



Thomas Stodulka, Birgitt Röttger-Rössler (eds.)

# FEELINGS AT THE MARGINS

*Dealing with Violence, Stigma  
and Isolation in Indonesia*

campus

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Dealing with Violence, Stigma and Isolation  
in Indonesia

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## Lessons from the Notion of "Moral Terrorism"

Tom Boellstorff<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the cultural and political implications of a series of attacks on *gay*, *lesbi* (lesbian), and *waria* (roughly, male transvestite) Indonesians when they attempted to claim public space. While taking place in 2010, these attacks shared many features with an earlier series of attacks in 1999 and 2000 that I termed "political homophobia" (Boellstorff 2004). However, there were also important differences; my goal is to build on my earlier framework in light of these new developments. This allows me to analyze these events through the theme of "continuity and change," which has long been a highly productive rubric for exploring culture and politics in Indonesia, as exemplified in the classic work of Harry Benda (1972).

In this chapter I briefly describe the most significant of these attacks, which took place in March 2010, and also my experiences in speaking to victims of these attacks in July 2010. Of course, it is apparent that some of these attackers were little more than thugs—paid, it was rumored, Rp 20,000 to participate. Yet two other key things are apparent as well. First, a range of hard-line fundamentalist Islamic organizations were openly and actively involved, enabled by the acquiescence of the police forces. Second, emotion played a key role in the attacks, and also in the broader cultural frameworks that made the attacks intelligible.

As I discuss below, during the March 2010 incident the attackers labeled *gay*, *lesbi*, and *waria* Indonesians "moral terrorists." While most likely

not the product of reasoned reflection, I want to take this notion of the moral terrorist seriously, as revealing a new configuration of emotion and social marginalization in the archipelago. In my view, we are at a stage of research where the pressing need is not for answers so much as better-framed questions that can direct inquiry into promising new venues. Some questions I see as potentially helpful include: What is the tripartite relationship between marginality, emotion, and thought: for instance, do thoughts become emotions when pushed to the margins? How does emotionality help constitute the margin itself? How are the margins places of emotion in an indexical versus a causal sense? In other words, in what ways does being emotional mark one's marginality—in other words, serving as a symptom or index of marginalization—and in what ways does emotion work serve as a means to marginalize others?

### The ILGA-ASIA Incident

The International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA), founded in 1978, is one of the oldest and largest networks seeking to expand the rights of sexual and gender minorities on a global scale. The organization has worked to build regional networks as well, and with that goal in mind several regional organizations have been formed, including ILGA-Asia. This regional organization held its inaugural conference in India in 2002, followed by conferences in the Philippines in 2005 and in Thailand in 2008. The fourth ILGA-Asia conference was to have taken place from March 26–27, 2010, in Surabaya, Indonesia, home to GAYa Nusantara (hereafter GN), one of the largest *lesbi*, *gay*, and *waria* organizations in the archipelago and one that serves a national coordinating role. To hold this conference in Indonesia would make an important statement about *lesbi*, *gay*, and *waria* claims to national belonging and specifically to the public sphere. Such hopes were not unfounded, based not only on the increasing visibility of *lesbi*, *gay*, and *waria* persons in many dimensions of Indonesian society, but by the successful staging one year earlier of the vastly larger International Conference on HIV/AIDS in the Asia Pacific. That conference, held on Bali, was opened by none other than the President of Indonesia, who in his speech spoke of "partnership" with, among others, "the network of gay, transgenders, and men who have sex with men."

<sup>1</sup> I thank Birgitt Röttger-Rössler, Thomas Stodulka, and Ferdiansyah Thajib for their support and encouragement, and for organizing the conference "Feelings at the Margins: Emotion and Marginality in Indonesia," sponsored by the "Languages of Emotion" Cluster of Excellence, Freie Universität, Berlin, in July 2010. As always, I thank my Indonesian interlocutors for their insights, with particular gratitude in this case to *Gaya Nusantara*.

With these hopes in mind, the planning for the IGLA-Asia meeting proceeded apace, and by March 3, 2010 GN had received police permission for the event (GN 2010, 1). However, by this time a number of Indonesian mass media outlets had reported on the planned conference. In particular, the local newspaper *Surya* ran a story on March 23, 2010 entitled "Gay and Lesbian Congress in Surabaya," which resulted in GN receiving a complaint from the Mercure Hotel, where the event was to take place (GN 2010, 2). The event, or more precisely the organizers of the event, were rightly seen to be staking a claim to the public sphere. It was in response to this public visibility that a number of Islamic hard-line organizations threatened to prevent the Congress from taking place—in particular, the United Madura Front, the Ulama Assembly of Indonesia, Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, and the Front Pembela Islam or "Islamic Defender's Front" (hereafter FPI). By the afternoon of the 23rd, the Mercure Hotel's General Manager had apparently received threats and also statements from the police that the Congress lacked police approval and the police would not be responsible for any damage to the hotel. For this reason the conference was moved to another hotel, the Oval Hotel. By March 25, the day before the event was to have begun, the ILGA board announced the official cancellation of the event, as news of the event's move to the Oval Hotel had spread (Liang 2010, 4).

On Friday March 26, events came to a head. Participants in the conference, most of whom had already arrived from across Asia, decided to meet in their individual hotel rooms to be discreet, but progressive Muslims keeping an eye on local mosques warned that a coalition of hard-line Islamic groups was planning a demonstration that afternoon (Liang 2010, 5). Dozens of protesters came to the Oval Hotel, while others went across town to the GN office and padlocked its gate shut, spray painting on the gate the slogan "gay men and lesbian women are moral terrorists" (*lesbian gay teroris moral*; Liang 2010, 6). One *lesbi* participant recalled the attackers entering the hotel shouting, "God is Great! Kill! Kill! Kill!" (*Allahu Akbar! Bunuh! Bunuh! Bunuh!*), and the fear this inspired. Later in the evening, the protesters returned to "sweep" the hotel for conference participants, who hid silently in their rooms, some for as long as ten hours.

## Teroris Moral

Without going into a detailed chronology, it bears noting that incidents like the shutting down of the ILGA conference have taken place before. For instance, in my earlier work I examined two incidents that took place in 1999 and 2000 that also involved groups identified as hardline Islamic fundamentalist disrupting attempts by non-normative men to stake a claim to the public sphere.

In keeping with my interest in the trope of continuity and change as an analytic approach, however, it is crucial to highlight some key differences between the events of 1999 and 2000 on the one hand, and the ILGA event on the other. One distinction is that the ILGA event was a co-gendered event to a much clearer degree than the 1999 and 2000 events. The greater and more explicit presence of *lesbi* women may have had consequences for how these events were understood as threatening dominant norms of sexuality as well as gender.

The most striking difference involved using the phrase "moral terrorist" to describe *gay*, *lesbi*, and less explicitly *waria* Indonesians. Ten months after the attack on *gay* and *waria* Indonesians in Kaliurang, Central Java, an event discussed in my earlier work, the September 11, 2001 destruction of the World Trade Center in New York City reshaped global debates over violence and emotion. To my knowledge, the Indonesian phrase *teroris moral* was never used during the 1999 or 2000 attacks: while I have not been able to definitively determine when the phrase first became widely known in Indonesia, from online searches I have not discovered a clear-cut example of the phrase before 2006. Since that time, the phrase has become quite common and seems to be associated with Islamic hard-line groups. For instance, Ariel Peterpan (née Nazril Irham), the Indonesian rock star arrested in 2010 over pornographic videos found on his laptop involving himself and several women, was termed a *teroris moral* by the FPI and similar organizations.

Assuming then that *teroris moral* is a novel phrase and one coined by hardline Islamic groups, what can we learn from its use in contemporary Indonesia? First, the phrase is clearly an example of what Foucault termed a "reverse discourse" (1978, 101). It is a case of persons who are themselves frequently labeled "terrorists" redeploying the term against their accusers. But what is particularly fascinating to me is the bringing together of *teroris* with *moral*. Historically, the notion of "terrorism" has referred to

acts of violence (or threats of acts of violence) for the purpose of some political or social goal. In conjoining *teroris* with *moral*, these hard-line groups acknowledge that *gay*, *lesbi*, and *waria* Indonesians do not present a physical threat. Instead, by placing the threat at the level of morality, they return the notion of "terrorism" to the domain of emotion from which it originates. Moral terrorism is in a sense a threat based upon the perceived morality of certain persons, but it is an emotional threat.

Of course, this relinking of terrorism to emotion draws upon multiple spatial scales. The effect of globality is obvious, given the explicitly transnational emphasis of most radical Islamic groups (apparent not only in the general sense of Islam as a world religion, but in specific calls, say, for a transnational caliphate). Various local spatial scales may likely be relevant as well. In this regard, a key question for future research involves the question of what I term Muslim Javanese religious ethnicity, since the vast majority of these attacks against *lesbi*, *gay*, and *waria* Indonesians have taken place on Java. In what ways is this simply related to the fact that around 40 percent of Indonesia's population lives on Java and socioeconomic power is concentrated there, and in what ways might specifically Javanese understandings of Islam, sexuality, and emotion shape the dynamics in play?

The national spatial scale is pivotal to better understanding the figure of the *teroris moral* and its implications. This is one way that I link my analysis here to my broader history of research in Indonesia, for I contend that despite increasing attention to the nation-state as a cultural formation, many anthropologists of the archipelago continue to treat what the distinguished Indonesianist Benedict Anderson termed the "imagined community" of the nation as ontologically subsequent (in other words, a secondary effect) to what I call "ethnolocality" (Anderson 1983; Boellstorff 2002). It is important to link the figure of the *teroris moral* to notions of shame (for which the notion of *malu* is a rough equivalent) as well as to masculine and often collective, public enraged violence (for which a common term is *amok*). Both of these concepts are found across Southeast Asia but also have specific linkages to the nation-state, since a sense of "shame" regarding national subjugation can motivate the collective emotions of popular revolution (see Collins and Bahar 2000). Additionally, these are just two concepts from the broad intersection of emotion and belonging in Indonesia. Not for nothing is one of the most common terms for what in English is termed a "demonstration" then *aksi unjuk rasa* (literally, "action to raise emotion"). Crucially, not just the hardline Islamic groups but even gov-

ernment officials consistently said things like (to quote the Minister for Religious Affairs), "this does not fit with the traditional culture of Indonesia. Moreover, the Indonesian people are religious people." Never to my knowledge did any of the perpetrators speak of a threat to Javanese culture or any other ethnolocalized culture, nor of a threat to Islam in a global sense. The threat of *teroris moral* was seen to be directed specifically at the nation-state, to Indonesia (not Jakarta, or Java, or the Islamic world), and the response was thus properly national in scope.

I hesitate to label anyone a "terrorist" without a very clear justification, but it bears noting that the phrase *teroris moral* could be directed back against these very hardline fundamentalist Islamic groups. Certainly I think many of the *lesbi*, *gay*, and *waria* persons present in the Oval Hotel during the attack would use the word "terrorist" to describe those who forced the cancellation of the ILGA-Asia meeting in such a manner.

From the first moment when the men (note, all men) entered the lobby of the hotel shouting *bunuh*, *bunuh*, *bunuh* ("kill, kill, kill"), to hiding silently for hours in their hotel rooms—afraid to even use the bathroom lest they give away their presence—to fleeing later to waiting vehicles to be rushed to a safe house elsewhere in town, or to a train station, or airport. All was colored by a sense of terror, based upon the claims others were making to moral superiority and the right to determine who is granted national belonging.

An important question, one I suspect is foremost on the minds of many of those involved, is: will this kind of event happen again? In this regard it is disturbing not just that the police seem to have stood by while these attacks took place, but that there were few consequences for those involved in the attacks, despite a report to the National Human Rights Commission, the condemnation of the attacks by many more tolerant and inclusive sectors of Indonesian society, growing calls for the dissolution of the FPI, and greater acknowledgment of the FPI's linkages to the Indonesian military.

The uneven temporality of these attacks has significant emotional effects. After the events of 1999 and 2000, there was nearly a decade during which such attacks took place on only a handful of occasions (for instance, the 2004 attack on an event held by the magazine X-Pos (Boellstorff 2004, 481)). The emotional effect is strengthened precisely by this sense of uncertainty as to when the next attack will take place. This was brought home to me when I participated as a trainer in two days of a ten-day course on



gender and sexuality organized by GN in late June and early July 2010. In the weeks before the course and when I was spending time with a *gay*, *lesbi*, and *waria* organization on the island of Sulawesi, I was surprised to hear that no one knew of the course, and also that it was never mentioned on any of the email lists used by national *gay*, *lesbi*, and *waria* networks. The course was, it turned out, publicized very discreetly and involved only the twenty or so persons who ended up taking the course.

The course itself was held in a hotel on the outskirts of Surabaya and at the behest of the organizers, there were no banners or posters advertising its existence. During the course we took time off one afternoon for a group photo shoot, but all involved were warned by the organizers not to post any pictures from this shoot, or any personal pictures taken with other participants, until the course was over. When one person was teaching some part of the course, other staff from GN, as well as outside trainers like myself, would sit at the back of the room with our laptops, primarily playing around on Facebook. At one point I made a status update to my Facebook page along the lines of "I'm having a great time at this course!" About an hour later two staff from GN came to me in a panic. With a sense of urgency they told me that one of the staff had made a comment on my posting, a comment that they feared revealed too much about the course in progress. As a result, they asked me to immediately delete that staff person's comment from my post. As I did so, I was struck by their level of concern. Could a member of the FPI or some similar organization really have "friended" me or someone I knew and gotten access to my Facebook page, then have taken the time to read this particular post and the staff person's response to it, a response which was vague and gave no details as to the themes of the course or its location?

When I asked about the probability of a real threat emerging from this circumstance, members of GN acknowledged it was remote, but emphasized that some of these hardline groups were quite Internet-savvy and there was no harm in playing it safe. What struck me as significant was how the ILGA-Asia incident had shifted the emotional landscape of *gay*, *lesbi*, and *waria* organizing, in effect making it less "open" (to use the *buka/tutup* or "open/closed" dichotomy that is very roughly analogous to the Western metaphor of "the closet"). By 2010 in this same city of Surabaya, there had been no disco or club that had a "gay night" for several years, despite the existence of such clubs during much of the 1990s and early 2000s. What had changed was not just the occurrence of an event in

the form of the IGLA-Asia incident, but the creation through that incident of a new emotional climate of fear and mistrust, a sense of potential threat that had a real and lasting cultural efficacy.

### The Margin of an Archipelago

What does all this tell us about emerging intersections of emotion and marginality? What are the consequences of this shift from thought to emotion—from a reasoned opinion that homosexuality or gender transgression is morally wrong, to an emotional threat against Indonesians with non-normatively gendered and sexual subjectivities staking a claim to national belonging? None of us have clear answers to these questions, but I see value in drawing upon the rich body of scholarship on emotion and marginality in Indonesia to think and also feel through what these events might mean into the future. I say "think and also feel" here because academics and activists are often accustomed to equating theory and analysis with thought. However, it is worthwhile to ask how emotion might not just be a derailment of analysis or a retreat into the personal, but a mode of reason, an epistemology, as well as a subject of study.

In the final section of this chapter, I explore some specifically Indonesian aspects of these dynamics with regard to spatial scale and the notion of "feeling at the margins." It bears noting that the term "margin" comes from a Latin root that refers to a retaining wall, rim, border, or edge. It is a metaphor of contiguous geography, in which power resides at the center and radiates out to dominate a less-powerful periphery. While a center-periphery concept of power has a long history in much of Indonesia (Anderson 1990), the notion of a "margin" is predicated upon a continental imaginary.

But where does the margin of an archipelago lie? Archipelagoes have boundaries to be sure, but these boundaries are fractured and self-evidently social constructions. Archipelagoes can also have margins that are not peripheries, margins that are specific to an island yet central from the perspective of the archipelago as whole. I want to pause briefly on this notion of a margin that is not a periphery, the idea of a margin at the center. In some ways this recalls what Eve Sedgwick termed the "epistemology of the closet" in the West (1991). The open secret, the elephant in the middle of

the room, that which hides in plain sight, the thing that everyone knows but of which no one speaks.

Consider the national "anti-pornography law" that was passed in 2008 and upheld by the Constitutional Court in 2010. In her insightful analysis of the debates over this law and the cultural frameworks from which it drew, Laura Bellows made three points relevant to the discussion at hand. First, emotion was central to the legislation; the "aroused public" in the form of the "cultural 'peeping Tom' (*pengintip*)... [acts] as a silent, and deeply ambivalent, partner to the state" (2011, 224). Second, the debate reflected a view of globalization as contamination, an assumption that "the pornographic is always from somewhere else" (2011, 224). This fear of the global recalls continuing debates over mass media dating back to the 1990s that I have characterized in terms of "dubbing culture", the bringing together of two things (like a film and its dubbed soundtrack in another language), but in such a way that they do not blend into one (see Boellstorff 2003). Third, Bellows noted that this construal of threatening "racial and foreign others" applied "by extension [to] ethnic and religious minorities" (2011, 244), and originated in particular from a Muslim Javanese position. This recalls my earlier question regarding the role of Muslim Javanese religious ethnicity in the notion of the "moral terrorist". This issue of the ethnic and its articulation with the national plays a pivotal role in constructing the margins of the archipelago itself. Bellows observed that:

Ethnic or racial others perform "new," "modern," "foreign" sex styles, or *gaya*. When *gaya*, or style, is embedded in the local classification of heterosexual porn into genres, *gaya* associates racial or ethnic differences with particular heterosexual acts... In this usage, *gaya*, "style," comes from elsewhere; to *bergaya*, "have or adopt style," is to be already in the process of becoming someone else with modern tastes. While *bergaya* often implicitly references a Western, or global, modernity, when the term is qualified, *gaya* may also refer to other specific times and places, and by association particular sex acts. Anal sex is *Gaya Arab*, Arab style; oral and orgasmic sex and sex with women on top are all *Gaya Barat*, Western style; violent sex involving bondage or hypnosis is *Gaya Jepang*, Japanese style. (Bellows 2011, 222)

Bellows focused exclusively on heterosexual acts, reflecting how heterosexuality was central to debates over the anti-pornography law. However, in Indonesia (as elsewhere) homosexuality plays a key role in making the very modern concept of "heterosexuality" cohere in the first place. Bellows did not mention that since the early 1980s, many *gay* groups have used a "GAYa X" pattern to name themselves. In this formulation, the first term

is *GAYa*, with the first three letters often capitalized to highlight the polysemy between *gaya* (style) and *gay*. The second term is in the case of *GAYa Nusantara* (the oldest organization) a reference to "archipelago," but in the case of other organizations has an ethnoculturalized referent—for instance, *GAYa Dewata* in Bali (*dewata* is an Indonesian term for "gods" and Bali is often known as the "island of the gods"). In contrast to Bellows's discussion, here *gaya* is not used to identify the deviance of non-Indonesian others; instead, it is taken up by *gay* men as an implicit commentary on their own marginalization from national belonging. Rather than label sex acts deemed un-Indonesian, it identifies sexual communities as legitimate "islands" of the national archipelago (see Boellstorff 2005, 104–143 for further discussion). In contrast to notions of the "aroused public" with regard to the anti-pornography legislation passed in 2008, in which "ethnicity has become pornographic" (Bellows 2011, 227), we find a counter discourse in which homosexuality becomes part of the multiplicity that lies at the core of an archipelagic understanding of national belonging.

This discussion indicates that if we take seriously the notion of the moral terrorist as diagnostic of contemporary landscapes of emotion and marginality in Indonesia, it reveals the presence of an archipelagic marginality that is not peripheral, but rather central to affective constructions of national belonging. A "style" that refuses a narrative in which the foreign is by definition deleterious, and instead allows for the "dubbing" of new, unexpected forms of legitimately Indonesian community. For this reason, paying attention to the everyday lives of contemporary *gay*, *lesbi*, and *waria* Indonesians can teach us about much more than misunderstood and even persecuted minorities. It can reveal pivotal understandings of selfhood and society in the archipelago, and raise important questions about how reconfigurations of gender, religion, sexuality, and national belonging might strengthen islands of tolerance and affirmation that continue to permeate the archipelago. From such a wellspring of continuity and also change, might lie the enduring promise of a nation that could truly live up to its motto of "Unity in Diversity."

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## Navigating Inner Conflict— Online Circulation of Indonesian Muslim *Queer* Emotions

Ferdiansyah Thajib<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

Waves of violent campaigns against queer<sup>2</sup> subjects have increasingly become a part of the landscape of everyday life in Indonesia. This article highlights the dispersal of the ILGA (International Lesbian and Gay Association) regional conference in Surabaya, East Java by police under pressure from local Islamist groups (see also Boellstorff in this volume) in 2010 as an entry point to understand the emotional dynamics surrounding the ongoing series of religiously driven hostility towards the visibility of queerness in public spaces. By concentrating on the utterance of emotives

1 I would like to thank Christopher Sweetapple, Birgitt Röttger-Rössler, Thomas Stodulka, and Henri Myrtinnen for their constructive criticism and close readings of the paper.

2 The term queer in this article is consistently italicized, following the format introduced by Tom Boellstorff in his reference to Indonesian *gay* and *lesbi*. Boellstorff's categorization underscores the global and local dynamics in understanding of "gay" and "lesbian" identities in a non-Western context. The popular use of "queer" has been developing in later stage of sexual-identity construction in Indonesia after 2000, as it is added to the already existing terms of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual/Transgender (LGBT) category in social activists' environment. The term LGBTQ functions to accommodate discursive spaces for allusion and euphemism (Munir 2011) to the already stigmatized words of "gay" and "lesbian". Unlike Boellstorff, who wished to highlight the use of these terms more as lived concept (2005b, 8) than analytical gaze, *queer* in this article is introduced as an analytical prism and social category that includes non-normative subjectivities which do not define (and do not have the privilege to define) themselves based on sexual practices. To draw attention to the different contexts at play, the non-italicized version of queer is used whenever I am referring to more global perspective of queerness. This approach informs the larger research project that this article is based on, as it continues to problematize the social relations constituted around identities and norms, including those that are long considered as contradictory in nature, such as Muslim *queer*. While fellow queer scholars in the Anglophone tradition often use the term queer as the main signifier, I would like to vex the discussion by investigating the theoretical traction in reintroducing secondary signifier such as Muslim into a main category of thinking.