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# The Emergence of Political Homophobia in Indonesia: Masculinity and National Belonging

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**ABSTRACT** *This paper explores an unprecedented series of violent acts against 'gay' Indonesians beginning in September 1999. Indonesia is often characterized as 'tolerant' of homosexuality. This is a false belief, but one containing a grain of truth. To identify this grain of truth I distinguish between 'heterosexism' and 'homophobia,' noting that Indonesia has been marked by a predominance of heterosexism over homophobia. I examine the emergence of a political homophobia directed at public events where gay men stake a claim to Indonesia's troubled civil society. That such violence is seen as the properly masculine response to these events indicates how the nation may be gaining a new masculinist cast. In the new Indonesia, male–male desire can increasingly be construed as a threat to normative masculinity, and thus to the nation itself.*

**KEYWORDS** *Homosexuality, Indonesia, emotion, violence, masculinity*

**O**n November 11, 2000, about 350 *gay* and male-to-female transvestite (*waria, banci, bèncong*) Indonesians gathered in the resort town of Kaliurang in Central Java for an evening of artistic performances and comedy skits.<sup>1</sup> The event, in observance of National Health Day, was sponsored by several health organizations as well as the local France-Indonesia Institute: many heterosexual or *normal* Indonesians also attended. Events like this have been held across Indonesia since the early 1990s, and those present had no reason to suspect this night would be any different.

However, at around 9:30 p.m. about 150 men who later claimed to be members of the *Gerakan Pemuda Ka'bah* (Ka'bah Youth Movement) burst into the Wisma Hastorenggo hall where the celebration was underway.<sup>2</sup> Arriving in a mass of motorcycles and jeeps, many wore the white hats or robes associated with political Islam. Shouting 'God is Great' and 'look at these men done up

like women. Get out, *banci!*<sup>3</sup> they assaulted those present with knives, machetes, and clubs. Sounds of shattering glass filled the air as the attackers smashed windows and destroyed chairs, tables, and equipment. No one was killed but at least twenty-five were injured; witnesses spoke of persons 'bathed in blood' from severe wounds. At least three persons were hospitalized, including the local director of the France-Indonesia Institute, who among other injuries was struck in the head by a sword; another victim suffered injuries near his right eye after being hit with clubs and a chair; yet another was struck over the head with a bottle until the bottle broke.<sup>4</sup> Others were hurt while fleeing; one *gay* man was injured when leaping from a window to escape. The attackers also robbed and verbally abused their victims, vandalizing the vehicles used to transport participants to the site. These male attackers displayed a high state of emotion throughout the incident; one *gay* witness described them as filled with cruel anger (*bengis*), possessed by anger (*kalap*), hot-tempered and wild (*beringas*), and shouting sadistically (*bentakan-bentakan sadis*).<sup>5</sup> Fifty-seven men were arrested following the event but all were soon released without charges being filed.

This incident was foreshadowed by another one year earlier. For two decades in Indonesia a series of groups – ranging from formally structured entities to small clusters of persons in rural areas or even single correspondents – have worked to link together *gay* men and *lesbi* women in a national network.<sup>6</sup> Dédé Oetomo, an anthropologist and linguist based in Surabaya (East Java), has been a major figure in this movement and in the mid-1990s became involved with the Education and Propaganda division of the People's Democratic Party (*Partai Rakyat Demokratik* or PRD), which includes a call for *lesbi* and *gay* rights in its platform. In 1998 Oetomo even stood as a candidate for national parliament under the PRD banner.

Through the efforts of Oetomo and many others, plans were hatched in the early 1990s to hold a meeting that could strengthen the national network. In December 1993, the first National Gay and Lesbian Congress was held without any negative consequences at Kaliurang, the very location where the violence described above would take place seven years later. From this meeting was born the Indonesian *Lesbi and Gay Network* (*Jaringan Lesbi dan Gay Indonesia* or JLG I). The JLG I successfully staged a Second National Congress in Bandung (West Java) in 1995 and a third in Denpasar (Bali) in 1997. Like the first National Congress, these events attracted from fifty to one hundred participants from Java, Bali, and Sulawesi (persons from other islands rarely attended because there was no money for scholarships). At no time did these



Fig. 1. Cartoon from *Gatra* magazine, September 18, 1999, commenting on the Solo incident. Note the angry men in the background, as well as the magazines held by the two men, arms linked in flight, that read 'Raker-nas [RAPat KERja NASional or "national working meeting"] Lesbian & Gay Solo.' One of the shirts reads 'JLGI.'

events draw unfavorable public attention. The 1997 Denpasar Congress, which I attended, was covered extensively by the local newspaper *Nusa* in a five-day series of feature articles (November 24–28, 1997); much of the coverage repeated stereotypes of *gay* men and *lesbi* women as obsessed with sex, but it also included statements by public figures calling for Indonesian society to 'embrace' *lesbi* women and *gay* men.

In the wake of these successes, plans were soon underway for a fourth meeting in 1999 – the first to follow Soeharto's fall.<sup>7</sup> That September, members of twenty-one organizations and groups came from Java and Bali to the city of Solo in Central Java to participate in the meeting, which was to take place at the Dana Hotel on the 9th and 10th, with a press conference to follow. Such a press conference had never taken place before, and represented a substantial move to claim public recognition in a post-Soeharto civil society. By at least September 7, however, several Muslim organizations in Solo had learned of the meeting and, in sharp contrast to the indifference that greeted the previous Congresses, declared that it should not take place. Moreover, this rejection took the form of threatened violence – specifically, to burn down the Dana Hotel and kill anyone found there.<sup>8</sup> The Secretary of the local Indonesian Muslim Cleric's Council, Muhammad Amir, stated that the meeting would be 'very embarrassing [*sangat memalukan*]. As if we are legalizing the practice of such sexual deviations.' Once these threats became known the meeting was canceled, but the Muslim organizations soon learned of a backup plan to hold a press conference at the local PRD office; on September 10, a

group of youths from these organizations surrounded the office and threatened to burn it down. Death threats were made against Oetomo and a mobilization took place across the city based on rumors that the meeting would be moved to an undisclosed location. H. Sadili, member of the governing board for the Solo Muslim Youth Front, said that 'if they become known, they'll definitely become the target of masses running *amok*.'

### **Masculinity and the Nation**

From one perspective, these incidents appear as further cases of the dreary efflorescence of violence following the 1998 fall of Soeharto's 'New Order,' violence whose genealogy stretches back through the New Order (1967–1998) to the colonial state. From another perspective, however, they are bluntly novel: historically, violence against non-normative men in Indonesia has been rare to a degree unimaginable in many Euro-American societies, where assaults on homosexual and transgendered men are familiar elements of the social world.<sup>9</sup> What is in particular need of explanation is the cultural logic that makes this new genre of violence comprehensible to Indonesians (*gay* or not, Muslim or not) so that these two events could have a continuing, generalized impact.

In a recent review of anthropological writing on violence in Southeast Asia, Mary Steedly cautions against either essentializing violence (as an inevitable dimension of human sociality) or culturalizing it (as necessary element of a particular social system). The third alternative Steedly proposes is to 'localize' violence: 'By this I mean exploring the full particularity of its multifarious occasions: how it is produced in certain circumstances; how it is deployed, represented, limited, imagined, ignored, or instigated; how it is identified, disciplined, interrogated, and, of course, punished' (Steedly 1999:445–446). My only quibble with this alternative is that when violence is framed in terms of localization, a presumption that culture is local in the first instance grounds the analysis in the last instance – no matter how emphatically the constitutive role of the state, the legacy of the colonial encounter, or other translocal forces such as 'world religions' enter the interpretive frame. In the cases at hand here, both the 'deviant' masculinities and the cultural logics of the attackers drew their structuring assumptions from national and global discourses. Understanding these incidents can illuminate how the full particularity of violence's occasion can involve an imagined Indonesian community (Anderson 1983), rather than the ethnolocal categories (Javanese, Madurese, Buginese, etc.) that, however historicized and problematized, continue to dominate anthropological investigations of the archipelago (Boellstorff 2002). This article



incorporates an attention to what was unique about these incidents (that they targeted non-normative men), with attention to national topographies of culture, towards the goal of investigating intersections of emotion and violence.<sup>10</sup>

I wish to ask how emotion figures in violence understood as political. In the historical moment that I write emotion and political violence come together most starkly in the figure of the terrorist. The ‘terrorist’ is the limit function of the emotion/violence nexus, and the terrorist’s terror is by definition political, else the person is solely a mass murderer. Against claims that emotion is a precultural, even acultural psychological response function, it is clear that the terror produced by political violence is a cultural phenomenon. This means its form is always historically and geographically specific. *Political homophobia* is the name I give to an emergent cultural logic linking emotion, sexuality, and political violence. It brings together the direct object of non-normative Indonesian men with the indirect object of contemporary Indonesian public culture, making enraged violence against *gay* men intelligible and socially efficacious.

Through highlighting the role of national belonging in this violence, I suggest that norms for Indonesian national identity may be gaining a new masculinist cast. I also hope to foreclose reductive explanations in terms of Islam. While at present Islam may represent a necessary condition for these new forms of violence, it cannot explain their relationship to masculinity, emotion, and the public sphere. In reconfiguring official Islam’s heterosexist rejection of male homosexuality and transgenderism into political homophobia, the perpetrators of this violence are not just expressing religious belief but reacting to a feelings of *malu*, a complex term that can be provisionally rendered as ‘shame.’ While informed by Islamic sexual norms, the context and timing of the Kaliurang and Solo incidents reveals a new problematic evoking these feelings. This is the sense that the potential for the nation to be represented by non-normative men challenges a nationalized masculinity, enabling what has long been understood to be a normative male response to *malu* – namely, the masculine and often collective enraged violence known in Indonesian as *amok*. By definition, *amok* is always a public act. The attackers in Kaliurang and Solo, who claimed to represent a post-Soeharto vision of the national, may have sought to shore up a perceived shameful threat to the nation through public violence directed at the events themselves. That it is these events which are considered shameful, and that violence is seen as their proper counter, indicates that these attackers’ vision of the nation is normatively male. Emotion here can be used to divine politics.<sup>11</sup>

Political homophobia highlights how postcolonial heterosexuality is shaped by the state, but in ways specific to particular colonial legacies and national visions, and which therefore vary over time as well as space. A substantial literature now documents the massive effort undertaken by the Indonesian state to inculcate gendered ideologies of the ideal citizen, a national masculinity and femininity. Against the wide range of kinship forms found throughout the archipelago, the family principle (*azas kekeluargaan*), with its associated ideologies of 'State Momism' (Suryakusuma 1996) and 'State Fatherism,' sets forth narrow visions of masculinity and femininity as the foundations of society.<sup>12</sup> Implicit is the heterosexist ideology linking these ideally gendered men and women into the citizen-family. As we see in nationalist literature going back to the 1920s, the idea of becoming a modern Indonesian is often framed in terms of a shift from arranged to 'chosen' marriage (Alisjahbana 1966; Siegel 1997; Rodgers 1995). While there are still arranged marriages, and many that fall between arrangement and choice, the ideal of chosen marriage now dominates images of the proper Indonesian citizen. I have noted elsewhere (Boellstorff 2004a) that when marriage is arranged sexual orientation is secondary, but that when marriages are based on love and choice, sexuality becomes a new kind of problem. In contemporary Indonesia choice, to be national, must be heterosexual choice, and while both man and woman choose, the dominant ideology is that men pursue while the 'choice' of the woman is secondarily that of refusal.<sup>13</sup> It is through heterosexuality that gendered self and nation articulate. In the new Indonesia, men who publicly appear to make improper choices threaten this gendered and sexualized logic of national belonging.

I come to the topic of political homophobia from a larger project in which I explore how Indonesians occupying *gay* and *lesbi* subject-positions are shaped by national discourse (Boellstorff 2003, 2005). It bears noting that so-called 'traditional' homosexual or transgender roles, primarily limited to ritual and performance contexts, can still be found in many parts of Indonesia. *Gay* Indonesians occasionally draw upon these 'traditional' sexualities to claim legitimacy (they are almost exclusively for men). In reality, however, few *gay* Indonesians identify with or even know of these 'traditions': they see themselves as (to employ the Indonesian term), *modern*, part of a national community. These Indonesians are found across the archipelago, even in rural areas, and are more likely to be lower-class than members of the jet-setting elite that stands so frequently as trope of the 'Third World' homosexual. It is in this sense, as persons whose sexualities are irreducible to locality or tradition, that *gay* Indonesians could be seen as a major, if unintended, success story of

Soeharto's New Order – truly national subjectivities. *Gay* Indonesians are not marginal to the body politic, but a kind of distillation of national discourse. This is not an Indonesian version of 'Queer Nation;' the impact of state ideology on *gay* Indonesians is not primarily at the level of politicization. Few *gay* Indonesians are involved in the kinds of political work exemplified by the failed Solo national meeting. For a dominant ideology to impact subjectivities, it is not necessary for that ideology to be loved or even clearly understood, as we see in Euro-American homosexualities, so shaped by sexological legacies of which many lesbian and gay Euro-Americans are unaware.

### **Homophobia and Heterosexism**

Like much of Southeast Asia, Indonesia is often characterized as tolerant of homosexuality, bisexuality, and transgenderism. Like most myths this is a false belief that contains a grain of truth, and to identify this grain of truth I develop a distinction between 'homophobia' and 'heterosexism.' Most behavioral sciences use 'homophobia' as if it transparently reflects a set of real-world conditions. Psychological correlational studies employ measurements like the 'Lesbian Internalized Homophobia Scale' that assume, for instance, that a lack of desire to affiliate with other lesbians and gay men, or a pleasure at being perceived by others as heterosexual, are a priori indicators of 'internalized homophobia' (Szymanski *et al.* 2001:34; see also Floyd 2000; Wright *et al.* 1999). In fact, the concept originated in the early 1970s. As Daniel Wickberg notes in his cultural history of the term, 'unpacking the idea of homophobia reveals liberal norms and assumptions about personhood and social order rather than just liberal attitudes toward homosexuality itself' (2000:43). Homophobia links Western conceptions of shamed self and threatened society: later I discuss how *malu* and *amok* are linked in a similar fashion.

The distinction between homophobia and heterosexism can provide a powerful conceptual rubric to address questions of violence – particularly if we employ the binarism not as a gloss on precultural reality but as embodying assumptions about politics and the self. If homophobia employs a Freudian problematic to locate antipathy in the individuated psyche, heterosexism employs a Gramscian problematic to locate antipathy in hegemony. Heterosexism refers to the belief that heterosexuality is the only natural or moral sexuality. It does not imply the gut level response that homophobia does; for instance, a bureaucratic structure may be heterosexist but it cannot be homophobic. It operates at the level of generalized belief and social sanction, rather than on an emotive plane. In the Euro-American context, this gives heterosexism



a cultural currency that homophobia lacks. While few Euro-Americans would admit to being homophobic, many – for instance, much of the Religious Right in the United States – would openly affirm they are heterosexist, often through terms like pro-family. Homophobia and heterosexism form a binarism, building on distinctions between emotion/thought, personal/public, and ideational/material. While the binarism does not isomorphically diagnose a real-world division between two forms of oppression, it proves heuristically productive for understanding the imbrication of violence and emotion.

In many cases homophobia and heterosexism feed off each other; heterosexism creates a climate where fear and hatred of non-normative sexualities and genders can take root, and homophobia creates a climate where heterosexuality is assumed to be superior. However, this is not necessarily the case in all times and places. De-linking homophobia and heterosexism gives us new perspectives on sexual inequality, not only in Indonesia but in other parts of Southeast Asia where there is a need for ‘a more refined model of cultural antipathy’ towards homosexuality (Jackson 1999:229). It is possible to have homophobia with little or no heterosexism – cases (like some Latin American contexts) where many forms of sexuality are recognized as natural, yet emotional violence against homosexual persons exists – and heterosexism with little or no homophobia, where heterosexuality is presumed superior to other sexualities, yet this does not lead to violence against homosexual persons.

This latter state of affairs has predominated in Indonesia until recently: heterosexism over homophobia. Since violence against *gay* men qua *gay* men is almost unknown in Indonesia, and since in addition the Indonesian Civil Code (based on the Dutch Civil Code, which is in turn based on the Napoleonic Code) has little to say about homosexuality and transgenderism<sup>14</sup> (and to my knowledge there have never been arrests for homosexuality in post-colonial Indonesia), Euro-American visitors often misrecognize a ‘tolerant’ culture. This is because for Euro-Americans the constant threat of violence is the disciplinary pedagogy marginalizing non-normative sexualities and genders. (If in my home country of the United States I imagine walking down the street holding the hand of my male partner, what I fear is not that others will think me immoral, nor that they will enact laws against me, but that they will physically assault me.) In the absence of homophobia, heterosexism is assumed to be absent as well. However, despite the fact that there is little homophobia in contemporary Indonesia, heterosexism is pervasive. The expectation that everyone will marry heterosexually is voiced in many belief systems across the archipelago, but gains added contemporary force from

the state's portraying it as essential for becoming a modern citizen. The 'tolerance' of homosexuality exists only because Indonesians keep these practices secret and do not publicly proclaim homosexual identities.

### **Homophobia as Thuggery?**

The potential sea-change in Indonesia is the masculinist drawing of a connection between homophobia and heterosexism, such that the former can stand as a condition of possibility for the latter – in a context where heterosexism has historically held a dominant cultural position without homophobia's aid. By exploring how changing masculine representations of the nation shape this shift from everyday heterosexism to political homophobia, I hope to avoid reducing political homophobia to either thuggery or Islam. While we yet have no concrete data it is plausible that the attackers involved in the Kaliurang and Solo incidents were paid, as have been many of those involved in political violence in Indonesia since 1998. That persons were paid, however, does not mean that emotions were not involved (it appears that many men involved in the rape of ethnic Chinese women in Jakarta in 1998 were paid; yet their erections were no less real). I am particularly keen to avoid treating Islam as source of political homophobia. The pivotal question of this article is not whether or not official Islam disapproves of homosexuality (as a heterosexist cosmology, it obviously does), but how and why Islamic (male) youth groups have, at a certain point in time and within the nation-state of Indonesia, transformed this heterosexism into homophobia. The homophobic reaction of these Islamic youth groups appears not as a specifically religious response (those attacked were not in mosques or demanding religious recognition) but as a reaction to feelings of *malu* associated with representations of the nation.

It is true that in the Kaliurang and Solo incidents the perpetrators represented themselves as belonging to fundamentalist Muslim groups, and that Central Java is a hotbed of these groups. These groups have also attacked other social groups or places they associate with immorality, such as brothels and discos.<sup>15</sup> On one level, then, political homophobia is linked to a wider cultural dynamic where Islam represents an avenue for political struggle that includes conceptions of an Islamic polity (Hefner 2000). However, while to date Islam may be a necessary condition for political homophobia, it is not a sufficient condition and these incidents cannot be 'read off' political Islam. Such an analysis could not explain why antipathy towards *gay* men should be expressed in an emotional and violent manner, rather than, say, the passing of an Islamic legal judgment (*fatwa*) or some form of non-violent social sanction. This linkage

of Islam with violence is both an Orientalist stereotype (Lawrence 1998:4) and a self-Orientalizing stereotype taken up by some 'fundamentalist' Islamic groups: Muslim intellectuals in Indonesia have cautioned against taking this representation at face value (Wahid 1999). There are a wide range of Muslim groups and belief systems in contemporary Indonesia, many of which tolerate sexual and gender minorities. Crucially, most *gay* Indonesians are themselves Muslim, and we lose sight of the rich cultural contexts in which they reconcile sexuality and faith if we treat Islam as direct source of political homophobia rather than a contributing (but not determining) factor. Indeed, it is unclear to what degree Islam is a confounding variable, since it is also the normative, majority religion (approximately ninety percent of Indonesians follow the Islamic faith; Indonesia is thus home to more Muslims than any other nation). In contexts where other religions dominate, it is typically the fundamentalist variants of that religion (Hinduism in India, Christianity in the United States) that have the cultural capital to employ violence, and in these cases it is also linked to masculinity (Hansen 1996).

### Engendering Violence

In the rich body of anthropological work on emotion in Southeast Asia, a central conceptual category has been the Malay/Indonesian term *malu* (and its analogues; e.g. Javanese *isin*, Balinese *lek*, Bugis *siri*, Tagalog *hiya*). *Malu* typically appears in dictionaries translated as 'shame' or 'embarrassment,' but the anthropological literature is unanimous in concluding this fails to represent the complexity of *malu* and its centrality to Southeast Asian conceptions of sociality. Long before Clifford Geertz construed Balinese polities as 'theatre states' (Geertz 1980), he inaugurated the dramaturgical metaphor in an analysis of *lek* (the Balinese near-equivalent to *malu*). Phrasing *lek* as 'stage fright,' Geertz concluded that:

What is feared – mildly in most cases, intensely in a few – is that the public performance that is etiquette will be botched, that the social distance etiquette maintains will consequently collapse, and that the personality of the individual will break through to dissolve his standardized public identity (Geertz 1973:402).

It was from precisely this passage that Ward Keeler launched his critique of Geertz, based on his own study of *isin* (the Javanese near-equivalent to *malu*). For Keeler, the weakness of Geertz's metaphor was that it 'implies a distance between actor and role, and so between self and social persona, which is misleading' (Keeler 1983:161). In a manner foreshadowing Butler's performa-

tive theory of the constitution of the Euro-American gendered subject (Butler 1990), Keeler argued, in effect, that the actor comes into being as a social persona only when on stage. He concluded that *isin* is neither shame nor stage fright, but *an awareness of vulnerability in interaction* (p. 158). In my reading of the literature, and based upon my own ethnographic work, Keeler's analysis of Javanese *isin* is valid not only for Balinese *lek* but Indonesian *malu* and its other analogues. Indeed, there is general agreement that *malu* is nothing less than a key site at which Southeast Asians become social persons. In their review of the literature on *malu*, Collins and Behar conclude that it is 'a highly productive concept that has effects in a wide array of personal and social realms,' including the political domain (Collins & Behar 2000:35). They also emphasize the linkages between *malu* and sexuality:

As with the English concept of shame, *malu* is closely associated with sexuality. The Indonesian word for genitals (*kemaluan*) echoes the English expression 'private parts.' Furthermore, sexually provocative behavior by self or others should elicit *malu*... Gender-inappropriate behavior causes both men and women to feel *malu*. A boy would feel *malu* if he behaved like a girl, for example by displaying tears in public (p. 42).

But while sexuality can elicit *malu* in both men and women, 'the most obvious gender difference in the construct of *malu* is in the appropriate response to being made *malu*. While women made *malu* are expected to become withdrawn or avoidant, crying out of the sight of others, men are expected to react aggressively' (p. 48). In the cases of political homophobia at issue here, we find not only a masculinist expression of *malu*, but a masculinist and politicized trigger of *malu*. While rarely openly discussed, many Indonesian men have had experiences of being seduced by other men – at religious boarding schools (*pesantren*), at a friend's home, in a park, or elsewhere. While men who think of themselves as *normal* rarely discuss such incidents, *gay* men have described them to me during fieldwork, as illustrated by the excerpt below, from an informant recalling events near Kediri in East Java:

Shall I tell the story? I used to live in the *pesantren*, from the last year of junior high school through until the end of high school. About four years... it was at that time that I started to understand same-sex relations [*awali mengerti hubungan sejenis*] because I was seduced by my Koranic recitation teacher ... I was 18 or 19 years old at the time and he was 25 years old. The first time we were together I didn't have any emotions [*belum rasa*]... When we were sleeping together he liked to hold me and he'd ejaculate... at the beginning I felt very uncomfortable [*rishi*]. I didn't like

feeling the sperm in his sarung ... but he started asking me to hold his penis ... eventually I started to like it... He had his own room, so we could do it easily. He was always very helpful to me in my studies; perhaps at the beginning he was only sympathetic [*simpatik*] and eventually there arose desire [*timbul suka-suka*].

Here, my informant uses a language of emotion to describe a landscape of desire in which a *normal* man desires another man sexually. At the point when these sexual relations occurred, my informant did not yet think of himself as *gay*; it was one *normal* man seducing another. What is typical here is that the emotional response is of discomfort, not rage; when *gay* men talk about *normal* men who spurn their advances the reaction is described as one of refusal not violence. It appears that what is interpreted as 'sexually provocative' or 'gender-inappropriate' male behavior leads to violence when it involves staking a claim to civil society.

That the sense of malu is masculinized can be seen not only in that the perpetrators were male, but that the response took the form of violent group attacks – of amok. This cultural logic that links malu to amok is of particular interest because if malu is a site of subject-formation, amok is typically understood to be its opposite: a gut reaction where the masculine self disappears into raw action (and often, into a crowd). The contrast is not interior versus exterior, since malu involves the public self, and amok is an intentional state, not just mindless physical action (it has been evoked, for instance, by resistance to colonialism). The distinction pivots not on interior versus exterior but self versus society. Amok is a gendered response to malu; it counters a sense of vulnerability in interaction with a sense of *invulnerability in action*. The question is: why, at this point in time, would acts by *gay* men to access civil society be perceived as initiating a chain of emotions beginning in malu and ending in amok? In these cases, the entry of male homosexuality into public discourse is framed as motivating a gut-level reaction of malu, as if one's own (male) social self is threatened. I am interested in this dynamic, in how political homophobia bridges malu and amok when a particular kind of nationalized masculinity is at stake. This may be because the nation is perceived to be in immanent danger of being represented by non-normative men.

### **Emotion and Masculine Sexuality**

While there is a male-specific typical reaction to malu, and while gender-inappropriate behavior can elicit malu, the range of acceptable masculinities has been quite wide in many Indonesian contexts. For instance, in Java, where the Kaliurang and Solo incidents occurred, 'Pure' Javanese tradition does not



condemn homosexuality and regards a very wide range of behavior, from he-man to rather (in [Euro-American] terms) “effeminate,” as properly masculine’ (Peacock 1968:204). This has even included the political realm: the most notable recent example of this was the 1995 incident when Joop Ave, then Minister for Tourism, Post, and Communication under Soeharto, fled New Zealand after being accused of accosting a male staff member of the Carlton Hotel in Auckland. Despite widespread rumors that Ave was *gay*, he not only kept his post, but the mass media dismissed the ‘homo rumors’ even while openly pondering why Ave had never married.<sup>16</sup> This was not simply due to journalistic fear of state reprisal; it reflected a general belief that so long as Ave did not publicly proclaim *gay* status, his possible sexual activities with men, while perhaps leading to gossip, did not threaten his public position.

Until recently the fact that men engage in public male–male sexuality (e.g., at a park, disco, or performance event) has not resulted in *malu*. For Indonesian men male–male sexuality has either been ignored, used contrastively to underscore one’s own social propriety, been greeted with curiosity and even titillation, or been casually looked down upon. But it has not led to a personal feeling of *malu* that could justify violence. Historically, successful Indonesian masculinity has not hinged on a sole sexual attraction to women, so long as one eventually marries. Prior to marriage, same-sex encounters remain common (but almost never publicly acknowledged) in a wide range of contexts, from religious boarding schools to markets and shopping malls. Often these activities are construed not as ‘sex’ but playing around (*main-main*), particularly if anal penetration does not take place. After marrying it is by no means unknown for men to continue to engage in homosex (or discover it for the first time); a lack of cultural salience for homosexuality and gender segregation make it possible to hide such activities.

In this context where it is assumed all men will marry women, but also that they may have sex with other men and/or with *warias*, violence is almost never linked to homosexual erotics. *Warias*, while hardly celebrated, are an accepted part of the contemporary Indonesian social mosaic and can be found in a wide range of contexts, from salons to music videos (see Boellstorff 2004b). Acts of violence against *gay* men have been rare. When, for instance, an Indonesian man encounters another man expressing sexual interest in him – even in public – the man will typically either politely refuse or agree to the sexual encounter and keep quiet about it afterwards.

I recall another incident from the Kediri region; I was in the company of a group of *gay* men from the area and two *gay* men from Surabaya. We were

spending the evening in a part of the town plaza (*alun-alun*) where *gay* men meet for conversation and to find sexual partners. As often happens in such a place, other Indonesians could be found nearby – *normal* couples with children in strollers, groups of older men and women running late-night errands. Closest to us, however, were a group of young men sitting on a low wall under a tree. As we walked by, Amir – one of the *gay* men from Surabaya – struck up a conversation. The men were aged from 16 to 21 and had come to this part of the town square without realizing its significance. When they asked what we were doing in town, Amir explained that we had attended a meeting of the local *gay* group. In response to their blank stares, Amir calmly clarified what *gay* meant – and that he was *gay* himself and liked to have sex with men. The youths giggled but did not take offence; indeed, they remained all evening. One of them eventually pulled Amir aside to say that he was interested in having sex with men but did not want his friends to know about it. This story is not atypical: across Indonesia, street youths are a common feature of the public areas used by *gay* men, yet these youths typically do not accost them; they leave them alone, asking for cigarettes or pocket money at most, often having sexual relations with (or even becoming long-term partners of) *gay* men.

The pattern seems similar across the archipelago and across religious or local difference. On another occasion I was out on Saturday night with three *gay* men in the city of Singaraja in north Bali. We made our way to the park where *gay* men and *warias* often spend their evenings. I rode on the back of a motorcycle driven by one of the *gay* men; another motorcycle carried Made and Danny, two Balinese *gay* men very much in love. It was late but the park was still busy, with a mix of *gay* men, *warias*, and *normal* men, many sitting along the benches of a bus stop. I sat down on one bench with several *warias* and three *normal* men; at another bench two meters to my right, under a street-light, Made sat with his Danny in his lap, their caresses visible to all who drove or walked by.

After a few moments one of the *normal* men, with long hair and a stocky, athletic body, sat down beside me and introduced himself as Gus. A few pleasantries passed our lips; then, silence. After a few moments Gus gestured towards a *waria* standing nearby and said ‘that one is pretty, like a normal woman’ [*perempuan biasa*]. I asked ‘do you like to have sex with *warias*?’ Gus replied ‘Yeah, sure, it’s *normal*, because there is passion [*gairah*].’ Then I pointed to Made, who was embracing Danny at the other bench, and asked ‘would you like a man like that, who isn’t made up?’ Gus shrugged and said ‘No, no thank you! I couldn’t do that, because there is no passion to have sex with

someone like that.' Gus' reaction, like that of the youth in Kediri, was not homophobic. His desire for warias was not paired with an emotional repugnance towards *gay* men; he was not offended by Made and Danny, and did not find my question insulting. Examples like these are infinitely more representative of contemporary Indonesian society than the Kaliurang incident: for an Indonesian man to attack another man because that other man expresses sexual interest in him, or because effeminate men appear in public, has been rare indeed.

The emergence of political homophobia indicates how the public presentation of male homosexuality and transgenderism can now occasion malu even if one does not participate oneself, because in the post-Soeharto era, masculinity is nationalized in a new way. With the nation under perceived threats of disintegration, attempts by non-normative men to access civil society can appear to threaten the nation itself. While both *gay* homosexuality and waria transvestitism figure in this calculus, recall that waria are a publicly recognized social category. As Peter Jackson notes in the case of Thailand, under such a discursive regime male homosexuality can represent more of a danger than transgenderism, since it is more difficult to fit within a heterosexist logic where those who desire men must be effeminate (1999:238). Male homosexuality is also more threatening than transvestitism due to the widespread Southeast Asian assumption that inner states should match exterior bodily presentations (Errington 1989:76). Warias, who identify themselves as men with women's souls, properly display this inner mismatch in their cross-dressing. In contrast, *gay* men have a different kind of desire than normative men (they 'desire the same'), but this inner deviation is not exteriorized; some are effeminate, but most are indistinguishable from *normal* men. The cultural expectation that exterior presentation should match inner state or belief has been politicized before; during the Soeharto years one of the most successful ways to create fear of a by-then nonexistent communist movement was to describe it as an 'organization without shape' [*organisasi tanpa bentuk*]; that is, a collectivity whose exterior did not match its interior, just as it was supposed that individual communists were failing to exteriorize their political beliefs. With their difficult-to-read desires, *gay* men can be interpreted as a kind of masculinity *tanpa bentuk* – not when they make sexual propositions to other men in private, but when they appear to stake a public claim to civil society; that is, when they appear political. It may be for this reason that *gay* men have been the primary target of political homophobia, while warias and *lesbi* women have been attacked to date only by virtue of their association with *gay* men.

### **Conclusion: The Emergence of Political Homophobia**

It is in the Indonesian context, where heterosexism has predominated over homophobia, that the recent attacks gain such significance. For the Muslim youths involved in these attacks, the public presence of non-normative genders and sexualities became interpreted in phobic terms, as a psychic threat to proper masculinity. This made violence not only thinkable but sensible as an emotional 'gut reaction' to what was now interpreted as an assault on the nation's manhood. We see a shift from an intellectual assumption, rarely voiced because taken for granted, that all Indonesians should marry heterosexually, to an emotional assumption, carried out with knives and clubs, that non-normative men threaten the nation's future. I term this a shift from everyday heterosexism to political homophobia, and the character of this emotional rage shows us that the nation envisioned by these attackers is normatively male. While all homophobia has political effects, the notion of 'political homophobia' is useful for highlighting violence deployed as a means of controlling who can make claims to belonging. The violence of the Kaliurang and Solo incidents was directed at demands for inclusion in a new public sphere and not at the mundane romances and seductions of everyday life.<sup>17</sup>

Alarmism is not the goal of this analysis, and I do not mean to suggest that political homophobia will become an everyday occurrence in Indonesia. There has been an increasing presence of *gay* men in Indonesian public culture, as illustrated by the 2004 hit movie *Arisan!*, which included a subplot concerning a *gay* man and featured two scenes of *gay* men kissing each other. However, the linkage between emotion and violence that these events have set in motion does not hinge on repetition. A single incident can have sustained emotional consequences for its intended indirect object; we see this in the World Trade Center attacks and the 1992 destruction of the Babri Mosque in India. Indeed, the Kaliurang and Solo incidents continue to affect *gay* Indonesians. We see this most clearly in Yogyakarta (near Kaliurang), an important center of *gay* community and publishing since the early 1980s; following the Kaliurang incident, *gay* organizations in that city ceased meeting and *gay* publications ceased production, beginning again only around mid-2003. A book launch held by Dédé Oetomo at a Muslim university in Yogyakarta in early November 2001 for a volume of his writings on homosexuality and Indonesian society took place without incident, but a second event to be held at a local bookstore was interrupted by the police, who prevented the event from taking place on the pretext that it would disturb public security.<sup>18</sup> More broadly, intermittent attacks on *warias* and *gay* men, including assaults on *gay* men in public



places and incidents where waria are assaulted and their hair forcibly cut, have occurred in several parts of Indonesia, including Aceh, Bali and Java.<sup>19</sup> In 2004 a group of Muslim-identified youth arrived at the end of an event held near the city of Solo by the racy tabloid *X-Pos* to thank their *gay* readers; upon arriving they burned all the copies of the tabloid they could find, as the *gay* men present hid in their hotel rooms or fled the scene. Thus, while on the whole, there is little evidence that everyday homophobia is in on the rise, it remains an open question as to whether or not the increasing visibility of *gay* men will co-occur with greater violence (Oetomo 2001).

Perhaps the most urgent question is how political homophobia will shape struggles over Indonesia's emerging post-Soeharto civil society. Historically *gay* men and warias have appeared only rarely in the political sphere either as topic of discussion or trope. When the latter has occurred, it has usually been to speak metaphorically of persons who change their opinions (like warias change their gender presentation). For instance, in a 1999 volume of essays concerned with demonstrating that Islam is incompatible with political violence (*kekerasan politik*), Abdurrahman Wahid – noted Muslim intellectual and recently President of Indonesia – spoke metaphorically of intellectuals changing their opinions as changing their sex, jokingly admonishing them not to become warias (Wahid 1999:182).

Compare this with the situation two years later, when the populist and often anti-American newspaper *Rakyat Merdeka* (published from Jakarta) ran a front-page headline concerning U.S.-led attacks on the Taliban with the title *Amerika Béncong!*<sup>20</sup> (*Béncong* is a variant of *banci* (waria).) The headline was accompanied by a photograph of President George W. Bush doctored to include lipstick, earrings, and a leather jacket (Fig. 2). Here non-normative men stand not for shifting intellectual views but a compromised nation. The article claimed that the United States was a *béncong* because rather than challenging Osama bin Laden to a one-on-one duel, Bush had the audacity (*berani*) to invite its allies to attack Afghanistan *en masse* in search for him. In other words, the United States had no malu, no sense of vulnerability in interaction, and thus felt a rage – a sense of invulnerability in action – that compelled it to enroll others to join in amok violence. The United States is presented as operating under a nationalized intersection of manhood and emotion. It is the dynamic of the Kaliurang and Solo incidents, displaced into the figure of the non-normative male. Under a cultural logic of political homophobia, Bush-in-drag – representing a nation's failed masculinity – appears both violent and a proper target for violence.

My hypothesis is that political homophobia may make this image intelligible





Fig. 2. From 'Rakyat Merdeka' newspaper, Oct. 7, 2001 issue. George W. Bush as emotional transvestite.

to the Indonesian public regardless of religion. In place of national masculinity as benevolent and paternal (however violent in actual practice), we find it embattled, in danger of losing its very manhood. It is thus called upon to deflect this shame in a properly masculine manner, by violently striking down any representation of itself by homosexual, effeminate, or transvestite men. As Indonesia struggles through a period of tense uncertainty, anthropological attention to the public face of emotion and the heterosexual gendering of national belonging can contribute to a better understanding of how violence is not the 'primordialist' suspension of culture, but the working out of cultural logics of inequality and exclusion to their horrific but comprehensible conclusion.

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## Notes

1. Of these terms, *banci* is the best known, but is somewhat derogatory; I use the preferred term *waria* (an amalgam of *wanita* ('woman') and *pria* ('man')). I italicize the term *gay* throughout to distinguish it from the English term 'gay,' to which *gay* is related but distinct. For consistency I italicize *lesbi* as well. Data on the Kaliurang incident is compiled from *PlanetOut.com*, 11/13/00 and 11/14/00, *Detik.com* 11/13/00, *Kompas* 11/12/00 and 11/14/00, *GAYa Nusantara* #77, Oetomo 2001, and direct testimony from witnesses.
2. According to witnesses, some of the motorcycles driven by the attackers also had stickers from the Muslim United Development Party or the Anti-Vice Movement (*Gerakan Anti Maksiat* or GAM) (*Detik.com*, November 14, 2000). The *Ka'bah* is the holy shrine at the center of the Great Mosque of Mecca.
3. The statement was allegedly in Javanese (*lanang kok dandan wedok, banci metu*; in Indonesian this would be *laki-laki kok dandan perempuan, banci keluar*) (*Detik.com*, November 14, 2000).
4. *Detik.com*, November 13, 2000.
5. *GAYa Nusantara*, 77:16–17, 23.
6. While *lesbi* women groups and correspondents participate in this network, it is dominated by *gay* men.
7. Because of difficulties with attendance, this Congress was renamed a National Working Meeting (*Rapat Kerja Nasional*, shortened to *Rakernas*), and scheduled for September 10–11 so as to coincide with *September Ceria* ('Joyous September') a large *gay* event held annually near the city of Solo (Central Java).
8. Two leaders of the groups, Hasan Mulachela and Boyamin, stated that 'as citizens of Solo we cannot accept these practices à la Sodom and Gomorrah to take place in Solo. If the Lesbian and Gay National Meeting takes place in Solo that would publicize those practices' (*Kompas*, September 11, 1999). Mulachela also threatened to bring out 'thousands of the Islamic community' to force the Congress to be cancelled (*Bernas*, September 11, 1999; Mulachela is also a member of the Pembaruan DPRD party fraction).
9. Many *gay* (also *lesbi* and *waria*) Indonesians who know of these two incidents see them as watershed moments when, for the first time, non-normative masculinity became the target of publicly articulated hatred and physical assault.
10. In a 1994 review article, Carol Nagengast noted that '[u]ntil relatively recently, few anthropologists examined violence and conflict between groups and the state and among groups within states' (Nagengast 1994:110). Nagengast identified anthropology's focus on ostensibly self-contained communities at the expense of the nation as one reason for this lack of attention to violence outside domains of custom and tradition (112; see also Riches 1986). Also in 1994, John Pemberton presented anthropology with the image of Javanese peasants shoving each other aside over pieces of a cooked chicken in a *rebutan* or 'struggle' (Pemberton 1994: 18, 213). By counterpoising this vignette to Geertz's use of the tranquil *selamatan* feast as master metaphor for Javanese culture (Geertz 1960), Pemberton indexed the growing number of ethnographically-informed studies of violence in Indonesian societies (e.g., George 1996; Robinson 1995; Siegel 1998; Tsing 1993). More recently, scholars of Indonesia have responded to new and resurgent forms of violence following Soeharto's fall (e.g., Anderson 2001; Barker 1998; Rafael 1999;

- Stasch 2001; Wessel & Wimhöfer 2001). Some of this scholarship provides insights on everyday violence, including domestic violence and its linkages to state violence (Berman 2000; Butt 2001; Idrus 2001). The primary emphasis, however, has been on 'political violence.'
11. I am grateful to Joshua Barker for this turn of phrase, which originates in his insightful commentary on an earlier version of this paper, given at the 2001 meetings of the American Anthropological Association.
  12. See, inter alia, Aripurnami 1996; Blackwood 1995; Brenner 1998, 1999; Hatley 1997; Robinson 1989; Sen 1998; Tiwon 1996.
  13. It is therefore not surprising that *tomboi* call themselves *hunter* in some regions of Indonesia, particularly south Sulawesi. They use this term because they 'hunt' feminine women as potential partners; they consider the act of initiating contact masculine.
  14. Ann Stoler notes her own 'long-term and failed efforts' to find any significant discussion of homosexuality in the colonial Dutch East Indies (Stoler 1995:129).
  15. See Oetomo 2001; 'In Indonesia, Once Tolerant Islam Grows Rigid,' *New York Times*, December 29, 2001.
  16. See, for instance, the coverage of the incident in *Forum Keadilan* No. 3 (Year IV), May 25, 1995, pp. 12–20. Since most gay men marry women, Ave's bachelor status at 51 years of age was noteworthy.
  17. This new political homophobia in Indonesia is thus quite different from (though not entirely unrelated to) the arrest and conviction in Malaysia of Anwar Ibrahim, former Deputy Prime Minister, on charges of sodomy and corruption.
  18. Dédé Oetomo, personal communication.
  19. For an example, see *Serambi Indonesia*, June 29, 1999. My thanks to Dédé Oetomo and Edward Aspinall for respectively bringing the Bali and Aceh incidents to my attention.
  20. I thank Karl Heider for bringing this article to my attention.

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