistic. ‘Yes, perhaps in 100 or 200 years it will be like that’, they reply” (Interview PLUsh, 11.07.2014).

*I still [pray] a lot. Sometimes when I feel tired, I want to pray, and sometimes I try to remember when I struggle, when I am happy, I don't remember. But yes, before, I always prayed, it is in the heart, I want to, even when I am like this, it is okay to pray. Whether the prayer is accepted or not depends on the one above.*<sup>476</sup> (Interview Bayu and Nuri, 22.08.2014)

Prayer, for Nuri, had a positive value – especially in strenuous times. Her wording here contains a moment of justification. Prayer, she said, is *still* important to her and good for her, *even if she is like that*, even if her desire is for women. When we spoke about the headscarf, a similar argument emerged: She said that she would like to wear the headscarf regularly, and not only occasionally on holidays, or when with her family. It was a symbol of her faith. She liked wearing it, and she felt that others approached her in a more friendly and polite manner when she wore it. However, as a Sales Promotion Girl she was not allowed to wear it at work, and her girlfriend did not appreciate the look either. Also, there was another reason not to wear it:

*Yes, other people think so... there was a femme who also used the veil, people's comments were negative. 'A femme, why would she wear the jilbab? If you wear the jilbab you shouldn't act that way, it's not in accordance with nature.'* (Interview Bayu and Nuri, 22.08.2014)

Her partner added: “One is considered hypocritical.”<sup>477</sup> In this understanding, the headscarf is a symbol representing compliance with religious principles, and the perceived contradiction between this and her desire destabilized Nuri’s already complicated identification with religion. This demonstrates how normative views also permeated LGBT+ spaces and prevented people from expressing themselves more freely through and in religion.

## 7.2 Modes of negotiation

Interviewees emphasized or discussed their personal religiosity in a space-specific manner. This was especially true in spaces shaped by the family and those shaped by LGBT+ people themselves.

In family spaces, interviewees were more active participants in worship, particularly when interviewees had become *ketahuan*. At this moment, religious practices often emerged as a suitable, if not indispensable, means of dealing with the situation.

<sup>476</sup> Original: “Masih sering. Kadang kalau ngerasa capek, pengen rasanya sholat, terus kadang berusaha ingetnya pas susah, pas seneng enggak inget. Tapi ya, kalau dulu kan, tetap sholat, ada di hati, pengen ya, meskipun aku begini, enggak apa-apalah sholat. Kan kalau sholat itu diterima atau enggak tergantung yang di atas.”

<sup>477</sup> Original: “Ya orang-orang lain yang bilang, kan, pernah ada fem juga yang pakai jilbab, komentar orang-orang kan negatif. ‘Fem koq pake jilbab, kalau pakai jilbab ya jangan berperilaku kayak gitu, enggak sesuai kodrat.’ Bayu: “Nanti dikiranya munafik.”

Even when one's desire remained unknown to one's family, the family would motivate its members to maintain their religious practice and identity. Many parents viewed 'the temptations' of modernity and secular life critically, and encouraged their children to maintain religious and traditional patterns of life. This occasionally reflected the wishes or needs of interviewees themselves, who, for example, chose to wear a headscarf to religious family celebrations or participated in collective ritual practice. Others, whose identification with religion had decreased, avoided regular participation in family settings where demands for religious practice might arise, so as to neither disappoint nor confront their families.

In contrast with family spaces, LGBT+ people's gathering spaces were the only avenues where the intersection and compatibility of desire and faith could be discussed openly, whether in terms of theology, beliefs, or persons' practical experiences. These spaces included discussion groups or activist organized events, where invited experts might speak.<sup>478</sup>

These discussions contributed to individuals' personal negotiations. They had to find 'their' path within the inner negotiation. As Yuni expressed it, using a philosophical metaphor:

*Life must go on, we cannot live on complaints. I still have to eat. If we complain about hunger, but do not care about finding food, then we just stay hungry.*<sup>479</sup> (Interview Yuni, 14.09.2014)

It is this inner process of searching, asking, and finding, captured at a specific moment in time, that I now turn to.

### 7.2.1 Compartmentalization

One way LGBT+ individuals deal with the seemingly contradictory aspects of their inner and outer lives is compartmentalization. This *mode of negotiation* is characterized by having two separate spheres of life with associated value systems that generally run in parallel, touching each other only rarely. Both systems carried specific value for the person and are not easily compatible in terms of content. Bayu and Andre, both masculine *butchi*, made use of this mode in their approach to religion at the intersection of desire.

Bayu's memory of very early religious socialization involved recitation exercises at kindergarten age in TPA (*Taman Pendidikan al Qur'an*), and religious education during school. She did not consider her family to be particularly religious, as she was the only one (irregularly) performing ritual prayers. The headscarf gave her an uncomfortable feeling, and she had not worn it since High School, when it was compulsory. Yet, she followed *puasa* (fasting), because it was required by her faith.

<sup>478</sup> Such as the camp, or the *syawalan* feasts presented in Chapter 6.2. In the non-activist *lesbi/an* circles, the topic was discussed in informal exchanges about the intersection.

<sup>479</sup> Original: "Hidup harus terus berjalan, kita tidak bisa hidup dengan keluhan, aku tetap harus makan, kalau kita ngeluh lapar tapi kita gak usaha gimana kita cari makanan, kan tetap aja kita lapar."

Andre had known religion since his early childhood, but it had not played a major role in his upbringing. He had never been in the TPA, and therefore could not read *al Qur'an*. From the third grade onwards, he received regular religious education in school, which included practices such as praying or attending religious celebrations. Daily prayers and learning to recite had only been taken up in the family in the last few years. At the Islamic health school where he had trained to become a midwife, clothing consistent with Muslim *mubrim* regulations (see Chapter 3.3) was compulsory. Thus, religious practice was part of his life, even if he did not integrate it independently into his private life. However, fasting was considered as essential for Andre as it was for Bayu.

Both considered religion and Islamic values as providing general guidelines and orientations for their personal ways of life, but more in the sense of a framework of basic values rather than in the sense of a personal adherence to daily practice and strict (*kental*) faith. Andre recognized the importance of fasting, and that God had created him as a woman, which is why he would never dare to pray as a man.<sup>480</sup> He would also – if it should ever come to that – acknowledge the guidance of a Muslim husband, because it was part of his *kodrat* as a woman. However, regular self-initiated religious practice was not his central focus, even if he enjoyed the feeling he experienced during prayers:

*I ask for help. I pray for my parents, for my dead grandmother, I pray that my girlfriend will be forgiven her sins. Then I feel so close, really close to God. My heart is comfortable, calm, peaceful, like that. My mind is clean, as if there is no burden. But after that I feel far away [...]. Now I feel far away because I rarely pray.*<sup>481</sup> (Interview Andre, 19.08.2014)

Parallel to this, he expressed a strong and positive identification with *lesbi/an* life and the comforts, spatial, and behavioral freedoms that the articulation of female masculinity enabled. Bayu, likewise, described religious beliefs as “still [important]. [...] Religious beliefs are still there. [...] Yes, no matter what, our religion is Islam.”<sup>482</sup> At the same time Bayu felt comfortable with same-sex desire: “It is pleasant with women [...]. I don’t want to change, it’s comfortable that way”<sup>483</sup> (both Interview Bayu and Nuri, 22.08.2014).

<sup>480</sup> For a woman to pray as a man would be seen by *Allah* as an act of attempted fraud, one that would pollute the mosque, he told me.

<sup>481</sup> Original: “Saya meminta pertolongan, a saya berdoa mendoakan kedua orangtuaku, mendoakan nenekku yang sudah meninggal, mendoakan pacarku cewek agar diampuni dosanya. Itu aku merasa dekat sekali, bener-bener dekat dengan Allah. Hatiku nyaman, tenang, damai, seperti itu. Pikiranku bersih, seakan-akan itu enggak ada beban. Tapi setelah itu merasa jauh lagi [...]. Sekarang aja aku ngerasa jauh karena aku jarang shalat.”

<sup>482</sup> Original: “Masih [penting]. [...]. Kepercayaan agama ya masih. [...] Ya gimanaapun kan agamanya kita kan Islam.”

<sup>483</sup> Original: “Nyumannya sama cewek [...]. Enggak pengen berubah, enak kayak gini.”

Neither religious sentiments nor same-sex desire and female masculinity were things Bayu and Andre wanted to neglect, but without successful harmonization, both were potentially in friction. However, they only sometimes experienced this friction, mostly formulated as theoretical perception rather than as an acutely felt emotion:

*In Islam women are not allowed to be with women, as this is cursed [...]. So, being a lesbian is conflicting. It's not proper. [...] Lesbians are a sin. [...] In Islamic religion, they do not exist. But me, I like girls.*<sup>484</sup> (Interview Bayu and Nuri, 22.08.2014)

Andre was more explicit about the feeling of sin as an emotion that he had experienced:

*I felt sinful before because I turned (belok). I am defying nature. I really sin because my nature is a girl, I should like a guy, but instead I like girls. [...] I read the Qur'an, the meanings of the Qur'an are... it's terrible. So, I felt guilty, I kept reading about the torments of the grave,<sup>485</sup> watching the films about the torments of the grave. So, I immediately felt really sinful.*<sup>486</sup> (Interview Andre, 19.08.2014)

Later in the interview he stated that the acute feeling of friction between his identifications had diminished and that it was no longer in the foreground of his daily life. What had previously been practically conflictual had become decentered into a theoretical contradiction, and not a decisive one.

*If I am a lesbian, I'm not afraid of this in respect to my religion, I'm not afraid of sins, because I think of it this way: when I die, the sins of my life I have to bear myself, I also don't know, if I'm in hell tomorrow I will be tortured in what way, I don't know, so I go through with being a lesbi [...]. I care about my happiness in the world, but I don't think about my life in the hereafter tomorrow.*<sup>487</sup> (Interview Andre, 19.08.2014)

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<sup>484</sup> Original: "Di agama Islam, cewek sama cewek kan di, enggak di bolehin ya kayak di laknat kayak gitu. [...] Ya kan, kalau lesbian kan, bertentangan. Enggak sewajarnya saja. [...] Kalau lesbian kan dosa. [...] Di agama Islam enggak ada kayak gitu. Tapi aku ya, ya suka sama cewek."

<sup>485</sup> Conceptually, the torment of the grave pertains to the time between death and resurrection on the Day of Judgement. *Hadith* narrations tell that the souls of unrighteous sinners are punished after interrogation by angels, while righteous souls may rest in peace until the Day of Judgement. See also Raven (2004:459–461).

<sup>486</sup> Original: "Saya pernah merasa berdosa karena saya itu belok. Saya melang menentang kodrat. Saya bener-bener berdosa karena kodrat saya kan cewek, seharusnya saya suka sama cowok, tapi malah saya sukanya sama cewek. [...] A saya membaca Al Qur'an, arti-arti Al Qur'an seperti itu, kok mengerikan ya, seperti itu. Jadi saya merasa berdosa, terus membaca siksaan-siksaan kubur, melihat film-film siksaan kubur. Jadi langsung saya ah merasa berdosa banget saya."

<sup>487</sup> Original: "A kalau a saya menjadi lesbian ini, saya di agama saya tidak takut lesbi itu lho, tidak takut dosa seperti itu, karena saya berpikirnya gini: kalau saya meninggal, dosakan aku yang nanggung sendiri, aku juga ga tahu besok aku di neraka disiksa kayak gimana, aku juga enggak tahu, jadi aku menjalani lesbi ini [...] Saya mempedulikan kebahagiaanku di dunia tapi saya enggak berpikir di kehidupanmu di akhirat besok."

One could try, as many did, to act in the present life with the aim of ensuring a good position in the afterlife, but this would still not eliminate the desire. Hence, Andre concentrated his efforts on happiness in the here and now.

Bayu and Andre had both accepted and discovered positive aspects of their desire while simultaneously identifying with their religious affiliation. Their articulation of religious identification through practice or the use of symbols was very space-dependent. For both, faith was rarely a vehicle for primary, active identification, but rather an accompanying aspect of their lives.

Through their approach, the above-described contradictions could not be resolved as long as Bayu and Andre delved deep into both orientations. The feelings of acute distress reduced over time, making the question increasingly a theoretical one, which reflects a form of compartmentalization. Compartmentalization describes the existence of two parallel value systems important to the actors, between which little exchange occurred. They accepted the alleged contradiction between these worlds, as its theoretical nature made it bearable and enabled a simultaneous coexistence with their *lesbi/an* identification.

### 7.2.2 Turning away from organized religion

The cases of Nike and Henny, both 'born' Muslims, and trans man Tama, 'born' Catholic, demonstrate a different mode of negotiation: that of turning away from organized religion itself. Like several other interviewees, these individuals experienced difficulties in coming to terms with their positioning of self, because they felt their desire and their religion to be mutually exclusive. They experienced an inner state of doubt and confusion about which way to follow. Some of them began to critically reflect on the structure of organized religion and its claims and contents. They pacified the inner conflict by focusing on one side and rejecting the other. In the course of their negotiations, they withdrew from their religious communities, ceased to be active believers, and began to question the universal, rightful character of religious doctrine.

Nike's religious socialization had begun in kindergarten, where s/he learned the practices of prayer and fasting. Nike's family in Balikpapan (East-Kalimantan) were enthusiastic about religion and faith, especially hir mother. Since the divorce of hir parents, Nike's mother continued to encourage hir, via text messages, to pray and read the *Qur'an*. The headscarf had never been greatly significant for Nike's personal sense of religiosity, so s/he wore it exclusively during the religious lessons of hir moderate school, where it was prescribed. Hir former religiosity, s/he said, was ordinary, neither strongly pious nor unbelieving. At the time I interviewed hir, faith was no longer important.

Henny, likewise, considered her family in Padang (West-Sumatra) as religious. Her father, an *ustadz*, had left the family after a divorce, and Henny had grown up with her maternal uncle. Until she was about 22, she was a religious woman herself. Until then she prayed regularly, believed in God, and turned to the local *ustadz* for

advice. At the time of the interview, she described herself as no longer a believer – an atheist.

Tama described his family in Malang (East-Java) as strict Catholics. Both parents assumed active roles in church during Tama's childhood and youth, not only during masses but also in local Catholic organizations. Tama was equally active in the Catholic youth organization Mudika (*muda-mudi katolik*), the church choir, and as an altar servant during mass. Tama was further engaged as the spokesperson for the Catholic students at his Catholic school, where he organized religious camps. Looking back, he was "really very religious." With the realization of same-sex desire prior to his transition, Tama increasingly felt apart from the Catholic community. At the time of the interview, Tama no longer identified as Catholic, even though he continued to identify positively with Jesus.

All three interviewees had been religious in the past; in all three cases their turning away from faith and organized religion was related to their desire, but it was not spurred by a personal sense of sin. Critical attitudes to religion led to political perspectives beyond their personal contradictions. At the time Tama realized his desire he was anxious, because shortly before a (presumably) *lesbi/an* couple of teachers had been separated at the Catholic school. One of them was transferred to another island for punishment. As a consequence, Tama realized that his environment rejected people who felt like him.

*Well, I felt sinful too and like my mother said, I will follow God's direction, I go to church, I am active in church. But really, the more I went to church the less I felt sinful. I did not feel punished because in my imagination, if I was punished, my life would be miserable, right? Sad, suffering but I had fun friends at school, I did a lot of activities at school that I really liked. [...] So, I thought, if God really doesn't like this desire, why does God give me such good things, why am I not given bad things?<sup>488</sup> (Interview Tama, 12.08.2014)*

The absence of God's punishment led to the idea that God had a certain acceptance of his desire. This strengthened Tama's personal relationship with God. At the same time, or perhaps because of it, Tama raised new questions about religious hierarchical organization, both dogmatically and structurally. Instead of the warm and good feelings he had once felt during church services, he now felt angry.

*For example, sermons that cornered waria, or sermons that always talked about not getting divorced, but never talked about domestic violence. So, every time I came home from church,*

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<sup>488</sup> Original: "Terus aku merasa berdosa juga dan yang seperti ibuku bilang, aku akan mengikuti petunjuk tuhan, aku pergi ke gereja, aku aktif di gereja. E, cuman sebetulnya aku gak, semakin aku pergi ke gereja aku semakin gak ngerasa bersalah sebetulnya gitu lho. Aku gak ngerasa, aku gak ngerasa dihukum karena bayanganku kalau aku dihukum harusnya hidupku miserable gitu kan. Sedih, menderitaku gitu tapi aku mendapat, aku punya teman-teman yang menyenangkan di sekolah, aku punya banyak kegiatan di sekolah yang benar-benar aku suka. [...] Jadi kok aku ngerasa, kalau memang tuhan gak suka sama, apa ya, perasaanku kenapa, kenapa dia ngasih hal yang enak-enak gitu, kok, aku gak dikasih hal-hal yang buruk-buruk gitu."

*I got angry. Then I got annoyed, you know. [...] So spiritually, I felt that going to church was no longer good for me.*<sup>489</sup> (Interview Tama, 12.08.2014)

The turning point in Tama's relationship with the Church was characterized not only by the perception of a double moral standard between the values preached and those actually practiced, but also a heightened awareness of the embeddedness of the Church in the national and global context. The Parish Priest, whom Tama had to meet after his desire became known in the family (see Chapter 5.2), told Tama to remain Catholic and to come to church regularly, even if Catholic values condemned his desire. Tama would never be accepted but should continue to avow his faith anyway. This revealed the sort of hypocrisy Tama cited on the subject of divorce above. "I came to the conclusion what they were actually afraid of was the reduction in the number of Catholics"<sup>490</sup> (Interview Tama, 12.08.2014). Furthermore, Tama disapproved of the Church's hierarchical organization. In his view, criticism should be permitted, but it was always the case that superiors in Rome or Indonesia enforced rules and doctrine from top to bottom.

Through a process of reflection on personal and structural levels, Tama finally came to criticize the Church from the outside. Tama's socio-political comprehension of society increasingly stood in opposition to certain dogmas and the Church's organizational structure. As such, he turned away from organized religion. Nevertheless, Tama continued to feel connected with at least one aspect of religiosity:

*I engage in social issues, like LGBT+ issues, then peace building and when working in organizations there are already [...] many challenges. I think my belief in Jesus' values is very helpful when there are many problems. For example, when experiencing rejection from people or [...] when I started organizing the trans men friends, there are so many obstacles, the life story of Jesus I always remember. [...] It really has an effect, including for example, it challenges my personal furious, or when I become judgmental with people who reject LGBT+. 'Ah, ok, I don't agree with their values, but that doesn't mean I have to judge them back, right?' [...] Basically, this spirit helps me to keep going in this movement, [...] I can live safely as a trans man, but my belief pushes me to think about other trans men friends, what about my trans men friends who don't have access to information?*<sup>491</sup> (Interview Tama, 12.08.2014)

<sup>489</sup> Original: "Misalnya kotbah mereka yang menyudutkan waria atau kotbah-kotbah yang selalu membahas tentang supaya tidak bercerai, tapi gak pernah membahas tentang kekerasan dalam rumah tangga, jadi tiap pulang dari gereja itu aku marah. Terus aku kesal gitu lho. [...] Jadi secara spiritual aku ngerasa kayak pergi ke gereja tidak lagi menolongku."

<sup>490</sup> Tama's interpretation refers to the minority position of Catholicism within the Indonesian religious landscape, in which the church was concerned to not become even less significant as an institution. (Original: "Aku menyimpulkan, jadi sebenarnya yang selalu mereka takutkan itu, mengurangi jumlah orang katolik").

<sup>491</sup> Original: "Aku gerak di isu sosial, maksudnya di isu LGBT+, terus peace building dan kalau kerja di organisasi kan udah banyak [...] banyak tantangan kan. Menurutku keyakinanku terhadap nilai-



Tama's personal connection to the values of Jesus was not affected by his criticism of the religious institution of Catholicism. Rather, the values of Jesus supported his personal capacity to deal with challenges, to mediate between interest groups, and to be less self-centered.

The process of Henny's negotiation, which at the time of the interview had been going on for about 10 years, involved varying strategies. After realizing her desire, she too felt conflicted. Since she felt great fear of God's punishment for her sins, she initially tried to minimize the desire, and sought advice from an *ustadz* to not succumb to it. Henny took the advice of the *ustadz* seriously, avoided direct contact with her crush and, to calm her emotions, even stayed away from school for a while.<sup>492</sup> This strategy failed to work, leading to a kind of crisis.

She was angry with the *ustadz*, whose solutions had proved useless and had created even more chaos. She was angry with herself, not because of sin, but because of her incapacity to change her desire. The anger subsided with time, but her romantic interest in women remained. She continued to follow religious practice and prayed regularly. In her personal prayers she began to ask God, among other things, to allow the girl she was in love with to open her heart to her. When she was about 22 years old, a feeling of being thoroughly 'dirty' began to increase. Instead of doing the regular ablutions before ritual prayers, she preferred to take a shower. Her negotiation between identifications had apparently reached an impasse.

By falling in love with a new woman, Henny's inner negotiation received new impulses. This new partner was herself critical of religion, but she encouraged Henny to continue her religious practice. Here, a new perspective opened for Henny, in which a separation of spheres made both possible. She was able to live her desire for connection to God through religious practice, while, at the same time, being with a woman. Yet her compartmentalization was only temporary:

*She helped me, but then I decided to leave religion. But no, I can say it wasn't because of the sexual orientation. But it was not fitting into one another, there was always pressure*

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nilainya Yesus itu, itu sangat membantu kalau lagi ada banyak masalah. Misalnya ngalamin penolakan dari orang atau [...] waktu mulai organizing temen-temen transman ini, ada banyak kendala gitu, kisah hidupnya Yesus itu selalu jadi aku inget gitu lho. [...] Sangat itu ngefek banget termasuk kalau misalnya a itu challenging my personal furious, misalnya aku sudah mulai judgemental sama orang-orang yang menolak LGBT+. A, ok, aku gak sepakat dengan nilai mereka tapi bukan berarti terus aku harus ngejudge balik, kan. [...] Secara pokoknya, secara spiritual itu membantu banget untuk terus jalan di movement ini, [...] Aku bisa aman hidup sebagai transman gitu, tapi keyakinanku mendorongku untuk berpikir gimana dengan temen-temen transman lain, gimana dengan teman-teman transman yang gak punya akses informasi?"

<sup>492</sup> In the end, however, the advice of the *ustadz* led to more and more intensive contact with the beloved. Because of Henny's withdrawal, the girl she had a crush on felt compelled to visit her at home, to inquire about her well-being and to bring over homework, whereby the two girls also became physically intimate.

*and pressure. While our obligations were too numerous, our rights don't exist. So, I felt, for what having religion if it is only adding work.*<sup>493</sup> (Interview Henny, 10.09.2014)

Here she describes a functional, emotionally distanced, input-output calculation, one from which she concludes that as a practitioner, she derived too meager a benefit. In her initial negotiations, she had externalized her capacity to act. Over time, she reinternalized this capacity, and started to implement her developing criticism of her own actions. This resulting in a turning away from religion.

Henny also criticized the central place of religion in many areas of Indonesian life, such as everyday interactions, politics, and culture, where it was increasingly perceived in a universalized manner, as the highest order under which all other must subsume. Religion had become a 'marketing factor' and a vehicle for moralizing discourses. In her view, religion should be a way of life, rather than life itself. Many people misunderstood this difference and equated religion and culture. Henny found it questionable when other *lesbi/ans* retained a belief in religion's centrality and continued to acknowledge the universal character and claims to truth of religions. She understood that this involved trying to find a balance between the dichotomies of the false/true, *haram/halal* logic, but it was no longer her approach. Her criticism of religion led her into LGBT+ activism, where, as she was religiously educated, she became involved in interreligious dialogues.

Similarly, Nike described hir challenges to reconcile hir religious faith with hir desire. Nike had previously considered the incompatibility thesis to be a definite fact of Islamic religion. S/he upheld religion and pushed hir desire into the realm of denial. The continued performance of prayer in the religious community was possible, as hir desire was invisible, but s/he experienced unpleasant moments in collective spaces due to hir gender expression.

*Every fasting month, the night prayer, tarawih prayer is always done in the mosque. In itself, that was not too much of a problem. I was not caught for being a lesbian. But the problem was my appearance. Because people at the mosque are not used to women wearing pants. Short haired woman, not wearing a hijab either. Probably that's why many people were staring. Being gazed at was uncomfortable, like being gossiped about. [...] So, when Lebaran [holiday at the end of Ramadhan] approached, there is zakat fitrah [the obligation to pay alms]. At that time, I paid zakat at the mosque. There I got rebuked by this guy, the man who guarded the mosque. So, he said, 'Miss, how come a woman wears*

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<sup>493</sup> Original: "Dia membantu tapi kemudian memutuskan untuk meninggalkan agama, tidak, saya bisa bilang itu bukan karena orientasi seksual itu. Tapi memang gak ada yang cocok gitu, selalu ada pressure dan pressure. Sementara kewajiban kita terlalu banyak, hak kita gak ada gitu. Makanya saya rasa buat apa punya agama cuman nambah-nambah kerjaan gitu."

*the hair like this, dresses like this, just like a boy. Wear the hijab, Miss, you are not appropriate.*<sup>494</sup> (Interview Nike, 11.08.2014)

Various people belonging to the collective setting of the mosque signaled, implicitly and explicitly, to Nike that s/he was not in accordance with community expectations of gender. Only after moving to Yogya to start a university degree, did s/he dare to enter offline activism and join the local LGBT+ community. This exposure increased Nike's self-confidence and enabled hir 'coming in'. At the same time, it led to a growing feeling of incompatibility with her religion, as s/he became increasingly aware of the hegemony of religious thinking rejecting LGBT+ identity and desire, and the dangers it implied. For example, s/he had been a guest at the reading of Irshad Manji, which was attacked by Islamic hardliners (see Chapter 3.3). Hir new experiences helped change hir views of religion in general:

Nike: *The more I arrived here, the more it turned out to me that actually religion is more mistaken. At that point, at that very moment, I was no longer religious. I felt I [had] already abandoned my religion. But sure, before, religion had made me very confused, very scared. Because for becoming a lesbian there is no space in religion. [...].*

Kristina: *How did you disconnect from religion; what kind of process was that?*

Nike: *Because I tried to balance both. Ah, both, right, they were like opposites to me, yes. Both were contradictory. If I want to be religious, I stay with religion. If I become a lesbian, I become a lesbian – like that. Before I was stubborn, I thought I have to be a religious person, good, I should not become a lesbian. After a long time, I realized that is not realistic. It turned out I love God, not religion. So, it was like, I quit my religion, out of religion, I became a lesbian person, but I am still good. [...]. I became a good person for humans, that's enough. Ah it feels difficult to think about religion, especially we are so many, especially because LGBT+ have many enemies from religious groups, right? That is why I lose my sympathy, like I don't respect religion anymore. Religions just cause trouble.*<sup>495</sup> (Interview Nike, 11.08.2014)

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<sup>494</sup> Original: "Kalau setiap bulan puasa, kan, kalau shalat malam, shalat tarawih itu selalu di masjid, nah, mungkin tidak terlalu masalah. Malah ga ketahuan, kan, aku lesbian. Tapi yang jadi masalah tu penampilanku. Karena orang-orang di masjid itu gak biasa kalau ada perempuan pakai celana. Perempuan berambut pendek. Gak pakai hijab pula, gitu-gitu. Mungkin itu yang ditatap banyak orang. Dilihatin gak enak gitu. Terus kayak digossipin gitu. [...] Jadi kalau mau lebaran, kan, ada zakat fitrah. Aku waktu itu bayar zakat ke masjid. Terus ditegur sama bapaknya. Bapak yang jaga masjid itu. Terus dia bilang, 'Mbak, masa perempuan rambutnya kayak gitu, dandanannya kayak gini. Kayak laki-laki aja. Pakai jilbablah, Mbak gak pantas?'"

<sup>495</sup> Original: Nike: "Tapi ternyata semakin ke sini aku berpikir, kok, malah agama yang lebih banyak salah gitu. Jadi aku di titik ini, saat ini, aku gak lagi beragama. Aku merasa sudah meninggalkan agamaku. Tapi jelas dulu itu sempat, agama sempat membuatku sangat bingung, sangat ketakutan."

Nike's negotiation ultimately led to a sense of needing to take a decision to resolve his inner conflict. Through his involvement in LGBT+ activism, s/he experienced religiously motivated violence, which tilted his inner struggle to one side. Rejection had pushed Nike out of the bigger community, but s/he recognized the personal importance of forming a connection to God. Nike came to believe that there were other means to be a good person, something s/he had previously considered synonymous with faithfulness.

Those interviewees who had turned away from their community's form of organized religion described a long and ongoing process of empowering themselves within their sexual identifications by gradually questioning the position of religion in their lives and in society. The incompatibility thesis was solved by a change of perspective: They developed an analytical gaze that scrutinized religious universalism, undermining the power of the incompatibility thesis. This altered their perception of other believers and of religion itself, both of which they now increasingly saw as violent.<sup>496</sup> They slowly re-evaluated their desire, transforming their socially ingrained negative evaluation into a positive one. For some, turning away from the collective did not preclude maintaining a personal connection to faith. Their journey was also influenced or supplemented by increased engagement in LGBT+ activism, which led them to focus on human rights and social science. Via this route, they acquired other perspectives on religion and began to develop critiques of the power and politics of institutionalized religion in Indonesian society. While some continued to negotiate the position of faith in their lives, it became clear that distancing from religion allowed them to carve out a space for positively identifying with their desire, and to deconstruct its evaluation as a sin.

### 7.2.3 God's providence: Turning to and trusting *Allah*

If some turned away from religion, others experienced negotiations that led them to turn towards God and religion. In these cases, interviewees also expressed difficulties in reconciling the two aspects of desire and faith. This caused friction and a

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Karena untuk menjadi lesbian itu ga punya tempat bagi agama, kan, gak, gak benar gitu [...]. *Kristina*: Dan menurut kamu bagaimana prosesmu menjauhi dari agama? *Nike*: Karena aku coba menimbang-nimbang keduanya gitu. A, dua-duanya, kan, kayak berlawanan, menurutku, ya. Dua-duanya berlawanan. Kalau aku mau beragama, aku beragama aja. Kalau aku menjadi lesbian, aku menjadi lesbian aja gitu. Setelah, dulu aku bersikeras, misalnya aku tetap harus menjadi orang beragama, baik, ga boleh jadi lesbian. Tapi lama-lama aku melihat enggak realistis gitu. Aku ternyata mencintai tuhan, bukan mencintai agama gitu. Jadi kayak aku quit lah dari agamaku, ke luar dari agama, aku menjadi orang yang lesbian tapi aku tetap baik gitu [...]. Aku jadi orang yang baik bagi manusia udah. Ah susah mikirin agama itu, apalagi aku apalagi kita banyak, apalagi LGBT+ itu kan banyak musuhnya dari kelompok-kelompok agama kan? Itu yang mmbuatku semakin kayak gak simpati lagi, kayak gak respect lagi sama agama gitu. Agama bikin ribut aja gitu."

<sup>496</sup> "Violence" referred to acts of physical violence perpetrated by hardliners, but also to hierarchical organization, inconsistencies between what was preached and what practiced, and to the imbalance between the powerlessness of believers and the high expectations laid on them to meet religion's normative expectations.

perception of their desire as sinful. Although respondents adapted to their desire in daily life and maintained romantic and platonic relationships with other *lesbi/ans*, it was clear to them that this desire did not present a viable prospect for the future. Considering the cultural expectations placed on everyone, especially women, to marry and start a family for religious reasons (see Chapter 3), they imagined this conventional path for their future.

‘Turning to’ religion and God does not necessarily imply an intensified religious practice, nor did interviewees change their desire by being pious. I was told several times about women who indulged in religious practice and started to wear the headscarf and advised other *lesbi/ans* to do so “in order to not be L anymore”<sup>497</sup> (Interview Henny, 10.09.2014). However, this was not a path taken by the people I interviewed.<sup>498</sup> For them, the aspect of ‘turning to’ meant that they recognized the importance of adherence to religious principles (e.g. marriage, starting a family) or, alternatively, that they left the course of one’s future path of life to the will of *Allah*. Examples that I will now discuss are Anju and Nuri, who imagined the path of marriage as appropriate for their futures, and Frentzy, who had pursued it already.

*Trusting Allah’s fate: Imagining marriage as proper way for the future*

Anju grew up in a village in the outskirts of Yogyakarta. She recalled her religious socialization as beginning in kindergarten and continuing in school. In her village, participation in religious activities was a social obligation. Religious practices and celebrations were community activities that provided a connection to the community, which she liked and participated in. Until high school, she prayed more regularly and read the *Qur’an*. However, she found the headscarf uncomfortable and refused to wear it at school. During high school, she was accepted into the regional U16 badminton team, and the demands of training led her to stop praying regularly. Although Anju had never identified strongly with faith or religious practice, an identification with religious values and principles remained a matter of course for her. When she realized her same-sex desire, she experienced a crisis.

*Initially, I was shocked, crying. [...] I wanted to be a normal woman. A real woman, who likes boys, men. [...] In Islam, it [the desire] is strictly forbidden. It’s very [...] hated. What to do? I am afraid of sinning, yes, afraid of not being able to refuse my desire.*<sup>499</sup> (Interview Anju, 31.07.2014)

<sup>497</sup> Original: “Tapi banyak teman-teman saya yang L gitu, ‘kamu berjilbab aja biar gak jadi L lagi.’”

<sup>498</sup> People who tried to overcome their desire in this way usually abandoned friendships with other *lesbi/ans*, so as to avoid further temptation. Some then entered *Pesantren* to concentrate on their religious education. Accordingly, I had no access to people who chose this path. Rumors among LT+ people implied that they continued, nevertheless, to fall in love with other *santri*.

<sup>499</sup> Original: “Awalnya, sih, shock, nangis, iya. [...] kan, saya pengennya, ya, wanita normal. Wanita asli, yang suka sama cowok, sama laki-laki. [...] Kalau di Islam, kan, itu sangat diharamkan. Itu sangat [...] dibenci. Gimana ya, takut dosa iya, takut ga bisa nolak perasaan sendiri.”

In order to be a ‘normal’ woman and avoid sin, she would have to overcome the desire. She framed the assessment of her situation within the logic of the incompatibility thesis, and referenced the hegemonic narrative suggesting that same-sex desire could be changed through training and nurture. Initially, she tried to compensate for sinful behavior with religious practice. Despite her efforts, she did not notice any change. Over time, the acute emotions associated with sinning faded and gave way to a feeling of helplessness.

Her phrasing during the interview indicates that she perceived herself as rather passive regarding her future path in life, as she externalized her capacity to change to God.

*My fate, something may change [...]. Maybe I am not yet able to change my destiny. My destiny that is supposed to be a woman. [...] Yes, that's why I pray to God, forgive me my sins. No matter how mean I am, I still remember my God, no matter how naughty I am. As much as I do not pray regularly or follow the recitation classes, I definitely beg for mercy. To somewhat calm down.<sup>500</sup> (Interview Anju, 31.07.2014)*

Anju was convinced she had been born with the desire. Therefore, it was beyond her power to change it. If there was a possibility, she believed that hope lay more in the power of God than in her own self-realization. Moreover, the vague aspiration to this self-realization was clearly located in the future, relieving the need to adjust her actions in the present. Being 19 at the time of the interview, she imagined the age of 25 as the time when she would, if possible, transcend her freer youthful lifestyle (*masa muda*) by entering a mature (*mateng*), normal life through marriage. This narrative of attainable heterosexual normality was dominant in her imagination of the future. Later, I concluded the interview with the general question of what she wished for in her future.

*My hope, my wish, for the future... I want to be like a normal woman [...]. And I want children and a husband, who really can receive me with my past, who really can accept me and my shortcomings. [...]. Then, if my husband is responsible, provides for the family, and can be a good leader, though maybe if he forbids something, I will follow him, because anyhow, he is my husband, the head of my family.<sup>501</sup> (Interview Anju 31.07.2014)*

<sup>500</sup> Original: “Takdir itu, kan, ada yang bisa dirubah [...]. Mungkin saat ini saya belum bisa ngrubah takdirku, kan? Takdirku, yang, seharusnya jadi wanita. [...] Ya, cuman doanya sama tuhan, ya, ampuni dosakulah. Sejahat-jahatnya aku, aku masih ingat dengan tuhanku. Senakal-nakalnya aku. Seenggak ingatnya aku sama shalat, ataupun TPA, ataupun apa itu, saya pasti minta ampun. Biar, ya, apa, ya, agak tenanglah.”

<sup>501</sup> Original: “A, harapanku, keinginan, untuk masa depan, aku ingin seperti, wanita-wanita normal [...]. Dan aku ingin memiliki anak, dan, punya suami yang bener-bener bisa nerima aku di masa laluku, dan, bisa menerima aku, yang bener-bener nerima aku, kekuranganku. [...] Kalau, kalau suamiku bertanggungjawab, nafkahkan keluarga, bisa, bisa jadi imam yang baik, sekalipun dia nglarang, pasti bakal ikutin, karena bagaimanapun itu suamiku, imam keluargaku.”

Obviously, same-sex desire was not a valid vision for the future. Anju's humble wish was to attain marriage and children and follow religious gender norms, as others did. The imagination of normality, even if she only conceived of it abstractly and without a clear vision of how it might be achieved, provided a vision for the future. It promised the prospect of personal security, social participation, and religious settlement and recognition.

Likewise, 21-year-old *femme* Nuri had a vision of growing out of her desire in the future. Religion played a prominent role in her family, especially for her father, who she described as a devout believer. He had a talent for teaching Islam in an appealing way, which is why he was respected in the neighborhood and had also taught Nuri from an early age. In addition, she had attended courses in TPA. She had fond memories of that time and enjoyed fasting and prayers, which she tried to perform frequently. Nuri enjoyed the feeling of wearing the headscarf and identified with the values she associated with religious ideas of gender: "Yes, I mean, I can't be rude, I can't yell at people, I'm still gentle"<sup>502</sup> (Interview Bayu and Nuri, 22.08.14).

When she realized her desire, she also struggled with its (in)compatibility with her faith. In contrast to other *lesbi/ans*, however, the doubts she mentioned were more logical than emotional in their level of interpretation. In other interviewees, doubts were expressed via an emotional feeling of sinfulness, but Nuri seemed inclined to raise questions in a more dispassionate way. With regard to the headscarf, for example, she articulated uncertainty as to whether wearing this symbol of faithfulness as a *lesbi/an* was not a hypocritical presumption. Where ritual prayers were concerned, she was unsure if God would accept the prayers of a *lesbi/an* at all. In addition, she did not struggle profoundly with feeling sinful: "I never felt anything specifically. Because I think of Bayu as a guy"<sup>503</sup> (Interview Bayu and Nuri, 22.08.14). Bayu's masculinity and role in the relationship complemented her femininity. This was close enough to her role, her *kodrat* as a woman, and was almost like a relationship with a man. Later, she admitted she sometimes felt a sense of sin. "Yes, sure I think lesbians are a sin, but what can I do? I have the wish not to be like that anymore, but it's small"<sup>504</sup> (Interview Bayu and Nuri, 22.08.14). She felt comfortable in the relationship and therefore expressed only a theoretical interest in overcoming her desire.

At the same time, Bayu was not a man, and she knew that her family expected her to fulfill her destiny to marry at some point. Despite her family's expectations, she regarded this providential expectation as coming from God. Therefore, the orientation of her life towards religious principles was important and formed the foundation of her self-understanding. As with Anju, Nuri's path to married normality was not up to her: God would provide the way.

<sup>502</sup> Original: "Ya maksud aku juga gak bisa kasar, gak bisa bentak-bentak orang, aku masih lembut."

<sup>503</sup> Original: "Enggak pernah ngerasa apa-apa. Soalnya aku nganggapnya Bayu itu cowok, gitu aja."

<sup>504</sup> Original: "Ya tetap merasa lesbian itu dosa, tapi mau gimana lagi? Tapi ada keinginan buat enggak kayak gini lagi ada, tapi dikit."

*Even though I am now like this, I will later definitely return to my nature, it's possible if I have confidence that all this is fate. Destiny is like this, maybe tomorrow I am destined to meet my match and to get married. Maybe now Bayu is accompanying me, is a friend, is my family [...], but maybe later God will arrange another.*<sup>505</sup> (Interview Bayu and Nuri, 22.08.14)

At some point in the future, she believed that God, and also, on an abstracted level, her faith, would provide her with a way to overcome her desire. By externalizing the responsibility for her future path to God, she would avoid condemnation if no marriage took place, as her never getting married could also be understood as the providence of God.

#### *Trusting Allah's providence*

Butchi Frentzy, aged 42, actively decided on and pursued the mode Anju and Nuri imagined for their future when she was in her early 30s. She had grown up in a Javanese family in Solo, where faith was very important, especially for her mother, who encouraged religious practice among her children. Prayer and fasting were normal practices for Frentzy in childhood and youth. However, her personal connection to faith was first and foremost nurtured by one of her earliest girlfriends, who encouraged her to pray when her heart felt heavy, which brought relief to Frentzy. Over the years, her immersion in religious practice sometimes intensified, and at other times, receded. However, faith in God and his power as well as a connection to Him through personal prayers remained constantly present.

*I believe in God, that God exists and listens to the prayers. I really believe, but at times my faith struggles with thoughts like: 'Will we survive or not, what about the three children? Will I manage?' But ultimately, I do believe. For every person there is fortune respectively. We make an effort and don't forget to pray. We try and we pray. [...] In the end, if there is faith, there is fortune.*<sup>506</sup> (Interview Frentzy, 23.08.2014)

This trust in God combined with her personal strength proved worthwhile for Frentzy. In her early 30s, after experiencing several serious same-sex relationships, she was frustrated by the secrecy they involved, and by the feeling of not 'moving forward' in terms of social and religious respectability. This feeling stemmed from not being married at that age, which disappointed her family. When her girlfriend

<sup>505</sup> Original: "Meskipun kayak gini, toh nanti juga pasti balik ke kodratnya sendiri-sendiri, kan mungkin kalau aku percaya sih, ini semua takdir kayak gitu. Takdirnya kau kayak begini, besok ditakdirkan aku ketemu jodohku terus menikah gitu. Mungkin sekarang Bayu yang nemenin aku, jadi teman, jadi keluargaku, [...] tapi mungkin nanti Tuhan garisin lain."

<sup>506</sup> Original: "Aku percaya sama Tuhan bahwa tuhan itu ada dan mendengarkan doa itu. Aku percaya sekali soalnya untuk sekarang ini kita yang berpikiran seperti ini. 'Ah kita bisa hidup gak sih mana anak tiga lagi. Kita bisa, gak ya.' Tapi akhirnya aku percaya. Setiap orang tu ada rejeki masing-masing. Kita jalalin aja dan gak lupa berdoa. Kita usaha dan kita berdoa. [...] Akhirnya ada yakin, ada rejeki."



ended their relationship to enter a heterosexual marriage, she rethought the possibility of entering marriage herself, a path her family had long been pressuring her to pursue. They welcomed her change of mind and enthusiastically started organizing suitable candidates. She entered marriage largely due to the absence of any alternative perspectives, and she remained married to her violent husband for fear of the consequences of separation. During the marriage, she justified his conduct with reference to religion:

*Religion automatically becomes the foundation, as it was with us. The religious teachings suggest it is not allowed for a woman to leave the house without her husband's knowledge, without his permission.*<sup>507</sup> (Interview Frentzy, 23.08.2014)

Such restrictions were hard to bear for Frentzy, who as *butchi* had never identified with the 'female' role she was forced to assume in marriage. During the interview, she criticized interpretations of sacred texts that tolerated or even encouraged domestic violence under the guise of religion. Her criticism was directed towards religious experts and believers; it did not influence her bond with God. Faith provided her with support. Despite trying to fulfil her religious and social role by marrying a man, she still felt desire for women, and endured domestic violence in her 'divinely ordained' marriage. Frentzy sought release in faith by embracing religious teachings and trusting in *Allah* to guide her to find the 'right path'.

*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.'*<sup>508</sup> (Interview Frentzy, 23.08.2014)

By accepting the authority given to her husband by religion, but also embracing her faith and trusting in *Allah* to show her the way, she tried to overcome her obstacles by externalizing her agency to *Allah*. In the end, *Allah* reasoned that heterosexual marriage was not the path envisioned for her, because He gave her 'a way out' by allowing her husband to die (an event, she said, she explicitly did not pray for). Though widowed, she remained a respectable woman in society's eyes, as she had protected her family's reputation and had fulfilled her 'woman's destiny'.<sup>509</sup> She tried to teach her children to believe in God by setting a good example and integrating a religious routine into their daily lives. At the time of the interview, she was a 'single'

<sup>507</sup> Original: "Agama ya otomatis itu menjadi dasar. Seperti kita juga. Kan ajaran agama itu menyarankan kalau yang namanya istri itu kalau keluar rumah tanpa sepengetahuan suami, tanpa seijin suami, itu kan gak boleh."

<sup>508</sup> Original: "Tiap hari akhirnya gini aku memutuskan untuk berdoa saja. Dengan segala carakulah. Berdoa tu gak mesti harus pas shalat, kan. Setiap saat aku berdoanya begini. Ya tuhan kalau ini jalan aku, e, beri aku kekuatan. Tapi kalau mungkin ini bukan jalan aku, beri jalan keluar."

<sup>509</sup> As a result of her experiences in her first marriage, she adamantly refused the demands of her family that she remarries to ensure a secure livelihood for herself and her children.

working Mum and again involved in a secret same-sex relationship, recapturing her *butchi* gender role.

Over time, Frentzy reevaluated the question of whether her desire was a sin. Since her family had discovered her desire early, and her parents had emphasized its sinful nature, Frentzy had adopted this perspective. Decades later, her evaluation was more ambiguous:

*This feeling to be honest, sometimes still exists. That's why I hide. It went on for a long time until I met this [LGBT+] community. [...] Now I come to this conclusion: Whether it is sin or not is the judgment of people. 'It is a sin' – that's what people say. But with God, God does not say that. Whether He is willing to accept it or not is up to God, it is God's business. [...] So, I conduct such a relationship and even if people think I sin, it will be a matter with God later.*<sup>510</sup> (Interview Frentzy, 23.08.2014)

Remembering that God, not humans, is the legitimate judge of sins, her faith provided her with a way to negotiate her sexual orientation at its intersection with faith. By turning to faith in a time of need, a way was revealed to her, one with implications for her desire. God did not intend for her to dwell in marriage. While this line of reasoning did not provide a religious justification for the desire itself, it made it clear that marriage and the attempt to be 'normal' did not represent God's path for her.

The mode of negotiation 'God's providence: Turning to and trusting *Allah*' demonstrates how respondents trusted in the power of God to find a way to deal with their desire and to lead a 'normal' life in the future. Younger *lesbi/an* informants (18–24) especially engaged with an imaginary of their future in which they would, through God's providence, embark on the heterosexual 'right path' and embrace the female gender roles created in the intersection of local culture and religious belief. These interviewees emphasized the need to keep 'age or life-stages' in mind. Thereby they also drew a connection to well-established concepts of gendered achievement tied to marriage and parenthood, and the respective amounts of responsibility and independence one might enjoy during different phases of life.<sup>511</sup>

By trusting the providence of God for the future, participants externalized the responsibility to find and follow the 'right way' to God. If God wanted it, they

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<sup>510</sup> Original: "Perasaan itu, jujur aja, kadang-kadang masih ada. Jadi istilahnya aku tu untuk kedok. Berlangsung lama sekali, kan, sampai aku ketemu sama komunitas ini. [...] Ya aku gini aja ngambil kesimpulannya seperti ini. E, mau dosa mau enggak, itu, kan, penilaian dari orang. 'A itu dosa.' Itu kan kata orang. Kalau sama tuhan kan, tuhan gak mengatakan seperti itu. Dia mau nerima atau tidak kan itu urusan Allah, urusan tuhan."

<sup>511</sup> They understood the life-stage of youth and young adulthood as a phase of trial and error, of self-orientation and of having fun. Later, they believed, through marriage and parenthood one should take up one's responsibility as a woman and member of a family who protected their status and reputation, cherishing the well-being of the group and securing one's future. This implies a processual concept of personhood, in which people move through various life stages, learn, gain expertise, and master their roles over time, see Blackwood (2010:84); Smith Kipp (1996).

would eventually marry a man and fulfill their role as a woman. As long as this did not happen, they would live the life they personally had come to terms with. Frentzy's example demonstrates how a 'normal life' could lead to the acquisition of social recognition and personal fulfilment through children. A 'normal life' did not, however, represent a more satisfying life, nor did it transform same-sex desire.

#### 7.2.4 Tolerance for ambiguity: Compensation, balance and personal responsibility

Some individuals remained mostly convinced of the universal character of religious doctrine. Accepting the universal rightfulness of scriptures, they believed in the dominant interpretation that posited an incompatibility of same-sex desire with Islam. They evaluated either their desire or the expression of it as sin, and as something they could not change. This meant that they could neither turn away from their faith nor turn away from their desire. Instead, their desire produced an even deeper engagement with their faith. This was how interview partners Reno and Yuni pursued their negotiation within the logic of religion.

When Reno was a child, her parents were not as religious as they were by the time I encountered her, even though her extended family on her mother's side operated a *pesantren*. At the age of 4 it was her aunt, and not her parents, who introduced her to ritual prayer. Her parents did not urge their children to practice religion, but supported them if they asked for it. Reno, eager to learn more and hoping to make new friends in a collective setting, was enrolled in the TPA. She started to learn to read and recite *al Qur'an* in the TPA, while the religious classes at school taught her Islamic law and rules. In her family, personal religious practice was not something to be interfered with by others. Instead, each could decide how to form a relationship with God, and whether to achieve it through religious practice. Likewise, it was up to each individual to wear a headscarf or, like Reno, decide against it. The exception was fasting, which was mandatory for every family member. Raised in the Islamic tradition, Reno and her siblings nevertheless attended Catholic schools and universities.

Reno felt an affectionate connection to her religion. However, her religious identification was not centered around ritual prayers, but rather her ability to read and recite *al Qur'an* in Arabic. This gave her the ability to understand the prayers and to communicate her needs to God. She appreciated not only the physical place of the mosque, but also the sense of empowerment she drew from religion.

*I like to be in the mosque because it feels calm there, comfortable. When I pray at the mosque, afterwards I can communicate anything with God. I think it's [beneficial] for everyone, not the religion itself but the teachings. In my opinion all religions teach goodness, [...] a fortification for our attitude to ourselves and to others, how we behave. There, we*

*are taught mutual help and that we must do good to people.*<sup>512</sup> (Interview Reno, 27.08.2014)

Even before she fell in love with girls, she had internalized the hegemonic interpretation. Religious education taught her that such a connection between two people of the same sex was considered a sin. “The one about the prophet Lot. The one who knew, that those who do homosexual acts become cursed by God, turned upside down, that’s how it is and that’s why homosexual acts are a sin”<sup>513</sup> (Interview Reno, 27.08.2014). When Reno realized her desire for women, she was convinced it was a major sin, a realization that shook her religious self:

*Because I am a lesbian. And the sin I am committing is not like I take your belongings, which is wrong and a sin. But because that is in me every day, every second, and I cannot... what I mean [is], it becomes a part of me, so I thought ‘for what should I follow the practice of praying if the reward which I get may not be sufficient to outweigh my sin that I am committing constantly?’ So before, I skipped, I didn’t want to follow prayers. I am sinning at every time, so for what?’<sup>514</sup> (Interview Reno, 27.08.2014)*

The evaluation of her desire as a sin so grave it could not be compensated for was so overpowering that she briefly withdrew from religious practice. In Qur’anic understanding, sins and wrong-doings can be atoned and compensated for by repentance, seeking forgiveness, the performance of good deeds, and obedience to other commandments (Hawting 2001; Qasim Zaman 2006; Raven 2004). As the desire permeated her whole being, Reno doubted that this could apply in her case. In time, she became acquainted with the alternate interpretations of Lot’s story, which stressed that it was violence, coercion, and ‘free sex’ that were condemned (see Chapter 6.2). These new insights changed her perception of the scriptural story, and enabled a renewed self-evaluation at the intersection of faith and desire.

*When I learned it is not a sin like that, finally I [began] praying again, and also fasting. [...] I also obey to not eating pork, that’s haram, I don’t eat it. What else... Almost everything that is written of what He said is haram I will not violate, with the exception of drinking. [laughs] Alcohol still occasionally. So only occasionally I sin. For example,*

<sup>512</sup> Original: “Aku suka di mesjid karena disitu itu rasanya tenang, nyaman, terus yang kayak aku sholat di mesjid habis itu, aku bisa kaya bilang ngomong apapun dengan Tuhan. Menurutku sih untuk semua orang, bukan agamanya tapi ajarannya. Kalau menurutku semua agama itu mengajarkan kebaikan, [...] kayak benteng untuk sikap kita untuk diri kita sendiri terus ke orang lain, bagaimana cara kita bersikap. Disana kan, diajarkan kita harus berbuat baik sama orang, tolong menolong.”

<sup>513</sup> Original: “Yang tentang nabi Luth. Yang tahunya karena berbuat homoseksual mereka di laknat Tuhan, dijungkir balikkan ya begitulah dan karena itulah homoseksual adalah perbuatan dosa.”

<sup>514</sup> Original: “Karena aku seorang lesbian, dan dosa yang aku perbuat itu bukan dosa yang kayak misalnya aku ambil barang kamu itu salah dan itu dosa. Tapi karena itu ada di diriku setiap hari, setiap detik dan aku gak, maksudnya itu menjadi satu bagian dari diriku. Jadi aku ngerasa ya setiap saat aku berdosa karena aku seperti itu. Jadi buat apa sholat toh pahala yang aku dapat mungkin gak cukup, kalau dihitung dengan dosa setiap saat aku buat. Akhirnya dulu memang aku pas, aku gak mau sholat. Aku setiap saat berdosa, jadi buat apa?”

*you know you want to start fasting in one month, so 40 days before I don't drink because of what I know about religion is that religion says it disappears after 40 days. So, 40 days before I don't drink, then I can fast and it can be counted.*<sup>515</sup> (Interview Reno, 27.08.2014)

With this changed mindset, she no longer felt completely permeated by sin. She was motivated to re-implement religious commandments as standards for appropriate conduct of life. Within the religious logic, it was possible and necessary to counteract and balance wrong and sinful actions with good deeds and rule-oriented behavior.<sup>516</sup> She no longer allowed others to talk her into feeling guilty. Nevertheless, 'counting' behavior and balancing out sin with piety was pivotal for compensating existing sins:

*Sometimes for example I feel wrong or sinning when I have sex. In religion this is classified under zina,<sup>517</sup> but I think I cannot get married because nobody wants to officiate it. So how can I avoid zina?<sup>518</sup>* (Interview Reno, 27.08.2014)

As a result of her acceptance of alternative interpretations, her feelings of sin had shifted towards the logic of 'hate the sin and not the sinner'. 'Free sex', without formal recognition through marriage, was still reprehensible. However, without formal marriage opportunities for same-sex couples, there was no solution to this problem. In the logic of her religion, she remained with the idea that she was responsible to compensate for her behavior. Her orientation towards Islamic commandments, she was convinced, enabled her to be a better person, despite her desire.<sup>519</sup>

Yuni grew up with her maternal grandmother in a village 60 kilometers from Yogya. She was part of an interreligious extended family in which Islam dominated. In the village it was normal to religiously socialize the children at an early age, and so Yuni went to the village mosque for recitation classes as a kindergarten child.

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<sup>515</sup> Original: "Setelah tahu kalau itu sebenarnya gak dosa gini-gini, akhirnya ya sudah aku akhirnya sholat, puasa juga masih. [...] Aku juga nurut dengan babi itu haram, aku gak makan. Terus apa ya ... lebih yang kayak gitu sih, apa yang tertulis dia bilang itu haram aku gak akan langgar kecuali minuman, ha ha ha. Alkohol, sesekali masih. Cuma terkadang hah aku dosa. Terus misalnya nanti karena tau satu bulan lagi mau puasa, itu 40 hari sebelumnya aku gak minum karena dari yang aku tahu tentang agama itu, jadi dibalang kalau agama itu hilang setelah 40 hari. Jadi 40 hari sebelumnya aku gak minum, aku akhirnya bisa puasa dan itu bisa dihitung."

<sup>516</sup> Raven (2004:457) explains: "On the day of resurrection everyone will be confronted with his book [...] in which his standing is recorded. That day will be the 'day of reckoning' [...]. Another commercial metaphor (q.v.) is that of the scales on which all deeds will be exactly weighed."

<sup>517</sup> For an explanation of *zina* (adultery), see Chapter 3.3.

<sup>518</sup> Original: "Kadang-kadang ngerasa bersalah atau berdosa ketika misalnya berhubungan seksual. Jadi kalau diagamakan itu masuknya ke jinah, tapi aku berfikir aku gak bisa nikah gak ada yang mau meresmikan. Jadi gimana caranya aku menghindari jinah."

<sup>519</sup> In Reno's view, heterosexuals' reproductive capacity placed them at greater risk of accumulating sins in the 'reward and punishment' calculations. Even if Reno carried sins through *zina*, in her perspective, she was better off compared to heterosexuals who might have affairs or abortions.

Her grandmother was a devout woman who taught the children the ritual prayer practice. At prayer times, she gathered them around her to pray together. At the beginning of primary school, Yuni and her mother went to live with her stepfather in the Jakarta metropolitan area. She received religious education in a *madrasah* in the area. In elementary school, she participated in a *Qasidah* group that performed Islamic songs with Arabic singing and instruments at festivities.

During secondary school, her desire for women surfaced. Initially, she responded with denial, influenced by the denunciations of *lesbi/ans* she had previously been exposed to in her religious education. In the absence of trustworthy friends, she sought solace in her relationship with God:

*At that time, I was scared [...] because I was also studying religion and became indoctrinated in my place of study that women were not like me. [...]. The lesbians in my head at that time were humans who were cursed by God. People who belonged to the damned group of people, [...] who were born to become cursed like the devil, like demons who were born full of sin [...]. I rarely talked to my friends, I became a close-lipped person [...] and I delved more into religion, there I got closer to God. Actually, I became very diligent in prayer, even I who never prayed any sunah [optional ritual prayer], I prayed sunah.<sup>520</sup> (Interview Yuni, 14.09.2014)*

She dealt with the burden of her religious ‘inadequacy’ by turning towards religion and faith. However, this ‘turning to’ differed from the previous mode. It was based less on an externalization of agency expressed by the sole trust in God, who would guide and arrange the ‘right path’, but on an increase in personal commitment and action. Here, the responsibility remained with the individual to follow a path that was as religiously viable as possible.

After Yuni got *ketabuan* during her youth, her mother was convinced that Yuni was possessed by a spirit (*setan*) that could and had to be banished through spiritual and religious rituals. This marked the beginning of a period of ‘healing’ and conversion attempts. Yuni had to drink specific waters prepared by the local traditional guardian and healer (*dukun*), and participate in rituals with the *kyai*. Since both approaches did not bring the desired success, her mother brought her to the Catholic Church, even though she and Yuni were Muslims. At church, Yuni took part in prayers, services, and exorcism sessions over the course of one month. During this time the priest, supported by prayers and the choir, tried to exorcise the spirit. She even got baptized. That her mother was willing to leave the realms of her own religion reveals not only her desperation, but also her unbroken trust in the power of

<sup>520</sup> Original: “Waktu itu aku ketakutan [...] karena aku kan, belajar agama juga, aku juga doktrin ditempatku pengajian bahwa perempuan itu tidak seperti aku. [...]. Lesbian yang ada di kepalku saat itu adalah manusia yang dilahnat Tuhan. Orang-orang yang masuk kedalam golongan orang yang terkutuk, [...] dilahirkan untuk menjadi terkutuk seperti iblis, seperti setan yang mereka lahir dengan penuh dosa [...]. Aku jarang bicara dengan teman-temanku, aku jadi orang yang sangat tertutup [...] dan aku semakin belajar agama justru disitu aku makin mendekatkan diri sama Tuhan. Sebenarnya, aku jadi sangat rajin shalat, bahkan aku yang gak pernah shalat sunah pun, aku shalat sunah.”

faith and its rituals as a way to achieve 'healing'. Even though her mother initiated these steps, Yuni shared her hope for liberation from the spirit, and so she participated. In the absence of secular information, she participated because she did not want to be condemned but rather to be loved by God.

As time went on, Yuni got to know other *lesbi/ans*. As relieving as it was to no longer be alone, the narrative of incompatibility and sin remained dominant also among these new companions. Yuni was irritated by their way of dealing with the situation. Since they already bore a grave sin through their desire, they unashamedly committed more sins (drinking alcohol, for example) as if there was nothing left to lose. Yuni objected to such behavior and tried all the more to maintain her connection to God and her faith through personal prayer, mosque visits, and by avoiding the accumulation of more sins. Learning about religion was crucial to her process of negotiation and self-acceptance. It enabled her to develop a more nuanced view towards her religion and God. She came to the conclusion that the punishing character of God, which had dominated her previous religious education and personal evaluation, was overly simplistic and reductive.

*I am still afraid whether the path I am taking is right or wrong, but I remember that God forgives, God is merciful, God is loving. Even if my way is wrong, I keep trying to do good, I believe God understands me as he forgives. [...] I do not commit crimes, I do not kill, I do not steal, I do not prostitute myself. [...] I calm myself, I study religion more and more, I have understood the 99 attributes of God, and this calms me a little. [...] I accept myself by controlling and bracing myself. [...] Through my religion I can stay away from bad things, even with my sexual orientation I make peace with my religion, because my religion also teaches the nature of God. Without my religion I would not know the nature of God and I would continue to live in fear, so my religion is very helpful.*<sup>521</sup> (Interview Yuni, 14.09.2014)

Yunis negotiation at the intersection of faith and desire succeeded through the combination of three factors. Firstly, she came to realize God's tolerance of ambiguity. She understood that God's perceptions and actions were not monolithic: instead, when judging a person's life, God would consider the many aspects that make up that person's life. This perspective is suggested in the *Qur'an* in terms of rewards and punishments (Qasim Zaman 2006; Raven 2004). The second and third factors

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<sup>521</sup> Original: "Aku takut apakah jalan yang pada akhirnya kujalani ini adalah benar atau salah, tapi aku ingat Tuhan itu maha pemaaf, tuhan itu maha pengasih, Tuhan itu maha penyayang. Kalaupun jalanku ini salah, tapi aku berusaha tetap berbuat baik, aku pikir Tuhan mengerti, karena Dia maha pemaaf. [...] Aku tidak melakukan kejahatan, aku tidak membunuh, aku tidak mencuri, aku tidak melacur. [...] Aku menenangkan diri, aku semakin belajar agama, aku memahami 99 sifat Tuhan dan itu sedikit menenangkan aku. [...] Aku menerima diriku sendiri dengan cara menenangkan diriku sendiri. [...] Bahkan dengan agamaku ini aku bisa menahan diriku untuk tidak berbuat hal yang buruk bahkan dengan orientasi seksualku ini aku berdamai dengan agamaku karena di agamaku juga di ajarkan sifat-sifat Tuhan. Kalau tidak dari agamaku, aku tidak tahu sifat-sifat Tuhan seperti apa, dan aku akan terus hidup dalam ketakutan dan agamaku menolong sekali."

related to her personal actions and responsibilities, which were aimed at creating a balance that would compensate for her sin. Similar to Reno, Yuni found her way by focusing on other religious principles. This mode of negotiation was thus grounded within a religious logic that interviewees combined with the self-optimization of personal behavior.

For the most part, interviewees who pursued this mode of negotiation appreciated and accepted the universal, rightful character of religion. They accepted the incompatibility thesis and evaluated their desire as sinful. However, they did not engage in the motif of desiring changeability through training and nurture. Instead, they used their religious expertise as an enabling resource. Believing that God holds a certain tolerance of ambiguity as long as there is rightful intent, they understood that God's future appreciation is dependent on our behavior and efforts in the present. Even though they partially relied on alternate interpretations and combined them with hegemonic interpretations, they sought resolution in ways similar to other believers who had committed sins. They focused their efforts on complying with other religious norms and tried to commit good deeds to balance out their 'bad' behavior. Their sinful behavior was not erased, but was counterbalanced by elaborate, responsible behavior. This strategy bridged the difference between them and other believers, by emphasizing what they shared: the fact that they had all committed sins, which they handled much in the same manner.

### 7.2.5 Integration via interpretation

Some interviewees integrated their desire with their faith through adherence to uncommon interpretations of religious texts and norms. In these cases, the negotiation process also began with feelings of inadequacy derived from the incompatibility thesis. This was followed by an exploration of identifications and underlying principles, confirming the value of both identifications to the self. Subsequently, some respondents developed diverse and complex interpretations of religious texts and hegemonic perspectives. In this way, they were able to harmonize their identifications and find a concept of faith for themselves. Ayu and Kesi, for example, used their religious knowledge as a resource to create a place for their identity to exist, while also challenging one-sided interpretations of scripture and existing gender/sexual inequalities.

I interviewed Ayu, a 22-year-old *femme*, in her hometown of Medan, North Sumatra. She had been religiously socialized since her early childhood. In kindergarten and after, she had learned about the history of Islam, and how to read and recite the *Qur'an*. During primary school, she additionally attended a *madrrasah* in the afternoon, which expanded her religious education. Religion characterized the way of life in her family, but she classified the religious direction of the family as liberal and "free".



Her family was locally known and reputable, as her father was a high-ranking member of the police force. When certain topics (marriage, or proper public appearance) came up in the interview, it became clear that there was a strong expectation that family members were collectively responsible to live up to and protect the family's middle-class reputation. Even though Ayu herself was quite comfortable with her desire, she was deeply aware of the social disapproval and possible harm it might cause if her secret was not properly guarded:

*In public you have to behave, when we are together, we have to be careful too, I do not want us to be labeled nasty. [...] Yes, it is [important] not to disturb, not to cause discomfort, because some people still think conventionally about relationships in public. [...] For example, hugging in a shopping mall can seem disrespectful, because veiled women are also there, that's why we pay attention there as well. [...] Because most people know me, 'ah, the kid from so and so. What, that's how she behaves outside?' [By avoiding this] I look after my family.<sup>522</sup> (Interview Ayu and Adek, 9.11.2014)*

She attributed the social rejection to patriarchal social structures, although she noticed that others justified it based on religious values. By refraining from public displays of affection, she both protected her family's reputation and avoided reinforcing the perception of *lesbi/ans* as lacking morality.

Reputational protection was equally reflected in her outward observance of religious norms out of love for her family. Ayu regarded her family's religious orientation as liberal. Still, she estimated that by the age of 25 at the latest, she would have to marry a Muslim man, as this was a religious commandment:

*The most important thing is to marry. Even my mother said, 'Honey, get married for a month, the important thing is you got married at all.' [...] If you don't get married, then people talk. [...] I have a plan to become a young divorcee. Well, when you're divorced, there's no pressure for marriage. We'd be freer, and up until now there's been a curfew... I have to be home by 9, 10 pm and I can't go out every day. It's still patriarchal, I feel like a child who's all grown up but can't be independent. [...] I think if Adek is serious and we are looking for LGBT+ people [to marry] who also look for a social status for the family, then we would conclude an agreement that it is nothing more than a marriage, no housekeeping. [...] To decide against a marriage seems impossible because my family has a name.<sup>523</sup> (Interview Ayu and Adek, 9.11.2014)*

<sup>522</sup> Original: "Harusnya di depan umum itu harus menjaga dan aku berhubungan sama dia harus menjaga juga, aku gak mau di cap kita itu jelek. [...] Ya gak mengganggu tapikan orang kelihatan risih karena ada orang masih awam tentang hubungan di depan umum gitu. [...] kalau misalnya kalau di mall peluk-pelukan kayak ginikan kurang sopan karena masih ada ibu-ibu yang berjilbab, kita kan menjaga kesitu. [...] Karenakan kebanyakan orang kenal aku, 'ih anaknya si ini. Masak, dia kayak gitu diluar?', aku menjaga keluarga."

<sup>523</sup> Original: "Yang penting nikah. Mamaku memang pernah bilang, 'kau kak nikah sebulan, yang penting kau nikah,' gitu lah. [...] Tapi kalau misalnya gak kawin-kawin itu jadi omongan orang. [...]"

Through such a ‘status wedding’ she would respect her religion’s commandment, while protecting her family’s reputation. For her own sake, she imagined a quick divorce. Again, the ‘*lesbi/an* path’ did not represent the ‘right’ future perspective. A future that included same-sex desire was only imaginable if one first honored the heteronormative socio-religious rules, even if only briefly or with a gay man. However, personal orientation towards religious principles did not only occur because of familial affiliation. In Ayu’s self-image, faith and religious practice featured prominently: “I am guided by this, so if, for example, it is said that God does not exist, I do not believe it, because according to my opinion we were created by God”<sup>524</sup> (Interview Ayu and Adek, 9.11.2014).

In Ayu’s recollection of her negotiation process, moments of compartmentalization and of compensation surfaced. While she did try to consider the two strands of identification as separate spheres, she also tried to compensate for possible sins by *sholat*. In her interview, her expression of feelings of sin was less prominent than with other interview partners. This was because the desire that unfolded through her relationship with her romantic partner, Adek, felt comfortable and secure. She also emphasized that the roots of dominant religious understandings lay in centuries-old *tafsir* traditions, which, in her understanding, spoiled them through a male bias. All this indicates that her negotiations on the subject were a dynamic, ongoing process, influenced by alternate interpretations and discourses (see Chapter 6.2), which extended her long-term self-understandings.

*Muhrim* is a religiously defined term that describes the public or private nature of a social relationship and defines who is (not) eligible as a marriage partner (for details, see Chapter 3.3). For women who cover their *aurat* (e.g. hair) in front of strangers for religious reasons, it is permissible to reveal it to *muhrim* people. Ayu’s understanding of the *muhrim* principle led her to conclude that her desire and her relationship with a woman were religiously permissible:

*I’m muhrim to her, aren’t I? When we have sex, for example, it’s still as muhrim as possible. I’m still logical, it’s not sinful. [...] It must be with someone who is muhrim to you. Because I’m a woman and she’s a woman, we are muhrim to each other. There’s no sin in that. What confuses me is, a woman with a woman, it is confusing, does religion prohibit it or not? Because regarding religion it is said that you are created in pairs. Pairs can mean women with men, men with men, women with women, it is not explained more*

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Aku punya planing jadi janda muda. [...] Jadi kalau misalnya udah janda, kan udah gak ada tuntutan lagi disuruh married, jadi kita udah bebas, selama inikan aku terkekang harus pulang... setiap hari itu harus pulang jam 9, jam 10 malam batasnya dan gak boleh setiap hari keluar rumah, masih yang patriarki gitu, jadi merasa aku sebagai anak yang sudah dewasa, gak bisa bebas. [...] Dan aku berfikir kalau misalnya si [name of girlfriend] serius kita mau cari yang LGBT+ juga yang sama-sama mencari status sosialnya untuk keluarga. Jadi setelah married kita punya kesepakatan cuma married aja gak lebih dari itu, gak berumah tangga. [...] Kalau memilih untuk tidak married, itu kayaknya tidak mungkin dikarenakan keluarga punya nama.”

<sup>524</sup> Original: “Jadi masih berpedoman itu, makanya kalau misalnya di bilang Tuhan itu gak ada, rasanya gak percaya aja gitu, karena kita diciptaan sama Tuhan, kalau menurut aku.”

*precisely. I am still unsure, but in society women with women are not allowed, but in religion I have no problem, it is an evaluation of society.*<sup>525</sup> (Interview Ayu and Adek, 9.11.2014)

Ayu applied an extended interpretation of the *mubrim* concept. She counted women familiar to her as *mubrim*, which is why physical closeness to her partner Adek was permissible. A spouse becomes *mubrim* to the other person through marriage. According to Ayu, the statement that sexual relations may only take place with a *mubrim* person is therefore in line with doctrine, even if critics may evaluate it as a distorted interpretation of the principle.

Another interviewee who resolved the perceived contradiction over interpretation was Kesi. In her family, religious practice and religious values were also commonplace. Her father was involved in a religious party, had received religious and secular education, and mediated conflicts in the neighborhood. The family was not wealthy, but the father, like Kesi, possessed social and cultural capital because both were eager readers, with an affection for books that was reflected in her religious upbringing.<sup>526</sup> Religious practice was taught by family members, while her father taught her exclusively in the recitation and history of Islam. He was critical of the religious teachers in the neighborhood mosque, where all the other children were taught from kindergarten age.

Even though her father's teaching and the religious education she had received in school had laid the foundation, Kesi considered herself an autodidact in terms of her religious understanding, which she had acquired through different books. Although she had taken note of alternate perspectives,<sup>527</sup> she had learned that the religion that she loved rejected her desire. This conclusion caused self-doubt and feelings of guilt, and a sense that she was at the mercy of others. This led her to become defiant:

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<sup>525</sup> Original: "Aku itu sama dia muhrim gitukan, kalau misalnya melakukan hubungan itu ya semuhrimnya, aku itu masih logika, gak berdosa. [...] Itu harus sama yang semuhrim. Karena aku perempuan, dia perempuan menurut aku semuhrim ya. Itu gak ada dosanya. Yang aku bingung kan, perempuan sama perempuan itu, aku masih bingung, yang dilarang agama atau enggak, tapi di agama itu gak, ada dibilang kamu diciptakan kamu berpasang-pasangan, berpasang-pasangan itu kan bisa perempuan laki-laki, laki-laki dengan laki-laki, perempuan dengan perempuan itu gak ada dijelaskan. Jadi aku masih bingung, tapi di masyarakat perempuan sama perempuan itu gak boleh tapi di agama itu aku gak ada masalah sih, penilaian masyarakatnya aja."

<sup>526</sup> In their small house a whole wall was filled with books, novels, or textbooks on history, religion or politics. After I interviewed the father, he not only gave me a history lesson about Indonesia, but also invited me to discuss Marx, as he considered me – as a German – a more suitable discussion partner for this topic than local people.

<sup>527</sup> This wording refers to different interpretations within her religion. Nevertheless, she was aware of plural but situated narratives on religion globally. In the interview, she explicitly distanced herself from views which she perceived to be widespread in Christian-majority or secular countries, which marked Islam as merely oppressive of women. To her, religion was dynamic; some used religion to oppress women, others used religion to argue for the importance of education for women.

*From childhood I could recite, I was versatile in religion but I didn't want to show it because at that time I still hated religion. Nevertheless, I kept studying because at that time I thought I was cursed in the view of my religion because of being a lesbian, right?<sup>528</sup> (Interview Kesi, 23.07.2014)*

She had struggled with the feeling of sin and social exclusion because she had become *ketabuan* in school. Over time, she developed perspectives that gradually enabled her to integrate her desire with her religiosity in a way acceptable to herself. It would be God, not the people around her, who would evaluate her in the end. Her interpretation recognized the value of sincere intent and avoidance of pretense, which God is said to acknowledge:

*So, I began to accept myself when in high school and only since after school I made peace with God. [...] I still thought: 'Yes it turns out it is like that, right, sin?' But [now I think] for specific people, yes, it is not wrong, because right and wrong is God's decision, important is just the struggle. [...] For sure I have to hold on to religion and God. Like that, because what facilitates thinking like this is religion and God himself. What I mean is, if we can find peace with God, within our religion we can also comfortably think that our lesbianism is a sin, but especially for us, it doesn't count as sin. Right, for example, she is a heterosexual woman, then she fools around and pretends to become a lesbian, maybe for God she is a sinner, but because I am a lesbian since I was little, yes, it is not a sin.<sup>529</sup> (Interview Kesi, 23.07.2014)*

Desire, she suggests here, is part of God's creation. By that, she sets her own being and behavior apart from reprehensible deception. If a person *pretends* to be something s/he is not, it is reprehensible and sinful before God. In that case, a person deviates from creation. If a person, on the contrary, follows the way s/he has *always been*, then this represents surrender to God's creation and fulfilment of God's plan. This interpretation confers an innate, unchangeable character on both heterosexual and same-sex desire and challenges not only the idea that heterosexuality is the only 'natural' form of desire, but also the narrative that same-sex desire can or should be changed. Via this interpretative approach, Kesi harmonized her identifications.

<sup>528</sup> Original: "Dari kecil aku bisa mengaji, aku bisa agama tapi aku enggak mau menunjukkan karena waktu itu aku masih terlalu benci sama agama, walau aku mempelajarinya karena aku pikir apakah aku di kutuk dengan agamaku dengan aku menjadi lesbian waktu itu kan?"

<sup>529</sup> Original: "Jadi aku baru bisa menerima diriku sendiri itu waktu aku SMA dan aku baru bisa berdamai sama Tuhan setelah aku SMA juga. [...] Aku pikir ya ternyata memang seperti itu kan, dosa? Tapi bagi orang-orang tertentu ya itu tidak salah, karena kan, salah dan benar ya sudah penilaian Tuhan, yang penting adalah perjuangannya. Seperti itu, bagiku agama ya seperti itu. Ya tetaplah aku harus pegang suatu agama dan megang Tuhan. Seperti itu, karena justru yang membuat aku berpikir seperti itu ya agama sama Tuhan itu sendiri, maksudku kalau kita bisa berdamai dengan Tuhan, dengan agama kita juga jadi bisa berpikir dengan enak bahwa ya kelesbianan kita ini memang dosa tapi khusus untuk kita tidak berdosa, seperti itu. Kan ada kann, dia seorang perempuan hetero terus dia menyamar jadi lesbian, mungkin bagi Tuhan dia berdosa tapi karena aku dari kecil lesbian ya tidak berdosa."

In this mode of interpretation, faith itself, along with knowledge of religious principles and texts, constituted a resource for working on the incompatibility thesis and transcending one's self-evaluation as a sinner. Rather than engaging with their respective religious communities, where rejecting interpretations prevailed, these interviewees directed their negotiations to God. When participating in collective ritual practice, they usually searched for less heteronormative spaces like a friend's group, the *Pesantren Waria*, or religious spaces that openly expressed a welcoming attitude towards LGBT+, such as Christian STT Jakarta.

### **7.3 Theoretical discussion: *Modes of negotiation and desired identifications as agency***

The above passages demonstrate how signified subjects can navigate or transcend the attributes ascribed to them. I now propose to understand the practices of my interviewees, which I have framed within the analytic concepts 'modes of negotiation' and 'desired identifications' (see Chapter 4.2), as forms of agency.

Within feminist discourse, agency is often framed within "the logic of repression and resistance" (Mahmood 2005:14) and rephrased as a matter of tackling domination and gaining a voice, of fighting oppression by speaking up, and of challenging hegemonies or expressing critiques. With such narrow conceptualizations (feminist) researchers risk misunderstanding the experiences of individuals under study by "misattributing to them forms of consciousness or politics that are not part of their experience – something like a feminist consciousness or feminist politics" (Abu-Lughod 1990:47). If such a politically-situated focus or desire, which "often remains a liberatory one" (Mahmood 2005:14), is applied unconsciously, it only recognizes active forms of agency associated with speech, sometimes coupled with a consideration of bodily practices. This approach is problematic because it excludes all subjects who express different desires or who do not engage in forms recognized as paradigmatic for agency (Mahmood 2005:15). If they 'resist' the scholarly recognized form of agency, they receive the feminist insinuation of false consciousness, or may be perceived as lacking agency altogether.

The issue further extends to another level. If researchers rely on a dichotomous conceptual approach founded on the "naturalization of freedom as a social ideal" (Mahmood 2005:10), they cannot explain or understand why subjects develop desires and endorse or follow structures that demand their subordination.

*Instead of limiting agency to those acts that disrupt existing power relations, Foucault's work encourages us to think of agency: (a) in terms of the capacities and skills required to undertake particular kinds of moral actions; and (b) as ineluctably bound up with the historically and culturally specific disciplines through which a subject is formed. The paradox of subjectivation is central to Foucault's formulation in that the capacity for action is enabled and created by specific relations of subordination. (Mahmood 2005:29)*

By highlighting aspect (a), Mahmood allows us to conceptualize various “modalities of agency involved in enacting, transgressing, or inhabiting ethical norms and moral principles” (Mahmood 2005:188). With aspect (b), she points to cultural specificities, such as institutions, discourses, and norms, which over time ‘define’ a set of qualities and properties that discipline individuals and make them intelligible subjects. As such, she marks forms of subjectivation as well as forms of agency as specific to a cultural context. Indeed, with the image of the disciplined piano player (see Chapter 1), she regards subordination – on the theoretical level – as a prerequisite for agentive personhood. By this, she proposes a broadened understanding of agency, one that includes bodily practices and cognitive efforts to master something, and which also accounts for the multiplicity of ways in which power works.

These theoretical considerations lead me to argue that we need to understand modes of negotiation, desired identification, and fluidity in gendered articulations (see Chapter 5.1) as (sub-)cultural, specific forms of ‘inhabiting norms’ and hence ‘modalities’ of agency. By applying this perspective, the self-understandings and practices of interviewees (including those who struggled with their desire, assessing themselves as sinners or liars), appear as culturally-embedded ethical practices. Through the lens of the dichotomous resistance/subordination understanding of agency, the efforts of interviewees to build up and maintain certain religious self-understandings or desired identifications would appear as passive subordination, as they did not ‘resist’ the heteronormative discourses ‘loud and proud’ in every space. However, the theoretical considerations just explicated allow for these practices to be seen as agentive acts, instead.

While I have previously described the manifold forms that modes of negotiation and desired identifications consist of, I have mainly given functionalist justifications, especially for desired identifications, such as bodily protection or securing socio-economic privileges. Nevertheless, I demonstrated how respondents were embedded in different cultural logics carrying normative ideas that motivated and informed their self-understandings at the intersection of faith and desire, and gave a framework in which they established desired identifications. They perceived the logics of their other identitarian affiliations (such as cultural or religious ones) as standing in conflict with their desire. Despite this friction, these multiple sets of norms were equally part of their life and whole personhood. Advancing Judith Butlers insights on norms, Mahmood (2005:23) clarifies:

*[N]orms are not simply a social imposition on the subject but constitute the very substance of her intimate, valorized interiority. [...] I want to [...] think about the variety of ways in which norms are lived and inhabited, aspired to, reached for, and consummated.*

The self-understandings and practices conjoint under the concepts discussed here were neither lies nor passive subordination. They represented subjective, sometimes embodied forms of inhabiting, aspiring, and consummating norms, constituting foundational cornerstones of the self. These did not simply disappear when interviewees perceived their same-sex desire as real. Regarding modes of negotiation,

compartmentalization made it possible to maintain a religious identification by not placing the perceived incompatibility at the center. Turning to God in God's providence demonstrated trust in God's power and guidance. The mode of compensation reflected a commitment to taking responsibility for one's own behavior. A similar finding emerged concerning desired identifications: Through non-articulation, some interviewees relegated desire to another space, enabling them to inhabit norms of social harmony and age hierarchy. Andre, by embodying functional femininity at work, aspired in his way to uphold the religious norms of his educational institution and the binary logic of gender. Frentzy tried to inhabit the norm of marriage in practice. Ryo aimed for a compromise between her desire and the norm of heterosexual marriage for women. Their stories demonstrate the importance of belonging and the value of religiously and culturally informed (family) affiliations.

Overall, modes of negotiation and desired identifications are different ways of *inhabiting* social, cultural, or religious norms of different scales. Though they had to be negotiated due to frictions and self-scrutiny, all contributed, at least partially, to respondents' personhoods. Modes of negotiation and desired identifications corresponded to and often revealed knowledge, compliance, and mastery of norms, thus representing (sub-)culturally specific ways of agency.

Non-action was another culturally specific modality of agency, one that neither followed the logic of resistance, nor of speaking up (see also Spivak 1988).<sup>530</sup> At times, it enabled a (self-) perception of being normatively coherent while simultaneously achieving further personal un/conscious objectives, e.g. by compartmentalizing, by not clarifying a 'false' attribution, or by not protesting against parents.<sup>531</sup>

LT+ interviewees' negotiations surrounding non-normative gender and desire demonstrated "many different ways of forming a relationship with a moral code" (Mahmood 2005:29). Despite their inability to fully conform to heteronormative religious and societal norms, interviewees not only scrutinized themselves in relation to norms, but also cherished those norms. Norms guided their behavior and conduct. As they oriented much of their behavior according to society's canon,

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<sup>530</sup> I encountered an example of this 'non-acting' agency in the case of someone I asked for an interview. She initially voiced an interest and agreed on a later date. When I subsequently approached her, however, she was reluctant to set a date. In the end, she suggested a time 15 minutes before an activist event. I participated in this event, but she did not. In my interpretation, because of my status as a white, foreign PhD student, she felt she 'could not' say no due to cultural etiquette, but later on she conveyed an intelligible 'no' by not showing up.

<sup>531</sup> Andre for example 'got away' (*dibiarkan*) with his masculine behavior because he reacted in a culturally appropriate way after his parents summoned him in hopes of changing his lack of femininity. Within the cultural matrix, it would have been ineffective to resist, to explicitly argue for his position, or to get into a loud 'battle of words'. Instead, he agreed to get (heterosexually) married in the future, as religious ideas were also important to him, and he did somewhat adapt his behavior in the familial space, while still insisting on being mobile and using unmistakably masculine visual markers. By quietly doing masculinity (non-action in response to demands for femininity) and not ranting about it, his non-normative gendered expression as a 'daughter' was tolerated, because he also adhered to the principles of future marriage, respect, and avoidance of conflict.

which was as important to them as it was to others, I consider them to be ethical subjects, and their modes of negotiation and desired identifications culturally specific forms of agency. By inhabiting norms, interviewees constituted themselves as intelligible subjects within existing discourses, even if their sexual desire or gender remained theoretically at odds with religious and social intelligibility.

## 7.4 Summary

In this chapter, I have shown how the agentive process of negotiation challenges hegemonic discourses and diversifies the classification of ‘moral heterosexuals’ and ‘immoral LGBT+ people’, which symbolically delimits the latter’s scope of and participation in normality. Sin and religious proscription coincide with the indisputability of desire, making negotiation unavoidable. Respondents who sought to become capable actors within the framework of society, and religious LGBT+ people in general, had to engage with the ascribed attributes and pre-shaped discursive subject positions, to strategically manage the Self and social expectations. On a personal level, the negotiation process enabled LT+ interviewees to elaborate a subject position that, for themselves, was finally inhabitable. Through this, the process of religious negotiation also facilitated their process of coming in (see Chapter 4.2).

Modes of negotiation systemize respondents’ manifold forms of negotiation. Depending on which mode of negotiation was used, the self-understanding of interviewees with regards to religion included confirmation, negation, critique, the reinterpretation of the incompatibility thesis, and the reinterpretation of their own ‘difference’ as a consequence of their religious or world-view competence. However, the negotiations described reveal subjective effects emanating from religious discourses on sexual morality and moral personhood, as the hegemonic discourse actually produced the subjects it signified. The reconstructed attributes such as being sinful, unnatural, immoral, and so on, built up in the discourses excluding LGBT+, provided starting points to interviewees to understand and evaluate the Self. Almost all interviewees initially understood their desire in terms of this hegemonic discourse – as inner conflict, sinful, and changeable.

This discourse is powerful, but not absolutely disciplining. Through the lived religion approach, the analysis of the modes of negotiation reveals what interviewees *did* with religion. While the process did start with ‘inner conflict’, it did not remain at that point. In the spatially-dependent representation and articulation of same-sex desires, alternative discourses and agency enabled the creation of new spaces and concepts for such desires. There, respondents could rework the subject-making effects, and partly replace the incompatibility thesis with attributes of alternate discourses. In addition, they could use their religious expertise as a resource to *work on* the signified landscape surrounding them, by developing self-understandings that transcended the hegemonic definition of sin and incompatibility.



## 8. Un-Indonesian and un-religious: The creation of LGBT+ people as a social minority in discursive developments since 2014

With its national motto of ‘Unity in Diversity’ (*bhinneka tunggal ika*), the Republic of Indonesia seems to found itself on principles of diversity, tolerance, equality in rights, and general acceptance of ethnic, religious and cultural plurality. This positive image does not hold true, however, in relation to contemporary developments around the growing vulnerability of gender and sexual, but also religious minorities (Fealy and Ricci 2019:2). As noted in earlier chapters, recent developments have manifested intolerance towards difference and a trend towards standardization of plurality. Made, one of my interviewees, already evaluated the situation for LGBT+ in 2014 as follows: “‘Unity in diversity’ as ideal is very good. But it [...] [is] not yet for us, not yet for LGBT people”<sup>532</sup> (Interview Made, 02.12.2014). Since 2014, in fact, Indonesia has seen a discursive ‘explosion’ involving the domain of political Islam and societal acceptance of LGBT+ people. Therefore, in this chapter I ask: *What changes have occurred since the end of 2014? How can these changes be classified in terms of historic state-Islam and majority-minority relations, and to what overarching transformations do*

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<sup>532</sup> Original: “Bhinneka Tunggal Ika itu idealisme yang sangat baik. Akan tetapi [...] belum untuk kami, belum untuk orang lgbt.”

*they point?*<sup>533</sup> In answering this question, the present chapter examines the discursive ‘explosion’ as another piece in a chain of historical events that sheds light on Indonesia’s trajectory, especially in the relationship between the state, Islam, and sexual/gender minorities.

Indonesia’s current surge of conservative political Islam against gender and sexual diversity is clearly interwoven with historical continuities, local and global cultural flows, and power relations. This has led to a narrow reinterpretation of the diversity-affirming foundations of the democratic state, one which aligns with the power of majoritarian Islam’s and those who adhere to the ‘right’ tenets. Examination of the rise in homophobia since 2014 requires a macro-perspective. Accordingly, in this chapter, I consider the ideological lines along which hegemonic currents of gender and sexuality are drifting back and forth in response to shifts in political power. I argue that it is these power shifts that shape or restructure minority-majority dynamics. In making this argument, I briefly summarize the discursive references to the ideoscapes<sup>534</sup> that delineate national identity, as made by political actors in their politics and acts of self-positioning (see Chapter 3), before examining the course of events since 2014. This allows me to analyze how lines of argument converge ideologically, and relate to historical ideological streams. Currently, conservative political Islam, as an ideological tendency, is gaining authority over minority-majority relations and, therein, shaping the evaluation of gender and sexuality. This process constructs LGBT+ people as a social minority. Recently, an ideological coalition of Islamic conservative and radical forces has orchestrated a perpetrator-victim reversal, insinuating that LGBT+ desire and subjectivities represent an ideological ‘takeover attack’ by ‘the West’. This narrative implies that if this ‘takeover’ succeeds, the Muslim majority would again be deprived of its rightful place and suppressed. In a postcolonial nation whose people are heirs to a long struggle against Western colonial appropriation and exploitation of land and people, and where since independence there has been a struggle for a more prominent place for Islam in relation to the state, this narrative is powerful. It makes use of historically-conditioned local fears and operates in the spirit of modern, globally created enmities, which have been fortified, not least, by the ‘war on terror’. In this narrative, Western nations do not acknowledge any of Islam’s plurality, but equate the religion with terrorism and attacks on individual rights.

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<sup>533</sup> This chapter deals with events that occurred after the end of my fieldwork in 2014, and which therefore do not feature in the previous empirical chapters.

<sup>534</sup> Appadurai (1996a) coined the concept of ideoscapes. Below, I elaborate the concept in more detail.

## 8.1 Islam and Westernization as ideoscapes deployable by political forces

The assumption of a clear separation between ‘local’ and ‘global’ overlooks their mutual interaction. Global discourses act locally and become localized, just as the local acts into the global, whereby processes of homogenization and heterogenization happen simultaneously (Robertson 1998). Goods, currencies, and ideas (cultural, religious, and political) have traveled the world for centuries, whether through expeditions, trade relations, pilgrimage, or colonialism.<sup>535</sup> These ‘flows’ of globalization constantly transform their configuration, connecting, making accessible, and fostering imagination unfolding in activity, while also intersecting or creating friction, separation, and fragmentation. This complex global economy is shaped by “fundamental disjunctures between economy, culture and politics” and triggers fears in nation-states and their populations of “cultural absorption by politics of larger scale” (Appadurai 1996a:295). The trope of the fear of absorption is also manifest in recent public discussions around LGBT+ people in Indonesia. Appadurai (1996a:296) proposes to explore these configurations and ‘disjunctures’ by assessing the relationship between different dimensions of ‘cultural flows’, i.e. ethnoscapescapes, mediascapescapes, technoscapescapes, financescapescapes, and ideoscapes.<sup>536</sup> These (land-)scapes are deeply perspectival constructions, emphasizing the diverse situatedness and interests of actors, such as nation-states, diaspora groups, or particular communities (Appadurai 1996a:296). Media- and ideoscapes, which are especially closely related, don’t create realistic or neutral images of the world but – through the mixing of realistic and fictional images of information, commodities, and politics – give rise to imaginations of the world. These imaginations, especially if far removed from personal experience, stimulate the creation of ‘imagined worlds’ that motivate actors, for example, to migrate or align their efforts. This ability of imagined worlds to motivate and align is clear in the struggle between Islam and Westernization, which have competed throughout Indonesia’s modern history and have shaped narratives on gender and sexuality (Robinson 2009:119). I see Islam and Westernization as ideoscapes, which state power restricts or deploys in shifting but strategic ways with the goal of legitimizing majority-minority relations and of sanctifying inequality and discrimination in ways that protect the state’s power. At Indonesian independence, contending ideological camps offered different ‘imagined worlds’ as competing foundations for the new state. Islam, the faith of the majority,

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<sup>535</sup> The technological revolution of the 20<sup>th</sup> century intensified the speed and scope of these movements through accelerated, globe-spanning, flows of people, finance, media, technology, and ideas (Appadurai 1996b).

<sup>536</sup> The suffix ‘scapes’, derived from ‘landscapes’, evokes a flowing character, irregular in shape and without objectively given relations. Thus, ‘scapes’ offer different ‘things’ to various actors, and change according to perspective.

served as the imagined foundation for one camp. For the other camp diversity, including all, was envisioned as the foundation. Ultimately, the second version was implemented, although religion gained a specific role in the constitution.

In the following, I am interested in political invocations of ideoscapes,<sup>537</sup> exploring how they were deployed to delineate gender and sexual aspects of national identity, and how both content and utilization changed in relation to the ideological orientation of government. I show how the signification of these aspects changed over political periods and, in the end, serves to create and justify a minority status for LGBT+ people.

## 8.2 Political references to ideoscapes and changing power relations ordering majority-minority relations

Contemporary understandings of minorities usually include properties of disadvantage, ostracism, or discrimination. While this understanding often reflects the status of minorities, it is not absolute. Minority status is an outcome of power, as it depends on social and political circumstances and can go through historical transformations. A group considered a privileged or disadvantaged minority at one point in history may find that its status changes, and may experience unexpected consequences resulting from that change in status (Cribb 2019:19).<sup>538</sup> After Indonesia achieved independence, the former constellation of statuses was inverted;<sup>539</sup> formerly privileged minorities saw their privileged positions ended, were marginalized, and suffered violence.

Minority status is thus complex, related to power dynamics, and not solely determined by numerical proportions. This is how, I will argue, conservative political Islam uses distinctive, stereotyped ideoscapes to ‘create’ LGBT+ people as a social minority with eroded access to rights. This line of reasoning defines minority status as a combination of numerical and qualitative properties; being fewer in number than a dominant group *and* being disadvantaged (i.e. treated differently, lacking opportunities, and not being granted the same access to power or rights). Membership in a minority group can be established by self-definition or by social ascription and is often based on ethnic, religious, bodily, or sexual characteristics that are thought to differ from those of the dominant group (Fealy and Ricci 2019:6–7).

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<sup>537</sup> Understood as chains of images connected to “the ideologies of states and the counter-ideologies of movements explicitly oriented to capturing state power or a piece of it” (Appadurai 1996a:299).

<sup>538</sup> For example, the Dutch colonialists were a numerical minority in Indonesia, but exercised powerful authority during their rule. In those years, they conceded privileges to certain minorities, such as Indo-Europeans and ethnic Chinese, while exploiting and restricting the numerical majority of Indonesian ‘Natives’.

<sup>539</sup> For example, the constitution anchored the principle that the president must be *asli*, a Native (Cribb 2008, 2019:23–26).

### 8.2.1 From Colonialism to *Reformasi*: Ambivalence and restriction

In Chapter 3 I reviewed the distinctive histories, both colonial and post-colonial, that have shaped the politics of gender and sexuality in Indonesia. Colonialism in Indonesia pursued a path of prescribed ideological and practical Westernization, whereby sexual relations and family life became a target of state control. Concurrently, Nationalist' resistance to 'imported values' and forced Westernization emerged. Independence brought the new ideology of *Pancasila*, whose first principle was the belief in a great, true God. It established religion and godliness as a principle of the state, but without privileging Islam or establishing a theocracy, to the chagrin of Islamic nationalists. Ideologically, *Pancasila* aimed for integration by unifying and equalizing different ethnic and religious strands and recognizing their diversity as part of the national fabric. The Indonesian nation-state became a hybrid democracy, neither thoroughly secular nor strictly religious in nature.

The country's first president, Sukarno, continued a midway course between Westernization and Islam. His development doctrine and coalition with the Communists (PKI) fought Western imperialism while accepting the ideoscape of Westernization. This acceptance reached an abrupt limit in the encounter with Western feminism, whose values Sukarno regarded as a case of imported 'decadence', contradicting Indonesian ideas about women's gender and morality (Wieringa 2000:443). 'Neutral' international concepts of state formation and treaties,<sup>540</sup> typically Western in origin, were welcome as they enabled, in adapted form, a balance between competing nationalist agendas and international economic and political integration. However, Western concepts of gender equality, perceived as threats to local specificities, also posed challenges to the religiously supported, biological paradigm of gender equality/difference. This line of argument became a flexible weapon, framing normative (often patriarchal) interests in terms of regional belonging, cultural/religious values, and morality.

President Suharto's New Order rejected liberalization concerning gender and sexuality, and the Westernization ideoscape with its alleged lack of religion and morality was marked as threatening.<sup>541</sup> Dangers stemming from liberal, imported political and cultural stances were cited by the New Order regime (1967–1998) to justify state control over 'emancipatory endeavors', be it in terms of gender or political

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<sup>540</sup> In 1950, Indonesia became a member of the United Nations, and therefore at least "theoretically bound by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights" (Eldridge 2002:127; see also Lindsey 2019:38).

<sup>541</sup> New Order in particular stigmatized Gerwani, the Communist women's organization, active during Old Order of Sukarno, as a danger. A political smear campaign claimed that they were involved in the abduction and subsequent seduction and castration of generals during the coup, in which Suharto emerged victorious. With the act of castration attributed to Gerwani, the New Order used them as a symbol for the alleged danger to men that would arise from the liberal gender roles and equality associated with the West. Moreover, the government branded Communists in general as a danger to the religion- and value-conscious nation, its traditions and values. After Suharto overtook power, Communists were persecuted, which ended in mass killings (Wieringa 2003).

ideologies. Religion was designated as a mostly private matter and the public and political dimensions of religious freedom were strictly controlled (Hefner 2018:212). Despite Islam having a central position for the majority of Indonesians, it was politically unacknowledged, leading to a “minority mentality” among the Muslim community (Cribb 2019:28).<sup>542</sup>

Like Sukarno, Suharto appealed to Westernization in his nation-building project. Under the development doctrine of *pembangunan*, this included policies targeting gender and sexuality, which included Islamic and Western, but not liberal, emancipatory ideas. The family, as ‘the smallest unit of society’ was to be mobilized for nation building, promoting the religious, conservative, and ‘natural’ social order of the *kodrat wanita*. The strong separation of sex roles in the *kodrat wanita* mapped sex-based spheres of responsibility on to a public/private divide in ways that mirrored not only the “dualisms of seventeenth-century European political thought”, but also royal court practices and Islamic values of sexual segregation (Robinson 2009:120). As the state heteronormatively emphasized women’s function as mothers and wives, *lesbi/ans* were constructed as ‘non-women and un-Indonesian’.<sup>543</sup>

From the late 1970s onwards there was a resurgence of Islam and its ideoscapes, marked by heightened ritual observance, increased religious orthodoxy among believers, and an expansion of religious infrastructure, including in education (Hefner 2000:17–18).<sup>544</sup> In the early 1990s, there was a shift in the Suharto government’s treatment of religion that supported this resurgence. New policies gave more space to orthodox and modernist Islam.<sup>545</sup> The expansion and reform of the religious school system enabled many of their students to later study at state universities. When this goal was achieved, some leaders of these educational institutions shifted their focus to further cultivating piety. Consequently, after graduation, faithful and pious Muslims equipped with knowledge and values entered the new professions facilitated by their degrees (Hefner 2009:65–67). Spatially-segregated religious instruction likewise aimed towards general morals and imparted teachings and values about marital roles, gender, and their peculiarity and complementary relationality to

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<sup>542</sup> If Islam had been given a more prominent role in the state, the followers of other religions and beliefs would have been automatically turned into minorities (Cribb 2019:29).

<sup>543</sup> Mien Sughandi stated that *lesbi/ans* contradicted *Pancasila* because they were not fulfilling their social mission as women, see Chapter 3.1. Indonesia’s rejection of a UN declaration recognizing same-sex desire in the same year (see Oetomo 2001) also framed such desire as un-Indonesian and implicitly Western, because it occurred at a context, which is understood as a Western institution.

<sup>544</sup> See Chapter 3.3 and 3.4, for details on Islamic plurality and the position of religion in the state.

<sup>545</sup> The government now permitted the wearing of headscarves at school and encouraged both Islamic education and the establishment of Muslim organizations (Franke 2012:167; Hefner 2000:18). In turn, people defaming Islam were punished with strict sentences (Ricklefs 2001:393).

its students. These were often conservative and “masculinist” (Hefner 2009:63, 75).<sup>546</sup>

For Suharto and his government, Westernization was welcome in terms of development and governance of the population. However, Westernization in terms of sexual libertarianism and homosexuality became dissociated from tradition and national identity across the norm of heteronormativity, which marked same-sex desire (or liberal feminism) as un-Indonesian and imported, and had the potential to unify the ideoscapes of Islam and Westernization. Obviously, these ideoscapes are not incommensurate,<sup>547</sup> as current populist positions claim. Yet, two crucial factors led to friction and exacerbation. Firstly, the position of Islam in the state was strengthened by the easing of restrictions that followed the introduction of democracy. Secondly, the government’s narratives stereotyped gender and sexuality as oscillating between personal autonomy and collective morality. While the former was staged as dangerous Westernization, the latter was portrayed as traditional values in accordance with religion and culture. In the Indonesian constellation, both are interdependent; the position Islam may assume in the state determines not only the extent to which religiously-based concepts become binding standards, but also shapes how ‘untraditional’ individuals and minority groups are treated socially and legally.

### **8.2.2 *Reformasi*: Religious conservatism, human rights and diverging crossroads**

After the demise of the New Order regime, the politically centralized state that concentrated all power in Jakarta was replaced by a new system based on a policy of decentralization. Under this policy, the position of Islam in state and civil society was renegotiated and strengthened by the easing of previous restrictions. The former focus on (forced) unity shifted, metaphorically, to the governance of Indonesia’s diversity. While discourses on human rights and individual rights of citizens entered politics and civil society alongside established but clearly growing conservative discourses (Wieringa 2007), non-hegemonic subjects only acquired a limited voice. When claiming space or rights they were, and often still are, subject to violent attack or human rights violations.

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<sup>546</sup> Religious educational institutions do not homogenize, yet they create – as other social movements do – personal and ideological networks, unifying feelings of solidarity and ‘cultural frames’ that can be deployed for the broader proclamation and realization of social goals (in this case, Islamically-informed social goals) (Hefner 2009:71–72).

<sup>547</sup> This is also evident in many Muslims’ preference of tolerant and independent, plural forms of faith over state-regulated Islam or an Islamic state, which they demonstrated during the pro-democracy tide and student protest that ultimately brought, in 1998, the era of Suharto to an end (Hefner 2000:18–19).

Political decentralization allowed some provinces and districts to introduce *shari'a* legislation alongside national legislation.<sup>548</sup> Such concessions to political Islam demonstrated the state's increased recognition of the numerical majority's religion, as well as the potential for that majority to assert itself within democracy. This transformation of the relationship between the state and Islam was a prelude to Islam becoming a 'majority argument'. Meanwhile, women could now enter politics (Blackburn 2004:227; Oey-Gardiner 2002), and greater attention was paid to conventions on international rights (e.g. human rights, women's rights and children's rights) that had been ratified during the New Order period. Indonesia, at this time, remained "reliant on foreign donors and multilateral agencies for development funds that require expressions of commitment [to international conventions] [...] as a condition of funding" (Robinson 2009:139).

The state loosened its restrictions on the press, media, and public gatherings, leading to the development of a broad mass of civic organizations and initiatives. Civil society encompassed the whole continuum of ideological engagement: at one end, there were some radical groups that fought in rather 'uncivic modes', questioning liberal values and democracy; the middle ground was inhabited by conservative, moderate, or liberal NGOs and huge mass organizations with diverse outlooks on the democratic governance of diversity; at the other end were liberal (feminist) Muslims. They engaged in topics that concerned them and their bodies and challenged conservative religious-political advancements targeting legislation and impacting women (Beitinger-Lee 2010:4; Carnegie 2010:121; van Klinken and Barker 2009a:2). All these changes created space for more diverse representations and fields of involvement, in which LGBT+ and women's organizations thrived and fought for visibility and recognition of their causes.<sup>549</sup> Indonesian Islam, meanwhile, underwent a "conservative turn" (van Bruinessen 2013).<sup>550</sup> The various contending camps held different views on the rights of citizens, gender equality, and morality, as became evident in post-2006 debates and protests over anti-pornography legislation. The anti-pornography law is the first of its kind to create a legal basis for the prosecution of LGBT+ people, as it defines same-sex practices as 'deviant sexual acts' and encourages the reporting of such behavior (Wieringa 2019:124).<sup>551</sup> Since democratization, political homophobia has been growing (Boellstorff 2004c; Liang

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<sup>548</sup> *Perda shari'a* usually regulated the comportment and bodies of all women living in these areas under notions of Islamic morality *qua* gender. Some of these *Perda* also restricted same-sex sexual acts as well as transgender identifications: See Chapter 3.1.

<sup>549</sup> During this period, the tenor of research presented Indonesia as a role model, due to the relationship between the state and Islam. It rated Indonesian Islam as moderate, and reported relative tolerance towards LGBT+. In retrospect, Wieringa (2019:114) assesses this moderation toward LGBT+ as "an anomaly rather than the norm in Indonesian history."

<sup>550</sup> This version of Islamization refers to an increase in followers and conservatism; it ought not be confused with ideological radicalization or fundamentalism.

<sup>551</sup> Since 2015, especially, it has served as a basis for conducting police raids, e.g. in hotels, nightclubs or saunas, often violating people's privacy rights and sentencing those arrested, see BBC (2017); Bevins (2017); HRW (2017a).



2010). Radical Islamic groups have started to carry out physical attacks on LGBT+ political events while warning against Westernization. They justify these actions by reference to the Islamic ideoscape. They denounce LGBT+ content and identities as un-Indonesian, blasphemous, and damaging to Indonesian morality (see Boellstorff 2004c; Child 2010; Coppens 2015; Kurniawan 2012; Liang 2010; Paramaditha 2018).

These radical groups in particular reproduced and instrumentalized the historically emergent discourse that portrayed liberal and emancipatory perspectives on gender and sexuality as un-Indonesian, hostile, and imported – the first sign of a homogenizing loss of values through Westernization, which they deemed as very dangerous. Through their rhetoric, they portrayed the ideoscapes of Islam and Westernization as absolute opposites, utilizing the fear stemming from the historic “minority mentality” (Cribb 2019:28). They virtually presented Islam as an attacked victim that needed, urgently, to defend itself against ‘the immoral West’. This was the context of the emerging equation with blasphemy, and the beginning of a populist anti-LGBT+ tendency that, as I show below, expanded in the coming years.

During this period, (ethno-)religious lines and the relationship between religions and related issues of majority-minority, power, privilege, and discrimination, also became more politicized. In the beginning to mid-2000s, this led to several ethno-religious violent conflicts, often between Christians and Muslims.<sup>552</sup> Minority Islamic groups, such as the *Abmadiyah* and the *Shi’a*, which differ from ‘the standard’ majoritarian *Sunni* orthodoxy, were labeled and stigmatized as deviant sects. They have been stopped from using and building new mosques and have been violently attacked on several occasions (Budiwanti 2009; Fealy 2016; Hasyim 2016).<sup>553</sup> As with the attacks on LGBT+ Indonesians, neither law enforcement nor government implemented any decisive interventions to ensure the security of *Abmadis* (Fealy and Ricci 2019:2). Olle (2009) analyzes the role of the MUI<sup>554</sup> (Indonesian Ulema Council) and their *fatawa* against heresy in warranting violence against *Abmadiyah*, not as a cause but as a justification. He concludes that the strong anti-heresy stance from the MUI ultimately morally justified violence exerted by radical groups, thereby shifting the ideological center-border pattern to the right.

These developments indicate not only the growing importance of mainstreamed religious identifications but also rising rivalry, religious intolerance, and ambiguous state responses. They also reveal the dilution or expansion of what is covered under the catch-word of morality, and therefore, what is considered a proper target of control by political Islam. Corrupted morality, in this perspective, manifests itself

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<sup>552</sup> Like those in Ambon (Maluku province) and Poso (Central Sulawesi), see e.g. Panggabean, Alam and Ali-Fauzi (2010); Qurtuby (2016); Schulze (2017); van Klinken (2007).

<sup>553</sup> After all, *Abmadiyah* had existed peacefully in Indonesia since at least the 1920s; see Crouch (2011).

<sup>554</sup> The MUI has an advisory role to the government, but no power to introduce or pass legislation. Even without the power to change national laws, however, the MUI is highly influential, as its legal opinions serve many Muslims as guidance.

not only in ‘untraditional’ gender or sexual behavior, gambling or alcohol consumption, but also in blasphemy and heresy. Although political and social references continued to be made in the direction of the Westernization ideoscape, conservative political Islam has been able to mark its ‘territory’. Political Islam’s radical margins have been pushing and instrumentalizing the issue of morality to forthrightly advocate for a religious state.<sup>555</sup> This political shift has reordered minority patterns<sup>556</sup> and transformed the connotations the Westernization ideoscape has in discourse. Through the associative equation of the Westernization ideoscape with liberalism, immorality, and godlessness, it is now depicted as an adversary and threat to the ideoscapes of Islam, rather than just to ‘tradition’.<sup>557</sup> In the next section, I describe how this tendency has evolved and expanded since 2014, particularly targeting LGBT+ people.

### 8.2.3 Post-*Reformasi* since 2014: Rise and escalation of moral panic

During my fieldwork, I encountered a social atmosphere of heteronormativity and implicit homophobia. However, LGBT+ affairs were not prominently covered in mass media, which concentrated on corruption, natural disasters, and the presidential election that pitted Prabowo Subianto against the eventual winner, Joko Widodo<sup>558</sup>. As a researcher, I aimed for a balance between activist and non-activist perspectives, and thus participated in LGBT+ activist events as a bystander. In the following, I refer to these events to outline activists’ engagements, their scope of action, and consequent social responses, as they occurred in the year of my research. Since that year, there has been a discursive shift in the social, political, and legal valuation of LGBT+, one bolstered by the increased narrative portrayal of the ideoscapes of Islam and Westernization as being in opposition.

In March 2014, I participated in various events and a public rally in Yogyakarta for International Women’s Day organized by a broad feminist alliance. Sometimes, passers-by eyed us with interest, while others viewed us with irritation. The police showed their disinterest by their absence. In May, the activist LGBT+ community organized a flash mob on the occasion of the International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia (May 17<sup>th</sup>). I joined about 60–80 people who marched around

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<sup>555</sup> As an ‘imagined world’, immoral elements would, in such a state, be controlled according to the values of the numerical majority, and Islam would finally assume the status it has been denied since independence.

<sup>556</sup> As for example, with *Abmadiyah* who through discursive progression were transformed from a numerical minority to a marginalized social minority.

<sup>557</sup> The more this pattern of monolithic blocs, one representing a purported majority, and the other allegedly threatening that majority, gains power (albeit subtly), the more structuring power it may unleash. For example, Muslims who desire to maintain state principles affirming diversity, or who demand rights and protections for minorities can also be portrayed as un-Islamic, heretical, or blasphemous.

<sup>558</sup> Many human rights and LGBT+ activists invested high hopes in Jokowi, whose campaign slogans called for a ‘mental revolution’ (*revolusi mental*). These hopes were betrayed by his actual politics.

the *Tugu* monument with a 20-meter rainbow flag over their heads and some megaphones (see the photographs in Image 4). After 20–30 minutes and some mandatory group photos the participants dispersed, animated and in a good mood about the event's success. On November 20<sup>th</sup>, the Transgender Day of Remembrance took place in Yogya, to commemorate trans people who died by violence or suicide.<sup>559</sup> This event was attacked by masked young men and four participants were injured (see Muryanto 2014b). Until that moment, societal rejection and hatred had been relayed to me primarily through stories and interviews. All of a sudden, the news of the attack spread rapidly and reached all those who were not present at the event via private cell phone messages.

During a visit at a LGBT+ NGO in Medan, North Sumatra in November 2014, I learned how the neighboring Aceh province had just passed the *Qanun Jinayat*, a catalogue of by-laws to *shari'a* legislation. From October 2015, it would redefine moral transgressions that had not previously been considered breaches of the criminal law, bringing them under legal consideration and making them punishable, usually by public caning.<sup>560</sup> In the same month and during the following December, I saw repeated messages in LGBT+ forums on Facebook about LGBT+ hostile events disguised as scientific discussions.<sup>561</sup> The LGBT+ community and their allies tried to counter with knowledge and their situated perspectives. At the end of 2014, I left an Indonesia where the winds were perceptibly shifting.

### 2015 – Prelude to Backlash

In 2015, the winds blew harder. In early March 2015, the MUI, as the highest Muslim authority, issued a *fatwa* prepared in 2014 (see MUI 2014). This *fatwa* classifies 'sexual deviations' – namely *lesbi/ans*, *gays*, fornication, and sodomy defined as *limat* – as criminal offenses that defile the dignity of human beings. The *fatwa* suggests penalties for such acts, starting with caning and even advising the death penalty as the most severe measure.<sup>562</sup> The *fatwa* cited the *Qur'an* and *hadiths* to explain why these sexual acts are religiously forbidden and not compatible with a moral Islamic way of life.<sup>563</sup> In addition, addressing primarily the government and the House of

<sup>559</sup> I was unable to attend this event as I had just moved to Bali.

<sup>560</sup> The *Qanun Jinayat* has been in force in Aceh since October 2015. It covers, among other offenses, adultery, unsupervised social interaction between persons of different sexes, and same-sex intimacy and sexual acts.

<sup>561</sup> For example, from the perspective of psychology or in relation to national security.

<sup>562</sup> The MUI (2014:1) justifies the need for the *fatwa* by citing an alleged increase in the prevalence of the phenomenon; evoking images of a disturbed society in which questions about Islamic evaluation and punishments arise; and by claiming that these 'deviations' pose dangers to the only sexuality-legitimizing institution of marriage, and to the social order in general.

<sup>563</sup> The explanations largely mention the aspects I have elaborated on in previous chapters, namely God's creation of humans in pairs, the command to channel sexual desire in a way that can be justified, the necessity of marriage for legitimizing sexual relations and offspring, and the prohibition of same-sex acts in reference to the story of Lot and prohibition of *limat*; see MUI (2014:1–7).

Representatives, the *fatwa* (see MUI 2014:14) recommended the drafting of legislation forbidding the legalization of any sexually ‘deviant’ community or same-sex marriage. This would introduce severe, and strictly enforced, penalties for such acts, and would create prevention and rehabilitation measures to minimize their proliferation.

This *fatwa* formalized and codified the already hegemonic norms rejecting LGBT+ identities and affirmed Islam’s purported incompatibility with same-sex desire. Through this standardizing move, alternative interpretations from other scholars or institutions<sup>564</sup> are ideologically deprived of space and legitimacy. Because of this formalization, proponents of the compatibility of same-sex desire and Islam can potentially be accused of heresy or blasphemy. At the same time, the *fatwa* can have the effect of morally legitimizing violence and vigilante justice against LGBT+ people, organizations, and their allies, as the MUI *fatwa* against heresy did (see Olle 2009). The *fatwa* calls on policymakers to implement Islamic law to all citizens of the country, and thereby prioritize the ideoscape of Islam over that of existing law and human rights. While claiming to believe that ‘deviations’ in desire are ‘curable’, the *fatwa* also calls, contradictorily, for the death penalty for those who commit them. Public and media discussions of this *fatwa* of MUI, which only acts as an advisory body, were controversial.<sup>565</sup> While the general population seemed to approve of the *fatwa*, Parliament Secretaries questioned its general applicability. LGBT+ and human rights organizations emphasized its non-binding character and condemned it, calling for adherence to human right standards (see e.g. Aco 2015; Jakarta Globe 2015; The Jakarta Post 2015).

Three months later, in late June 2015, the US legalized same-sex marriage nationwide. On July 6<sup>th</sup>, ten days after the American decision, the Indonesian *TV One* channel (see TV One 2015) aired a debate in which four panelists discussed the usefulness and legal im/possibilities around same-sex marriage in the Indonesian context. Two politically high-ranking officials spoke for the opposition, namely, the vice chairman of the Parliament and the Speaker of the legal department of the MUI. Activists of the LGBT+ organizations *Arus Pelangi* and *Gaya Nusantara* represented the pro(gressive) side. Unfortunately, the LGBT+ activists were rarely given the opportunity to express their opinions or respond appropriately to the universalist rhetoric of their counterparts, whose stance of rejection prevailed. Disastrously, a sociologist of *Universitas Indonesia* in the audience, introduced as a scientific expert, argued in an un-sociological manner. He religiously explained that there can be no same-sex marriage in Indonesia, not because prevalent religious views in society oppose it, but because God, as it is written in *al Qur’an*, forbids it.

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<sup>564</sup> As those described in Chapter 6, or by LGBT+ themselves, as analyzed in Chapter 7.

<sup>565</sup> MUI *fatawa* are regularly critically discussed, especially when their conservative stances declare popular behavior to be prohibited, e.g. the taking of ‘selfie’ photographs, or the wearing of ‘jilboobs’ (a style of dress combining a headscarf with tight clothes).

This was the second major event in which LGBT+ people came into the moral-critical focus of public attention, in a way that signaled their intensifying social exclusion.<sup>566</sup> Prevailing ideoscapes carried, and would continue to carry, narratives of dichotomy, portraying LGBT+ acceptance as un-Indonesian, attributed to the West, and as a potential attack on heteronormative marriage and morality. These, in turn, became associated with the ideoscape of Islam, and by extension, the Indonesian nation.

In September 2015, a rumor emerged of a gay wedding involving tourists on the island of Bali. Users on Twitter and Facebook shared photos under the hashtag #loveknowsnolimits, depicting two men involved in what the public and media perceived to be a Hindu marriage ceremony. Over the following 13 days, the website of the local newspaper *Tribune Bali* published at least 15 articles that documented and discussed the findings of the police investigation and the reactions of religious and political leaders (see e.g. Darmendra 2015a, 2015b; Kusniarti 2015). All emphasized a coarse breach of law, religious and cultural norms, demanding consequences for the men in questions. Although it was soon established that the gay couple had simply received a ritual *Karma Cleansing*, subsequent media coverage emphasized the incompatibility of same-sex marriage with Balinese religion and culture, and the Indonesian Constitution. These discussions did not refer to the ideoscape of Islam because of Bali's local, Hindu context, but they did cite moral concepts of religion and culture that the gay foreign tourists had allegedly violated. Morality, as a cipher for heterosexuality, became an integrative paradigm that bridged religious boundaries and engaged in the dichotomous stereotyping of the Westernization ideoscape as gay-friendly, immoral, un-Indonesian, and 'illegitimately encroaching' on sacred rituals.

#### *2016 – Moral panic and the narrative of the attack on the majority*

By 2016, these trends in public discourse had evolved into moral scaremongering in which political parties, media, and radical groups wound each other up, bringing the discussion into the forefront of public consciousness, at least temporarily.<sup>567</sup> The motif of danger through infiltration and homogenization was strongly emphasized, inciting fear and a heightened sense of the need to protect and defend one's values, culture, or religion. On January 24<sup>th</sup> 2016, the Minister of Research, Technology, and Higher Education, Muhammad Nasir, responded to a university student group that offered a discussion group on sexuality and counseling for LGBT+ students on campus: "Really, is campus for that? There are standards of values and

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<sup>566</sup> Ultimately, this debate was preventative, because none of the Indonesian LGBT+ organizations are (to my knowledge) seriously fighting for an introduction of same-sex marriage. NGOs focus more on fundamental problems, such as sexual and reproductive health, advocating for the human and civil rights of LGBT+ people.

<sup>567</sup> Since an explosion of discourse took place in the course of this year, I refer only to a selection of incidents. For a comprehensive summary of statements by politicians, see HRW (2016a, 2016b).

standards of morality that must be maintained. The campus is the guardian of morality” (Laeis 2016). Many politicians joined him in the following weeks; some questioned the right of LGBT+ people to be in universities,<sup>568</sup> or called LGBT+ “a danger to the morality of the whole nation” (Nasir Djamil). Others demanded that LGBT+ persons be banished or prosecuted, or said that their ‘psychological disorders’ needed to be cured (see documentation in HRW 2016a).<sup>569</sup> The most striking statement was one by Defense Minister Ryamizard Ryacudu, who referred to LGBT+ as part of a proxy war by a foreign power.<sup>570</sup> The statement illustrates precisely the discursive progression of the narrative equalizing LGBT+ desire and subjectivities with immorality, the West, and an infiltration of Indonesia. This discursive linkage exemplifies the ideological tensions of contemporary global interactions, which manifest locally as fears of homogenization and absorption (Appadurai 1996a). ‘The normal’, however, is rarely subject to ideological suspicion. The discursive escalation demonstrates how

*the simplification of these many forces (and fears) of homogenization can also be exploited by nation-states in relation to their own minorities, by posing global commodization (or capitalism, or some other such external enemy) as more ‘real’ than the threat of its own hegemonic strategies.* (Appadurai 1996a:296)

None of this went unanswered. Various institutions active in the field of democracy and human rights, but also some political and religious actors, called for an end to the political and media agitation. The former explicitly criticized the blatant homophobic turn, and the discrimination and intolerance emanating from the government.<sup>571</sup> The latter did not denounce the rejection of LGBT+ people, but pleaded for rehabilitation efforts and called on their followers to observe the civil rights of LGBT+ individuals (see e.g. Gabrillin 2016b; Salim and Parlina 2016).

Despite these voices, homophobic sentiment quickly translated into tangible effects, including on public space, which it symbolically marked as a space hostile to

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<sup>568</sup> Later on, his ministry attempted to soften Nasir’s statement. The ministry emphasized LGBT+ people were not actually banned from campus, but that sexual activities were forbidden and LGBT+ activities had to be monitored by the university management because universities had to protect morals; see Gabrillin (2016a).

<sup>569</sup> This ideological battle also produced absurdities, as when Khofifa Indar Parawansa, the Social Affairs minister, stated that in Lombok LGBT+ people targeted middle school children so successfully that in weeks boys were ‘turned around’ and were wearing lipstick, or when Tangerang Mayor Arief R. Wismansyah suggested that nutritionally deficient food, e.g. instant noodles or formula milk, could make children gay; see HRW (2016a); Irawan (2016).

<sup>570</sup> Allegedly, this proxy war would be more dangerous and effective than a nuclear attack because all of Indonesia would be slowly and invisibly undermined, which could destroy everything, while just one specific area would be destroyed in a nuclear attack (quoted in Tempo.co 2016a, 2016b).

<sup>571</sup> See, e.g., open letters and comments by the Study Center on Gender and Sexuality of *Universitas Indonesia* (PusKa Gender & Seksualitas 2016), by the legal aid center LBHM (2016), by Komnas Perempuan (2016a) and Komnas HAM (2016) or individual LGBT+ rights activist like Zurlia (2016).

LGBT+ persons. Several LGBT+ Facebook groups I followed changed their security settings to 'hidden'. In mid-February, the government demanded that funds from the UN Development Program, which had been earmarked for LGBT+ awareness and community programs, be rescinded (see Halim, Jong and Ramadhani 2016).<sup>572</sup> Then, the radical Islamist group FJI (*Front Jihad Islam*) 'visited' the *Pesantren Waria* in Yogya. A week later, the *Pesantren* had to close, after alleged complaints from the neighborhood and pressure from the radical group (see Muryanto 2016).<sup>573</sup> On February 23<sup>rd</sup>, the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission (KPI) proscribed the depiction of male actors in female clothes behaving as women (see Bata 2016).

By February 23<sup>rd</sup>, the radical Islamist group FUI (*Forum Umat Islam*) was calling for an anti-LGBT rally in Yogya, demanding 'Islamic-based' sanctions, for 'sexual deviants'. These sanctions were to include execution by throwing people from heights. They announced a competition to award the most beautiful anti-LGBT poster design, encouraging citizens to produce more banners and to occupy public spaces with them. In response, progressive democrats called for a rally supporting the LGBT+ cause under the title 'solidarity with the struggle for democracy' (*Solidaritas Perjuangan Demokrasi*) for the same day. On the sidelines of the rallies, police and law enforcement were unwilling to restrict the anti-LGBT demonstration and ensure the rights and safety of the counterdemonstrators. According to some interview partners who participated in the democratic rally at the *Tugu* Monument, the police surrounded their gathering from the very beginning and prevented it from progressing. The rally of the FUI was supposed to run from its starting point in the opposite direction, but they turned around and instead headed towards *Tugu* without any intervention from the police (see also Wicaksono 2016). When pro-diversity protesters tried to leave their rally, the police stopped them and injured at least 12 people, primarily *waria*. Since the attendees could not leave, people from the FUI demonstration photographed participants and circulated their pictures on social media among the anti-LGBT faction.<sup>574</sup> These tactics triggered feelings of panic and terror in LGBT+ people, who feared potential attacks at any moment.<sup>575</sup>

President Joko Widodo let a loud silence ring for many months; only in October 2016 did he comment on the situation, but his statement lacked the unequivocal stance many human rights activists had hoped for. He did emphasize that the state would not tolerate discrimination against minorities, including sexual minorities, and assured protection by the police if they were attacked. At the same time, he

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<sup>572</sup> LGBT+ organizations are quite dependent on funding from international donors, as national funding is usually accessible for HIV/AIDS prevention but little else. As one activist noted, her NGO had been struggling for legal status for some time, because the notary repeatedly rejected their application because their name included the word 'sexuality'.

<sup>573</sup> The *Pesantren Waria* reopened in 2019, see dw.com (2019).

<sup>574</sup> Private communication to the author via WhatsApp, 23<sup>rd</sup> of February 2016 at 12:57 CET.

<sup>575</sup> Some former interviewees reported they already had received threats as a result of these disseminations of photographs, and tried to leave their rooms as rarely as possible, fearing for their physical safety.

stressed that Indonesia was the home of the largest Muslim population in the world, whose norms must also be respected (quoted in BBC 2017).

The interplay of limelight-grabbing politicians and media coverage produced a climate of moral panic that had direct impact on both LGBT+ political work and on LGBT+ private lives. Media representations from the LGBT+ community were suppressed and funding bases for political work attacked. Radical Islamist groups took advantage of the ideological fervor that they themselves had fueled, acting as enforcers and defenders of the ideoscape of Islam. This served to justify their homophobic actions in public (via rallies and banners), against institutions (*Pesantren Waria*), and in personal space (defamation). LGBT+ people were framed as anti-thetical to local values, people against whom it was deemed necessary to ‘stand one’s ground’.

#### *2017 onwards – Repeated attempts of criminalization*

In 2017, although the frequency of reporting declined and the media returned to other topics, the social climate of rejection persisted. The issue had moved so far into the political spotlight that some political camps now saw the momentum to initiate legal action against LGBT+, arguing that the morality of society was at risk. While same-sex sexual acts are not illegal in Indonesia (with the exception of Aceh<sup>576</sup>), no legal framework grants LGBT+ people access to minority rights or specific protection against discrimination (Lindsey 2019:42). Same-sex acts can be prosecuted as ‘indecent activities’ between adults and minors based on Article 292 of the Criminal Code (*Kitab Undang-Undang Hukum Pidana*, KUHP), as well as via the anti-pornography legislation introduced in law 44/2008. In 2017, the conservative Muslim group AILA (*Aliansi Cinta Keluarga*, Love Family Alliance) together with other applicants submitted a proposal to the Constitutional Court seeking to expand the articles on rape, adultery, and Article 292, so that same-sex desire would become illegal in general:

*They [AILA] said the court should declare that it prohibited ‘indecent acts’ between any people of the same gender, regardless of their age. A narrow five-to-four majority rejected this request, holding that the court did not have jurisdiction to create criminal offences, because this was a matter for the legislature. (Lindsey 2019:43)*

As Indonesia was already in the process of revising its Criminal Code, attempts to criminalize homosexuality, as proposed by the Constitutional Court, moved to the regular level of the national legislature. Here, elected politicians/parties or the government can introduce drafts and revisions, which are then discussed, revised, rejected, or passed by the House of Representatives (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat*, DPR).

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<sup>576</sup> On May 17<sup>th</sup> 2017, the first men in Aceh were convicted for homosexual acts under the *Qanun Jinayat*. Their punishment, 85 cane strokes, was carried out publicly the following week (see Arintonang 2017). The choice of sentencing date seemed like an act of bitter and malicious sarcasm, as it was the same date as the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia.



Thus, at the beginning of 2018, different drafts for the revision of the Criminal Code, which expressed the AILA concerns and were aimed at the criminalization of LGBT+ desire and sexuality, were introduced and discussed in the respective sub-committees of the DPR. One proposed an expansion of Article 292 with focus on the topic of LGBT+. Then Article 495 on LGBT+ would include the criminal punishment of ‘indecent acts’ regardless of age. It would also encompass consensual and coerced same-sex sexual acts, but would punish coercive acts more severely (Erdianto 2018b). If passed, the state would have legally linked LGBT+ with immorality (Lindsey 2019:43). Critics rejected this state intrusion into the private lives of citizens, because in consensual activities there was no aggrieved person and therefore nothing to punish (quoted in Ihsanuddin 2018). Other drafts discussed the criminalization in relation to an expansion of the Articles regulating adultery (*zina*). This draft proposed to expand the understanding of adultery beyond marriage, and to define punishments for any extramarital sexual activities (Da Costa and Kapoor 2018; Erdianto 2018a). In addition to adolescent sexuality, this would have made same-sex sexuality punishable, since no same-sex marriage exists in Indonesia to legitimize this type of sexuality. Critiques scathingly attacked this proposal for its potential to render cohabitation punishable by law, and to discriminate against women, who could be punished under the expansion of the Article regulating adultery even if they were victims of rape (quoted in Erdianto 2018c). Both proposals were rejected – for the time being. Nevertheless, in 2017 and 2018 police and radical Islamist groups raided places (saunas, hotels, nightclubs) and private homes where LGBT+ people allegedly mingled. They evicted ‘suspected’ LGBT+ tenants for ‘unsettling the public’ without legal justification and arrested over 300 people in 2017 alone. Furthermore, in 2018, some local decrees proposed conversion therapy, school curricula incorporating hostility towards LGBT+, or the creation of lists of LGBT+ individuals for use by the authorities (see HRW 2017c; Knight 2018).

In early 2020, the regular legislative process discussed another bill included in the 2020–2024 priority list that would have far-reaching implications for both gender equality and LGBT+ subjectivities. The bill, presented by a coalition of conservative Islamic politicians, was riddled with traditionalist gender roles in line with religious values and ideas. It represented an attempt to ‘protect’ the heteronormative nuclear family from the dangerous quasi-Western influences of modernity and globalization. This ‘Family Resilience Bill’ (*RUU Ketahanan keluarga*) proposed to fix traditional gender roles by law. It defined the husband as the responsible breadwinner and protector of the family, which included protection from sexual deviation, and the wife responsible for managing the household and treating her husband and children according to social ethics and religious norms (see Cahya 2020; Permana 2020a). Articles 85, 86, and 87 of the bill targeted ‘sexual deviations’, encompassing incest, LGBT+ desire and identifications, and sadomasochism. Sexually ‘deviant’ people, it proposed, should report to authorities to receive ‘rehabilitation’ therapies in government centers. Rehabilitation might include social, psychological, spiritual,

or medical measures. If the person would not report voluntarily, the family was tasked with reporting them to the authorities (see Permana 2020b; Zhacky 2020).

The bill was controversial for months and became the target of countless critiques. Female politicians and civil society alike criticized the proposed patriarchal intrusion into the private lives of citizens and argued that familial responsibilities, competencies and roles should be negotiated by spouses rather than imposed by the state. LGBT+ and human rights organizations excoriated the mandatory reporting of ‘sexual deviance’ and the creeping introduction of conversion therapies (see e.g. Cahya 2020; Lang 2020; Reuters.com 2020). In November 2020, the majority of factions, especially nationalist and pro-democratic ones but also some of those politicians who had initially submitted the bill, voted against it (see Jakarta Globe 2020; Utami 2020).

A few months before the defeat of the ‘Family Resilience Bill’, a new ‘Eradication of Sexual Violence’ bill (*RUU Penghapusan kekerasan seksual*, RUU PKS) was discussed. It aimed to create a legal framework to make punishable 13 different forms of sexual violence, including marital rape, and to provide survivors of sexual abuse with rights and improved treatment options, to enable prevention measures, and to make perpetrators liable for the cost of recovery measures (see Linggasari 2015; Sagala 2020; Tashandra 2015).<sup>577</sup> Democratic, progressive, and feminist forces supported this bill, and its implementation was repeatedly called for at mass rallies or via the trending Twitter and Instagram hashtag #sahkanRuuPKS (‘sign the PKS bill’). For many conservative and radical Islamic groups, the proposed ‘western feminist’ definition of sexual violence was too broad, as it contradicted religious teachings. Some critics anticipated difficulties in police enforcement or lamented a permissive stance towards *seks bebas* and the use of the term ‘desire’. They suspected that it represented the quiet legalization of LGBT+ existence, while others suggested that the bill was the result of foreign interference (see Adhiningrat 2018; Margret and Pandjaitan 2020; Utami 2019). Instead of challenging patriarchal reasoning and taking seriously the rising numbers of sexual abuse cases, critics fostered the image that bodily autonomy, protection from and criminal liability for sexual abuse were concepts from the West, and from whose interference Indonesia needed to be protected. As the deliberations proved too ‘difficult’, the bill was dropped from the 2020 priority list, to be re-negotiated in 2021/22<sup>578</sup> (Sagala 2020).

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<sup>577</sup> The number of reported cases of sexual violence has been increasing in Indonesia for years, partly because the #metoo movement motivated survivors to press charges. Survivors have often experienced victim-blaming (see Gerlach 2020; Lestari 2015). The RUU PKS would introduce new criminal offenses, because several forms of sexualized violence have not been punishable until now (see Tashandra 2015). For example, rape is defined solely in heteronormative terms, as a man’s violent insertion of a penis into the vagina of a woman to whom he is not married, excluding the possibility of insertion of objects or same-sex rape (see Alaidrus 2020). Another challenge to survivors seeking justice is the need for witnesses.

<sup>578</sup> This bill was later ‘toned down’ and renamed “RUU TPKS”: it was passed in April 2022, becoming Law No. 12/2022 about Sexual Violence Crimes.

The moral media panic that had erupted in 2016, unequivocally fostering homophobia, persisted into 2017 and has not abated since. The various bills introduced by conservative Islamic actors demonstrate a definite attempt to discredit LGBT+ identifications as Western and immoral, and to criminalize same-sex sexual acts. The line of argument that frames the ideoscape of Westernization as an attack on the ideoscape of Islam was maintained. As in previous decades, politics problematized Westernization in relation to the realm of gender and sexual morality, and much less in relation to other cultural flows of globalization promoting ‘development’.<sup>579</sup> These dynamics have three aspects. Firstly, there was the rise of a conservative Islamic camp and its intolerance; secondly, an increasing divide between ideological positions was created; and, thirdly, Indonesia found an ambiguous balance of power in which the conservative faction records gains, but has (so far) been confronted by democratic, secular, and progressive forces who also defend their visions.

### 8.3 Summary: From ‘Unity in diversity’ to ‘Unity in morality’?

The transformations of the *Reformasi* period require a ‘meta-perspective’ on the respective connotations of the Westernization and Islam ideoscapes. Whereas the government had previously enforced a relative balance between Islam and diversity, democratization opened up new pathways for political Islam through the abolition of authoritarian restrictions on civil society and religion. Government policies continued to oscillate between these two competing ideoscapes. In the early 2000s, as the government adopted several human rights agreements and mechanisms, some cities were likewise allowed to introduced partial *shari’a* regulations proposed by political Islam. As ‘the West’ began its ‘war on terror’ singularly denouncing ‘Islam’, Indonesian Islam shifted from moderate to more conservative positions. Political Islam became more intolerant of internal plurality and religious minorities, and took harder lines on the issue of morality. Over the last ten years, actors of conservative political Islam have successfully fomented and instrumentalized fears around absorption and morality to discredit the ideoscape of Westernization, and to promote the ideoscape of Islam as the necessary and indispensable solution for the state’s ‘social maladies’ – all the while obscuring that their own claim to hegemony would undermine minority rights and protections in the future.

Problematic Westernization has been discursively associated with liberalism, bodily autonomy, sexual permissiveness, and lack of morality. Until 1998, it was

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<sup>579</sup> In fact, in October 2020 in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, the parliament pushed through the ‘Omnibus Bill’ on Job Creation despite massive public protests. This law facilitates foreign direct investment while eroding workers’ rights and environmental protection: See e.g. Akhlah (2020); Lane (2020); Lingga (2020).

presented as contradicting Indonesian values and tradition; since then, through democratic and majoritarian transformations, it is increasingly framed as an attack on Islam. Since 2014, this transformation has unfolded primarily on the backs of LGBT+ people, marking them as worthless, abnormal, and by definition outside of the moral majority. Since 2015, a consortium of conservative and radical politically-motivated actors has systematically construed LGBT+ as immoral, abject, unreligious, as a western attack and, therefore, as un-Indonesian. Although non-heteronormative lifestyles and cultural formations have, historically and in numerical terms, occupied a minority position, in this case the rise of conservative and radical forces of political Islam created a deprived social minority who are cast as posing a danger to society. The danger this 'new' minority is said to pose provides the pretext for limiting, or even abolishing, their rights and protections. This is clearly reflected in the repeated attempts to criminalize LGBT+ expressions and to impose Islamic-style morality in general. The regime of heteronormativity (Wieringa 2019) with its focus on morality thereby operates as an integrative paradigm, as it renders Islamic efforts potentially applicable across religious and ethnic boundaries.

The escalation of events from 2015 to 2021 suggest that negative perceptions of LGBT+ in Indonesia may not abate soon, and may even intensify into legal or other social, political, and economic discrimination. LGBT+ people have reported on the negative effects of their increased visibility, heightened public awareness, rising homophobia, and a pervasive climate of mistrust.<sup>580</sup> Although increasing visibility is elsewhere traded as a condition for potential future recognition or acceptance of LGBT+ people, it is my understanding that in Indonesia visibility has not helped LGBT+ people – a viewpoint Wieringa (2019) shares.<sup>581</sup> Another risk of the current demonization of LGBT+ is the slow but steady erasure from history of Indonesia's diverse and plural local forms of gender and sexuality, as well as the memory of their acceptance. Furthermore, the emerging narrative, reinforced by the MUI *fatwa*, linking LGBT+ issues and acceptance to heresy/blasphemy, are also a cause for concern. Lindsey (2019:46) asserts that while the blasphemy law certainly has the potential to defend religious minorities, it has, in recent years, been more often used as a weapon backing the supremacy of Islam. The law, Lindsey argues,

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<sup>580</sup> In everyday life, many have been suddenly recognized, as their LGBT+ affiliation became perceivable. Some interviewees had to endure public hostility or moralizing discussions despite their desired identifications, lost their jobs, were evicted from their *kost* or felt forced to grow their hair long, in order to avoid attracting negative attention.

<sup>581</sup> The present conditions render 'coming in' all the more significant, even though with increasing hostility it will also be more difficult to achieve.

can be wielded to interpret criticism of an officially recognized religion as blasphemy.<sup>582</sup> If LGBT+ people or allies argue for the compatibility of Islam and same-sex desire, this could be construed as blasphemy or heresy.

Even if the trend toward conservatism is evident and the global polarization between Westernization and Islam has become 'localized', it would be premature to assume a definite triumph of conservative elements. Social acceptance of LGBT+ as a part of Indonesian diversity in the near future seems doubtful indeed. Nevertheless, the historic perspective reveals that tolerance of diversity has deeper roots than homogenizing religious intolerance. The recent societal debates show not only existing plurality, loud criticism, and appreciation of diversity and social justice, but also equally committed dedication from nationalist, pro-democratic, and diversity-acknowledging Muslims and non-Muslims alike, who strive to uphold a version of democracy that grants rights to all citizens, including protection from discrimination. In the face of ongoing and further intersecting local and global cultural flows, it will require broad and courageous political and civil society coalitions and strategic alliances to defend and do justice to the ideal of 'Unity in Diversity' against the new 'Unity in Morality'.

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<sup>582</sup> This happened in the high-profile case of Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, the former Christian Chinese governor of Jakarta. He was "convicted of blasphemy and jailed for two years in May 2017 for calling on Muslims not to be fooled by *ulama* advocating a particular interpretation of a Qur'anic verse" (Lindsey 2019:46).



## 9. Conclusion

In this book, I have presented an analysis concerned with revealing *lesbi/an* and trans lives in their plurality. The preceding chapters have explored multidimensional practices, the diverse affiliations of intersectional subjects who have related themselves to different ethical aspirations, and varied ways of (not) connecting and reconciling same-sex and trans- identifications with religious faith. While normative and idealized understandings of gender and ‘natural’ heterosexuality may have served as initial reference points for these LT+ individuals’ negotiations, their expressions and experiences have been remarkably diverse. This concluding chapter summarizes the primary challenges facing LT+ subjectivities in Indonesia, and reflects on the theoretical aspects of my analysis. I begin by mapping out the specific challenges that affect LT+ people and their lives. Subsequently, I present the results of my research, organized according to thematic categories, and discuss each category within its relevant theoretical framework.

### 9.1 Key challenges for LT+ subjectivities

In Indonesia today, LT+ individuals face challenges, both in their personal lives and as members of a marginalized social group. These challenges constitute potential starting points for greater participation in society and the reduction of discrimina-

tory treatment, if Indonesia's government, politics, and society are willing to recognize the specific situatedness of LT+ people, and the LGBT+ community in general.

### 9.1.1 Heteronormativity and marriage

In Indonesia, a binary system of gender prevails, where gender is deduced from assumed sex and linked to heterosexuality as a normative order and hegemonic constellation. This heteronormative ideology, deeply rooted in society and religion, constructs marriage and biological reproduction as essential aspects of human life.

In this framework, LT+ individuals who usually are understood to be women face heteronormative expectations concerning gender and sexuality (especially around femininity and marriage), which they encounter in the spaces they participate in: spaces of the family, work, and education. In family spaces, these expectations are powerful because of emotional ties, wider personal affiliation, and economic dependencies. In educational and workplace settings, the power of such expectations varies; some are powerful due to the binding character of regulations and because of economic dependencies, while others are less powerful due to a relative absence of socially and emotionally binding ties. Heteronormative expectations also dominate public spaces. LT+ people face heightened pressure, under recurrent anti-LGBT+ rhetoric, to appear inconspicuous in terms of gender and sexuality, lest they risk verbal and physical offenses or legal prosecution.

Some *lesbi/ans* can imagine themselves entering heterosexual marriages and/or bearing children.<sup>583</sup> Their basis of identification is not so much desire, but rather a gendered impulse to understand oneself as a woman. Embracing multiple affiliations may not only lead to the fulfilment of that role, but also to conformity with expectations of the family structure, thus positively confirming their intersectional belonging. One's personal identification as a same-sex desiring woman can find relief and validation through fulfilment of woman's 'social task', or at least by being perceived as doing so. Nevertheless, a considerable amount of *lesbi/ans* do not want to marry or bear children because they do not desire men or are opposed to the adoption of femininity, which are imagined as a prerequisite for marriage with a man. Despite their wish for self-determination, they experience family pressure, or even have their marriages arranged for them without their input. What is particularly challenging, here, is that LT+ individuals do not usually articulate the real reason why they decline marriage, which is why it cannot be considered by their families. The heteronormative structuring of above-mentioned spaces disables articulation of LT+ identifications, as individuals consider socio-cultural values of restrained behavior and the possibility of negative consequences for their physical, emotional,

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<sup>583</sup> According to my experience, many LT+ persons would like to have children, if this was feasible without heterosexual sex or marriage.



and economic safety. While same-sex desiring women and trans men surely do participate in every field of society, heteronormativity restricts their self-determination and open participation. Society not only ignores the specific needs and challenges of LT+ people, but also hinders their attempts to shape society according to their interests and experiences.

### 9.1.2 Family ties

For LT+ people, the family holds significant value. It also functions as a regulator of social relations and gender variance. On the one hand, personal integration into and orientation towards the family leads to commitment towards its values and structures. On the other, such closeness to family also leads to secrecy and concealment of one's personal identification. As females are especially thought to represent their families' honor, they are required to uphold a 'good' image. This requires conformity, subordination of dissonant parts, and creates a high level of pressure for LT+ people to behave in certain ways. A rupture with the family network is not only morally ambiguous, but also challenging, as the family environment with its situated background (political/religious orientation, ethnicity, class affiliation) has a massive influence on the living conditions and self-image of *lesbi/ans* and trans men, as the family provides access to resources (networks, alimony, education, health care and knowledge). LT+ people live out their gender or sexual identifications 'off site', not only because of love, solidarity, and cultural etiquette, but also because of (partial) economic dependence. Disclosure of desire often carries the risk of unpredictable results, as surrendering control over this information may have serious consequences. This challenge is also linked to heteronormativity. Family ties are challenging for *lesbi/ans* and trans men because they constrain self-realization of some identifications, while promoting others equally important to the individual. To navigate these realities demands a delicate balance of consideration and self-effacement.

### 9.1.3 Economic security and age

The issue of economic security in later life is closely intertwined with family structures and societal norms. In Indonesia, social and economic security is provided less by the state than by families, creating a kind of intergenerational family contract where children are expected to provide for their parents in their old age.<sup>584</sup> This intergenerational care system, with its focus on biological reproduction, is based on heteronormativity. It therefore discriminates against constellations of love and family that are neither classically heterosexual nor capable of reproduction. For older *lesbi/ans* who did not marry or bear children, the question of future security and care in old age arises and becomes especially pressing. Some therefore consider marriage to secure support from their husbands and any eventual children. Others try to meet

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<sup>584</sup> Nursing homes have a poor reputation and it is considered a humiliation to take up residence in one. There is also a high level of poverty among the elderly.

this challenge on their own by fostering closer ties with their family, or by creating alternative structures of care.

Access to means of economic security is biased by gender, as the patriarchal gender role model conceives of women in relation to men. Men are supposed to take responsibility for providing for women, while women's socialization focuses more on marriage and use of their education for subsidiary income that supports the family, rather than economic self-reliance. This can have precarious consequences for LT+ people. *Femmes* are prone to face even more challenges through their identification with femininity and trans men are denied access to gender confirming health care. Positioned outside the heteronormative economy of meaning that privileges men, trans men and *lesb/ian's* life realities are structurally discriminated against, much like those of heterosexual women.

#### 9.1.4 Religion and belief

Religion and faith are challenging for LT+ due to the prevailing norm of heteronormativity in their hegemonic currents. Consequently, LT+ people perceive themselves as devalued, wrong, and sinful, adversely affecting their mental and emotional health. Convinced of their personal reprehensibility and feeling shamed, they tend to withdraw from mainstream religious settings. LT+ people often feel uncomfortable and unwelcome in such spaces, where participation produces stress rather than a connection to the divine. Ritual worship is therefore more likely to be practiced alone or among like-minded people, than collectively in a mosque or church. As such, the socially-propagated narrative that portrays LGBT+ individuals as unreligious is misguided. While not all LGBT+ people are deeply pious, a considerable number of them are religious, concerned not only with God but also with religious requirements. They would be even more invested in their faith if, now and then, they could find acceptance instead of devaluation in their religious communities. The heated discourse of recent years, which has emphasized religion's rejection of same-sex desire and LGBT+ subjectivities, has not led to the elimination of desire nor of the religiosity of LGBT+ individuals. Ultimately, this rejection has led to pain and self-doubt, and has prevented LGBT+ people from practicing their faith on an equal footing, even amid their respective religious communities.

#### 9.1.5 Security matters, rights, and laws

The area of rights and laws has emerged as another challenge for LGBT+ people. *Lesbi/ans*, as well as other people belonging to the LGBT+ universe, enjoy civil rights as individuals. However, the state does not recognize sexual orientation as a characteristic that deserves specific protection. Therefore, LGBT+ as a group are not an officially recognized minority granted protection by the law. Instead, a more worrisome trend is unfolding. The days of moderate Islam seem distant, while conservative and in some cases radical elements of political Islam are on the rise. What counts as 'really' Muslim or Islamic is becoming more standardized, which weakens

internal plurality and allows new claims to truth that assert boundaries between permissible and prohibited. This trend is also reflected in the political arena, where draft legislation aimed at regulating the realm of morality has been introduced with steady frequency over the past 15 years. Initially, proposals for regulation focused on gender; in 2016 and after, sexuality has been added. Since then, there have been several attempts not only to criminalize LGBT+ practices, but also other sexual practices that are considered unnatural and pathological, such as sadomasochism. The main argument in each case is that of incompatibility with religion, culture, and local values. The specter of Westernization is consistently invoked. In these debates, visions of morality and nationhood collide. LGBT+ people are portrayed as morally depraved troublemakers who corrupt the imagined communal morality of religion and culture – consequently, they must be fought. While political homophobia and attacks on LGBT+ events have occurred before, the developments described in Chapter 8 indicate their increasing normalization. Although these attacks have been carried out by radical Islamic groups, conservative majoritarian Islam has provided a moral ground. The hesitant response of police and law enforcement further exacerbates the situation, as LGBT+ events do not receive adequate protection, and perpetrators are not consistently prosecuted. Instead, authorities have used existing laws and regulations to break up events and prosecute LGBT+ individuals. This not only deprives individuals and initiatives of space and socio-political representation, it also promotes discrimination against a minority, putting their lives at risk.

Global trends, such as the rise of populist forces that set the West against Islam, are already evident in Indonesia, alongside the spirited efforts of those fighting for a more equality-based democracy. Of particular concern is the push for Islamic supremacy through majoritarian, democratic means, clearly reflected in the wrangling over jurisdiction in areas of morality and minorities. This trend poses significant challenges not only for minorities, but for the constitution of democracy. Historically, Islam has vied for rights and recognition with (other) minorities. This has fostered a “minority mentality” where the withholding of supremacy is perceived as marginalization (Cribb 2019:28–29). Since democratization, this mentality has been used to stoke fears of renewed loss, which require defensive actions to secure or elevate status. The question of how Indonesian democracy will develop in the coming years remains an open one, as does the question whether rights and laws will provide protection for both the Islamic heterosexual majority *and* for minorities.

## 9.2 Results and contributions of this research in light of theory

My research strategy combined practice theory, a social constructivist approach, and Mahmood’s (2005) agency concept to explore the research topics. This combination of approaches allowed me to uncover how hegemonic social structures are perpetuated, how they are internalized by subjects, and how subjects initially perceive them

as normal and true. The focus on practice, meanwhile, demonstrated how subjects negotiate, interact, and engage with structures. Negotiation is especially evident when subjects ‘fail’ to conform to the norm. A primary focus on ‘doing’ does not rely on an approach that prioritizes the norm and analyzes any failures of conformity to that norm. Instead, it centers the workings of and engagement with norms and facilitates an examination of societal and religious norm-setting processes. This viewpoint is based on the experiences and accounts of LT+ subjects. The approach thus depicts LT+ as active members of society through whom the violence inherent in majoritarian notions and their norms can be assessed. It also provides a lens for assessing personal commitments for belonging and recognition, along with intersectional experiences in a complex society marked by hierarchy, privilege, and discrimination.

I have described multiple trajectories and approaches to negotiating in normative settings, whether in relation to gender/sexuality (with the concepts of coming in, desired identifications, and gender fluidity), or in relation to religion (with the notion of modes of negotiation). They expose LT+ people as ethical and responsible subjects who not only maneuver societal structures through agency, but actively relate to them. The applied agency concept of Mahmood (2005) recognizes not only resistance against norms as agency, but also subjects’ capacity to navigate the self in normative settings. In contrast, a resistance-based agency concept would have recognized *butchi* as agentive but would rarely accord agency to *femmes*. It would also not have recognized agency in practices of oscillating gender performance. In terms of religion, only the (activist) ‘turning away’ and ‘integration via interpretation’ would have qualified as agency, but not the other modes of religious negotiation identified in this study. The selected agency concept thus forgoes the feminist insinuation of a false consciousness and mitigates implicit white and Eurocentric biases on the part of the (feminist) researcher. The concept facilitates recognition of the intersectionality of actors, and their entanglement with normative currents that produce and structure their being as subjects and motivate their lives.

### 9.2.1 Marginality, stigma and sexual and gendered diversity: Becoming and living as a LT+ person

In the book, I incorporated the strands of theory discussed above when discussing gender self-understanding, and the question of how *lesbi/an* subjectivities develop between childhood and young adulthood in relation to their specific socio-cultural environment. The first focus revealed dominant LT+ performativities and understandings of gender, but also practices that challenged and pluralized dominant forms. *Butchi* and *femme* gender positions are based on a strong binary and come with associated roles that parallel society’s biological understanding of gender. Contrary to the societal notion, however, gender for *butchis* is not derived from anatomy. This binary *lesbi/an* form is challenged by understandings and practices extending and critiquing the either/or pattern included in *butchi/femme* gender labels. Gender

positions that instead populate the ‘in-between’ of the outer poles of *butchi* and *femme* provoke and erode this binary. *Butchi ngondek* (expressive femininity), as an exaggerated and temporary persiflage, functions as a strategy rather than a fixed label. It plays with and simultaneously unmask both the societal fetish for heteronormative gender dichotomy and *lesbi/an* labels, which are experienced as an imposed, artificial, and restrictive normativity. This extends society’s conception of how women look, act, and behave.

Sexual subject formation was revealed by mapping out ‘coming of age as a *lesbi/an*’ in its different phases. This also uncovered how stigma is learned, felt, and replicated. For *lesbi/ans*, stigmatized desire distinguishes them from others in their perceptions. Coming in and desired identifications provide internal and external coping responses to alleviate stigma and its potential consequences. Unlike coming out, both are culturally-specific approaches that account for the surrounding socio-cultural context, which values self-restraint and sensitivity towards other’s needs in the interest of social harmony. This, in turn, secures ongoing societal participation. Because of their marginalization, LT+ individuals become experts in assessing space with its power relations and performing the self accordingly in the process of subject formation. Secrecy constitutes an aspect of collective experience that lets LGBT+ people create spaces that bridge isolation and enable encounter, information exchange, and temporary normalization. Interactions in these spaces reveal parallels in experience and show that homo- and transphobic rejection and aggression is a structural, rather than an individual problem.

Combining these theoretical perspectives shows how heteronormative structures and their associated power dynamics shape normative standards, normalizing certain lifestyles and devaluing others. *Lesbi/an* gender and sexuality form through reference, interaction and negotiation with the hegemonic ‘truths’ of gender and sexuality, even if a heteronormative perspective frames them as different, abject – a foil against which the heteronormative self defines itself as normal. The process of sexual subject formation analyzed here extends Blackwood’s (2010) understanding of *lesbi* sexuality as resulting from one’s respective gender position, where masculinity desires femininity and vice versa. In contrast, the findings described in the phases of ‘coming of age as a *lesbi/an*’ suggest that desire can emerge independently of and without a causal connection to one’s gender position, as some *femmes* felt their desire toward women as children rather than solely toward masculinity (by *butchi* and men) in adolescence or adulthood. Even if “*desire for the opposite*” (Blackwood 2015:228, emphasis in original) between masculinity and femininity continues to be the dominant pattern in society and among *lesbi/ans*, my examples indicate that desire can result from a respective gender position – yet it does not have to. Another theoretical contribution of my research is the systematization of the processes of sexual subject formation, centered around the concepts of ‘coming in’ and ‘desired identifications’. These offer a conceptualization of how female same-sex identifications (including some later realized trans masculine identifications) are formed and negotiated in a Muslim majority country. By taking seriously

the multidimensional identificatory affiliations of subjects, it systematizes connected processes without prioritizing the axis of desire, as in Western contexts. While in western, liberal countries coming out is considered to be a positive personal acknowledgement as well as a political tool, coming in represents this personal acknowledgement in the Indonesian context. Desired identifications ensure the individuals' social integration and participation, as they combine measures of secrecy with the performance of socially-appreciated identifiers and systematize this mix as an interpersonal strategy of information control. They relate to socio-cultural and religious conditions and (partial) self-identification with them. The concept, with its empirical sensitivity to space, power relations, and sociocultural engagement of subjects, contributes to the understanding of what from the outside may appear as oscillating, contradictory, and non-transparent behavior, without labeling them as dishonest or hypocritical. Moreover, it facilitates consideration of the collective effect and width of secrecy and is potentially transferable to the assessment of other stigmatized identifications in context-sensitive ways.

### **9.2.2 Identifications and fluid performances in space: Relating and delineating a multi-dimensional self to hegemony**

Gender is performed and articulated in ways that produce *intrapersonal* gender fluidity. This production, articulation, and performance take place in relation to the gender ideal of *kodrat wanita* and occur in different spaces. To enquire into the relationship between the production of gender (fluidity), societal expectations, and spatial influences, I focused on two key aspects. The first focus highlights the significance of the *kodrat wanita* as a benchmark and reference point for familial socialization regarding gender and sexuality, shaping interactive negotiations within LT+ individuals' familial context and beyond. The second focus assessed the consequences of accidental or willful disclosure of desire for women, which displayed a person's breach of heterosexual normativity. As LT+ people usually are assessed as women when their sex assigned at birth is known, but do not meet the heteronormative and/or femininity standards of families and other members of society, negotiation becomes a necessity. *Femmes'* performance of gender mostly meets the standards of femininity. As such, it is rarely problematized, but requires them to navigate norms and restrictions associated with their gender. Nevertheless, *femmes* establish a certain *intrapersonal* fluidity in gender performance enabling them to follow personal interests and to transgress the stricter code of conduct applied to them. In comparison, *butchi's* and trans men's masculine gender performance regularly collides with gendered expectations. While this leads to pressures to conform to femininity, it also means that they are less restrained by the strict application of norms and restrictions, allowing them liberties beyond the regular scope for females. Socialization as women and the training in femininity it involves creates, in many *butchi*, a sensitivity towards gendered expectations in each space. As such, they

cultivate a retrievable bodily capacity to customize their gendered performance. Increased fluidity in *butchi* gender performance arises due to a disparity between their sense of self and expectations conveyed in different spaces. Thus, fluidity in gender articulation sometimes reflects a voluntary compromise with familial or societal expectations and, at other times, a constraint derived from a female anatomy present in family, or (state) institutions. Fluidity emphasizes the character of gender neither as biologically determined nor as a singular practice, but as a negotiation between one's sense of self and the expectations of society.

With regard to accidental or deliberated disclosure of desire for women, the analysis shows a continuum between acceptance and rejection rather than generalizable consequences. However, it highlights how disclosure is a pivotal and potentially perilous event. Reactions to accidental disclosure are more intense than those to voluntary coming out, as are ensuing consequences. The spatial context and socio-cultural frames of appropriate conduct and personal obligations between counterparts also influence the intensity of actions and reactions, and of the levels of confrontation involved. Interaction with friends or in the workplace is more egalitarian and direct, but within family settings interaction is governed by considerations of age and gender hierarchies, reflecting personal commitments and obligations among the subjects creating the space. After accidental *ketahuan*, LT+ experience different degrees of unfolding stigma, including social exclusion<sup>585</sup> and the implementation of measures to correct LT+ individuals so they may become 'normal again'.<sup>586</sup> Even if LT+ partially comply with such measures, it does not change their desire but instead produces a renewed commitment to secrecy and desired identifications, sometimes resulting in withdrawal from the setting. Coming out is feared and carefully prepared for, but initially dismissive reactions usually fade over time. In both types of disclosure, but most crucially in long-term negotiations after coming out in the family, time is a pivotal factor. In combination with LT+ peoples ongoing participation in social settings, time transforms power structures in space and enables tolerance, acceptance, and gradual normalization of their desire.<sup>587</sup> As such, hegemonic structures fail to change or realign desire or gender expression, but are able to suppress the subject matter in spaces and impose rejection on it, thereby strengthening the supremacy of heterosexism. This has the effect that same-sex desire is usually only expressed in exclusive spaces. The negative consequences for *lesbi/ans*' and trans men's physical and psychological well-being after disclosure, coupled with societal disaffirmation, explains why coming out is not a sought-after option for the Indonesian LGBT+ community.

The analysis of gender performativity, with a focus on spatial dynamics, demonstrates how *lesbi/ans* negotiate the expectations they encounter (expectations that

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<sup>585</sup> Ranging from bullying, and the breaking off of contact, to eviction from the family home.

<sup>586</sup> For example, healing attempts, or propositions for heterosexual marriage.

<sup>587</sup> It should be kept in mind that it was only people who, as experts in the respective social context, assumed tolerance can be achieved, actually strove for coming out.

operate as power relations) through fluidity in gender performance. It is evident that gender transgression in the form of female masculinity is problematic in many spaces, even if it is also often accepted. At the same time, gender is performed fluidly. Hence, the theoretical approach used here fruitfully opens up a perspective on how space informs the performative practice of gender in the everyday. Another contribution of my research is the enhanced perceptibility of *intrapersonal* gender fluidity. Only by tracing variations through space and considering time as a factor, does the scope of fluidity of gender become perceivable. The performance of interviewees produces different degrees of fluidity depending on the rigidity and fixedness of the societal gender binary in space.<sup>588</sup> This reveals the constraining power as well as the limitations of societal categories. On the one hand, it produces performances of femininity under the precondition of individuals' previous familiarization with femininity. Whether with desired identifications or temporal performance of femininity by *butchi* as part of their gender fluidity, the results suggest that "public gender performances are often formulated in relation to regulatory frameworks structuring what is acceptable and intelligible" (Davis 2009:103–104). On the other hand, the categorical limitations manifest themselves where the narrow categories of women and men do not represent nor include the gender experiences of *butchi*, nor are able to prevent the emergence of LT+ gender and sexuality. In their claims to LT+ gender and sexuality identifications individuals interrupt, on a theoretical level, society's and religion's essentialized connection between sex, gender, and desire, by showcasing how sex determines neither gender nor desire. On a practical level, however, most *butchis*' with their reference to be 'like men' are, as Blackwood (2015:228) argues, "situated within" and perpetuating "a gender binary whose boundaries cannot be legitimately transgressed." Nevertheless, their performed female masculinity as well as their gender fluidity diversifies the category of women.

Performativity theory accommodates fluidity of gender. Here, my research makes another contribution. Fluidity is neither the American dream of infinite possibilities, nor is it as simple as changing clothes. Performances of gender that are fluid in nature and which transgress boundaries remain under the same constraints of reiteration and reference as performances that are more or less fluid within one gender. Hyperfluid performances are thus neither beyond nor 'post-gender'. Moreover, for hyperfluidity, the physical component is crucial. Bodies are trained, exercised, and inflected by socialization in the performance of gender. Hyperfluidity is only possible through intention and previously acquired bodily knowledge that can either be retrieved or built upon. Thus, the fluidity that I saw during the course of my research develops more in response to different demands – fluidity does not evolve out of playfulness, freedom, or critique. However, because the capacity can

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<sup>588</sup> Andre's performance is fluid because of the requirement of femininity for people with such a body in school: Frentzy's gender performance was fluid in the long run because of the presupposition of a feminine gender role for people with such a body in marriage.



still be used to maneuver the regulatory structures of society, it should still be considered a form of agency.

The analysis of fluidity through the local example of female masculinity in Indonesia conceptualizes fluidity as possibly transgressing the realm of one gender, rather than as a unique feature of trans individuals' practice and experience. Nevertheless, I argue that further research is needed on other practices reflecting gender and diversity in different locales of the world, in order to theorize gender fluidity and its ability to transcend (b)orders further. This is necessary not only to enable recognition and inclusion of situated practices and perspectives, but to ground, critique, and amplify the international (but mostly Western-based) vocabulary and theoretical distinctions of Gender- and Queer Studies. In an ongoing Eurocentric system of knowledge production, practices and societal dynamics happening in non-Western places need to be acknowledged as valid, in order to criticize and expand established theories or create new ones.

### **9.2.3 The incompatibility thesis in light of lived religion: Pluralizing hegemonic interpretations and arranging a subjectivity intelligible for the self**

My analysis has shown how individuals have adopted and shaped discourses, how they understand religion, and how they form, use, and live religion differently. At the macro-level, the analysis examined the question of how actors construct an (in-)compatibility of Islam with same-sex desire and sexuality, and on what concepts and different Islamic discourses they base their constructions. This approach shows that religion is a vibrant field of debate in which plural, partially politically-motivated opinions struggle for authority of definition, because they have different understandings and approaches to exegesis. In this context, the dominant position asserts the incompatibility of Islam and same-sex desire, drawing heavily on religious scripture and especially on the accounts of prophet *Luth* in *al Qur'an*. This perception is so widespread that it is considered common knowledge, requiring minimal textual elaboration. The certainty with which this thesis is held as 'true' reflects an important tendency in today's Indonesia: the standardization of religious beliefs on what Muslims are permitted to do and what defines them. In this version, religion appears as a static, universal, and constant system with fixed properties (e.g., naturalness of the gender binary, heteronormativity) that evaluates modern social transformations, frequently defines them as a threat, and seeks to regulate them in order to protect its definitional dominance. As religion itself is not an active agent, humans advocate for its definitional supremacy, as they seek to protect their understanding of faith, tradition, and their situated interests. This perceived constancy of religious content and evaluation, while providing a sense of stability, it serves to legitimize exclusion and hierarchy, especially in today's differentiated, globalized world. By positing binary gender and heterosexuality as a God-given, natural quality, LGBT+ desire, gender, and identifications appear as unnatural, immoral, and as

acquired post-birth. This framework not only stigmatizes same-sex desire and trans identifications as deviations from God's creation, but also implies that such deviations are reversible and should be changed. As long as people do not submit to this normative framework, collective degradation is justified through the hierarchizing of lives that are worth living and lives that are deviant.

Alternative discourses question and challenge this dominant, 'purified' vision of religion through alternative knowledge production. They argue for compatibility with LGBT+ identities under certain conditions. Here, compatibility hinges on LGBT+ people's willingness to implement core religious values in how they conduct their lives and romantic relationships. This approach is supported by a multitude of actors who unite and establish alliances and networks, transcending religious boundaries and affiliating with liberal, democratic, feminist, and human rights-focused orientations. In this alternative framework, religion appears not as static, but as something rooted in values. It posits a dialectical interdependence between the form and content of religion and the contemporary historical context in which perception, practice, and interpretation are situated. In this way, it recognizes the historical changes of religion as both inevitable and necessary. As long as believers recognize and follow core values in their practice, the character of religion is inclusive. Desire is understood as incidental or even as a God-given part of the self, representing human diversity in which no part of the plurality is inherently superior. Consequently, religion is seen not as the property or home of only specifically situated believers, but through its relationship to people it comes alive and becomes a tool that enables and unites believers across differences.

The micro-level analysis addressed the question of how religious LT+ relate to and negotiate the incompatibility thesis, and what modes of negotiation they create at the intersection of personal faith and desire. This act of conceptual creation is needed for the individual to inhabit, reconcile, or transcend potentially conflicting identifications. The analysis revealed diverse ways in which subjects 'do' religion, or do things with religion. These negotiations demonstrate not only the efficacy of structure, but also agency. The dominant discourse forms the starting point of the negotiations, as it requires commitment to an ascribed subject position via its attributes. In negotiation, an individual uses their personal expertise, their understanding of religion, their worldview, and interpretations from alternate discourses. These result in different *modes* of understanding and signifying the self at the intersection of desire and faith. The negotiations are conducted primarily with the self and in friendly spaces, such as LGBT+ only spaces, and occur less frequently with family members. They never happen within the institutionalized framework of a religious congregation. Negotiations enable the creation of subjectivities intelligible to the self and, thus, the coming in of individuals. Sometimes they even reach befriended LGBT+ people. However, they do not challenge the incompatibility thesis on a broad, societal scale. Addressing this challenge is a focus of LGBT+ NGOs, who do their work in cooperation with plurality-affirming actors, as the macro-level analysis showed.

By combining the theoretical perspectives of lived religion and practiced space, we gain insight into how some actors use standardized religious versions, while others challenge them and carve out spaces for alternative interpretations. These alternative interpretations, as well as discussions held in LGBT+ only or friendly spaces, encourages individuals to understand religion as dynamic rather than as a static truth. It enables them to reflect on internal processes of norm-setting and plurality in interpretations, thus deconstructing the notion of a singular truth. It follows that not Islam itself *is* homophobic, but that the faith can be utilized for homophobic reasoning as well as to counter such reasoning.

Another contribution of my research in this theoretical field is the concept of ‘modes of negotiation’, which systematizes the negotiations of the individual in the context of social and religious stigmatization and ostracism. The concept illuminates the negotiations surrounding the incompatibility thesis, showing how religion is lived from the perspective of those affected by exclusion. This change of perspective not only exposes the constructional character and normativity inherent in external judgements, but more importantly, reveals processes of reconciliation or overcoming from within. The concept is relevant because it not only demonstrates the agency of LT+ people in the field of religion and faith, but also the religiosities of LT+ people themselves. Likewise, the concept points to inner-religious processes of inequality and norm-making that exist at historical and structural levels, and illustrates how these dogmas and approaches impact individuals internally. The findings not only support LT+ people’s negotiations at the intersection of faith and desire but also enable religious communities to understand the specific challenges of LGBT+ people in the field of religion. This understanding can facilitate self-reflection within religious communities, prompting an examination of exclusionary structures and, ultimately, fostering inclusion.



## Appendix



## Images



*Image 1: Two photographs from the 'International Consultation on Church and Homophobia', November 2014.*

*This event was hosted by Jakarta Theological Seminar (STT Jakarta). Photographs by author.*



Image 2: Poster advertising a seminar on 'healthy sociability without free sex'. Found at Campus of Gadjah Mada University. Photograph by author.



Image 3: Two photographs from the Syawalan Feasts, August 2014. One maria is getting ready to recite passages of al Qur'an at PLUsh. Photographs by author.





*Educational Syawal Feast at the Pesantren Waria. The ustadz is greeting the audience.*



*Image 4: Three pictures from a flash mob organized at the Tugu Monument on the occasion of the 'International Day Against Homo-, Bi-, Inter and Transphobia' (IDAHOBIT), May 2014. Photographs by author.*



*An LT+ participant during the flash mob.*



*An activist waria during the flash mob.*

## Glossary

abangan	‘nominal’ Muslims, ordinary folk; complement to priyayi and santri
adat	local customary practices, norms, traditions and laws
adik-kakak	literally: Younger sibling – older sibling
Ahmadiyah	Muslim minority in Indonesia, count for Sunni Muslims usually as sect
al Qur’an	Koran, the holy scripture of Islam
al-mukhonnas, al-mukhonnis (pl.)	person with clear sexual characteristics but a opposite gender soul, sexual category in Islam
anak belok/koleb	colloquial term for lesbi/ans. Literal: anak = child, belok = to turn, koleb = belok spelled backwards (lesbi/an vernacular)
aneh	strange
Arus Pelangi	LGBT+ NGO in Jakarta
aurat, menutup aurat	body parts that should be covered when in company of a not muhrim person; literal: ‘closing’ or shielding the aurat (Islam)
Bahasa Indonesia	Indonesian language
bhinneka tunggal ika	Unity in Diversity, the Indonesian state motto
bli	Balinese male form of address, originally meaning older brother
bulé	white foreigner
busana Muslim	Muslim clothing
cantik	beautiful; used for women
cara Java	Javanese way (of relational conduct)
cinta	love
coming in	an inner state not only of self-awareness but also of self-appreciation of same-sex desire or trans identification. Coming in is coined as essential for mental health and in turn highly appreciated for the development and advancement of LGBT+ people in Indonesia (LGBT+ vernacular)
daerah istimewa	special region, administrative term
Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat, DPR	House of Representatives
Dharma Wanita	a states women’s organization gathering the wives of civil servants founded during New Order. Literal: the duty of women

dia	pronoun, third person singular, he or she
dukun	local traditional healer, spiritual expert and guardian
fāhisha	an obscene act of transgression against God from which a Muslim should refrain (Islam)
fatwa, fatawa (pl.)	formalized legal opinion or interpretation on a question of Islamic law by qualified legal scholars, e.g., the MUI
fiqh	Islamic jurisprudence, human understanding and interpretation of Islamic law
Front Pembela Islam, FPI	Islamic Defender Front; radical fundamentalist Islamic group
ganteng	handsome; used for men
Gerwani, Gerakan Wanita Indonesia	Communist women's organization, active during Old Order of Sukarno. Persecuted and annihilated after Suharto overtook power
gotong royong	principle of mutual assistance, for example in the neighborhood
hadith, hadis (pl.)	Hadith (Hadis) collections are narrations and reports of the words, habits and actions of the prophet Mohammad. Hadith are mostly used as a tool for contextualizing al Qur'an in the interest to gain a fuller understanding of al Qur'an and guidelines (especially Islamic Law) for situations and incidents that are not mentioned in al Qur'an. Different schools of Islam use different Hadith Collections (Brown 2009).
Hajj, hajji	the great pilgrimage to Mecca. A hajji is a respected person who has completed the pilgrimage to Mecca. (Islam)
halal	religiously allowed (Islam)
halus	refined, delicate
haram	religiously forbidden (Islam)
hijab	Islamic headscarf
hormat	respect or deference
ibu	mother, woman
Jalan Malioboro	main shopping and tourist street in Yogyakarta
Jemaah Islamiyah, JI	Islamic Congregation; radical terrorist Islamic group
jilbab	Islamic headscarf
jinn	created beings of the Qur'an who have good and evil powers (Islam)

jodoh	(arranged) romantic match, mate
kampung	residential area, neighborhood
Kapan nikah?	When will you get married?
kasar	rude, harsh
kaum ...	a group of people associated/affiliated with ..., folk of ...
keluarga lesbi	lesbi/an family
ketahuan	being caught, becoming discovered
khuntsa	person with ambiguous, intersex or no sexual characteristics, sexual category in Islam
kodrat (perempuan/wanita)	nature or duty (of a woman)
Komnas HAM, Komisi Nasional Hak Asasi Manusia	National Commission on Human Rights
Komnas Perempuan, Komisi Nasional Anti Kekerasan terhadap Perempuan	National Commission on Violence against Women
komunitas adat terpencil	isolated and vulnerable ethnic or cultural community
Kraton	palace of Sultan in Yogyakarta
kurang sopan	impolite
kyai	leader of an Islamic pesantren
label	category to denote a gender position, such as butchi and femme (lesbi/an vernacular)
lahir dan batin	lahir is the outer realm of self and batin, the inner realm of self
LDR	acronym for long-distance relationship
Lebaran	Islamic holiday at the end of Ramadhan
Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Asosiasi Perempuan Indonesia Untuk Keadilan, LBH-APIK	the Indonesian Women's Association for Justice
Lembaga Kajian Islam dan Sosial, LKIS	Institute for Islamic and Social Studies, Yogyakarta
liwat	anal intercourse, commonly translated as sodomy or pederasty (Islam)
madrasah	Islamic day school
Mahabharata	Hindu epic, exists in an Indian and Javanese version. Wayang puppet theater depicts the stories of the Javanese version

mairil	same-sexual acts between men, often between teachers and students, in Islamic educational institutions
Majelis Mujahiddin Indonesia, MMI	Assembly of Islamic Warriors; radical fundamentalist Islamic group
malu	feeling of shame or embarrassment
mas	Javanese male form of address
MBA	being married by accident
mbak	Javanese female form of address for younger women
Muhammadiyah	with about 30 million members one of the two largest Islamic non-governmental mass organizations in Indonesia
muhrim	Islamic concept defining suitable marriage partners and degrees of bodily exposure, see Table 4
MUI, Majelis Ulama Indonesia	Indonesian Ulema Council, top Muslim clerical body advising the government
mukena	female prayer dress (Islam)
nafkah	the husband's obligation to provide to his wife in material terms (Islam)
nafsu	lust, sexual desire, sexual appetite
Nahdlatul Ulama, NU	with about 40 million members one of the two largest Islamic non-governmental mass organizations in Indonesia
nama baik	reputation, literally: good name
ngondek	expressive femininity associated with gay guys, that other in derogatory terms term 'sissy' or 'effeminate'
nrimo, menerima (Jav., Ind.)	to receive or to accept
pacar	girlfriend or boyfriend
Pancasila	State philosophy encompassing five principles
Partai Komunis Indonesia, PKI	Indonesian Communist Party
pasangan	romantic partner
peci	religious headgear for men (Islam)
Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga, PKK	a women's mass organization under coordination of the Ministry of Women's Affairs which conveyed state programs mostly to villages, re-structured as wives' organization during New Order
penyuka sesama jenis	lover of the same sex (lesbi/an vernacular)

pesantren	Islamic boarding school
Pesantren Waria al' Fattah	Islamic educational place for waria with the name al' Fattah in Yogyakarta
pilih, pilihan	to choose, choice
PLU Satu Hati, PLUsh	an LGBT+ NGO in Yogyakarta
preman	gangster
pria	man, male
priawan, transpria	trans male, female-to-male transgender
priyayi	Javanese aristocratic, court-based elite of pre-colonial kingdoms and later administrative civil servants during colonialism; complement to abangan
Program Keluarga Berencana Indonesia, PKBI	state driven family planning program
puasa	Fasting (Islam)
Qasidah group	a group of people performing Islamic music or Islamic poetry accompanied by singing and percussion
Ramadhan	month of fasting for Muslims, one of the five pillars of Islam
Reformasi	political period of democratization from 1998 onwards
rukun	social harmony, ethical sociability
rumah kost	a house, where you can rent short to long-term and often furnished rooms
sabar	patience
sah	legal, valid
santri	student of Islamic boarding schools, very common especially in rural Java; complement to abangan
sarung	bigger piece of fabric, worn around the hips
Seks bebas	unregulated, extra-martial sexual relations. Literal: free sex
shari'a	Islamic law, derived from the Qur'an and hadith
sholat	ritual prayer practice in Islam
sholat jumat	Islamic Friday prayer
slametan	life-circle celebrations within Islam Java
Srikandi	warrior princess, figure within the epic Mahabharata
suku terasing	isolated and vulnerable ethnic or cultural community

Sumbadra	sister of Srikandi in the epic Mahabharata, an obedient wife
sunah	optional ritual prayer (Islam)
Syawalan	religious celebration to celebrate the first month syawal after the end of Ramadhan
tafsir	qur'anic interpretation
Taman Pendidikan al Qur'an, TPA	al Qur'an learning center for children
tarawih	voluntary night prayer done after the ritual evening prayer during Ramadhan (Islam)
tasbih	prayer chain (Islam)
tidak tahu diri	not knowing one's self or one's place
umma	the religious community of fellow Muslims
Umroh	the 'little' pilgrimage to Mecca
ustadz	leader of a mosque
wali	male guardian (Islam)
wanita	woman, lady
waria	roughly translated either as male transvestites or male-to-female trans gender
warung	small restaurant or food stall
wayang	puppet theater
wong cilik (Jav.)	ordinary people
zakat fitrah	the Islamic obligation to pay alms during Ramadhan, one of the five pillars of Islam
zina	fornication, adultery (Islam)



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**U**nity in Diversity is Not for Us explores the lived experiences of primarily Muslim lesbians and trans men (LT+) in Indonesia, where Islam is the majority religion. Using an ethnographic approach, the book traces how LT+ individuals understand their identities and negotiate their gender and desire amidst socio-religious rejection. The analysis illustrates the biographical process of coming of age as a lesbian as well as the protagonists' ability to navigate spatial gender norms, leading to fluid gender performances. Through the lens of lived religion, the book shows how LT+ actively negotiate faith at the intersection of non-normative gender and desire. In their personal strategies, drawing on both dominant and alternative religious interpretations, they affirm, negate and reinterpret religious contents, carving out space for their subjectivity. Combining Anthropology of Religion and Queer Studies, this book delves into the complex local interrelations of religion, gender and sexuality on the micro level. Through a macro-level analysis of recent social and political developments, it argues that Indonesia moves slowly from Unity in Diversity to Unity in Morality.